



MY GHOST

What can make a woman not want to look at herself in the mirror? Not want to see her reflection in the glass?

Chela, Chelita, started talking to us at Border Woman via very short emails, but with messages taken from a poem, a song, graffiti, the Bible...And then she let go and told us her story, which she had never told anyone. She was forced to work as a prostitute and take drugs for the benefit of others and to please savages, who paid not just for sex, but to beat her. Two in one. They got pleasure from feeling that they were 'violating' her.

Chelita escaped; she was so exhausted, so doped up, so ill that she slept in the toilets in a shopping centre. Even she does not know how long her recovery took, lost in silence and not wanting to see whether it was night or day. But her story didn't shock the group; we'd all lived through our own hell. What shocked us was the fact that she couldn't look at herself in the mirror.

It had been nearly two years since she had done so, or at least that's what she thinks, because she wasn't counting the days and nights. We all talked amongst ourselves, we all had an opinion; some of us understood her reasons, others didn't. But certainly we all hoped that one day she would be able to look at herself in the mirror.

After more than a year of contact with us, writing long emails, sending songs, making jokes, reflecting deeply, writing advice on how to escape for women who were enslaved, one day in 2012 she sent us an email that took all our breath away, but allowed us to breathe new air.

Her email started as follows:

"I had a ghost that followed me around like a shadow.

Every year it was bigger, stronger.

I gave it the face of bad people; I hated it.

A short time ago, I went out to take a walk and think about the words of a friend who also didn't have a face, but had a very soft and very strong voice.

I walked around the port, thinking about my ghost. And I started to see it; blurry, but with more features each time.

My heart started to beat fast and I began to sweat with fear. I felt like crying, and I felt that my ghost also wanted to cry.

I felt like running home. When I opened the door, I knew who and where the ghost was, and I went to look for it.

I ran like a crazy person into the bathroom and saw that the ghost was me, looking out from behind the mirror.

It was me! It was the me from before; the one that was strong, but became weak and suffered so much, it turned into a ghost. I had been punishing myself and I had become a ghost.

I'm not exaggerating when I tell you that we looked at each other, that we hugged, her younger than me. I asked for her forgiveness for hiding her away, and she asked for my forgiveness for having allowed herself to be hidden away.

It was the result of my silence, of hiding from everyone what had happened to me. I'm not crazy; on the contrary, I feel more alive, more complete. I've started listening to the music I like again; I've started happily eating food I swore I'd never eat again because it was what they gave me there, in that place.

Why did I lock her away? Did I want to protect her from other people? Was I afraid they'd treat her badly if they knew what had happened to her? Why had it taken me until now to realise that it was me?

How stubborn I am; I'm so stubborn I became a ghost. Stubborn for denying her, and her stubborn for trying to come out!

Yesterday I felt so much love for myself; I felt great, and I feel that the little I have achieved is so much.

I went to bed happy, remembering good times. I remembered boyfriends, friends from before, parties, songs I liked to sing. Good times came all of a sudden, and FOR THE FIRST TIME in this second life, I wept with joy. I cleansed myself of guilt, and the first thing I did when I got up was go out, eager to find a computer with an Internet connection and write to you. I love you so much, you're so great!"

Chelito looked in the mirror! And she told us about it excitedly. We felt happy for her. And she was so excited to receive our emails of happiness, to know that we wept with joy for her, that one day she surprised us. I went on chat, clicked and her picture appeared in front of us; her picture that we had never seen before. She looked at us; she saw that we were looking at her. She saw us jump for joy. And someone from Guatemala shouted "Oh Chelita, you're going to fall in love!"

(2012)