

***How to...***

***find the most beautiful thing  
on earth***

*The Story of Esmeralda Thetics-Périens*

I need to share the story of a very good friend of mine. She was a southern beauty, huge brown eyes, long eye lashes, dark curls that jumped when she laughed, and defined lips like a Greek marble statue. She was perfect, and men fell for her when she walked by on the street, because her pace was a dance and her body music that made the trees in the alley dream of heaven.

So going out with her was a bit of a dare for us ordinary girls. But she was a good sport and didn't seem to notice turning heads and glances following her.

Then, one day, she showed up to have a last cup of coffee and say good bye. She had left her heavy suitcase outside on the porch, and that made her appear uneasy and her good bye hasty.

She was embarking on a journey to find “the most beautiful thing on earth”, she explained, and her face lit from expectation.

Back then I grinned and didn't take her seriously. I even offered her a mirror. But I quickly realised she was dead serious about it. And so I hugged her good bye, and she promised to write, and walked out and was gone.

To be honest: I expected her to be back the next day. Or the next week. But I was mistaken.

And then the postcards started coming in. Colourful postcards from all over the world. I have a wall in my room covered with them.

The first was from Hawaii and showed a volcano erupting at night. It read:

*My dear, being close to this huge mountain, and feeling the heat of the inner earth, is a breathtaking experience. I feel like I am one with the core of the planet, and the lava pulsing out is the shining blood of this huge organism that nurtures me.*

*But... (And I got used to those butts over time) - the smoke takes my breath away, it smells horribly - like foul eggs - and the black surrounding me, especially at night, is kind of frightening. Lots of love and stay tuned.*

Next was from the Swiss Alps.

*Imagine!, she wrote, I took a ropeway up to the top of the highest mountain and then sat there, high above the world, the cities with tiny trams and even tinier humans to my feet, the gorgeous panorama all around, but all other mountain tops below mine. It was breathtaking. Then I felt as if my lungs widened to inhale the space, and I took such deep breaths I felt light, and as if I could just stretch*

*out my arms and fly, and experience this ultimate freedom that seemed to invite me to explore.*

*But... although this time there was no smell or unpleasant experience, I don't think this is it. Because as long as I dream of flying, I can't be sure if flying wouldn't be even more beautiful than this. So farewell for now...*

Her next card showed blue sky with a tiny parachute, and her comment was even more excited than the last. She actually sounded breathless, as she raved:

*You wouldn't believe it! I am a bird. I am the sky. I am the master of the universe. I am free! I am everywhere and nowhere. You can't catch me or cage me in, I explore the earth with the speed of the wind.*

*But... the wind in my face was a storm, cold, biting and taking my breath away, a wall blocking my excited screams, and nearly made me lose conscience. So I think I need to find something as free but more relaxed.*

Wow my dear friend!, her next card started. It showed galaxy in cheerful colours, and she explained she had visited a planetarium.

*Leaning back in my seat, the universe unfolding above my head, seeing the stars wander across the black endlessness, and then the feeling of flying directly into space... Made my stomach turn, she wrote.*

*But... it was only an illusion, of course, and not real. I am not sure if the most beautiful thing on earth should be an illusion. Hugs and kisses...*

Her next card came from Disneyland. So finally she was on her way back, and I was relieved.

*This is so much fun, it read. Going up and down and up, feeling the stomach go up, being pressed into the seat and the wind caressing my face felt so great...*

*But... now that I experienced this activity inside my body, I feel that I should do more than sit in front of or on a mountain, or in a Planetarium, or hang from a glider... I should actually DO something to experience these extraordinary feelings.*

So... next she was back in the mountains. This time the Himalaya.

*I climbed all day, she wrote. And I experienced the most amazing feeling of being and not being, of moving but without effort, though climbing hundreds of meters. It was a concentrated, steady movement towards the top. The destination. Of life..., of this day..., of myself.*

*But... Now that I am back in the tent my arms hurt terribly, I shake so much I can hardly hold the cup of butter tea, and I feel I need to vomit because of exhaustion. So maybe this is not beauty for every day. From the most beautiful thing in the world I definitely expect less side effects.*

Next I got an envelope with 7 postcards inside.

*I travelled the grand tour, visited all these gorgeous monuments, with a group of tourists from twelve different countries.*

*But... I would so have loved to ask the artists HOW they created their pieces of art, and WHY. But I learned they are long dead, and marble and gold don't answer my questions. I wonder... Is beauty in the art or in the artist?*

*I am. I am free. I am feeling, her next card explained. My dear, I freed myself of the shoes that parted me from the fertile soil, water, mud and tickling stones. I learned to feel again: myself, the world,*

*the heavens. I hear birds and see sunsets and my life is replete with everyday occurrences. I am reborn, like a child, experiencing my breath and heartbeat for the first time.*

*But... I wonder... Would it be possible to intensify these regained novelties further, now that I am an adult?*

The next card showed a still life of an old master, and on the back side a larking message:

*My dear friend, I send you some drops of orange, mango, strawberry, pineapple and pomegranate. (Little arrows pointing to the respective dot.) I travelled from India via Arabia to Africa, and it is a juicy frenzy of scents and spices and tactile abundance.*

This was the last card for a long time. I got really worried, but since every card came from another place and she never seemed to know where she was heading next, there was no way I could have found her. And so I waited. Worried. And waited. And tried to be patient. Until I found myself checking the mailbox several times a day.

Until – finally – I found another card.

This time the picture said it all: a couple in close embrace, melted into each other, draped in red sheets.

*I love you. I love the whole world. I finally, finally found true and utter beauty. He is beautiful inside and beautiful outside and beautiful is what he does to me.*

And no but. THAT made me worry. I was married for too long to trust this fickle beauty she had found. So I waited for the next card. Hoping it would not come too soon, for her sake.

But of course it came.

I fumbled it out of the mailbox reluctantly, without really looking at it, and the cover was black.

All black. And there were round corrugated dots covered with a faint salt crust where her tears had dropped on.

*My soul is a black river, losing itself in the grey meadow of forgotten bliss. Each and every cell in my body screams from pain of losing it's better half. The sun will never shine again, the grass will never be green again, I will never sing again and my soul will never dance again. I am dead, and the only feeling left is complete emptiness. Or even more than emptiness. When bliss is absent it makes room for a dark universe of despair. I have never felt this lonely in my life. I want to die.*

*This was a stupid idea. There is no beauty on this earth.*

Now I was relieved, because obviously she was in the process of healing.

The next card – as expected – came shortly after. It showed mountains again. High mountains, tops covered with snow.

At second glance I realised they were just painted.

*My dear friend, if you are still out there and reading my cards, I greet you as a broken person. I have spent days, weeks and months trying to find the most beautiful thing on earth, and found only shallow distraction. And when I thought I had found the real thing, it turned out it could not be trusted and was no more than another illusion. There is no real, much less lasting beauty on this earth. It is only this: earth. I found that out sitting in a cave on a high mountain, where I have spent the past two weeks in total solitude, untouched by life and unhurt by humans.*

*I am slowly recovering, and finally start to see more clearly. Your grateful friend...*

The next card was not a card. It was a big dry leaf she had cut into almost rectangular shape, and the ink was of a strange brown colour. If I hadn't known her better I would have thought it was written with blood.

*My dear friend, since life is an illusion, things are illusions and especially feelings are illusions, I now decided to learn to create those illusions within myself. Deriving from experience, I magnify, intensify and purify, or, as Kant might say, "transcendend", and create my own beauty and my own utmost intensity.*

*Beauty is in the eye and inner capacity of the beholder.*

At this point I got curious. So far I could relate to what she had written and often expected what she might find. But at this point our friendship ended, and I transformed from a caring heart to a voyeuristic observer.

Next was a photo. It was difficult to make out more than eyes, and I turned it upside down and back around again and still couldn't figure out who it showed.

*My dear friend, it read, I'm sending you a photo of my new love. I finally found the most beautiful being on earth.*

I flipped it over again and tried to make out lips or nose, but everything was covered with hair, seemingly, and I still couldn't make out an expression.

Shaking my head, I continued reading:

*He is the most gentle, most caring and warmest heart any woman can wish for, and I am so incredibly lucky to have found such a beautiful soul in the loneliness of these mountains. He touches me in*

*a way nobody touched me before, he feels what I feel and knows all my inner secrets. No one could ever fulfil my desires the way he does. With him I experience stages of ecstasy I never dreamt possible, he makes me fly in frenzy all night, screaming and crying again and again. And again...*

*But... (Ah! There! She was recovering, her old self made itself seen.) When you read this card, I will have left him. It will break his heart, I know, but he too needs to understand that bliss is only an illusion. So I leave him before he leaves me, and travel on in the inner realm, to higher spheres.*

I screwed this card up and would have loved to give her a piece of advice, to treat the poor creature the way she did, to selfishly use him and then throw him away – out of cowardly fear!

But of course my role was to wait and read.

Her next card – to my surprise – came from Paris. The city of love. So I expected the worst.

*My dear friend, I hope you are not too angry with me because of my last card. I know you would not agree. But then... you did not live through these hells or needed to recover on an alienated mountain for weeks...*

*I now am back in life, and experiencing the company of hundreds and thousands of very ordinary people, who never left home to seek anything. I'm not yet sure what this passage of my journey will bring, and feel kind of uneasy, yet very relaxed, as I drift through crowded streets, following the flow of everybody's curiosity.*

That sounded normal. And not. But at least I didn't need to worry about her starving in a cold mountain cave any more.

Next was the photo of a choir in uniform clothes with uniform open mouths in front of a uniformly white wall.

*My dear friend, my new friend Felicité invited me and I joined a choir. It is the most peculiar experience, to lose yourself in the crowd. As if your own voice and with your voice your personality vanished in the vibrating space. Vibrating from the sound produced by a hundred souls, all in tune, homogenised, flowing together to a huge ascending column of sound. Just fabulous.*

*Why did I waste so much time hiding all alone in a cave, if there is so much beauty in communion? I think I went about my search all the wrong way from the very beginning.*

I smiled. Finally she was back. At least mentally.

The next card showed an arrangement of stones, in the typical minimalist way of Asian art.

*My dear and sound friend, singing truly opened up my soul and showed me how my activities create beauty that can be shared and collected to build something multiple times bigger than me.*

*I understand that my contribution to the composite work depends on my artistry and self-awareness, and so my journey continues in all directions: towards the inside and the outside, self-exploration and cooperation. I feel that finally I can create something with substance that exceeds my own capabilities by far.*

*I am looking for the sound that is truly me, pure and empty, but at full volume. I can feel it inside of me, and outside, and I long to get together with my friends and lose myself in the tremble of a space filled with love and care for each other and the intense positive, selfless feelings of these powerful human beings, who give themselves up to become part of something more beautiful – for an hour or two.*

*We can be more than what the mirror reflects.*

Next I got a card with an irritating spiral that made me dizzy just from looking at it, and I had to hold on to the back of my armchair before I could turn it around and read.

*My dear friend, I met a very special friend today. It is the most loving, caring and forgiving being that exists. An with it I am a part of everything that lives, and ever lived and will live, and fire and wind and water and stones. I lost myself in space and found myself in an atom and forgave and was showered with pure love, and experienced untrembling sound of pure light.*

*I will never love more and never will be loved more.*

Her last postcard came 3 months later.

The door bell rang, and when I opened up she stood in front of me, smiling, unchanged, and handed me a white postcard as if it was the most normal thing in the world for two old friends to meet this way, after months and months of being parted.

I read:

*Eternal bliss is not of this world. Beauty is within ourselves. Triggered by an out of time and space spark. I am soul. I am beauty. I correspond.*