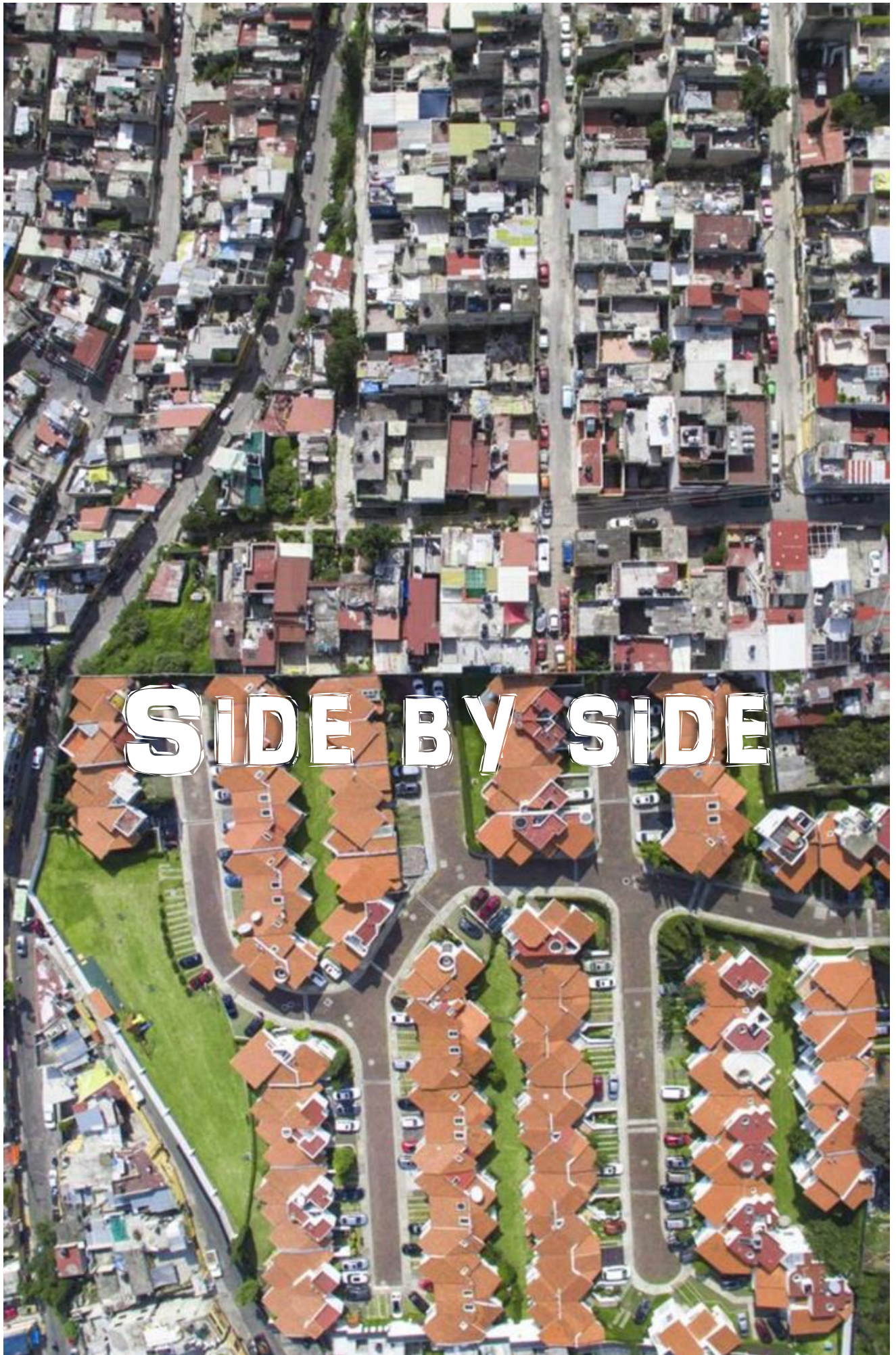




SIDE BY SIDE

The fall was long and brutal but fortunately, not too painful. Luckily, he had fallen well and came away with only a few scratches. That was the moment his vision changed. The darkness now gave place to the artificial light emitted by a row of **streetlights** lining the **paved road**. But time was short. He knew that he shouldn't stay too long in the field of the light rays, under threat of being detected. His legs moved faster and faster to regain a corner of obscurity. He noticed that his clothes had been torn apart in his race, but the most important thing was that it was not his own flesh which had been cut by the barbed wire he had just crossed. Once in the darkness, he took the time to observe his surroundings. Everything was so different. Here the houses were all identical and imposing. The light being reflecting on the facades, was of an extreme whiteness, evoking a certain form of purity. Everything was thought and built in perfect symmetry and all the houses were lined up and surrounded by verdant gardens. Inside each one of them was a swimming pool bordered with sun loungers. The dwellings were separated by beautiful hedges, and each **urban island** was intersected by roads, where it was sometimes possible to see various luxury cars parked on the aisle (when they were not stowed away in personal garages). He remembered being surprised by the colors reflected in the scenery. Despite the darkness of the night, everything seemed brighter and more colorful. Where he was living, one always felt that a thick cloud overhung the **neighborhood**, as if poverty and criminality had tarnished the colors of the **city** while darkening the life of the inhabitants. Indeed, he lived close to the luxurious **gated communities**, except that he lived on the wrong side of them...

On the other side of the wall everything seemed deserted. The buildings that housed the institutions, **facilities** and diverse **public services** had been degraded because of the lack of maintenance since the various **government services** had left the area. The **municipal services** had almost disappeared, leaving room for private operators whose only objectives were and remained: safeguarding, privatization and **spatial and social segregation** of the city for the benefit of the richest inhabitants.

The decline of the **area** was rapid and particularly destructive. Many diseases had spread, criminality exploded and food resources had decreased. In the **slums**, the dwellings were formed of slabs and various materials of recovery. In the shantytown, urbanization was anarchic and very concentrated. The inhabitants of the dwellings crowded together, and the green areas had become almost inexistent.

It was by crossing the wall that night that he realized that everything he had been told since his childhood was true. Cities were spatially divided between the rich and the poor. These two areas were separated by a wall several kilometers long and rutted with barbed wire. Of course, unlike the residents of the slums, the privileged could change areas when they wanted, but they all preferred not to risk being assaulted or even killed while passing on the other side.

Without even imagining the neighboring misery the **inhabitants** of the **private suburbia** were living in absolute comfort, only their safety was worrying them. On this side of the wall, there was no longer any need the police, it was the **residents** who were dictating and applying their own laws. Relations between those two areas although very close, became extremely rare. Only some poor people working in the service of the wealthiest could enter with a badge, but the passage was highly controlled by the guards who watched each of the few entrances to the **private residence**.

Now, he understood the scale of reality. He knew he was not born on the right side, but he was going to do everything he could to get his family out of misery. Of course, he knew that it was not without risk and that the mere fact of entering the gated area could cost him a lot. Some people said that it could even cost him is life.

His plan was extremely dangerous but well thought. He could no longer stand seeing his family in need and his mother killing herself at work. Every night his mother came home exhausted. The days passed and her skin tone turned more and more pale. He was afraid that she had fallen ill but that she did not dare tell him for fear he would worry.

He pulled out a piece of paper and consulted it one last time. On the paper was written: No. 26 Donald Trump **Boulevard** - Privileged Zone. It was

in this house that he had to enter. He knew the place vaguely thanks to his mother's information. He went out of his hideout to quickly look where he was. He was close to number 15, so he had to go up the street in all discretion for not risking being caught by the guards. That night the owners were out, they were eating at neighbors. As for the cameras, he knew that at this moment the man in charge of the surveillance was busier observing young women taking their shower rather than watching the street. A hint of disgust pervaded his thought but voyeurism was part of the risks incurred when one deliberately decided to install cameras everywhere, he said to himself. He recovered quickly. According to his information, he had about 30 min to enter the house - in which his mother had worked in the past - and steal from it a few assets of coveted values.

He was running at race pace and avoiding as much as possible the luminosity emanating from the streetlights, while moving up the street. Some dogs were barking when came close to them, but he otherwise nobody noticed him. His breath was short, his heart was beating fast, but he had to keep his cold blood. No. 23, 24, 25, No. 26! There, it was! He contemplated the house for a short time and climbed to the top of the hedge before letting himself slip on the other side and finally reaching the bottom of the garden.

Then, he grabbed a bin that he brought to the front of the house and used it to climb on. From there, he took a deep breath and managed to catch the gutter and finally, climbed onto the second floor. The windows of the rooms remained open, since in theory, the gated community was a secure place, where people were trusting each other. Perhaps even the front door wasn't locked but fearing of being spotted, he preferred to sneak in from behind, in a less obvious way.

He had reached the first floor. The sweat ran on his forehead. He had to redouble his efforts to reach the second floor with the strength of his arms. He clenched his teeth and finally reached it. In that moment, he was able to put his foot on the edge of the window, then lean on the frame finally slipping his whole body into the room. The acrobatics he had just undertaken was very dangerous, but fortunately he was used to it. Perhaps one of the only advantages to survive in the slum: developing his agility and a certain ability to survive.

He opened the window with such delicacy, that the squeaking was barely perceptible. He entered the room. As expected, it was the parents' room, which were still having dinner at the neighbors. The room was spacious and neatly decorated. A king-size bed dominated the room, he wondered how many people could sleep there. But there was no problem. He had to lift the enormous mattress with the last remaining strength he had, to see if there was money hidden underneath. BINGO! In the hollow provided by the edge of the mattress and the bed base, he found many bundles of banknotes. His smile widened. He had never seen so much money in all his life, but knew he had to keep his self-control and continue his quest. He went to the dressmaker's dressing table and seized almost all the jewels that were inside. He did not know the value of these objects, but in doubt he took full control of everything that shone or attracted the eye. Then he opened the night table. Under a bible he found a colt. One never knows, he said to himself, it will always be useful. And slipped it on his belt.

He surely had enough booty to get out of it financially but he missed one last catch. He had to seize the family papers. Passport or any other document that he could exchange on the black market to put his family in a safe place, but for that they had to leave the country.

He went to another room and passed through the immense corridor that served a multitude of rooms. He was at the level of two closed doors, he hesitated for a moment and then grabbed the handle of the right door hoping to fall on the owner's desk. Unfortunately he entered in the wrong room. Considering the decoration it had to be a teenage bedroom. His eyes circled around the room. Suddenly it was as if an electric shock had crossed his body, so great was the astonishment. A girl about her age was lying on the bed.

That evening, Mia did not want to dine at the neighbors with her parents. She did not like them too much. She had decided to go to bed early, yet she did not find sleep. For long minutes, Mia closed her eyes in the hope of falling asleep. When suddenly a strange sensation invaded her. She had the curious impression that someone was watching her. She told herself that it was only the fruit of her imagination. To reassure herself she decided to open her eyes. She had not been mistaken. She did not even have time to utter a cry as the boy leaped over her and put his hand in front of her mouth to silence her.

- "I beg you do not scream, I do not want you any harm, my name is Miguel"
- "Mhhhhh hmm hmm» Mia defended herself.
- "Well, I will slowly withdraw my hand, but you must promise not to alert the whole neighborhood! She nodded in agreement. Miguel released her from his hold.
- "What are you doing here?" What do you want from us? "
- "It's a long story, but I promise you I will not hurt you. Look into my eyes, I do not lie! What is your name? "
- "Why did you come?" To steal from us? "
- "Believe me, if you were in my situation you would surely do the same. »

She did not know how to react, contrary to the image she had of the people of the area, this boy looked honest and without aggressiveness. She decided to save time, hoping that her parents would return before he had time to escape.

- "My name is Mia - but how did you manage to enter the residence?" "
- "Pleased to meet you Mia!" It was complicated and dangerous and now that you have seen me, you will have to help me to escape without being spotted»
- "Then do not count on me!" Suddenly they heard the front door close, her parents had to be back...
- "Quick! Show me how to get out of the house! I beg you, your father will kill me if he sees me!"

Indeed, Mia knew her father well, and like the other inhabitants of the Gated communities, he was ready to kill to defend his territory. They could hear the footsteps on the stairs. Panicked, she hid Miguel in her closet and went back to bed, trying to look a though she was sleeping. As expected her parents opened the door of her room a few seconds later to check if everything was fine. Miguel hold his breath. Mia knew the routine of her parents by heart. She knew perfectly well that they would go and wash in the bathroom at the other end of the house before going to bed. She heard the water from the shower sink

away. She seized Miguel and guided him to the front door. She pretended to follow him to the other side of the street where the light was weaker.

- "Sorry, but I can't drive you any further. I've already helped you and taken enough risks for you. Good luck»

- "But you can't leave me there?"

Mia was already on her way back, when suddenly Miguel saw a dark car driving at full speed over a short distance. He ran, grabbed Mia by the arm and pressed her against him. By this gesture he probably saved his life. In that moment something special was happening inside them.

- "Well, I'll help you to get out of here, follow me. I know one of the guards very well. He would do anything for me, he will take you out safely. Except that Mia's plan was going really wrong. The shrill noise of the general alarm spread through the area. All the lights of the dwellings lit. Indeed, all the houses were equipped with a button in case of imminent danger. Someone must have seen them in the dark.

- "Mia, what are you doing?" yelled Miguel, terrified.

- "It's not me I swear; someone must have triggered the general alarm. All exits are already closed. We're screwed, said Mia with tears in her eyes. "

The neighbors were already gathered, arms in hand to begin the stalking. The two teenagers ran to hide and to gain time. Suddenly Mia had an illumination. She remembered the old rumour about an unguarded secret passage to the **Red-Light District**. And yes, the inhabitants of the community also had their own vices. Rumor said that there was an **underground passage** for the most influential people of private residences who wanted to have access to the networks of drugs and prostitution out of sight.

Mia prayed for this story to be true. She told Miguel to follow her. At every second, the revolted people which were at their disposal, were approaching. The pursuit race was long and breathless. They had almost arrived at the secret passage, but their followers gained ground, so they had to find a place to hide - what more harmless than a dumpster? They heard the footsteps of those who were tracking them getting closer and closer. Fortunately, no one had the idea of rummaging through the garbage. Once the perimeter was marked, they left

in another direction. At last the two teenagers could leave their repugnant hiding-place. Then, they desperately searched the premises, hoping to find the tunnel. Suddenly a sound rang in Mia's footsteps, it was a sewer mouth, engraved differently from the others. So it was true! What a miracle, the secret issue really existed! Seeing her face glow, Miguel understood as he went to get out. In a burst of joy he took Mia in his arms.

- "I could never thank you enough for what you just did for me! I would have liked to meet you in other circumstances. So god Mia! "

Mia remained speechless, she felt a craving need to follow him, but he was a total stranger. As incredible as it may seem, she had just passed one of the best nights of her life because Miguel had taken her out of her quiet little life. A life in which nothing interesting was ever going on. She had never felt in her place in the gated community, surrounded by people living only in appearances, pretending to lead a perfect life while in reality they were governed by money, racism and violence.

She knew that if she stayed here, she would never see Miguel again because they lived in two different worlds yet so close...

... Side by side

THE END

SIDE BY SIDE



WRITTEN BY MAUD WASSELIN & AXELLE MICHEL

Synopsis :

The fall was long and brutal but fortunately, not too painful. Luckily, he had fallen well and came away with only a few scratches. That was the moment his vision changed. The darkness now gave place to the artificial light emitted by a row of streetlights lining the paved road. But time was short. He knew that he shouldn't stay too long in the field of the light rays, under threat of being detected. His legs moved faster and faster to regain a corner of obscurity. He noticed that his clothes had been torn apart in his race, but the most important thing was that it was not his own flesh which had been cut by the barbed wire he had just crossed. Once in the darkness, he took the time to observe his surroundings. Everything was so different...

