

Down the Promenade

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I woke up to the smell of salty water around me. I was not very sure where I was. I tried to sit up and take a look around. It must have been dawn; maybe six or seven in the morning.

I was shivering. The cold breeze blowing on my cheeks, randomly interrupted by large clumps of warm, black smoke; which would almost make me choke. Waves of foamy water, full of debris, were battering the rocky shore. As I turned my head further; flames fading into pitch black darkness, silhouettes blending with the purple hues of the morning sky, a black and red inferno afar. Blurry fearful and desperate faces fading with the flames and the smoke, as well as what seemed like blinking emergency lights approaching. All of this scenario, developing rapidly, in absolute silence.

I was startled. It must have been a traumatizing experience, for no matter how hard I tried to recall how I had ended up in this place, every trace of memory from the previous events leading to this incident seemed to have been wiped clean from my mind.

As I tried to sit up, the pain in my wrists and my hands had seemed to vanish, and, surprisingly, I also stopped feeling cold.

Suddenly I heard something. It sounded like someone speaking my name.

'Paul' I heard it clearer this time, together with the sound of approaching footsteps.

'Paul we must go, get up.' She said, gently. I did not know who she was or why she was calling my name, but something inside me was telling me to comply. She seemed friendly. Perhaps a bit shy and sorrowful, but I trusted her, nevertheless.

As I stood up, we took one last look around and started walking down the promenade. The scenery of chaos and destruction suddenly felt almost irrelevant. We were having one of those beautiful, stimulating conversations that do not happen very often. We talked about our lives, our projects and dreams. But there was something about her which was almost unsettling: she seemed to know more about me than I would have liked to admit.

As we walked and talked, she mentioned intimate facts about me, things that I had said, facts about my family, my wife, my childhood. She even mentioned things that had never even left the confines of my mind. Things I had long forgotten. And then it all came to me. She knew every little thing about me. She was retelling my life as if I were watching it on display.

We were heading to some place that I had never been to and I felt as though I was not ready for it yet, however inviting it might seem.

'I'm sorry, but I must go back' I said to her. I was trying to sound determined, as fear started to take over me.

* 2º premio del Concurso Literario USAL en Lengua Inglesa – Categoría cuento (2015).

She glared at me. And when I hoped that she would understand, she just uttered a frustrating: 'Suit yourself, but understand that you'll have to go all the way back by yourself. Go now, before it's too late'

I felt truly sorry for her, but I had to go back. I tried to hold her, but she pushed me away.

I ran. I ran as fast as I possibly could. As I approached the crash site, I started to hear the sirens and the screaming. There were people everywhere, standing all around. There were ambulances, patrol cars; fire-fighters, and these two paramedics standing by my side. I collapsed on my knees and faded off.

As I regained consciousness, I heard one of them saying: 'Only two people survived the crash, this man and that woman over there, but she ain't gonna make it.'