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The Forest por M<sup>a</sup> Dolores Ballesteros

## The Forest

When he opened his eyes, he realized that he was shouting. Probably, he has had a nightmare but, where? He was lying on the ground and he felt a bit of tiredness and a great pain in the stomach. However, his curiosity was stronger than his stomach ache and he woke up. He was in the middle of an enormous forest of high and narrow trees. He couldn't see the end or the beginning of it. It was immense, dark and desolated; he felt this desolation in each bone of his body. He felt worried because he couldn't understand what he was doing there and he tried to remember where he was before but he couldn't. The last thing that he remembered was an intense light and the blue sky and the tree's tops above his head.

Then, he decides to walk, to try to find an exit in this massive forest. Little by little, the forest became darker. Neither an animal nor a living plant could be found there; all the trees were dry, not one of had leaves.

Suddenly, he saw a clearing in the distance. He ran. He ran as never before; perhaps he would find someone else there or in that he will remember what he was doing there. He approached more and more to the light of the clearing and in that moment, he had a flash:

*He was a seven-year-old child. He was playing on the shore of a lake with his new little boat. Then, he decided to board and to sail in the lake. All was all right but when he tries to change the course of the boat, it unbalanced and he fell down into the water. He couldn't breath, he felt the air escaping and unexpectedly, he came out of water and he saw this desolated forest; his parents and his little boat had disappeared, he could only see this immense, dark forest with no leaves. Suddenly, he perceives an intense light which grows more and more and finally it surrounds him. The next picture was the face of his father crying and his strong arms surrounding him.*

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He remembered it in a second. At the same time, a shiver ran down his spine. Now, he was covered in sweat and he was shaking. He had forgotten this event and the vision of the lake had made him relive this moment in a very realistic way. He was nervous. His mind couldn't assimilate all the events that he was living. He couldn't continue seeing the horrible lake and he started to wander again, aimlessly.

He couldn't understand anything. Where was he? It had to be the forest in which he used to spend the summer with his parents. However, it had changed a lot. It wasn't so big and dark; it was full of life and animals. Perhaps, both the forest and he had changed parallel: both of them had grown and both had aged.

Little by little, as he was walking, strange vapours which came from the ground clouded his track. At the same time, a murmur could be heard in the distance. Excited, he ran in that direction, he ran as much he could. He had the hope of finding someone who could explain to him where he was. Sounds became more and more close and he ran faster and faster. There were different voices, they were of some teenagers.

Suddenly, he stopped. He had arrived at a cliff surrounded by vapours which permitted him only to see a part of the rock wall in which the boys were scaling. He recognized these voices and these boys and another shiver ran down him:

*He was thirteen. Jack and David had decided that they must prove their strength climbing the white wall of the biggest cliff in the forest. Then, they started their little adventure with laughs and jokes. However, when they were at the middle of their feat, Jack began to feel bad, he looked down and he discovered in that precise instant that he had vertigo. Then, he, who was the youngest, tried to help Jack, approaching and trying in vain to comfort him. However, he slipped and he fell down in a projection of the wall. There, he saw the end of the cliff and the forest, but it was a different forest; it wasn't the place in which he was playing all his childhood, it was a dark and immense forest with tall and no-leaf*

*trees. All of a sudden, an intense light surrounded him and the next picture he saw was the white wall of the hospital.*

It couldn't be possible. How could he be hearing these distant voices of his teens?. How could he forget these extreme situations? The answer was clear: he had needed to have a five-year therapy with a psychologist to get over his traumas related with heights and with lakes. And now, he was trembling, frightened and crying such as when he was a child. But, at this moment, neither his parents nor his friends could help him. He was alone in the middle of a phantasmagoric forest which brought him specters of the past, fears which he didn't overcome.

Gradually, he began to calm down and he decided to analyze the situation while walking. It had to have any explanation: he may have fell sleep and he had to be dreaming, however he could feel: he had a strong pain in his stomach and step by step it was increasing. Another possibility was that he had drunk too much and he started walking in an unconscious way arriving at this forest. Nevertheless, it wasn't possible because the last memories he had been in his flat in London and there wasn't any forest with this extension and this kind of trees in this city and its outskirts. Then, where was he?

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Besides, he realized that he didn't know how long he was there; hours, days, who knows? He hadn't got his watch or his mobile. The last time reference he remembered was the 8 of December. However, how could he know what time it was? Well, if it was a sunny day, he could remember his years as a scout and he could make a sun-clock. Nevertheless, the tree's tops couldn't permit him to see the sun and the vapours which surrounded the cliff were spreading to all the forest. Then, he had neither

temporal nor space reference. He was lost in the middle of nowhere with no one and surrounded by a foggy atmosphere.

Step by step, he felt a calm coming over his body and although he continued to have a stomach ache, he felt better. He was walking unconsciously, without thinking where he was going and without seeing what was in his path. He was gazing into space, however something woke him up: there was a narrow clearing in the forest; the countless line of trees was stopped briefly by something which was narrow and long: a road; it only could be a road. He ran in this direction with all his might. He advanced thinking that he only had to follow the road's direction to find the exit out of this forest and the refuge of civilitation. When he arrived, he heard and saw a car approaching. He started shouting and jumping; he moved his arms frenetically but suddenly, he stopped. It was his old car, the same model and the same registration number. Then, he started to feel dizzy and he had a flash:

*They were in the middle of a French forest trying to find the hotel which they had booked. Kate was too nervous because there was horrible weather; there was an intense fog which surrounded the road. Furthermore, she was angry because he had ignored her indications and consequently they were lost in the middle of a forest without battery in the mobile phone. Then, they started arguing again. She complained about how he never listened to her; he reproached her for all her faults. Suddenly, they realized that the car was about to crash head-on with some trees. He swerved and the car turned right over. There, upside down, he tried to move his legs but he couldn't and he looked over at Kate, who was unconscious. Behind her, the fog was disappearing and he could see in the distance the enormous and fine trees surrounded by a dark and mysterious atmosphere. Then, a tremendous pain in his head made him faint. The next picture he saw was the face of the doctor who was immobilizing him and taking him into the ambulance.*

He was there, lying down on the ground. The road had disappeared and he could only see the trees' tops. He felt a strange calm and only the intense pain in his stomach kept him awake.

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However, he couldn't stay there as nothing was occurring. He had to find an explanation of all these events and an exit out of this terrifying forest.

He got up off the ground and he started again with his interminable walk. While he was advancing, he was analyzing his situation, trying to find a rational explanation for all these events. He had relived the three extremest experiences which he had faced in his life. The first one took place in Canada, the second one in his town in England and the third one in France. He couldn't stay in three countries at the same time; however he had seen the same lake, the same cliff and the same road. Well, perhaps he was seeing mirages because he hadn't had anything to drink or eat since he was there. That was a very possible explanation. Only a little detail didn't fit: he wasn't hungry or thirsty. Moreover, he didn't feel anything, neither cold nor hot, neither sadness nor happiness. Only calm enveloped him and the incessant pain in his stomach.

Nevertheless, he knew that he was forgetting something. An element which could clarify this situation was missing. Then, it became clear to him: he had to remember what had occurred before to understand his present situation. He started thinking, remembering. Suddenly, the images came to his mind and in this precise instant, he understood all:

*He was in his flat in the center of London waiting for Kate. Then, he decided to smoke the last cigarette before she came because she hated the smoke of cigarettes. However, the pack was empty and he decided to go out, walk a bit and buy another.*

*When he was in the shop, a suspicious boy came in and started speaking with the salesman. After a second, the boy took out a revolver and started shouting. He was hidden behind a set of shelves. Suddenly, the packet of cigarettes slipped between his hands and the boy shot him. Blood came out of his stomach and he fell over shouting desperately. The light from all the shop's light bulbs converged and surrounded him. The*

*next picture he saw was the blue sky and the trees' tops.*

Now, it all fitted perfectly and he understood these strange flashes which he had had. Then, he smiled with bitterness. Kate was right again. She always said that cigarettes would be his end. Finally, he lied down and he looked at the sky feeling the calm coming into his body. Suddenly, an immense peace surrounded him and in that moment, he realized that he was dead.

**Maria Dolores Ballesteros**