



Coelho

DISAPPOINTING THE DEVIL

On facing the terrors of life
with joy in your heart. By Paulo Coelho

THE MAN IS ADMIRING THE SUNSET ON A BEAUTIFUL BEACH BESIDE HIS WIFE, enjoying a well-deserved holiday. Everything seems absolutely in place, when all of a sudden from the bottom of his heart comes a nice, friendly voice that asks him a difficult question:

"Are you happy?"

"Yes, I am," he answers.

"Then look around you carefully."

"Who are you?"

"I'm the devil. And you can't be happy, because you know that sooner or later, tragedy can appear and upset your world. Look carefully around you, and you'll understand that virtue is nothing but one of the many faces of terror."

And then the devil began to show everything that was happening on the beach:

The excellent family man who at that very moment was packing and helping the children get dressed would like to have an affair with his secretary, but was terrified at how his wife would react.

The wife who'd like to have a job and her independence, but was terrified at how her husband would react.

The children who behaved well, terrified by the idea of punishment.

The girl reading a book, alone under her beach umbrella, pretending to be casual, while her soul was terrified at the possibility that she'd never find the love of her life.

The young man with the racquet exercising his body, terrified at having to live up to his parents' expectations.

The old man who didn't smoke or drink, saying he felt much better that way, when the truth was that the terror of death whispered like the wind in his ears.

The couple running past, their feet splashing the water where the waves broke on the



beach, all smiles, and hidden terror saying they would grow old, uninteresting, invalid.

The rich man who stopped his speedboat in everyone's view, waving and smiling and sunburned, and filled with terror because he could lose all his money at any moment.

The owner of the hotel who came out to greet his guests when the sun was setting, trying to make them all happy and full of cheer, all the while demanding miracles of his accountants with terror in his soul because he knew that no matter how honest he was, the men in the government would always discover all the flaws they wanted to find in his accounts.

Terror filled each one of those people on

that lovely beach during a sunset that would take your breath away.

The terror of remaining alone, the terror of the dark that filled their imaginations with devils, the terror of doing something not included in the manual of good behaviour, the terror of God's judgment, the terror of the comments of men, the terror of justice that punished any fault, the terror of the injustice that left the guilty free and threatening.

The terror of risking and losing, the terror of winning and having to live with the envy of others, the terror of loving and being rejected, the terror of asking for a raise, of accepting an important invitation, of going to unknown places, of not managing to speak a foreign language, of not having the ability to impress others.

The terror of growing old, of dying in a terrible way, of being noticed on account of your defects, of not being noticed because of your qualities, of not being noticed either for your defects or your qualities.

"I hope this has made you calmer," concluded the devil. "After all, you're not alone in your fears." And he prepared to take his leave.

"Please don't go away until you hear what I have to say," answered the man. "We have the capacity to detect pain, remorse, wounds—or terror, as you prefer to call it. But my father once told me the story of an apple tree so laden with apples that its branches couldn't sing in the

wind. Someone passing by asked why it didn't try to call attention like all the other trees did. 'My fruits are my best advertisement,' answered the apple tree.

"Of course, I'm no different from anyone else, and my heart is filled with many fears. But despite everything, the fruits of my life speak for me, and if someday a tragedy should happen, I know I haven't spent my life without taking risks."

And the devil, disappointed, left him to try to scare other—weaker—people.

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