

## Auto de Fé

Sunday morning. The heat of the day began to get stifling as soon as the sun rose. An old man from the bottom of the village, his back bent by the insistence of time, dragged his feet along the ground as he went up Rua das Malvas. He turned up Rua Direita, which would take him to the Main Church, still beyond the houses on the outskirts of the village, as if asking someone to adopt it.

It was Sunday. It has already been said. The day of Mass. He never missed it.

In the old man's head, whether from the strength of the heatwave, or the wear and tear of use after so many years, or, who knows, by the power of his imagination to refuse to give up, the times and memories and vivid experience were all confused with the stories heard from other people, from other generations. And that was how, when he arrived at the main square and stood facing the Town Hall, he paused, looked up, listened and understood. From the neighbouring streets, the people from the countryside arrived in waves. Would it be the coming of Dom Miguel again? The return of the 'longed for, legitimate King'? Alas, no. Men and women crowded around the pillory. Many of them were attracted by the intrigue behind, in *the Praça da Vila de Cano*, on the steps of the fountain where the news arrived and the truth of each day became entangled. The most important local dignitaries came out onto the balcony overlooking the pillory, welcomed with hearty cheers from the street and from the voice of the choir. Below, to the left at the fishmonger's, salting was under way, which would soon bring the dried fish to the doors of the wedding feast. To the right, in the butcher's shop, the lamb ordered for the ceremony was hung up, the first of many to follow that would bring the whole afternoon to life.

Over in the corner on the right, in the basement of the council building, the prison bars guarded the condemned man. He let out a scream. Of distress. Of fear.

Every time he appealed, horrified in pain and despair, the people responded: - Death! Death!

From the belfry, high up, crowning its power, the bells rang out.

The old man had stopped in the midst of the populace. Lost in time, he couldn't distinguish what he saw from what he merely imagined. From the *Ovens of the Holy Order* - it seemed to him - a strange aroma of bread and peace was released, while from the sun streamed rays of light that made the 'ten halberds' from Cano sparkle.

From the square in front of the Church, the executioner arrived from below, dressed in black, his face hidden. The cries of 'death...death' grew louder and deafening as the condemned man arrived dragged by three soldiers.

In the background. At the end of Rua Direita. In the Main Church. The Sunday Eucharist began. The welcome chants were over. The priest went up to the altar. And with perseverance, said:

- *In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti.*

In the square, the congregation responded in chorus:

- Amen.

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