



A picture for eternity Santiago Vieto Many years ago, in the east, where forests do not sleep, fearsome beasts roam and the high peaks rip the heavens; where many villages lie covered by a veil of superstition, enigmas are counted by the thousands and mystery reigns, there lived a nobleman known as Aksa Aryan.

He was famed in the region for his kindness and the purity of his habits, for his great wisdom, the fruit of many years of study and long meditations. But curiously very few appreciated what the illustrious man considered to be the greatest gift that God had given him: the power to create a fantastic fictional world and to express his ideas in beautiful pictures.

Since his youth, he entertained himself by contemplating splendid panoramas and thinking of castles of crystal, silk lilies and trees full of life, whose glittering leaves of malachite, moved by the breeze, swayed in such a way that they seemed to communicate in an incomprehensible language.

His greatest suffering was always that his artistic ability was not on a par with his prodigious imagination and he was tormented seeing how all his efforts to capture his idealistic musings on canvas with dull brushes and insufficient colors were in vain.

With the passing of the years the wise Aryan came to be known in that distant place as the dreamy hermit. On very rare occasions was that once pleasant, talkative, and kindhearted man seen to leave his dwelling. Many talked of a strange obsession that had taken hold of him, and of how some people had seen him on the balcony of his house, spending long hours in front of an immense canvas, painting without rest, until the last sunbeams were resting tired on that enormous cloth.

It all began when he decided to paint a tree on that colossal piece of cloth. From childhood he was entranced by the contemplation of the beautiful white poplars in his garden known in the area as "trembling giants", which grew strongly, stoically and were a thousand years old. He admired their longevity, well his grandfather and great great grandfather had contemplated those same trees which despite lashed by countless seasons still remained firm and impassive with a combative demeanour as if defying the centuries to come.

This will be my masterpiece! he said, and dedicated hours to painting every leaf of this fantastic plant.

But there was something that seriously worried Aryan. It became increasingly clear that each day had to bring closer the day of his journey. A terrible journey with an uncertain end, which was impossible to postpone. Will I have time to finish my masterpiece? he wondered.

With the passage of time, the skillful and insatiable painter was completing the picture with an almost mystical background, composed of misty mountains bathed in the rays of a rising sun, which stained the snow-capped peaks in Alaming red and cheerful orange.

From the imposing mountains it seemed to flow like diamond glitter, a wellspring that in many picturesque curves brought over green hills, the crystalline waters that irrigated the forest. Yes, now there was a forest, that ended with loneliness of the tree. An exuberant animal life started to show on the canvas; colorful birds appeared like jewels hung on treetops, shrewd squirrels frolicked in the branches giving energetic jumps, albino deers and some picturesque rodents roamed the woods. The canvas seemed to not end, and the size of the work of art was taking on enormous proportions, almost as big as the fantasy of Aksa Aryan itself. Even, the stubborn elder was already thinking of completing this garden with one fabulous palace or tower of alabaster or ivory, and perhaps some decorated fountains with mythical animals, or perhaps a Alowery pergola. Sometimes, marvelous ideas sprang out of his mind like a geyser exploding with creativity that filled him with joy, but immediately saddened his unsatisfied soul, because he knew that many of these visions could certainly never be realized.

One day of storm, as usual, after a succulent breakfast, Aryan

went to work but was unexpectedly interrupted by the dull sound of someone knocking at his old door. It was one of his neighbors asking him for help, because the strong winds and the rain had wreaked destruction on his house and he needed help to fix the roof, and he now suffered from a severe limp. Always kind and generous, Aryan was prepared to go to his aid and began looking for his tools. Next to the shelf where they were kept, there was a vintage calendar on which his distracted gaze fell, at which point, as hit by thunderclap he realized something terrible; It was missing only one week for the trip and his masterpiece was not yet finished.

The spirit of Aksa Aryan was inundated with darkness, and the fear of abandoning his incomplete picture took control of him. After remaining still for a few seconds, he came back to his senses, and remembered his neighbor who was waiting him anxiously. From that moment, each second was precious and essential to achieving his goal. The question lashed his soul, what to do: help the poor cripple, or ignore him and go about his work? What would so much lost time be worth, if he found himself compelled to leave, leaving behind an incomplete picture? Who would give value to an incomplete picture? Facing this crossroads, charity took precedence over his desires, and considering that a clean conscience is the key necessity for being able to fly through the skies of a healthy imagination, the wise Aryan went to the aid of his neighbor.

He took his tools in his trembling hands and not wanting to think anymore, left his house in such a way that he looked as though he was heading to a battlefield. It was in fact a battle and not an easy one, because there is not a more arduous war than the one every human being fights with himself. After spending several hours in the midst of a tenacious battle against his old age, the rain and the cold, but mostly against his selfishness, he was able to fix his neighbor's damaged roof. After finishing the work, the cripple thanked him and the poor Aryan replied with a smile so forced that it seemed filled with irony. It wasn't easy for him to assume this charitable attitude, moreover because he knew well that the cripple was the leader in the region in criticizing his love of the painting. He was the same man who entertained himself by telling others that Aryan was a mad dreamer who had lost the final years of his life in useless chimeras. Back at home, despite

the fatigue, he wanted to go to work on his project, but soon after, exhausted, he fell asleep in a chair in front of his imaginary world.

The next day, this poor man began to feel very ill and his temperature rose without stop, forcing him to stay in bed. But more than the discomfort, what made him suffer was the thought that the time to complete his picture was running out and he could not do anything. Days passed and the progress he managed to make was truly minimal. Aryan could not sleep and the obsession with his picture made him lose track of time. A few days later the noble man was sitting in front of the painting in contemplation when someone knocked on his door. The poor old man realized that it was time to leave; they had come looking for him. Aryan asked the man who had come for him to give him more time to finish his work, but to no avail.

They had to go immediately. Aryan tried to resist but this character took his arm and forced him to leave and get into a carriage, quite a strange one, without a window. During the trip, in the thickening darkness Aryan cried, thinking we would not be able to go back to his picture which was the object of so much effort and which he fervently loved, not so much because it was the work of his hands, but because it represented things superior to his time that were reflections of the God creator. Between sobs the poor man asked himself what he had done to deserve such punishment, and at a certain moment, in an inexplicable and mysterious form, in a wonderful instant, he had a vision of everything good and bad he had done in his life, even the insignificant deeds.

After the vision he began to feel an enormous consolation in himself, because he felt a wonderful certainty that, not by his own merits, but by God's grace, despite often having been wrong in his life, he had been an honest man because his heart had been in God. At that moment the carriage stopped abruptly and an instant later the door opened and an intense ray of light entered, but of a special light, like a rainbow full of life and with colors he had never seen, of an indescribable purity. Aryan, attracted by the light, stepped out of the carriage and the first thing he saw before him was the same man who had sought him at home, but with a very superior appearance, since now he was shining in some spectacular garments, of a fine

silk, adorned with precious stones. But what surprised him most was seeing the enormous wings that he now possessed, of an incomparable beauty and color. The angelic being welcomed the traveler with a slight bow and moving aside, invited him with a hand gesture to walk forward. When the angel's formidable wings ran clearing the scene, what Aryan saw at that moment was so shocking, that his immediate reaction was to fall on his knees, and abundant tears began to fall down his cheeks. In front of Aryan, on top of a small hill stood a beautiful tree, radiant and magnificent.

But it was not any tree, it was his tree, but no longer painted on a canvas, otherwise it was so real and with so much life that it seemed endowed with immortality. Aryan couldn't believe what his eyes were looking at, but more was his surprise when he realized that in this vision the picture was complete, nothing was missing, not the mountains, nor the forest, or the creek, or the animals, everything was there, alive and more beautiful and sublime than he had conceived it. But also, all the wonders he imagined and never could paint were also present there and endowed with a unique perfection.

The happiness that Aryan felt was indescribable. It was the joy of an innocent soul who had admired and loved all the wonders that God created and that he could see in his lifetime, and not sated with these he created in his imagination quintessential archetypes that shaped a world of possible wonders; and he suddenly found that all his ruminations had been made a reality, by a mystery that he didn't know how to explain. After a few minutes of gazing, immobile, at the astonishing scenery, he started to walk toward the big tree and seeing it up close, touching its leaves and its bark, he realized that the material that it was made of was not organic and earthly, it was of another nature, an essence of a solidity and perfection far superior to the earthly, and that it is not possible to describe for one who has not been witness to it. Its roots penetrated the ground displaying an idea of power that no earthly strength could mirror. Its branches expanded from the trunk with such order and proportionality that they appeared to be an imperial baldachin. Its leaves were glowing and of a green color which in the sunlight was confused with the Alash of the Ainess silver. But on approaching, Aryan perceived, astonished, a mysterious light that was coming out from inside the tree and that seemed to keep a secret. It is as if the wood from that tree symbolizes something or

were destined to an end so high that it rose above any other.

The wood of the throne of the greatest emperor of the Earth would never have that light as special. While he was meditating on the tree, engrossed, the angel spoke to him saying: "Do not worry, when you see the Light of Light you will know the secret that this tree holds inside. And now, blessed Aksa Aryan, Could you tell me why you are so happy?"

Aryan, surprised, responded to him: How a being endowed with intelligence would not exult with joy seeing such a wonder? And his guide told him: "Those who were not, by means of creatures, able to recognize the creator and worship Him as their Lord. In fact, for them, the existence of these wonders is one of their major torments." Aryan was troubled to think that there are beings capable of rejecting such evidence and of refusing to revere who is the Alpha and the Omega. On seeing his troubled face the angel said: "This is possible when the dark shadows of pride cloud vision; when on looking in the mirror of creation you don't want to see the reflection of the divine and you fall for the temptation of looking at yourself. From that moment, evil and madness have no limits."

The angel approached Aryan and pointing out a waterfall that fell from the top of a mountain into a lake, asked him, "What do you see?" Aryan, before such a vision, came out of the confusion he was in and, smiling, replied: "I see a source of water that falls from the sky, as well the grace of God over men, and I see water of such purity that it only occurs to me to compare it with a immaculate God; I see how the water, on falling, penetrates the rocks in the same way that the love of the Lord of the universe penetrates the most hardened hearts; I see the reflection of a picture on a mantle of liquid crystal, as pictures exist in the divine mind; I see light, I see colors and along with them I see a reflection like I never saw, of that which is the Infinite Beauty."

The angel said : " You have spoken wisely Aksa Aryan, and you have done so from the heart" That's why you have deserved to see this place." At that moment Aryan knelt before the winged being and said to him: "Let me stay here for all of eternity. I know that I'm not worthy, but for mercy, for the love of God, let me stay." On hearing that, the angel took a step back and opening his wings started to radiate a light so strong that the sun

itself that was behind was overshadowed and with a deep voice and full of grandeur he said: "Dear Aksa Aryan, this wonderful place you see has been created by God for only one purpose: to welcome you and to thank you for the picture that you were making, by love of the Creator, and because you knew to put the love of neighbor over your desire to see it finished on earth. What you created in your mind was made with the participation of the Creator power, of which you were made as image and likeness, and becoming reality by His work, it will stay for eternity.

But rejoice Aksa Aryan because your journey does not end here, but it will now take you to a place no human eye saw, nor any ear heard and never occurred to the mind of man." Aryan shuddered from head to foot on hearing these words and in his heart forebode that perhaps he would get to see the Eternal, God himself. The angel said to him: "Take me by the hand because we arrived to the moment, the hour to fulfill the purpose for which you were created." Aryan took him by the hand and they started to rise to the skies in a flight as delectable as hopeful. His tree looked farther and farther away, but this time leaving it did not matter to him, and when they were already very far the angel said to him: "Look at the sun, look at the light!!", and looking at the glowing disk of Aire he felt that its light penetrated him and took him entirely, as if he himself were transformed into light, into Aire, into a torch of wisdom and worship. What he saw from that moment on cannot be described in human words. Who will be able to imagine the wonderful pictures that Aksa Aryan is painting now? I think nobody. We hope, someday, to be able to go to see them.

Author. Santiago Vieto R. Based on "Leaf by Niggle" by J.R.R. Tolkien
Meaning of the character name: Aksa: Name of Sanskrit

Origin meaning: Soul. Aryan: "Noble". (David in Sanskrit) Clarification: This story is doctrinally based on the following affirmation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church "The affirmation that there is no salvation outside the Church does not refer to those who, through no fault of theirs, do not know Christ and the Church that He founded. And, citing the Council again, the Catechism tells us that if these "seek God with a true heart and attempt in their life, with the help of grace, to carry out the will of God, revealed through that which their conscience tells them, they can achieve eternal salvation (Vatican II, LG 16)." (Catechism of the Catholic

Church #847)