

# WANDERHEART

A heart-shaped cutout in the center of the cover reveals a landscape. In the foreground, a shepherd wearing a red robe stands with a flock of sheep on a sandy, brownish ground. The background shows a wide, flat expanse leading to two large, rocky, reddish-brown islands or hills under a clear blue sky. The overall scene is bathed in warm, golden light, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

NEW STORIES  
*from*  
MY TRAVELS  
*to*  
EVERY COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

**BORIS KESTER**

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New Travel Stories from  
My Travels to Every Country in the World

TRAVELADVENTURES.ORG

“Tell me, and tell me the truth. Where have you been, and through which countries have you traveled? Tell us about the peoples themselves, and about their cities—who were hostile, cruel and uncivilized, and who were hospitable and humane?”

– Homer, *Odyssey*

“Why must we listen to our hearts?” asked the boy.  
“Because that’s where you’ll find your treasure.”

– Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*

“Wherever you go, go with all your heart.”

– Confucius

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## INTRODUCTION

**A**t twenty-three, I quit a promising IT job. My colleagues asked about my new position and especially the accompanying salary. But my resignation stemmed from a deeper realization: the rigid pattern of office life would never truly make me happy. I yearned for freedom and wanted to explore the world.

I started traveling—always more and always farther—went to university, and then started working for an airline. Each journey and every adventure fueled my desire for more. Eventually, that insatiable hunger led me to visit every country in the world.

Along the way, I discovered what traveling is really about. It's about people who surprise and move you with their unexpected hospitality. About prejudices that disappear when you take the time to look deeper. About finding humanity, even—or perhaps especially—in places where you least expect it. About pushing your own boundaries. About learning to trust your intuition, especially when it leads you to places others would avoid.

Too often, I see people arranging their lives according to society's expectations, the presumed norms of their environment, or self-imposed limitations. We set aside our passions and dreams, make decisions out of fear or convenience, and thus hold ourselves back from much beauty before we've really begun. We listen too little to our hearts. Why? Out of

fear of failing to achieve what we truly desire? Out of fear of letting our dreams become reality?

After my decision to step away from my promising career, I learned to listen more keenly to my intuition. As a result, I naturally started taking more risks. Each time, my confidence that things would turn out well grew, and I dared to go one step further. My heart proved to be an excellent guide. Not just for traveling, but for life in general. It strengthened my determination, it urged me to see things in perspective, and it taught me not to be afraid. Travel is like life in miniature.

In *Wanderheart*, I invite you to live all kinds of adventures together with me. From my very first trip to Morocco as an impetuous youngster still trying to find my way, to a moving glimpse into the reality of the devastating war in Ukraine. Come with me as I knock on the door of a stranger in Japan who will immerse me in unexpected hospitality. Travel with me through impoverished Haiti, feel my wonder as I climb the Mountains of the Moon in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and experience with me one of the most precarious moments of my wanderings in Iraq, in addition to many other adventures. Interwoven throughout these episodes is the story of my search for a lost love to bring her my first book, *The Long Road to Cullaville*.

I hope *Wanderheart* inspires you to follow your own heart, even when the path is uncertain. Because life can be just as surprising as you dare to make it.

Leiden, May 2025

## PROLOGUE

I should arrive in a few kilometers. The realization hits me with increasing intensity: this might be the most exciting of all my adventures. Waves of unbridled eagerness and gnawing doubt surge through my body like a wild cocktail. Yet deeper inside, I also feel a calming certainty. The conviction that I cannot do anything other than what I'm about to do, simply because it comes straight from my heart.

I'm on my way to bring Nana a copy of my book, *The Long Road to Cullaville*. She plays a defining role in the first chapter—without her, the book probably would never have existed. After the dramatic end of our turbulent relationship more than thirteen years ago, we never saw or spoke to each other again.

Nana doesn't know I'm coming—just as I don't know if she'll be home. I have no idea how she'll react when she sees me—that is, *if* I can even find her, because I only vaguely know where she lives.

## UNDER THE OLIVE TREES 1: HATI

*Denmark/Spain - 2021*

A few hours after cycling to the station in the dark, I see the winter morning light shining low over the fields of Southern France far below me. Trees cast long shadows across the ground, here and there holding onto wisps of mist. I pick up *The Long Road to Cullaville* and once more read the intense fragment from the first chapter. Every minute brings me closer to the woman who plays such a defining role in it, and that thought makes me shiver involuntarily. As the snow-covered Pyrenees loom in the distance, tears silently creep down my cheeks and are quickly absorbed by my new turtleneck.



A few months ago, I was still busy with the final changes to the opening chapter of *The Long Road to Cullaville*. In it, I tell about my journey through Yemen and how I lost my heart there. Not only to the captivating country but also to Nana, the enchanting woman I met there. Years later, our tempestuous relationship came to an end, which became the catalyst for my decision to travel to every country in the world. I had to rediscover myself and my freedom, and traveling offered the perfect

opportunity for that. It seemed natural to dedicate the first chapter to Yemen.

While writing, I looked up our old photos. I needed them to describe Nana accurately. Once, I could dream her face. After more than thirteen years, those images have faded. Time has gnawed at my memory. Imperceptibly. Invisibly. Inexorably. What stays are misty impressions of an alluring woman who had sent my head spinning in a fairytale-like Sana'a. I needed the digital images to write about how she had managed to do that.

It remains peculiar. We fall for someone, our thoughts are in the covetous spell of that love, and we can't imagine a life without them. Then, when a moment follows where everything changes, we desperately try to erase all memories of that same flame. As if not every love leaves its mark on our life and somehow defines us. As if we shouldn't actually cherish those memories.

In the years after our breakup—more than thirteen years ago—I have anxiously avoided every photo of her. Yet I couldn't bring myself to delete her countless images from my hard drives. After all, she had been, in one way or another, an important part of my life. That's exactly why I was convinced that our chance encounter, and everything that followed from it, deserved a place in my book. After all, without her, it probably would never have been written.

Fidgety, I looked up the photos. In the first one, Nana sits ready to shoot with a Kalashnikov. Around her stand Yemenis in traditional clothing, with daggers on their bellies. They look admiringly at the woman with the reddish hair. Another photo shows Nana looking out over the rugged mountain landscape of the Haraz Mountains, and another captures her with a deep frown on her forehead. She apparently sensed that something momentous was about to happen. Something irreversible.

Then, all the other photos. I had forgotten how many I had taken over the years. Denmark, Djibouti, Haiti, Uganda, Peru, Thailand, China, and many more. Once, seeing these images would have filled me with pain and sorrow, but now I mainly feel warmth. The sharp edges have worn away. What remains is a mild wonderment. How can two people love each other so intensely, yet still lose each other? Now I mainly see an irresistible and extraordinary woman who played an important role in my life, who shaped me into who I am. The bitterness of our parting has faded the way old photos tarnish and has given way to gratitude for what we experienced together.

While I begin translating the chapter into English a few months later, I suddenly see it clearly. Nana must read this too! The chapter is about her: it tells of our improbable encounter more than seventeen years ago, and it turned her life upside down too. The longer I think about it, the clearer it becomes: it would actually be strange *not* to give her the book.

I may not know where she lives, but that's just a detail. I must be able to find that out, so I can send her a copy. A vague tension takes hold of me at the thought of her having my book in her hands. That she will read about how our love ignited, read about herself, about how I finally wrestled myself free from the dark period after the end of our relationship, and about all those adventures I experienced around the world. Without her.

Involuntarily, I also wonder what went wrong back then. We were so much younger and had been madly in love with each other. Ah, how many mistakes we had made. Looking back, I wonder how on earth it could have derailed. Or maybe that's inherent to the most passionate loves? They often end in an all-consuming, merciless fireball.

A few weeks before I submit the final manuscript of my book, I go to the Faroe Islands for a week. I need peace in my head. Getting properly



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# Wanderheart

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**Be the first to know when *Wanderheart* launches in early 2026** — plus receive an exclusive launch week discount!

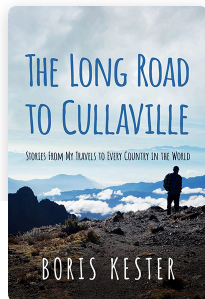
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Available in early 2026

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## Also by Boris Kester

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### **The Long Road to Cullaville**

Within its sixteen stories, *The Long Road to Cullaville* takes you to Yemen, Congo, Nauru and Afghanistan, amongst other places. Thanks to his rich descriptions, the author shows you what it's like to travel in unusual countries.

His stories are compelling and entertaining, breathtaking and moving. Meanwhile, he makes you think about the risks of travel and the pre-eminent influence of fate. The book caters to both experienced globetrotters and armchair travelers, inspiring wanderlust and curiosity in all.

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