

BLACK FRIDAY

Marisa couldn't fall asleep. Two, three in the morning, and there she was, eyes wide open. A premonition had settled in her mind. She didn't want to give in to it; she knew that if she thought about it, her anxiety would skyrocket. The psychologist had suggested a simple technique to help her through these moments. She only had to take deep breaths through her nose for five seconds, count to three while holding the air in her diaphragm, and then exhale very slowly through her mouth. She did several sets; she seemed to be relaxing. She got up to get a glass of water. She didn't want to take sleeping pills. A friend had told her that, after two years, she had to stop taking them because they were causing a strong dependency. She looked at the clock: four o'clock. Her father was getting old; he would soon be eighty. When he could no longer take care of his daughter while she worked late to pay the rent, school fees, and car loan, what would happen? She would like to have an Arab maid, one of those who wear their hair covered with a scarf. One of her friends did housework for her, and it wasn't expensive, but even that wasn't enough to afford. Although the Asian cook only charged by the hour, the café didn't generate enough income. Of course, her daughter would continue attending private school. She certainly wouldn't send her to the public school where most of the students were foreigners, some with significant learning difficulties, and the teachers couldn't possibly reach them all.

Her unease was like a tiger on the prowl, approaching, retreating, poised to pounce on prey that feared the deadly bite. She felt her heart pounding incessantly. She closed her eyes, slowed her breathing. Her head ached. She got up and went to the kitchen to take some paracetamol. To make matters worse, her period had just started. The alarm clock rang. A sleepless night.

In that same country, in a city near the west coast, some seventy-five years ago, a baby was born into a wealthy family connected to the construction industry. This child never knew the ordinary paths that most people followed in life. From a young age, when he couldn't get his way, he threw tantrums, screamed, and whined. With these tricks, he always got his way. He never took no for an answer nor accepted frustration; he grew accustomed to the immediate gratification of his demands, and everyone around him yielded to his constant requests. His actions in his student life, in the business world, in his personal life, in the lavish world of celebrities, and on the television shows in which he frequently participated, continued to be marked by this manifestly narcissistic character. There was no doubt: genetics and social context had created a tyrant.

In his later years, a passion for politics took hold of him. He dedicated a portion of his vast fortune both to waging a fierce battle within the Radical Party to secure the nomination and to competing in the subsequent national election campaign. Thanks to his impassioned speeches against emigration and in favor of revitalizing the once-thriving but by then-struggling and declining industrial sector, he managed to win the presidency. A veteran and prestigious journalist, the day after the magnate's victory, wrote in his diary: "Throughout these lands, every night, not just on nights of the full moon, we will hear the powerful howls of wolves, and the sheep will huddle together in terror, not even daring to breathe."

While this was happening in the capital, two hundred miles away, in another large city, Marisa's father died unexpectedly. At first, the girl expressed her grief with loud sobs and cries, but then fell into a permanent silence. The Friday after the cremation, an officer went up to the fifth floor, pressed the doorbell of apartment A, and, after a sterile and formal greeting, handed the tenants a letter from the Ministry of the Interior. The letter stated that they had to leave the country within twenty days and repatriate voluntarily; if they failed to comply with the new regulations, they would be arrested, their property confiscated, and sent to a maximum-security prison in a third country.

Marisa couldn't believe it; she had been a full-fledged citizen for many years. She went to the Municipal Government Office to report the error. Everything was in order. The rule affected all immigrants without exception, with or without proper documentation. She was paralyzed; a large part of her life and her future had been erased forever. That day, when she got home, with her daughter there, she couldn't show her distraught state, but had to maintain a composed demeanor in the face of the extraordinary situation. However, she cursed herself inwardly because with her vote she had contributed to these injustices taking place.

The next day, after checking the information on his phone, he contacted an association affiliated with the main opposition party. He was attended to by a young lawyer who appeared to have Indian features. This initially made him suspicious, but as the interview unfolded, his misgivings vanished. Within days, his case was presented to the court, and after a thorough review of the submitted documentation, his repatriation was declared null and void. Others were not so fortunate, either because they couldn't find the right professionals or because they couldn't afford the substantial expenses generated by the urgency of the process.

From that moment on, our protagonist's life underwent a remarkable change. She was forced to sell her café business, which was acquired by a large restaurant chain. She accepted a job as a cook and waitress at the same establishment to earn a salary that would allow her to live comfortably, and she enrolled her daughter in the local public school. Later, when the country's government changed hands, she and two of her friends legally hired a refugee girl to clean their homes.

Once she had come to terms with her new life situation and overcome the stress, she had a dream that intrigued her not only because of its content but also because it kept recurring. She decided to see her psychologist to find out the meaning of these dreams. The psychologist asked her to describe the dream in detail. So she began the following account:

"Dad returned to the grave dejected and saddened. All was lost. Five years of drought and low prices had destroyed the fertility of the land, and I had to go to the other side of the ocean.

I started working on a huge plantation owned by an American company. On several occasions, I helped an elderly woman with copper skin make her work more bearable. Every month I saved money because I only spent enough for food and the occasional soft drink, when I had no choice but to join the others in the canteen so as not to appear antisocial. My desire was to return home. To cultivate our land and see the hacienda shine once more. Inside, I felt my father watching me, smiling and happy.

Since I returned, some nights we could hear her footsteps inside the house, followed by the gentle rocking of the rocking chair. Her granddaughter and I would scold her because she went to bed so late and needed to rest."

After several sessions, she learned that it was a recurring dream. A type of dream that repeated itself, with slight variations, over time, related to the person's mental and emotional state, and which often

reflected past traumatic experiences. The therapist summed it all up in one sentence: "You overcame a difficult period in your life and have achieved inner peace."

"Stories without Mufflers"(2006 -)

Jesús Claver Giménez