

A Dream- Pinguino Frog

They have arrived; I can feel them, their cold, their pain, their solitude. They wake me up brushing against my shoulder. It's past 12 o'clock they inform me. With some difficulty I open my eyes and see them floating, there, at the side of my bed. They have arrived, they have arrived to give me a message from the other side, they have come to tell me that the dead are worried, that they are worried because I am getting dangerously close to their borders. They talk to me in an unknown language that all the same I understand perfectly. I sit on the edge of my bed to see them better, I rub my eyes to make sure that they aren't merely some kind of trick. The spectres are completely unknown to me, not even by straining to see them better can I identify them; who they might be. I cannot avoid comparing this apparition with Dickens. I can't help feeling like a Scrooge, victim of three Christmas spirits, even though, those who visit me number five.

One of them has a briefcase which he opens to give me a cylinder which I suppose is made of metal, but when I put it in my hands I feel it burn like ice. I think it is a telescope, but it's actually more like a kaleidoscope. The spectre motions to me to look through the eyepiece, and at this moment I can observe, with surprise, all the happy moments of my life, the happiest, complete wellbeing and happiness, absolutely all of them. I am speechless, dazed watching these moments, some already buried in the cemetery of the forgotten, of those *without memory*. I feel completely overwhelmed by these visions, by the presence of these messengers, I am unable to scream. Barely a tiny shiver, more like a tremor, makes the hiddenmost corners of my skin tremble, tears exit like drips from a winter icicle melting in the thaw.

No, I cannot keep looking, I don't know what to do with these visions that the phantasms have brought here, I let the cylinder fall from my hands and it breaks as if it was made of sheets of sugar. I bring my hands to my face, I try with all my energy to cry, but just a few sobs are leave my mouth. The spirit laughs with the most terrible roar that my ears have ever known. This is the moment where fear starts to take over me, as if a million ants had begun scaling my body.

One of the phantasms draws affectionately near and dries my tears with the tips of all his fleshless fingers at once, while another, seemingly younger, puts his finger into one of his empty eye sockets and takes out an orange-coloured pigment with which he paints an unrecognizable sign on my forehead.

They all surround me, closer every second; they start to close the circle. There is an enormous flash of lightning, which illuminates the whole room, the whole city. It starts to rain in a disproportionate manner, the spectres laugh at my defenceless state.

I wake up, gasping. I realise it's raining, with endless thunder and lightning. I'm sweating, breathing fast, I get up from the bed and the phantasms are no longer there, I look through the window and see an intense red sky of low clouds, I think that I have never seen a sky like this, never in my life, I keep thinking that maybe it's an omen for something that will happen soon.

I take off my t-shirt, soaked in sweat, you can almost squeeze water out of it. I bring the glass of water to my lips which feel dry and white. I take a sip and a gag reflex makes me cough. I get to the bathroom, turn on the light and look at myself in the mirror, I look tired. I check my forehead and I see no sign painted there in orange. It was a dream, it was all a dream, I breathe, with long pauses, relieved.

Outside the rain continues, the red sky keeps calling my attention, it keeps me worried, even if just a little bit. I return to bed to try, once again, to sleep, I look at the ceiling for a few minutes, I listen to the rain hitting the window, I think about the dream I've just had. It was definitely strange, I couldn't call it a nightmare, but when I remember it, or try to recreate it, it makes me feel a little uncomfortable. I close my eyes; breathe deeply, one, aaaaaaaah, two, aaaaaaaah, three, aaaaaaaah, forty six, aaaaaaaaaaaaaah, two hundred and eighty two, aaaaaaaah, four hundred and five...

(.....)

They are here again. I thought they had gone, but they are here. I feel cold, very cold, my teeth chatter, I try to open my eyes, to wake up, I don't want to see them again, I don't want to dream about them again, I can't, I cannot wake up.

I open my eyes; they are there, though this time just two of them.

I sit on my bed, I want to talk to them, ask them what they want, ask for answers, one of the spectres signals me to keep quiet, not to say anything. I don't know what to do, whether to get up and run away (*am I awake, or asleep, or dead?*) or do what they ask of me. It's terrifying not to know what is real, this is the first time I have ever had that sensation, I feel completely defenceless, that I'm one slip away from completely losing all reason.

One of them gives me a small Manila paper envelope, I take it, I open it, more with fear than care, there is something in it. A dismembered finger with an engagement ring on it. I feel my blood leave me when I recognise this ring, I gave it to someone a few years ago, the engagement was called off and although the person in question wanted to give me the ring back, I never accepted it. Why? Of course I had never forgotten the event, but with the passage of time it became something I just accepted, something that belonged to the past. But at this moment, it is the most frightening vision I have had, and, especially, the fact I recognise the finger. It is almost black, full of little worms, although the nail still keeps its red varnish.

I close my eyes and once again my tears do not come, they get stuck, once again my cry disappears in the blind labyrinth of my throat, I let the finger fall onto the sheets, the ring seems to look up at me. But that is not all, inside the envelope there is a small piece of recycled paper made with those luminous leaves that fall from the trees in autumn. On it is written: "Do not forget that this finger was cut off by you."

Truly, I do not know what to do, had I cut it off? *What? How?* The other phantasm approaches asking me not to cry, that everything is not lost.

Lost?

I want to wake up but I don't know if I already have; and if I'm awake, I want to close my eyes and sleep and dream of something else, or not dream.

The phantasm approaches with a box with gift wrapping, adorned with a brilliant black bow. I take the box, with even more fear than with the envelope, but also with an undeniable

curiosity. The spectre smiles at me as if to give me faith, should I open the box? *Is this box really in my hands?*

At this point, my emotional and physical reactions are completely taken over, beyond the reach of my will, of my conscious thinking. I tear the wrapping with desperation and carelessness, as if I were a child opening his first present on his seventh birthday. I see that the wrapping paper has photographic sepia prints all over it of the most terrible and desolate moments of my life, of all my life, everything.

The phantasm encourages me to open the box; he puts his terribly cold hand on my head, as a grandfather would to his grandson to show him he cares. I open the cursed, damned box. The contents seem completely strange to me, but at the same time familiar. Inside there is a Cuban cigar, a stamp of the Virgin, three tarot cards which I know well. The Devil, The Hanged Man, The Lunatic, a small candle, a little myrrh, the Ace of Spades, a bottle of jasmine scented oil, a stamp of the Powerful Hand and the Sacred Heart, some seashells, stones of jade, obsidian and one in particular that I recognise which belonged to a collection that my father had, which in turn had been given to him by my grandfather and which, when I was little, played with and lost, when I was, I don't know, 8 or 9 years old, I really don't remember. My father didn't tell me off, but he talked to me in a way that made clear his disappointment in me, in a way I had never heard in my life.

Inside there is also small piece of paper, folded in four, thin, rice paper. I take the paper and with resignation I open it while looking the phantasm in the eyes. The paper says

*"This, which seems a dream,
is not
this box contains treasures which will protect you
if you do everything correctly
to the very letter...*

*do not flee in fear
remember
this, always, will save our lives.*

*This will not be the only vision
prepare yourself
sleep deeply
that way it will be easier to visit you”*

I open my eyes and the morning light streams through the window, it is another day, the following day has arrived, the day we never know if it will be the last. I feel completely exhausted, my body hurts, I feel ill. I remain lying down, trying to recognise the objects in my bedroom, to digest the dream, or nightmare I have just experienced.

Everything had been so real, horror has never taken shape in me like it did the previous night, what a strange dream, disturbing, I can remember the most minute details, whereas normally in my dreams everything happens in a blurry, indefinite way, where visions overlap and confuse each other and the following day it is almost impossible to remember anything exactly. Not in my case, the dream is here, it stays like an image captured in a photograph.

Already, a little more awake, I can't help but notice a certain unpleasant smell, acid, subtle but constant, I wonder with surprise what it could be. It smells like, I don't know, as if a small mouse had died under the bed three days ago. In a simple reflex act I raise my head from the pillow and put my hand underneath it and what I feel leaves me frozen, I feel my temples start to throb uncontrollably.

It is the manila envelope of my dream, and when I touch it, immediately I know what is inside, the smell is unbearable and putrid. I put my hand in, and yes, exactly, the finger with the ring is there, I leap out of bed with a panicked raspy breath; I throw the finger away from me.

“Do not forget that this finger was cut off by you.”

This cannot be, this cannot be, this cannot... In this exact moment, when my heart is about to stop, I see, at the foot of the bed, the box, the small wooden box for storing cigars and on the floor the ripped scraps of wrapping paper around it. I go over there, with a terror I can barely control, I think I'm about to suffer a heart attack, but I cannot bear the crushing

curiosity which takes over me, and from this point, with heroic force I open the box and there is everything. The stamps, the stones, the jasmine scented oil, the tarot cards, although upper left hand corner of The Devil is burnt. I drop the card, the box, the seashells smash against the floor, and the contents scatter all over my room.

The only thing left for me to do is fall to my knees and cry, now that I can, and cry like I never have before and never will, with a desperation only the condemned know...

"This which seems a dream, is not..."

Pingüino Frog

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