

Broken Glasses

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Trabu and David were waiting for Leño on Sunday morning at the park entrance. This consisted of three white stone benches and a lamppost. On one side of each bench you could see two poly—chromed metal drums due to rust, which the city council had put there as wastebaskets, as indicated by the motto written in white paint —TOSS BOOZE—. The floor was littered with the remains of pipes, cigarette butts, empty Styrofoam cups, and what had been ice packs. Behind the benches there was a stone wall that ended just past the last bench at the entrance to the park itself, which did have trees, grass, children's facilities and other things of its own. At the end of the park, not included in it although it did create a physical border with its black iron gate, was the town's cemetery.

David and Trabu had gotten together recently and had taken the middle bench; the first asked the second why he had not brought his bicycle as they had agreed to do the day before and as he himself had done —he had it leaning against the bench—, to which the second explained that he and Leño they had changed plans at the last minute, but forgot to tell him.

—What happened last night!? —That's where they were when that scream cut them off and drew her attention. It was the Log, who used it by way of greeting as he walked over to his bench with a grin from ear to ear.

—Like you don't know —Trabu replied, laughing with him.

David just shook his hand and greeted him as he sat down on the bench between him and Trabu, with Leño to his right. He wasn't very amused by what had happened the night before, he thought that if he hadn't been drinking he wouldn't have participated, although that didn't excuse him.

—We still went a bit too far, don't you think? —Finally she dared to say— I think we went too far with the joke.

Hearing this, Leño got up, went to the nearest drum, full of the remains of the party from the night before, and searched for something.

—Why? —he paused— For breaking two bottles? —According to what he had just said, he took an empty liter out of the drum and, without warning, threw it at David. Trabu had stepped aside, but David, thinking that his friend would only dare to feint, stayed put. The bottle flew past him and shattered against the wall.

Trabu started laughing heartily while David froze. He knew that those in his town had always been a bit of junk, but since the last time he had been there three years ago, things had gotten a little out of hand.

—Are you crazy? —David exclaimed— You almost hit me. And we broke the bottles in the middle of the road, do you know what can happen to us if we broke a car?

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—Don't get like that, I didn't shoot to hit you. And about the bottles... Don't be a shithead, you know we don't like shitheads in this town, right?

—I'm not a poop!

—You'll have to prove that.

While the other two were talking, Trabu was too busy with a cigarette to enter the conversation.

—How?

—You know that dumpster on Eucalyptus Street, the one that's almost reaching the tree? I want to see if you can outrun someone on your bikes.

—And which of the two is going to get involved?

—None, I was thinking more of a test dummy —answered Leño, putting his hand back into the jerrycan seeking bottles.

Ángel got out of bed in his house in town. His room had no windows, but during the day a lot of light came in from the rest of the house through the translucent glass door. The temperature in his bedroom was considerably lower than that outside, which was welcome on sweltering July days like this one, since it wasn't even eleven o'clock and the heat was almost suffocating; he had woken up covered in sweat. He had the room to himself and a bed twice the size of the one he had in Madrid, which was one of the things he liked best about going to town. He dressed in short jeans, a red short-sleeved T-shirt and sandals, washed his face and combed his hair in front of the bathroom mirror, where he only reached on tiptoe, and went to breakfast in the kitchen.

Upon entering, he said good morning to his mother and grandfather, who were sitting at the table watching television. She took the milk out of the fridge to make a cocoa milk. When he did so, the refrigerator fell silent for a second and when he closed it again, its usual buzzing joined that of the flies that were flying around the room despite the fact that, judging by the smell of lemon, someone had once again used that insecticide that Ángel had originally confused with any air freshener. Then he took the bottle of cocoa and a spoon from a rather shabby cabinet, poured a couple of spoonfuls, put the bottle back in its place and sat down at the table, which had a plastic tablecloth with fruit motifs, on one of the chairs of wood that there was, next to his mother.

—You have to go buy milk, we don't have any left, —the mother said as soon as her son took her first drink.

—And why me? Can't my brother go? I'm sure the bum hasn't gotten up and isn't planning to until one o'clock, can't you wake him up and let him go?

—Well, I'll tell you two things: first, that's not the way to talk for a nine—year—old, and second, it turns out that today your brother met with the people from town early. He has taken the bike, I suppose they will go for a ride.

—Bu—.

—Pay attention to your mother —sentenced the grandfather.

So Ángel finished what was left of his drink in one gulp, more than half of a large glass. He was cold enough that it wasn't pleasant, but he was too hot that it bothered her. Then he went to do the errand.

He came out of his house and looked around to see if cars were coming, a city mania that many people in small towns don't usually share. As he did so, he saw Trabu above the street and Leno below. He had to go through the intersection where Leño was, and when he did, this one stopped him. Two seconds later David arrived on the bike.

—Hello, little angel —greeted Leño mockingly. Come with us, we have a surprise.

—What kind of surprise? —Angel turned his eyes up the street, Trabu was no longer there. I have to run an errand.

—I'll vouch for you, little brother, don't worry —answered David.

—Hello! Trabu greeted, pretending that they had met by chance. He looked fatigued, as if he had just run a sprint.

—Really, it's an important errand —Angel insisted nervously.

—An I've told you told you that you're coming with us his brother answered. Angel replied, but it didn't matter anymore. Half forced and half dragged they took him with them.

For the move to go well, they had to reach the destination, which was two streets away —Cervantes Street, where they were, and the one known as Eucalyptus Street—, either without being seen, or at least not attracting attention.

They had no problem until they reached the junction with Eucalyptus Street, but this street was the first or second largest in the town, it faced north to an exit from the town and at its southern end it faced east to the exit to the Plaza del town hall and to the west it joined Cervantes Street, which was the most commercial and leisure street in the town. It was located to the east of the town and crossed it entirely from north to south in a straight line. Throughout the route from north to south, which was what they were going to do once they managed to reach the container, there were also numerous crossroads with neighboring streets perpendicularly. Even so, as a general rule, there was almost no traffic in the town.

As the four walked up the street from south to north, they met a neighbor who greeted them kindly. Trabu, Leno and David returned the greeting.

—Help me, ma'am,— Angel said instead.

—Ay ay ay. Let's see, what are you messing up? she asked slowly to the three kids.

—Don't worry, Dona Justi, we're just playing,— replied Leño calmly.

They hurried out without letting the little boy speak.

—If you do that again, I swear you're going to have a really bad time,— Leño threatened Ángel. Trabu punched the boy in the shoulder, causing him to cry out, to back up his friend's words.

—Are you dumb or what, huh? —David told Trabu when he saw what he had just done, throwing the bike and giving the one he was talking about a push.

Leño responded to David by grabbing him by the neck.

—Don't fucking mess with me or you'll pay for it,— he told him. David was trying to say something, but Leño didn't seem to have any intention of letting him go. He couldn't breathe. After what seemed like an endless time, he released him. After this he held out his hand to her in a sign of friendship. David was too scared by what he'd just been through to do anything but shake his hand and force himself to think that he really hadn't meant to hurt her, that he was just being a little rough. He took the bike and kept walking.

They ran into two neighbors again: Puri, who was cleaning the front door of her house by throwing out a bucket of dishwater, and Carlos, who was about to get into his car at that moment. In both cases, the boys greeted each other and Ángel, already under duress and with the non—existent help of Dona Justi, did not dare to say

anything again. David was also too scared to help his brother, he just kept repeating to himself over and over again that what he was experiencing was a bad day, but that after the nonsense of the container, his friends would leave them alone.

Finally they reached the top of the street, to the last houses of the town. There began the county road to the north and to the east a dirt road at the beginning of which rose a eucalyptus, which was responsible for the name by which the whole town knew that street.

Just where the street ended was a dumpster, green and little smaller than a car, with its lid open. The four of them stood next to him.

—Now? Trabu asked.

—Now! replied Leño.

Then they got into a fight with the little boy, who tried to defend himself, but could do little against two teenagers who were four years older than him. So they managed to get the kid into the container.

As they lowered him inside and closed the lid, David heard his brother scream and make what must have been a retching sound from the stench of the container, which hadn't been emptied the night before. The combination of high heat and organic waste of all kinds made it possible to clearly appreciate the stench emanating from that container from where David was, a few meters away and already mounted on the bicycle. Even so, he kept telling himself that nothing would happen, that the container would move a few meters, it would fall and his brother would come out unharmed, although with a good anger.

Trabu and Log began to push the container down the street, meanwhile unable to contain their laughter at what was happening. The container began to file past, David following close behind on his bike. He began to notice concern when he saw that the container picked up more and more speed and that his brother did not stop screaming uncontrollably. He wondered if he couldn't stop it at all, and a thought crossed his mind for the first time: "What if a car passes by?" This idea made him feel deeply stupid and ashamed..

Against all odds, or at least David's, the container continued all the way down the hill. He was following him closely with his bicycle, he couldn't do more. Finally, the wheels of the container collided with the sidewalk at the intersection with Cervantes Street, and the container, with Ángel and many kilos of garbage inside, was violently projected against the window of the Owl store, generating the sharp and brittle noise of a large crystal as it broke into a hundred pieces, many of which shattered again. This was followed for a second by silence.

All the people inside the store and its owner came out, as well as all the residents of the place who were at home at that time. The scene was grotesque: the

container had crossed the store until it was almost completely inside it, leaving scattered garbage around it and Ángel lying face up on the floor between it.

Hearing screams in the background but not understanding a word, David contemplated the state of his brother. He had cuts all over his face and body. He wasn't moving. David sensed more than he heard the people who had gathered there organizing themselves to call the emergency room and to go to his house to notify his family. He was totally paralyzed.

When his mother arrived he was still not moving.