

Peritas - Story: Rob Simes

In this moment I was cast to the very centre of the universe. It was only, and always, simply a boy and his dog.

All the accumulated dross and accretions of life simply fell away.

The sweeping plains fell away. Everything here was plains and dust, horses and sandalled feet, bows and arrows and screaming obedience, so different to my home, and it paled to nothing.

The constant clamour of voices fell away. Bellowed orders, the many-pitched chanting, worst of all, the whispered awe, and everywhere the dulled beat of bronze-clad hearts, they silenced to nothing.

The stench of battle, the stench of bravery, the sweet, metallic creep of blood, until it was all one could smell, perhaps would ever smell, dripped away to nothing.

And, in its place, a boy and his dog.

He was a gift. Peritas, I had named him, my guardian. When all else was so complex, he was simple. My remote and jealous father, always seeking the simplicity of the battlefield, away from the others. Away from the sons and wives and concubines, the priests and cronies and sycophants. Away from the constant demands, the plots of the palace, and their lying eyes. My crazed mother, broken by all her desires, her arms, her hands, always on me, pulling me close. And her eyes always elsewhere, seeing danger in every shadow, in every whisper, in every glance. Her head high, the world beneath her.

And, against all of this, in this moment, in the silent centre of all things, his great, growling bulk nestled close. His huge head was next to mine, his thick fur spoke of simpler times, better times, and his blood ran thick through my fingers. He breathed his last, and all I felt was peace.