

The Host

Nils Verd

2021

Dedication and Acknowledgment

I thank and dedicate this book to everyone who, even being used, even living in difficulty, even giving to others what they hold dear, can still see hope, still manage to smile, and show me that life is always greater than our sumptuous dreams.

The Host

Illustration

Vinicius Buzzatto was born in Curitiba, Brazil. He studied at the School of Music and Fine Arts of Paraná from 2009 to 2016, graduating in Printmaking and specializing in Visual Poetics. During his journey, he was invited to instruct at the Museu da Gravura Cidade de Curitiba, where he taught between 2015 and 2020. His research encompasses traditional etching techniques, as well as the production of materials and equipment, extending through painting and drawing. Vinicius Buzzatto, in this etching series that comprise The Host, given the superimposed perspective, expresses himself by feeling, raising awareness, and materializing through etching the reflections shared by the Host.

Instagram: @vibuzzatto

English Translation

Rafael Belomo was born in Curitiba, 1977. His interest in languages dates back to when he was a child. As the son of a Portuguese Language teacher, it was a matter of honor to do well in that subject. He began studying English as his first foreign language when he was 11 years old. Later, came Spanish, Italian, French, Esperanto, Turkish, and a little of any language that crosses his way. Graduated in Business Administration at Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná, he spent over ten years acquiring experience and developing his career in the business and financial education areas, both in Brazil and in the United States. His academic background includes Effective Written Communication, Corporate Entrepreneurship, and Marketing at Harvard University Extension School, as well as a Bachelor of Arts (Licentiate) in English/Portuguese at Unicesumar. In 2010, he decided to change his career path, so he set up Belomo Language Services and has been teaching English as a second language ever since, along with translation projects in Portuguese, English, Spanish, and Italian.

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The Death

(Chapter I)

The night inched along to once again be taken by light, which always reigns firmly after another night has passed. The sun always devours the night, and then it is devoured by the latter, in perfect balance, day after day, in an endless war.

The night that progressed serenely, although its ending seemed eternal, foreshadowed the final moments of a king who, like the night, would be gulped up, but by death, which comes for everyone in an irreversible process, since there would be no return.

If the relationship between day and night is one of alternation, between light and darkness, the same could not be said of the relationship between life and death. Death touched only once, in a moment of sadness and pain, not for the one who was leaving but for those who stayed. The king had lived his time and soon his life would come to an end, just like a candle that has its appointed end, after so much glow, by burning its body for a brief whisper of time.

He was a wise king who skillfully and effortlessly ruled his people. All the peoples of the earth, from north to south, from east to west, were united around a single realm, something imaginable for such confused beings.

A wise king who made everyone happy, so he thought. In every city in the world, people prayed for a king who was now going to find a new life after having lived so intensely.

In his sumptuous room, well into the 21st century, more precisely in 2013, he felt happy for what he thought he had done, and at that moment no one was able to deny the feeling of a triumphant, well-lived life, to someone who was

already arm in arm with the approaching night, decreeing an end to that cycle.

- My king, I came as fast as I could and forgive me if I took too long, but the roads from Lisbon to here were in terrible condition, and the sea conditions were not conducive to a long journey. The ships, despite being strong, are not strong enough to endure so many waves and winds. In the dark, rocks are always the meeting point between two things that don't love each other. - Said his only living child, one of several he had during his long life. The others he buried with his own hands. Exactly sixteen children he had, with seven women. He had sworn he would never have another child or love another woman again, due to the pain he felt as his years passed and the people he loved were gone while he stubbornly lingered alive.

His last child came from a warm night out, in which drinks distort reason and sharpen feelings, booze and women, who even unloved can provide some flashes of deep love between bodies that want each other just at that moment. From that encounter came his last son, and this time, for the first time, the natural order would prevail and the son would bury the father.

- It's so good to see you once again before I close my eyes forever. I want to make sure you take my place and take care of my people.

At this moment the old king's eyes tried to let some tears run, but they wouldn't flow. It was possible to see the tears running abundantly in the eyes of the people who were in the room, as a sign of the farewell scheduled to take place in a few minutes.

Everything had been magical in the life of this king, who accepted everything naturally and never questioned the fact that he had been alive since 1730. He was born in a small English town, in an old house devoid of dreams, and plunged into the misery of his parents and his eight siblings.

In his long 283 years of life, something unimaginable in that world of peace, he did not remember his long and distant past. The truth is that, at the age of twelve, he was playing near a cliff after a long day at work with his father and siblings, tilling the land to sow and harvest its bearings before winter came to make life even more difficult for those people, who only had their bodies and the illusory dream for better days.

And it was playing on this cliff, that without realizing the danger, alone one late afternoon, he fell and only did not die because he managed to hold onto a small gap in the rocks, a few meters away from the plateau where he was playing.

This passage of his life he remembered very well, for it was at this moment that his destiny profoundly changed. Many other passages of his life were erased by the years and tasks that would come and go in his rich and delightful life, full of happiness but sometimes hurt, with small wounds, that would heal more due to stubbornness than by time, which makes us forget things we don't like to remember.

Still in the cave, he screamed in the foolish hope of being heard, for there one could only hear the cold wind that passed through the rocks in small bumps, whistling, as if announcing the death of someone who would soon leave this life, either by hunger or by falling during a unsuccessful cliff climb attempt.

Far away, beyond the wind, one could hear the fury of the sea shattering against the rocks that protected the cliff, as if in anger at the great rock that impeded its advance. He, at the age of 12, desperate, just screamed and cried for his fate that seemed to come to meet him, like the waves of the sea that meet a rock and dissolve in it, without any possibility or intention of changing direction.

With nightfall, which brought the usual cold of a summer that had not yet settled in, and with the hunger that was always present in that slender and fragile body, sleepiness came and he began to give in to that pleasant feeling of drowsiness.

Wanting to sleep, he tried madly to forget the pain that the approach of death imposed on him, trapped in that place.

He then lay down where it was possible in the chasm, curling his body and pulling his legs so that they would fit properly in that place. Before, he threw away the remains of an old nest that still contained the body of an almost dry chick, and he didn't get scared, or didn't hear, the last chirp of the dry chick, which should have been dead by then.

He closed his eyes, but not without first offering a prayer to his saint of devotion and, of course, in the midst of his fervent love for Saint Mary, mother of Jesus, he made his request:

- My Saint Mary, I beg you to get me out of here. If I go out tomorrow, I promise that I will be a good boy, that I will always listen to my father and mother. I promise.

His closed eyes took him into the world of his dreams and his body relaxed, relieved from the sensation of hunger and the pain from the wounds that had been imprinted onto his frail body, resultant from the fall he suffered into that chasm. When he sighed deeply, sinking into the sleep he had thrown himself into as if by magic, his eyes opened and looked out into the night that had already settled.

During that night, his eyes shone and, in them, there was no more despair or pain. There was just the wonderful contemplation of a picture that was too spectacular, but that we do not value as we are used to visualizing it every day. It was a starry night, with enough stars to fill any sight.

The night brought a warm, refreshing breeze and the wonderful sound of seawater caressing the rocks of the cliff below, like two lovers.

The body, then lying down, sat cross-legged and lay there, contemplating that beautiful picture for the first time seen by his eyes, in a profusion of colors, aromas, and sensations. In the beginning everything was intoxicating, and then it became fantastic.

How many would not give their lives to see the world as it was seen at that moment? His eyes fixed on the immensity of the new, which was lost in the grandiosity of the darkness. They only blinked every now and then to moisten the eyes that savored everything.

How much would he give so that he wouldn't have to blink and look at that endless beauty forever? Sometimes a meteor would cross the skies, leaving its path marked in the air and drawing his attention, but even so, he did not take his eyes off the line that set the limits between the stars and the sea.

The silver moon reflected in the waters of the sea gave a sensation of vastness and increased the size of the sea, so that the stars seemed to fall from the sea, towards the sky, there on the horizon line.

How could the sea love the cliff and the stars, and the two of them not be jealous? And so it went on for all those years to that body, sitting in the little gap watching, day after day, the life that blossomed after the gap, until the eyes were consumed by time in a bent body and sitting in a secluded gap, just to see what they were shown.

And that king, still a boy who would soon die, slept in his dreams, having forgotten his pain as his body sat down and let another contemplate what he had always seen and never cared about. The boy, still in the chasm, at a given moment woke up, and, in his dream he thought he was awakened by the morning light because he thought that the night was dying for a new day that was born. Upon rising, however, he saw that the light was not that of a new day, but of a saint who illuminated him and lovingly awaited him to rise.

At first, he looked at the woman floating over the sea, very close to the hole he was in, a little scared and afraid. As she approached him with a smile on her lips, he felt safer and sat in the gap.

- Are you the Saint Mary?
- Yes, that's me.

- Have I died?

- How can someone so happy and important to me die in my hands? I would never let that happen. One day you will die and I will be there to receive you, but this is not the time.

Of all his forgotten recollections throughout his life, this was the only one the king kept in his memory: the certainty that, on the day of his death, Saint Mary would take him to the kingdom of heaven.

If on the one hand it is comforting to know that you are loved to the point that there is someone in your life who always looks out for you, on the other hand there was a responsibility to keep the promise, so the word given would never be broken.

The boy in his dream, imagining that he was in his crack on a cliff, looking so happily at Saint Mary projected in front of him, was so happy that he let out a smile, not caring about the sound of war made by the sea against the cliff.

- My little child, soon the sun will come up, and at this moment, look to your right. There you will see small bumps, just above your head where you can place your hands and pull your body up, supporting your feet on the rocks and gaps I made for you. Don't be afraid, for even though you don't see me, I will be by your side helping you and silently encouraging you. Remember that my hands will never fail to help you if you need them.

- I promise to be a good boy, and...

It was not possible to hold back the tears that flowed from his eyes and were carried by the sweet breeze that passed through the chasm, as if he wanted to fill the already full sea, with salty and happy waters, with his tears.

- Why are you crying, my precious Eduard?

- I have been so mean to my brothers and parents, and now I'm facing the mother of Jesus who comes to help me. I wonder what I have done to deserve such a great gift.

The image approached the poor child, who wept copiously and now wet the gap, which was too dry in those

days of a summer not yet fully settled. She then reached out her hands and touched that distressed, thoughtful face. She caught a few tears and moistened her hands. How could anyone express so much pain just by letting their eyes get wet with the water he'd once consumed himself?

- You can't imagine what you've done for me, my sweet Eduard. During the night, as you slept, I sat beside you and could see the world in this chasm, caressing you while you just dreamed the sweet dreams I put in your mind that will never be erased while your body stubbornly lives for centuries. And looking at the sea, I saw the stars and the moon feasting on the horizon, while the sea spoke to me things that I knew were always there, but I didn't hear it or didn't want to understand it. You've already given me so much in return.

Eduard did not understand what she meant by that. Everything seemed enigmatic. But his tears were drying up with the caress that was given to him, in an affection such as his mother rarely provided, in that hard and briefly finite life of poor people who lived more like slaves than free creatures, despite having no chains.

- Do you want to ask me something?

- I only ask that you be a good king, that you govern with love and respect. Do it for me, free my children from the judgment that life imposes on them by the lords who today devour this world, but who are also my children.

- Will I be a king?

- If you wish, you will have my support, but only while your path is for peace and the development of the world you dream of every day. I know everything you think and dream about the world, and your dream is beautiful. I got into your soul and saw the world you live in and the one you would like to live in. It captivated me deeply.

- I promise, my kind and beloved Lady.

And they stayed like that, looking into each other's eyes as the sun rose over the horizon, at the same time Saint Mary

disappeared in front of him, like a cloud that departs when the wind blows. Of course, there is no greater faith than that which is seen through the eyes of those who have it.

Eduard, then, replete with happiness, got up from his cell, not only because he was sure he would live and leave that place, but because he would one day be the king of a people who wanted, like him, just to be free.

The sun was already up. Eduard, sure that he would leave that place, supported himself firmly in the exit of the chasm and looked at the wall to the right of the hole, as had been said by the apparition. On the right, just above his head, there was a ledge, where he placed his hand and, on a small rock, he supported his left foot and thus threw his body out of the gap in search of his freedom.

Ledge after ledge and stone after stone, he lifted his frail body over the cliff. Near the top, after 30 minutes of climbing with difficulty, he supported one of his feet on a loose rock and almost fell. He just didn't fall because he kept himself suspended by holding himself on one hand.

He despaired, losing the faith he had gained. With his strength gone and again crying when he felt alone, he just didn't fall because he heard a soft voice telling him:

- Remember, I'm here, don't be afraid. Have faith in yourself!

His strength returned as if given by a supernatural being, an angel, or by God. Soon, his hands lifted him and his feet found a place to lean on as if dug by them. It didn't matter how, but he was heading towards the long-awaited freedom.

When he reached the top, his body was thrown onto the grass and he felt happy and relieved. Relieved that he was able to win the challenge, and happy that he was now making sure someone was looking out for him.

Already at the top, lying on the grass, he slept under the sun that warmed the day of his freedom. He was now another person, no longer just a boy, but a man who knew what he

wanted and what he had to do. There was a smile on that face, imperceptible, but it was there for anyone to see and for anyone to feel.

When the weariness had passed, he sat down on the grass and ate some strawberries that bloomed near his hands. The strawberries hadn't been there the day before, but that wasn't important. At this point, all that mattered was the sweetness that he felt in his mouth. An undeniable magic of unparalleled sweetness.

Still sitting on the grass, he didn't understand how the daylight could be such a deep blue and the wind so pleasant. Even the sunlight on his skin was different now. The heat was deep and pleasant as if the light directly touched his soul, not his body.

The scents and breeze coming off the sea were pleasant, intense, and totally ecstatic. His eyes saw precisely what they touched and even the small insects and birds that flew in the distance were seen so perfectly that he believed he could touch them if his arms were raised.

It was as if he was in heaven, but he was alive and his senses deceived him like that. Eduard felt alive and he really was. But, deep into a chasm on a cliff, sitting, with his eyes open, watching the sea that incessantly tried to embrace the cliff, and where birds flew freely.

In that chasm was his body, which had been left there. The truth was, the body and himself were in the same place. He only believed that he had left with divine help, but no. He didn't see it, but the other saw what his eyes could see. The truth was, he saw what wasn't quite true. He was free, but only in his thoughts.

He now lived in an unreal world, full of sensations and emotions, but his body was still in the chasm, sitting with his eyes open, falling in love with the fantastic world he was being shown.

Within the body, that in return gave him dreams, there was someone, or rather something, that ate him like a hungry and petty person, devouring what was given to him, with such force and gluttony that he would never feel pleased.

When the strawberries ran out, a fourteen-year-old boy appeared on his horse. Still far away, the image was forming with clarity as it approached Eduard. It was possible to see dignity in the horse and a semblance of freedom in the rider.

The skittish animal trotted impatiently, carrying on its back the load that had been imposed on it, a deer hunted by the young man on foot, guiding his hefty animal. Walking near the cliff, the gentleman and his horse saw Eduard and he, Eduard, recognized the boy, but he was the same boy from two years ago, nothing had changed.

- Who are you?

- My name is Eduard, son of Thomas and Gerferina. I live in a small house on the land of your father, Count Abdeman, my lord.

- I remember you. Two years ago, my father took me to collect the taxes and there was some discomfort, as it seems my father took more than what he was owed. I'd like to apologize for my father, he is not a good person.

- No need to apologize, my lord. You cannot be blamed for your father's actions.

- Yes. But these are past times. He is very ill.

- Ill? I didn't know that.

- Soon he will die. I will be the Earl of this place and use my father's name. On this day, everything will change. I don't want to live off the crumbs of other people's lives. I want to help change the lives of people in this place. And maybe you can help me.

- Me? But I'm just the son of a poor vassal.

- No. You, more than I, know these lands and what they can give us. Animals and people are part of your blood and that would help me understand this place and my people. I don't

understand the animals that run free through these fields and I see that even my horse shies away from my command, but lets itself be petted by someone who has never ridden it. The land, which feeds everyone, must be taken care of by the hands of those who know what it needs. I know nothing, neither of the animals that serve me, nor of the land that sustains me, and I even understand the people who use them. Both animals and land need to be understood precisely and delicately. You would help me to lead this county down a more suitable path than the one my father did.

It goes without saying that Eduard was delighted to be able to work for the future earl, helping him to change the things and habits of the people who had lived in that region for centuries. He, while stroking the beautiful horse, which with his head was touching him asking for more caresses, looked far away, into the lands he could see, in the opposite direction of the noise coming from the sea, and smiled deeply with the world he glimpsed from that moment on.

- And what can I do to help you at this time, my lord?

- Now I would like you to help me with the heavy deer I bring for lunch. Help me clean and roast this great animal and we will have an excellent lunch, worthy of two nobles who come together to think about a world that will soon be different. May this lunch mark this alliance forever in our lives, in such a way that hunger no longer exists in well-kept green fields. I hope that in this alliance the most important thing is always remembered and that food is honored for what it should always mean: more life.

The boy smiled. It has been a long time since he had eaten a piece of meat and, at that moment, he would taste something that would be offered to him as a contract, in which two think as one.

Quickly, the animal was cleaned and the fire was lit. The spices were generously found locally and thus they seasoned the meat. The two ate and talked like two eternal friends. There

was an extra tenderness in the young son of the Count as if at any cost he wanted to thank Eduard for the meat that he savored abundantly, still inside the chasm.

It was a fair exchange, he thought. One meat for another meat. And Eduard's flesh, which came by accident, or sent by God, greatly changed his life. The day was favorable not only for a new friendship, but mainly to thank Eduard for the gift of being able to see and think about the world around him, through his mind and eyes.

The earl's son, who was nothing more than a false apparition, infiltrated Eduard's dreams, began to love Eduard for everything he learned in such a short time. How much of his life would he not give right now to anyone who had in his mind, seen more of the world, or known more of life than Eduard did? However, what he was given already entranced him in such a way that, even if he were given less, in the face of everything he was before, it would still be great.

After having lunch and getting some rest, the two of them walked away while the horse followed behind as if it were watching two friends chatting incessantly. The first place they stopped was at Eduard's house.

The parents were thrilled to see their son who had not slept at home that night. The brothers hugged him and he felt like he had become the most loved person in that house. This had never happened to that young man. The strangest thing was seeing everyone at home, away from their chores.

- Dad, the fields are greener than yesterday and the seeds have already sprouted. It was so fast this year.

- Yes my son. I think we were blessed. Everything is going very well, we will have a good harvest this year and we will not go hungry. It even seems that Saint Mary blessed this family with her eternal love, in such a way that part of the love that spilled onto the earth turned our sweat into crops.

The cattle were strong, and the milk already drawn in a volume never seen before was ready to turn into cheese. The

fat hens with their chicks ran around the house. The pigs wallowed in the leftovers and the smiles were generous, as if the sun would never say goodbye to the day and winter would never touch those bodies with the intensity it always did.

- Father, this is the son of Count Abdeman...

- Lord, forgive this foolish peasant for his lack of manners. - And he bowed, as did all his children and wife.

- These formalities are not necessary with me. Your son is my friend, and so are you.

And so they were talking all around Eduard as if he were the only interest of all those people and animals. Everyone looked at him with a hidden smile, in a way. Even a caress on his skin or a word in his ear, even the singing of birds and the fruits of the trees seemed simply to give thanks for the feast, in which his body was consumed. While it was happening, in exchange Eduard had rather real dreams, as if life went on smoothly so that he could always be happy.

Eduard was still a child and did not suspect that everything was very magical. Someone more calloused would have suspected that, for so much joy, the meat must be being consumed somewhere, or it would be at some point.

There is no magic in this harsh world we live in, day after day, whether under the eyes of light or hidden in the shadows that form when the sun hides on the other side of the planet.

In a few days, Eduard was already the youngest Knight, the right-hand man of the Count, who shared with him the control of his county. He was polite, in the best possible way, but all that was presented to him were just small memories of the fragile memory, of a poor and immature child, which were kept and were accessed by the one who had his body and slowly devoured him as if he were imprisoning the soul and from it was sucking the energy of life, which kept a body connected to its soul.