

Anita Ruxandra Gala

BLENDING COLORS

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INTRODUCTION

You can run from most things in life but not from your destiny. Most of the time life is driving you in a certain direction without you even being aware of it. However, when you become aware of what your destiny is like, your eyes are suddenly open, and you have just one goal in your life: the thing you are meant to accomplish. And you aren't happy until you do so.

I am a biochemist and I started my career as a teacher and continued as a researcher in a prestigious institute until the big wave brought by the fall of communism in Romania swept all the known values away. Life drove me out of my safe environment and gave me the challenge of working in business, which was something I was not prepared for. But, in time, I managed to perform according to expectations, I got appreciation and respect from people I interacted with. The new world was opening for me, offering new and interesting perspectives.

I have an innate sense of adventure. I never refused to go through a dangerous situation; my intuition told me that any hardship could be overcome with perseverance and calmness. The size of danger is a matter of perception.

Emotionally, I couldn't settle for less than true love and passion. I never abandoned my dream of finding the right person whom I can offer all my love and receive his in return. That proved to be a hard quest marked by apparent

success followed by grief, disappointment, confusion, but never losing hope. If I gave up hope, I'd just end up feeling sorry for myself. And so the quest went on and on. Until one day..

Life would surprise me beyond expectation, and I took the challenge. I got caught in the story spinning around me, I did everything possible to keep it going. My life changed as the story rolled on and new horizons opened. It was certainly worth the effort. And there was no turning back.

I hope my story will inspire others to have the courage and follow their intuition, grab opportunities without thinking twice, take the right decisions at the right time. And most of all, believe that true love is there; it is just to have faith, patience, and perseverance to look for it or let it find you.

CHAPTER I – Life before...

The central lounge of Schiphol airport in Amsterdam looked busy. People so different in their attire, color, behavior were passing in all directions looking up to the signs directing to the gates where they were supposed to embark on their next flight, some hung out in front of shops, made calls, laughed. I had made it early from the little Dutch village I had been to for a sales meeting and, looking at the clock, I knew I could indulge in a survey of the lively shops in the lounge. I was always tempted by souvenir shops; I had a collection of key rings, magnets, or calendars from every trip abroad. Perfumes were tempting, too. Sweets not so much, as they were pretty much the same all over the world.

Then my eyes fell on the bookstore. Maybe I could find an interesting book; let's look inside. There was a great variety of books, each luring me in a different world, of fiction, history, adventure, traveling, love. I was aware that I had to make a choice, so I focused my attention on a couple of bestsellers. And one caught my eye with its title: "Think, fast and slow", by Daniel Kahneman. What could be so special about thinking and why fast and slow? I picked the book and looked at the comments on its back. One advised readers to "buy it fast, read it slow and it will change your life".

Really, could a book change one's life? And my next thought was that I really wanted a change in my life. I wanted to look good, find a companion for my yearly vacations, find love and inspiration. Leaving the bookstore with that book in my bag I had the feeling of something big and irreversible starting for me. Was it just self-suggestion and the curiosity of how a book could change one's life? Or was it something touching my heart and telling me I must have the courage to make a change?

What was my life like? Successful in my work, moving on to managing the newly created company; there would be new challenges, but the business was smaller than in the old company where I worked, which meant more free time. I was travelling for work but lately also going abroad on holidays. Back home, I was continuously trying to improve the old house where we lived; I wished we could move to a new place and forget everything.

My daughter whom I had raised alone was a student now. She was a fine and independent lady, and she had her own life. We were very close to each other but now she was no longer the child I was taking to play in the park. We still went out together and even travelled abroad each year, which we both enjoyed very much. We had been to several countries in Europe, visiting historical places, enjoying the environment, and generally having a good time. Izzy was accustomed to the intense program of visiting each city when we started in the morning and only returned to the hotel late in the afternoon. I wanted her to get to know

various countries; maybe one day she would go and work abroad, like many of our people.

Otherwise, she had her colleagues and friends. She needed her space and freedom. So, I mostly ended up watching TV or reading in the evening with nobody to comfort me.

What else was in my life? I had a boyfriend, a long-time relationship that was not going anywhere. At this moment we were too bored of each other to have sex, get married or travel together. Marcel and I had been through a lot, we stayed together but didn't advance in our relationship.

After nearly 15 years of relationship, we did not get married. Some of our friends lost track of this fact and believed we must have married secretly since they still saw me around. Only his family members remembered we were not married and admonished him constantly. I was familiar with the pattern of those discussions. And I knew his answers in advance, which caused me pain. I had believed in this man and didn't want to leave him; most of the time he had been good to me. He admired me as a woman and was proud when his friends and family admired me. I had made mistakes, lost my temper, complained. He wasn't taking the matter seriously. He took me for granted; he was convinced I would not go away. Where would I go? We were together but living parallel lives.

He lived in Rasnov, a small town in the mountains. I went there to spend weekends with him for the beauty and relaxation of the mountains, not because I expected anything special to happen. He lived in a spacious house surrounded by a big garden and orchard, with a view to

the Bucegi mountains. However, he kept his home a mess despite my constant protests and displeasure. All kinds of objects were lying on the floor, on tables or any other flat surface, an assortment of tools, cables, shoes, clothes. If I even tidied the rooms one weekend, I would find the same mess during the next one. I was running out of arguments.

Marcel was an electrical engineer with an exceptional talent for repairing electronics; he was quick to find any fault and fix things. Instead of making money out of his skills, he preferred to repair TV sets and such for almost nothing; his clients were his friends and most of the time they just offered him a drink. He was also a talented photographer but didn't want to go further than shooting pictures at weddings.

In all the time we spent together I could not change his lack of self-confidence and negative attitude towards anything that fell out of his known and accepted range of facts. He was very stubborn and looking towards the past more than towards the future. He had several cats and dogs at home and these seemed to rank higher than humans in his mind. I liked animals too but saw them as lovely companions and not a substitute for a family. Otherwise, he was a very nice, reliable, and respectable person.

Driving back to Bucharest on Monday morning, after my weekend visit, meant two and a half hours to think. I stood by the side of a man whom I probably didn't match, we tried to amend things, and nothing worked. We were wasting time and I had to put an end to that. I was lonely all the time, even when I was with Marcel. I missed that

warm feeling that made my heart race and my spirit light as a feather.

Other questions raced through my mind. Is life so complicated that one can never find one's soul mate? Like one man had me and he didn't care about me, while maybe another longed for my attention, and I couldn't reach out to him. The solution was to go out and meet people, lead a more social life, hear what others had to say. Yet, it wasn't easy to get out of everyday monotony.

As I walked towards the terminal in Schiphol airport where my flight to Bucharest was boarding, I felt eager to start reading the book I just bought. I felt it was more than curiosity driving me. Much later I'd read an interesting quote by Fabienne Fredrickson: "The things you are passionate about are not random; they are your calling." Events would soon make me understand what that phrase meant. Yet the road to knowing the nature of my calling was long and mysterious.

During the flight to Bucharest, which was almost three hours, I remembered what happened one year ago when I bought a nice swing and set it up in Marcel's garden. I liked swinging from the time I was a child and, when I got the opportunity to buy the swing I was really enthusiastic. I managed to assemble it before he came home and was already enjoying it with his cats. It was so good to swing back and forth looking at the treetops, each moment seeing the world from a different angle, my mind free and relaxed in the afternoon sun. This was until he arrived and started to complain brutally:

“I don’t need this swing here” – he said.

“Why, it is so nice in the garden” – I replied.

“In winter I will have to disassemble it, it is not good.”

“Oh, we can cover it when it rains or snows, nothing more.”

“How much did you pay for it?” – came the next question.

“Not too much. Anyway, it is a gift. Even the cats like it” – I replied smiling.

So much for my intention and effort. From that time on, I took refuge in the swing along with the four cats of the house. They seemed to have more sense than their master.

Swinging up and down, that pleasant sensation of changing perspective, mountains in the distance showing now bigger than smaller, the fresh grass coming closer and again farther in the glittering sun. Only the sky was uniformly blue wherever I looked. It was one of those glorious spring mornings in the mountains. On a Sunday morning, I enjoyed the silence interrupted only by the distant bell chime of the church. Morning had always been my favorite part of the day, when everything was fresh, bright, full of hope, having so much time to develop into something beautiful. Afternoons could be disappointing. Not everything you planned in the morning would come true. But next morning would come with new expectations. Days were like swinging: up and down, up and down...

As autumn turned into winter, Marcel took the seat off the swing and placed it in a small warehouse outside the main building. There were many items thrown randomly

in that warehouse, as there were in the house itself. I didn’t complain about it.

When spring came with warm air, I wanted to take out the seat and mount it on the swing’s frame. Only, as other different objects had been thrown on top of the seat, one of them caused the material to tear on the left side. I was very angry and sad at the same time. In the beginning, I tried to repair the material, but it didn’t work. It just kept tearing more.

In the end I gave up and told Marcel I was very disappointed. He didn’t react in any way. He never took anything serious.

But it was serious to me. We were living parallel lives; we were together but not connected to each other. Everything was just routine.

What else did I have in my life? I had a satisfactory job with a good company. I was travelling abroad for training and sales meetings with our suppliers; I was traveling all over the country for marketing and technical support. There were many activities that kept me busy, sometimes making me drive long hours. At some point the company manager created a smaller company that would cover a part of our product lines. I was appointed manager of the new company. If we were only two employees, my assistant and I, we were assigned a huge office space in a penthouse. We occupied only the living room downstairs, while the other rooms were empty. It was elegant, but it rendered a feeling of loneliness and lack of belonging. I was feeling

strange, partly because of being separated from my other colleagues and partly because of that empty space.

I tried organizing my time efficiently, divided between office work and visits to clients, so as not to have too much downtime. However, work was less than in the other company; I worked with only three of our suppliers. One of them was an American manufacturer of lab equipment whom I really enjoyed working with. I had gained experience with their product lines, which were sold successfully in our market, and I liked their friendliness and efficiency. They were always ready to help and solve problems; we had a very good communication.

Our office was just behind the international airport. Every time I looked out and saw planes taking off, I felt like my life would be better somewhere else, far away from the present monotony. I had financial comfort, but that was not everything.

I needed a change in my life, a new beginning. There had to be a way to get out of the monotony I was living in. I felt that adventure was waiting for me somewhere and I just had to reach out to it.

At the beginning of 2013, I decided to make a change in my life. I had no idea what that change could be or where it was coming from. Yet I felt a breeze of hope and determination. It was just to keep an open eye for opportunities.

CHAPTER II Coming online

I decided to join Facebook out of curiosity. Everybody was talking about Facebook and how they met friends and got news. Could social media help me get news from people I had not heard from in years? Like my former schoolmates? All those people I had known and interacted with, they had to be somewhere. After the revolution in 1989, that brought an end to the communist regime in Romania, a lot of people scattered out of the country. They went for a better life and opportunities in a settled world. At that time Romania was like a ship drifting in a storm we knew not how it started, or if the ship was sound enough, or where it was drifting to. We were young at that time and the world opened to us. Everybody could get a passport and visa to anywhere. The impact of newly gained freedom was immense. It was only later, after we joined the European Union, that the country started to stabilize and work towards development.

Now I followed the steps that Facebook prompted and created a profile. How much should I disclose? Anyone could read that information. Yet there was nothing wrong, that was my education, work history, favorite films, and songs. And so, the story began. A new world was there to be explored.

How to find friends on Facebook? Or maybe let friends find you? I needed names of persons. Slowly I came

up with names of my former schoolmates. So many were not in the country any longer, but some were around only I never bounced into them. Many of the boys and girls I was in school with now had families, grown up children, a good career.

A lot of girls looked extremely well for our age. “Our generation is beautiful, we are not getting old” – I thought with admiration – “Maybe because our ideals were sincere, our dreams big and our ambitions high”. Yes, everybody in C.A. Rosetti high school wanted to prove their best, settled for nothing less than excellence. And it worked for most of us. As we met one another on Facebook, we later managed to organize a meeting in person in our old school. Around 30 of us living in Romania or coming from abroad gathered at school, along with some of our teachers. It was a very emotional moment. We were looking at one another and saw the young boy or girl that we were back then. I thought we had changed physically but otherwise we were the same as on the day we said goodbye to our teachers and school and headed for university.

After spending time at school, we headed for a nice restaurant nearby to celebrate more. The place was by one of the lakes, with a beautiful garden and classic setting. We spent the evening remembering so many moments we shared during the high school years, the happy and unhappy ones. Some brought their children, a replica of what we used to be back then. It was a magic night, a dream come true and the answer to questions I had in mind all these years every time I remembered my school years.

So, social media had something amazing in bringing us together. Now we would be able to keep in touch and meet in smaller groups.

Coming home that night, the feeling of loneliness took over. I needed someone whom I could tell everything I felt and listen to what he said, too. I needed to share emotions, plans for the future, all that is beautiful in life. I could not be content with doing nothing except wait for time to pass. Was I already afraid of what old age would mean?

One day I found a nice inviting message on Facebook, from a good looking fellow. I read the short message over and over and considered if I should reply or not.

Yet it seems that the pleasure of getting attention is stronger than the fear of getting in trouble. After a few days I replied that message. Bret was from the UK, working as an engineer, sometimes traveling overseas for work. We quickly exchanged email addresses and started conversation. He was educated and romantic; we always discussed interesting topics and got to know each other better. I enjoyed reading his text; it was like a fresh breeze in an ocean of boredom. Sometimes he sent me YouTube links to listen to songs I had never heard of before. I liked all this very much. At some point he called me on phone, and I was very excited to hear his voice. I felt assured he was a good person, with good intentions.

After a few weeks of pleasant conversation, we came to the point when we thought it was time to meet in person. I could travel to the UK without problems, and I told him so.

Bret said it was his duty as a man to come and visit me first, which I took as a gentleman's decision.

Only, at the moment, Bret had to travel to New Zealand for work. He was going by ship and the journey would last around one month. I felt disappointed, but then it was his work. He promised to keep in touch with me throughout the journey. I had warm feelings for Bret already and thought that this one month would help us to understand each other better before meeting.

My new office was in the town of Otopeni, near Bucharest, behind the international airport. It was on the third floor, with a nice view. The space was generous, even too big for two people and a few office items; the new company I managed was a start-up, smaller than the former one I was working in. My assistant and me did our best to decorate the place, we brought some plants and made the place friendly. There were few neighbors around, as most of the other apartments were not taken.

The place was silent except from the occasional noise of planes landing or taking off. Even the workers building the last of the estate's houses were relatively silent: no shouting, no laughter, no banging of construction materials on the pavement. Silence often gave me a sense of loneliness. I missed my colleagues from the other company, the chatter and laughter I was hearing from my desk.

In the morning, I would enjoy my coffee and plan for the day ahead. Now, I had Bret to think about, which brought a pleasant sensation. I couldn't wait to read his messa-

ges and think of what to reply. Things were going smooth between us, and I was feeling happy and hopeful.

And then it happened. One day, Bret wrote me a message that their ship was off the coast of Somalia and had been attacked by pirates. The pirates robbed the crew of their belongings. However, Bret's box of valuables was spared, being well hidden. Now, he wanted to send that box to me when they stopped in Malaysia, before reaching his final destination. He was afraid of more attacks in the area. At the beginning I didn't realize what he was trying to do. It was only when he called me from Malaysia and told me that the shipping of the box would cost ten thousand pounds and I was supposed to pay for it, I realized he was trying to get money from me. I was so sad and disappointed about the situation. He was insisting and became aggressive in his speech. Who was he?

As I started checking information about scammers online, I realized Bret was behaving like one of them. It left me speechless.

So that's what some people are doing online: show fake feelings and tell intricate lies to obtain money from their victims. Bret seemed so nice and loving, that I could hardly imagine he was planning bad things in cold blood. It was true that I never saw him on video, only had pictures of him. I thought it was not essential to have a video call since we were going to meet each other face to face.

I wondered how widespread this business was. The worst thing was that it left me with a feeling of uncertainty and fear of approaching anyone online. After a series of

conversations meant to give confidence and hope in the relationship, it was just an illusion.

I decided to take a break from everything; what better spot for clearing my mind and relaxing was there, if not the Danube Delta? It was late August; the weather was still warm. My daughter agreed to join me on a three-day trip; we drove to the town of Tulcea and left the car in a safe place, then continued the journey to Saint George by boat. There was no road reaching Saint George, which was situated in the heart of the Danube Delta, close to the Black Sea. The boat trip was excellent, watching the river lined by green shrubs and trees, silence broken only by the sound of the engine, the shuffling of water and eventual bird song. I had a feeling of detachment from all stressful things.

After a couple of hours, we arrived at our destination, got off the boat and walked a short distance to the guesthouse. The place was called Green Village, a name that fully matched the place's description. It was a beautiful resort, with cottages made of wood, surrounded by greenery, winding alleys and a small river flowing through the place. The furniture inside was also solid wood, traditional style, most probably hand made. The place looked unique and inviting one to relax and feel good.

We settled down and rested for a while, then we went out to explore the food. The food was mostly fish, as we were between the Danube River and the Black Sea, in a fishing village. Everything was tasty and unique.

The next day, we hired a small motorboat with a guide, to take us on the canals. The guy happened to be an ornithologist, so he was able to point out various species of birds. My daughter and I found that so exciting, to see all those creatures with our own eyes.

As the boat left the shore, we glided on the river and then entered one of the canals. The vegetation was dense and all green, against the brownish water and blue sky. There was silence, interrupted only by the squeak of a bird and the sound of our engine advancing at low speed. The guide explained that wild birds were extremely shy creatures, we have to keep quiet and try to get close enough to take good pictures of them. We managed to get a glimpse of some, at a distance.

The canals were like a labyrinth; it wasn't easy to find the way out unless you knew the places well. To me, everywhere looked the same but our guide was familiar with the environment. Inside the narrow canals even the water seemed to be still, although it was surely flowing in some direction. The day was getting hot, as the sun was up and shining.

When we exited the last canal, reaching where the river water merged with the sea, suddenly there was wind blowing and waves were shaking the boat. After all the calm sailing, this was entirely different. As our boat began rocking, I was a little afraid.

The guide took us to a place where there was a pelican colony. There were many of the big birds, some flapping wings, moving around or just sitting motionless.