

MEMORIES OF A TURKEY

A short time ago I was invited to eat at the house of a friend and, after they had served the other dishes, the turkey made its triumphal entrance, as is the custom on Easter for all those who respect the venerable customs and traditions of our country.

None of those present, including the host, were skilled in carving, since we were used to seeing the meat after it had already been carved. But whether it was because of the solemnity of the moment that demanded some sort of action, some absentmindedness, or some other reason not worth mentioning, the whole bird was there before us asking for the carving knife; so I made a decision and, putting my faith in God, and in my memory of the course I had taken in high school where they gave us instructions concerning this difficult task, I took the meat fork in one hand and the carving knife in the other and, come what may, I made a vicious cut.

The sharp knife penetrated all the way inside the featherless biped, and the readers can imagine my surprise when, in those inner regions, the blade struck another strange body.

“What the devil does this animal have inside it?” I exclaimed making a questioning gesture to the owner of the house.

“Why, what would it have?” my friend answered not showing any concern; “It’s full of stuffing.”

“What kind of stuffing?” I insisted, as I struggled to discover the reason for my great astonishment. “It seems like there must be papers since, judging by the way it resists, and the sound it makes when it’s touched by the knife, this animal is holding some documents in his belly.”

All those present laughed, when they heard my remarks.

Feeling somewhat annoyed by the incredulity of my friends, I proceeded to cut open the body of the turkey and when, after some effort it was finished, I said with certainty, as our Savior said to Saint Thomas:

“See and believe!”

And now, the others were just as astonished as I was. Once the breast of the bird was separated into two pieces and the bones were cut open, we could all see a roll of papers occupying the place where the entrails had been, where we would have expected to see some tasty and edible stuffing.

The owner of the house frowned. The joke, if that’s what it was, it could only have been done by the cook, and as a joke, one would have to say, it was a little over the top.

After the first moment of astonishment had passed, during which they were at a loss at what to say, the other guests exclaimed:

“Let’s see what’s on those papers.”

The papers were, in fact, filled with writing. At the risk of getting my fingers stained, since they were quite greasy, I pulled them out of the turkey and moved toward the light where I could read the manuscript, which I have not published before:

Impressions, loose notes, and philosophical thoughts of a turkey for the purpose of writing his Memoir.

I do not know who my parents were, the place I was born, or the part I am to play in this world. I do not know, therefore, where I came from, or where I am going.

For me there is no past and no future; whatever I was, I don't remember, and what I will be does not concern me. My existence, limited to the present moment, floats in a sea of created things like one of those luminous specks that swim in a ray of sunlight.

Without ever being able, or even trying, to determine where I came from, I have found myself alive; and since they say you should not look a gift horse in the mouth, without arguing or worrying about it, I have tried to take advantage of it in the best way I can.

Because the truth is that on those pleasant spring days, when the mind is full of dreams and the heart is full of desires, when the sun seems brighter and the sky is a deeper blue; when the gentle, warm breezes waft around us full of pleasant aromas and notes of distant music, when from the surroundings, one absorbs a subtle fluid that enters the blood and enlightens the soul, one feels an indescribable, diaphanous, and enjoyable pleasure in oneself, and in everything that is around us, and we have to admit to ourselves that life is not all that bad.

Mine, at least is quite acceptable. For a turkey, that is of course.

Day has not dawned, when the rooster who is one of my companions here in the shed, informs me that it is time to get up and go look for something to eat. So I open my eyes, I ruffle my feathers, and there I am, all dressed up and ready to go.

The first rays of the sun that shine over the mountains cast a golden glow on the smoke that rises in blue spirals from the red chimneys of the town; they brighten the drops of dew hidden in the grass, and cast a web of lights like a constellation of fallen stars on the broken pieces of glasses, plates, and dishes, that have been left in the mound of garbage, toward which I direct my steps.

During the time that stretches from morning to afternoon, I spend time either chasing an insect that flies away and hides, and then appears again, or I dig in the damp ground with my beak where, from time to time, I find a tasty seed to eat. Later that afternoon the gentle sound of flowing water draws me toward the banks of a nearby stream where, in harmony with the music of the air, the water, and the leaves in the poplar trees, I open the fan of my feathers to attract the admiration of the innocent hen, the beautiful lady of my dreams who, if she were seen, would be the envy, not of the rustic peasants who frequent these parts, but of the illustrious admirers of Galatea herself.

So that is my life; today like yesterday, and tomorrow probably like today.

Repeat this page as many times as there are days in a year, and you will have a good idea of the first part of my history.

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The unchanging serenity of my life has been disturbed, like the waters of a pond into which a stone has been thrown.

An unusual restlessness has taken over my spirit, and I often find myself thinking of strange things.

This increased activity of my mental faculties creates a great imbalance in my regular habits; I can barely sleep for eleven hours, and yesterday the pit of an apricot caused me indigestion.

I have always thought that there was nothing beyond the mountains that fill the horizon around our village. But now I have heard it said that we are going to the Capital City, and that in order to reach it we are going to cross over the granite rocks, which I have

always considered to be the end of the world. The Capital! And what would it be like? It seems that I will soon find out.

I am writing these lines in the shed where I usually sleep, taking advantage of the last glimmerings of twilight. Tomorrow we will leave. That seems rather precipitous to me. Fortunately, I won't have to worry about packing.

It is the next day, and I have stopped on the top of a ridge that surrounds the valley where I lived in order to look one last time at the land around our enclosure.

How fitting it would be if this sad elegy, uttered from the place where I am saying my last goodbye to my former home, were entitled: *The sigh of a turkey!*

From here I can see the fields where I hunted for food; further on is the stream where I was able to quench my thirst, and which served as a mirror where I could admire my beautiful feathers. That is also where my turkey hen lives; next to that tree is the place where I saw her for the first time and, at the foot of that other one, is where I once declared my love!

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Tears are obscuring my vision and, try as I may, I can't seem to stop crying, no matter how hard I try.

It feels like leaving this place is tearing out a piece of my heart which, in spite of my absence, will still be part of it!

Could it be that this feeling is a foreshadowing of some future misfortune? Could it be that...?

A blow from a cane shook me out of these reflections, and I immediately start running to catch up with the flock, so that the warning would not be repeated.

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We are now in the Capital. Someone had to tell me, and then repeat it several times, before I could actually believe it. This is the Capital? Is this the paradise I dreamed of when I was still in my village? My God! What a horrible disappointment!

The sun has to struggle in order to cast its rays into these streets whose houses seem to be castles; there is not a single blade of grass growing in the empty cracks between the cobblestones; on the ground there is not even a discarded orange rind, a leaf of cabbage, or the pit of an apricot, or anything, in short, which could be considered edible.

In every street there is an obstacle; in every corner, a danger. When there isn't a dog chasing us, we are in danger of being run over by a carriage, or else some brute kicks us.

The cane never gives us a moment's rest. Night and day it is hanging over our heads like a new sword of Damocles.

I can no longer wander around wherever I feel like, and I can never stop to rest from our constant walking. "Go on, go on!" I am always told by the guide that accompanies us with his words and a blow from his cane.

How much more justifiable for me, than for that famous Jew from the legend, if they were to call me *The wandering turkey*.

When will this endless pilgrimage ever end?

I have lost at least two pounds; nevertheless, one of the men who stopped to look at our flock was saying how fat I am. If he could have only seen me in my former home, in my better days!

After he said that, he picked me up by the feet at least three times and examined me while I hung there, and then he let me go and continued the lively conversation he was having with our guide.

Now he has picked me up for the fourth time, and he must have gotten distracted while talking, because he has kept me hanging upside down for more than five minutes.

The whims of this fellow are really starting to annoy me.

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Is this some horrible nightmare? Am I sleeping, or am I awake? What is happening to me? It's now more than a quarter of an hour that I have been trying to overcome the stupor that has seized me, and I haven't been able to do it.

I feel like I have awakened from some terrible dream... And there is no doubt; I have been sleeping, or better yet, I must have fainted.

I am trying to figure this out. I begin to remember confusedly what happened to me. After a long conversation between our guide and the unknown fellow, the latter gave me to another man, who grabbed me by the feet and slung me over his shoulder.

I tried to resist, and I wanted to cry out when I saw I was being carried away from my companions, but my indignation, my pain, and the uncomfortable position in which they had placed me, choked the words in my throat. You can imagine how sad I was when I could no longer see them.

After that I felt myself carried through many different streets, until we started to climb up some steep stairs that seemed to go on forever.

In the middle of this ladder, which was so long it could be compared to that of Jacob, although no angels were going up or coming down, I finally lost consciousness.

The blood that was rushing through my head must have caused some sort of cerebral congestion.

When I came to, I found myself surrounded by a profound darkness. Little by little, my eyes grew accustomed to seeing objects in this darkness, and I have finally been able to distinguish the place where I am.

This must be what in Madrid they call a *buhardilla*, or attic. Old pieces of furniture, rolls of cloth, and curtains of cobweb, constitute the only furnishings in this dark room through which several rats are scurrying back and forth.

A feeble ray of sunlight is shining through the narrow skylight. The sun, the open air, the countryside! Dear God, what a multitude of memories rushes through my mind! Where are those happy days? Where are those...?

It was impossible for me to go on; an old hag had jammed fourteen nuts into my craw. Fourteen nuts, with shells and all. Imagine what my situation is like at this moment! And this is what they call giving you something to eat in this country?

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Lasciati ogni speranza! Several days have passed, and the horrible situation I am in has now been made clear to me. I have seen the sinister gleam of the knife with

which they are going to cut my throat, and I have contemplated with terror the pot in which they are going to pour my blood.

I can now hear the the drums which the children are beating to announce my death. My feathers, these beautiful feathers which I have so often opened into a fan, are going to be pulled out, one by one, and cast into the wind, like the ashes of a terrible criminal.

My tomb will be a stomach; and for an epitaph, the words of a night watchman who asks for a gift:

Se tu non piangi di che pianger suoli?

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When I finished reading this strange diary, we all were deeply moved. The presence of the victim made the story of his misfortune even more touching.

However... there was the force of habit, and there was hunger! And once the first few moments of our amazement had passed, we dried our eyes with the corner of our napkins, and we prepared to devour the corpse.