



1

Today is my birthday. No matter my ancestry, it's not a good day to die. It's not venerated *Dia de los Muertos*. But whatever happens, happens. The readiness is all.

I wonder if my brother is still alive? I sense that he is - identical twins have that energy. But San Diego lost communication with Humboldt ten days ago - same day the Golden Gate flared into blue smoke and scant pieces of twisted metal. I go on faith. I imagine he mirrors my presence at the edge of the sea.

*So you wanna know what pisses me off?*

Don't play stupid. You know it. You live it. You survived it. Up to now, you survived it. I think maybe you should go away, maybe go back to the Valley, and then if we see one another, then we got something going. If we never see one another again, then *cest la vie*.

Quit mumbling in your cups.

Mix some tears in there if you want some sympathy.

All right now.

You need to shut up and watch and I will show you my story as it unfolds.

"Is it a short story?" you ask.

*Only if I die soon.*

Damn, my response came so quickly. I dropped over the edge a long time ago.

*I want it to be a long story*, I whisper through your silence.

It's your story too but you're still dumbstruck and can't mouth the words. Some of you can't even think the thoughts and when a glimpse of *history* shudders through your shattered brain, you jerk your head out of the way like a beaten dog from the open palm of its so-called "*Masta, Sir.*"

Let me pause for a few seconds. Just the facts. Pull the emotion in. Keep me under control. Save my energy for the fight. *Which one, you ask?*

Most of them don't have names anymore. They run into one another too quickly.

*I've never heard you speak so much*, you say and I just give you that stare and finally reply,

*The time for talking will soon be at an end.*

2

Standing astride the shore, I watch the incoming seawater sweep about my feet, pushing long fingers of red kelp strands against them. When the tide recedes, the kelp is drawn back and around the black wetsuit that covers my ankles. I feel it tighten and take hold and pull on my balance and I think, wouldn't that beat all, the child of a former Navy Seal being drown by a secret enemy weapon of killer kelp. Has the war now come to our shore?

Rumors of war had circulated for years as demonstrations and fire fights and civil wars broke out at various locations throughout the world, before they were briefly quelled, only to have the winds carry the turbulence to some other part of the globe. Ubiquitous as COVID, they became frequent in occurrence, they became engorged with participants. On the side, the committee of vultures waited patiently. Watching their meals, waiting their time.

I keep my balance, the water slides back into the ocean and the killer kelp falls quietly to the sand around my feet and I look up to the murky morning sky to see my *Watching Bird*.