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Paths of war

by
Esther Garboni

translated by
Iride Lamartina-Lens

(Excerpt in English)

CHARACTERS

ANNA, ANNE or ANA—This modest young woman may be called any of these names. She represents courage and loyalty. Her strength is not apparent physically, but rather it is transmitted in her energy and guiding light as a radiating beacon, illuminating an uncertain path. She is poetry.

JAN, JOAN, JUAN or IVÁN—Is a slightly older young man free of baggage who accompanies our female protagonist on this road. He represents love and peace. He is a handsome fellow, but his appeal does not come from his clothes or possessions; but rather from his innate gallantry and in the way he faces difficulties.

BRIGITTA, BRÍGIDA OR BRIGITTE are the names of motherhood that appear in our dreams. She is both Anna's mother and mother of the world. She is the voice within us whose much-needed embrace we dare not request.

VÍCTOR, on the other hand, the child soldier, is not so much the son of the world, as its natural consequence. Like ÚRSULA, the broken woman who carries the weight of death, he embodies the horror of war.

SETTING

Any nation, any war, any person at whichever border... A path, a border-crossing, a hope and a farewell.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

Nighttime. From the jaws of a mammoth and noisy factory, stinking sewage and nauseating waste move along two long conveyor belts protruding beneath an industrial door covered by dirty wide strips of plastic curtains, which end up in an infinite landfill. Together with the garbage, ANNA is painfully spewed from this filthy place. Nonetheless, she feels the liberation of a newborn, even though she starts from an interior light that moves towards the darkness of a night blurred by the moon's shadow flitting between the trees. Two heavy suitcases spit out at her from the same place she came from. ANNA collects her belongings and begins to walk on one of the conveyor belts and feels, at last, that the world also spins under her feet. Her suitcases are without wheels and they appear to be heavy, but SHE is young and still has her strength. The journey has only just begun. The roaring sound of the factory begins to fade as ANNA advances to the sound of crickets.

ANNA

(Singing to ward away her fear.)

Descend, moon, descend,

illuminate the path,

guide my steps,

to my journey's end.

Descend, moon, descend,

tread with me.

Dark is the night,

afraid and cold am I.

For if you don't descend

when crossing the river,

my heart

wolves will bite.

Suddenly, the erratic sound of something moving through the bushes. A mole? A fox? A dark forest is scary... The noise intensifies. So, too, the fear. Something is approaching. Could it be a man? In moments like these, no animal should frighten her more than a man. Alert, Anna stops, takes a step back, and then trips over some stones and slips off the trail.

ANNA

Who's there? Don't come near me! I have a weapon!

Silently and peacefully, JAN emerges from the bushes. HE is a strong, cheerful and handsome young man, but despite wearing fine clothes, his pants and shoes are smeared with mud, his long and greasy hair sticks to his forehead, and his unshaven beard shows signs of days of neglect. JAN's white-tooth smile offers a pact of non-aggression.

JAN

Shh...don't speak so loudly...you'll wake up the wolves.

ANNA

Who are you? Don't come near me! Hey! I told you to stay away!

JAN

Fine...don't be scared. Calm down...I won't go near you; I won't go near you...

ANNA

(Sitting up with dignity while holding on tightly to her suitcases like someone holding on for dear life.) Who are you? What do you want? What are you doing here?!!

JAN

Gee, I'm not even at the border yet and I'm already being interrogated?

ANNA

Let me go on my way, and you go back to wherever you came from. Move out of the way!

JAN discretely wipes his hand and politely offers a handshake. His polite gesture is in stark contrast with his appearance.

JAN

My name is Jan.

ANNA

Good for you.

JAN

Aren't you going to tell me your name?

ANNA

That's none of your business.

JAN

We're 95 kilometers away from Bolter. If we're going there together, the first thing we should do is introduce ourselves. Where are you from?

ANNA

Who said we're going there together? Bolter? What do you mean?

JAN

We're going to the same place.

ANNA

How do you know?

JAN

You're carrying two suitcases and you look like a runaway.

ANNA

I'm not running away. Running away is for cowards.

JAN

Everyone on this road is doing the same thing. You shouldn't feel ashamed.

ANNA

I'm not ashamed.

JAN

It's called the survival instinct.

ANNA

(Pushing him aside.) Well, if you want to survive, move out of my way!

JAN

Or what? Are you going to shoot me?

ANNA

Don't you doubt it!

JAN

You're not armed.

ANNA

How do you know?

JAN

Show me.

ANNA

If you make me take it out, it'll be to shoot you. Move out of the way!

JAN

You haven't told me your name.

ANNA

You don't need to know my name at all.

JAN

I'm not going to rat you out.

ANNA

But I will if you don't let me pass!

JAN

Okay, go right ahead.

ANNA

Thanks.

JAN

No problem... (*ANNA is walking away.*) But if I were you, I wouldn't keep on walking...!! (*ANNA turns around and JAN points to the horizon.*) It's almost daybreak...

ANNA

So what?

JAN

Do you see anyone else on this road? It's easier to see us in the daylight and there's an order to hunt down fugitives.

ANNA

Do you think I don't know that? But I'm no snake hiding from the sunlight. And let me correct you: there's an order to detain those who are un-do-cu-men-ted at the border...

JAN

You have a visa? You have a permit allowing you to cross over the fence?

ANNA

(*Proud and arrogant because for once SHE's on the winning side of this conflict.*) They're going to give it to me in Bolter.

JAN

So, why aren't you going by train?

ANNA

Because there are guards on the train, and police who ask the same dumb questions as you. I'm under suspicion until I get my visa.

JAN

You're a lucky girl. A work visa?

ANNA

Yes.

JAN

What kind of work do you do?

ANNA

I'm a cook. But it's none of your business!

JAN

Maria, the cook.

ANNA

My name is not Maria.

JAN

As long as I don't have a name, I'll just call you Maria.

ANNA

Whatever...

JAN

Seriously, Maria, it's better not to go until it gets dark. If they catch you without your documents, they'll arrest you.

ANNA

I know...I know...I know... You think I don't know that?

JAN

And I can assure you that it's no joke at the border police station.

ANNA

I can imagine.

JAN

And it's worse for women.

ANNA

By any chance, have they ever arrested you?

JAN

Three times.

ANNA

Three times? And you still haven't given up?

JAN

(HE unbuttons his shirt and shows her the scars on his chest.) It's your first try, right?

ANNA is horrified by the sight, and begins to feel insecure. SHE has lost all the

momentum to escape. The horizon threatens to lose its intense darkness, and a faint thread of light expands slowly, like blood dripping on linen. ANNA knows all about injuries-SHE has helped heal many wounds-in the same way SHE knows the horror of war and the cruelty of the merciless. The daylight can't be stopped either, soon the sun will rise. The unexpected song of a lark sounds a chilling warning.

ANNA

Where are you thinking of hiding during the day?

JAN

I've put my things behind those bushes. And you should do the same. (*HE takes a few peanuts and almonds out of his pocket.*) Want some?

Making up her mind to take his advice, ANNA sits on one of the suitcases so as to not dirty her clothes. They just put the brakes on her like a moving train. All the months of planning have been derailed.

ANNA

I have my own food, thanks.

JAN

You wouldn't happen to have condensed milk?

ANNA

Yes, I do.

JAN

Um...um...won't you offer me any?

ANNA

No.

JAN

I have some jerky...

ANNA

Me too.

JAN

And dried meat...

ANNA

I'm not going to barter with you.

JAN

I need sugar.

ANNA

Why? Are you by any chance diabetic?

JAN

Well...

ANNA

Like dad... (*SHE mutters to herself while SHE discretely takes out a white sweet treasure out of her suitcase--an unopened tube of condensed milk.*) Take it. But don't drink it all at once.

JAN

Thank you!

ANNA

No problem and good-bye. I can't stop now! I can't wait till it's nighttime again! I'd waste too much time! They're waiting for me at Bolter. They're waiting for me at Bolter on the thirtieth of the month. And you...what about you...? Have you ever thought that it might be safer crossing the woods instead?

JAN

(*Staring at her patent leather shoes and the outfit of the hard-working middle class young woman.*)

It's possible you could cross the border more easily dressed as a classy young woman, but you won't make it across that mountain with those heels and without tearing your stockings. They sure are pretty! Are they silk?

ANNA

I'll take them off. (*SHE looks down at her feet. SHE knows that a person stands out by her hair and shoes.*) I don't have any other pair...but these have a low heel. They're comfortable and so pretty... They're dancing shoes, you know, though I never got the chance to use them for a party.

JAN

I figure it can take six, seven, maybe eight days of brisk walking up the mountain trail to Bolter. You have to go up and around that hillside and it's steep. Impossible to do with suitcases...especially those! What do you have in there?

ANNA

Have I asked you what you're carrying?

JAN

I'm only carrying a backpack with food and a blanket.

ANNA

Nothing else?

JAN

It's what I need. The best luggage is money and contacts. What do you have that you can't leave behind?

ANNA
Clothes.

JAN
You're going to need two suitcases full of clothes?

ANNA
Summer and winter. It's cold up north. I'm also bringing a blanket, a pot...and a few other things you don't need to know about.

JAN
Are you also bringing some silver spoons?

ANNA
No.

JAN
How about a bronze candelabra? Or something made of gold?

ANNA
No.

JAN
Jewelry?

ANNA
The only jewel I have is my grandma's medal that I always wear. So, if you're some kind of a thief, you can look elsewhere. I have little to offer you outside of this medal and condensed milk.

JAN
Milk is exactly what I need! (*Trying to grab hold of her suitcases.*) Why do your bags weigh so much?

ANNA
They don't weigh much. I'm just tired. (*JAN takes one of her suitcases away from her.*) Hey, you! Let go of it! (*JAN plays around.*) Give it back to me! Bring it back!

JAN
I'd say it weighs around 13 kilos. If it's all condensed milk, you can sell it on the black market.

ANNA
Give it to me! (*The suitcase suddenly bursts open, and to JAN's amazement, all its contents spill out.*)

JAN
Papers?

ANNA

(Quickly putting the papers back and feeling naked.) You're rude!

JAN

As soon as they open that suitcase at Customs, they'll make you translate every page, one by one. Is there something incriminating?

ANNA

Why are you acting this way? This is not a game.

JAN

It sure isn't a game! Your life is at risk. Even though you...you don't have to jump the fence, you have a permit...The gate is open for you. You have a job as a cook...and a bunch of papers that can surely open doors for you. Tell me...are you some kind of a spy? An informant? What's in those notebooks?

There's the sound of a motor vehicle. ANNA and JAN jump up quickly and hide in the bushes while it inevitably becomes day.