

# The Way to Freedom

By Stela Brailean

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## *Introduction*

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The door closed behind her and she was now alone, into which at first seemed to be complete darkness. A heavy rusty smell hit her nostrils and according to the humidity of the air, she was surrounded by underground stone formations. Was it a man built tunnel or a cave of natural formation, it was hard to tell. And there was no way back. But it was the way out. The so much sought for, longed for, fought for way to freedom. She dreamed of it for years, and paid high price to get here, despite knowing that her own life might become the highest and ultimate price for risking this way. As it always happens with dreams, giving them up can hurt more than going through all the suffering of attaining them.

Laura was born and grew up in an area bounded by military conflict and constant government persecution of its people. It was a closed society, slave of its own character and cemented mentality. Group of people marked by centuries' long suppression and denial.

The mentality of people that she left behind, formed over centuries of slaying and brainwashing, did not define her though. Disobedience, anger, an inner sense of right and wrong, similar to an interior balance that shifted its weight at the slightest unfairness, were defining her from head to toe.

From early childhood she was taught that life was merely about survival to the next day. Her intuition, though, told her that this was not all life was about. And this is how she got here, after long years of search, sacrifice, disobedience, and hatred towards the status quo.

It was a well-kept secret and many denied its existence, rather calling it a legend or feeble made up story for the dreamy souls. A way out of this slavery? Who would allow it? And what would it make it possible?

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## Chapter 1

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Her days were rather grey and uneventful, long hours of work in the local factory producing pieces of clothing. She was in the tailoring department, working on intermediate by-products without ever getting a glance of the final product. Sometimes it seemed part of a lingerie piece that she was holding; at other times it was a piece of suit and office dress or tie. Although never seeing the final product of her work, her imagination made up for the remaining pieces and it was then that her earliest rebellious thoughts were born, thoughts that life could be better, that her own life was a small part of the big gift of life that could be reached and lived as well. It was simply not making sense to her, how can one be forced to use fewer skills instead of more, how can one willing and capable to do intelligent and brain involving work, be forced to crawl at its lowest level of existence. It was a vicious circle and she could not allow tiredness get in her way.

And as if she wanted it much enough, universe has leaked a ray of possibility on her way. One night, when passing over the same old bridge she used to go on her way home back from work, she stopped for a moment, to take a longer look at the sunset, and the shades it created out of trees, houses, hills on the long forgotten valleys. The mix of warm, and in the same time, violent and rebellious colors, matched perfectly her state of mind and mood overall. Calm and kind on the outside. Full of energy, defiant and angry on the inside. The long hours at work have tired her body but they didn't tire her soul. She felt pain and strain over all her body, but she decided it will not take control over her mind and decisiveness to get out of there.

This is when a sudden dropping sound has caught her attention. No, she was not to such a degree submerged in her dreams to not realize that those were her home keys falling, through the rusty bars of the bridge side walk. The bushes and grass and dried thorns at the bottom of what long time ago used to be a river bed, didn't seem a too attractive scenery to hike into, especially at this late hour. But other choices did not come closer at the horizon, than the horizon itself. So she started at the closest edge,

slowly going down, watching carefully each step and aware of the darkness setting in, with each and every moment passing by. The river bed proved to be deeper than what she assessed from the top. Apart from rocks covered with grass, bushes powdered with dust and fallen tree branches crossing her way, there was also a plastic water bottle and a few packages wraps, probably carelessly thrown in there by bridge common passers-by. This is what she initially thought. But after a few moments, her perspectives changed significantly. A faint trace of voices, almost transcending into whispers, have made her stop and listen. Was it simply an illusion of something that would seem impossible at this place and hour? The voices were real nevertheless and were not coming from people walking or standing on the bridge. They were rather coming from an underground space, which seemed impossible in this place. Then it all vanished, as if never existed. As if a mere hallucination playing with a schizophrenic mind. Just the evening breeze frolicking with the tree branches, then reaching her cheeks, and mockingly simulating human voices, as if what she heard, never were a reality. But she was more certain than ever, that senses did not lie to her, that something was going on, that she was on the edge of discovering something of tremendous importance. She could not catch the words themselves, neither to differentiate whether it was a man or a woman speaking, or whether it was English at all. But this animal instinct in humans, that senses vibes when no words are spoken, have made her conscious and alert of the gravity of the tone conversation, or was it monologue. She listened more for a while, but complete silence was reinstalled and being aware of the time, she continued the journey in search for the key. Determined to return to the same place, and investigate, at a better time and with additional preparation.

Days passed carrying their usual routine. Morning alarm, coffee, 20 min walk, work at the factory, evening at home. But the thoughts of the voices under the bridge kept coming back. And finally came the day when she could leave work earlier than usually. This free time didn't happen that often nor could it be scheduled in advance. It was the boss of the factory who decided and gave directions to his line supervisors, as to who could leave home and when. And it was more often that workers had to do longer shifts than shorter ones. But the long awaited day finally came and it didn't find

her unprepared. During the long working hours at the factory, when performing one and the same repetitive task over and over again, her mind was working with more agility and dedication, just the way it was always intended to work. In her mind, she put together a detailed plan to find out more about activities going on at the place under the bridge.

As soon as she was free to go, she put on more comfortable shoes, which were no more than covered feet by stiffened material over a rubber sole. She took something warm, in case her stay will need to get pro-longed over the cold early spring nights. A small lantern, a box of matches, as it is always useful to be able to ignite a fire when needed. The closer she was getting to the place of descent, the more fear was coming close. There were no doubts, that she was doing the right thing. But going for it and not knowing what to expect, is a real test of courage. She took the same path downwards as when searching for the keys, just that now she kept the pace quieter and closer to the wall of the basin. After a more attentive look, she realized that the place had perfect emplacement for hideout: due to the angle over the bridge that the trees were placed, anyone could get lost out of sight in an instant, at the very first step down the valley.

On one hand, she was terrified to continue, on the other hand, she knew, that if she ever wanted to change something in her life, then this could have been the chance. Maybe even the only chance.

The further she went, the more intriguing the place became. A place that from above seemed nothing but a world of weeds, devoid of a life breath, deserted due to its inaccessibility – apparently. Making her way towards the bottom, she noticed with stupefaction that what seemed random and wild from above, interestingly made perfect sense at the bottom. As if every rock was not simply thrown from above by forces of nature, but rather carefully placed and had a role in camouflaging this river bed paths. As if every tree and branch conspired in putting together one key, one message, one story.

This strengthened her belief that there was something about this place, something well planned and well hidden, and something worth exploring and finding out. She tried going to the same spot where she heard voices last time and despite efforts to recall, it was hard to identify that exact spot. She realized this was one of the mysteries of the place. In order to fixate one's position in space, it is necessary to have at least two points of reference. And although there were plenty of rocks, trees and other such points of reference in the river bed, no two of them would make a position in the valley unique. The entire emplacement was a riddle, a play to any logical effort to solve. What genius mind could have designed this complex structure? Nevertheless, the place looked completely inhabited, no touch of human hand, or other creature alike. But she could not be mistaken. Having the view from the bottom up, being in the middle of it all, it looked too unnatural, too precisely to the point, too well-crafted and thought out, to be believed to be random.

The sun started setting and she had to admit on having to leave for the day, without finding out much. Next day, the first minute free on lunch break – if this is the way to call the up to half an hour mid-day break to which one was 'officially' entitled but that one needed to ask for permission and explain to direct supervisor the reason for being away – she went to the City Library. This was one of those dusty and forgotten places, the low attendance being due to lack of time and to an overall glorification of ignorance. Or appreciation for anything else but knowledge or education. Reading and learning do not bring immediate return. So why bother, why invest? Why make your people smarter, when fools are easier to fool further. The Library was also poorly funded and most of the books and materials were rather her grand grandparents' contemporaries. Not because grand grandparents' contemporaries were more interested in learning, but because those materials did not constitute an intellectual threat nowadays anymore. Or so it was thought.

She knew that the chance to find documents in the Library, leaking the secret of the bridge and the river bed, was very low. But it was the only solution her mind could think of. She asked the librarian working there, whether it was possible to get more information about the history of the town, either books or local newspapers. The

librarian didn't seem surprised of, nor accustomed to, such requests. He was rather bored, as majority of that town's population at a later age, when life becomes so foreseeable and helpless, and one's child dreams so predictably unattainable. It took him quite a while to look in catalogues and index cards and to lead her to a dimly illuminated corner of one of the rooms, filled with not less mold than books on the shelves. Some of these shelves were made of wood, the majority were made of thin plates of iron, whose rust was playing a good mate to the mold in the books. The Library was a good mirror of the society it was serving. Old, screechy, uninteresting, unmaintained. He pointed to a section which was marked with the name of the city and left her to research her way. There were books, newspapers and magazines altogether. Some carefully bounded folders with research on specific subjects, with selected newspaper cuts, paper clipped handwritten letters and markings in red, notes added on the side. It was all more than she expected and she eagerly went on skimming through the documents. This gloomy corner in the town public library was the place where she returned to every day during the short lunch breaks she could take. But it was enough. It was sufficient time to find out interesting facts about the history of the town she was living in. Part of the information was rather useless to the purpose of her search, describing random events of a town forgotten by world's glories. She still read with a smile on her face, about the people of the past, which made a difference to the growth and development of this little town. The old mayor that dedicated decades on renovating old buildings, setting up irrigation systems, planning and digging what was supposed to be an underground system of both water supply and electrical transmission devices. The passionate horse breeder who dreamt of making the town famous through its immense horse rising facility, built to serve both recreational horse riding and racing, and farmers' power supply. The devoted baker who travelled the world in search of best recipes, secrets of baking, so that to master and bring back the skill of preparing crispy pastry, delicious bread and unheard-of tastes. And they all succeeded to some extent, until something or someone intervened that swept away all these efforts, all this enthusiasm, all this perspective for growth was gone, like a feather in the wind. Here lied the mystery of it, and this was the point she realized that trails were broken, marks were lost and signs stopped

giving away messages. There was a clear cut timeline between the progress that used to be and the moment when all changed and things started towards their worst.

And there were no trials left, to pick up the broken lines and put together one whole picture of that long forgotten past. It was as if someone has carefully went through all and picked up any source than would lead to an understanding of what happened during those times. She somehow intuitively felt that it was all connected to the mystery at the bridge, that if she gets to the bottom of one, she will learn more about the other, too. And she also understood that if someone tried so hard to conceal those materials, that person or persons will surely not approve but rather prevent her from finding out more, from finding out the truth, about the town where she lived, and its people. Thus she decided to keep her workings in secret and to be prudent in her search.

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## *Chapter 2*

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At the factory, she shared the work and space with other people of her age, doing all more or less the same processes. Once one is older, such work doesn't suit one anymore: blinded eyes, trembling hands and a tired soul. Once one is older, they are moved to different, low end job departments, or discarded to live in peace and in one's own routine. If peace can be called the times when one isn't needed, useful or sought for. This knowledge was another reason motivating her decision to go out of the vicious circle she joined by birth. The vicious circle of one becoming means to someone else's goal, of one wasting beautiful young years in exchange of a minimum subsistence pay, and the complacency of not being enough, or being too much.

It was one of those many days that didn't seem to bring anything different or important. She was having lunch with a colleague from the logistics department. He always seemed to her more bright and agile than average and she was even secretly questioning his working on such a low-end and uninvolved job. The guy could talk

knowledgeably on basically any subject of science, art or business. He didn't seem to be doomed or resigned to mediocrity either. The brightness of his eyes, the power of his posture and the firmness of his voice were setting him apart and telling more than the color of his collar. It was not romantic attraction towards him but rather a deeper connection and mutual understanding, as if belonging to the same wave, group of people, flocks of the same dreams.

The food was relatively good this time, and the topics of conversation interesting. He was describing a painful experience, of having the people from the electricity supply office, coming to challenge emplacements at this home. With this came the question that many come to, but few dare to rise. The elephant in the room, that everyone feels but few acknowledge its presence, despite the discomfort. He took a longer pause, followed by a deep and resolved glaze into her eye: "Why do you put up with this?" the question took her by surprise, but they both knew precisely what was it about. "You know you can do better than this, you know you are more than the slums and misery and neediness around you." To which, hesitantly, she replied, not even herself believing the sound of her voice: "To which extent can one surpass the reality of ones birthplace, and opportunities not given?"

The answer came in the form of a rhetorical question, painful enough to not allow passivity:

"Whatever excuse you make in your mind right now, will you be able, after years into the future, to look into the eyes of your dear ones, and state that excuse as true reason? Will you truly believe it? Will they believe it? Or will they simply agree with you, to avoid hurt feelings and confrontations at a point in time when it is too late to change anything, anyway?"

For both of them, the conversation reached a point of no return. They both knew, that something has to follow, that being satisfied with the present situation, is not an option anymore.

Lunch break was short and other people queuing for a table made it clear that it was no time to finish the conversation, nor the right moment to follow something outside of

the regime-like cycle of work, lunch break, work. They departed quickly, each to his/her own workplace, but not before he whispered almost unnoticeably to her ear: “I will see you today just before sunset, when last sunrays leave, and the dusk comes in. At the place under the bridge where you have been so often lately. You might find the answer, and be given the opportunity you look for, but remember, it won’t be easy”

These words have left her speechless. She hardly found the power to continue moving, through mindless motion towards the exit of the canteen. And all this time... all this time she thought to be alone in the river bed, alone in that deserted world-forgotten place, making her way through the dusty leaves, through the branch-clenched bushes, moving stones and looking for cues. All this time, someone was watching her, and at least him, has seen her. But no one stopped her. So she was right, that place was hiding something, and she will find out what – today.

The remaining of the working hours passed with incredible lag. She kept counting hours, minutes, seconds. Images of possible scenarios, of how the story will unfold, kept rummaging her imagination. She kept guessing what the secret was about, and whether weeks of vain research will finally turn into a ray of light. But not a single time did she suspect danger or did she fear going there at night. Where does this bravery come from? She asked herself. And she realized once more, the power of dreams, the power of possibility – how powerful can the spirit become once driven by hope. One can be lied to in many ways, but one cannot lie to hope, as it is hope always remaining when all else is gone.

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### *Chapter 3*

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It is been long time since she didn’t have this feeling. And it surely was the first time ever so strong. A type of impatience that makes one want it to happen as soon as possible just to cross it off the list and get the nervousness out of the way. And that in the same time palpitates of emotion and wishes it could be postponed to infinity.

Surely the coziness of one's home bed feels better and definitely easier. But so does being stuck in a rut. And this was her chance of getting out of it.

Evening was setting in. Sky was clear and undisturbed, as if secretly conspiring and clearing ways to those determined to follow their dreams. Laura was pacing carefully on the path leading to the bridge. Not many people wandering around at this time of the day. A 9 to 5 job was standard and no further development, mental or physical, was generally sought after the clock ringed 5 pm. This is when the sluggishness of comfort and tamed despair settled in: in front of TV, aimlessly watching pre-fabricated brain washing entertainment, no thinking or effort required. The evening shadows, the lack of people thereabouts, the uninterrupted silence heavy of a too humid atmosphere, all contributed to the mystics of the place. Knowing that one is watched, but not knowing exactly by whom and at which point of the journey, enhances the unpredictability of the situation. Laura's all senses were on full alert. She quickly reached the place where she lost the keys initially and then quickly started descending into the river bed, among rocks and stones, thorns and grass, all which to her surprise were designed to leave no mark of her passage, and probably none of anyone else's either. Although she has been there countless times before, in vain trying to decipher the mystery of the place and the source of the voices she overheard, it was difficult for her to confidently recognize and fixate in her mind or recollect any particular position relative to the surroundings. This was part of the puzzle, aimed at disorienting any unwelcomed visitor and to prevent anyone from replicating or learning and becoming accustomed with the place. She continued pacing at times reluctantly, not sure herself anymore whether she has been there before and whether she came to the right place for the meeting agreed. Her heart secretly wishing she should have avoided this entire adventure, and concomitantly gasped in tremor that she might miss seeing her colleague and finding the chance of a lifetime. During these moments of indecision, trying to figure out how to make herself heard, without disturbing the surroundings and the entire plot, she suddenly felt a warm breeze all over her feet, more of an air current as if caused by two windows opened at two ends on a heavy-wind day. Trees and bushes around were frozen in their marble-like stiff position. And despite the dark

setting in, commonsense told her that the breeze she felt must have been caused by unnatural grounds.

“I knew you will be smart enough to figure it out” Her heart racing with impatience, she could hardly hold her breath at the clear sound of a human voice in that remote place foreign to civilization.

“The evening you dropped the keys and overheard our voices, was a rare coincidence that is hard to explain even for ourselves. We rarely spend time in this unit that is close to the surface. Not speaking of leaving airing leaks open at the same time. It was both a mistake on our side and breach of the rules, as well as it was a happy occurrence to test your commitment, a test that is not yet finished. If you don’t want to continue, now is time to turn around and leave. However, once you step inside our premises, there is no turning back” The voice was toned down, although strong and confident. “Take your time to think once more. This is the way to freedom, but it won’t be easy.”

“I didn’t come all the way here in order to turn back. Hardships don’t bother me, although I might have not known many until now. Except for the burden of staying in my own comfort zone, hands and mind tight, with the rope of the system we all live in. And this I cannot bear anymore.” Laura answered, bothered by the thought that one could hesitate in face of the great opportunity of freedom.

With no further exchanges, the sound of a door clasped open and closed right behind her after just a few steps, with a swiftness and precision that seemed supernatural, given the darkness all around. She could only feel the heaviness of humid air breezing from the right. Intuitively, she turned towards it, hands held straight in front as if trying to understand the place she was moving towards, and to avoid an impact. One step, then another, through the muddy ground which felt like a mix of gravel, sand and mud. She could not overlook the contrast of the dry river bed at the surface compared to the humidity of this underground tunnel, two opposite environments at only few steps distance one from another. Geography and climate don’t play games and are straight-forward in their rules of nature. She could sense the human engineering element, but

not understand what it was leading to. Or where. After few more steps, she felt passed the wind stream as if leaving it behind. The ground was also more dry and steady. In the flash of a moment and with no sign betraying its source, a very strong light immersed having her at its very center, dazzling for a few seconds. Instinctively she covered her eyes and turned around to avoid the pain of the unexpected bright light, and this is when the same mysterious voice has greeted her. The light got dimmer and did not have her in spotlight anymore. To her surprise, she was in the middle of a perfectly round plaza surrounded by a number of equally distanced alike-looking entrances, with no signs or whatsoever distinguishing one from another. That was a geometrical precision able to owe anyone with slightest knowledge of science. Its main purpose though was to make it impossible to the person who arrived there to know by which door she came, and therefore, to not know by which door to return. As she was told at the very entrance, there was no turning back. Not that she wanted it. Bridges were burnt behind, and there was nothing but going forward, even if lacking the clarity of where it was leading.

“See how wind waves have lead you to the exact place we expected you. People are very amenable and let themselves carried away by wings of circumstances, with very little or no resistance. For most, this is a lifestyle, and then at the end of the days, nothing but a grumble for a fate unwanted, blaming others and those who brought them there.”

“I am here by my own will. And no one to blame, not now, not later” Laura’s voice was firm and decisive, although deep inside her heart she felt the burden and uncertainty of risks taken.

The eco sound of the underground plaza was built in the same brilliant and precise fashion. She could hear the voice speaking but could not infer from which door the sound was coming, a tribute to the complex architecture of sound structure.

Hearing rustle behind her back, she turned and saw two men standing side by side. Despite their informal stands, she recognized the confidence and posture of soldiers. The younger one was her work colleague with whom she spoke in the canteen earlier

in the day. She could barely recognize him in the dark blue uniform with black finishing. The other was older, looked to be in his 50s, age divulged by the depth of wrinkles which also inspired an uncompromising strength of character and nobleness in features. Naturally she could not tell from which one of the doors they came. It was part of a mystery still to untangle and part of a well-designed security system.

The round plaza was indeed a piece of art as to its elegance and artisanal sophistication mended with geometrical preciseness. It was part of a complex system build at each of the entrances to an immense underground labyrinth dating from few centuries ago. The underground passages were initially formed by nature forces – sandstone formations and granite passageways shaped by geological moods of water, fire, wind and earth crust. Later they become places for hideout and secret meetings, its endless corridors resonating with ideas, hopes and reinstatements. A refuge from the imposed rules of the outside world. At some point in its history, it was discovered by emperor's crew and he ordered to blow it away and wipe it out of the earth surface. The order was accomplished in an unprecedented massacre, but the irony of it was that the labyrinth of caves has never been at the earth's surface. So the attempt to destroy it succeeded in just detonating an arm of it, while leaving the rest and main part of it intact. Like a gigantic octopus, this cut has made it re-grow to its original entirety and even stronger. Learning from the previous security shortcomings, successors have worked relentlessly to not repeat the previous mistakes and to make the place undiscoverable and entirely secluded. After many generations have passed, the story of the underground meetings and its system cave faded away into legends and later generations stopped believing of their existences. The handful of man who continued had spread their knowledge and enlarged the underground audience or the membership by carefully selected individuals who have to prove their loyalty to the group and they grit of enduring hardship and highest degrees of pain relentlessly. To ensure they were not followed or discovered again by outside authorities, they have destroyed one-by-one any piece of evidence of their existence, and later destruction. Any newspaper containing an article of it was carefully removed from libraries, papers or other records carefully traced and picked up from various homes, any book mentioning the case, was chased up to its last issuance and either benevolently

purchased or forcefully dispossessed from its owners. As a result, as generations passed, the story become more of a legend, people forgot about it and no reference could be tracked to certify its reality and truth. This is how not even Laura, despite her relentless grit, could not find much reference to the story of the town past a certain period of time, and the few items she found were merely a superficial account to the forgotten past of an ordinary and insignificant town.

“We are glad to see you here” The older man continued. “We have been following you thoroughly, since the very moment you came across to discover one of the entrances to our hideouts in the river bed. We have no doubts of your commitment to join our secret society and the strength of your character, nevertheless we must obey with the initiation rules and take you through all stages of adhering to our organization. You can call me Aaron” The older man introduced himself “and this is Ceranius” he continued, turning to the person she knew as her colleague, not knowing anymore which was his real name and understanding that from then on she will call him by the underground name. As if having read her thoughts, he continued “You will have the chance to choose your own name as well, once you are ready to join us”

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#### *Chapter 4*

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Laura woke up in semi-darkness, feeling tired and her head heavy as if after a very long sleep. She could vaguely remember the previous day encounter and was not even sure whether it really happened or was just a dream erected in her never ending search existence. As that wasn't her bedroom she gradually came to the conclusion that she wasn't dreaming, that what was happening was reality, her heart filling both with the joy of expectancy as with the doubt of unknown.

The mattress she woke up on was of a very rudimental design with no frivolities but she was amazed by its practicability. There was nothing else in the cave hollow of the size of a small room. The dim day-like light was coming from a series of lamps placed

throughout the corridors. They were providing just enough to light the surroundings, but not sufficient to see details or examine the walls. The round plaza of yesterday was out of sight and she couldn't tell how far she was from it. Next to the mattress she found a small backpack containing basic necessities such as water and snacks and mainly a handheld and another head lantern and a folded letter starting with a quote on the first page "A tread, a step, it never ends until search is over" and followed with instructions pages saying:

"If you arrive successfully to this end of the day, you should find another place for sleeping and a survival kit for the next day. If not, it means you took the wrong route and that your day will be longer until reaching the destination. In fact, there are no days here, and you are the complete owner of your time. You can make two days here in the tunnel, out of one day on earth surface, or you can waste one week of days doing nothing that one day on earth would suffice. Remember, there is no way back, only forward. And it is up to you whether the way forward leads anywhere. It can as well lead to nowhere. There are no guarantees. The only thing that is certain is that if you don't go, you surely won't arrive"

The entire beginning of this experience seemed a bit of contrast to her. After all, she went for this in search of her freedom, in search of more opportunities to express herself, for a better environment, to learn new things and skills, to do something for herself and the world. This was something she waited for her entire life, she dreamt of it at night and woke up with its thought in the morning. But never expected it to come in this form. Alone, in the darkness and humidity of an underground cave, not knowing how far beneath the surface. What she was experiencing instead, was getting locked up in an underground tangle of tunnels and labyrinth, herself not knowing where it leads and whether she will get there, and what it will be, even if she gets there. Something was telling her that it was worth all the effort, and that the pain is temporary and very small comparing to the greatness of a future in the new world.

As she was stepping further the corridors, an immensurable state of peacefulness has immersed her. She felt in safe hands, although alone in the infinity of silence. The dim lights across corridors were somehow showing the way, at times splitting to more

passageways and to spiraling staircases leading up and down into galaxies of unknown. The walls were testimony to the old age of the never resting nature. Calcium carbonate formations played into centuries old adornments, a tease to imagination, insinuating sceneries of mountains covered by clouds, fields full of flowers, stalactites and stalagmites reminding of people and their companions. The communion of man and nature was never more symbolic and suggestive than in this remote underground labyrinth that was further from men and further from nature she has ever been. Many times before, she felt more alone in the middle of the noise at the factory than she was feeling right then, in the middle of unknown. She realized that loneliness was not so much about how close in touch you are with people around you, as it was about how close in touch you are was with yourself. She realized that when one follows one's dreams, one is never alone. Despite the many turns and splitting of the way, she chose to follow the path based on the same stream of wind that guided her when she first stepped inside the cave. The air flow was very soft and even indistinct at times, parts of the labyrinth was immersed in complete darkness so she had to use the lantern, some corridors were leading to dead ends, so she had to turn back and chose another way. Some places were marked with indecipherable signs or symbols that she could not relate to. She tried reading them from various angles, imagining them upside down or combining them so that to understand the message that they could convey. Neither of her approaches led to anything, so she just continued her way based on intuition and the slight breeze which at times was joining her pursuit, at times disappearing mysteriously.

Interestingly enough, she realized to not have the watch anymore. It probably has been taken away from her and perfectly in line with the note she got, that time was a different measure in the underground. She couldn't tell the time, how long has she been strolling across the endless labyrinth nor whether it was day or night. She had the meals alone, the snacks she found in the backpack. They were slowly coming to an end and she knew, if not based on tiredness, but at least based on food supplies, that she needed to find the next resting point. Despite not having a time or space measuring instrument, she knew that she did at least tens of thousands of miles by then and was surprised by the vigor and energy in her legs, her soul taking wings. The

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