

The Art of Living

Overcoming trauma through seven steps

Daniel Rivero

Content warning

This book contains explicit descriptions of experiences of emotional trauma, mental disorders including Borderline Personality Disorder, depression, anxiety, emotional abuse, illness, loss, and drug use.

The purpose of these accounts is introspective and educational. They do not encourage self destructive behaviors and they do not replace professional medical, psychological or psychiatric support.

If you are going through a difficult time or are struggling with suicidal thoughts, please call 112 or the Romanianum Alliance for Suicide Prevention at 0800 801 200 free and confidential call.

Note on characters

This is an autobiographical work inspired by real events.

Some names and identifying details have been changed to protect the privacy of those involved.

People who appear under their real names have given their explicit consent.

This volume reflects a personal experience. It does not replace professional medical or psychological advice. If you are going through similar suffering, seek help from a specialist.

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The book *The Art of Living* an initiatory autobiography with a confessional structure.

The law of the seven Arts of Living

Love awakens courage.

Courage opens the wound.

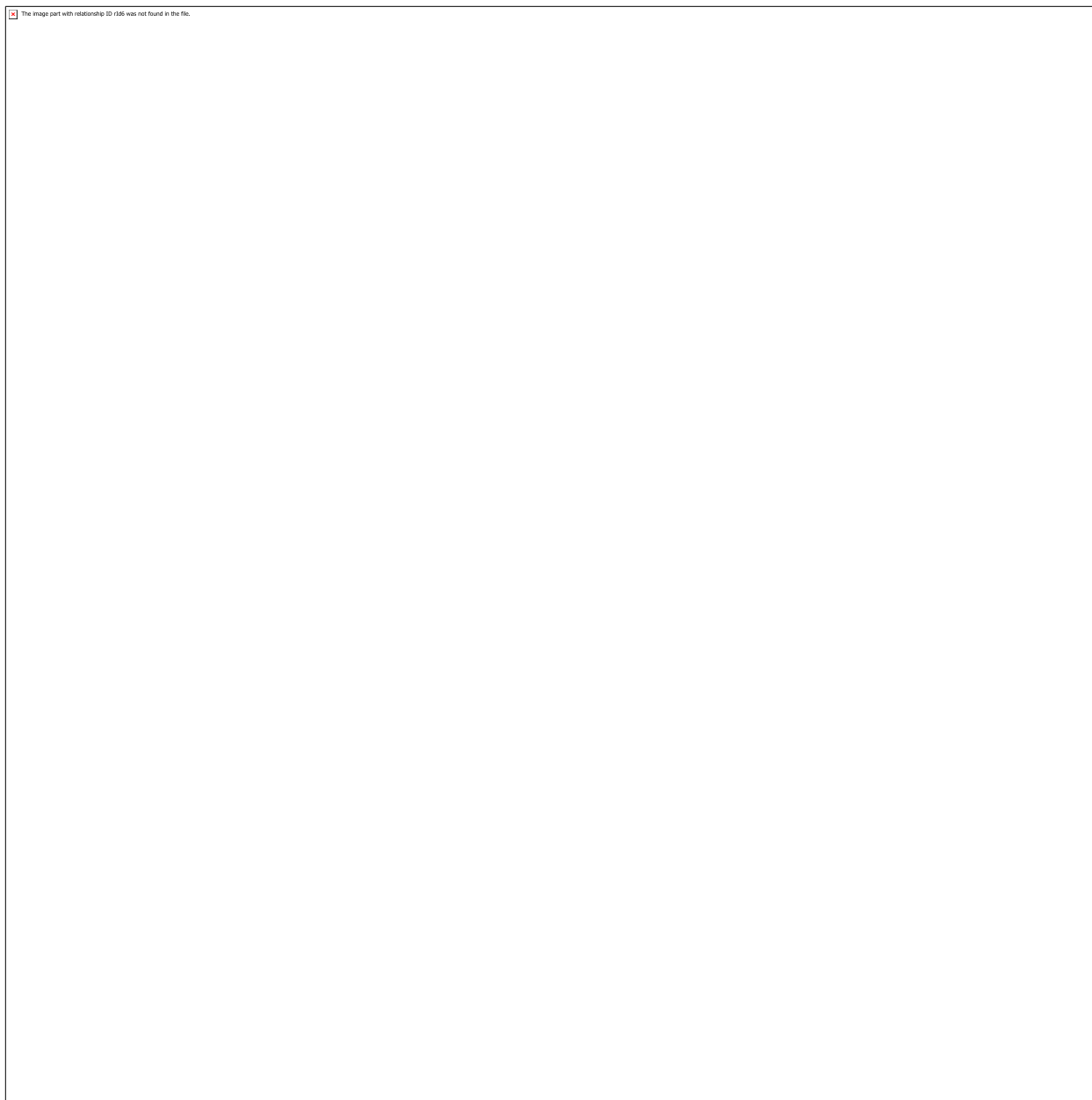
The wound gives birth to knowledge.

Knowledge makes room for communication.

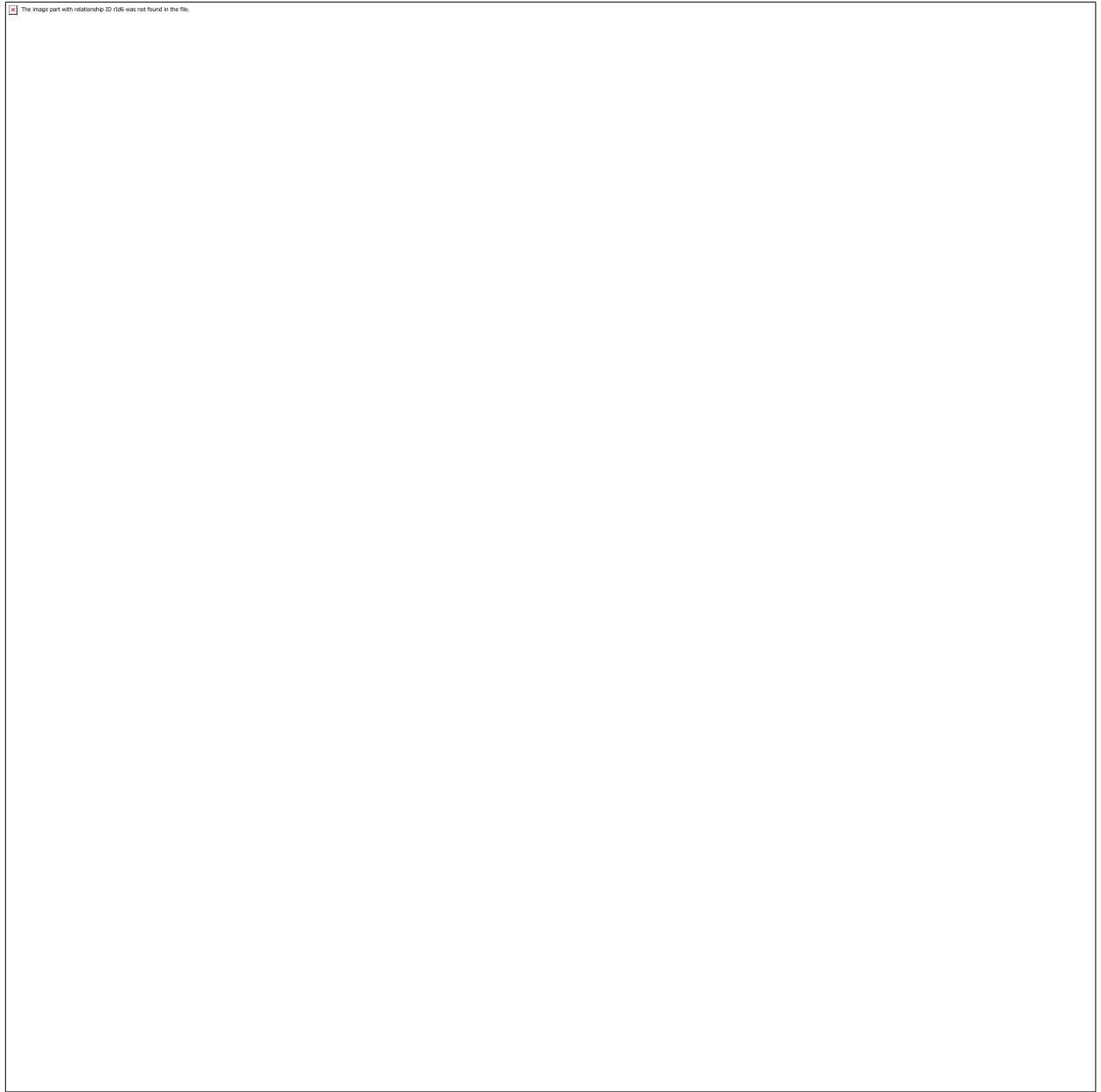
Communication brings you into the present.

The present transforms you.

And transformation returns you to love.



V1



V2

What is the art of living

I chose seven central themes of the universe of the book *The Art of Living*.

Seven dimensions, each with a corresponding color of the rainbow. They can be viewed independently, or with inner branches.

The Art of Living goes beyond a simple autobiography as a structure, because it adds an archetypal dimension. I split my voice into three different instances Daniel, Rivero and Dani. Together they form the psychological unit.

Daniel is the child, his symbol is the moon. Dani is the angry antisystem teenager represented by the sun, and Rivero is the mature adult voice represented by the stars. Each of them also has a specific element. Daniel is water, Dani is fire, and Rivero is air. The earth part, although less present, is represented by Badea. One cannot exist without the others. Other instances also appear, selves that make up seven voices in total. Considering my BPD diagnosis, I became aware that I cannot exist through a single self, that I am in a constant negotiation between the different facets I have.

This is a manifesto through which I want to mark the quintessence of life through universal themes.

Did you know that a human being lives on average twenty six thousand days. It is a chance of one in several trillion that you exist in this moment.

Heartbeats, billions of cells that die and are born continuously, every breath and many other vital functions that work autonomously. It is estimated that more than one hundred billion people have lived so far since the beginnings of civilization and you are one of them.

We do not breathe consciously, we spend a third of our life sleeping. The grooves carved through the synapses between neurons determine a large part of the quality of life we eventually live.

The book is built on three planes. Daniel, the child with a passion for knowledge. Dani, the impulsive rebel who became a public voice. And Rivero, the voice suspended in time, who

learned to integrate his identity out of chaos. My support consists of hundreds of pages, entire journals, observations and reflections of all kinds.

In a probabilistic sequence with an incipit given by birth and an inevitable epilogue of death, how can one truly live in this space that we call life.

The inside of a bright fire and the inside of water waves have never met. Could water put out the fire, and could fire spread into the water. When they touched, steam erupted. It is directed by air. The earth below them moves at its own pace, slowly. It seems unmoving for those who walk above and beneath it. Sometimes even the earth shakes. Under the tension of movement, it still remains the most solid.

Only electricity can connect the ether with the other four elements, accompanied by the sound of thunder.

Chapters

1 The Art of Love 1998 to 2009

2 The Art of Courage 2009 to 2017

2009 to 2013 Stage 1

2013 to 2017 Stage 2

3 The Art of Healing 2017 to 2021

4 The Art of Knowledge 2021 to 2023

5 The Art of Communication 2023 to 2025

6 The Art of the Eternal Present 2025 to

infinity

7 The Art of Transformation infinity

About the author

I am a double valedictorian at SNSPA and a doctoral student in the making in communication studies, where I research the relationship between psychology, political communication and sociology.

I went through the experience of hospitalization at Obregia, which I turned into a process of self overcoming and human reconstruction. It is the manifesto of a man who has Borderline Personality Disorder.

I explore the tension between suffering and meaning, between identity and healing, between the wounded child and the lucid adult.

How does someone go from the end of the ranking from last to first.

Back cover

The Art of Living is an initiatory autobiography about rebirth, suffering and reconciliation with oneself.

Between the child who cries silently in the face of abandonment and the adult with Borderline who learns to speak lies the path through the seven arts love, courage, healing, knowledge, communication, the eternal present and transformation.

It is the story of a man who learned that there is no healing without confrontation, and no light without shadow a journey between memory and consciousness, between reality and dream.

An imperfect model for imperfect people.

Publishing and translations

Any translation, adaptation, republication or partial or full distribution requires the written consent of the author.

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Contents

1. The Art of Love (1998 to 2009)	12
1.1 The Pillow with Stars and the Moon (2001 3 years old La Palma Canary Islands)	12
1.2 The Transition to the New Home (2002 four years old Bucharest)	13
1.3 The Seed of Love (2003 five years old Bucharest winter home)	14
1.4 The Tangled Voice (first grade 2005 seven years old Bucharest school and home spring)	15
1.5 The Child with the Hourglass second grade (2006 eight years old Bucharest commercial shoot School 13 dance room spring)	16
1.6 The Kaki Shawl (2007 nine years old Bucharest apartment on Vlad Județu Street autumn).....	17
1.7 You Have to Be Strong (third grade 2007 nine years old Bucharest Bilingual Theoretical High School Paradoja and hospital autumn)	19
1.8 The Compass behind the Block (October two thousand seven Bucharest Calea Călărașilor autumn).....	22
1.9 Childhood you cannot forget (fourth grade two thousand eight ten years old Bucharest Paradoja and after school September).....	23
2.0 Badea's Staff	24
2.1 The Corridor of a Memory (two thousand eight ten years old Bucharest Paradoja hallway and gym September)	25
2.2 The Root of Shame (two thousand nine eleven years old Bucharest Paradoja yard and gym spring)	26
2.3 Is Courage the Opposite of Shame (sixth grade twelve years old two thousand ten Bucharest Paradoja school yard)	29
2.4 Exercise.....	30
2.5 Love	31
2. The art of courage (2009-2017)	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.1 Antisystem (2009, 11 years old, Bucharest: on the way to Paradoja / home, spring).....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.2 The Birth of Dani Seventh Grade (13 years old, 2011).....	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.3 The Dance of the Shadow Between Three Worlds (13 years old, 2011, Bucharest: behind the block / neighborhood)	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.4 The Death of the Child Daniel, the Birth of Dani (2011, 13 years old, Bucharest; later reflective insertions)	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.5 Dear Time (2025, 27 years old, Bucharest: desk)	Error! Bookmark not defined.
1.6 I am you-I from yesterday 2011–2025 13–27 years old Bucharest reflection across time	Error! Bookmark not defined.

1.7 Dani’s sword of fire 13 years old **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1.8 Maybe it is destiny 13 years old **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1.9 Double existence 15 years old **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

2.0 Is courage love or is love courage 15 years old **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

2.1 On the slope of death 15 years old **Error! Bookmark not defined.**

1. The Art of Love (1998 to 2009)

Part one Childhood

1.1 The Pillow with Stars and the Moon (3 years old, 2001, La Palma Canary Islands)

“The wound is the place where the Light enters you.” Rumi

[Daniel]

I am surrounded by black sand and I feel the sun scorching my skin. I see my mother standing with the ocean water up to her ankles. I am building a small fortress in the Saharan dust.

I shout to her

— Mamá quiero agua.

It is the first time I remember speaking. The first time I remember asking for water.

From the blurred embryo of memories from 2001 I feel Daniel the three year old child. My mother Maia and I are rushing to leave the island of La Palma.

Do you remember what your mother told you that evening

— You will never see your father again.

Words that followed me like a ghost.

On the plane I lean against one of the few objects Maia and my mother managed to take with us the blue pillow with the moon and stars. An image etched into my mind forever.

My mother speaks to me in a grieving tone affected by leaving La Palma the place where my father Ricardo works as an astrophysicist.

Through the airplane window I see a multitude of colors blending together. I do not know if I am dreaming or if my imagination is overflowing. It is my first time flying and I leave behind everything I have known the ocean the palm trees the black sand the volcano.

A few memories remain and I hold them tightly to my chest.

I did not understand the severity of what was happening around me but I listened to Maia and to my mother.

The seriousness of that day would sculpt my personality.

I say goodbye abruptly without having the time to process what is happening.

Goodbye to the colorful talking parrots.

Farewell to the places where I played with the beach ball with the other children from the island.

I will remember the ice cream I ate with Maia and my mother on the stone paved streets but not you father.

My gaze is fixed and serious. I cannot blink.

I only nod like an adult. I listen with maximum attention to my mother's words. What she says seems to freeze in the dense air. My mind understands and refuses to accept.

The moment passed like the last sunset.

A sunset with waves of green blending into the sun.

My last one from the Canary Islands.

My first steps in the country will be watched from a distance in the Bucharest airport by my great aunt Olga. She will give me my first gift a little dalmatian plush toy while I hold the pillow tightly against my chest.

1.2 The Transition to the New Home (2002, four years old Bucharest)

[Daniel]

The moment the wheels lifted off the ground a part of my identity broke away.

As I take my first steps in Romania the memories of the island begin to hide under a seal of forgetting. I arrived in a fog of social confusion left behind by communism.

In Romania I discovered snow for the first time. Not even the black sand could compare to that sensation.

I see the tall identical apartment blocks of Bucharest a combination of old and new. A city painted in muted grey tones. While I walked on the streets I imagined the buildings changing color. My imagination transformed the city.

During the day I explored the world and at night I was fascinated by the diffused glow of headlights.

My mother talks to me encouraging me not to forget Spanish but it is already too late.

At home my new family is made of women only Maia my mother and Olga my grandmother's sister.

I have no uncles.

No brothers.

No grandfather.

At home I am Badea. Badea Rivero Daniel.

I was surrounded by love even in the photos where Ricardo holds me in his arms.

Through the absence of my family from Spain I appreciated even more the safety offered by the Badea family in Romania.

To understand who I am I step away from Daniel for a moment. I let the future Rivero speak.

[Rivero present]

— I carry his name and his blood Daniel.

I tell the child with cold lunar tears.

We both carry the name.

— Under the pressure of a diamond you will take shape.

I answer the disoriented child hungry for answers to soothe himself.

1.3 The Seed of Love (2003 five years old Bucharest winter home)

[Daniel]

The only moment my father called and I did not recognize his voice was on my fifth birthday. Maia and my mother tried to explain to me that Ricardo had called but I no longer understood who he was.

I am the baby who once fit in a palm and later the child with curly hair. Always curious always searching. Maia transformed her love into a gift chosen with care. She gave me my first encyclopedia when I was five and a half.

I tried to write my first book when I was six years old. I could not write even a single page.

[Maia]

— With all my love for Daniel and his children. Happy birthday. Maia.

[Daniel]

A message inscribed for eternity on the first page written by her hand on Christmas Eve on December twenty five two thousand three.

Among the first winters and holidays I remember in Romania I received the most special gift.

When I went outside that winter Maia could not come down with me because it was hard for her to walk. She moved with a cane and when we went out together she leaned on me. I was a pillar of support for her.

When I played with the neighborhood kids she always watched us from the window on the second floor.

Flipping through the encyclopedia became one of my favorite childhood moments. Through encyclopedias I formed my first opinions about the world. Through the hundreds of hours spent reading the texts and looking at the images of ancient civilizations I discovered the Greeks the Romans and the Egyptians.

At first I did not know how to read but once I learned to decode the letters my passion for understanding grew with me.

I appreciated solitude but I deeply wished to have friends and expand my world. I knew no one was coming to save me and I learned this very early.

The burning desire to weave words and create stayed in my blood. Reading those pages the small Rivero was born.

In two thousand three I met Buffy my first dog a Bichon the first pet I had in Romania. A companion from another species but perfectly mine. Versions of me at five and six years old were sinking into the world of knowledge.

The few memories I still have are from the kindergarten years during the long evenings when I played Ludo with Maia my mother and Olga at a round table. It was a primitive form of love a knowledge through play.

Hearing the sounds around me and a dog barking on the street I begin to notice the worn whispers of Rivero.

A few years later I was about to start school. I could see that Maia's health was worsening. Change was inevitable. The whispers of the sky alerted me. It was Rivero.

[Rivero]

— Will you manage to break the wall of ice?

I ask Daniel as he gathers his toys in the bedroom.

1.4 The Tangled Voice (first grade 2005 seven years old Bucharest school and home spring)

[Daniel]

I started school first grade. I remember that feeling of being torn away from everything familiar and safe.

I spent most of my time with my grandmother when I came back from school. When I was not playing and she was not forcing me to sleep we stayed together. Maia her nickname hid her real name. My grandmother's name was Ștefania.

At seven years old I am a child who cannot even syllabify two words properly I stutter. Instead of saying clanță door handle I say clanciă.

At home there is no real time for rest. I am constantly on guard one eye on my toys the other on the front door. I hear her footsteps.

— Daniel Daniel

Maia calls from the other room.

My skin freezes. She gets up with the help of her cane and slowly walks toward the bedroom door. Her calls grow louder through the walls. I hide under the blanket and pretend to be asleep.

As usual I am dressed in my favorite pajama pants and a white T shirt.
Maia has a certain instinct and almost always senses when I am not really sleeping.

The afternoons drip by in a slow rhythm but the days when the smell of fresh salty sticks waits for me at home are priceless. Sometimes she treats me like an adult. We talk about politics about the weather about the latest news. She asks for my opinion.

At seven on my birthday I invite Cristian my former kindergarten classmate and neighbor from the block.

He comes with his father to our home. It feels strange to me that he has a father. I do not envy him. I do not even compare myself to him. His father hands me a pack of Duel Masters cards a collection that was trendy then. The joy is unimaginable. I can complete my collection.

— Mulți ani trăiască Rivero.

I listen emotional to the only guest who has crossed our doorstep.

1.5 The Child with the Hourglass second grade (2006 eight years old Bucharest commercial shoot School 13 dance room spring)

A year later Olga's neighbor came to me and my mother with a proposal.

[Daniel]

When I turned eight Neli asked me to appear in a commercial. I went with my mother to the shoot. In my hand I held a simple transparent hourglass.

In my childish innocence I imagined how for thousands of years people have measured seconds with such precision.

I imagine time itself flowing through the hourglass. Trapped inside an object the size of my palms. I measure with it the waiting time before my scene. I do not let go of it for a second. Memories are as fluid as the wings of a butterfly.

They film me while I play football. I stand in goal. I cannot focus because I keep thinking about the sand flowing. I flip the hourglass over and over playing out all sorts of scenarios. For a moment it seems as if

I care more about the passing of time than about any other toy.

If the hourglass is time and the compass is space then the kaleidoscope remains pure color. It reminds me of my first flight.

I only know that I love Maia and my mother. I love my toys and my games. I look at the hourglass and hold it against my chest. A voice echoes between my ears as if time itself wants to speak to me from the future. Love could be transmitted through many forms and at that age the love for knowledge took root for the first time.

I have strange passions compared to my classmates. At eight years old I am obsessed with reading books about archaeology. I want to become an archaeologist to learn about dinosaurs and space. Among other things I enjoy going to karate and I am trying to dance. I am a bit shy but what could happen My mother and Maia support me. I am about to start dance classes with other kids from school.

That day I was punished. I had done something wrong but what exactly

The time comes for dance practice at School 13. Time seems to align with the rhythm of the kids around me. Not with mine. I cannot keep their beat and I am confused. I simply perceive the world through different senses. When my heel touches the floor I do not have the same freedom to express emotion. I am inhibited.

— Was I born like this or did I become like this
I wonder.

My curious spirit is testing me again.

Maps rolled into scrolls are wrapped around my body.

— Hmm what is on the high shelves
I try to reach them then give up. I get bored.

The next song starts. I hear it slightly muffled through the wooden door. The place where I am is cold and dim. Through the crack I see my classmates still dancing and they do not even notice I have disappeared.

Now I sit with my feet flat on the concrete crouched down.

I do not have the hourglass with me to protect me.

Soon I will go home. I will see Maia and we will eat chocolate filled croissants with small toys hidden inside.

The one who was already watching the sand of his own existence was Rivero.

[Rivero]

Whenever I put passion first the sand seems to fall faster. But during second grade math time stops. I am discovering relativity by intuition without understanding it yet.

1.6 The Kaki Shawl (2007 nine years old Bucharest apartment on Vlad Județu Street autumn)

[Daniel]

My grandmother's health keeps getting worse as I hurry toward third grade.

At home Maia hits me with a switch and becomes so strict. My whole body feels the tension and I press my fingers against my face to shield myself. The fury and helplessness coagulate inside the child with lunar eyes. A new voice begins to form inside the same self.

If I do not obey her rules she hits me with the ring on her finger until my lip bleeds. Her rigidity and need for constant performance haunt me all the time.

Maia wants me to be the best in school. I am decent but not exceptional. The stress at home mirrors the stress outside. I do not understand much but it seems that adults are suffering because of money.

Is it my fault that Maia has become more and more aggressive with me

A broken shard of memory with Maia visits me

I am lying on the floor in an X shape in front of the heavy reddish metal door of the apartment on Vlad Județu street. My mother is not home. Chaos has taken control of me.

Maia wants to go to the cemetery and never come back. In a moment when she seems to lose her mind my frail body is the only thing that can stop her.

She wears her favorite kaki shawl. As she gets dressed she tells me she wants to leave home. Not to light a candle but to die.

I scream and tell her I do not want to abandon her.

I cling to the door hinges rocking my body. I am facing her with my back blurred into the shape of the door.

— Maia I do not want you to die. Maia I love you.

[Maia]

— I am going to the cemetery to die Daniel.

[Daniel]

Her words numb my eardrums.

My hoarse voice tries to fight her tone. Something is different about her. I do not recognize her behavior. How could the one who takes care of me want to give up

What did I do wrong

I recognize her voice but the tone and the words seem torn from a script.

Unknown yet familiar.

In the following days Maia calmed down.

Mother spends time with us without knowing about the incident. My soul feels cold and every second I keep that suffering inside changes me.

Besides school I have to go to karate. I have just earned my orange belt. I go to karate to learn how to defend myself. I am practicing Goju Ryu one of the styles.

I get home and drink almost an entire liter of sparkling water. The sting of the mineral water remains tied to a moment when we were together as a family.

They wait for me with warm food. Sometimes there is meatball soup. The smell and my hunger blend into a unique palette of senses.

Soon I will walk through the same door to go to school the Bilingual Theoretical High School Paradoja.

[Shadow]

In the middle of chaos Rivero's voice was being born. Along with it I was rising like a metal curtain. I was covering the light in Daniel's eyes.

[Rivero reflective present]

That evening followed me like a shadow. The kaki color of the shawl is what stayed burned on my retina. Together with the brighter parts worth remembering in a strange mixture. Daniel managed to stop Maia that night but for how long

1.7 You Have to Be Strong (2007. 9 years old, third grade, Bucharest Bilingual Theoretical High School Paradoja and hospital autumn)

[Daniel]

— You have to be strong.

This is the thought echoing in my ears along with the two songs downloaded onto my black MP3 player. I listen to music on the way back home in trolleybus 33.

Any dream I had shattered with Maia's harsh diagnosis. In September 2007 my grandmother was hospitalized with cancer. Whenever the fire of pain overwhelmed me I heard Dani.

As Maia grew sicker my outings with the neighborhood kids became rare. The care for myself faded day by day. I had to take care of myself. I no longer knew what my mother was doing.

— I miss my mother.

I played on my first computer whenever I was alone. I soothed my pain with the first online games I discovered. School became a place of mental and emotional torture. At home in my refuge I was happy.

When she was overwhelmed my mother left me in the care of Fatma a family friend. While I was trying to adapt to life with Fatma my mother watched powerless as her own mother faded away in the hospital.

A few days later on a September morning I met my new teacher Evelyn Foster. I met my future classmates.

Tobă one of the boys quickly invaded my personal space. Before I could say a word he threw his arm around my neck in a brotherly gesture trying to befriend me. Gâlmă stood next to him along with the other kids and the rest of the students.

My teacher Evelyn Foster had favorites. I was not one of them. On a school day she treated me as if I were a problem child who deserved to be isolated.

— When he tries to talk to you behave as if you were talking to a wall.

Another classmate tells the others influenced by the group and by Foster.

— Hai plimbă ursul.

She throws the words at me a Romanian expression that basically means get lost.

Inside I crack again. I hear these words coming from the mouths of my new classmates. I belong to no one.

She starts to talk to me as if I were a wall and in her muteness others follow like dominoes.

Almost the entire class begins to treat me badly.

One day I walk back from school with my pants nearly falling down too large and all wrong for me. My sneakers are worn out to the point of falling apart.

I want to keep the hourglass close to me but something inside wants to smash it into a thousand shards.

Throughout 2007 in third grade I barely scraped by in all subjects with teacher Foster. My grade book did not even have a picture of me. The absence of any photos from that period became a symbol of the erased identity I carried. I was not only excluded I was losing my passion for learning. I was invisible.

I wanted to become a good son. If at school I was ignored at home my mother's tears kept falling. When she cried in the evening I tried to soothe her. In a moment of weakness she told me my father had been a drug addict. I did not understand what that meant.

I whispered to Almin in class what my mother had told me at home.

Before I could react he shouted at the top of his lungs so the whole class could hear

— Tatăl lui Dani e un drogat.

My father is a junkie.

Those words echoed through the classroom. Everyone heard. Everyone remembered.

Holding that report card in my hands the card that once was bigger than my palms makes me wonder if that is when everything truly began.

With my undeveloped body and small back I was about to carry the sins of two broken families and learn to live at a different rhythm.

Almin regretted it. He still does to this day. He is one of the few who stayed and realized how deeply he had hurt me.

I visited Maia only once in the hospital. The hospital smell made me dizzy. I was happy to see her but my face showed a mute sadness. I was unable to help her and it was no longer up to me.

Her last wish was for me to transfer from School 13 to the Bilingual Theoretical High School Paradoja so that I could study Spanish.

I closed myself off and built a separate world in my mind. Far from the voices that hurt me constantly. From a child with a wide smile I was starting to become as cold as the moon.

Part II Adolescence

Here childhood ends. Daniel's tears dissolve into Dani's fire.

A few weeks have passed.

My grandmother died on two October two thousand seven but her presence will stay with me forever. When I miss her I will go behind the block where I spent my first years in Romania.

Daniel you are annoying.

I am only nine years old with cold tears running down my face under the moon behind the block. Olga has no way to really speak with us. One day she came to school and fought with Fatma for me. Now years later I remember the feel of paper and pen. Notebooks and homework. I see Dani standing there saying nothing. Just still.

[Dani]

At night I am alone with my demons. I watch the sky where darkness and pollution seem to choke the last stars. During the day I struggle to reach school and during the night I struggle to stay alive.

I drag my backpack filled with old and new textbooks and crumpled sheets covered in poems. With my eyes fixed on the tips of my sneakers I realize I am about to live my first winter truly alone.

I am the one now watching the stars and the moon from the new studio apartment where I live with my mother on the seventh floor. The view is monumental. I can see a huge part of Bucharest. From inside my being a tornado rises. That tornado is Rivero.

[Rivero reflexive present]

The death of Maia the legacy of a family that will never again sit in the same room marks me forever.

After years of searching I understood that the opposite of love is not hate but indifference. A shade that Daniel recognizes best with his forehead lowered.

I am another brick in the wall like in the Pink Floyd song. A wall I once hated and later decided to smash at any cost without caring about the consequences.
I have two dogs one white and one black. Like my future split personality.

1.8 The Compass behind the Block (October two thousand seven Bucharest Calea Călărașilor autumn)

[Daniel]

I was that child who was given no chance. Between laughs that sounded vicious I tried to find my compass. Most of the time I lost it somewhere in the studio. Intrusive thoughts took me nowhere but they kept me barely anchored to reality. I tried to move forward and backward but everywhere I turned I heard the same message

Daniel you will not succeed in life.

In the whispers of the night I heard their voices and in the shadows I saw their reactions.

My compass broke. The frustration did not come from fear of success but from feeling wrong in every group. Even in the new neighborhood. On top of that Maia was gone and so was the old home.

After Maia's death I became invisible in front of my mother's depression. I wanted her to be happy more than I wanted my own happiness.

A compass is useless especially a broken one that only points north. Whatever direction I choose does not lead anywhere. The only space I can travel is my mind. Meanwhile my mother tells me Maia's last words from the hospital

You and Dani must help each other.

She made her promise. Her legacy stayed alive in me in my mother and in Olga.

To suffer meant to learn to decode love. The mourning never really ended because as I grew older I kept visiting the space behind the block.

Now Dani's anger and his questions are what remain. I let him take control.

[Dani]

Should I lose all contact with my father and stay tangled in Romanian words Should I be different from the others yet similar to so many kids who live the same story Were all these things preparing me to become a voice for the ones who are mute like I once was

I will love my fate and accept what adult life will bring while I am still dressed in a child's costume. I will not resign. I will not become comfortable in loneliness. I say this while dragging a toy sword behind me like a lord.

I did not go to the funeral and kept visiting her in my memories. Around me the same metal bars that became our football gate. The stairway wrapped in autumn leaves. This is the sanctuary of my most beautiful memories.

[Rivero reflexive present]

How can I control my destiny if I cannot control the outside world I ask myself lost among stars.

Daniel you are living a reversed amor fati.

[Daniel]

The compass shows only one direction. I need to learn how to love again.

I look at myself in the mirror with ash colored eyes. Through the iris I can see Dani. He wants to talk to me.

[Dani]

Should I spit at my reflection the way others spit at me or should I learn to love again

I survived one year. Next comes fourth grade.

1.9 Childhood you cannot forget (fourth grade two thousand eight ten years old Bucharest Paradoja and after school September)

[Daniel]

A year has passed the hardest in my life. The year when I was constantly on guard.

I had Foster as a teacher for only one year because she became pregnant. After she left a new teacher arrived and for the first time in years I opened up.

My grades were finally good. Once again my reality was turned upside down.

In fourth grade with teacher Bogasieru and in after school I had a short period of blossoming and rediscovery.

I wrote her a poem and years later when I finished high school she mentioned it and praised it.

In that period my stomach felt cut open by anxiety while fear ran wild through my nervous system yet teacher Bogasieru genuinely appreciated me.

I played basketball with Almin at after school. We had become desk mates. We both drew robots. The smell of fresh markers filled the air. He had become my first favorite person.

The bounce of the ball like the pulses of the hourglass from my early childhood witnessed this brief time of peace in my life.

Childhood you cannot forget
You never return to it

We sang in choir without realizing it was the last time I would be in the same class with Ana Prejmereanu with Almin and with Mişu. The last year with teacher Bogasieru.

The first poem I ever wrote even if it began as a game I gave it to her.

2.0 Badea's Staff

[The Alchemist]

When Rivero punches the air on the edge of shattered ecstasy or when Dani raises his sword in pajama pants neither finds peace. Each runs in a zig zag.

[Dani]

Fire twists around air like a tornado. They feed each other endlessly in the absence of a calming element.

[Daniel]

His shoulders droop his gaze is lost. The same thoughts and syllables press against his chest. He is exactly where he feels he should not be forgotten by himself in the absurdity of time. Worlds crumble and are born in the blink of an eye.

[Badea]

The holiday trip with Bogasieru the landscape with the sun stretching its rays over our eyelashes.

The staff like a simple wooden stick was lifted by me and Almin. The eternal duel between green trees the smell of the plate filled with warm food. The feeling that all power was condensed in an object that seemed to come alive in our hands. A world of knights and lords was being born.

It was never about competition. It was about who could wield the staff with more honor.

Whenever I parted from that object the world we had created crumbled. The secret was that we could be whoever we wanted. Somehow in the judgement of all mornings that passed over us those staffs went back into the earth buried under leaves and snowflakes.

The dream of fighting honorably remained like a seed that many times was torn out by storms during my anger outbursts and breakdowns.

I could feel another self looking down at me from above.

[Dani]

Those were the days when I protected my identity from the mockery and laughs around me. I moved with a fiery air born from a simple wish to be loved.

I was so full of light that a simple touch could have burned the hands that reached for me. I would have turned them into ashes and crushed them between my fingers.

[Rivero]

Because of the small ones who still build worlds of wax of dolls of clay and wood the world will belong to them.

From generation to generation some traumas will repeat and people like us will discover that they can raise the staff from the ground and lift it toward the sky for their inner child at least once more.

[The Alchemist]

My only continuous line is born at the fracture between selves. The jumps between them confuse me but somewhere on a higher scale they form a straight path.

2.1 The Corridor of a Memory (two thousand eight ten years old Bucharest Paradoja hallway and gym September)

Systemic problem bullying macro social layer

[Daniel]

I walk next to Almin. We are heading to the gym. It is an ordinary Wednesday and our nervous systems are on alert.

Tobă always threatens us during classes. He polishes his fist in a way the teacher cannot see.

Suddenly Tobă and Gălmă appear. We do not want to interact with them because they always behave badly.

Where are you going
asks Tobă as he closes in on us.

None of your business
says Almin and I can feel his breathing become shorter.

Almin nicknamed little car because he loves technology keeps walking and tries to ignore them. He is wearing a shirt one of his favorites.

Tobă comes at us aggressively. He will not leave us alone. He starts pulling at Almin's clothes. Almin is trembling with anger. He has a volcanic temper. It is not a good idea to push him yet Gâlmă laughs in the background.

I do not know what to do. I am agitated. I want to help my friend.
Almin's shirt tears.

It is not a game. It is psychological domination. The abuse is intentional. Our self worth rises and falls with their actions. I cannot stand watching Almin suffer.

I cannot stay a spectator while this happens around me. My friend's face turns red with rage and he shouts

You ripped my shirt.

The tension in the air is thick. I am furious about what happens again. It is his favorite shirt.

One thing is clear. I am not the only one being abused. Besides our shared passions what unites me and Almin is the desire to protect each other.

He is the first friend who takes care of me and I take care of him. Together we can get through their insults. Together we are strong.

[Rivero reflexive present]

One day I will wear my own shirt with pajama pants to the high school graduation exam.

The maturity of the years that flew over us confirmed what the child in me already sensed.

[Daniel]

After school we go to after school care. We play basketball. The echo of the ball hitting the ground travels along the chain of walls.

For people like me who learned to dream among shards of hope for you I have fought since I was a small hero among heroes to show you are not alone. I have been and remain the black sheep of my family.

Out of this conflict the voice of Badea is born the heir of a family tree in slow collapse.

[Badea reflexive present]

This is the heavy inheritance of a boy who wants to walk the path of a man without anchors and social landmarks.

I have been the sheep the wolf and the shepherd. We are all a bit of each and we choose which one we feed through our actions.

Years later beyond the origin of the trauma what remains is the root of an authentic friendship. As terrible as a school day could be it was matched by the laughter and smiles I had with Almin at after school.

2.2 The Root of Shame (two thousand nine eleven years old Bucharest Paradoja yard and gym spring)

[Daniel]

Shame took physical form when I was eleven. That is when deep shame was born. Almost my entire class turned against me. A few held me so I could not move. They tried to rip my clothes off. They managed to tear my shirt.

The moment still spills over me like a wave of trauma because I remember the hits the slaps the fear and the cold body.

My classmates threatened to film me with the first generation smartphones. One girl in fifth grade already had her phone out and seemed ready to do it. They were laughing.

I try to escape and fight back.

I still see on my retina the moments when Tobă and Gâlmă throw my beanie and backpack into the dirty snow.

My mother came to school to speak in front of the whole class with our homeroom teacher watching. I felt shame and inferiority.

My mother asked if I wanted to transfer. I refused. I was stubborn. I did not want to give in to those who mocked me.

On top of my awful grades at school at home I kept investing in my dream to create content. I did not care about consequences.

[Mama]

Time for bed. Now.

[Daniel]

Let me stay ten more minutes please.

[Mama]

No. You have to go to school.

We wake up at six in the morning.

Go to bed now.

She says it in a hard tone.

[Daniel]

The only authentic happiness at home I feel through the glowing pixels of a screen. The old television where I watched news with Maia is gone.

I am buried in unexcused absences at school.

Memories strike like lightning. I am hit by heavy basketballs. My body shakes.

I kick the ball with all my strength. I am hit by Gâlmă and Tobă but also by Pyrin and Felix who make me feel small.

It always happens when the teacher is not there.
I have bruises every Wednesday.

When the teacher appears their tone shifts. Their behavior flips. I still hear their lines

It is just a joke between classmates nothing serious.
We were only playing sir.
He started it.

When the homeroom teacher asks them about the day they tried to undress me they all deny everything.

The only one who stands up and tells the truth is Mișu.

I am threatened with beatings so if I try to speak I cannot. I am reduced to silence. I need someone to rescue me. And that rescue comes from the youngest boy in class. Mișu tells the truth.

The moments when I draw robots with Almin and play alternate with outside chaos.

During free time I go swimming with Olga.
I become one with the water.
Rivero sighs trying to tell me something.

[Rivero reflexive present]

I discovered friendship as a third form of love after family and curiosity. The ocean of my early life is replaced by the swimming pool that fills my soul. In all the darkness the moments with loved ones shine like a diamond. Pure as water.

[Shadow]

Dani sees love as the cure for rage while Rivero tries to feed his inner void. Daniel holds his hands over his face. The three of them are starving to be seen and heard yet each has a different voice.

[Daniel]

Between failing grades and humiliation my story was not meant to stop there.

At home I lived in a parallel virtual world.

As an adult Mișu became a police officer. His sense of justice followed him.

In the movement of my body in the pool something happened to my senses. I felt purified. Water became a safe space that washed the shame away.

The desire for rebellion slowly crystallized in Dani's voice.

2.3 Is Courage the Opposite of Shame (sixth grade twelve years old two thousand ten Bucharest Paradoja school yard)

[Daniel]

It is sixth grade and I am twelve.

Inside the walls of the Bilingual Theoretical High School Paradoja I was thrown to the ground and mocked.

In the inner nightmare when I spin in spirals I see the girls in the yard pointing fingers at me while laughing. Humiliation.

They come closer and corner me. There are several older girls and I cannot leave. They push me to the ground and I curl up. I am overwhelmed. They laugh and point again.

On another day at the start of the year a new girl joins our class. Everyone wants to be friends with her.

Among my classmates there are already the favorites of the homeroom teacher. Those with parents who are doctors or who have respectable positions enjoy advantages. I with an absent father and a mother who never finished her studies am irrelevant. I am ignored again.

You are ugly. You will die a virgin.
Loser. You are annoying.

Who am I A child who feels neither Romanian nor Spanish.

What hurts me most Total indifference.

I stare at the ceiling. Dani at thirteen is absorbed by YouTube burning with the need to express his raw authenticity.

Did I really want love or simply to be seen

Is being seen itself a form of love I think it is the first form to be recognized. My eyes are empty and my gaze lost.

My passion for creating content becomes the place where I no longer have reason only love and devotion. Months pass while the number of videos uploaded on YouTube grows. I am about to enter seventh grade.

[Rivero reflexive present]

I reached the conclusion that every person eventually accepts the love they believe they deserve.

I am the child of an astrophysicist and of a mother who happened to give birth to me instead of finishing her education. What future did I steal from her What chance to live free without a child the way her friend called me problem child a remark that I cannot forget.

There were many like me. Diamonds still in formation. Misunderstood kids.

I was so close to achieving everything I ever wanted and that reality crumbled with my crises. The sum of Dani the tumultuous one and the repressed side of Daniel is the mix of ice layers and an inner torch.

2.4 Exercise

To understand yourself better and to help me understand myself I took the test below at five twenty eight in the morning lit only by the monitor. I answered yes to six out of ten questions.

Each question revealed a vulnerability not necessarily the full trauma load or its complexity. It felt like a breathing pause. I sense myself better.

ACE test Adverse Childhood Experiences

Instructions

Think about your first eighteen years of life.

Answer yes if the statement was true for you at least once regardless of intensity or duration.

1. Emotional abuse

An adult in your family parent caregiver or close relative often insulted humiliated or cursed you or made you feel unsafe or worthless.

2. Physical abuse

An adult in your family pushed hit slapped or threw you to the ground. There was a time when you were afraid you would be physically hurt.

3. Sexual abuse
An adult or a person at least five years older than you touched or tried to touch you in a sexual way asked you to touch them or tried to have sexual contact with you.
4. Emotional neglect
As a child you rarely felt loved protected or supported. You felt that nobody in the family understood you or offered affection and attention.
5. Physical neglect
As a child you often lacked clean clothes food shelter or medical care when needed. Your parents or caregivers were too busy or too unavailable to properly care for you.
6. Domestic violence
You saw or heard one parent usually the mother or maternal figure being hit insulted pushed threatened or hurt by the other parent or by a partner.
7. Addiction in the family
A family member frequently used alcohol or drugs or had addictive behaviors such as repeated drunkenness substance use gambling.
8. Mental illness or suicide attempt in the family
A family member suffered from severe depression another mental illness or attempted suicide or died by suicide.
9. Separation or divorce
Your parents were separated divorced or one of them was absent for a long time physically or emotionally.
10. Prison or conviction
A close family member was arrested convicted or spent time in prison.

Based on the Adverse Childhood Experiences study by Vincent J Felitti Robert F Anda and collaborators Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and Kaiser Permanente nineteen ninety eight.

The result struck me. I did not grow up with extreme violence at home but the emptiness was not silent. It was loud.

Through a psychiatric diagnosis received late in my life I discovered that what I was living had a name BPD. The test did not capture that dimension. The specialist help did.

2.5 Love

[Shadow]

Leave me alone I need you.

How can I be brave and move forward when so often I do not know who I am

I see Daniel pale in bed holding his temples in his hands.

[Daniel]

It feels as if the Shadow wants to hug me.

It is as if my self multiplies to survive. A thin dissociation and a sense of inner void a space where black and white meet in the middle.

My palms are heavy and sweaty. I feel hypersensitive as if all my selves scatter around me and dissolve. I avert my gaze. My slightly trembling voice falls completely silent. This is the moment when something that seemed solid starts to shake.

My connection with the people around me wavers and my mirror shatters into shards that reflect fragments of you. I try to run but there is nowhere to go because the noise in my mind grows like waves.

Is this the emotion of the abandoned child or of the grieving teenager

I would build a world out of holograms just to understand myself and still feel it is pointless.

Leave me alone I need you.

In one sentence this is my entire life. The constant flight between two realities that interweave.

I sigh deeply.

I have never hugged Ricardo. His face does not even appear. I cannot imagine him at all as if his memory were locked in a dungeon.

The cold light melts into Rivero's stellar energy.

[Rivero]

I am the testimony of ancestors I never met.

I never played with my father.

The inner child speaks to me through shards of glass scattered across the bedroom. It is an emptiness I no longer even notice. Unspoken.

[Daniel]

I believe my father is dead or simply does not care that I exist.

Maybe one day I will hear his voice.

Dani rises angry.

[Dani]

Maia's kaki shawl remains on her chair in the bedroom. Silence covers the old world. I am in a strange space where the new has not yet been born and the old is dissolving.

Simple endurance becomes courage. Resilience.

The explosion of darkness climbs to its peak then collapses violently. I feel it slam my face into the ground as if reality itself hits me in the stomach again.

Resilience was the only guide I had. The voice began to fall silent but not the desire to speak.

I existed without truly living. I tried to make sense of the surrounding chaos until chaos swallowed me. A small telescope that my grandmother gave me made me think of stars.

[Rivero]

I feel the echoes of Daniel who lives inside my selves. I could visit him whenever I look at the moon at night when the cold rays spread across the sky.

[The Alchemist]

I used imagination and by looking at the different faces of past and future I noticed one thing you cannot stop the sand from falling unless you let all of it run out.

Only the present can melt time for a moment.

[Rivero present]

His fire is the fuel needed to awaken the flame of courage. Air is the medium without which the two would never meet.

The safety I once felt in my childhood home is trapped in the spiral of the hourglass. I can feel it but I cannot relive it. It is like a chandelier hanging from the ceiling visible but out of reach.

It takes only one reflection on a shard to light up the entire hourglass.

Love is like a piece of glass which when placed at the right angle can reflect light. If that shard is kept away from light it will reflect darkness.

Its essence is what remains when all other feelings blend together like the sediment at the bottom of the finest senses. Like a mantra that chisels the soul.

Suffering turned into love and fear into courage.
A reversed amor fati.

[The alchemist]

Love is the force that does not disappear but transforms like energy. It can change shape but not essence.

[Shadow]

Leave me alone I need you.