

## **I will marry Eddie Vedder**

“I can’t believe it” thinks Giulia as she stressfully plays with a concert ticket in her hands, a concert that she’s been dreaming about for over a year, or maybe even all of her life.

Eddie Vedder - Cramberries - Visarno’s Racecourse - Florence - date: 24th of June 2017 - time: 12:00 p.m. - Inner Circle Parterre-Puccini-Rosso Square: this is what's written on the ticket that arrived in the post a couple of days before. That black ticket, with a picture of Eddie dressed elegantly, holding a ukulele and jumping barefoot on a white sandy beach, she will treasure forever inside a wooden memory box. A beautifully scented box that's still waiting to be filled with future memories of her new life.

A life that started a year before and that it’s still rather immature but already promising, she tells herself. This is the sentence she keeps reminding herself of whenever she looks proudly at her new apartment, which she bought with her sweat and decorated based on her own unique taste: a safe haven full of books and cds, where she can relax after long and stressful work days at her Milan advertising office where she works. That concert and that ticket are just another little liberation from her old life, which she doesn't repudiate, but she did have to leave behind in order to truly be herself, because, as Joseph Campbell says “ You must give up the life you planned in order to have the life that is waiting for you.”. Giulia has written this quote all over her house on little post-it: inside her bathroom cabinet, next to her computer on her desk, on her fridge and on her entrance door. She always keeps them there to remind herself to have courage whenever she feels insecure, because sometimes her future scares her.

But today she’s happy, a fortunate coincidence made the date of Pearl Jam’s frontman concert the same as her 35th birthday. A stellar coincidence and a sign of good luck, she thinks. “There is no way in hell I will miss this event” she shouts loudly while looking towards her vinyls that she inherited from her brother. It's almost time to go, the bus for Florence will leave at 8.00 am, she has to hurry, but she lingers through her memories in front of LP’s collection which she got from her late brother. Giulia keeps her vinyls like sacred relics: 80’s and 90’s rock music from hard rock, to grunge, that haven’t played since the death of her brother. From the very large selection in chronological order of LP she pulls out the first 33s from Pearl Jam: “Ten”. She hugs it tight while emotions start flooding in, her mind rushes back in time stopping in 1997 summer time, when she was only 15 years old.

She remembers about a girl named Jane, an American friend of her brothers whom he met in Seattle that summer and decided to invite her back to Italy:

- I am utterly in love with Naples... and with you brother your know?

Said Jane with a stunted Italian, while laying on Antonio’s bed. Jane was so beautiful, laid-back and carefree: she was smoking in her underwear looking at Antonio with a winking smile.

Giulia thought she seemed different from all of her brother’s girlfriends and friends that he ever brought home, when she met Jane she instantly admired her, not knowing why, maybe because she loved her determination.

- C’mon you, convince him to marry me! I want to live here and with him forever.

She said to Giulia, laughing.

-If you don't marry me Antonio, I swear I will marry Eddie Vedder instead! She shouted with a fake angry tone voice.

Antonio answered back while putting a vinyl on the record player:

- Here it is! Your precious Eddie Vedder singing about his lost love, if you listen carefully you can I hear how inconsolable he is in this song...

- Listen Antonio! I'm not joking... I know a sound engineer who works in a recording room in Seattle, he told me he can introduce him to me if I want.

- Than what are you waiting for? Let's go right now back to Seattle to your sound engineer friend so he can introduce him to me as well! I'll ask Eddie to surf together on the waves of the ocean.

Jane answered back throwing a pillow towards him and shouting some swear words in English, while Giulia, sat at the end of the bed, enjoyed that scenery. It was very hot, even though the windows were wide open to let some air through, but there was none. Giulia was still happy even with the very warm weather. The rest of their family, mom, dad and bigger sister were all at beach trying to fight the hot temperatures, but Giulia decided to stay in the house to wait for the return of her brother from a trip that their parents bought for him as a present for his philosophy degree.

- Mom and I decided to buy this ticket to America as your graduation present. Uncle Giovanni will be waiting for you at Seattle airport, he told us you can stay there as long as you want.

Said his dad, with tears in his eyes, the day after his graduation.

Antonio stayed in America for 1 month and a half, staying at his uncle's house who emigrated there 20 years before and opened up an Italian bakery. Giulia had suffered a lot because of her brother's absence, she was filled with loads of different emotions: on one hand she was proud to see her brother happy for all that he had achieved, but on the other hand she was sad she didn't have him close ready to comfort her, so she was impatiently waiting for his return. Yes, she was impatiently awaiting because Antonio was the only one who could understand her in her family, he was the only one who realized her true identity, and comforted her without judgement. Antonio's open mindedness and his sensitivity were the keys to Giulia's heart and to her true essence, and he understood her inner journey, one which was still unknown to her.

Unfortunately, her brother's untamed spirit often made sure to keep him away from her, and after the trip to America, Naples seemed to little for him, and for years she saw him leaving the city for new adventures, always changing destinations, because he was trying "To find his place in this world" he always said. In the end, he did find his place: a base camp on the Himalaya, where he became a skilled mountain climber, organizing excursion to the most beautiful mountain tops of Central Asia. Because he disappointed expectations from his parents, he rarely went back to Naples, but he always kept in close contact with Giulia.

- I want to come there.

This was the end sentence of every phone call and letter Giulia sent to Antonio.

- This summer, after school, I will come and get you, so we can spend some time together, if you want.

He always told her.

- You don't understand - she said - I don't want to spend just some time with you, I honestly think that my place in the world is next to you. I won't bother you, I will live on my own, I will have my life and you will have yours... but all I want is to be close to you, that's all. I love you and I need you.

She told him, as a young and hopeful teenager, noticing her brother's reticence.

- I love you too, and you know it...and this dream of yours could maybe come true someday, but before you decide to go anywhere, unlike what I did, you should try and find your own place, inside you.

He answered back. Giulia couldn't understand.

- What do you mean? What are you saying?

- You have to love yourself for who you are.

Why did he tell her that? What made him think she didn't love herself? She was passionate about her studies, she didn't use drugs and she didn't abuse alcohol; she didn't even smoke, unlike all of her friends. It's true, sometimes she did feel very lonely even though she had a load of friends to hang out with, but this surely didn't mean anything... "My melancholy is a trait of my personality" she told herself.

And what's wrong in wanting to follow her brother's footsteps? Why couldn't she follow him? She made her decision: when her studies were done she was going to save money to join him. She was an adult so she didn't have to ask for permission. Unfortunately she did have a little problem that was going to get in the way of her decision: her obsessive need for tidiness. She was fixated on having everything in a specific order: objects, clothing and supplies that she would need to bring with her. She needed to bring everything with her because she had another obsession: keeping everything with her. Every object had to be catalogued by dimension and size, placed in singular nylon envelopes or in boxes of different sizes. Her clothing had to be divided into different categories according to color, type of fabric, brand and even size, since she kept clothes from when she was younger. "But why do you need them?..." Grumbled her sister, "...let's bring them to a charity shop." But Giulia didn't want to give anything away. She also didn't want to leave without having everything in her specific order, and this was basically impossible, so it became increasingly difficult for her to fulfill her dream of joining her brother. Even if she kept everything in boxes, suitcases and packages around her house, she always missed something that kept her from finally moving away. In the end it was Antonio who came back to Naples, on the day of her graduation as a surprise. When she saw him for a couple of seconds she was unable to think, it seemed like an angel or even a saint came down from paradise this occasion. After these few moments of shock, Giulia ran towards her brother, hugging his muscular body that reflected his profession. On his ambered face Giulia could see the first little wrinkles that were surrounding his loving eyes, that she longed to see for such a long time, when once she finally did, tears of joy and relief came rolling down her face.

- I'm so proud of you.

Said Antonio reciprocating her big hug. Once she finished pleasantries with the other relatives that were there for her graduation, her and Antonio holed up inside her bedroom. Her brother, noticing all of the packages and suitcases, couldn't hide his concern for her...

- You have to make room. You have to lighten up a little...

- I know, you're right Antonio, but it's very difficult, I don't know how to explain it... I tried giving up on something, but in the end I just can't do it, it just ruins my order.

- And what happens if your order get ruined? Please do tell me...

- What do you mean by what happens? Everything becomes messy obviously.

- Oh it becomes messy? Jung always said that in the vortex of chaos you'll find eternal miracles and the world becomes magic. Mankind not only does it belong to an orderly world, but also to a magic world inside its soul. Inside the tidiness that you so obsessively keep there's no space for your soul. You have to subvert it and eliminate the superficial stuff in order to make some room inside of you.

- No... I can't do it... - Giulia understood what her brother was trying to tell her, his words were very deep and she knew deep down that her obsession of tidiness was just a symptom of a deeper uneasiness. She could see that her problem was coming from a deeper discomfort, that really scared her.

- Make chaos your world, your new secret order, your personal order.

Inside you there are the sun, the moon and even the stars if you'll let them shine through and like that you will never be afraid of the dark anymore, Giulio.-

Yes, Giulio, his brother called him with his right name, because at the time for the General Registry Office Giulia was Giulio Palmieri, born in Naples on the 24th of June 1982.

"It's been 10 years since that day" thinks Giulia while putting back the vinyl she took out moments before. It has been 10 years since her epiphany, or rather since, thanks to her brother, she started a deep journey inside her soul trying to to reconsider herself and her life.

She realised, after a long period of psychotherapy, an upsetting truth: she had been living under a specific model referred to her physical structure. She had been hiding her true nature in the maze of the conscience... all of this because she didn't want to disappoint the expectations of society, of her friends, of her relatives but most importantly of her parents. One of their children, a while back, had already disappointed them "with all of the sacrifices that we made to make sure he could go to university's and graduate, he's being a vagabond... he doesn't even have a family."

Giulia saw her parents aging faster from the sadness that they felt towards her brother's life choices, how could she ever give them another disappointment? How could she confess to herself that she had a man's body but the heart and the soul of a woman? She just couldn't.

It had been easier for her to just deny her true essence since she was a little boy, and keep her true nature hidden in her subconscious. With time, an uncontrollable angst emerged and keeping her inner balance became everyday more difficult. The only way for Giulio to keep his inner chaos at bay, to control his life and emotions, was to maintain everything in order outside of his soul.

Organising everything perfectly made sure that he could be in control and it also helped satisfy his twisted desire for mental cleansing. He always organised the outside to remove the chaos on the inside. Keeping all of his objects and clothing was a useless attempt of trying to keep all of the parts of himself together that otherwise would've vanished, annihilating his existence. "I never would've made it without you Antonio..." whispered Giulia, while caressing with her fingers the row of vinyls on the shelf. "You took me by the hand

and lead me to my true self.” In fact it was Antonio who accompanied her to the psychologist: he waited outside for her for all of the first ten sessions, and then, one day, he told her with kindness:

- I have to go, I can't stay here anymore.

- Please Antonio, stay a little more...I don't know if I can do it on my own.

- Everyone has their demons, Giulio. My peace is at the top of the mountain Everest, I can't stay here anymore, but I'm sure you'll make it. You are ready to take care of yourself, trust me.

Antonio was right, at this point she needed to take care of herself more than anything in her world, and she was ready to fight and go through fire to get there. And through fire she did go since her journey was nothing but difficult...

But from the ashes of a puppet named Giulio, a person with the identity of a woman and the body of a young man was born: her name was Giulia.

The twittering of her phone interrupts Giulia's stream of thoughts. On the phone's screen she reads a message from Valentina, her neighbour: -Have you left yet? What time is the bus departing? I'm already at the office, I honestly really wanted to go with you, but my husband is out of town and I couldn't find anyone free to look after the kids... so unfair... anyways, blow a kiss to Eddie from me and remember the tablets for your stomachache.

-Oh gosh! My tablets! Thank you, Valentina.- she was about to forget them, but thanks to Valentina, she remembered. Weirdly, Giulia and her friendly neighbour, who also happened to be a Pearl Jam fan, had the same identical problem, that would happen anytime they were anxious: their stomachs would rumble.

Valentina was always so attentive and sweet towards Giulia, since the day they met three years before, when she moved to Milan.

Giulia was definitely going to blow a kiss to Eddie from Valentina and also from Antonio. “Actually no, I won't do it from Antonio.” She thought; she wouldn't need to, because his spirit was going to be there with her for the entire time, like it would always be since three years before, since the day he died. She thought about how weird it was that she only saw him three days before his death looking as healthy and happy as ever, when she was finally able to leave her house and went to see him in Pakistan. She stayed there for 15 days, the best of her entire life and the only days she finally felt free and at peace with herself. But that happiness didn't last long: “I know I was born and I know that I'll die, the in between is mine, I am mine” sings Eddie Vedder in “I am mine”. “What's in between is yours Giulia, remember that.” Whispered Antonio while saying goodbye to her at the airport, it seemed like he knew something was going to happen. Those were the last words that Antonio told Giulia before going missing just 12 hours after they left each other. Antonio was declared missing on a climbing trip.

Giulia found out about the discovery of her brother's body after just three days from his disappearance and knowing this made her even sadder for a while; those were the most difficult months, in which she decided to go back to psychotherapy. Then, with time things started to get better; she still thought about Antonio and how much she missed him, but finally she realised that her brother had the life that he wanted, that he died while doing what he wanted and in the places he loved the most and that maybe, he could've not asked for a

better life from God. This time it was Giulia Palmieri's turn to have the life that she always wanted. And today what she wanted to do was to go to Florence and see Eddie Vedder at his concert and, if everything went like she predicted, maybe something else was going to happen. But she already wasted enough time so she had to get a move on.

"Here we go: pills, concert ticket, bus ticket, money, ID card, backpack with water and food... I think I got everything..."

Walking in front of the mirror, before opening the door, Giulia looks at her reflection, satisfied; what she sees is a tall feminine figure, with long and thick brown hair that had a melancholic smile. "So, c'mon Giulia, let's go!" And after scolding herself, she smiles and goes off.

At the bus stop there are quite a lot of people that were about to get on board. Giulia is observing all of the fans that decided to order the package "Bus plus Eddie Vedder's concert". She saw Groups of friends, married couples between their forties and fifties, young couples... and also a few like Giulia, that travelled alone. It's the first time that she decides to go to a concert alone, she's a bit anxious, but the bus is full of people whom are passionate about the same musician as her so she thinks this could be a way of getting to know new people. In front of her, there's a young woman waiting to get on the bus, and she also looks like she's travelling alone.

- It's so dead out here uh?- the young woman tells Giulia, as she sits next to her on the bus.

- What? -

- Oh sorry, I'm Alice, nice to meet you... I was saying, it's quite dead in here... we are all Eddie's fans right? Then we should all be excited to see him and hear his music and we should be happy to share this moment with everyone else, right? Instead everyone is on his own. You arrived later but in the last half an hour that I was here waiting with everyone for the bus. I couldn't help but notice how everyone here is so cold and distant, nobody even bothered to share a word with me, since I was here alone. If you think at how friendly everyone is inside those fan clubs on the internet... -

- People prefer virtual relationships, it's less complicated... - answers Giulia, introducing herself to this beautiful girl with restless eyes and a curvaceous body that made her instantly friendly.

- I know... it has to be like this... -

- Oh sorry... - whispers a young and blonde woman with light blue eyes and a foreign look, while the bus started its journey.

- I couldn't help but listen to your conversation... I'm also travelling alone and thought the same thing as you. I'm Judith, nice to meet you. Do you want to give me your backpacks? The seat next to mine is empty and you might have more space if you do.

Giulia and Alice introduce themselves and kindly accept her offer.

- Are you french? - asks Alice.

- Yes, I've been living here for a lot of years, but my accent still remains.-

- It's a nice accent, I wish I could talk like that... it's sexy, right Giulia? -

- Oh yes - Answers Giulia amused and finally relaxed. What more could she ask for? She was going to a concert that she'd been waiting her all life for and found very sweet company. She really liked the two girls, she couldn't explain why, she just thought they all had a "particular feeling" with one another. She wasn't sure if they realised that she was transgender, a lot of people usually didn't realise because she always had feminine traits, even as a boy and also her treatments and operations gave her lots of femininity, and this sometimes creates embarrassing and unfriendly situations but she didn't want to think about all of that as she felt that Alice and Judith were different the the rest of the people. Giulia felt that the two girls definitely had interesting but troubled lives: psychotherapy, especially the group sessions, made her develop a particular empathy that allowed her to identify people that were struggling with themselves and were looking for a better life. To make sure that she was right she decides to ask some questions to them?

- Why are you two here alone? -

- Oh, I want to enjoy Eddie alone, without Stefano, my partner "on trail". - answers Alice.

- What do you mean "on trial"? -

- It's a long story... let's say that these last few years I didn't have luck with men... they were all insecure and and control freaks. I wanted space, I needed space. Me and Stefano have been together for a couple of months, for now it feels like he's different but after a few heartbreaks you tend to be very cautious. Let's say that this concert I will be a test: I'll see how he will behave... is he won't stress me with text messages like: "Where are you now? What are you doing? When are you coming back?", he will pass his first test. And then... I want to be free to comment however I want about my one true love: Eddie. He's the perfect man to marry, am I right? -

- Oh yes! Jill, his wife, is very lucky... - says Judith - I wis I had her luck...but I'm here alone because I've just separated a little while ago. My parents bought me this ticket. "You need to distract yourself" they told me. -

- They are so cute...- says Giulia, looking the the sad smile of Judith that was in contrast with her beautiful big blue eyes.

- Yes they are: they did everything for me even though they live quite far away in Borgogna. This has been a very tough time. I have three kids and ti separate is always very hard, but when it's not consensual and with three kids in my back it's not very easy...

- I know... was it him? I mean... who decided to separate? I'm sorry, maybe I'm being too intrusive... - asks Alice.

- Oh no, don't worry. I decided to separate, I should've done it a long time ago, before our three kids... you know "Betterman" the song, right? -

- She lied and says she still loves him, can't find a better man... - sing together Giulia and Alice, without even realising they were both singing. They are getting so close already that they all start laughing together.

- She think she won't be able to find a better man... do you think he will sing this one?"

- Of course he will! He dedicated that song to his mother.- assures Alice.

- And you? Why are you travelling alone? - asks Judith looking at Giulia.

- Because I'm scared of being too happy... -

- Too happy? You definitely have to tell us why now! We're intrigued! - shouts Alice.

Giulia realises that she's not scared of telling these women the story of her life because she feels like she has known them her entire life.

- Well you know when something feels too good to be true? That's what's happening to me. I have a boyfriend: his name is Sergio, he owns a little gardening business... I met him in a psychotherapist study... I always saw him in the waiting room every time I went for my therapy group sessions. I liked him as soon as I saw him the first time: waiting there with a resigned look on his face... But during that time I was so sad for my brother's death and I couldn't focus on anyone else except for me. I like him but I decided not to pursue him and just look at him every Tuesday... -

- Mmmm... this is getting interesting... go on, how was his look? - asks Judith.

- I can't even find words to describe it... intense and fascinating... -

- He liked you as well, it's clear... -

- As I told you before, it wasn't a nice time for me, and even trying to accept that reality was too difficult for me, and after a while I also realised that he wasn't there for himself but he was accompanying another girl that was suffering from anorexia and she also attended the same group sessions as mine. A beautiful girl that worked as a model, it was impossible to even try and compete with her... -

- But he always looked at YOU with intense eyes... -

- I know and that, even though I liked it at first, after a while it started to bother me. I always thought: "What a guy... he's not even that special if he behaves like this...". Then at one point the girl stopped coming to our group sessions and so I didn't see him for a couple of weeks. I missed seeing him there, because, it might sound weird, but every time I saw him I felt like your eyes brought us together. -

- Wow! And then? - asks Alice, impatient.

- And then one afternoon, one of those when the sky decides to throw down a sudden thunder, coming out of the study, I found him standing there in front of me. He was there with his umbrella and next to his parked van, and as soon as I saw him it felt like it stopped raining for a second and the sun came out; I stayed there petrified under the rain instead of looking for shelter. -

- Double wow! It's so romantic! And him? Was he there for you? Did he have a beautiful bouquet of flowers for you? -

- Nono, no flowers... he was also standing there looking at me in silence, like always, and then the sound of a horn woke him up and he came towards me. As soon as he was there in front of me I thought of saying: "If you're waiting for your girlfriend, I assure you she did not come..." he didn't let me finish and said: "She's not my girlfriend. Elena is my sister, I know she didn't come today... do you need a ride home?"

- Oh my gosh Giulia! It was his sister! You need to kiss straight away a guy who accompanies his sister to all of her psychotherapy sessions and is there for her during a difficult time... – says Judith.

- He was there for you... what did you do? - asks Alice.

- Yes, he was there for me. What did I do? You don't even know what that sentence did to me... I took his arm and went underneath his umbrella, I smile and told him: "Yes, thank you. I really need it."

- Wow... such a beautiful start, and as we can see your story is going very well, but you think everything is too good to be true. Why? Does he love you? - asks Judith.

- Oh yes! He loves me so much and for who I am, only one other person in my life loved me for who I am...

- The be happy, c'mon! What's wrong with being happy? -

- The problem is that I'm so happy that it scares me. I'm scared of loosing this happiness.

Everyone between us is going wonderfully, and that why Sergio wants more now: we wants to live together. It's been a year now that he has been trying to convince me...but I'm keeping him in his toes because I'm scared that living together might ruin our happy relationship... he's sad about it and I don't know what to do... -

- Oh poor guy... - says Judith and Alice, together.

- I know my poor baby, I tried to tell myself to be brave and face this fear. So I made a pact with myself: "Give yourself another few months, go to Florence Rocks to see Eddie Vedder in concert, alone. Think of this as you lucky bachelorette party". -

- Oh! You made a decision and you're here alone for superstition: after the concert you'll say yes to him! That's amazing! - exults Alice.

Giulia gets emotional after seeing the excitement in her new friends' eyes. Emotions become overwhelming for Giulia; after telling her story to her new friends, she has increased her consciousness: she now knows what she wants with a of her heart: to live together with Sergio.

- He still doesn't know. - confides Giulia.

- Oh c'mon! Don't keep him on his toes, send him a message now. Today is the right day. - suggests Judith.

Before Giulia could say or do anything, the bus hostess stops them, giving everyone useful information about the journey, the arrival, and indications on how to get to the venue of the concert and where to find the bus.

Giulia listens carefully but then Alice shakes her arm:

-Giulia! Oh my gosh! Look over there, something's happening! - says Alice all excited and looking out of the windows.

She turns around looking outside, and she's not the only one: all the passengers look interested, even the bus hostess.

- Oh my gosh! Sergio! - yells Giulia, incredulous.

- On the other lane of the road a green van horns; form the window flowers and petals fall all outand attaches to the van there's there's a banner saying: " I love you. Happy Birthday Giulia Palmieri."

- Happy Birthday, Giulia! - says the bus hostess with the microphone while her new friends comment with excitement, but she's completely woozy and can't keep her eyes off of the road.

The vibration of her phone wakes her up: she look at her display and read the text message that has been sent.

- Giulia, what? What's written on the text message? Why are you crying? Actually no... why are you laughing? - asks Judith, seeing her laughing trough her tears.

Giulia couldn't even answer her friend; overwhelmed by emotions, she shows them her phone: "Come live with me, or I swear I'll marry Eddie Vedder!".