

REALMATTER



#18

**Conversations with
a Photograph**



REAL**MATTER**

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Table of Contents

1. Ploughing Water

2. If You Were

3. Body text

4. A quote for you

1. Ploughing Water



You are so beautiful, dammit.

Smiling in black and white, even as it robs you of your gold and bronze tint, of the deep brown shine of your hair, of your eyes.

Your chocolate and peach skin, your hairless chest, your flat, smooth tummy, they all come back anyway, etched in my eyes and in my hands. All I need is this image, to know that it is you, and I reclaim your face, that I could no longer recall, lost in search of details, your belly button, your legs, a gesture, your voice.

Ah! Your voice. So peculiar that I cannot define it, so yours that I was moved discovering its timbre in the parlance of the brother that you hate. So strange, your voice, rough like cracked metal, nasal but not nasal, perhaps a pose, that too, perhaps Mediterranean, but not even that.

The voice that never said a further word to me, anything indisputable, incontrovertible, even a slight tipping of the balance. Damn you, you slept with me without saying a further word. Only gestures, looks, smiles, caressing hands that mirrored all movements, mine on your body, yours on mine, sweet.

The kisses you blew as you left the room, and yet all of it, those looks and those smiles that melted my heart, they were always elusive, fleeting, lest I tell you later, “you said you loved me.” But words are so fleeting too! And isn't making love to someone more of a commitment than anything one could say?

Beats me.

I'm glad it went this way, gladder to have had your body than your words, that's for sure.

Who wouldn't be, child of the sun, peach skin, as pretty as the sky? Warm as the Mediterranean sun, sweet as chocolate?



The image of you sitting by the pool recalls other images, soft and colourful, bathed in gold as memories always are. You sprawled on a chair under the gentle sun of five PM, the other (so beautiful too, damn it, an infectious smile, tall and big and green-eyed, alas, how many beautiful boys I missed out on, lost in pursuit of you!) sitting next to you, towelling off after his last swim.

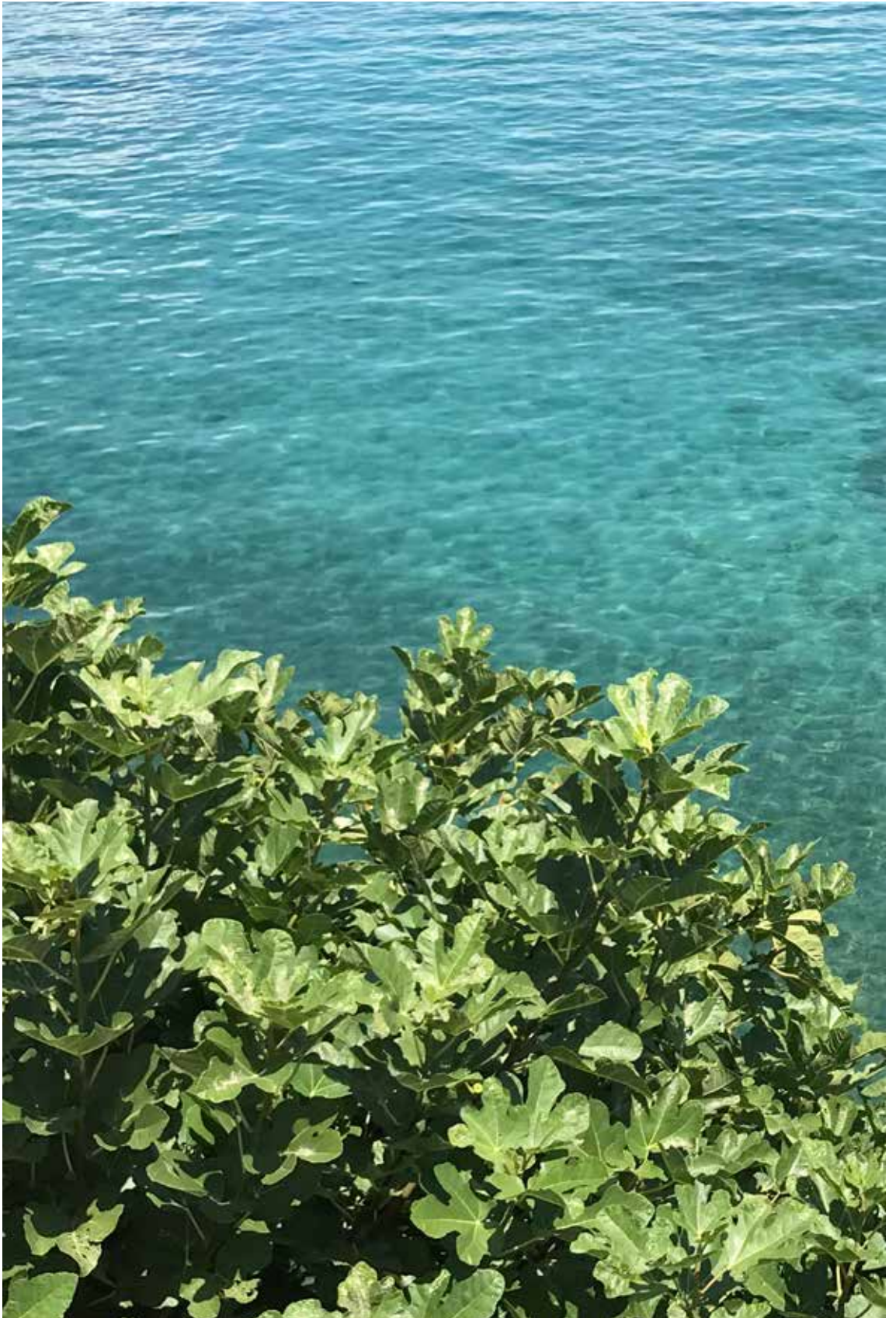
You saying, "let's have one more swim," and him, "I don't feel like it," and you: "take me."

And you made him lift you in his arms like a bride, his forearms under your knees and shoulders, he carried you all the way to the pool, and you whined: "but you cannot throw me, now, I will get hurt, you must jump with me."

Dammit, you were so beautiful, your head a bit tilted, leaning into his chest, and him jumping still holding you in his arms. What a delight you were, plunging into the water on a late summer afternoon. What an idiot I was, ploughing water all summer long.

And yet I am glad, outside my window pours cold London rain (and we are only in October, it seems yesterday I lay under the Mediterranean sun, spying you behind sunglasses) and looking at your photograph, seeing you laugh in black and white, does me good. I love admiring you and I love what has been, I love having loved you for one long moonless night, my precious, child of the sun.





2. If You Were



I play with you the game of “if you were”. How easy it is to do, because you are in my hands only in image, made alive by memory alone. You don’t talk, you don’t think, you don’t exist (you are far away) and I can mould you into anything I want.

If you were a dog, you would be a Doberman. For the colour, for the body, slim and shiny, sunny and dark, soft and skinny. One of those Doberman dogs, I’ve seen a few of them, who are male but have pronounced nipples, androgynous like my love.

And also for its demeanour, half conceited half tender, like a lady always posing, not a moment of disharmony, no ungracefulness. The form! Important, impeccable.

In a moment of passion I might say you are a Great Dane, but that would be too great, too black, and also too kind.

If you were a language, you would be Spanish, elegant and hot and petulant all at the same time. Oh to hear you speak Spanish, with your metal voice, I think I would faint then and there.

If you were a game, you would be hide and seek. I hide: will you seek me?

If you were fire, you would burn up the world! (If you were storm, you'd raise a massive swell).

If you were a book, it would be difficult to choose. Maybe Oblomov, the immortal hero of laziness. Maybe Like Water for Chocolate, more the male protagonist than the book itself: a little spineless and very lovable, flesh and blood and skin so edible. Or Pedro Romero in Fiesta, but you are just a pretty boy, not a hero. If you were a hero, you would be the immortal hero of laziness. Body made of sun and life, body made to love and soul made of dusk, of nothing, of fear of living, and is it even true? If you were a puzzle, you would be impossible to solve.

If you were a flower, you would be a black tulip, or rather a dark red rose, almost purple.

If you were fabric, you would be velvet. If you were clothes, you would be a skimpy tank top, plain and tight-fitting, like those that when I saw them on you I felt my stomach churn, and I tensed all my muscles so that I did not scatter in the air. You are so beautiful that I would like to be you, so that I could spend the day looking at myself, touching myself, all day, every day.

If you were a season, you would be summer, round like a watermelon.

If you were a day of the week, you would be Sunday, sweet idleness, eternal vacation.

If you were a shape, you would be a circle, round like the sun and like a hole, slick, intangible, perfect.

If you were a body part, you would be a belly button. And how beautiful a piercing would look on it.



3. Body Text



I love these written conversations with your photograph. I love written conversations, any and all. Once at an end-of-year high school festival a teacher who may have been hitting on me (or was I hitting on him?) asked me what my favourite things in life were, and I said reading, and writing, and trees.

At the time I was obsessed with trees. I still love trees but reading and writing have remained a much more constant and much more significant presence. I digress. I love writing in conversation with this picture of you.

And yet the body, the bodies, ours, are missing. And they were so present; not only in bed but in all things, the way your body existed in space, the way I could not resist touching you in your car and at the dinner table and at every opportunity.

Common sense dictates, dictator that it is, that the mind is superior to the body, especially in matters of love. It is proper to tell people that we are attracted to their soul, not their body, lest they think we “only want to fuck” and we “don’t care about them”. As if “them” coincided with the mind. I could never buy into that.

Often with girlfriends we talked about physical attraction. For me it is something clearly distinct from aesthetic appreciation. I find that guy good-looking, hot even, but I am not attracted to him. I find that other guy rather ugly, but my body tingles in his presence.

Attraction for me is something more than just physical, but also more than just intellectual. I’ve tried to wrap my head around this for so long, and I think now and perhaps thanks to you it is finally coming into focus.

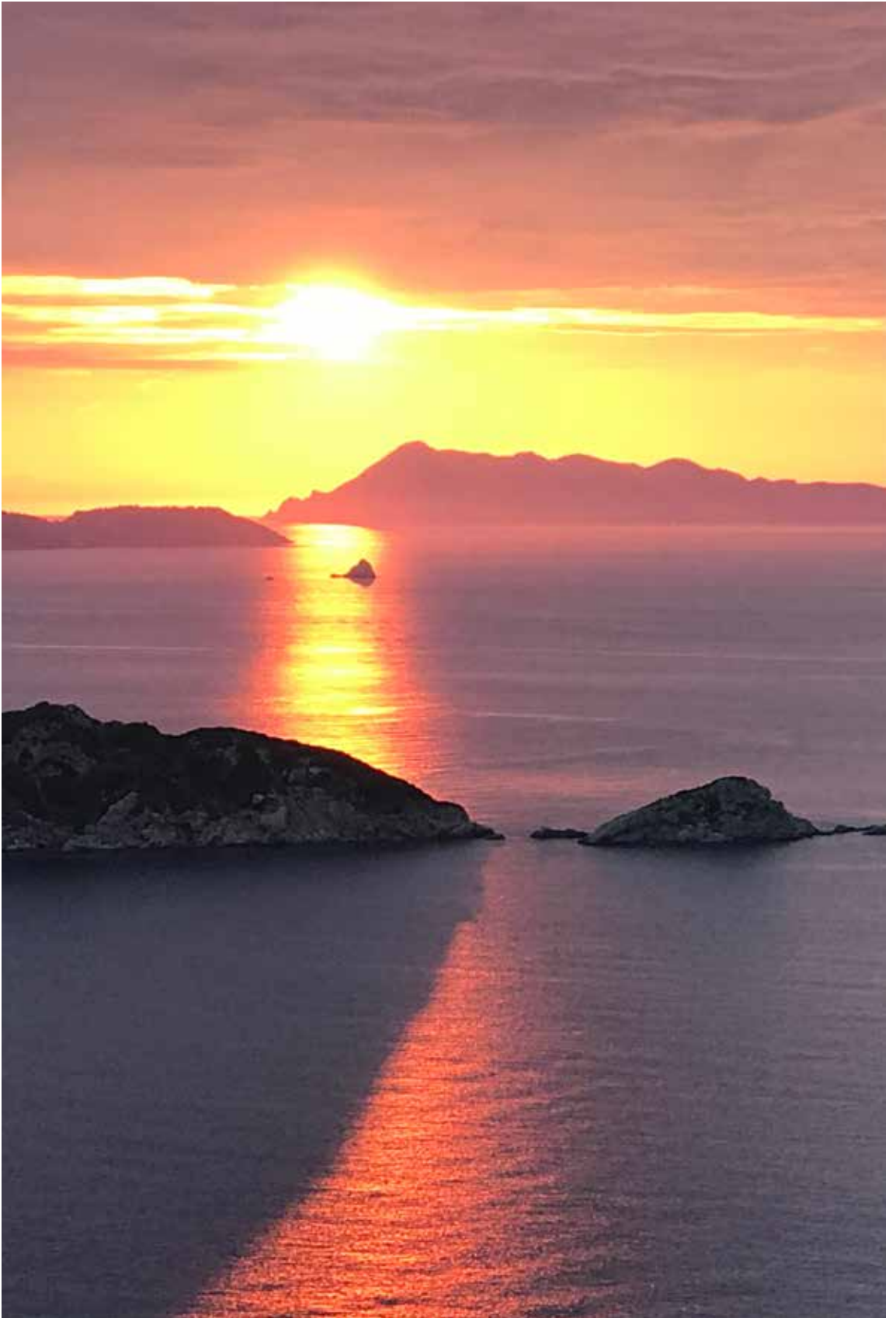
As I am wont to do, I discover hot water.

The bottom line is, attraction is something I feel. Thinking that someone is hot, thinking oh, wow, we are on the same page on so many things, thinking he is smart or cool or kind, thinking this and that... none of it counts and none of it matters. For me. What matters is feeling. How banal, I know. But it took me a long time to realise it. And now I don't even know what lesson I should learn from this.

But going back to the body. There is no mind without body, no body without mind. And yet, there is someone without a body now, and how delightfully painful that is! Your two-dimensional, black-and-white presence.

I grab at thin air, and I think: we never grasp anything anyway. Everything comes to an end, including our own lives.

I miss your hands, your skin, the concrete form of you. The other day I thought I saw the shape of your head in a crowd and my heart skipped a beat. How I wish you were here to once again bit the nape of my neck, like dogs do when they play, sending shivers down my spine.



4. A Quote for You



Today everything is shrouded in fog. The beauty of winter-time: it is strange to tell you about it, child of the sun. I go out and walk in this soft white world, but a dark and damp white, here and there the outline of a tree, a stone, obscure and blurry, watercolour blotches. Beautiful.

Walking through this fairy-tale landscape I expect to see a goblin jump out from the shadows. It is both quiet and disquieting. I no longer feel at home in winter, I no longer belong to the North. How long till another summer?

It is a day for sitting by the window with a cup of tea and a book. So in written words I look for solace. And I find a quote.

A quote for you, my black and white beauty. “We never suffer as much for something we never had, however extraordinary that thing may be; my heart grieved, rather, for what had once been mine.”

And yet, I don't know. I think that in my heart, the slight of never having had you would smart more painfully. I feel no nostalgia for you, for what you were. What were you for me anyway? A splendid vision, just like you are now, in this photograph. Only of that, I would have wanted more.

It was a summer so sweet, with nights so full of stars. I wanted to make love to you many more times, on fragrant lawns under the sky, to touch your perfect body in silence, or chatting about no matter what, admiring and caressing you, for longer than I was able to do.

Just a little longer. After all, I was afraid too, of finding myself alone with you, of the awkwardness, of the imperfection that contaminates the harmony of gestures, inevitably, when they become habit. I am like you, in a way, or I have been many times, with others: I have run away too soon.

Yet the slight stings, the unfulfilled desire tortures me still. You coward, you lazy, you beautiful one. I long for your belly, your glorious sun-kissed body. I wonder if you are beautiful in winter too.



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