

Coffee, dust, and combat boots

*(AND SPANISH TV SHOWS, LONG FLIGHTS,
FLATMATES, VELVET SAND, AND,
IMPORTANTLY, FUNCKY SOCKS)*

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June 2023

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I am yet to get used to the fact that this summer on the small island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea is colder than in Siberia. Still, despite it being cold compared to all other summers that I've spent here, the thermometer shows more than *thirty* degrees Celsius. Going from there, – it's time for beach wear, sundresses, shorts and tees, and high heels together with sandals. And yet, I open the drawer, grab a pair of socks with, importantly, a funky print, put them on to later hide all the funkiness in the slightly dirty pair of combat boots. As usual, the air is full of san-

dy dust that gets carried by winds all the way down from Africa. This type of dust sticks like the wet swimsuit would wrap your body – it's hard to get rid of and it covers all the surfaces it has access to. Hence, there's no shine to the boots' black vegan leather.

The boots squeak every time I make a step; the type of noise you would cartoon characters' shoes expect to make. Squeak, squeak. The thick sole adds a couple of centimetres to my height as well as makes it impossible to feel cracks and gaps on the ground. There is a little knot of unknown origin on one of the laces, which makes tying the boots harder, as the knot gets stuck every time I try to pull it through the small eyelet. The right side of the right shoe has a white mark that won't come off. The creases on the left shoe collect dust with magnetic power, so at times these creases look identical to the white mark of the right boot.

I would be a fool if I said that sandals weren't a

better option to wear in the height of summer. I also would be a fool if I denied that during hotter months, I have never wished I wore something else but the combat boots. However, in the course of the last two or so years, I haven't considered getting a new "better-suited" for *put your occasion here* pair of shoes.

I don't remember when I got them, nor do I recall the reasoning behind the choice in their favour. Albeit, I remember walking down narrow streets of different European capitals listening to their squeaky noises.

We had 20 minutes before our flight as we walked into the airport. The only slowing factor my friend and I faced was a request to take our shoes off to get through security. And so, we realized that we were wearing the same combat boots as well as that we had had no idea how to make proper choices and dress in accordance with the occasion. Exhausted after a flight, we opened the door as quietly as we could so the sound of a rusty key turning in a

keyhole wouldn't wake anyone up. Squeak, squeak; my friend's shoes didn't make this sound. After a long day and a transfer from one island to another, I took the boots off, slipped under the covers, and fell asleep. Spanish tv shows on full blast woke us up the next morning; apparently, our flatmates weren't that concerned about someone else's sleep. We got up and realized that a trip to a convenience store was needed before we did anything else. So, after a store trip and a long preparation, we were headed to explore the country neither of us had ever been to before. The boots walked from one town to another; it's funny how the distance between cities there is shorter than my daily home-work route. The streets smelled of the Mediterranean breakfast – coffee and cigarettes, tourists grouped into long waiting lines before attractions, and locals had their chat about the scorching



weather. We didn't have a plan for the day, didn't know what we wanted to do or to see, and didn't seem to care that we were roaming around aimlessly. The further we got away from the tourist areas, the more vibrant in its mannerism the local language got, the words seemed familiar while being complete non-sense to the ears of our multilingual gang. Squeak, squeak; fascinated with the linguistics, the boots switched between the languages as the topics of their discussion changed. Tired, we entered the first bar we saw.

It felt like we had to be melancholic over the fact that we were going home soon. Cigarette smoke arose above our heads and later faded away in the hot and humid air. Our talks were meaningless, meaningless in their existence at worst. Going to another country only to be angry over the things that awaited as at home – a tackily naive thing to do, but who cared then? I bet, it seemed like we were trying to justify to each other our emotions and our right to be upset, as if we weren't friends and as if friends

by definition weren't meant to support each other. The coffee at the bar we chose was too sour, the food was too sweet, and all the ashtrays were full and dirty – bad of us, we still left tips.

The days of our vacation passed; all of them started with the same three Spanish shows – stayed we a bit longer, and we definitely would have been able to tell the time by the theme songs of each series. The talks about our problems also stayed the same, as well as the sourness of the coffee we drank. Actually, I was the only one who drank coffee; smoked we both, however. It was lazy of us that we had only a few concerns to complain about - at least we could have prepared ourselves and got some more if we unintentionally decided to be overly talkative in a negative way. Funny enough, we managed to visit all the places on our bucket list, but we didn't find a decent coffee. Or it was a decent coffee who didn't find us. Either way, we were more sour than all the espresso shots I got.

Flying back home, the boots were reminiscing on how that trip was a great way to get away from daily life, how great of a restart, fresh air, and yada, yada it was; how more often they should travel and that it was the time to book another vacation. Since then, my combat boots flew a couple of times; my friend's also. The coffee almost every time was sour.

Also, I lied when I said I remember hearing the squeaky noises of my boots exclusively in European cities. There was a time of me sitting on a beach in the country I'd never had a wish to visit. Sipping my coffee, I was enjoying the sun rays and for the first time wasn't thinking about not wearing my sunscreen. The shoes stood by my chair, halfway dug in the velvet sand. Sadly, I only had 20 minutes before going to the airport and leaving. So, after finishing my coffee, I got up, went straight to a street shower, washed off the sand, and put on a pair of socks I got earlier that day. Without any thought, I put my shoes under the stream of water; I'd forgotten by then how shiny they

once were. On my ride to the airport, I came to a realization that I should stop asking for pure Arabica.

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June 2023