

Fired

Juan Andrés Ércoli*

“Sorry if to bother you at this late hour, my friend,” apologised the big Boss of the most prestigious Bank in the country. “But you owe me a *leetle* favour.” Astorre stood straight, impatiently waiting, for the chief’s orders. It was ten minutes after midnight. He could lightly sense what his orders might be. Due to the investiture that had been bestowed upon him, he was compelled to obey. Sitting on his leather chair, arms on both armrests, the Boss gave him a defiant look scanning him thoroughly to decide whether he was trustworthy enough for the job... “You’ll have to fire Tattaglia. There were many wrongdoings on his side, and the bank’s lost millions of dollars.” Astorre grabbed a chair and sank into it. He was bewildered. No. Not Tattaglia. He had seen this coming, but a simple warning would have been fine. He was one of his best friends, and a reliable partner. Since childhood, their friendship had been unbreakable. He knew this was a test, so he struggled to regain his composure and show the Boss his loyalty. With a modest nod, he accepted the challenge, turned around, and gingerly, headed for the door. He heard the chief say, “Tomorrow morning.” There was no turning back. His nerves twitched a little at the thought of the coming events.

Astorre Viola was a young, handsome man. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and a little chubby around his waist. As he got out of the building and drove home on a chilly winter night, he dug deep into his memories. He let his mind wander. He remembered the extraordinary childhood they had shared and cherished. How he missed running around his friend's backyard, arms widespread, as if imitating airplanes. How delighted he had felt when they went together on that trip to Europe! How happy he was when he got married. Such an attractive woman, too! He would always remember her magma-red hair, flowing over her shoulders; her sweet, warm smile, and the dimples on her cheeks after every joke. And Tattaglia embracing her, depicting what happiness should be like. Sadly, their friendship would cease to exist. Grievance overcame him and filled his body with hatred. Impotence. Helplessness. Loathing. Fatigue.

Indeed, he owed the Boss a favour. A few years ago, starvation had been his life prospect. He was dead inside. That was why he pitied and understood Tattaglia. The feeling of being dead. Broke and aimless, he had implored the Boss to give him a job. He became an assistant and rose through the ranks, effortlessly, until he reached the position of *consigliere*, of consultant. He interrupted his train of thought, went to bed, but slept not a wink.

That morning, he put on a suit, had breakfast, and went to work. That morning, everything would change. That morning, he would snatch something significant away from his best friend. That morning, his wife and kids would suffer. From that morning onwards, they would have to cut down on things, to give up something of enormous value. A relaxing and cheerful

* 1º mención especial del Concurso Literario USAL en Lengua Inglesa – Categoría cuento (2015).

life. He reached the door, and grabbed the door knob. He felt its coldness stinging his hand like a million bees, causing him to shiver. He languidly turned the knob. He sluggishly opened the door, hoping that he would be delayed somehow. Tattaglia was standing next to the window, at peace, gazing at the huge buildings through the French windows. He turned around startled by the noises behind him. His eyes showed realisation and fear. They stared at each other, long enough for understanding to pour out of their expressions.

There.

The *leetle* favour had been returned. He closed his eyes in despair, let a few tears drop, and beseeched that God should absolve him for having submitted himself to the will of the big Mafia Boss, Vito Corleone. In their world, there was no place for traitors.