

*MAQUETTE* - a short story by *Cristina Galeano (Uruguay)* -  
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The minute I downloaded my emails, my gaze was drawn, as if by a magnet, to your name: 'Fernando Salgedas' ...

No message could impact on me like one from you. I adjusted my multifocal glasses, took a sip of coffee and, unable to waste a single second more, opened it excitedly.

*Daniel:*

Remember me? I'm Fernando, your old friend from the Architecture Faculty. I found your email address on your website. It looks like you've done well professionally. I hope you have in your life too!

Twenty years ago it was - I wonder if you remember - when I ran into you in the street, with my brand new architect's diploma under my arm, there right at the turning-point of my life, I told you I'd just had a really exciting job offer from New Zealand. I was sure that if I was to get on in life I needed to go away. I was so full of enthusiasm, of course, that I didn't register your reply: 'Fernando, don't go! Don't give in to *can't be done!*'

With visions of landscapes in my head, even fantasising some dream supermarket, not realising everything has to be paid for, I didn't even say goodbye to the neighbours: I stuffed a few things into a suitcase and took a first-class flight out.

And that, my friend, was how I started from square one.

Today, twenty years on, with a fat chequebook but not a single friend, here I am on this very special day. Now I've reached the age when you stop in your tracks to think: here I am at fifty.

Some people I know here have offered me either a party in a five-star hotel or a luxury cruise.

As for myself, all I want is for you to see this message and wish me happy birthday!

All the very best!

*Fernando*

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Fernando:

What better could I do than be at your side on this day of all days - and send you my **gift-thought**. It'll leave here in a flash and reach you in the twinkling of an eye. **It's so important, on your birthday ... to feel there's a friend at your side!**

How could I not remember you! A brilliant student, a university friend, someone I could really trust ...!

If you'd only known! I used to dream of having just half of your memory, a quarter of your designer's skill, one tenth of your way with the girls.

Not that we went out much back then; no, we studied hard, we breathed a sigh of relief every time we passed an exam, we shared dreams and conversations. Usually, you'll remember, we prepared the maquette together at your house. Your mother Sara was always around for our breaks: she'd knock-knock discreetly on the door, and then she'd come in, petite and tender, balancing a tray groaning with calories and soft drinks. An afflicted look on her face, she'd coax us: 'Come on, eat, boys! You're so skinny!'

As far as the world of work goes, I can't complain. I'm a respected architect and I even lecture at the university .... But how hard it was at the beginning! The miles I walked with a file tucked under my arm! I knocked shamelessly on door after door. I'd ask people: 'Please, look at my plans', and I'd leave my card. At night, my old friend, I racked my brains trying to figure out how to improve them, get them to stand out from the rest. 'I just hope I make it tomorrow!', I told myself anxiously as I fell asleep over the last words of the plan ...

But no suffering lasts forever - and no-one's body can resist forever either - as you always used to remark between bursts of laughter - and in the end the day dawned when I was offered a first-class contract.

'Who got it for you?', asked some. 'Pure luck!', thought others. For myself, I believed it was the result of my unselfregarding perseverance.

Fernando, now let me tell you what I've built in my life - for that's a kind of construction too!

I have a wonderful son, aged twenty-five: his name is Guillermo. Before you ask, no, he's not an architect. He's a musician and a very good one, and he moves in bohemian circles. To tell you a bit more about him: he's a real stickler in his profession, and far more punctual than most. He's well-off, but whenever he gets the chance he packs a rucksack and goes off to see the world.

I admit not everything has gone well for me. I divorced his mother years ago, then I tried going out with a student for six months, and now I've just finished a relationship which didn't come up to expectations.

And so, rising up after I fall, trying to see the bright side of everything that happens to me, and presuming there's no such thing as perfection, I still go on believing in *can be done!*

Now here's a coincidence! In a week's time, it'll be my fiftieth birthday too. Like you, let me tell you, I feel I have to weigh up the profit and loss.

My family and friends have offered to hire a club, where we could even take our grandchildren. There'll be music, food galore, a live show too.

But what matters most, Fernando, isn't all that! What matters are my feelings, the feelings that have kept me company in good times and bad.

And that, my old friend, is why now more than ever, and however much I may have stashed in the bank, it's impossible for me to forget the way you and I met just at that turning-point in your life, by chance or maybe not. And today, twenty years on, between these lines charged with emotion, you can hear my **gift-thought** saying these words to you:

Fernando, my friend, the friend I could always really trust! Don't feel alone on that day! Your friends are always with you, we've been through things together, we don't need a business card! Let me send you an idea on the wing, an idea that turns into a proposal as it flies: Would you like to join my staff? I would feel so honoured if you agreed!

So, yes, my dear friend, don't let life catch you napping - use that energy which always got you such good qualifications:

**Create a new project! Take an inert space and stir it up! Close circles! Redesign interiors! Decorate your life! What have you got to lose? And how much you stand to win! Come back! Don't give in to *can't be done!***

My greatest wish is, next Saturday at nine in the evening, to find you and me together, drinking to our half-century.

**Happy birthday!**  
*Daniel*