

The graft.

They were happily traveling on vacation to a beach hotel. Time stretched almost to infinity, limitless for them. The road zigzagged playfully, skirting the mountains, with the adjacent big blue ocean. Justinian with his hair fluttering in the sea breeze, drove a four-seater sport coupe. Next to him, Shirley, his young wife, and in the back, Jeremiah, his twin brother. Due to the exhausting trip, they decided to rest among some trees on the side of the road. One caught their attention. It offered a welcoming shade, under a very thick right branch competing with the trunk. Curiously, it curved, as if embracing the contour of the mountain and in the direction they should follow. Justinian fell into a light sleep marveling at the exuberance and whims of nature. He was a few minutes older than his brother, born from the same womb, from the same amniotic sac. Justinian in his drowsiness, listened like a distant echo, the jokes that Shirley and Jeremiah exchanged. They woke up and resumed their journey. With the last rays of sunlight on the horizon, the atmosphere was gloomy. The so-called blue hour.

Shirley's occasional flirtations with her brother worried him, prompting him to ask her for a favor.

- Shirley, take off my wedding ring and read what is inscribed inside it
- he asked her gently.

- "Eternal love and only death will set us apart," she read softly.

At that moment her husband turned to see the reaction on her face. He lost control of the vehicle, skidding and crashing head-on into a granite

wall. He died on the spot. Jeremiah was seriously injured and the woman with some bruises.

The ambulances took them, wrapped in the wailing of sirens, to the nearby hospital. Justinian was taken to the morgue, shrouded with Shirley sobbing in the background, she hugged Jeremiah who was also crying. They were directed to the surgical emergency room. The case of the twin was very serious. He would lose his right arm because of severe tears in arteries, nerves, and muscles. She had only superficial bruises and abrasions.

- We have a one-in-a-million alternative for Jeremiah! the surgeons assured her. As they were identical twins, they could transplant the dead man's right arm, it was undamaged, with little chance of rejection; but they needed the informed consent of both survivors.

- Justinian will not need it in the grave - the wife nodded resignedly.

- I am of the same opinion; besides, it would be like preserving something of my dear brother - said Jeremiah with cold pragmatism.

Given the urgency of the case, a group of expert surgeons delicately extracted the limb and immediately took it to the operating room for the graft. It was a very long and meticulous work of about twelve hours, where a team of the best specialists among anesthesiologists, reconstructive surgeons and orthopedists joined all the tissues with precision. The latest technologies were used, a high magnification microscope for the union of the tiny blood vessels and especially the nerves. Drugs were applied that would decrease the chances of blockage at the neural junctions, a major

obstacle to the proper transmission of impulses. The arm was immobilized, and Jeremiah was sedated for several days.

In the meantime, Shirley was given painkillers and psychological support to help her overcome her grief.

Daily laboratory and physical examinations showed the acceptance of the foreign tissue in the new body. The coloring of the fingers, hand and arm in general were excellent.

There was no evidence of rejection or infection, it pleased them enormously.

After fifteen days, the skin scar was beginning to mature. With the widow's support, Jeremiah was adapting to his new condition day by day. Within a month it was well consolidated. Gradual rehabilitation exercises started, he complied with them without any problems. The sensitivity in his fingers and his fine movement were perfect. All that remained was to exercise the larger muscles.

Shirley had overcome grief and accepted her new reality. She encouraged Jeremiah constantly.

After three months he had a check-up. The specialists in regenerative and reconstructive medicine were 100 percent satisfied with his discharge. He would return for follow-up appointments, but they did not expect any rejection.

Jeremiah and Shirley left the hospital very happy about the spectacular recovery. They had bonded affectionately, establishing a relationship of greater and deeper acceptance. It was a symbiosis relationship, where he adopted the image of the gone man, with the symbolic right arm; she gave him emotional support, a propitious ground

for the relationship to move towards something more in the future.

Justinian's official burial took place in the family crypt, where he was buried in a luxurious coffin. The emotional scars still showed on the faces of the mourners.

Home life gradually resumed its routine. With Jeremiah as a guest, it became a little easier, even under the sadness and shadow cast by the recent death. Emotional fibers were still very sensitive in both of them. She had always sympathized with the twin, but preferred Justinian and married him. Jeremiah was most obliging to the widow and wanted to show his appreciation. She would sometimes get carried away with nostalgia and affectionately kiss the twin's right arm. The latter did not know who she was kissing, him or the longed-for memory of Justinian.

Gradually he began to wear the shirts of his deceased brother. He felt an irrepressible impulse to do so. This desire extended to the coats as well and since they were the same size, they fit him perfectly. Shirley tolerated this willingly as many had been given by her as gifts; she now perceived Jeremiah as more like her late husband. Another remarkable fact was that the twin, who was left-handed, began to write impeccably with his right hand as well, with the handwriting of his brother, who was right-handed.

Neurologists had no answer to this extraordinary and prodigious fact.

Sometimes he even wrote love letters, which he jealously guarded. Although they were both attracted to each other, she had not yet overcome the trauma. That was as far as the rapprochement went.

One year later, the family decided to exhume the body and cremate it to free up space in the crypt. That day, as usual, Jeremiah dressed in his

twin's clothes. He was just finishing dressing when he looked in the mirror behind him at a small chest. He opened it and found the wedding ring that had been taken from his brother's hand. He put it on following a strange impulse he felt coming from the same arm.

When he reached the place where the coffin was being taken out, she saw the ring and asked him anxiously for it. It was one of the few belongings she wanted to keep, as an affective responsibility that fluttered in her memory, towards her departed husband. He agreed immediately, but as he struggled with his ring finger to remove it, he was distracted and slipped. When he fell into the mortuary pit, one of the picks used by the workers, was embedded in his thorax, piercing, and mortally lacerating his aorta. He bled to death within seconds. His right arm was stretched out over the coffin, with the gold ring still on his finger. The terrified widow immediately jumped on the coffin, wrapped in tears. She finished removing the golden ring.

- "Eternal love and only death will set us apart" she read bitterly.

- This is the price we finally pay - she thought.

Shirley lightly shook Jeremiah, who was absorbed looking at his reflection, as if in a trance.

-We're waiting for you - she said.

He turned around and smiled. She kissed him gently on the cheek, they held hands and walked out.

A smiling and pleased ghostly figure watched them walk away from the mirror.

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