

Elan Meets Rafa: Transcription of Journals

PART ONE

Chapter One

Page 12

Elan

Wednesday 12am

I don't remember much about the accident. I only recall a solid shape of shoulders against the evening sky and the feel of a strong hand effortlessly helping me up.

Chapter Three

Page 1

Elan

Today I met the person from the accident. Although I didn't remember him, I felt ridiculously glad to be recognized. Rafa was his name. He had a strong body – robust arms, and frank countenance. His friend Jake had opposable thumbs, but I am not sure a measurable IQ. I am not sure why I agreed to have lunch with them. But as I turned to go Rafa caught my hand – lightly and gently – yet it was enough to stop me long enough to be convinced.

Unfortunately I believe Rafa and Jake were planning to play a joke on the new kid in the neighborhood. Father always says I am too gullible, he'd be happy I didn't fall for this one.

Chapter Break

Elan

I am an adult, but I have the sense of being a child thrown in a grown-up world. I'm so ill-equipped for what I'm experiencing. Physically I just feel tired – tired and waiting for an inner voice to either say "Stop" or "Keep going". I am sure in the end this city will kill me.

Murakami is watching the traffic in the street down below with me as if we were pair of old friends who have been together forever. The morning sunlight comes in through his hair, tracing his face and picking out his fine whiskers. You'd think in such a grey slum I'd be immune to beauty like this - a Siamese cat caught in a beam of light that was made just for him. He looks at me with absolute quiet and calm behind blue eyes as if he is telling me I need to find something inside me – tough and indestructible – that will enable me to bear these different circumstances.

Chapter Five

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Elan

I'm staying with Rafa for a short time. I'm so sleepy. And although I'm trying to stay awake, I don't think I will be when he returns. I haven't had a good night's sleep in days.

How did he convince me to LIVE with him? There was something a little different in the way he carried himself than before when he was with his IQ-challenged friend. He looked me in the face and talked to me in an open good-natured way. Or perhaps I was too worried about Murakami and distracted by the sound of his voice to think clearly. Rafa has a funny voice. It is smooth with a very rich urban accent. He seemed genuinely amused to find this directionless, socially ill-at-ease person to room with – like it would be loads of great fun. His eagerness to play made me think he must have had a happy childhood and his bright dark eyes and big grin made me believe that, yes, maybe it will be OK at his place if he doesn't know who I am.

But he's tall, and strong, and standing near him I feel small and silly like I should be holding a giant lollipop and singing "We represent the Lollipop Guild". And when we shook hands his slow release made me shiver though the weather around me was warm.

Rafa

I remember this day so clearly: you standing so defiant with your hands on your hips like you thought you were a tough 6'6" and 260-pound man amongst the scent of urine and amid smashed bottles, crumpled wrappers and the other various residue of vice and gluttony.

You always kept so much hidden. If you'd've told me everything. And if I had only known everything you would become to me, I would have done it all differently Elan. I would do everything differently starting from this moment.

Chapter Six

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Elan

I can't shake the feeling that I'm being examined like a lab rat by everyone in this town. It is as if they are surreptitiously testing what random stimuli will cause happiness, pain, or escape behaviour in their test subject. But the good news is that I am greatly refreshed, relaxed and well fed. I feel as though I have been carried across some dangerous passage and lifted safely to the other side.

[*underlining is Rafa's*]

Rafa

“I made you laugh”. I told you, but I might as well have said “I made you come!” Because that was the satisfaction I felt to put such a nice smile on a face that didn’t seem to smile very much.

Chapter Seven

Page 5

Elan

When I got the silly job Rafa squeezed me so tightly I thought my ribs and spine would crack. At first I felt I had to endure such overt brotherly affection. I had no choice. But then there was a lifting of something off my heart when I felt his warm breath on my neck – a strange unaccustomed warmth, like a thaw. And suddenly I wished I could remain standing wrapped in him forever, taking in the sweaty scent of him while watching the bums shuffle across the street.

Rafa

This day was the first time I noticed this journal. Even from a distance I could see that your penmanship was distinguished. All your letters curled into uniform perfect patterns. I was selfishly relieved the job was only part time. I didn’t want you to leave me just yet. I wanted you to stay with me.

Chapter Seven

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Elan

I used to play the piano but I had to stop. Oh how I missed it! I missed the Music that would soar from my fingers and fly throughout the room and out the windows. The Music that would escape from our house and soar up and fly far away into the sky like migrating birds. In my mind I would follow their path away into the clouds. I would leave the house that smelled of stale cigar smoke and alcohol and kept with it a history of nothing but loss.

I quit the piano because it irritated my father when I played. It reminded him of my failures: my performance anxiety, my competition failures, my fumbled recitals. And now I can’t look at birds and not envy their freedom.

Rafa

You should have told your dad to just fuck himself. I heard your music. I watched you play... so thin and tough and glowing in the backlight of the bar. All of it was so fucking beautiful. My hands literally grew hot to touch, my lips wanted to kiss, those flying hands.

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Elan

This night Rafa was drunk and too stoned to even speak clearly, and oh he flirted with me plenty, but he flirted with everybody. That makes him sound like a player, which I

suppose he is, but he is also kind, ingenuous, and a true artist. I know he doesn't think much of me but I adore him anyway. I am starting to feel love for him in the way you slowly fall for someone you trust, gradually, by steady, imperceptible degrees. I can't seem to stop myself and I must shove these feelings away because at best I am doomed to failure.

Yet what do you do when you find yourself sleeping next to a lovely, broad-shouldered, blonde boy with your bodies fitting together in easy familiarity? I felt a swirl of belonging curl inside of me and just wanted to continue sleeping next to him forever in a little ball like Murakami does when he is cold and affectionate.

Father I thought today of all days you might send me a message. I am truly not your son anymore.

Rafa

Imperceptible degrees? I was so ahead of you Elan. You hit me like a freight train from the moment I saw you. I had a hard time admitting this to myself, that this little squirt had floored me from the very beginning.

And that night I wasn't so drunk. I remember how your dark curls merged with the tangle of my straight hair, and how your sharp angles – all elbows and shoulder blades, felt so fragile against my chest. But now I know those strong bones really held in an immeasurable toughness.

Chapter Ten

Page 4

Elan

Today I awoke cleansed and satisfied from my love's delicious desire. I feel as if I had been choking all my life and just been Heimlich'ed. It was the most wonderful but temporary reality I could ever hope to know.

So much to do today! More later...

Rafa

Great, now you decide to reveal so little when I need this the most. All I want to do is read about about how that night my mouth was so soft and tender moving with yours. And I could in turn say how smooth, warm and pure was your body under me. I could write forever about how I never wanted anyone the way I wanted you. I had never felt the combination of tenderness and desire at the same time for ANYONE else before.

Yet I can't lie. At that time I wanted to run far away from you too. This was the way I liked to make other people feel – not the way some little dude would make me feel, not ME. I just wanted to raise my hands and stop this.

But stop what?

What the fuck was I thinking? Stop a life with this odd, brilliant beautiful boy?

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Elan

The sky outside is pink and the city rooftops black. I can already see bright Venus, the shepherd's star and the star of love, above me. This neighborhood, this city, is a real city – unpredictable and sexual. I feel I am home. It does not matter how many mansions, penthouses, and country homes I've visited and lived in, I love the shabbiness of our dear little complex more.

But I still miss my father. I wonder what I'd do if his deep voice busted suddenly into Raf's home saying "Elan, son, what fag thing are you doing?" I wonder what that sound would do to me, if I would recoil or rise up. Sometimes I think I see him in the face of some man crossing the street. I have to blink him away and go back to whatever I'm doing – walking hurriedly somewhere or dodging traffic.

Does it matter now? Now that something important is happening in my life? With Rafa there is the beginning of something that makes me feel good about myself again. I am being picked out as special by someone, and his support plants deep inside me making me grow taller and more self-assured, sure as a seed.

My student Javier's father owns a pawn shop and he engraved the necklace I got for Rafa. I want to have a nice restaurant dinner so I can give it to him as a thank you gift. I already regret signing it "Love, Elan", but maybe Rafa won't read too much into the sentiment – though it is true. I love him.

Rafa

I found the necklace carefully wrapped in green tissue in your backpack. No one is coming for your stuff, so little you had here.

Although I don't deserve it, although I never gave you the opportunity to give it to me, I keep your gift with me always to remember a time when you did love me and I was happy.

Chapter Eleven

Page 13

Elan

Does my father look at the same sky and think – is Elan reading the stars again tonight? Rafa doesn't care for the constellations, he is solidly planted on the earth. My mother taught me the stars. I point them out to Rafa when he isn't worried about muggers in the night. I show him the Milky Way, The North Star, and the Little Dipper – Hercules, the Polaris Cassiopeia, Ursa Major and Minor. I always settle safe at his side and feel a measure of calm.

Rafa wonders who I am. But how do I make him understand I don't want to be my old self. For so long I did not have the energy to be anyone else. Mr. E. Jones, Mr. E.P. Singer – does it matter now? I'm sitting on the fire escape looking up at those stars, then

downward towards the puddles on the sidewalk and streets. Each rain drop ripples and I feel each circle formed quiver inside me. I am comfortable with the nameless person I am now.

PART TWO

Chapter Twelve

Page 18

Elan

I ran into Jake yesterday. Yes, Jake, in his ripped T-shirt, studded leather belt, and leaning against a wall with a cigarette in his usual “I don’t give a shit about you” way. He tossed his long dark hair back in the coolest most hippest manner before he stepped towards me. Only then I could see he looked pale, almost scared, his pupils like two pinpricks. He had to be high. The Governor says he is in trouble, big trouble, and everyone he cares about is in danger. He says I need to keep Rafa away from him. And that dream the other night warns me about Rafa too. That nightmare so alive I can’t sleep alone in fear of calling it back.

How do I tell Rafa this? How do I garner the resilience and guts to make him respect me and listen to me when I know he loves Jake best? I feel such envy for their intimacy and the secrets that they have shared, and are sharing. And I never knew how that gnawed inside of me like a claw scraping at my heart. I never knew how much until now. I now know easy proximity was the sole requirement for us becoming lovers – I was stuck to him like a barnacle in this tiny apartment, so we stuck together.

“Rafa will leave Elan eventually” – I’ve overheard the gossip. I already have felt him slipping away, like warm sand through my fingers. When we are apart I make elaborate plans to leave first. I’m afraid if I don’t I’ll become that pale ineffectual friend in the background. You know, that friend who is taken granted and everyone is a little embarrassed by.

A solution to save face that is so elegant in its simplicity – I could just fly away one day. If only I wasn’t anything but a paper crane with thin wings incapable of flight. My resolve is gone when I feel him in the night, warm and damp with sleep, lying beside me, his face buried in my neck, his arms tight around my torso, his skin a golden tan in the morning light.

Rafa has treated me with warmth and compassion and yet I find myself completely alone and conflicted.

Rafa

This is your last entry. I have no more. I’m left with nothing. We never talked about serious things. I could have told you – *no estás triste Elan, porque te amo, mi querido*. I love you more than anyone.

I never once said it. I thought I had time. I never told you how much you came to mean to me. Now it is too late.

I love you Elan. *Te adoro con toda mi vida.*

Chapter Fifteen

Page 5

Rafa

Elan, it's been two weeks. The doctors had said you'd recover. You are like a gazelle combined with an ox combined with a Mack truck.

Your father has taken you back. That means you're going to be *bien cómoda* again and far away from the tweakers, crack heads, drunks, muggings, drive-bys and gangs. I can't explain the mixture of relief, guilt, sadness, and crippling anger I feel upon knowing this.

That warm electricity you brought into this room, into my life, is gone. This apartment is so silent now. I wish I could see your smile. I wish I could hear your voice – it was always so soft, so secure, and intelligent. You were a naturally quiet person, but every now and then so talkative in a way that always made me laugh. Elan, you were so funny and warm-natured, and an innocent – a real one. You don't find that kind around here ever. You just do not.

I can still make out your beautiful face made serious by these wire glasses. I can remember the first time I kissed those crazy dark curls back when I knew my feelings were not simply raw infatuation or simple attraction. It was love. I was in love, but I thought I had nothing but time to get used to that. I thought I had lots of time.

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Rafa

Los refrigeradores are delivering your piano today. I cleared out the spot I always wanted for it – right next to the window you and Mura used to sit all the time.

It has no other home until I sell it. Or I'll keep it as a reminder of my failings with you. Each note from it like a thorn digging in.

Chapter Seventeen

Page 1

Rafa

Shit just fell on top of you everyday and I never really knew how you felt. You just seemed to take it and never revealed anything on, like Scott said, your poker face.

But I do remember your smiles in the morning. If I did anything right I only did it at night. We knew each other in the most intimate way. And I still know the feel of your skin, the heft of your body, and you still know best how to own my heart.

Page 7

Rafa

Remember that time I borrowed my sister's bike (the one with all the Hello Kitty stickers on it?) and we rode around the neighborhood because you wanted to see all of it. I thought it was absurd. I told you that the junkies, hustlers, hookers, roaches and mice looked the same on every street.

But all the time you kept pointing out something pretty that I'd never noticed – like a tree growing inside a crack of concrete or a handmade funky curtain on a window. You could see something good in the details that I had missed in this shitbox place, and in my life.

Elan, you had no idea how your presence sustained me and made me believe this armpit of the city could be capable of small beauties. I was beginning to understand the weight of my love for you when this place almost killed you.

I need to know you still live somewhere. I need to keep you alive.

Page 8

Elan

Rafa's Theorem

Although Rafa and I have no contact, and perhaps he never thinks of me anymore, he is always on my mind and he continues to influence me. It is like Bell's Theorem in a non-subatomic particle kind of way.

Two humans once in contact will become entangled and continue to influence each other no matter how far apart they may separate. Rafa's common sense and strength and goodness will influence me forever.

This is what I think about as I sit here staring at these walls. Because of my myopia, the room is a bright blur like an Impressionistic painting. Bell's Theorem to Monet although the morning birds have yet to begin outside the windows – I'm going crazy. No complicated DSM-IV diagnosis needed.

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Elan

Rafa did leave me with something, something big as it was simple: we can step out of our shadows and save a stranger's life. I thought of him as I walked over the litter piled up outside The Regina Arms – the liquor bottles, torn wrappers, and heroin needles that lay along the corner of the building inside the weeds. It was all so different from the place I'd just left that it was as if I'd been dropped not simply onto a different neighborhood but a different planet with a different way of communicating – the clicks of guns and knives rather than the cold hard numbers on a computer screen.

I remember a chorus of mourning doves perched on telephone wires called out to me in soft, drawn-out laments – fo-OO-el fo-OOOO-el.

Fool.

I might have been a fool to save Jake, but I didn't care. I'd rather lose all my money and my heart than Rafa to end up another statistic.

Chapter Eighteen

Page 9

Elan

I remember he smiled at me in such a warm and loving way that it made me want to look around to see if someone else was the recipient. It couldn't have been me – I am about as unique and sexy as a bowl of oatmeal.

But there was never anyone else. This gives me hope that when I return he will want me again – optimism against all the evidence to the contrary. Hope eats me up from the inside, I don't want to hope. I can not bear these bubbles of hope churning up in my stomach when it was clear in our last conversation his heart still belonged to Jake.

No matter what happens, no matter who he lies with, I have to remember his lesson – it is not just the importance of being tough and hard, but the importance of reserving kindness to those who need it most.

Chapter Break 7

Elan

There are things he told me: the first time he kissed a boy, his father's drinking, his fear of becoming like his brothers, and how he promised his mother he would never get a tattoo. He would laugh as he said these things and toss his head and hair back like a pony. And I would feel a splintering of love and pain spread in me.

I remember all these things and more. I have to hold on to all the words and memories he gave me, even when I feel I am disappearing from our story. My memories are my only proof that we actually happened.

Chapter Nineteen

Page 15

Rafa

How did you survive Elan? How had the world you walked into not stomp you into a million brilliant pieces? Yet, there you were: intact, still alive, still breathing. I imagined I could hear your gentle heart beating. You did not see me though.

Your dark hair was cut short. You were still slim but no longer painfully thin. Even from a distance I could see those thick eyelashes and that full mouth. What a beautiful face, beautiful in a way that unnerved so many of my friends. But currently a determined face, I realized. There was something else about you now. Was it the way you held your head straight or the way your jaw jutted out? You looked stronger than ever.

Had I thought you needed rescuing? From what? As always I did feel the impulse to protect you, shield you from some nearby danger. But the only danger around that moment was me – the *simplón, cabronazo, un pendejo*.

My fingers grew hot wanting to touch you. My arms yearned to feel the smooth warmth of your body. The need for contact was all-consuming. But I did not move. I only watched you drive away with my heart.

Chapter Twenty

Page 2

Elan

I'm trying to assemble the pieces of information I've stumbled across thanks to some sleuthing, and my butler.

I spoke with my uncle today. It has been six years since I last saw him, but I can picture his face clearly. My wonderful ole Uncle Felipe, my wonderful ole anyone with a willingness to reveal some affection for me. Or maybe now it is no longer affection, but just an alliance forged from the bond of common enmity.

If you ever meet my uncle, you would never doubt his sincerity or tenacity. I am sure it is no lie he has spent the last six years in court fighting to keep my inheritance away from my father, and my father keeping him and all relevant information from me.

I have this strange compulsion to put "father" in quotation marks. I keep trying to feel sympathy, pity, and even affection for him right now, believing him to be incapable of deception. Trying to love him even though his opinion of me has always been so much less pleasant than even my own.

In the meantime I maintain futile longing for those irrecoverable days with Rafa. He is my c, my light, my physical constant. My memory of him and our ordinary life together should be in retreat. Yet, my hope, worn and frazzled, still remains only by my desire to have it be this: he has been waiting, waiting for me to resume my life with him. I know this fantasy may be a substitute for a harsh reality, but right now there is a dearth of nice realities to go around. So I conjure up this version of Rafa to keep me warm and safe just to get me through this one more day.

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Elan

What are the options when there's nowhere left to go, no one to talk to who isn't somehow tainted with jacked-up theory that you are so terribly myopic and small. I could have clung to that expectation and curled into a Xanaxed ball on a couch listening to Patsy Cline over and over and over.

What would you do if you believe your life has been reduced to something weird and desperately out of touch with the real world?

Page 34

Elan

You regroup. Let them go. Find new allies.

Page 38

Elan

It was a long time before I could write again, even though Gérard presented me with this vintage journal and said I no longer had to hide my thoughts on scraps of paper. Nothing ever got past Gérard.

I spent no time considering my feelings to write. Exercising introspection was a luxury for others, an indulgence my own life at that point in time had not afforded me.

I had felt too angry, so demoralized on that ledge. I resolved to uproot the pain from my memory and heart. I wanted one-way streets with doors closed and never reopened. I needed to stop this elevator dive that was happening. I needed to hit refresh and leave the life where I was beholden to others to care for me out of greed (my father) or obligation (Rafa) rather than for love – an Orwellian life that had left me nothing but an overgrown, over-protected, scared, spoiled baby.

I was petulant where I should have been patient, but my heart was desiccated. I mourned my father, Rafa, and the violence I suffered for a long time. No one could tell by looking at me, because no one looked carefully enough.

And no one expected me to do all that I did. Everything awaited me.

PART THREE

Chapter Twenty-One

Page 12

Elan

I didn't want to turn around and look.

I even took off my glasses so it would guarantee that if I peeked all I would see was a blur...

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Elan

Without glasses it was like seeing a half-transparent figure float behind a steamed window. As I instinctively tried to recall a clearer picture of Rafa, the more my memory failed and the farther he faded.

So as we were driving away, my curiosity could not be held back.

I wish I hadn't looked.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Page 12

Rafa

I was angry at you, Elan. Angry that you came back, that you didn't tell me, and God knows what else. So mad I felt like I might spontaneously combust or attract a lightning bolt from the sky.

When I saw your back surrounded by those goddamn pigeons, it took me a while to open my mouth. I was afraid I would say something stupid, or worse, I would start to cry.

Page 13

Rafa

Then you turned around. Your face wore the usual mask-like expression, that same strange calm you always manage to maintain, and those blue eyes steady in their information gathering.

I could see from the way your strength was gathered in your shoulders that you were not in the mood for more bullshit orders from me.

Page 15

Rafa

I did not say one other word during the moments we were together in that park. Not one word. *Nada*. Like soldiers facing each other across a deep trench, the psychic yardage between us seemed insurmountable.

Page 16

Rafa

I stopped being mad at you. The undertow of love pulled the mad all out of me.

Instead of feeling anger all I felt was a deep sigh at the beauty of that stubborn face and the that mouth like the voice and the crazy-ass knowledge that poured from it.

I can write all this, but why can't I say it to you?

Page 17

Rafa

It used to be so simple to get anything I wanted with a quick line, a wink, or a smile. It is not vanity, but a fact that men, and women, did flock to me. Now there is the exception – one who reduces me to a shy idiot – Elan!

Chapter Twenty-Three

Page 16

Elan

Sonnet R

Love is a garden say the patient and wise.

Till the soil thoroughly, plant the right seeds.
A well-tended flower bed yields no surprise.
Rain is your friend, and learn to pull weeds.

So I grew a garden, and my best flower died.
Prima vendrá de nuevo. That's what they say.
You will recover from days that you've cried.
Spring will return to your garden one day.

But next year's garden will not be the same.
It will never bring back *primer amor*.
A rose is a rose by whatever name
But it will not be the love I am longing for.

Above my garden will shine the same sun.
My best flower, though, will be a different one.

Chapter Twenty-Four

Page 9

Elan

I could overcome being shot – it was random and nothing personal. But what my father had tried to do to me was shockingly intimate and devastating. There was no common rubric under which I could take to recover from it. The failure I was to him took its toll, a slow and painful reckoning.

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Elan

Unlike William tell, he can shoot more than one
Arrow. His shoulders stiffen with every draw.
Whenever the father speaks the son's name, the son
Straightens his own shoulders, sets firm his jaw.

The two, man and boy, train next to a roaring waterfall.
The rain in the stream is their powers combined.
There's a raw spot, right of the son's heart, where all
Judgments sink. "You have no talent." "You're too kind."

Dark callouses mark the fingers stretching the bow.
The father believes in his own heart's right to aim
For his son's death and rebirth. "How can you possibly know
Our shared legacy? I am too old. I am not to blame."

Archer's shoulder-blades spread apart
like wings.

The arrows keep flying, and the
flooded stream sings.

- -

I would take too long until I would let myself remember what happened, to mention it in some way other than rhymes, and finally, to begin to forgive myself. Until then, I kept plodding obliviously along like someone who thinks that just little glimpses of other people's happiness he sees were enough.

Chapter Twenty-Five

Page 6

Elan

At the bar I saw Rafa. He wore an Oxford Shirt with the top part unbuttoned and the bottom loosely tucked in – an irreverent Rafa style. I knew being at The Corner Hole would make these encounters inevitable. I was prepared for this kind of Sisyphean torture, but I was still afraid to look at his face.

Page 11

Rafa

Scott's response surprised me, for its quickness and its sternness, but also maybe because of its intimacy – it was like something you'd only do to someone you knew well. And then it hit me, *he did know Elan well.*

Page 12

Rafa

My vision went blurry. This is what I predicted and wanted for Elan – a good, strong, and smart man. I had no right to mourn as I stared at the cost of my own actions. I should not have felt jealousy, but I felt it anyway. I was full of loss and hate and confusion and guilt.

I tried to count 10 breaths, find a wiser and better version of myself, but there was no doing. I could not stop imagining them together. I could not stop this anger, anger that was inappropriate and later totally embarrassing.

Page 15

Elan

I wanted to match his insouciance, but I could only look at his hands – hands that had once touched me and made me come. His right hand, with its long and tapered skillful fingers, rested on the edge of the table, then back at his side, and finally hidden in his pockets. If he had listened hard enough he could have heard my heart bleating:

'remember, remember, remember.'

Page 16

Elan

I could see that however touched I might have been by his presence in my life, what an insignificant role I had played in his.

It was only when I followed his hands moving up to button his shirt did I notice a slight tremor, and only then did I catch a glimpse of his necklace. At first I wondered what he, who said he never wanted jewelry or tattoos, was doing wearing one.

Then I recognized the necklace.

Page 23

Elan

Why would Rafa wear my necklace? Like a crazy person, I've been running through scenarios. My conclusion? Sentimentality.

But there is only one way to find out for sure.

Rafa

Como me gustaría que todos estuviéramos juntos. Quizás uno de estos días Dios nos dé la oportunidad.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Page 7

Elan

In case you haven't realized yet, my capacity for self-delusion is infinite. When it comes to certain things, I can be irremediably dense. For even in my state of ecstatic entrancement, my mind whirled dizzily from the vain endeavor to find valid excuse for all these things I found.

Page 11

Rafa

It took me a moment to recognize him dressed in his dark-blue jeans and a white Oxford shirt – immaculately ironed now.

Page 12

Elan

There he was in the flesh – his tall figure, his long **strong** hands, and his heavy dark eyebrows arched above his half-sad, half-startled eyes. The room became so electric with emotion that we were frightened of one another. I was afraid to stop talking, or say something that would make those eyes narrow.

Page 16

Rafa

I had forgotten what a calm person Elan was – an elegant and introspective creature with his wiry body and a face closed like a shell making you want to know all his secrets even more.

Page 17

Rafa

Elan was so unused to this type of attention from me that he watched me as though holding his breath and waiting for my true self to emerge. He spoke as though he was mildly surprised – an expression so out of character, that it showed me just how surprised he actually was.

Page 20

Rafa

Impossible to believe I had once taken him for granted. More impossible was that I was more capable of feeling a completely unreasonable – or unrealistic – hope.

Page 21

Rafa

I could see him working equations in his mind before turning to leave. What logical formula could he throw out to believe me.

Page 22

Elan

I suppose it was a failure of my character that allowed old jealousies, neuroses, undiagnosed PTSD, unresolved terrors of childhood, and simmering resentments to take hold all at once. Yet, remember, I was someone who for many years knew nothing of love that was not based on conditions. After being betrayed and violated by a person you were sure would never harm you, and then dumped by someone you loved more than your own life – how do you then trust your own judgement thereafter?

It would have been so much easier to shut myself into a numb core.

I did not want to be that person. I wanted to taste each day and to stop being afraid to experience pain again . . . but how?

Rafa was the *deus ex machina* of my life. To him I owed my rescue from the battlefield of the neighborhood, my physical victory over my father, equipping me the courage and skills for real life. It is a debt that I acknowledge still with humble gratitude, and one can never hope to repay. I owed it to him to listen, to try.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Page 1

Elan

For so long thoughts of Rafa brought upon a pain that was visceral. It took me a long time to regain the courage to probe the open wound again.

Page 9

Elan

Once I got to the restaurant, I watched Rafa for some minutes before he realized I was there. How vulnerable he seemed when he was lost in thought.

Page 20

Rafa

It broke my heart when Elan wouldn't look at me. But when his eyes did sometimes, so briefly, sweep up to meet my gaze, well, my chest would crack right open. Nothing would be left but a burning lump of charcoal where my heart should be and a big hole where my brains up and left.

Because I would do anything for those eyes. I would overturn the tables and smash all the windows. I would run into the street and beat up anyone who slighted him – so much energy did his eyes electrify in me.

At the same time I wanted to grab his hand and waltz smoothly around the room – all the while singing like Julio Jaramillo, of course. His eyes would look up at mine and I would think: *this is what angels must look like*.

Words started kicking out of my mouth half laughing – half shaking. Because I was there, wanting more than anything, more than any single thing I have ever wanted, just to keep him there, with me, as long as possible.

Elan is right up there with cocaine and crack, except that he's far more stronger than any of those things.

Page 23

Elan

When I looked at Rafa, his small smile would turn into a crooked grin. He did not make it seem like a joke -- it was a warm grin, sincere. His eyes were glossed with wetness, but not quite tears.

I listened to the sound of his floodgates opening: his love, so sudden. The intimacy startled me - I had known nothing of it only hours ago. The heat of it made the skin on my hands and face tingle. But I didn't dare say much yet, for fear of disappointing or stopping him. My own voice, in comparison, was filled with deep curdled distance.

It is interesting how the subconscious undermines everything that might be considered antagonistic to prevailing good thoughts and desires. It was possible to survive my life, but not unaltered. It made me always calculating and evaluating. It made unworthy, since I never played with an open deck. Yet I yearned to escape the part of myself that guarded everything so assiduously.

Chapter Twenty-nine

Page 6

Rafa

A hazy, after-rain light fell over the things in the bedroom and transformed it into something warm and wonderful for the first time since Elan left.

So many questions I wanted to ask him that didn't get to the first go-around. What had he been doing? Where did he go to high school? Who was his first kiss?

But I let him sleep and started to take care of him, take care of us.

Chapter Twenty-nine

Page 29

Rafa

I'm finally learning how Elan communicates. For whatever reasons, and the reasons don't matter, he doesn't do it like normal people, not like you and me: straight sentences don't come out of his mouth. For example, this morning he was telling me something about electrons being drawn to the atoms that need them. These electrons look for another atom with the opposite conditions to "find balance." I laid there a while wondering why he was giving me a science lesson after all the romance I was trying to do. Then it hit me, he was describing us. I went and looked it up and still confused who is the atom and who is the electron or electrons? And I don't want any protons messing with us.

But sometimes Elan lets it all be written down. He writes like his thoughts and dreams are suited for paper but not for speech. When I read his old journal, his sentences dissolved my anger, my anxiousness, and calmed me. I want him to write again, I want to read what he wrote while he was gone.

Chapter 30"

Page 5

Elan

Fight or flight: the human's natural response to stress. Flight brought me to Rafael. Fight saved my life, Rafa.

But there is also the Freeze response -- like a rabbit does when a hawk is hunting above. during this time the rabbit can collect and integrate information about the situation to their physiological state and environment. Freezing, if you have little chance of escaping, is your best bet for survival.

Page 13

Elan

While everyone saw ugliness and evil everywhere, there is a graciousness. There are flashes of kindness. There is Scott. Scott who from the beginning always cared: he was the smile that lit whenever he saw me. He was the man who would walk into someone's life with no need to dominate it. He was the stability of good heart which never wavered even as my own belonged to Rafa, whose golden energy, after all, was the reigning force in my life.

There was usually an indescribable sweetness in Scott's expression, an openness in his kind hazel eyes -- a face that prints itself on your heart indelibly. But that day it was possessed by a sort of blank resignation. It felt like a break up, though it wasn't. I knew that even apart I would be tethered to him in some unspoken collusion.

My heart felt very tumultuous, full of both passion and fear; I would slip into Rafa's world, in a sense, allow it to swallow me with his intensity. I also possessed a sort of despair that was a novelty that would wear off and I would have lost an easier and simpler life with Scott.

Let me be taken. Let me turn my pain to passion, my victimhood to service for others.

Chapter 31

Page 9

Elan

Fight or flight: the human's natural response to stress. Flight brought me to Rafael. Fight saved my life, Rafa.

But there is also the Freeze response -- like a rabbit does when a hawk is hunting above. during this time the rabbit can collect and integrate information about the situation to their physiological state and environment. Freezing, if you have little chance of escaping, is your best bet for survival.

Even though I was back in our apartment, surrounded by Rafa's familiar objects, fear did not release its grip on me. My mind whirred like a computer's internal fan when its task is too strenuous -- when the hard drive is about to burn and fail.

- On a subatomic level, a single particle can exist in many places at once. This ability to be in many places at one is called superposition.
- Vega is the fifth brightest star in the sky.

Facts comfort me. I've always been a hoarder of information. It helps me avoid real-life truth, with good reason -- to protect myself from it. But even if I never thought about it, much less said it out loud, the truth still consumed me. Each day was infected by it.

What were the factual details of my mother's face? I only remembered the precise color of her eyes when I looked in the mirror.

I heard Rafa. I knew the familiar tempo of his boots in the hallway. I sensed the bounce of his golden hair bun and the volume of his athlete's body. In a few seconds he would bang on the door and wonder what is wrong.

Page 10

Elan

Next he would be leaning toward me, his dark brown eyes fixed intently on mine, or maybe darting around the room, as though he was trying to locate an answer in the walls to the mystery of this odd person he has welcomed into his life.

He will have reached his breaking point. He's going to make me say it.

Page 19

Rafa

For a moment it was hard to believe the violence Elan spoke about because of his quiet voice. His father. His father.

I heard something snap inside me and the world began to drain to gray. Horror images burned forever in my mind. I wanted nothing more than to pummel his father's face until the blood showed through his eyes, and then smash his ugly lips to oblivion. I wanted to choke him to the brink of death until he knew the fear he inflicted on his son. If I slipped, and killed him -- that would be just wonderful.

Page 20

Rafa

Color began to return to my world when I looked up at Elan. Sound drained from the room and time seemed to slow -- all giving me some clarity. He looked worried. He looked scared. Scared of me? Scared of what I might do?

No wonder he didn't tell me. Was I a normal human being? More than that, was I a strong human being able to control my own impulses? Elan didn't want revenge, he wanted comfort.

Elan, my brave dear *Santos cojones*. *Aquí estoy para amarte*.

Page 23

Rafa

One thing I've learned from Elan is it's good to sit down and logically write down solutions instead of flying off the handle.

So here:

1) Elan hires bodyguards for when I am at work. The Refrigeradores need work & Elan can afford it. I can justify it to him as helping out the twins. Between the two of them he will never be alone.

2) Elan is a good student. I can continue with the self defense. (I don't like the idea of him

handling a knife though.) Research Krav Maga.

3) Research restraining orders on that fucker (ask brother about this).

4) All else fails kill the mother fucker.

Chapter 31

Page 9

Elan

Having Gillermo around was like being followed by my personal Iron Giant – and just as conspicuous. But it seemed to ease Rafa's mind.

I knew my father wasn't afraid of one giant.

Page 13

Elan

My father's voice flowed as cool and hard as a marble rolling along a hardwood floor.

There were probably more graceful ways I could have answered them, more circumspect, less antagonistic. But I felt the uneasy sensation of being completely alone in their presence.

It is an imperfect skill, pretending to be strong.

Page 21

Elan

For so long I've been an outlier – a person cut off from everyone on a spit of sand surrounded by mile of ocean. Yet, somehow, this time, I've landed on a fearless, licentious, self-regulated, yet loyal island with a fraternity of odd souls.

Page 39

Elan

My story, like everyone else's, is a mixture of heartache and romance and the sublime and wacky. Mine includes the story of a pianist, a lover of Haruki Murakami and Johann Sebastian Bach, a philanthropist, and of an outlier finding a home. And who would not call a neighborhood of thoughtful rogues his home, and loving it with the passion of youth and friendship?

As I try to liberate memories that will sometimes rattle their chains in my mind, I will find no despair. I'll find no sorrow or anger. There will be only happiness in looking up our little patch of the world as I lay in Rafa's arms – large, capable, gentle, strong.

So, thank you, my Murakami, for helping to meet Rafa.