The Moment That Changes The Course of Life

Viorel ȘERBAN (Romania)

I was born in western Romania, in the Carpathians of Transylvania, in the land of gold mines exploited since the Romans time. All his life, my father was a gold miner. My childhood was comfortable with joys and unimportant events, until I was 10 years old. In that day of 14 December from 1960 the snow hadn’t still covered the yellowed threads of grass. I had come back from school, I had eaten something and as usually, I had left with the few sheep of my family, on the nearby hill.

Passing at the foot of the hill, a place full with piles of stones from the Second World War, when the Germans had wanted to build a railway for the transport of gold ore, I had rolled a stone.

Under this stone appeared a rusty red box. I picked it up. Opening it,I saw inside a strange metal object, egg-shaped, having a ring on a side. I stared at it for a while. Observing that the sheep were far away, I took out the object from the box and I put it in my pocket; after, I started following the animals. Reached the top of the hill from where you can see the village and the surrounding hills, I sat down on a white stone shaped by the rain in the form of a chair. The view that can be admired from there is of incomparable beauty, especially in the spring. In the distance, you can see the forested mountains that rise one after the other, revealing themselves among the mother distant mountains with white peaks. But in December, nature was gloomy. In the distance, the Carpathian ridges were lost in a thick, milky mist.

Frightened, I went together my sheep and I left home on the road I had come. Next to the chair-shaped stone, in the yellowed grass that surrounded it, I noticed an object similar to the one I had found in the red box. Checking my pocket, I observed it was empty. The object I had lost was sitting in the grass. I ha I had completely forgotten about it and who knows when I would have remembered if I hadn’t been there. Picking it off from the grass, I put it in the same pocket. At home, it was only my grand-mother. My father hadn’t come back from the mine and my mother was at the river where she was washing some clothes. With an axe, I began to carve a wood gutter for a spring I had discovered few days before at the edge of the forest. I had some skills for manual trades learnt from my grand-father with whom I got along very well. While working on that gutter, I elbowed the pocket of the coat in which the unknown object was. I stopped working and revealing it, I looked at it for a long time. It was strange, I looked at it without curiosity. I wasn’t wondering what it could be, I wasn’t curious to try to disassemble it to see how it was made. Such an indifference was not in my nature. Any new artifact I encountered, it was interesting for me. This time, it was as if I wanted to forget it, to abandon it, but someone seemed to bring it out in front of me. I I set aside the gutter and I placed the object on a stone. I stepped away a little and I hit it with another stone. It rolled on without anything happening. After looking at it for a while, disgusted, I took it and placed it on the edge of a wall. I suddenly felt a burning desire to hit it. I still had the axe in my hand. I set on one knee and hit it once and again. At the second blow, a violent light brought out followed by an infernal bang. It had been a war grenade that I found out later. Anyway, too late. I was thrown on a pile of wood and shrouded in dense darkness. I lay for a while, I really don’t know how much. When my relatives and neighbors came, attracted by the terrible bang, they picked me up and I was conscious. I remember telling my grand-father: Dear grey-head, I will never see you again! And it was completely right! The loss of sight was irreparable.

After months in hospitals, I returned to the village. I had recovered, I had lost nothing, but my eyes. My classmates hadn’t forgotten me. They immediately involved in their games. This was for example, a game of cards where the one who was fooled, lost. However, I couldn’t identify the cards by myself and I had to ask the others. Determined to master the situation, I punched each card with one or more dots in different places. I now had them under my control and I approached the game with other hopes.

At my parents request addressed to the ministry of education, in the next year I was assigned to a school for blind persons from Tirgu-Frumos. I was taught here to write from top to bottom and from left to right by punching the paper; I learnt to read the dots using my fingers. It was hard for my mind to break away from the ripples of visual writing borrowed from the native hills and mountains. But soon, my fingers became familiar with the dots, reminding me that my friends couldn’t fool me from the moment I decorated my playing cards with dots. I wonder if Louis Braille hasn’t gone through a similar try…

I don’t think so because unlike me in my home village, at the Royal blind institute from Paris, he lived among his fellow men without sight.