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HOOFS OF LIGHT

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by Chrys Romeo

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Mud. Wet, cold mud everywhere around.

I shift the gun on my shoulder and adjust my helmet. The mud gets on the helmet too, as I wait and watch the night. The darkness is so deep, there are no signs of movement. Only the flashes of light from lost bullets break the view into fields of randomly squirming barbed wire and splashing mud.

I'm in the trench, I'm guarding something. I don't know what exactly I'm guarding, I don't know how long I should guard it, I'm not even sure what that war is for. But I'm absolutely certain that the dark is not safe outside the trench. I'm waiting for something and listening to the bullets. Somehow, I'm not afraid for my own life; I just resent the insecurity of it. And then I hear the planes over my head and explosions start lighting the barbed wire again, the trench gets hit and blows up splashing more mud in my face. I jump out, knowing I can't stay there anymore. I run into the night and then it gets completely black.

The sound of planes seems to open a gate. It's a gate in the sky, a gate in time. It's a gate in the space of the past. Yet every time I hear the planes I know something wrong hovers above, something dark is about to happen, something old and dooming like a voice from another dimension, from another time. It's an unexplained feeling, the engine sound of the planes, opening the gate in the sky. Maybe it's a memory from the nights of war. Which war? I don't know. I'm outside, playing with my friends. We're just playing war - it's summer

and this is our favorite activity, though we take it very seriously. We're not even ten years old, yet we've assembled an army of the neighborhood and I'm the captain. I have a strange instinct to collect toy weapons. I have a deep interest in history. And I enjoy war movies. Besides, when I hear the planes roaring I am wary of the gate in the sky. No matter where I am.

I'm on a bus. I'm not seven years old anymore: I'm three times more at least. Over the years, the trips by plane, the courses in sky diving and the focus on spiritual evolution have diminished the effect of those gates in the sky so I hardly notice them anymore. Nevertheless, here it is: another gate that I see. I sense it clearly, though right now I'm on a bus, passing by the streets of the town and looking half absently through the dusty window. And there it is, high up. Like an open door. This time, there's not even a plane passing by. The sky is grey, patches of clear blue are speaking of ancient eras, of distant centuries, of something eternal waiting up there, watching, almost sorry for this limited world where I am, on a bus. I know there's something so immeasurably absolute up there, looking down, something where I feel I belong, like an everlasting home I'm sure to return to, when time is no longer relevant. I am aware, suddenly, that I'm living in an ancient time. The buildings of the town seem tired, dusty, lonely and lost. And the blue sky above, with traces of grey, watches from an immemorial dimension, from its greatness. I am so sure I'm just a pawn on a string, riding that bus. And I'm so sure that someone could answer, if I ask something. I keep looking at the gate in the sky, feeling lost in a time before time.

“Do you know where I’m going?” I ask the presence behind the gate.

An unexplained “yes” lights up the silence. I don’t hear the words, but I know the answer.

“Am I going in the right direction?” I ask again, becoming more and more aware of my own insignificance, compared to that impressive immensity of absolute light.

“You are.”

“Am I on a mission? Do I have things to accomplish here?”

“You do”.

Okay. That’s enough of an answer. The sky is watching for a few more seconds... then the bus gets to the station. There goes another gate. It’s a gate that opens within reality, then it disappears; a tunnel to where time and space are just a movie, seen from above, from outside. I’m just a character on a mission. I will do my duty and then I will go home. I know that now. But where have I seen those ancient walls before?

It was like a coliseum. An arena of clay and stone, when the skies were free of apartment buildings, car noises, planes or helicopters. Life was simple, life was just dust and stone, just skies and earth, just fighting and surviving, raw decisions made in the blink of an eye, no time for thoughts, no reason for complicated analysis. Appearance was simple too: just plain clothes, more like rags; a metal sword was the true wealth... to keep your life valuable. Courage and strength. And the sky above. The blinding sun, the implacable belief that this is

it. That life, that feeling. I've been there. I had a metal sword. I had determination. I had an army. And I had a helmet too... sometimes.

I like helmets. I've been wearing them a lot, it seems, through centuries.

But back to the gates: don't think they are some astral gates for aliens. No. Not star gates. Just a lot more than that. They are like a huge, unexplained, unpredictable fish net that the galaxies spread above us, throwing it on our heads, in our lives, not depending on time or space. They are open doors to where there is no such thing as time. Open eyes in the fish net. Yet we are tied to a story like knots in a tapestry, drifting through time... so how do we get out of it? I don't know. I only know we must achieve liberation from it, someday. If we know its truth, learn its meaning. Just as my life was caught in the fish net: one time, I was in the trench. Then, I was in the street, leading a bunch of boys fighting a playfully serious childish war, ancient instincts screaming in the summer freedom. Then, I remembered the era of clay, dust, stone and swords under an open sky. And how did I get from one episode to the other? Probably, by making knots in the net. A labyrinth of links. The knots are invisible, but made by our actions, by our decisions. If I want to avoid getting caught in the fish net, I must become an arrow and go through the gates. But first, I must untie the knots of the astral tapestry. To untie them, I must know them. To know them, I must remember.

“What do you want to remember?”

I'm trying a session of time regression, some kind of hypnosis. I'm doing it because I need to know more about my past episodes, to find out, to have a revelation about my way and the knots of the past.

"I want to know who I am. Where I come from. What I did. I want to understand why everything is the way it is now".

Is it too much to want to understand the mystery of life, of the universe, of the world, of your own existence?... Maybe.

Yet, I want to understand.

"Sit down. Think about a moment when you did not feel comfortable. What image does that bring to you?"

I close my eyes, then I see it.

"Tell me about it."

"I'm in a tunnel. It's wet and cold, like a prison. I cannot move too much. I get up and see a light. "

"Can you go back?"

"No".

"Then go forward, to the light"

How very typical, isn't it. The tunnel and the light. Yet, this tunnel seems very real.

I walk to the light and I get lost in it. Now, I'm a dot. A point. I have no other form than a point. I fly in the light, so much light, an ocean of light. Then, I get out of it and I'm flying on a planet in space, around a rock. The rock looks like a pyramid, but it's alive. And then the plants come, like a jungle crawling over everything. I fly up, I become like a piece of paper. I arrive at a river, I become a rainbow. I am an energy made of colors and the river is made of flowing colors

too. And there is some other entity there. I know she's my match because we have complementary colors. And I am happy.

"Is that a dream?"

"No, I'm sure it isn't. It's a memory."

"Go ahead, tell me what's next."

"I don't care what's next. I don't want to go away from this place. I don't want to leave her. I'm staying right here."

"You can't stay there, it's just a memory. Come back now!"

"No, I don't want to. I'm fine here."

"You must come back! It's not a real place to stay where you are now. You really have to wake up."

I am stubbornly determined to remain there. However, I'm aware I must return to the present. Reluctantly, I open my eyes, as if tearing myself from my own soul. I feel so sad, so displaced; I'm really suffering for that lost paradise.

"You cannot find out more if you get stuck in your own subconscious memory. And it's dangerous to not want to leave."

"I know. But I felt so right there..."

This world seems so rigid, so dark, so tough. Opaque surface that doesn't say anything.

I liked the rainbow river much better, I liked being made of colors and drifting by in harmony and bliss... I don't feel at home in this world, much less now, when I'm sure I've come from very far away and got lost. Yet, I might've been here before.

I give up the hypnosis session. It hasn't revealed much to me, except for the fact that I've been in other worlds, I've traveled through space and different dimensions. Life is not just what we see on Earth.

Yet the fish net keeps me here now.

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I'm walking in the woods. The mountains are hovering around us, it's so cold that the frost is making our eyebrows, our eyelashes turn to ice; as we breathe white foam; it becomes too painful to walk, too painful to breathe in this freezing mountain air, sharp and fierce. We step carefully in the snow. Our boots are wet and our toes are frozen, our torn gloves are stuck on the gun barrels, part of the skin from our fingers will probably remain stuck there forever. We are silent and each step cracks the stone like glass under our feet. I am followed by my troops of sincere and hopeful soldiers; we are a platoon that must get beyond the mountains. We could get killed any second now. Eyes wide open, we advance. The sky is crystal blue, like glass too; the swishing voices of the trees and the forests over the mountain side seem to whisper mysteriously. I hear the doubtful and fearful voice of one of the soldiers, asking me through frozen clenched teeth:

“Are you sure you know the way?...”

“I'm sure. Trust me.”

“Have you been on this path before?”

“I’ve been here many times, but never on the same path: it’s not a good idea to leave traces twice for your enemies. We’ll go on a shortcut today.”

“But how –“

“Shh! Be careful, they might hear us. Just walk. I know this way is right. I just know my instincts; I know I’ll get us there.”

And we advance some more.

We meet a guarding patrol, going down. Two soldiers, on a mission to get to the camp from where we left.

“You’re going the wrong way”, they tell us.

Now they are looking at me, as I’m obviously the leader of the group. I can feel my feet freezing, as we pause. I think my boots will get stuck in the snow and grow roots if we don’t keep moving.

“We must go”, I grumble. “I know this way is right”.

My thoughts are too frozen now to see anything more than the icy crunching glass snow and the trunks of the whispering trees.

“You’ll get wasted up there.”

“No, we won’t. We’ll get to the other side.”

And I go ahead, not looking back. The group follows me: they have no other point of reference and they trust me honestly, with their lives. I am so positive we’ll be fine.

An hour goes by marching, then another.

After we pass by the trees, we cross over the crest of the hill. And then, as we step up in the open field, we have no camouflage anymore. The trees were cut from the side of the mountain. I have less than a second to react. There’s no time to get my frozen gun up or jump face

down in the snow. As they see us from nowhere, I hear an explosion, gunfire and a blinding light ends the sounds.

I'm in the streets again, and the children are shouting. We're divided in two enemy groups. We fight with tree branches, we keep them as swords. They have trusted me until now: I am the captain. We win the fight too, by the way. Yet, I can feel it, they are beginning to back away from me. They don't trust me as much. Their loyalty is fragile and sometimes they are hostile, maybe they envy my strength over them. None of them could defeat me in a fair fight. That's why I am still the captain. But they are watching for the moment to take the leadership from me. They want to be heads of the pack, each of them. They are ready to rebel.

And I sway the sword up to the sky. I'm in the ancient town where the walls of clay and dust speak of nothing but simplicity; we are insignificant fractions of seconds in the face of eternity, that absolute sky watching us...

"The queen wants to see you".

I go to her tent, I bow. The dry desert sun hasn't diminished her splendor. She sits among pillows and jewelry. She looks at me from behind veils of silk and garments, bracelets and golden broidery. I bow more, watching the soft Persian carpet. Or is it Egyptian?

"You can stand up. Don't kneel before me. I consider you more of a warrior than a servant."

"I am more of that indeed".

I would not waste a queen's time for nothing.

"You promised me your army would be ready."

“It is ready now.”

“Where are they? Your warriors?”

“Waiting for a signal behind the dunes.”

The queen glances at me from behind her silk veils again. Her eyes have something deep, like an absolute trust, like an unexpressed need, a shaded oasis in the dry desert sky.

“Can I trust you?” she asks me.

“I believe you can”.

“If your army wins the war for me, I will reward you with whatever you want. Can you win the war?”

“I will do my best.”

“I guarantee you it will be worth your while. I promise”.

A queen that promises is an undeniable certainty. If the queen gives her word, it's enough for me. Yet, I get a feeling there will be more than a desert to cross, more than time from immemorial eras, many more battles and wars to win, before I can see that promise being kept. Somehow, as I walk out of that tent, worrying only about the battle and the army, I know I'm not expecting anything. I just know her promise has brought another knot to the fish net, but that's the way things are: action develops from action and more knots come from previous knots and the fish net extends above, invisible, yet it's not my concern. I'm going to win a war. And we'll see about her promise some other day. Maybe after the war. Maybe later, I'll see what becomes of the fish net.

Marble columns, temples, centuries... armies and eras washed away by time, in a huge tide, under a burning sun.

“The teacher wants to see you. She’s waiting for you in the teacher’s room.”

She wants to see me? That’s a surprise: I’m just a teenager who doesn’t know why I’m in this world or what will become of me. Yet the teacher considers me important and wants to talk.

I go downstairs; she’s waiting in the corridor. She smiles. I smile too. Something is very impressive about her. She’s more like a queen than a teacher.

“I wanted to ask you”, she says, watching me carefully, “would you like to participate in a competition next year?”

I shrug; I don’t know what to say.

“Yes, of course.”

The idea hasn’t dawned on me until now, but I can see myself doing it.

“We’ll train a little more for it”, she assures me. “But I would really want you to win; I am certain that you can. You write wonderful essays, and your stories are pure literature; it could be a great advantage in the competition.”

I am again surprised by her trust and sudden praise. She appreciates me, unexpectedly.

“You’re not like the others, are you,” she says, feeling more confident now.

“No, I’m not like the others.”

She looks at me with deep attention, in the shade of the corridor the sky of her bluish uncertain eyes has something eternal, something immensely wise and calm; suddenly, I feel under the eternal sky of an

ancient era and I seem to witness the speed of wild hoofs running in a world before time was even invented, something so right and so alive. I would wonder at that look in her eyes many times from that moment on.

We stand there and the blinding burning sun of a dry ancient desert lights my mind.

“We’ll achieve great things together”, she says and her royal and warm smile makes me think I really want to win that competition for her.

I start to believe I can and I will. It seems I’ve never wanted anything more than to win the competition and make her happy. I want to prove I’m worth her appreciation. I sense I’ve done something before, to meet her demands... what is it? A castle? Have I built a castle? Or a war? Maybe I won a war for her. Or was it something different, for someone else?... I don’t know. It was a precious thing anyway. I’m certain this is not for the first time we met, in that corridor. We share something more than centuries.

On the day of the competition I could feel that eternal sun making things happen. Light overflowing in my mind, outside the window, on the page I was writing, with her presence, invisible beside me...

“I’ll think about you”, she said, “you know, just to give you more energy.”

If it was her thinking about me, or the magic of the overflowing surreal desert sun, making the moment timeless, I don’t know. If it was the eternal blue sky above or I who wished so much to be more than perfect and win, I don’t know. But I won. It was a miracle.

“How does it feel to be number one?” she asked me afterwards, very content.

“It feels good”.

She laughed.

“It should”.

Yet I didn't tell her that what felt even better was the thought of having succeeded in making her happy, giving her something unique, that nobody else had ever offered to her before.

“You are special”, she said.

I discovered something that day: a power I didn't think I had, at that time. Yet by winning for her, I won something for myself too: a new me. A new me that had value and strength to achieve things. I became aware of that. I became someone better in my own eyes.

“How are you, soldier?” she asked me on the last day I saw her.

She had figured out I was a soldier, yet I didn't know where she understood that from. She knew me more than she realized and more than I suspected. The eternal sky would always be above us and we would forever meet beyond that timeless era...

“I'll come back to see you again”, she said just before she left. “If I ever return around here, it will be for you.”

Another lost promise that remained a tied knot in the fish net... because she never returned. Another reason to want to fight the injustice of things.

“You shouldn't worry about fighting so much”, she told me once. “You'll see love is more important than war. You'll try to reason with your enemies as much as you can, and it will be useless. You'll fight

them endlessly, to no conclusion. The only value that is ever worth your time is love. You'll be better if you choose love and forget about war. ”

How can I forget about war? There's a war going on outside. There's a war going on inside. There's a war of the limited minds, a war of interests, of envy, of imperfection. An endless struggle on many levels. War is a part of life. In other worlds, maybe there is no war. But this world seems to beget war just as it creates life. Peace is far away from us, more like an ideal we might never completely accomplish.

Yet I kept wondering if that was my lesson, in the end. If love could be the one thing to get me free from the fish net. My liberation from anger against the fish net. My absolution from a past of endless wars, of fierce fights, of stubborn enemies. If maybe, just maybe, I had to give up fighting and choose love instead. Start looking for love and only love. But what do you do if you are attacked? How do you defend yourself? With love?... And what if love needs to be defended too? Isn't love worth fighting for?... Anyway you see it, you can't get away from it.

I knew I had to have weapons: a sword, a gun, my wits, my courage, my resistance, my determination... a strong spirit needs weapons. And a helmet.

“Let them be. Let's just go”, says my sister as we stand in the snow, looking up at the bunch of evil kids swearing and yelling at us to go home.

I wish I could be as tolerant as she is. I wish I could be as peaceful and kind. But I'm fierce and tough and my mind boils and burns when I sense conflict in the air, I get fired up and I attack too. As childish as it might seem, because we are children with sleighs on a winter night, it just seems something more serious than that.

"I'll show them who owns this hill!"

"Nobody owns it, let's leave them, they're not worth the fight", she says.

We were there first, before they came. The little park was our usual sleighing place in winter and tennis field in summer. It was like our own yard. And yet they came on that evening, noisy and rude, telling us to leave. They wanted the slope for themselves. I was ready to fight, but my sister didn't want to. She wanted us to go. I was angry because they had spit on my winter coat. I wanted to fight and get revenge. She grabbed my sleeve.

"No, it's not worth it. Let's go. Don't start a fight, it's useless."

"They already started it! I will go and show them!"

"They're worthless. Let's just go home."

My inner warrior dignity told me otherwise, but for her sake, I did as she requested. I got out of that fight and let it fade into the past. Was that an example of choosing love instead of war? Maybe. I don't know.

Sometimes you gotta fight, sometimes you gotta walk away. So how do you know when to stand up for what you believe in, for what is right - and when to avoid a war? You don't really know. And you don't choose the war: the war chooses you. It was like that in my case.

Or maybe the fish net chose my wars for me. And I had to be ready and up to it.

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So, for me to escape the fish net, I must become an arrow now: I must become light itself, advancing through time and erasing the limits of this world. I must become like galloping hoofs, through eternity and beyond it; I must learn to fly with the flow of energy that does not touch the knots of the labyrinth. I must learn to become free of it, out of the fish net. I must have speed. I must have sharpness. I must be very aware and understand everything. I must be wise and pointed to the purpose, which is my liberation. I know the shape and performance of any weapon: steel, wood, iron, they have plenty of sharpness and precision. What I really want now is absolute sharpness and precision of the spirit.

So how do I become that myself, exactly? If you see me, what do I look like to you?... What am I for you to see anyway? A trace of light, maybe?... Invisible hoofs running to the horizon? Does my spirit resemble some kind of perfection of that absolute eternal sky when I am at my best? Or is there only the imperfection of the fish net? Do I reach the speed of light? Am I at least close to being as strong as speed of light should be?...

I don't know. Maybe. You cannot rely on anything in this world, for sure... except for the eternal sky and the burning sun.

The burning sun is there – it seems to be wherever I go. It speaks of desert dunes, houses made of clay with square terraces, a blue-green lagoon to the horizon, small hills deprived of vegetation, people having tea in the sunset, in long thin glasses with weeds floating inside, wild plants growing and surviving in the sand, waiting for another day to go by... palm trees where birds are chirping cheerfully despite the scarcity of water, heat ruffling through foliage of wild orange trees. In the middle of the night there are prayers wailing in dark tones, reminding me of the bitter sorrow and despair of the vast, mysterious desert, a riddle just like the struggle of life, just like the night sky... a feeling so deep and ancestral within a place without water, vegetation, resources or hope... such is the desert night sometimes. It's an unsolved mystery where the only possibility of getting beyond thirst and sand is to have speed: the speed of light. It's the only answer. It's what makes the gates in the sky possible.

The gates in the sky have changed in time. Instead of that threatening, imminent danger, the serene light gates are more frequent now. Light flowing from a place where the stream is infinite. It might happen because I'm beginning to see through the open eyes of the labyrinth: I'm beginning to see beyond its surface and its meaning. It's more like a game. A simple tapestry of strings: the spirit can be free of it, anytime. That is its greatest secret: you can actually get away from it, get beyond it. It's just an invisible fish net. And you don't have to wait for eternity: freedom can begin right now.

If I need to become like the speed of light, I should have a way to move ahead faster. I decide I need wheels. So I get myself a bike. A bike, a helmet – of course – and determination.

I choose “Courage” as the name of my bike. Soon, I get used to it so much that it’s a part of my spirit and I hardly see myself without it. There is no fear and no worry, no war and no troubles, when I ride the bike. It’s just me and the road. It’s just freedom, light and strength, going ahead. I remember the first bike I had when I was a child. It was named “Pegasus” and it had a silver horse with wings, forged on its front bar like a blazon. Riding a bike has been many times like flying.

Is riding a bike going to change my life? It certainly has improved it a lot, until now. Am I going to change at least some of the war into love? Is that possible, in this life? I don’t know. I’ll just have to see if the centuries of war can turn into wisdom, eventually, along with the speed of light. If I remember I’m not in a trench, I’m not at war, I’m not in the army, I’m not a soldier anymore ... or am I still fighting for something? Is it just for being free? Am I not free? I believe I am, now. If I tell myself I’m free and if I follow the light going up, to the serenity of that eternal sky and the burning sun, only the speed of light might remain in front of my eyes: like an endless road.

However, some things might have stayed unfinished: for example, the platoon lost in the snow of the winter mountains. I should go back and lead them away from there. Yet I can only go forward. I know the fish net might bring them to me again, so that I can show them the right way - to the light. What about the queen of the desert? Will she meet me again to keep that ancient promise? And what about the

teacher? Will she ever return to see how I am? What about my sword?... Will I use it for another day and another day still, until the end of time itself?

I wonder if the eternal sky has answers to these knots in the fish net. A reply to this labyrinth of questions. Or if the only answer that can ever be is freedom.

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I notice she likes me more when I have the bike. I see respect in her eyes. She admires me, as if she sees something unexpected emerging from another time: a warrior with power and dignity. Maybe she remembers something. Recently, the stings of hate behind her sharp glances have started to melt into curiosity and attention. I was so sure that she hated me with complete conviction. I was so sure she was one of the enemies and she wanted nothing from me. I was absolutely certain that I could expect nothing from her except hostility. And then, she saw me on the bike. It was as if she suddenly surrendered whatever she had against me. She just gave it up, in one second. She forgot about it. She saw me with different eyes. She saw me in a new light. It was as if she saw the real me, for the first time. And she changed her attitude somehow.

“Hi”.

“Good morning”.

She replies strictly and objectively to the point. Nothing more than distant politeness. It's very early in this winter morning and we're

both waiting for the same bus. Sunrise is not even half way up on the horizon. Only grey sky and snow.

“You’re not riding today”, she says without looking at me.

I jump up and down, to prevent my toes from freezing.

“Nope. Not today.”

I pause for a moment. I would not dare mention to her the fact that she’s also without her car. I would never start a conversation out of nowhere. She scares me somehow. I am not afraid of anything, be it war or danger, but I am afraid of her; she makes me uneasy. Maybe it’s because I know she can hurt me, if I let her. Maybe it’s because I know she doesn’t like me.

“Too much ice on the road”, I add, beating my boots on the solid snow, stuck to the pavement.

Everything is frozen. The air is thick with frost; it feels like inhaling countless icy pins.

We keep a safe space between us, as usual. An objective, impersonal space.

Until something begins to change: spring comes, the ice melts off the road and I’m on the bike again.

I arrive at the door of the building where I have a mission; I take off my sunglasses and my helmet. I notice her there, in the spring sun, almost brighter than the morning light. She’s elegantly shining, sculpted like a statue of ancient civilizations. She’s watching me like a panther, slender and ready to react. We cross short glances and we know for sure it’s like a silent compliment. It’s not fair that she should look so beautiful and be so close, yet so inaccessible. I sense a deep,

unexpected respect from her attitude: it's enough that I parked my metal blue bike next to the door. She sees the real me again. While I am almost upset at her beauty and elegance messing with my mind, it's difficult to look away. And she starts talking to me; a casual, polite and surprising question:

“Has the meeting started?”

Her eyes are so direct and disarming.

I look at her and I hide my smile, because I know that deep inside, she's still ready to hate me mercilessly, any second I would let her see anything more than indifference.

“I don't know”, I reply simply, walking up the stairs while playing with my bike keys that catch her attention, “but I'll go and see if I can find out”.

She remains in front of the door, in the morning light. I steal another glance at her, over my shoulder, one more time trying to suppress the rushing whirl of images of how I would get close to her, if I had the chance – which I don't, right now. I know I must keep my cool and remain completely serious and detached. She is capable of tearing me to pieces if she wants to, making me suffer if I care in the least. I must have a shield when I'm in front of her. What is more unexpected is the fact that I'm beginning to like her too much, even though I know she is fierce, sarcastic and cold as ice. Yet I can see beyond that now. I see her helpless need for protection and warmth. I see her having fun like a little girl. I see her becoming passionate like a feline. Yet reality is just a distance from that range of possibilities. Impossible wishes of turning an iceberg into lava. So how did she get

like that? Maybe life has made her become cruel and cold, in time, maybe she found no other way to survive, maybe she didn't know how. Maybe she enjoys being tough, being cold, it's the only power she knows: the power of distance and determination. But now I see beyond that – there's still a soul with a beating heart somewhere behind her severe eyes. And sometimes, a softer tone in the way she speaks to me. And I don't know what to say to her: I'm completely disarmed when she approaches.

I never considered myself her enemy, but she treated me as a threat, many times in the past. I hope to change that, even though I don't hope for too much anyway. Why would I be affected by her presence and why would we be insecure about each other? We both might have something the other needs, or something of similar importance to exchange. Something unknown, brought from immemorial time: a way out of the fish net.

It's a step forward, if we can begin to replace disregard with trust, indifference with care and hostility with appreciation. If we can let ourselves get to that level of understanding. If we can think of love instead of enmity, we could be free.

I walk up the stairs; I'm under the eternal sky again, in the ancient era of swords and walls of clay. I'm going to walk in a temple of marble and white dust. I've got my army following behind. We're about to take over the temple.

And she's at the door, in her immaculate robe, fiercely trying to keep us out of the building. She's got a long spear in her hand, but her eyes are more of a weapon than that sharp iron.

“What do you want?” she asks me, obviously referring to my army and my intentions.

“I want the vase”.

“It’s sacred, you cannot have it.”

She knows her duty and she will not let us take the vase from the temple.

“I need the vase for interests of war. If I take the vase for negotiations, it might end the dispute between our countries”, I explain to her, though I know it’s useless; she will not give in, no matter what I say.

“I don’t care what you need the vase for. It belongs to the temple, you cannot have it.”

“Are you aware that I can take the vase without your approval?”

I’m waiting patiently, looking in her expressionless eyes that shine with the morning sun, in that immemorial era. She measures me up, unimpressed, but I sense a restraint in her determination that’s beginning to shake. She realizes I’m a warrior and I am powerful enough to take whatever I want from her temple. Yet something makes me ask for her approval. She looks at my sword.

“If you take the vase”, she says, “I will never forgive you. I will hunt you down for as long as you live”.

“Do you think I’m afraid of that?...”

“You should be. I mean it and you’ll see.”

I frown.

“If you don’t give me the vase then we’ll have a war, starting tomorrow”.

“If that’s the way that it must be.”

She’s still at the door, stubborn and sure of herself, not letting me solve the matter peacefully. I think for a few moments, while my soldiers wait in silence. She’s waiting too. I’m the one who must decide now: shall we take the vase in a storm, by force, or shall we let things go by their own course – to the war? I frown some more and shades seem to cover the sky. A flowing shadow advances above the temple, dark clouds coming from beyond the desert. A sand storm, possibly – or maybe something from the future, from a time that is round and ready to happen, from a distant, far away place where I will look at her again and see in her eyes something that will make me change my mind and turn the anger into something opposite, in the blink of a second. We are strangers now, but from a deep unknown shift of the fish net, I have the certainty there’s more to it. I don’t understand it myself. Yet I lower my eyes to the stairs of the temple. Then I turn around.

“Let’s go”, I say to the army.

I don’t know when it really started - you know, the war before even time itself ever began. I don’t know why it started either. Why it goes on. Or how to make it stop: life destroying life to survive, animals, plants and people, conflict growing from conflict, action from reaction, consequence from choice, choice from decision, decision from instinct, instinct from need, need from inevitable evolution, evolution from infinity... and everything creating a fish net we will have to get out of, eventually. I have figured out by now that in order to achieve freedom,

the knots of the tapestry must be untied: erased, solved and changed into an absolute liberation. The eternal sky is waiting.

“You lost my horse”... she looks at me with big disappointed eyes.

We are in that era before time ever began. It's winter and we don't have anything much to keep us warm. We are used to the snow somehow; our bare feet don't feel it freezing the skin. We are used to the rough snow storms. And right now, a storm is coming. I look at the animal going in the distance, the hoofs of the horse running and disappearing in the raging snow flakes, thousands, millions, dancing over the frozen field. Only white snow remains. The horse is gone. Nobody could find it now, in that fierce, terrible storm. I was supposed to keep the harness in my hands. It was her horse – I had given it to her actually, as a gift, and I was keeping it for her, as we walked. It was my responsibility and I liked doing that for her. Simply out of love. She's almost just a child, as much as I am, but there's a trace of absolute wisdom in her eyes, something like the eternal sky that will be waiting for us, from now on, centuries after centuries. She looks at me with regret, as if sensing the length of consequences that have begun to unfold from that moment on. She starts to resent me and regret the inevitable loss ahead of us. It's as if that round time has dawned in her mind, in a second, and she knows how much it will matter – beginning with right now. Right this very instant.

“My hands are frozen”, I explain and I shrug innocently.

My fingers were frozen on the horse's harness and they slipped off. And then, in a fraction of that important second, the horse ran away, free. And it got lost in the snow storm. We are still standing there, as

the snow flakes surround us, and we know it's the beginning of an endless time, ahead of us. We look at each other and we know. There's nothing but us, the snow and the eternal sky. And we know.

"You must bring the horse back to me!" she says in a sudden demand and her eyes get a shade of determination.

"I can't do it right now. You see, there's a storm coming. We should get inside".

"It doesn't matter. You owe me my horse. Go and get it."

I look at her; it's difficult to see through the blizzard, as the snow flakes are flowing between us and they get in my eyes, they melt and run down my cheeks, becoming water, becoming ice tracks, freezing instantly. I blink. She keeps staring at me, in demand. I am as lost as the horse.

"I will find your horse later".

"Later, when?"

She is obviously upset; something was set off balance between us; I realize I must make things even, but I know, at the same time, that it might take an eternity before I can do that.

"I don't know when. Someday."

"After the storm?..."

"Yes, after the storm."

I would say anything to comfort her now. I know, and she knows, that I will get her horse back, eventually, even if that means we will witness the world going round and round for centuries without end. Yet we know I will do it. I will make things right again. It doesn't matter when anymore.

“Okay, good,” she says. “It’s a deal. I won’t forget you gave me your word. You’ll bring the horse to me again. Right?”

“Right”.

“Good. Now, let’s go home”.

And we go.

“Maybe I shouldn’t have given the horse to you in the first place,” I say to myself as we’re walking home, against the storm. “Then there wouldn’t have been any horse to lose.”

“Maybe,” she says. “And maybe you shouldn’t have met me. And maybe we shouldn’t have been here to know each other. And maybe life shouldn’t have appeared in this world to begin with. And maybe, and maybe... don’t you see? You can’t undo it now. Whatever is, just is. You can’t take it back. You can only go forward with it. Make sure you find my horse soon.”

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So after I achieve the speed of light, where will it take me?

It will take me to the future. Actually, it will take me beyond it. I know for certain that a timeless moment still waits for me up there, beyond time itself.

I pass by the tree of life; I rush to the valley where some children are rolling around with their bikes too. They see me and follow me like a bunch of swarming bees, zooming on their wheels, happy to have company for the ride.

“Let’s race”, they say to me, eager to test their power, to measure up with me, yet I smile with a bit more wisdom than their adrenaline dizzy enthusiasm.

“I’m not racing any of you. You can follow me if you like, but it’s not a contest.”

And I wonder if these children on bikes are not the lost platoon that I’m leading now to the right way, to the horizon, to freedom, to light... Maybe they are the ones who were waiting for me, ready to set the balance of things closer to harmony, to even the odds for the day when they got lost in the winter mountain. It might be my chance to get them out of the fish net. Their presence is like an answer, making things right. They ride by my side, happy to discover the thrill of speed. They’re following without a doubt, without uncertainty: their trust is rewarded by the sunrise that’s appearing in the horizon, as they advance toward it.

Finally, my bike catches more speed and even more, until the view is just a blend of spinning colors. I think my spirit is so high now that I’m slowly becoming immaterial; I seem just a spectrum of light, running along – and above – the street. The children cannot keep up with me. And they shouldn’t even try to. They’ll get to the horizon later, some other day, in their own time. It’s enough that they have direction now and they’ve started rolling their own race. It’s enough that they see me ahead and they know freedom is possible – it’s an imminent event, like sunrise of a new morning.

The wheels of my bike have become burning whirls of light, as I’m flying to the horizon. And then I see her beyond the line, she’s

becoming immaterial too, somehow, and I see the river of flowing colors, where she's waiting: something like the paradise that I remembered a long time ago. I feel I am flying home and I realize that the memory might have been a vision of the future – or maybe time has begun to bend and turn around, so the past is switched into the future, the beginning into the end, like a circle. A future appearing from a past I don't even remember now. It's not an inconvenience, as it's a new sunrise, when I cross the horizon.

I can see it, like a bright view, as I've arrived in that time beyond time, when things are no longer linear. I reach her side and I stop next to her. She is there; she has been waiting for me. It's the end of the race. There is a gate in the sky and she's looking at it too. I know she can see it now. It's one of those gates of a better energy, a better world, a better life... The flowing light is serene and reassuring. I look at her, as she's standing there, up high, a vivid presence, glancing at the gate that's opening in the sky, in front of our eyes. Time has become irrelevant now. We're hardly touching the ground; it feels like flying. She returns my stare for a second. And she smiles. She knows who I am. There is only love, light and the eternal sky.

“It will be here”, she says, still smiling, still looking at me.

I know what she refers to. I know we are waiting for something to come out of the open gate. The window in the sky is the answer. I know for sure that it will solve everything and we will be able to go on free from the fish net: whatever is approaching the portal in the sky will erase the centuries of war, the hostile glances, the dark clouds, the uncertainties and the endless suffering. Life will change. It will

become more alive than ever, anew. The labyrinth of knots is already gone; I sense it has vanished unknowingly. And then, I start to hear it: the sound of hoofs, from far away, from a distant space and time, from an immemorial life, thousands of centuries ago. Yet here it is, approaching, becoming clearer with each minute, like lightning flashes.

“It’s here”, I say and we both look up at the gate in the sky.

The sound of the hoofs is above us now, closing in, hovering – and then we see it: the splendor and brightness of the horse of light, appearing with its hoofs in front of us, touching thin air, coming out of the timeless gate to close the deal, to untie the knots, to liberate us forever from the claws of the fish net. It’s here to absolve us from the labyrinth. It has traveled a long way, but now it’s here: a miracle we’ve been waiting for since the beginning, when the fish net had started weaving around us. It has been written in the eternal sky, and now it’s being unwritten before our eyes. Life is suddenly redeemed. It’s suddenly becoming alive, more than the notion itself. It seems the hoofs of light have been running around since forever, just for this moment.

The majestic horse is hard to look at, so shiny, mane flowing in sparkles and little stars flying off from it, its warm breath so alive with energy and hope, certainty and liberation. It passes by above us, in a wave of rays of light and I reach out my hand, in that second, to grab the harness. I close my hand on it. The horse stops next to us, shaking its bright sparkling mane, overflowing in beams of light and breathing

steam, like the morning sun, a morning that is about to begin, free as freedom itself.

I look at her, as I'm holding the harness now, standing side by side with the horse of light.

"I've got the horse", I tell her happily and I hand the harness to her. "I can finally return it to you. Here. It's yours."

"It is," she nods.

And then she adds:

"I think it might have become ours now... both of us... "

She hesitates before seizing the harness. Yet she takes it and smiles with absolute happiness: everything has returned to its own right. I know I fulfilled my quest now: I kept my part of the deal. It's finished. I am free. The eternal sky is where we are. The endless sun is what we're holding. She touches the mane of the horse. And then she turns around, suddenly:

"You better keep it", she says, extending the harness back to me. "You've earned it. It should be yours now."

"Yes, but I gave it to you in the first place. I cannot have it for myself."

"You keep it for me. Just as you've always done", she smiles and her eyes remind me of countless times when we met along the way, in different centuries, in different places, in the fish net.

"We'll share it", I decide, accepting her offer and our hands meet to hold the harness together.

There's an unexpected glow where our hands meet. Life itself is walking with us.

The hoofs of light are shining now between us, like a new sunrise
of an endless unwritten story of infinity.

