

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE SEA

The end

10

He sat on the edge of a boat, fell into the water, the waves brought him in and out incessantly. In a last effort, slowly bending his knees, he managed to advance a few meters under the water until he sprawled lifeless on the sand. A caked dust dressed the atmosphere in gray. A pungent smell spread his wings along the coast. Ashes and fine chemical particles rained down, like aerosol droplets. A sour taste settled on his lips. He was alone on the beach. Then, at that same moment, he knew that the other shore no longer existed, not even the sea itself.

_Love, altruism, empathy, acceptance...-he whispered between his teeth, without vocalizing.

A smile, somewhere between desperate and nostalgic, covered his spectral features. Tears ran down his face like a spring. He closed his eyes, barely able to breathe.

9

He stumbled, staggering, blinded by the intensity of the sun that had mercilessly accompanied him throughout the journey to escape from that brutal hell. After a long time living as if in a ruthless dream, in a whirlpool from which it was impossible to escape, our protagonist finally arrived at the shore of a sea that seemed eternal, endless.

8

Along the way, exhausted as he was, he thought he saw a woman leaning out of the door of a cabin whose teeth were blackened by decay and some ragged children running around her. She offered him her house, but he, dirty with blood and half dressed, smiled at her kindness and continued forward with his eyes fixed on the ground so as not to fall, because if this happened he would never be able to get up again.

The knot

7

They began to hit each other in pairs. The organization was very simple: quarterfinals, semifinals and finals. Anything went: bites, scratches, punches, kicks. Any part of the body could be attacked. Weapons were prohibited. The fights were fierce, violent, without equal. Eyes were gouged out, tongues were cut out, teeth were thrown into the air. They knew that only one, only one, would obtain the great prize: survive. The audience howled, shouted, laughed, insulted, spat... One who behaved passively and did not want to look: they arrested him, beat him severely and dragged him to the crypt without any hesitation or consideration. The contestants showed very dilated eyes, they sweated a lot, they breathed quickly, their hearts pumped at high speed, some hormones gave them a lot of strength and others increased their resistance to pain. Our protagonist was not impressed by the large amount of blood that was spread around the ring. You could almost say that fighting made him happy. In the end, after two long hours of extreme violence and superhuman effort, the Dantesque spectacle over, he understood that he was safe and screamed full of joy and pain.

6

After ten bells, they took eight out to the square, him and another seven. Both the presenter and the spectators, with the exception of their eyes and mouths, were completely covered. "Only one will get out of here alive" - he shouted. Immediately, boos and loud howls from the crowd followed. They demanded blood, that was his great pleasure. He remembered that someone in the crypt had commented that every week they did several throws, that the fights were life or death and that there was only one chance.

5

Half an hour later, three shadows approached him from behind, immobilized him, put him to sleep, and carried him away to the crypt of the sacred place. When he woke up, the scant light that penetrated through the small window allowed him to see what was around him: a ragged, skeletal, foul-smelling mob uttering plaintive, barely audible cries that spread everywhere, in equal parts, terror and desolation. In his mind the content of an article that one day he sent, as a war chronicler, to his national newspaper reappeared: "There are people with whom life is cruel and they can do nothing to change their destiny, because they are passive elements without any influence." "about power. This is what is

known in slang as collateral damage."

4

Our protagonist, evidently, could not erase the physical signs that denoted his age. He still did not belong to that section that was called "third age", but he had already surpassed, although just barely, his fifties. He knew from experience that reaching this barrier in his country, in some cases, could mean losing work and with it dignity, because the prevailing economic system did not understand emotions, needs, biology, or even a minimum respect for the inevitable deterioration of carnal matter. The most important thing was productivity and this, apparently, had to be maximum, so with such a simplistic approach it was out of reach for a good part of the population.

The beginning

3

As night fell, single words reached his ears, but grouped together, they formed a disturbing, devastating text:

_ Condemnation, revenge, hatred, death, desolation, resentment, injustice, discrimination, racism...

He felt helpless, completely at the mercy of the ghosts that surrounded him. Later, when it was already dark, moonless night, he heard in a harsh tone several litanies or slogans, ending each of them with grotesque and thunderous laughter.

_ Welcome to the kingdom of desolation and helplessness.

_ You have only one day to erase your wrinkles and crow's feet, we don't want old people in this place.

_ Love is a lie that enslaves us.

_ Loving someone today is pure hypocrisy and a great waste of time.

_ Remember, don't forget, only the strongest survive.

_ Tomorrow will be a hard day for the weak.

2

To walk through the urban area was to immerse oneself in helplessness. Contrary to what

one might think at first glance, ghostly beings seemed to inhabit that swarm of destruction and oblivion. Although they were not shown in the light and were hidden in the darkness, the faint echo of their footsteps could be heard through the ruins of the buildings. Their muffled laughter floated in the dense dust raised by the wind. His grave, heavy breathing denoted chronic fatigue, an agonizing illness, a punishment from the fury of the gods.

1

It all happened in an abandoned temple-fortress in a city devastated by the intense bombings to which it was subjected for several years. However, as our protagonist was later able to verify, much to his chagrin, it was not just a specific place, but an entire devastated country, on whose surface remained an unequivocal testament to barbarism: pieces of brick, pieces of concrete, metal twisted, columns broken into a thousand pieces, collapsed bridges, raised roads that led nowhere, burned or burst vehicles, rotting and dried corpses, in short, the starkest image of hatred and oblivion. One could even speak of an entire civilization lost.

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