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ROOM 219

What does it take to start?

It's enough to close the door behind you, fill up the empty wardrobes, throw a book on the bed, customise the glass in the bathroom by putting your toothbrush in it and wash away your name under a hot shower.

A quick look at the times for breakfast.

No memory, no fragrance gently clinging to the heart.

These walls will be the walls of my room for five days.

I let myself fall on the bed: with my eyes closed I imagined millions of footsteps going frantically in and out of the other rooms: people undress, have a bath, get changed, talk on their mobile phone, they go out; there is always a mission to accomplish when you spend some time in a hotel room.

My mission was a very basic one: the agency for which I worked had sent me on a refresher course, all booked, hours fixed. I would only have to sit on one of those chairs with a small tablet arm for a note pad and wait my turn, say my name and tell absolute strangers the reasons for my being in that classroom, trying to be more original than the people who had

already introduced themselves. I imagined myself sitting there, filling the pages with ink, with more or less useful marks, while my gaze roamed over the others on the course, the rest of the team! Naturally, because the course was aimed at our becoming a team. For 5 days we would have lunch together, share the same space in front of the coffee machine, would invent a previous life to talk about in the virtual and tight-knit team of strangers, and then there would be the aperitifs and the discussions about the day's lessons. On the last day of the course, the most sensitive member of the team would ask us, his voice broken by emotion, to exchange our email addresses because at that stage we had become perfectly unknown "friends" and it would have been a pity to lose touch with one another.

There was none of my dust beneath the bed in Room 219, none of my books on the bedside table, none of my memories in the wardrobes and none of my salty air came in through the window; it was perfect for filling up with any kind of dream.

This is what key No. 219 opens: the ideal place to draw out a dream.

That night I used little of the mattress: my petite body hardly moved during sleep; the mattress was thankful to me for this.

My mobile phone alarm went off: damn, the course! By now my dream had got free and I found it in front of me, looking at me impatiently. I gently grabbed it by a corner and rested it on my lap: "You must have a bit more patience", I thought.

I ordered coffee, bread, butter and cherry jam; nothing starts without a good breakfast: not even the dressing rite; so I enjoyed my food on the mattress, between pillow and blankets.

I turned my laptop on and sorted out a collection of

tales that were kept in an old yellow file on the desktop, I uploaded and published them on a website dealing with the printing of books. I ordered 50 of them: delivery scheduled for the following morning.

I went down to the hotel hall and asked the porter for the name of the city's biggest bookshop.

I went out for some shopping and before going back to the hotel I passed by the bookshop for a look: four enormous windows at the front and two smaller ones at the side; a lot of light filtered in and had great fun bouncing between the shiny and opaque book covers, had there been some silence I am sure the brightest laughter in the city would have been heard.

That night my petite body moved all the time; the mattress did not thank me for that.

I had just got out from the shower when I heard a knock at the door: it was a delivery for me. Not knowing how much room a parcel of 50 books would take up, I threw open my door with a flourish. The look on the delivery boy's face reminded me that I was wrapped in a towel that barely covered my front. I pressed my back to the door and asked the delivery boy to leave everything on the bed. Once alone, I unwrapped my books in such a violent passion that I reduced the wrapping to paper petals at the mercy of a hurricane. As soon as I saw the book covers, my hands tried to turn the pages with delicate impatience, flipping through them near my face to smell the dream's perfume.

I loaded the books into a taxi and asked to be taken to the bookshop.

I walked through the entrance dressed in a dark green dress, with legs sheathed in stockings and 5-inch heeled knee-boots. As I headed confidently towards a shop assistant, I was overwhelmed by all the scents and colours of hundreds of books. I staggered, but no one noticed my loss of balance and I managed to carry on.

I told the shop assistant I urgently need to talk to the manager.

A smart man asked with exaggerated politeness if he could help me.

“Hello, I’m Violet” I replied urgently.

“Yes?”

“I am sure everything is under control but, as you are well aware, I’ll have to start the presentation in less than half an hour. Where did you think of placing me? Where can I have my books unloaded?”

Panic. His shifty eyes suddenly stopped in a lost look.

I had to reply before he could get his breath back.

“During the past few days my editor already delivered other copies of the book to you as agreed. In order to save time, I’ve brought 50 autographed copies with me and thought of offering some before starting, to involve the customers”.

The secret is to maintain a high enough tone of voice to penetrate the head of the person in front of you and prevent its neurons from connecting; word pace must be fast, he must lack air, breathe with difficulty, and panic.

And he did panic. He did not have my books to put on display and my workspace was not ready. Guilt made him call most of his assistants over to him. While I stared at them setting up an improvised dais, my heart started beating in my chest like a prisoner wanting to escape, my stone-cold hands frozen in an unnatural position. With an almost liquid embarrassment he apologized for not having a microphone due to an oversight.

I smiled. “It is not ideal, but I’ll make sure I keep the tone of my voice sufficiently high”.

Not knowing how to introduce myself, I was introduced in a vague way by the manager, creating a certain suspense which enabled me to capture the in-

terest of customers in the shop. I introduced myself, described my love for books and talked and talked, light was laughing and thousands of words kept leaping out from the books on the shelves, the kids yelled, people chatted, the tills issued receipts, opening and closing like mouths in search of nourishment. Some were listening. There really was somebody listening to my words; someone even touched my book. It felt as if an unknown hand was gently caressing me. When I finished my speech, the people collected the free copies of the books piled up near me and started moving along. I watched my pages going on their way, each with their new family. I noticed a hand stretching in front of me as if to say hello, it shook my hand and I looked for the arm it was attached to. A guy had a copy of my book in the other hand, the same copy that ended up on my mattress in Room 219 soon after. That night my petite body hardly rested upon the mattress: a much heavier body put the springs' resistance to the test. That night our bodies met with sweet insistence; the mattress understood.

I said goodbye to my unknown guest soon after breakfast and saw him take away that body of which I had seen even the smallest part. I got hold of a notepad and wrote what I would have handed over as courses notes: "Case history: conference to introduce a new author. Communication strategy, method plan and event organization". I dressed and closed the door of Room 219 behind me.

General rule for basic level missions: leave everything to do with people or events connected with the stay behind at the hotel. Only notes relating to the course are allowed in order to go back to real life.

I took my cases to the hall and while I was waiting for the taxi to take me to the railway station, I turned around and saw a woman with a red bag in one hand and a room

key in the other. Without realizing it, I had moved close enough to read the number on the key: 219.

I approached the woman and whispered with a knowing look: "Let your dream escape".

The taxi left and I with it.