

THE STORY OF A BUTTERFLY AND A SPIDER (Historia de una Mariposa y de una Araña)

After writing so much for others, please permit me to write something about myself.

During the course of my life, there are many things of little importance that have happened to me without my knowing why, but which I still remember.

I am capable of easily forgetting the most memorable dates, and I have only a vague memory of many things that have changed my life; however, I can remember all of the minute details of some little thing that happened to me on this or that day; I can recall things without any importance that were said during a conversation that took place six or seven years ago, or the clothing, the attitude and the features of an unknown person who was there when I was doing something, or who looked at me and said something. Then there are also times when I want to disregard trivial matters, because something important demands my all attention and the use of my faculties, and still it happens that I begin to remember many inappropriate thoughts and, jumping from one idea to another, my mind begins to arrange them all in some sort of absurd and extravagant mosaic.

Sometimes I think that between a woman whom I saw in one of the hundreds of places I have visited and a song that I heard a long time ago but still remember, there is a strange relationship, because my in mind they are there at the same time and are linked in some inexplicable way, as far as I can see, without any obvious point of contact that might produce this relationship.

Sometimes I have the feeling that a man whom I scarcely know, whom I often think of without knowing why, and who seems to have had an influence on my life, is waiting somewhere to find me again.

Whenever I have these futile preoccupations or remember an isolated event of no great importance, I try in vain to find some obvious reason; and I say "in vain," because if I ever happen to think that I have found some obscure relationship and, hidden behind an insignificant aspect of my ordinary life, I think I have found a mysterious link between it and what I have experienced, after a few hours of thinking rationally I am convinced that I have been an absolute fool.

Nevertheless, since my mind is constantly filled with these absurd ideas that torment me and that struggle to overcome my common sense, and since I have discovered that whenever I write about something like this and offer it to the public, I forget about it and it no longer bothers me, I am now going to make an attempt to get rid of some the most stubborn ones.

I also make a solemn promise that, if my sick imagination can be improved by this bloodletting, in the future I will make every effort to cast aside these foolish thoughts, and then, perhaps, my name will pass on to future generations and be linked with a new treatment, or some other discovery that will be of use to Humanity.

In the meantime, prepare to suffer the description of some of these foolish remarks, the description of two insignificant memories, which are: the sad story of a white butterfly, and the encounter with a black spider.

On a bright spring day, when we see that things around us grow old and are surprised that the world itself never ages, I was sitting by the entrance of a small village.

I had been thinking about making a drawing of a picturesque fountain located in the shade of some poplar trees; but in reality, what I was doing was simply enjoying the sun, since in more than three hours that I had been there, while listening to the water and the rustle of the leaves, I had done nothing more than sketch three or four lines on the sheet of paper.

As I said, I was sitting there daydreaming, and as I did that, two butterflies as white as snow passed before my eyes. Both were fluttering so close to each other that it seemed like there was only one. Perhaps they had both hatched at the same time from the same larva and, enlivened by a warm ray of sunshine, they had launched simultaneously into the second stage of their mysterious life.

As I thought about this, the butterflies flew in front of me again and then went to settle on a cluster of bluebells, where they stopped for a moment without ceasing to wave their wings. After that, they rose into the air again and started flying in circles around me. I have no idea why they were attracted to me. Undoubtedly, in the instinct of a butterfly there is something that leads them in the direction of death. They flutter dizzily around a flame, as though they are experiencing some sort of vertigo, even though it does nothing to attract them; in the same way, they sometimes act like we are attracting them as they circle around our head, and when we brush them away, they still come back again.

I don't know why those particular butterflies were attracted to me, and not others that were flying nearby; I don't know, nor will I ever be able to explain it, but I felt that I ought to kill one of them. So without really wanting to, and not expecting to catch one, while they were flying around me for the hundredth time, I automatically reached out my hand to grab one, and killed it. Afterward I regretted having killed it, just like I would have regretted it, if I had dropped my opera glasses as I leaned over the railing of my box and killed some poor fellow sitting in the seats below, something which has never happened, but that I have often imagined could possibly occur.

And that is the story of the butterfly; so let's continue with the one of the spider.

The spider was living in the cloister of an old monastery that was more or less abandoned. There, it had made a nest of dark silk threads in the hollow of a bas relief.

One day I entered the cloister and awakened the ruins with the noise of my boot heels. After a moment, it occurred to me that these cloisters had been made for those who were wearing sandals, so I began walking more quietly, since even I was disturbed by so much noise coming from me in that large building.

The sky was cloudy, and the light that came through the high, narrow arches left the cloister in semi-darkness so, even though I was all eyes, I had difficulty seeing the details of the bas relief that I wanted to copy.

That bas relief showed a procession of monks with the Abbot in the lead, and it served as an ornament for a group of column capitals located in the corner. I don't remember where I found the ladder I rested against the wall so I could climb up and get a better view of the details; however, I proceeded to do that and, while I became occupied with what I was doing, I noticed that the Abbot's miter was covered by some dark, dusty material that hid it almost completely; so I reached out my hand and pulled it off, only to discover that underneath it was a spider.

It was a horrible black, hairy spider, with short legs and a thick, viscous body.

I don't know what happened more rapidly, the movement of that ugly brute as it ran out from its hiding place, or my effort to throw myself to the ground from the top of the

ladder with the risk of breaking my arm, feeling frightened and shaken as though I had seen one of those terrible stone gargoyles perched on the top of the walls suddenly come to life and open his mouth to eat me alive.

The poor spider, and I say “poor,” because when I think back on it, I feel compassion; when I destroyed its nest, that poor spider was also upset, and it ran here and there over the raised figures of the bas relief, looking for a place to hide. By then, I had recovered from my fright, and wanting to take revenge for the fear it caused me, I picked up some stones that had fallen down and began to throw them, until one finally struck it.

Once the spider was dead, I said, “Good riddance!, but why was it so ugly?” I took my drawing board and, gathering my pencils, I went away feeling satisfied with myself.

I am perfectly aware that all of that was foolishness. Now that some time has passed and I have had time to think about things more rationally, I can say: “Why is that woman walking around me? I am not a flame but, nevertheless, she could burn herself. I don’t want to kill her but, in spite of that, I could do it.” And after even more time passed, I thought, and I think I was right: “If I hadn’t killed that butterfly, I might have killed her.”

As for the spider... unfortunately, at this point I begun to lose track of the invisible thread that created a mysterious relation between things, and when my reason came back, I felt like I no longer was aware of the absurd logic that had filled my mind.

Nevertheless, before finishing, I will say something that has often occurred to me when I remember that episode in my life. Why is it that spiders are so ugly, and butterflies are so beautiful? And why do we feel remorse when we see some beautiful eyes shed tears, but then say of some others: “Let them cry; they were born to weep”?

When I think about all these things, I feel like believing in metempsychosis.

But to do that would just be to believe in one more simple thing, like many others I believe in this life.