

In Crisis

By Sebastian Angarita

Written right after another depression crisis

Help me, I can't breathe! That's all I can say.

My body doesn't answer anymore, I lose control of it and I slide out the window until I fall with my chin over the edge, while I hear him —as if he were very far away— calling for an ambulance almost screaming. The first blackout.

The Date

The moon was over our heads and the app warned Álvaro that the pizza was coming.

- Go for the dinner that just arrived —he said.
- Which dinner? If we have some leftovers from today's lunch —I replied with a laugh.

And after beckoning me with his phone on and a notice of the address, I understood that dinner was the craving I had that week, my favorite pepperoni pizza.

When I got back with dinner, he told me to get ready because we had a date.

Moisturizer for this pale face that hasn't seen the sun for days, a little splash of rose water and a choice of the few clothes I have in Álvaro's apartment —my boyfriend— are “the little fix” I make for myself and the date he just planned.

The sky, absolute black, is interrupted by the twinkling lights of several colors that illuminate Monserrate Hill, framed by the large windows of the room. Two glasses, a bottle of wine and two pizzas in the center of the table, simulating a perfect date in our apartment that turns into a restaurant. Our favorite.

Prelude

It's around 11 at night — I don't remember very well. Our gasps perfectly matched the rhythm of the techno music that is playing in the background. Our sweaty bodies fog the windows and reveal that Eros had just passed through here.

After falling exhausted on the bed, I go to the bathroom to get some water, when I go back I cannot breathe very well, however, it is usual after sex.

A few minutes later, I still can't breathe. Two minutes later, I still cannot breathe. Three minutes ... Five minutes ... Six and nothing. The feeling of being suffocated is way heavier now.

- Try to breathe a little slower —he said to me as I tried, without success, to breathe a little lighter.

I see the window and all I want is to get out, I need to breathe and with the few words I can pronounce, I tell him that I need to get out, but inside I know that I not only want to get out to breathe but to get out of this lockdown that is consuming me. I need to get out!

Without realizing it, I was starting to have an episode of anxiety. And I, without knowing, am part of the large percentage in Colombia where "adults from 18 to 44 years old, (...) 52.9% have one or more anxiety symptoms and 80.2% shows that 1 to 3 depressive symptoms" according to the Observatorio Nacional de la Salud Mental.

Anxiety

The air gets away from me and I cannot retain it in my lungs. The window seems to get smaller and the night locks me up.

The trachea contracts like a snake before attacking. The noise of the city becomes increasingly distant and, so does, the voice of Álvaro asking me to stay with him.

The voice inside my head cries out for oxygen and its echo asks me to get out of this lockdown.

The anguish of both of us can be seen in our faces, I feel that I am dying and he tries to hold me so I don't faint.

My body doesn't answer anymore, I lose control of it and I slide out the window until I fall with my chin over the edge, while I hear him —as if he were very far away— calling for an ambulance almost screaming. The first blackout.

I come to myself and manage to get on my feet, while I take steps towards the door; all I want is to run away.

So, naked, we leave the apartment and I keep listening to him saying that he needs an ambulance, but apparently it is not possible —hours later I found out that the emergency hotlines couldn't send an ambulance, because there was none available and we had to get there on our own—.

Between tears and out of breath, I'm not longer aware of the steps I take towards the elevator. Once I enter, I fall again. I can't hear and all I can say is that I can't breathe. What time is it? What is happening to me? Am I going to die?

We leave the apartment as we can and I react.

- Álvaro we don't have clothes —I said, suffocated.

I see him running to the elevator while he goes for clothes and I stay downstairs, in the hallway —which doesn't seem like the hallway I've been through so many times— I don't recognize it anymore.

I don't know how much time has passed through, but I hear the sound of the elevator and I see him, my angel, going out with some clothes on his hands.

I don't even know how I put them on — or, well, he put them on me—.

We go out on the street and I still don't feel the cold, the wind or the concrete of the sidewalk where I sit on. Innocently, I think I can breathe better when I go out there, but I just can't. I just can't.

Alv goes back to the apartment, because of the eagerness he did not take a T-shirt for himself nor our ID's.

I don't know how, but I get back to the building and I stayed there, desperate and almost screaming — it's a failure — that I need to breathe.

He comes down again and every inch of my body asks for help. We go out and a taxi arrives.

We take it and I managed to see that the taxi driver looked at me in amazement, at the same time that Alv told her that we needed to go to the San Ignacio hospital and tell her to take the Seventh street, which at that time, it's the fastest one.

- Why doesn't he have a mask?— I heard.

I find out after the lady was a little upset by all the uncertainty that comes with transporting a suffocated man in the middle of a pandemic.

Between the little breath I have and my boyfriend instructing her not to follow the traffic rules, because we need to get there as soon as possible, I leave, inside of me, in my mind. Once again, I lose consciousness.

Then, consciousness comes back. I still don't know how much time has passed and I can't breathe. I opened the taxi's door and see two men approaching to me. I can't recognize who they are, but they are nurses, I'm almost certain. A sign like the one in the movies that says emergencies. They help me in. White, the ER target, people look at me in fear —or regret?—And, again, Alv asking for help.

Tears come to me as if I had an eternal source of them. The trachea remains the same, I am still the same, the same since this all started.

I see a nurse talking to me through a speaker, but I don't understand her. Help me please —I said to myself—.

I cry, my chest hurts, I try to breathe. I cry, my chest hurts, I try to breathe, but it's impossible. The nurse, who can't get out because of the coronavirus issue, tells me to breathe slowly. —As if I hadn't already tried it. I don't know how many times— I cannot, ma'am, I can't, the brain is not connecting to make me breathe at least.

And, between listening to the lady and staring at the ground, I lose myself, again, and fall head-first on the floor. I don't know what happens. I come back and Álvaro is sitting me on a chair.

Fifteen minutes, half an hour ... I don't know, I don't know how much time passes! Until I go in for triage. Of course, the crying, the pain in the chest and the lack of breathing had not gone away and had even accompanied me when I went to the bathroom, to enter I even had to leave the emergency room and go to a more crowded place, with their proper face masks, they looked at me again with their eyes wide open. —But was it my anxiety or were they really looking at me like that?—.

I am not able to coordinate what I perceive, but I am able to respond to the nurse what I am feeling and, vaguely, who I am, what I do and how old I am. Although I think I'm not there for those questions right now miss, I think.

My body comes back and I go out for ... I don't know where I'm going, I'm just going to a window in front of me. I really feel like I look not as cute as I would like. Sneakers that aren't mine, sweatpants that are not mine and a shirt that, of course, is not mine either. Although, seeing myself in the reflection of the window, it doesn't look too bad, to tell the truth: I look like a sunny Sunday on Ciclovía.

Another lady or ma'am— what am I supposed to know! —Who attends me at this window asks me questions that I can't understand. Where I live? What Health Insurance do I have? ... I don't know, ma'am, I don't know and I don't understand why I can't answer. I say an address that I think is not correct, but I say it because I don't want to think. Health Insurance? Compensar, but I can't speak, ma'am.

I sit back in the waiting room, and although my breathing rate has slowed, I still cry, unable to think about what's going on.

Depression

A nurse brings a wheelchair and tells me that we are going to psychiatry. After crossing some of the wide-open doors — worthy of a hospital — we waited in a hallway.

The coronavirus, anxiety and being in a hospital make me start to despair because Alv doesn't bring a face mask.

- Can you do me a favor and get a mask for him? —I ask desperately to the nurse.
- We don't have it, because now they deliver them by list —the boy answers me with laughter, seeing the faces that Álvaro makes for him, according to Alv I get annoyed with this topic.

We continue on I don't know how many hallways and we arrive to a room. A doctor comes out and asks us to go to the office. Again more questions and sometimes I know what I say, but other Alv speaks for me, because crying and tachypnea —this is how the increase in respiratory rate above the normal values is technically known— do not let me speak.

They supply me with a few drops of Clonazepam, which has no effect, and doubles the dose to calm my anxiety.

Between questions, I feel a deep hatred for myself. Having to run away with my boyfriend to a hospital in the middle of a pandemic. And my family? What are they going to say? I want to die!

Again.

What if I ever have wanted to die? Yes ma'am. What if I ever have tried it? Too. Why? I don't even know the answer.

Well, the thing is that "depressive disorders are characterized by sadness, loss of interest or pleasure, feelings of guilt or low self-esteem, sleep or appetite disturbance, feeling tired and

lack of concentration" (WHO). This is explained to me in the office and they tell me about some things I can do to control it, but I feel that I cannot process everything they tell me.

We finished the questionnaire and I still don't dimension how long it lasted. They ask me to calm down and they assure me that, due to the situation I am in, it is better that I stay the night in, because they fear that I may do something against myself.

I go back to my wheelchair and the nurse leads us to the room where I would spend the night — who would have thought that my date would end up here, as if we were in a hotel ha ha—.

Epicrisis

Depression and anxiety are disorders, diagnosable health conditions and are different from the feelings of sadness, stress or fear that a person may experience from time to time in his life.

The nurse — so glente — asks me to take off my pants and shoes, because they have laces —and, well, I can hang myself or something— and he passes me a dressing gown, although sophisticated, worthy of a hospital.

We lie down in bed, pick up my phone and start recording videos —because, yes, you can be sick, but still be a faithful centennial —.

I keep messing around with the masks of any nurse who comes across me; I even ask female doctors for masks, but nobody has them.

I am calmer emotional and physically, but I cannot feel so conscious, I feel doped. It must be because of the medicine they just gave me.

He, my date who became a guardian angel, continues with me and sings "La Lechuza", yes, the same one. Between singing and talking, I'm falling asleep and, as if I was going to pass out again —not this time— I fall asleep.