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NOIRAGE

CHAPTER 06 · SIDE BY SIDE

The Two Old Men of Rua das Flores

A story about walking together

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Every morning at half past eight, the two old men walked down Rua das Flores.

Nuno had lived on the street his whole life. He noticed these things. The two old men were always at the same time, always the same pace, always the same distance apart — close enough to talk, far enough for their own thoughts.

What interested Nuno was that they almost never spoke.

He watched them from his window sometimes while he ate breakfast. They'd walk the full length of the street, turn at the fountain, walk back. The whole thing took about twenty minutes. In that time, they might exchange five or six words, or none at all.

One Saturday, Nuno was sitting on the front step when they passed. He summoned his courage.

"Excuse me," he said. "Are you friends?"

Both men stopped. They looked at him. Then they looked at each other, like they were checking something.

"Sixty-one years," said the taller one.

"Since we were your age, more or less," said the other.

"Why don't you talk more?" Nuno asked. He knew it might be rude but he couldn't stop himself.

The taller man thought about this. "We've already said everything," he said finally. "Everything that needs to be said, we said it. Years ago."

"So now we just walk," said the other.

"Does that mean you've run out of things to talk about?" Nuno asked.

They both smiled at the same moment, which was strange and a little wonderful to see.

"It means the opposite," said the first man. "When you have to fill the silence, it's because you're not comfortable enough yet. When you can walk in silence together and it feels like enough — that's when you know."

"Know what?" said Nuno.

"That you've found your person."

They nodded to him and walked on, side by side, at the same even pace, down the street toward the fountain.

Nuno watched them go and thought about his own friendships — who he could be quiet with, and what that meant. He thought about it for a long time.

The deepest friendships are the ones where silence is a language too.

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A companion to “Side by Side”

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