

WITH FEET IN THE AIR

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for Inma, accomplice

For beyond our dreams
words, which don't belong to us,
gather like clouds
the wind hurls
on the earth
to change the world, not unsuccessfully.

JOSÉ ÁNGEL VALENTE, *Memory and Signs*



1

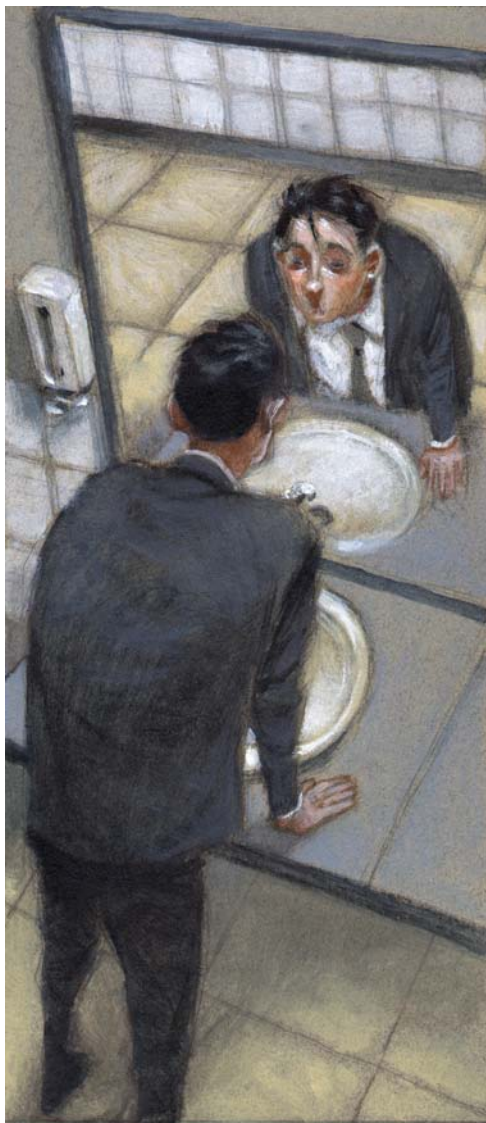
One afternoon, while working in his office, Daniel raised his head and looked around. He saw his colleagues, the papers covering his desk, the shelves stuffed with folders, the buildings just visible on the other side of the window... He felt a wave of sadness overcome him and suddenly he began to put into words the troubling sensation that had accompanied him over the previous few weeks: grey office, grey colleagues, grey existence. Without knowing how, everything around him had lost its colour. He found that his world was now a sad and tedious place.

This thought struck him with such force that he jumped up from his chair, to looks of surprise from those around him, and went and shut himself in the toilets. Once inside, he wet his head with cold water and leant against the wall. He closed his eyes and succumbed to the obsessive idea that now controlled him: work, work, it was as if work occupied all his waking hours. How long was it since he'd gone to the cinema or listened to music? Could he recall the last time he'd wandered aimlessly through the streets, just for the pleasure of walking? What had happened to the enjoyment he took in watching clouds, playing at guessing the shapes they would adopt? When had his life started turning grey?

"Time is slipping away from me like sand through my fingers," he thought sadly. He felt he was no longer in charge of his existence, which was now controlled by some strange being. He viewed his suit, grey as well, which he'd bought some months before just to match those of his colleagues, and was overcome by a sudden desire to escape. But he'd never missed work, not even when he'd been ill. What would his boss say?

The desire to escape was too strong, however, and he let himself be carried along. In front of his boss, he pretended he had a sudden, unbearable headache, which forced him to go home. He quickly gathered his things, enduring looks of reproof from his colleagues, and rushed down the stairs.

Once outside, he kept up a good pace. He didn't slow down until he was far from the office and the sense of



oppression that stopped him breathing had gone away. He now walked slowly, in no particular direction, enjoying a new found freedom after so many hours filling out pieces of paper that meant nothing to him. He raised his eyes and stared at the deep blue sky above the buildings. It was a beautiful afternoon, a gift from heaven. How could he have ignored that light, that air, the way they made you want to live?



2

Daniel allowed himself to be swept along by an inner force. He gradually left behind the busy streets, in search of peace and quiet. His footsteps took him to the residential part of the city, where the streets were full of trees and there were hardly any cars. All you could see around you were pretty houses with gardens protected by high stone walls.

As he passed in front of one of these houses, a melody reached his ears. Someone was playing the violin in a most charming way. He stood on the pavement, listening to that music coming from the other side of the wall.

Who was it playing so beautifully?

He felt a sudden desire to identify the author of these sounds. But the wall surrounding the house was too tall. To make matters worse, the top was sprinkled with glass. It seemed impassable, like the walls in fairytales.

Overcome by a sense of curiosity, he approached the wall and stood on tiptoe. He stretched up his arms and tried to climb but, try as he might, he couldn't find any gaps or ledges that would help him up. His attempt was in vain, there was no way to do it.

And then something happened, though Daniel couldn't explain how. He felt an intense tingling in his legs and a strange knot in his stomach. But he didn't realize his feet had left the ground until he saw his head was on a level with the top of the wall. As he searched with his hands for somewhere to hold onto among all the glass, he looked down and noticed his feet were dangling in the air, with nothing to support them. But he wasn't holding on with his arms. How was this possible?

He glanced at the garden. The one playing the music was a young girl, who can't have been more than twelve. She was standing in the doorway, concentrating on the score in front of her. On hearing a noise, the girl looked up to find that head peering over the wall. For a moment, their eyes met and Daniel saw the girl's fear. She immediately dropped her violin and darted inside the house.

When the music finished, Daniel felt the magic charm holding him up disappear as well, as if something invisible had broken inside him. Deprived of this inner force,



his body regained its usual weight and dropped to the pavement.

As he stood up, he noticed one of his ankles hurt and he'd cut his hand. But he didn't pay any attention to these minor details, he had more important things to worry about right now. He was confused by what had just happened and failed to find an explanation for an event that defied all the laws of physics. What a strange experience!

Was it true his feet had left the ground or was this a deceitful appearance? Had reality and desire got mixed up inside his head? In recent weeks, he hadn't stopped suffering from vertigo. So many hours sitting in the office were enough to do anyone's back in! Was it the fault of all the medicines he took against dizziness?

He started walking towards his house, feeling unsettled and disturbed. He wanted to get there soon, he needed to be alone to think, it was too many changes for a single day. First he'd had that anxiety attack in the office and now, when that was almost forgotten, this incredible experience. What was going on? Had he gone mad, was he suffering from hallucinations? Or had he discovered a new gift he didn't know he had?