



victoria mallorga hernandez

might as well call it love shot

The pain is as sharp and sudden as an arrow to the chest, making his knees crumble. The coffee cup he was holding hits the floor. For a few seconds, Jacob considers that perhaps the long legacy of heart attacks in his family has finally come for his ass, but the pain disappears so fast that he barely has any time to curse his father's genes. The coffee has soaked his knees. Jacob massages his chest in resignation, ready to pick up the porcelain, until a sudden texture stops him.

He unbuttons his shirt, a bit upset about what he is going to find there, and life does not disappoint. It's a thunder. Small, made of light traces but clear as if had been cleaved in his skin at some point, as if it was an old scar. Out of everything that could have happened to Jacob Hernandez a Friday morning this is by far the most bizarre.

Above him the Mamma Mia soundtrack starts again, and Jacob stands up, holding the broken porcelain in his hand. If his neighbor has the strength to wake up at this ungodly hour and sing about being a dancing queen, Jacob's going to have to move on.

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Lily thinks it's a destiny mark.

"It's Zeus' thunder, you're gonna be the hero of some prophecy," she says, sipping on the coffee Jacob bought this morning. She's got the heavy bottle glasses she uses when she has to read a lot and she doesn't seem to have left the office since Thursday.

"No joke", says Jacob, rolling his eyes without making eye contact. He's sure he left a yellow folder somewhere among the paperwork for the Suarez acquisition, but he might be wrong.

"If you start seeing rivulets of water between the sidewalks, don't get too close," jokes Lily, scrunching her nose. "We need the paperwork for this book before the month ends."

It makes Jacob smile. The light that falls from the window makes him blink rapidly and lament the clear colors of the office. It is not a good day.

"Thank you for your absolute dedication, Lily."



She makes a gracious reverence before leaving with his coffee, rather more cheerful than moments ago. Jacob goes back to his search, looting through his desk's drawers with renewed energy. He raises his left hand to his chest, intrigued and uncomfortable. He can't forget about the mark and every time he absently rubs his chest, it feels warm, which overwhelms any logical explanation besides magic. But Jacob doesn't believe in those things.

It's better to forget about it. He has a new tattoo, paperwork to finish and a weekend ahead. If he dies, then it better be after the paperwork goes through.

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He doesn't die, ergo he can't forget about it.

The tattoo itches at the weirdest moments. Sometimes when he's really far away from home or when the neighbor starts singing. Initially, Jacob attributed the pain to the heartburn caused by the absolutely terrible musical taste of his neighbor, but now that he has discovered the link, it's impossible to avoid it.

The sole thing Jacob knows about his neighbor is that he hates him.

It might seem unexpected and considering that Jacob leaves the building at early morning to come back rather late, it seems like the kind of unfounded statement that wouldn't stand in court. Nevertheless, the neighbor kicks off his every day singing pop through the years while Jacobs struggles through his morning routine. The next floor neighbor, who he has never seen, is a morning person who wakes up at the touch of the sun on his cheeks and sings with the joy of a hummingbird up until Jacob leaves the building.

Sometimes, when Jacob is being tortured with the seventh repetition of the chorus of *Don't Speak* by No Doubt, he wonders what would happen if he were to find himself face-to-face with his neighbor and tell him that—nothing, to be honest. If the guy had a terrible voice, Jacob would've started warfare a long time ago, but considering that he spends a long time out of the building it would be thoughtless, especially when the voice is actually tolerable.

Anyway, the point is that the neighbor's singing wakes the tattoo.

There's probably a less ridiculous way to phrase it, but this Saturday night, paperwork from the Suarez acquisition on his living room floor, convinced that Lily is right, and half-sure that the neighbor is some kind of siren sent by Zeus, Jacob has no time for that stuff.

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“Listen. Jacob, I understand you having a sexual crisis over your neighbor, but this is simple. You go up the stairs, you ask him for some sugar and then—*bleep bleep*”. Calling Lily for advice is a rotund failure.

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On Sunday afternoon, with his shirt open and the tattoo burning as the neighbor emotes to the second verse of *This I Promise You*, Jacob realizes that he’s going to have to move.

After hours of internet surfing, navigating pages of doubtful authenticity, Lily’s hypothesis does not seem that ridiculous. The internet talks of premonitory tattoos, of Eros’ arrow, and soulmate marks, and all that Jacob can think of is that this fever seems ridiculously one-sided and terrible. The Hernandez are not into mystical one-sided love and Jacob is not going to go up the stairs to knock on that door and talk to his neighbor a la “I’ll show you mine, show me yours”.

His mother’s weekend call is the only thing that shakes him from his sudden inner turmoil.

“Jacob, what’s going on? I feel you’re being very distant”

“Nothing, mom, you know the gig: working,” he says gesticulating in a manner that intends to include everything he’s omitting like increasing madness, despair and absurd marks on his chest, just over his hear.

“Oh, is this about your soulmate mark, honey?”

Jacob doesn’t have to think twice to figure out who was the dastardly rat. “I’m going to block your number on Lily’s phone”

“Honey, please, you know we’ve got each other on every social media.”

“I’ll take the Wi-Fi away from her”, he adds, mentally composing an email that will keep Lily away from his mother forever.

“Don’t change the subject, dear. You have to know this is very common in our family,” says Eliza.

“What do you mean,” asks Jacob, and he can feel Eliza’s voice going dreamy, as if she was resting on a sofa, getting ready to give a history lesson to his son.

“It’s a vestige of our old bonds, honey. Our legacy is so ancient that we can trace it back to the Huancas.”

“Mom, I’m quite sure the Huancas died off before—”

“Our ancestries go back to B.C., Jacob, don’t be insolent,” sighs his mother.



What goes back to Before Colonizers is the shamelessness of the guy who made the genealogic tree that Luis Hernandez adopted as his, after paying a formidable number of soles. It was the event that prompted Jacob to take over the family account.

“It’s a premonition: you’re going to find your soulmate and—”

“Mom, I’ve told you I’m not planning on giving you grandchildren,” he cuts in, starting off a talk that he’s repeated more times than the number of choruses of *Don’t Speak* that he has heard since he moved to the building.

“Shush, Jacob, listen to me and obey the tattoo in your chest.”

“Of course.”

When Eliza finally hangs up, after reminding Jacob that he will find his soulmate in less than a week, Jacob decides to abandon the building as it is if necessary. But later, other day, when he isn’t this tired, and doesn’t have to do paperwork and... Jacob Hernandez nods off on the sofa.

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An insistent knock wakes him up next morning. His neck hurts, his back is tender and he’s rather sure that he will be so late to work that it isn’t even worth it. He leaves the sofa with difficulty, avoiding the paperwork thrown around the floor while trying to style his hair into something acceptable.

When he opens the door, he freezes.

“Hey, sorry but can I go into your balcony? My bird’s cage fell down and—”

It has to be the neighbor, of course, but whatever Jacob expected of their first meeting is rendered insufficient. He’s taller than Jacob, with messy brown hair, probably worse than Jacob’s right now, but the real cherry, the true horror of the scene if that he has a scar on his forehead, just like Jacob.

It’s a thunder.

Jacob considers closing the door abruptly while his neighbor scrunches his nose in nervousness.

“Sorry, I’m Federico,” says the neighbor, doubtfully. “I live upstairs?”

Manners maketh man! Politeness! screams the side of Jacob that was raised by Eliza Hernandez and Jacob moves off the door, allowing the neighbor into his house. If he starts thinking about the tattoo, he’s going to pack so fast only dust will be left in his wake.

“Sure, come in,” he says. “My name is Jacob.”



Federico nods and enters the apartment with an awkward smile, heading straight for the balcony.

“I’m sorry, I was cleaning his cage, but I lost my grip and, well. I hope I didn’t wake you up?” Jacob yawns and shakes his head, sort of convinced that this is actually a fever dream and he’s still sleeping on the sofa, working himself towards absolutely horrid neck pain. He can almost hear his mother asking him to obey the tattoo, a nightmare most definitely provoked by the most bizarre conversation they’ve had in a while.

Unfortunately, that’s when Federico, the neighbor, decides to turn back and focus on Jacob’s chest. His particularly naked chest, with the open shirt and the glaring tattoo.

“You’ve got—,” says Federico, gesturing towards his chest in a sign that Jacob can’t quite understand.

“What”

“You’ve got the same scar I have.”

And then, in a profound invasion of Jacob’s personal space, he raises his hand and touches the mark.

The mark, a known traitor, disappears.

Federico steps back as if he had been burnt and Jacob closes his shirt as if he was closing a closet, a little scandalized by the invasion of his privacy and rather upset by the sudden disappearance of the mark.

“It appeared a few days ago,” he blurts out, a bit unexpected.

But even more unexpected is that Federico Lopez, the upstairs neighbor, holds the cage with both hands and lowers his head significantly as if he was ashamed or confused. He doesn’t seem a man of complicated emotions, this Federico.

When he raises his head, there’s a nervous smile in his face. It reminds Jacob of the many websites of dubious authenticity that he navigated the night before, and it makes his heart stammer in a rather foolish way.

“I know this is a bit sudden, but would you mind going for breakfast with me?” mumbles Federico. His knuckles are white against the iron of the cage. Jacob nods, curiosity slowly replacing his initial dismay.

“Sure...”

Federico Lopez has a dimpled smile that diminishes considerably the wariness his frankly appalling musical taste has caused so far. Jacob supposes he can live with that.



“I’ll wait for you”.



BIOGRAPHY

victoria mallorga hernandez is a queer Peruvian taurus, poet, and editor. Currently, she is an MA candidate in Publishing and Writing at Emerson College and a philosophy research assistant. Across the hemisphere, she moonlights as the chief coordinator of Literature in the alternative art fair ANTIFIL and reviews books for La Libretilla, a Hispano-American project. Her poetry has appeared in *Revista Lucerna*, *Plastico*, *perhappened*, *Anti-Heroin Chic*, *Kissing Dynamite*, and *Thin Air*, among other magazines and anthologies around the world. She has published two poetry collections in Spanish, *albi3n* (alastor editores, 2019) and *absoluci3n* (2020). Find her on Instagram or Twitter as @cielosraros.