

Title: *Envisioned Visions*
Word count: 1918

ENVISIONED VISIONS

I sensed the threatening presence entering my bedroom. Although nothing horrid was visible, yet I knew it was there, right in front of my bed where I was lying paralyzed. My eyes were wide open, my mind was awake and aware of the hostile force that was approaching me in slow and laboured progress. I was unable to move or speak. I wanted to shout but my throat hurt, and I knew I would not be heard. I was alone, imprisoned by the inability of my body to protect me against the inconceivable suffering I would endure. My heart started racing uncontrollably and I felt a nagging anxiety that could not be relieved. The darkness that haunted my soul spread through every crack and line in the room until I woke up in cold sweat.

A shrill cry echoed in the room. When I regained control over my body, I realised it had happened again. I had suffered another episode of sleep paralysis, which had been recurrent for the last year. Doctors attach its causes to stress, sleep deprivation or eating disorders. Since I was a little girl, my rational, scientific and pragmatic upbringing had always protected me against the intangible and invisible, such as superstitions and the supernatural, which I conceived as realms of the imaginary world of Gothic literature.

But... the humming and hissing sounds, the whispers, and the emotions of fear and panic instilled in me were so vivid that I couldn't help experiencing them as real, rather than as mere hallucinations. It was 5.30 in the morning. I composed myself, brushed the hair from my eyes and went to the kitchen to prepare some coffee, one of the rarest commodities from the past that had been substituted by chemical drugs that had a stronger effect. In the New Age, comfort and practicality came to substitute small enjoyments of past experiences, such as the romantic sense in drinking coffee that gently and slowly heightened my senses.

I could not go back to bed and I wanted to revise the lecture I had to read on literature of the New Age, or as I liked to call it, the Literature of Relief that started to be written after

the psychological trauma that the world had suffered in 2020, when the way of life people had known and enjoyed would cease to exist due to the worldwide pandemic that made us aware of the extreme depravity, evil and degeneration with which we had treated Planet A. Indeed, we destroyed what should have been most precious to us: our Mother and Home. The nostalgia of the past and the terror of the future defined our new present.

Waking up earlier than expected had always given me a sense of security and control, specially at dawn, when the day is waking up and the night falls asleep. It is the pleasure of liminal moments, isn't it? to allow yourself a bit of private extra time before life's duties and expectations wake your "public you". It was at such times when I experienced loneliness at its best...another past relic.

I saw the new city emerging from the shadows in its vibrant and hectic mood. However, something unusual was going on... On that day, a general sense of paranoia invaded the city's atmosphere. The morning alarm that reminded us about the beginning of a new day had not sounded at its usual time, the blue brigades were not keeping peace in the streets, the supremes had not appeared on the large screens of the streets to notify us about our assigned duties and expectations and we did not know what to do... was it allowed to go out? should we stay home? How were we supposed to demonstrate our aptitudes as validate candidates for spatial migration? The earth was dying and we, the last link in the chain of human evolution, were living in the only habitable terrestrial island that had not been ravaged by the pandemic. The land of Realia, which was born out away from past shadows and evils, had been founded as a reborn land by the supremes, the keepers of scientific and technological development who maintained our perfect society by making us work towards a shared dream: Planet B. A Republic ideally perfect in respect of politics, laws, customs, and conditions, where only eligible humans could start anew. We worship Planet B, a land where we could re-experience the wonders of a simple life.

Suddenly, my watch-clock warned me that someone was requesting access. It must be Anna, the closest real person I was attached to apart from book characters... Not by choice, but because of practical reasons. After the many incidents of civil disobedience, it was better to be isolated rather than risk my position as a respectable person by misleading bad influences. After all, our reputation preceded ourselves, and the outside world's penetrating glare kept us under strict but subtle control. We were being watched and judged and we acted as if we were alienated from the world. The watch-clock read Anna's digital fingertip and she entered my apartment.

"Zhanna... I am really sorry to bother you but ..."

Anna started crying while her hands could not stop trembling. She was shaking a strip of ragged paper she was holding tight... I had never seen her in such a mental state. What was the cause for such a deplorable behaviour? We were not allowed to be so emotionally expressive. She was confused, unable to react with determination.

"Rick did not come home last night. I know that he works really hard in the glass bubble, but he left a suspicious note. I know something is going on and I am not brave enough to face reality on my own."

The same feelings that had invaded me during the night took hold of my soul, but this time I had an apparent real cause to justify the uncontrollable fear that my subconscious was creating. Deep inside me I was sure something was being hidden from us, something we couldn't see... not even perceive.

Anna's brother was one of the supremes who worked in space programmes design. Although he was, or at least, he pretended to be a perfect citizen, there was something turbulent in his character. He was self-conscious, perfectionist and very concerned about their abilities... he perfectly knew how others perceive him and it was something I felt uncomfortable about.

"Calm down, let me see"

I took the note and opened it without hesitation. The letter did not reflect his personality. His handwriting was messy, disorganised and even difficult to understand... as if he had written those few words under threat. It read:

Start the backup procedure. Took nothing. Escape through the underground tunnel of the cellar, below operating panel. I am dead by now. Save yourself. Sorry.

Deep in our souls, we both knew what had to be done. A simple glance was enough to run to Anna's flat, go to the cellar and get into the trails of the tunnel that Rick had built. We arrived at an armoured room. Anna's digital fingertip worked. Anna got into pieces when she saw her brother again. Rick was there, although not in his human shape. His virtual projection on the air gave him the appearance of a digital spirit, but his image remained unchanged. Rick had a message for us:

"Anna, listen carefully. The supremes started an experiment centuries ago. Since time immemorial, they had induced in humans the idea that progress would make us build a world in which happiness and fulfilment were more than moments, but a mental and permanent condition. I discovered that there isn't a Planet B. It is the image that controls and guides our present time. Space is an unattainable and intangible illusion that has come to be both the means and goal of human existence ... as everything else that builds our lives."

Rick's words were truth serum. A truth we had buried as hidden secrets below piles of fears disguised in insatiable desires. However, the burning pain instilled in us stressed the need to look for answers.

But, answers came to light without being invited, for as confusion still clouded our minds. Denying the obvious meant betraying ourselves. We were living in the age of social simulacra and simulation. A time in history when symbols and signs had become the most real bond to reality. The essence of experience had been lost at the expense of a dangerous

parallel reality, in which expectations, desires and unattainable goals built the imaginary world of Planet B. It was beyond the death of dystopia and utopia. They had been reduced to the dreams and nightmares of the previous generation. The present was simply the non-present, or, a third space between imagination and reality. We had to leave this liquid world in constant transition to experience our own lives in its purest essence.

We had two options: to forget what had happened during the last 3 hours, to come back to Realia, say nothing and continue being puppets of the society of spectacle that the supremes had built. We would be testimonies and accomplices of the simulacra. As such, we would live under the protection of both the physical and mental borders of Realia. Our existence was in a comfort zone. In the end, we were not used to listen to noises and feelings we couldn't understand, precisely because we were paralyzed instead of facing them.

On the other hand, we could sacrifice the comfortable lie of the eternal sleep paralysis we were suffering and escape through the tunnel to start living consciously. But, what was to be found on the other side?

Without saying a word, the decision was taken. We could not imagine what kind of victory was waiting just around the bend. We did not resign ourselves to living in the age of superficiality, where the most precious human right -our power to freely decide and act accordingly- had been substituted by an artificial resurrection of distorted images we tried to understand...but we couldn't... We rejected a present existence dominated by a totalitarian system built upon the nostalgia of the past and an imaginary future. We learnt that it is better to choose freely rather than being controlled by fake illusions.

I finally woke up from the nightmare that had tried to haunt me for years... or... was it an awakening of common sense? This time I learned to overcome the fear that had enslaved me.

13th January 2020. English as a Second Language Classroom.

The bell rings. Students barely listen to the teacher: "Please, guys, reread the passage again and analyse..." The teacher hands out the reading comprehension exercise. Students are not listening...they are already immersed in their virtual reality. They are gone. Students get up from the chairs and leave the class in a rush. Some of them do not even take the worksheet...

"Keep trying... Look for the silver lining" I say to myself "Someday, your lessons will regain sense beyond the classroom reality. Someday, someone will listen... truly listen. Someday, literature will restore us to sanity and poetic imagination will transform inhuman forces into symbols we could trust"

Exercise 1: Multiple Choice

1. The short story is an example of _____ literature.
 - a. Dystopian
 - b. Utopian
 - c. Local Colour
 - d. Realism

Exercise 2: Answer the following questions (between 120-150 words)

1. What would you do if you could revive the fable today?