

THE VIRUS

I had been preparing this Internet adventure for some time. It had been on my mind for a few months and had finally settled as something inevitable and urgent. No doubt about it, which was necessary for my emotional stability. He was still sleeping when I left. I was excited, several days of camping and hiking through the wild landscapes of my region awaited me. When I returned I found the door open. Something unusual for him. I looked out of the window. From a megaphone they began to shout slogans: "No one is allowed to move from here. Remember that. Don't worry, we have taken all protective measures. Now go on with your beers and your dances." A new epidemic, I thought. It didn't take me long to discover the mystery: a herd of hungry wild boars had invaded the city. I decided to go back to the mountains, the asphalt did not appeal to me, especially not in that situation.

Before arriving in Mascatella, the village closest to the beginning of the first major trail and already off the tourist circuit in the area, I saw an elderly man in his seventies at the side of the track carrying a backpack on his back which, from its size, I deduced it would probably include not only clothes and food but also a tent. When I reached him I stopped and we talked for a while. It turned out that he had in mind taking a route very similar to mine and, like me, he was also fleeing the circus that urban life had become. Seen by an outside observer it might have looked that he had been waiting for me to arrive. So we got on our bikes and rode on.

Soon, we met a couple. We greeted them and asked them where they came from. They were our fellow citizens. From them we learned that the herds of wild boars were carrying an unknown virus and that it was now compulsory for anyone to report to the police or the army the exact location where any of these animals were seen. They then had to spend a fortnight in quarantine without meeting anyone and, of course, wearing a mask at all times and places. In addition, during the isolation, no water could be used for washing because the virus could run through the pipes. The woman would have continued talking, but he felt uncomfortable and did not want to prolong the conversation. So they started the motorbike and, leaving a strong smell of petrol, left us alone up the hill.

I soon realized that the old man saw nothing but disasters: that the virus was going to wipe out humanity, that every day we were more and more controlled by the State, that it was a pity about the dirt accumulated everywhere, that it rained less and less every year because the government was launching silver iodide rockets to reduce the clouds in

certain areas and bring them to others... I struggled inwardly not to get carried away by such pessimism and kept a more realistic view: the virus would probably not be everywhere but only in those places where there had been an invasion of wild boars, and besides, from what two people said, clearly frightened by the phenomenon, it could not be deduced that the problem was generalised and that there was no solution; the State does not control us, it only provides the means so that citizens can collaborate and thus face the problem with greater guarantees of success; the rain thing was complete nonsense, so, after consulting a website specializing in debunking hoaxes, I let him know that silver iodide was used to reduce the size of hail and so try to reduce the risk to crops. As for the fact that it was raining less and less each year, it was clear that climate change could not be denied and I agreed with him. But he argued that climate change was a hoax, that it had been installed in society for the purpose of reducing welfare in developed societies for the benefit of developing countries. I thought this was very poor reasoning and simply stated that climate change affected the whole planet, that we only had one planet and that all living beings, including us, depended on its state of health.

At one point, I looked up and could see the sky was closing in with a very light grey. Indeed, after about an hour, bigger and bigger flakes began to fall faster and faster. The height of the snow was growing little by little, and when it reached thirty or forty centimetres we had to get into the first deep crevice of rock we saw. We tried to spend the night there, but the cold had taken over the rocky area. We had drunk a large cup of very hot coffee and that helped us better cope with the low ambient temperature. Breaking our silence, we heard the distant but powerful sound of an approaching vehicle. We popped our heads out and, to our relief, saw that it was an off-road vehicle.

Until then everything had been, more or less normal. Now I can begin to tell you the most extravagant, though not unexpected, part of the story. I will tell you in advance that I have nothing to testify what happened next, not even witnesses who can confirm my version.

The driver stopped at our level. We chatted, we told him about our little odyssey and he told us that he used to drive around in bad weather to help people in need. He insisted that he had been doing this for quite some time. I thought there were few people as altruistic as this man. I admired him. Immediately afterwards he said that he not only acted like this in the mountains, but also in the city: sticking up for some people so that they could find work more easily, even if it was only temporary; contributing with his company to remove the dirt from the municipal park because the city council had left it quite neglected.

At this point I pointed out that some people have a tendency to drop packaging, bags and paper in the street, without worrying about the deterioration of the environment. To which he replied that the problem did not lie in people's lack of concern, but in the shortage of human and technical resources dedicated to cleaning services. My admiration began to crumble. He went on to say that all this was costing him a great deal of effort and that, of course, it was not fair that he could not get some benefit from an attitude so focused on the improvement of society. At this point, he let us know that he was the best positioned candidate to end once and for all (he said end and not replace) the mayor who governed the city; that, if it seemed good to us, we could put ourselves on his four-by-four, but knowing that, if we did so, we would incur a debt to him, in short, that we were committed to vote for him in the next municipal elections. He finished by fixing his eyes on our faces quite naturally, as if he had entered into the shop to buy a kilo of meat and politely greeted the butcher, and pointing out that, of course, under no circumstances should we feel obliged to comply with his proposition. Both members of the couple looked at me and smiled. The old man said very well, that he was old and back to his old ways. I refused, I couldn't believe what was happening. It seemed like a joke, but it was not. I stood there, somewhere between surprised and shocked.

I stayed in the small cavern. The snowfall reached one metre. I called the Guardia Civil rescue team. They let me know that I had been very reckless in deciding to go hiking without taking into account the warnings of the Meteorological Agency. I had to bear the cost of the rescue. Of course, without going into the details, this was very costly for both my finances and my social life. Apparently, near the cave they had found a family of wild boars which tested positive for the virus by the official veterinarian of the City Council. You know, fifteen days of isolation plus another fifteen days because, as the doctor said, my health was the first and most important thing not only for him but also for me.

My flatmate spent his days in the square, but one night he suddenly showed up at home, opened the door of my room and, shouting at the top of his lungs, told me that he was starting to get fed up with so much dancing and socializing, that he could be left to his own devices, since he likes to be alone now and then and not waste his time with idiots. I, who knew him, as we had been living together for several years, knew immediately that he had just had a strong argument with a fellow citizen over football-related matters.

He immediately realised that I had returned and in a friendlier way and with less intensity in his voice, he asked me: "But what are you doing here? "I thought you were up there with the mountain goats and golden eagles."

Smiling, I said: “Well, with the virus and the wild boars you’re not badly served either.”

“Stories without Mufflers” (2006 -)

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