

Beware of the seas which host no monsters, for neither do they hold dreams

(By Paula Rodríguez I Escribà)

It's one of those warm afternoons of late summer, so quiet in those strange hours between lunch and proper evening, which no one seems to quite know what to do with. The humidity clings to it all, making the heat all the more oppressive; crowns of courage are woven and stored away, kept: to be laid upon the heads of the intrepid few who dare face up to the open sun in its full power.

Outside, the silence, broken away by the waves hitting the docks and the surf caressing the sand, the critters doing their eternal concerts and a car here and there, lost, not knowing that this is no time to be out and about.

Inside, the room now empty but for a handful of stragglers and there, in the corner, two men: a table littered with crumbs and coffee cups, an ashtray filled to the brim, and an age-old chasm, sits between them. The air thick with smoke, memories, old resentments and unsaid words which darken it all.

"History is a terrible beast" the one with the thick white beard and gleaming skull, says.

"Yet one of our own making" replies his companion, green eyes shining in the gloom.

"In time, every creature grows to resent its creator" he concludes.

So, it goes on, and there they sit, argue and talk of the time empires, long since gone, never to last. Of bullets strewn in between their lands, of loyalties to things that are no more and melancholy for the fights lost. Remember where the trench lines that they dug up with fingers and nails, and lost friends and family to, used to lay, now much too blurred for any of us to see, yet we still know. They unearth their death, bare them for the other to see, to recognise, to remember. Does he really? Is regret ever present? Has it ever been absent? But these questions are quietly buried, lain to rest between the lines of militia that dividethem, never to be asked outright; fear of the question nearly outweighing the dread for the answers.

How *Carthago delenda est* and, indeed, thrice it was, all for it to be no more. What could be more memorable than the glory of battle? The triumphant heroes who sacked Troy returning home, and those royal Trojans slinking away to make the greatness of Rome. The Lion's mane dyed burgundy, sinew and marrow exposed, unblinking eyes gazing up into open skies.

And while they shout, around them, between them: the sea, theirs, ours. This bitter line of salt and bodies, and drowned ships with their forgotten treasures, that hacks the earth separates you from me. This capricious boundary that foolish men have dreamed up, dividing and separating north from south in the logics of despair, all but a mirage, a fiction to feed their pointless, ever renewed, fights.

This sea, an ancient being, composed in equal parts blood and brine, remembers. As do the birds, whose summer is here and winter is there, who care not for the splitsarching over hills and straits, scribbled in darkened rooms and engraved in the psyches of men. They who are older than any us and any of our forebears and fly over our heads – knowing a land much different from any we might recognise –, and will probably persist in their flights long after the very idea of us has been carried along with the winds and been swept away by the sea.

They recall that there was more to the story than the glory of battles and defeats, that there were songs, tales, rivers of paint poured from your shore to mine. Horizons, endless, stretching over water, stone and skies, each one more wondrous, waking up a gnawing hunger to glimpse just one more. The ineffable mysteries, all the questions we asked of one another.

The sea too remembers and, covetous of its secrets, gives us onlywhispersand echoes of that which it has borne testament to: of goddesses born from it and gods long buried within its basin, beneath all the salt and sand. And the sky, whose burning asters, reliably pointing our way, we turned into maidens, huntresses, carriages and lost princes. Broken remembrances, of teeth rupturing flint, of words more naked than flesh. How it carried us when we painted rouge empty chested cows and dancing women on walls, when it was all dreams and we traded wild wheat for azure beads and plaited silver; when we were made rich beyond the accrual of plenty. When seas too stormy and mountain ranges much too cold, were the only unsurmountable obstacles between me and you. When you had to see me bled in order to kill me.

The room, unavoidably shadowed, allows for a few tenuous rays of sunlight daring to pass through the heavily curtained and barricaded windows. Across the space, a young woman, already weary of years of battles fought under and over her, piles up cups and plates in new uncertain, equilibriumsand plots. For there are yet parties to be had, new dice to be cast, because the interminable story is far from over and, up the hill, the almond groves are ripe for the picking.

Mayhap those two will quiet their black and white memories long enough to listen, the radio, hung up in that weathered wall, will play that song they both used to love and they will remember that once, they had been brothers.

Outside, shouts, children shrieking with joy, delighted by their games, that those who have trespassed the dismal line into adulthood, can only strive vainly to fathom or comprehend.