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There is No End  
*A dystopian short story*

Source of inspiration: "Post-apocalyptic wallpaper", author unknown.



It was a sunny day. A weak sunshine was piercing through the thick, gray clouds blocking the sky, some of them even colored in a sickly green. The light, a faded yellow, was splashing with little dots a dead field, with nothing but remains of twisted plants sprouting out of the barren soil like curled fingers. A dog was silently making his way through the plants, sniffing there and there, searching for any trace of a living prey. Each of his pawsteps was raising a brown-colored dust, which was curling in small spirals in the air. Giddy, the dog sneezed, and the dust immediately backed away, like an offended snake. The field was silent. The dog couldn't detect any sound, except for the mocking croaking of the crows lazily flying above his head, or any odor that wasn't the one of death. Slightly frustrated, the dog pursued his course through the field, determined to find something, anything. His owners were hungry and needed to

eat. Food had been getting scarce since the big white shiny explosion, and his masters needed food. He could wait. He pushed away the monstrous plants and jumped over a root, ignoring the dust and dirt that were losing themselves in his brown hairs. The dog used to have a name, but he forgot it over time. His masters didn't say it anymore. His fur, which used to be a sparkling brown, was now completely decoulored, just like the landscape around him. He was but a small peck of color inside this world. However, it mattered little to the dog. Hygien was not a priority. Food was. With this in mind, the dog continued, carefully passed below a creaking steel wire, and raised his muzzle in the air. The odor was the same. The dog sniffed harder. He hadn't made all this way for nothing. His eyes, two dots of black lost between the cracked hairs, scanned the little humps and hills that were constituting the field. Nothing. Heavily disappointed, the dog turned his back to the scarred land, when his sensitive nose suddenly picked a familiar odor. There ! His chest heaving with hope, the dog bounced forward, its paws battling the earth underneath, his silhouette slashing like a brown dart in the air. He mounted up a crooked hill and hurtled down the slope. There it was ! Lying in the spiraling dust was a mess of black feathers, surrounded by screaming crows. The dog quickly chased them before slowly approaching, his ears raised in anticipation of any danger, the silent mass. A dead crow. The dog gently pushed it with his muzzle. It did not move. Fortunately, it wasn't too much damaged by the beak of its starving peers. His tail shaking from right to left with joy, the dog opened his jaws and, careful not to ruin the precious meat with his fangs, picked up the still bird. It wasn't easy, with the piece of cloth his masters had put over his muzzle. It was made with a thick black fabric, covering his nose, and almost going to his eyes. The dog did not understand why it was necessary, but if it was the wish of his owners, then he had to keep it. Finally, when he was sure the crow was solidly settled between its jaws, the dog turned around and picked up the pace of home, going through the field. His masters were going to be happy, the dog knew it. He fastened his speed, and soon found the way of a dirty road, completely unused since the white explosion. Relieved to feel beaten earth under his paws, which was true heaven compared to the harden one of the field, the dog slowed down and happily trotted in the direction of its house. Careful to avoid the discarded masks on the path, the dog stopped next to a rusty car, and listened for any peculiar sounds. Nothing but the whining of the wind answered his cautiousness. Satisfied, he continued, now able to catch a glimpse of the burnt roof of the houses. His own home wasn't too far away from now on. The other houses used to be occupied,

but their owners had disappeared when the air had taken a strange odor. The dog pursued his silent path, carefully eyeing the black entrances. There were like gaping hole, hungry mouths ready to swallow him at any time. His fur now bristling on his shoulders, the dog quickly passed them, the crow secured in his mouth. Soon, the crumbling walls disappeared from his view, and the dog relaxed a little. The threat being no more, the dog eventually saw the tip of a dozen of little houses. His own was among them. Confident, his paws batting the soft earth, the dog continued to advance. The road was leaking down a little place, where the earth and dirt gave place to the wellbeing of a stone path. Set in a tight circle, the houses, principally made of blackened wood, were blocking the very poor light that was able to reach the land. The dog stepped in between the homes and went down the little square that was the centre of this circle, careful to avoid the burning water of the broken fountain, which was forming a transparent spiderweb on the stony floor. From there, he could see the door of his owners' house. His heart beating with sheer joy, the dog went on forward, ignoring the scent of the dead crow in his jaws. The door was slightly opened. Silently, the dog gently pushed the piece of wood with his muzzle, not wanting to scare his masters. Already he could hear their familiar voices. They were hushed, yet the dog could detect the prickly odor of fear inside. Now a little bit worried, he pushed the door opened and stepped on the wooden floor. His owners were discussing something important. At the tone of their voices, the dog slowly advanced, waiting for one of them to notice him. Finally, it was the huge one, the male, who turned around and let out a cry of joy or surprise, the dog didn't know. He stayed still when the male crouched with one knee to his level while his eyes, hidden behind the blackened glass of the mask covering his face, carefully examined the stiff carcass of the crow. A dead silence plombed the house. None of the other humans were moving. The male slowly turned his head toward the female one, visibly unsure of what to do. After a moment of consideration, she nodded, and the hands of the male finally moved to pick the corpse. The dog gently let go, feeling the feathers slide between his teeth, and the male carefully held the bird to his mate, before turning his whole attention to the dog again. He began to speak with a hoarse voice, partly muffled by the mask, so big it seemed to swallow his face. The dog did not understand the sounds that were pouring out of his mouth, but he recognized the warm and cheerful tone : it meant the owner was happy. His suspicions were confirmed when the male's hand went to pat his head, a gesture that was definitely a sign of happiness or satisfaction. The dog let out a content

bark and pushed his forehead against the hand, satisfied that he had been able to perform such an important task. Eventually, the tension ended up leaving the house, and the human family was allowed to breathe again. The female one went to cook the crow while the male gave him a small biscuit, in addition to the brown pebbles the masters were serving him as food. The dog immediately crunched it, and though the biscuit was way too dry and had almost lost all of its taste, the dog was still happy to feel something filling his empty belly.

Content, the dog stretched his long limbs, leaving scratching marks on the decaying wood, and lay down, too tired to properly clean the grit that had lodged itself between his brownish claws. With half-closed eyes, he observed his masters venturing to their business. The black feathers of the crow lay stocked in a neat pile while the female, concentrated, was plunging the dead beast into a metallic bowl full of hot water. The male, however, was looking at a strange circle hanging on the wall, with a dozen of twisted symbols and two sticks moving on them. The dog never understood its use, but it must have been pretty important, since the male and the female were always checking it. His ears raised at the sounds of light footsteps in the stairs. A second later, two little ones, a female and a smaller male went downstairs, screeching through the air with their high-pitched and shrill voices. The female one immediately went to pet him once she spotted his brown form laying in the dust, while her sibling was looking curiously at the boiling crow that was now part of their meal. The dog watched their interactions, unmoving. He couldn't help but wonder how time had changed. All of the humans were faceless now. They had to bear a heavy grim-looking mask, which was covering all of their facial features, leaving the dog absolutely no other way than to rely on their voices to detect their humor. Still, if they got close enough, he could make out the glim of their eyes, the corner of their mouths, but nothing else. His humans had lost their expressions, and it pained him to no end.

The dog had slept for some time when he was suddenly awoken by the angry cries of the human pair. The female was gesticulating toward the crow and a few rotten vegetables, all of them bearing the awful smell of the air, laying on the table, while the male was angrily pacing across the room, glancing at his children. Even if he couldn't make out their language, the dog clearly understood the message : there wasn't enough food. A shiver of worry brushed his pelt, and the dog got up from his corner. The humans were still discussing, though in a more measured tone. It seemed that they

finally came to an agreement, for the male went to grab one of his sticks, carefully placed in a closet next to the kitchen. The hairs on the dog's neck bristled : he knew the use of the thing. It was capable of shooting fire, and instantly kill any animal hit by the stick. Even if the dog knew well that the master wouldn't use it against him, he still didn't like to see it in his hands, but it was necessary in case they were attacked. The family eventually moved along, and the male beckoned him with his giant hand covered in a strange black fabric. The dog happily trotted beside him, going outside for the second time of the day.

The family kept marching among the dead fields after going out of the little village and using the same route as he did. Now they were searching for food, the children walking with their mother, while the male was heading a little farther in the earth, his stick tightly secured in his hands. Muzzle in the air, the dog was constantly sniffing, yet he could not detect the odor of a rotting or living prey. He could hear the children chatting with their mother a little farther on the hill, when the male crouched down and began to dig up the earth beneath him. The dog watched him doing so, wondering if he should join or not. Finally, he managed to pull out a dirty plant, its root unnaturally twisting, bearing strange round fruits at their end. The male closely inspected them, before handing them to the dog. Knowing his mission, the dog carefully sniffed them, immediately hit by the foul stench, the same which was impregnating the air. With a growl, he backed away. The shoulders of the male drooped, and he heaved a sigh before letting the plant fall to the earth. Still, the male turned to look at the dog, and, designating the plant with one hand, showed him the earth with the other. Understanding, the dog began to dig, his paws easily tearing the dirt, and managed to discover several plants, juts like the one the male held. Hopefully, he handed them over to the dog, with each time the same response : a disdainful growl. All of the plants had the same acrid odor that was tainting the earth. The dog perceived the disappointment of the male, who got up to get a better look at the environnement. Crows were still flying in the gray sky, though that was the only sound that could be heard beside the rustling of the wind. While his master was still looking at the wasteland, the dog padded up forward. Maybe they'd found something else if they kept searching. Confident at the sound of his master's loud footsteps behind him, the dog came accross a small slope, descending toward the dried bed of what surely used to be a powerful river. Now only a tiny stream was gurgling instead of the roaring waves which should have been licking the muddy



shore dug by the water. The dog could picture it in his mind, as clear if it was lighted by a ray of sunshine. Careful not to slip, he descended the slope and approached the stream. His master followed behind him, his stick in hand. Suddenly, the dog felt something slimy under his paws. He looked down, and drew back as he stared right into the decaying eye of a dead fish. Lifting up his head, he realized there were more corpses trapped beneath the earth, for he could spot dozen of little bones and rotting scales scattered accross the border of the stream. While his human was examining one of the fishes, the dog padded a little bit more toward the putrid water. Sniffing it, he also realized there were aquatic creatures lying in the bottom of the stinky stream, but they didn't look much more alive than their peers. Most of them were skeletons, and the other were gradually losing the little flesh left on their skinny bodies. With a growl, the dog turned away and went back toward the male. The water smelt the same as the air, and so did the fishes. There was not even a point to bring them home. The human must have had come to the same conclusion, for he let the fish fall to the ground with an irritated growl. Together, they walked back to their starting point. The field was the same as ever. The earth was as poisoned as the air, and no healthy things could grew out of its barren shroud. The water was as burning as a river of fire. The dog slumped down next to his master, the foreign sensation of despair growing in his chest. There was nothing left. The human knew that very well, and he soon crouched beside his dog. He was talking, but the joyful tone he had used earlier was now replaced by a forlorn one. The dog listened closely. Even if he didn't understand, he knew that was important. The male gently scratched him behind his ears, an affectionate gesture, still talking. Suddenly, the dog realized that liquid water was running down the male's cheeks, while the corners of his mouth were twitching behind the black fabric. The dog had never seen the male like this, but he knew from experience that what was was happening when humans were sad. Deep concern sparkling within his chest, the dog went to nuzzle him, in a futile attempt to ease the quivering of his master's shoulders. It seemed to work, for the human took his neck between his shaking arms and hugged him for what felt like forever. Finally, the master slowly let go of his fur, and rose to his feet. He looked around before returning his attention to the dog, and, despite the cold glass that was covering his face, the dog could feel the intensity of his gaze on his pelt. Then, the human took the stick, pointed it toward his temple, and shot.

The dog let out a scream of surprise as the sound of the impact echoed on the wasteland while the body of his master fell completely limp beside him. His heart pounding with panic, the dog practically hurled himself on him and began frantically sniffing the mask. Waves of disbelief and horror washed over him as the scent of death hit his muzzle, already covering the warmth that used to radiate from his master. He let another horrible cry, incomprehension welling up in his mind. Why ? His master wasn't supposed to do that ! Why would he be doing such a terrible thing ? Sorrow bustled inside him, and no longer able to reason with the situation he was in, the dog screamed and screamed, monstrous cries shaking the empty earth with their sadness. Maybe if he screamed enough, surely the mother would come ? She would know what to do ! With a rising hope, the dog shot up to his paws and barked as loud as he could, but no one came. He couldn't hear the female human, or the chattering of her children. His ears could pick out nothing but the faint whispering of the wind on the cracked dirt. He was alone with his master. Sadly, the dog turned back, and, with whimpering cries, pressed himself tightly against the human's cold body. Time passed, and the sky began to darken behind its thick blanket of clouds. The wind howled harder against the dog's tight fur, and soon small pecks of dust were twirling and swirling through the air, as if caught in a mad yet graceful dance. The dog did not move from his spot, for he had the strong determination of not abandoning his master to the harsh lash of the wind or the beak of the crows. He was the only thing left to him now, the only thing that was important.

The dog did not know now many time had passed since his human's death. Sometimes the light of the sun weakly came back behind the clouds, sometimes it didn't. The dog had the feeling to be trapped into some nightmarish, endless night. More than once he had tried barked, growling, or screaming through the field, hoping that the mother or one of her children would come. They never did. It was like they had been swallowed by the constant cry of the wind. The dog had given up the hope that someone would have come to take his master's body back to where he belonged. Meanwhile, when he did not have to nourish his human anymore, his own body had began protesting. His stomach, harrassed by the bite of hunger, was churning and growling like a wild beast, while he had to fight with every last bit of his draining strength the sleep that was desperately trying to overcome his eyes. He knew very well now that looking for food was absolutely pointless, and he didn't want to leave his master's side. Everything was

the same. The non-existent light, the clouds, the earth, the wind. Nothing had changed, not even the cold human's body. No insects had crawled out of the field to fester on the flesh. Fewer and fewer crows were flying in the sky. Even if the dog had seen some fall not far from his little patch of dirt, he knew they would be just as rotten as the air around him.

One day, or night, the dog didn't know, he had since long lost track of the time, his eyelids, heavy with sleep, couldn't bear to stay open any more second. He fell, for the first time since the master's death into a long and dreamless sleep. He was awoken with a growl. Startled by a sound that was not one of the wind, the dog's eyes shot open, and he looked across the wasteland. There, near the little slope that conducted to the poisoned stream, was standing a huge dog. His fur, who used to be a fiery fawn, was now a faded orange, with a large patch of black hair covering his back and the tip of his bony tail. His ears were sharp and triangular just like his pointy puzzle, also black. His paws firmly planted in the earth, he was eyeing the dog with wild, crazy eyes, his lips peeled over his yellow teeth. Clearly this new comer didn't have friendly intentions, and yet he couldn't help but be saddened by this fact. The dog could see each of his ribs poking out beneath his filthy fur, and each of his breath were coming out with a large, raspy, hissing sound. A trickle of yellowish saliva was sliding out between his jaws, dropping on the ground. Given the poor state he was in, the dog could almost understand the wild desperation that was pouring out of his peer's eyes. However, it was clear that this foreign dog hadn't eaten in days, and he himself didn't want him to fester on his master's intact body. The dog heavily got up to his paws. Without further ado, the fawn dog let out a howl of rage and hurled himself toward his opponent, with deafening growls that shook the whole land with their madness. The dog braced himself for the shock. Within deadly seconds, the fawn dog collided with him, sending them both rolling in the dust. Immediately the foreign dog snapped his jaws right into the dog's shoulder, who cried out in pain. He hadn't been prepared for such violence. He had never fought another living creature in his entire life, let alone one of his peers. Plus, the strange piece of black cloth his master had secured over his muzzle didn't allow him to fully open his jaws. Fortunately, he managed to push away the other dog, scratching his face with his long limbs and his brownish claws. The fawn dog howled in pain, backing away. The dog pounced and pinned him to the ground, raking his claws in his fur, hoping his assailant would give up and leave.



However, the other, snarling, suddenly twisted his neck and planted his teeth into his muzzle, tearing off the piece of cloth. Feeling the foul stench of the air burning through his own nostrils, the dog immediately let go of his peer with a cry of pain. The air was burning, entering his muzzle, his mouth, his lungs. Soon all he could taste beside his blood was that cursed acrid scent, burning everything in his body. He looked up, tears welling in his eyes, and saw the fawn dog retreat, limping, his back tore off with heavy marks of claws. Head low, he didn't even shoot a glance back while he disappeared between the hills. His head dizzy with the sudden amount of air, the dog silently walked back next to his master's side and slumped down against the fabric. He didn't even have time to think with the searing pain that had took hold of his nerves. His lungs ached with every breath, his claws were tickling with the blood of the fawn dog that had accumulated itself on his pads, his whole stomach was screaming with hunger, and his entire fur seemed on fire, as much as his insides were, but the worse was the air. He couldn't escape the ravaging air now, burning and reducing everything to ashes within his flesh. Now, he understood fully well why the other dog had looked so desperate.

It was dark when the dog finally went limp against his master's body.