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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.

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