

**JUST SAYIN'**

**A play by Tina Zucco**

## **NOTE ON TEXT**

*Other characters can be recorded voices, played by other actors or played by Cat.*

*Pauses and beats are indicated by the space given between lines.*

*A forward slash (/) indicates where the line is interrupted by either another character or a new thought.*

*This is designed to be a one-woman show, however the story is made up of many other characters, listed below.*

### **Characters**

*Cat - female identifying, early to mid 20s, Italian*

*Organiser - female identifying, 40s.*

***Guy 1** - male identifying, mid-late 20s.*

***Guy 3** - male identifying, early 20s.*

***Team Leader** - any identifying gender, 30s, Irish.*

***Man**- male identifying, late 50s.*

***Girl**- female identifying, late 20s.*

***Boy**- male identifying, early 30s.*

***Mr.Homeless**- male identifying, 45.*

***Bond** - male identifying, 50s, French.*

***Greek God** - male identifying, mid 20s, Spanish.*

*Underlined characters are a suggestion of which character to have pre-recorded, or played by other actors.*

*Non-underlined characters are a suggestion of which characters can be voiced by Cat on stage.*

*This is a one-act show, and there should be no interval.*

*Lights up on CAT, who is already on stage sitting at a chair and table.*

**CAT.** (*Terrified*) This is insane. I can't do it. I'm sorry.

*(CAT gets up and makes to leave)*

**ORGANISER.** Welcome everyone! We're about to begin, so please, ladies, take a seat.

**CAT.** (*Defeated*) Oh, great! (*She sits down again*)

I usually don't do this sort of thing.

It's just, I didn't have anything to do today and it was free to be here, so I thought, why not.

Unfortunately, now that I'm here I can think of many reasons to win the argument for that WHYNOT.

The whole flirting thing alone is such an effort that I barely even try.

It takes way too much time and energy, putting oneself out there, between the clothes and the makeup, and the jokes, and the eye contact and then the avoiding eye contact and the fake laughing and all that, how does one manage to keep track of it all and still appear charming, pretty, smart and funny? Just Sayin'

All of that just to attract the attention of someone that in 95% of the cases, won't last more than a month.

But you know, I'm at that stage of my life where ALL of my friends are in long-term relationships, even the last single survivor just celebrated her 6 monthiversary, leaving me all by myself.

Besides, it's been a couple of weeks now that everytime I walk somewhere I notice *them...* couples. (*Pretending to be annoyed*) Holding hands, kissing, talking, running around on a piggy bag, sharing food. They're everywhere.

(*Genuine*) And they're beautiful.

*(Sound of microphone check)*

**CAT.** Oh God, here we go!

**ORGANISER (VO).** Ok! Well I can see some new faces here tonight, so here's what you need to know: Girls, you'll stay where you are throughout the whole event, it'll be the boys that every 2 minutes, when you hear this "ping" (*PING*) will move clockwise onto the next table, to come meet you and chat!

**CAT.** The thing is that I'm incurable romantic, and I have always wanted a boyfriend, but I've got too many things to do to waste time on someone that's not the one.

Will I find my soulmate here?  
Tonight? Probably not. But as I said, I really had nothing else to do.

I'm new here, so worst case scenario I'll find someone to explore the city

Every guy has a tag with a number, if you like someone and would like to see them again, write down that number and come talk to me at the end of the event, and I will give you their details. It's all up to the girls, so boyyys, your job is to impress!  
*(excited laugh, she enjoys this way too much)*

with...

Wait, is that the worst case scenario? I'm sure something worse could happen. Should I have told someone where I was going tonight?

**CAT.** Ok, I can feel something move towards me, it must be the first guy. What should I do? Do I look, do I not look? Ok I look.  
Oooh, not bad! Not usually my type, but he's well made.  
He's got a Damon Salvatore vibe to him.  
This is exciting.

*PING*

**CAT.** It's funny, he just stares for a few seconds, without saying anything, and he has this very serious, very sexy stare.  
So I just smile back, trying to pack my smile with charm, smarts, sexiness and a sense of adventure, so the result is something like this *(she shows the audience a very strange and uncomfortable smile)*  
Then finally he speaks.

**GUY1.** I'm not a serious guy.

**CAT.** *(to GUY1)* Oh, ok.  
*(to audience)* Well at least he's honest. Brownie points for that.

**GUY1.** I don't like serious things. I'm not looking for anything serious.

**CAT.** *(to GUY1)* Well it's good you said that because I'm not looking for anything like that either/  
*(To audience)* you know I am, but whatever Damon Salvatore here says, will do for now.

**GUY1.** You look serious, you have a serious relationship look on your face.

**CAT.** *(to GUY1, trying to sound super casual)* Ehm, no really, I am totally on board for just a fliiiing.  
*(to audience, anxiously)* Am I so transparent?  
*(to GUY1)* so... tell me something about you. What do you like doing?

**GUY1.** *(scoffs)* I was right! Serious stuff. I don't do that.

**CAT.** *(taken aback and uncomfortable, looks at her watch, tries again)* So... where are you from?

**GUY1.** *(scoffs again)* Right there! Serious. I told ya. Not for me.

**CAT.** *(To audience)* It takes me about a minute to figure out what to say next cause I'm out of chit chat!, but thank God as soon as I try to say something else/

*PING.*

**CAT.** Great start...

The second guy arrives and oh my God. *YES.*  
Now, he's my type. More of a Stefan Salvatore this one.  
Tall. Smiley. Smart face. Green eyes. Ginger.  
We all know that like in every smoothie in the world, ginger makes everything better.  
Just Sayin'.

The idea that I could meet my soulmate at a stupid speedating event is suddenly popping in my head again as we just hit it off right away.  
He asks me if I like yoga and I'm like "Oh yeah I do!". He asks me if I like hiking and I say "Ah, well yes! I really do!" He says he loves Italian food and I'm just like "well, oh my, I mean, I'm italian! What a small world!".  
He makes a joke about the sad little flower on the table and I am just like

*(CAT gives out a nervous and girlish ugly laugh, with a little accidental grunt)*

**CAT.** Then I notice he got distracted by something to his left.  
*(She looks in the direction of the distraction)*  
Apparently the distractions are two and they're sitting two tables after mine. They are round, they are big, and honestly, they're probably fake.  
Just sayin'.

*PING*

**CAT.** He couldn't get away from me fast enough, he basically jumped to the next station, getting closer to the table with the distraction...

I am never wearing this top again.

I start to lose hope about this whole thing, but you know, the third time's the charm! Right?

**GUY3.** Hi there!

**CAT.** *(to GUY3)* Hi! You know, it's been a rocky start, so I'll jump right in with you! Tell me something interesting, about you, or the world, whatever.

**GUY3.** Mmmm, ok well. Uhm...

**CAT.** *(To audience)* Oh, he's cute, a bit insecure, but seems very nice.

**GUY3.** Oh ok, uhm... something interesting...

**CAT.** *(To audience)* Ok, I get it, you care about saying something interesting but we only have two minutes here, chop chop, just say something!

**GUY3.** Oh yeah, this is quite interesting, and most people don't realise it yet. Did you know that vaccines are really only an excuse to implant a GPS locator in our bodies so that the government can track our every move?

*CAT looks very uncomfortable and doesn't say anything until*

*PING*

**CAT.** Oh thank God!

*CAT gets up from the chair*

Well that was a dumb idea. I know exactly who I am looking for. I have a type. I mean of course, kind and smart, someone you can watch documentaries with as well as room-coms. Someone who likes cooking is essential, otherwise he wouldn't survive in an Italian family like mine. And then you know, if he also looked like a mixture of Tom Holland, Harry Styles and David... by Michelangelo! It would be so perfect.

The puzzle would be composed by Tom's body from when he was shooting Spider-Man No way home, then Harry's beautiful face, eyes and haircut from 2019, then finally, the completing piece would be David's butt. Michelangelo really knew what he was doing. Stick an exotic accent in and you've got the full package.

Everyone always told me I have too high standards, that someone like that doesn't exist. That I should just give up, and settle for anyone who'd take me. I tried to half-follow the stupid advice, I came here tonight.

Now I know.

I'm always right, people are wrong.

Since I'm new to this wonderful place I decide to take the long way home, and walk about Barcelona a bit. I walk through the Gothic Quarter, a place filled with beautiful ancient architecture.

Something distracts me though, and instead of looking at the old cathedral and little streets, my head turns to look at a much younger, just as well sculpted, work of art.

He seems to be handing out fliers and as an attracted magnet I feel my legs walking me towards him.

He looks at me, smiles and greets me.

**GREEK GOD.** *(in a Spanish accent)* Hello, how are you tonight?

**CAT.** There's the exotic accent.

He hands me a leaflet and tells me that they're looking for volunteers, once a week, right here. I say "anything to see you again" and he says "what?" And I say "anything to help the less fortunate" and he says "cool! I'll see you on Sunday" and I say "and the Sunday after that, and the Sunday after that" while slowly backing away. I'm smooth.

A week later I'm in the same exact spot but everything looks different. There are a lot of plastic crates, and cardboard boxes, and homeless people, and volunteers... Oh no.

I slowly realise that the volunteering I had in mind was something similar to what I did back in Italy with the local church, helping kids, collecting food and cleaning parks. I had no idea it was going to be about/ to be fair I could have read the leaflet before putting it away in my memories box...

Homeless people. I never really thought about them.

The idea of someone not being in control of their lives and ending up on the street, makes me quite, this is pretty bad I guess, but honestly, angry.

I have always been taught how to take care of myself, think of the future, budget, save, and be responsible.

And it's not easy, nor fun, but it's possible, and it's sort of like a social responsibility that we have, right? What we take from society, we should give back, that's what makes the economy recycle or something. I'm not sure, I'm a biologist, not a "economist?"

Anyway there were many times when I wanted to just chill for a bit, go on a holiday I couldn't afford, but I didn't, cause when you chill, you lose control and when you lose control, you're a loser. And losing is bad otherwise it'd be called winning.

You can call me a control freak, but it's worked for me so far.

People should be more like me.

Just sayin'.

This whole volunteering mission to get to know Greek God, seems less worth it now. But then I see him, kindly smiling and helping a young boy out with some clothes, and I decide to stick around.

I'm quite nervous though, I mean, I never really know what to do when I pass in front of homeless people.

Do I talk to them? Do I look the other way? Do I give them money? Do I offer to buy them food?

Will they be stable or will they be high?

Will they attack me or will they thank me?

Unpredictability scares me.

Usually I just try to walk on the other side of the road when I see one, but here... they're all around me.

They probably saw all the question marks on my face so they tell me to gather around with the rest of the new volunteers.

**TEAM LEADER.** *(with an Irish accent)* Ok, here's how it works. Anything they need we can usually provide: pillows, clothes, blankets, cutlery, just find the relevant box and hand them what they need. Food is served over there.

Never give them money, even if they beg you, they'll most likely use it for things that they don't actually need or get robbed or end up in fights, so stick to what they would use the money for, and if it's legit, we'll get it for them.

All clear?

Oh and remember, just *chat* to them. They spend most of their time being ignored by other people. Some of them are here just for a chat.

If a fight starts, just go home and leave everything behind, the police will take care of it.

**CAT.** *(Referring to the Irish accent)* Barcelona is a melting pot, and I love it.

Turns out she's right, some of these people really are here just for a chat.

The first man I meet is in a very strange situation. He must be 50 or 55 years old and his wife threw him out of his house yesterday morning after an argument they had.

He tells me she is lovely, most of the time, but other times she just has these moments where she loses it a bit, over nothing.

Yesterday he asked her to be a little tidier with her things because she always leaves them scattered everywhere in the house. The next thing he knows, he's out with a bag of clothes and a blanket that she threw out of the window, no wallet, no phone, all of his close friends currently out of town.

He really just wants someone to rant about this for a while until he tries to go back home later today, but I wouldn't call it a rant because after every WIFE follows the word LOVELY!

**MAN.** Lovely! Lovely! My wife is lovely, most of the time! Yeah Lovely.

**CAT.** Good, easy start. I really hoped Greek God noticed me talking to him. I'd like to have time to walk up to him and have our first real conversation, but as soon as he's gone to get some food a girl walks towards me.

I don't understand if she is a little older than me, or if she's younger but life has sped up the years on her face.

She needs a pillow, but it looks to me like she needs a lot more than that.

I give her what she asks for and I try to get her to talk a bit, offer her other things, and ask her questions.

She doesn't really say anything, she looks down as if she is half scared and half bored of me. I try a little harder to strike a conversation

*(to GIRL)* So tell me, how was your week? I had a presentation for the lab I work at and it couldn't have been more boring than that!

*(to audience)* She looks at me, perplexed.

**GIRL.** I got raped twice this week. I didn't get hurt this time.



**CAT.** I think she must have realised the horror in my expression in hearing her say this so nonchalantly, hearing the words “this time” as if it’s something ordinary.

**GIRL.** You asked, I answered. It was always more than one man, so there’s nothing I can do, just hope I don’t get hurt and hope I don’t... you know. My period is due in about a week so I’ll know soon anyway.

Thank you for the pillow, where can I get some food?

**CAT.** (*To GIRL*) Uh, ehm... over there, where you see the queue.

I don’t remember much more from my first volunteering session.

But I remember this. I don’t remember looking for Greek God before I left, to say goodbye, but just going straight home thinking about her.

I remember thinking about it for days. I remember at some point thinking that she must have been joking. Right? Then I remember feeling ashamed for thinking that, and sheltered for not seeing straight away that things like that can easily happen.

Then life goes on, and you think about other things, and soon you don’t have space in your brain to think about all of those things at the same time.

Next Sunday, I’m here bright and early. I didn’t get a chance to talk to Greek God last week, so I have to be ready, prepared, to walk up to him. But everytime I’m free he’s talking to someone, or he’s walking all around the square looking very busy, and as soon as he gets close I just (*CAT giggles like a crushed teenager*) and suddenly pick up something to do in my vicinity.

Plus, you know, the more I wait to talk to him, the more chances I give HIM to ask ME out. I know I’m a feminist, but I still want him to make the first move, I’m already at this volunteering thing for him.

Just sayin’.

I don’t realise I start following his every move with my head until a guy walks up right in front of me and I almost punch him to get him out of the way, but then I realise he’s one of the homeless people coming for help.

He must be new here because he doesn’t seem to know his way around. He tells me his chosen name is Bond, but not from the 007 hot, world-travelling spy. But Bond from (*in French*) Vagabond, which you know, means (*in English*) Vagabond.

He’s French.

He’s homeless by choice.

One day when he was about 45 he decided that life wasn’t meant to be lived working in an office for most of the day and then never really have enough time to live life and have adventures and travel.

So here he is, 4 years and 12 countries later, a happy man.

He started travelling all around France, and then moved on to the rest of Europe and beyond. He visited Italy, and he’s actually seen more of it than me.

He says his favourite country to visit was actually the UK, lovely people, very warm, and the more North he went the warmer they were! But the weather...

**BOND.** (*in French*) No, no! Oh mon dieu le temp c'est terrible, mais la gens, uuuuh les gens, good people!

(*in a French accent*) All I need, really, is just a bit of food, I still have to change the few coins and banknotes I have back to Euros because you see I was in UK not long ago. I'm staying in Spain for a long time now, I want to see it all! And Portugal!

**CAT.** (*to audience*) He tells me how much he likes his life and how he has everything he needs, really, no more "stuff".

The stuff we have is all just redundant.

It makes me think about all my clothes and cds, and books and things and how much I could cry if I lost even just one of them.

I strangely find myself admiring him, the light in his eyes, the way he changed his life so suddenly.

(*she thinks*) I think back at the whole social responsibility thing though and I wonder "Is Bond having a great life because he leads a selfish life? He takes and he takes, but does he give back?"

Luckily for him, I do this thing where every month I give myself a challenge, and this month is to not be judgmental in any circumstance. Which is quite hard for me... but I let it go.

He tells me how when he's running out of money he buys some paper and he writes poems to sell. Poems about what he's seen in his travels. Poems about the world, about places and people and things that most of us won't be able to see, stuck in our office jobs five days a week. People pay him good money for those and they seem to really enjoy them.

He'll bring me one next week.

I ask him to write something about Germany. I've never been there.

**BOND.** (*In a French accent*) Bien sur! I will bring you a poem about Germany, maybe about all the castles they have there, because you look like a Disney Princess.

**CAT.** (*to the audience*) He's now my favourite person.

I ask him what's his favourite thing about this life, and he tells me it's the time he spends just sitting somewhere on the side of the road, to chill for a bit, and he listens to the conversations of the people passing by, and he has a little diary, where he writes the most common phrases he hears. They're usually quite strange and specific ones.

In Italy for example there were a lot of men coming out of shops, on their phones to probably their wife or their mother saying "Si, si, l'ho comprata la passata" which means "yes, yes, I bought the tomato sauce".

Unsurprisingly about food, and very original compared to the winning phrase in England (*in an English accent*) "Alright mate let's go for a pint!" or in Ireland (*in a Scottish accent*) "Right man, let's go for a pint!".

He's actually great at accents and impressions, he's funny. We're having a great time! I'm so lost in his life story that I don't realise Greek God has been looking at us for a while and he's now walking towards us.

**GREEK GOD.** Hey guys, it looks like the two of you are having a wonderful time.

**CAT.** Finally, my moment of glory.

I feel really confident right now because he came to me, he noticed me, so if there's ever a moment to say something confident and witty it's this one.

But I don't have time to even think about something to say because we all hear a very big thumping noise from behind us and we immediately realise something's wrong. People are shouting and the metal food cases make a clunking noise when they fall onto the pavement. I feel a hand gripping my arm and I look up to see it belongs to Greek God. I don't feel flushed, nor happy nor lucky. I feel a bit scared as he firmly yet gently pushes me towards the side of the square and tells me:

**GREEK GOD.** Go home, now. I'll see you next Sunday, I hope.

**CAT.** (*To audience*) I look around before following his order and I see that other volunteers are doing the same, just grabbing their things and walking, at a fast pace, away. I follow through.

I walk backwards for a little bit, because I wanna try and understand what happened. All those years of hiking in the Italian Alps, really prepared me for this under-pressure, emergency, backward walking. Even though I can't see what I'm stepping on or where exactly I'm going, I have no risk of tripping over. I'm very stable.

I manage to catch a glimpse of a fight starting between two of the homeless guys that were queuing up for food, then more people join them. Some instead just grab the salvageable food off the pavement and go away, others have to be sent away by the couple of senior volunteers that stayed behind to clean up the situation and wait for the police to arrive.

They did warn us that something like this could happen, but for some reason after a few good Sundays, I just thought it was a joke, things always seemed to go so smoothly.

One of the regulars came by, behaving in a very strange way, he was so impulsive, angry and violent. I back away pretty fast, but even from afar it is painfully clear that he is sad and lost and / but why is he so violent! Is he high? (at first she didn't think that was the case but then you see her face change while realising that it could be true)

He needed food and he came to get what we usually serve, some oven-baked pasta. We didn't have pasta today. We had a rice salad, delicious, even better than oven-baked pasta but however delicious this rice was, it wasn't the oven-baked pasta he came for. When he got there he cut the line, got to the food table, and asked for a plate. The volunteer gave him a portion of the rice.

**Mr.HOMELESS.** (*shouting*) What the hell is this? I'm here for the pasta. Where the fuck is the pasta?  
Give me my pasta!

**CAT.** The volunteer had seen this before and tried to be nice and explain that's all we had for the day.

He lost it.

All of a sudden he's overturning the table with the food and screaming even louder at the volunteer.

The seniors called the police but someone has to wait there until they arrive.

In just a second, another guy that was waiting for his portion walks up to the high, trouble maker and pushes him a little to catch his attention

**BOY.** Are you an idiot? What the fuck do you think you're doing? We've all been waiting in line to get some food. What the fuck does it matter what they serve us, it's fucking food. We need it. I haven't eaten in/

**CAT.** He couldn't finish his sentence, as a fist hits his nose, and then a push shoves him to the ground.

That's how the fight started. It was the first time I ever saw anyone fighting over food. It was also the first time I saw someone that high and uncontrollable.

I wonder what he's like when he's with family and he's talking to his mom.

Does he have a mom? Does he talk to her? How does one end up like that? Like the *villain* of Sunday afternoon. Like the one that needs help but that most people are afraid of helping.

**CAT.** When I get home I pray. I pray a lot.

I pray for him, I pray he'll be able to let someone help him. I pray that the volunteers who stayed behind are ok and didn't get hurt. I pray that Greek God doesn't get too involved, and I pray I'll see him again next Sunday. I pray for the other homeless guy who accidentally started the fight. I pray that he gets to eat soon, since he hasn't eaten for God knows how long. I pray for everyone else in that queue. I pray for everyone else in the world. I pray that whatever they're going through they have someone nearby that is trying to help them. I pray for the people that like me are praying for someone else. I pray for those who don't believe in prayers. I pray for my friends, even those who mock my faith. I pray for me, to get the strength to help that guy if I ever meet him again.

Hunger really bothers me.

It angries me.

Anger about hunger, that's something an Italian would *not* like to say three times in a row very fast.

I leave last week behind me much more easily than I'd have imagined.

I come back not scared, but curious, to see how everyone managed to survive the past week, to check if anyone got scared or spooked by the attack. Oh and yeah, to see how Greek God's doing, that too, but turns out he's not here today, so I focus more on the other things I came

here to do, and I dive in to meet more people, and hear more stories and give more clothes and share more food.

Some people remind me of animals.

Their features, their movements, their vibes.

Once you start looking for it you can easily see it. I've seen a leopard once, it was a girl from high school. The most common features are like squirrels, or turtles or beagles. Today, though, I meet my first chihuahua.

She is so petite. I mean, still taller than me. Most people are. But she looks somewhat smaller because she's very thin, and she looks very quiet in her own little corner. Small and docile looking, but as soon as someone accidentally pushes her to the side to squeeze out of the line, she attacks with this rude, loud, high-pitched barking.

Clearly a chihuahua.

I wish I could know the whole life-story of all the people I meet here, because they're all so different, all so unique. Everyone got to this life in a different way. I always thought the only two things leading to homelessness were betting debts and drugs.

I was wrong.

I also thought that once you're homeless, your life is over. No friends or family, no job, no life.

I was wrong.

Today for instance I hear a story, which doesn't end with homelessness, but starts with it.

This is the story of two crazy, colourful, cheerful people.

I call them the Tweedle Boys.

They're best friends, about 30 years old and they met here in Barcelona a few years ago.

Tweedledum is from Madrid and Tweedledee is from Berlin. Neither of them speak a word of each other's language, and their English isn't even that good, so it's a mystery how they can get along so well.

One night, about 3 years ago while Tweedledum was sleeping, somebody tried to steal his backpack, Tweedledee saw them and ran to shoo them away and then sat next to Tweedledum until he woke up to make sure it wouldn't happen again.

They've been inseparable since then.

Hanging out together in the day and protecting each other at night.

I start thinking about my Sundays even when I'm at work or when I'm at my dancing class, I can't stop thinking about all these people I meet and I help and I feel this rush of positivity and confidence that makes me feel hyper! So for the first time in probably 5 years, I go to the gym.

I sign up for this 30 days trial that includes a bunch of free classes too, and I decide to go to AMRAP. I'm sure it'll be just a new hip way of saying the usual exercises: arms, legs, bum, abs, stuff like that.

I turn up in this place filled with massive people, everyone looks so tall, they all must be over 6' and they all carry massive weights with them.

I get to my class and it turns out that AMRAP is not the usual stuff.

AMRAP, stands for as many rounds as possible, which meant that for a whole half of an hour I had one of those massive intimidating personal trainers, shout “DON’T STOP! NO BREAK NO BREAK! KEEP GOING!”

Next Sunday I am back at the volunteering square, but all my confidence has been knocked out of me since now I can’t even walk without some sort of muscle hurting me.

This is proper pain.

And since this isn’t enough to make today weird enough, I also meet the same hooligan that is responsible for the Sunday fight a few weeks ago.

Mr. Pasta-over-rice-all-my-life.

I’m the first person he sees here. I recognise him even though he looks completely different.

He’s sober, I think.

He’s not aggressive and loud, nor scary, not anymore.

He reminds me of a beaten up dog. He’s very down, very sad.

I don’t want to walk up to him, firstly because I resent him a bit for his outburst, secondly because if I move I’ll cry from pain.

I’m scared at the idea of helping him.

He’s been held by the police since the day of the fight but they must have let him out.

Now he’s back.

Unpredictability scares me, and I have no idea what he’s going to be like today, and how he might react if I even talked to him.

But then I remember being in my room that day after the fight, and I remember praying to have the strength needed to help him, should I see him again, so, I get over myself, and very slowly, very awkwardly, I walk up to him.

I greet him, I introduce myself and I ask him what I can do for him.

He freezes, he looks at me, eyes watering up in an emotion I cannot decipher.

He moves so quickly that I barely have time to register that I’m scared by his sudden movement, when I realise he’s hugging me.

He’s hugging me in the tightest yet gentlest, probably stinkiest hug of my life.

I can’t react. Maybe because I just don’t know what to do, or maybe because in his sudden hug he pinned my arms down so I feel like a very well loved wood stick.

He spent the last 3 days on the street, asking for people’s kindness, asking for food and money, asking if not for respect than for consideration.

Nothing. Not one soul has stopped for him in the last three days. Not one soul looked at him when he was begging. Not one soul threw him a penny. Not one soul acknowledged that he was there, standing next to them, asking for their help.

Until today.

**Mr.HOMELESS.** (*shouting*) This girl is the best human in the world!

**CAT.** (*to audience*) Today is a strange day.

He's got the biggest smile on his face and he's about to cry, so I just go along with it. I hug him again, and I ask him what he needs.

He never leaves my side that day.

He follows me everywhere and every time I'm trying to help someone else, he helps them too.

He tells me the biggest struggle since prison was not being able to buy any drugs.

He asks me if I have any.

I look at him, same questioning look as before, again impossible to keep up against that cheek-to-cheek smile on his face.

(*to Mr.HOMELESS*) No, I don't have any. But since you haven't used in a week, why don't you just continue your life without it?

(*to audience*) His smile instantly disappears. Then he has an almost hysterical laugh

**Mr.HOMELESS.** And live this life sober. No, no, no, no. Impossible. Bad. Terrible

**CAT.** (*to audience*) I drop the topic.

At the end of the day when I'm about to go, I am terrified that this is the last time I'm going to see him like this. Kind, enjoyable, sober.

He's probably going to find the money to get some drugs somewhere and that'll be that.

But to my surprise for the next couple of weeks he comes back just like this. I don't ask him if he uses during the week, because I really don't want to know, but also because whatever he's doing, he's still choosing to come here sober. He's choosing to let me help him.

Every Sunday we talk about something new, he tells me he's from Madrid, that he loved it there. He doesn't have anyone here.

I tell him he's got me, when he comes here sober once a week.

I tell him that everytime you're in a place where you don't know anyone, you'll find family in the most bizarre of people.

Every Sunday he needs something new. First a pillow, then some clothes, then a sleeping bag, then a pillow again, 'cause the first one got stolen.

It's like he's building his little empire, and he's taking care of his things. I mean, granted he doesn't have a place to put them so some of them get stolen while he sleeps...

He's starting to own things, and he's coming here sober.

I'm sure in the right time I'll be able to take him to that charity that helps homeless people find a job, and later on maybe a place to stay, and sooner than you know the life he lives now will be just a bad bracket in the equation of his life.

I get poetic when I'm happy.

Screw the gym, some sore muscles didn't knock out my adrenaline.

I'm happy. Happy enough to smile while you're walking around town, happy enough to smile while queuing at the supermarket. Happy enough to start dancing out of the blue.

I walk up to Mr. Homeless and I ask him if he's doing anything tomorrow afternoon, since it's a national holiday I'm not working and I want to take him to meet my Barcelona family. We always talk about difficult topics when he comes here, we make his life look so grim and tough and boring. But I now know it can be more, it can still be fun and worth living and interesting. So I ask him to meet me at the Ciutadella park and agree the time.

He doesn't even know what's waiting for him and yet he looks so excited, so happy.

While I'm getting ready, Greek God walks up to me, and asks me if I'm doing anything tomorrow.

Oh no.

**GREEK GOD.** Some of the volunteers are going for lunch, and afternoon drinks.

**CAT.** *(To audience)* Oh yes!

That would be so fun, and so great, maybe I'm still in time to rearrange with Mr.Happy-over-don't-know-what, I turn around to see if I can still catch him, and I swear I see him do a little jump of happiness...

**CAT.** *(To GREEK GOD)* I am so sorry, it sounds lovely, but tomorrow I really can't. I've just made other plans...

**GREEK GOD.** Plans that can be cancelled, or rescheduled, or like actual serious plans? I didn't want to say this cause I don't want to make a big deal out of it, but it's my birthday tomorrow, would be good to have you there.

**CAT.** *(To audience)* Oh. Great.

*(To GREEK GOD)* *(she hesitates)* Serious plans, I'm sorry I really can't, but have fun.

*(To audience)* And just like that all hopes are lost.

He'll go out, have fun, think about the fact that I didn't want to go to his birthday, will start talking to a beautiful girl, will fall in love, will get married, will have a super happy life and super cute kids, all the while I stay single and I meet Mr.doesn't-know-what's-waiting-for-him at the ciutadella park to take him salsa dancing with a bunch of 70 year olds.

I really hope that they'll at least teach me something cool today.

When he gets here, he quickly realises what we're about to do and he suddenly turns in Mr.I-don't-want-to-do-it, but he doesn't have a choice.



I introduce him to Pablo, who is this short, bald, 84 years old man. He's the most popular amongst the ladies, he's always dancing with someone, never time for a break seeing the queue of 60 year-olds that want a piece of him.

While Pablo shows Mr. please-don't-make-me-do-this the basic steps I tell him why I brought him here.

*(CAT slowly starts dancing some salsa moves, then while Latin music gets louder and faster and she keeps talking, she speeds up her moves, and spins a bit. )*

I tell him how I do this most Saturdays, I come here, I sit at my favourite bench and I watch this group of people dance in the gazebo at the centre of the park.

It makes me feel like I'm in the musical *In The Heights*, seeing all these sweaty people dance outdoors, in bright coloured dresses, to sensual salsa rhythms.

I tell him how one day, out of the blue, Pablo over there walked up to me and tried to get me to dance with him, I tell him I pretended to get a phone call and ran away because that's something I would have never done.

I tell him how after a few Sundays at the volunteering square I started feeling a bit more confident, a bit more adventurous and one day I stood up from my bench and walked up to Pablo.

It took a while but he finally got the dance he asked for.

I started coming here every Saturday, dancing with all of them. They get so excited everytime I come here because I'm the only one under 60. After a month of this, it's like I acquired 5 new sets of grandparents.

They help me with my dancing, with my Spanish, they bring me flowers and cake for my birthday, or for any other special holiday, and they really help me with my nostalgia of home.

*(CAT stops dancing.)*

*(To MR.HOMELESS)* Pablo, and everyone else here, they're family to me, through the most random situation. Just like I am family to you. Unless you don't want me to be. Just sayin'.

*(To Audience)* He has a blast dancing away, he's not really good at it, but that's ok.

We spend the rest of the afternoon together, and after a couple of hours of going at it with the salsa moves, we sit down on the green grass, enjoy the fresh air, and I decide that however uncomfortable this may become I want to ask him about his problem with drugs. About his life before the streets. About his skills, and hopes and dreams, because I want to help him get out of this cycle he's stuck in, get out of the streets.

I think he can feel I'm about to start *THE* conversation because he never gives me an in, he keeps asking questions about me and my life and my hobbies. What I'm doing in Barcelona, if I'm single/

*(to Mr.HOMELESS)* Single?

**Mr.HOMELESS.** Yeah, you're too perfect to be single, but you also give off such an independent vibe that really confuses me.

**CAT.** If you're trying to ask me out, I'm afraid you're too old for me.

**Mr.HOMELESS.** Ah, I would never be so stupid to think I'd stand a chance with you. But you've done so much for me, I want to know if you're happy.

**CAT.** Happy? Yes, I really am.

A little lonely sometimes but as the Italians say, "soli e' meglio che male accompagnati!" So basically "lonely is better than being in bad company".

*(To audience)* He doesn't seem convinced by this saying

*(to Mr.HOMELESS)* How about we stop talking about me and start talking about you now?

How did you end up here?

*(to audience)* He tells me it was gambling. He had a nice job selling software for accountants that paid him quite well in commissions. Once he decided to try and gamble to make even more money.

He tells me "as you can see it didn't go as planned". He kept playing to make up the money he lost, but he kept losing. After a while he lost family money, friends money... The house and everything in it went to repay part of the debts. So here he is.

*(to Mr.HOMELESS)* Why drugs? How can you afford them?

**Mr.HOMELESS.** I have my ways...

**CAT.** *(to audience)* He tells me he uses most of the money he gets from begging in the streets and when that's not enough, he prostitutes himself. He tells me "I'm quite good looking, if he says so myself".

Men pay better.

I ask him if he's gay.

**Mr.HOMELESS.** Not gay, just poor.

**CAT.** *(to audience)* I hate this.

I hate the hold this stupid substance has on him.

He does what he has to, to get away, to escape from this life. He tells me at the beginning he tried to get his life back but it's all a vicious circle. Without a house, there's no bank, then no job, then no house and so on.

It was a guy in a shelter that gave him his first shot of heroin.

I change the subject, we talk about jobs he'd like to do and houses he'd like to live in.

Sales is good, made him feel good and confident too, but he would never go back to the same place and the same colleagues. A flat would be good, as small as they come, to start with, he'd feel so happy to own keys again.

He tells me he had a crush on a woman years back, so whenever he feels like he's got it all back together he would like to reach out and see how she's doing, if she's happy and all that.

He asks me if I have a crush on anyone, and I tell him that I sort of did, but I think I got over it by never acting on it.

**MR.HOMELESS.** Tell me who it is.

**CAT.** *(To MR.HOMELESS)* What? No!

**MR.HOMELESS.** Come on, tell me, maybe I can help you! You're helping me! And I really want to do something for you, before it's too late. I won't always be around you know.

**CAT.** What? You're not going to die! I know I said you're old, but you're 45 not 100!

**MR.HOMELESS.** No! I want to leave Barcelona at some point. You made me think about how I want my old life back and that was in Madrid. When the time is right I'll go back.

**CAT.** *(To audience)* The next day at the volunteering square I bring him a list of steps to take to get completely clean, a list of organisations that can help him find a job, secure a bank account, and eventually help him get a flat. He looks at me, and asks me if I trust him.

I really really don't, I have trust issues.

He calls Greek God and tells him to come where we are.

**Mr.HOMELESS.** She has been trying to get me clean for weeks. She's the most helpful person I've met in years, and I promise/

**CAT.** *(to audience)* He hesitates, he looks like it pains him to say this.

**Mr.HOMELESS.** I promise that I will follow every point on this checklist, and get clean for good, if you two go on a date. When you come back from that date, and tell me how it went, I will officially stop. I will go to the support groups, and I will report on my progress.

**CAT.** *(to audience)* I don't even know what I'm feeling right now, but I don't even have time to think about it because Greek God suddenly says:

**GREEK GOD.** Yes. We'll do it.  
I mean, if that's ok with you?

**CAT.** *(to GREEK GOD)* Uhm, Yes, of course.

(to audience) Then he walks away because he has to finish helping a girl getting some clothes but/

**GREEK GOD.** Just out of curiosity, would you still have said yes if it wasn't to help him get clean, cause I've been thinking about asking you out but I wasn't sure if you'd be inter/

**CAT.** (to GREEK GOD) Yes!

**CAT.** We go on the date that week so that next Sunday would be mr.Let-me-fix-you-a-date's first day towards sobriety.

Sports dates are the best.

We go to the climbing centre because neither of us has ever tried rock-climbing before and we thought it'd be a lot easier than it looked.

It's not.

Three reasons why taking the guy you like to a rock-climbing gym on the first date is the best idea ever.

1. When you're on the wall you're too focused about not falling and dying to be nervous about the date.
2. Nobody looks graceful and cool on their first time climbing, so all sorts of lies and masks we wear on first dates are suddenly ripped off, to show people's true colours, which makes it a lot easier to really get to know him.
3. Whenever he climbs, you have to stay down and check he's ok, therefore having a GREAT VIEW to all of his backside shapes. Trust me, there's no better way to check out a guy's butt than to look at him hanging on a climbing wall like this (*she mimes the position*)

We take breaks every so often because our hands start to hurt and the gym has a lovely little cafe where we talk for hours.

I thought he was perfect for me.

Now I actually know it.

After the last try at some climbing we're both so tired and sweaty that he suggests going to the beach, because you know, in Barcelona, you can just do that.

We get there at about sunset time.

It's like a rom-com. But a good one, not the ones with Drew Barrymore.

Just kiddin' she's cool. I love her. "50 first dates" is my favourite film.

Today it's just like that, it's full of funny and heart-warming moments.

It's like I'm Drew, but without the memory loss, and he's Adam Sandler, but much hotter.

We're sitting on the sand eating a croissant and drinking coffee, looking at the gentle waves, and the birds, when suddenly one of those massive seagulls dives at crazy speed towards him and flies right on his face to steal his croissant.

He was terrified, he screamed for like 2 minutes, and then we laughed for half an hour.

Once we finally managed to calm down and start a different conversation the same stupid seagull flew back our way to poop that delicious croissant, on my head.

Some people say it's lucky when a bird poops on your head.

I guess they're right.

Between the climbing sweat, the sand, and the bird poop we both really need to go for a swim to get cleaned up a little.

The water's quite cold, and since this date stripped us of all our pride, none of us bother trying to be cool getting in. So we're both like:

*(CAT shows how she got in the cold water, arms up, little by little, with a lot of "uh!uh!uh!uh eeeeeeh! I'll dip my wrists so everything will be easier. uuuuuuh it's time for the belly now ouh! ouh!")*

Once we're in it's not cold anymore. It's just perfect.

I clean the bird poop off my hair.

The next day I get to the volunteering square bright and early, so early actually that mr.Today-is-a-new-beginning isn't here yet.

I help set-up the square and then start giving out food to the queue that had already formed. The chihuahua girl from a few Sundays ago, was now a regular too. When it's her turn to get her pasta she stops in front of me. She barks something like "I'm sorry" then she moves forward.

I keep handing out pasta when I start noticing something's up. Something's strange. People are quieter than usual. There is a police officer on the side of the square, he's talking to the senior volunteers.

Greek God is with them.

Mr.I-can't-wait-to-hear-about-your-date isn't here yet.

Maybe that's why it feels quiet.

Greek God takes me aside, but I can't make sense of what he's saying after

Mr.thank-you-for-caring-about-me won't be coming.

It's just a few words here and there that stuck.

Police. Morning. Found.

Overdose. Drugs. Nothing.

Overdose?

Mr.I'll-build-a-new-life is Mr.no-more now.

They found him with nothing next to him. Not a backpack, not a pillow, not a blanket. Not a friend.

My head is spinning trying to figure out what could have happened, and I come up with way too many scenarios.

The worst I think/ (*her voice breaks*)

He was a salesman after all.

It was all premeditated. He didn't need all the things I was giving him Sunday after Sunday. All the times I gave him pillows and blankets, and clothes and stuff, all the times he told me he lost something and needed another one. They weren't stolen. They were sold, money he would use for drugs.

He must have been *good* as a salesman.

All this time trying to help him, and I end up being the facilitator of his addiction.

All this time thinking I'm saving him but really I am just killing him a little more every time.

Mr. (*caring*) thank-you-for-your-kindness became mr. (*mischievous*) thank-you-for-your-kindness.

He couldn't have lost all those pillows. Or could he?

The best scenario

He knew Greek God and I went on a date. He knew he had to stop using from today.

He got cold feet, he wanted a last taste.

He got greedy.

He got robbed, once he was laying there, high, overdosing, people stole all of his stuff and left him there instead of helping him.

Other homeless people probably thought he was dead already and looted his camp.

Which is it?

No more fantasising about his future new job, about his house, about his life.

He would have bought a dog.

I told him he was stupid, cats are much better.

He would have called the dog after me, Cat.

Short for Caterina.

Cat the dog.

(*CAT lets out a sad laugh*)

**CAT.** So that's it I guess.

No more stinky hugs.

No more missing pillows.

No more making up names for Mr.Homeless.

Mr.They-should-make-a-film-about-us-because-our-friendship-is-cool.

Kids are taught that hate is a strong word, that they shouldn't hate things.

But right now I feel just like a kid.  
And all I can do is think of the things I hate.  
I hate drugs.  
I hate salesmen, I hate hunger, I hate dogs, I hate pillows, I hate people, I hate rice, I hate this square.  
I hate/

I hate this square.  
I mean how many people have I touched and tried to help in the last six months here? How many times did I probably say the wrong thing or give the wrong message?  
Have I ever really helped anyone?

I think back at that girl from the very first day. I gave her a pillow, we gave her food, but did we really do anything important for her? She still was all alone at night where things so horrible as rape could happen to her. She's out there where people can hurt her. And all I did was give her a pillow.

His name was Diego. That's all I knew.

Mr-I-don't-like-my-name.  
Mr-since-I-lost-everything-I'm-not-Diego-anymore.

How will his family hear of this? Who's going to check on that woman he had a crush on?  
What happens when things like these happen?  
When you don't have family around.

Family. I/

**GREEK GOD.** Hey, it's not the first time it happens.  
There's nothing you could have done.  
Let me walk you home, I'll cook you some food and we can watch your favourite episode of the Vampire Diaries to make you feel better.

**CAT.** God, he's perfect.

*(Whispered)* Thank you.

*Blackout*

**THE END**