**The Strange Friend of Tito Gil – Pedro Antonio d'Alarcón**

Tito Gil came from a family of shoemakers who had a very wealthy customer, the Count of Rionuevo, who took great interest in him. His mother died during childbirth, in 1703, and his father never showed too much affection to him.

At the age of fourteen, the Count brought him to his palace. There, he met Elena, the daughter of the Duke of Monteclaro, with whom he fell immediately in love.

The Count died and the Countess, who hated Tito, ordered him to leave the palace. An elderly woman invited Tito to live with her and he started to work again as a cobbler.

After two years, Tito found out that Elena had returned from France. He waited for her at the door of the cathedral. There, he saw her. Unfortunately, the Countess was there, and she humiliated him in public.

The elderly woman passed away of old age. Tito was poor and homeless, and saw no reason to live. In his pocket he had a vial of vitriol, a poisonous substance he used as a shoemaker, and decided to drink it. A voice stopped him.

Tito saw a figure wearing black robes. The figure introduced itself as Death and offered Tito its help and friendship. Death offered to share its knowledge and the ability to see it when people were about to die. It promised him wealth, nobility and, most importantly, Elena.

Tito accepted and was sent to Granja palace to visit the former king, Philip V.

Philip V had abdicated the throne in favour of his son, Louis I. His nephew, Louis XV, held the crown of France. His son had fallen ill and, if he died, Philip might need to take the throne again.

Tito offered to tell him the exact moment in which Louis I would die in exchange of a big sum of money and a title. Philip did not believe him. Tito revealed himself as a friend of Death and insisted that he would be able to predict Louis’s death. The king agreed.

Death explained how Tito would be able to predict the king’s death. In the king’s chamber, he saw Elena and the Countess of Rionuevo. Death informed Tito that his majesty would die the next day.

Tito refused to answer questions, as only Philip would receive such important information.

Tito saw Death approaching the Countess of Rionuevo and he knew that she would die soon. Tito informed what would happen and, immediately after, she started to feel unwell.

Death revealed that Tito was the son of the Count of Rionuevo and he selected him as his heir. The Countess intercepted official letters and declarations and kept them hidden.

Tito sat next to the Countess and talked to her. She recognised him and thought he was trying to kill her. Tito pitied and tried to reason with her, to save her soul and help her die peacefully. Tito told her that he forgave her. Feeling peace of mind, the dying woman told him where he could find the proof. The Countess passed away.

Tito finally had the documents and he could marry Elena.

Tito married Elena. He had everything he had ever wanted: nobility, wealth and Elena’s love. He felt so happy that he desired never to see Death again.

As the newlyweds enjoyed the sunset, filled with happiness and hope, a long black shadow appeared in front of Tito: he knew who it was.

Death asked Tito to talk. Tito, terrified, followed it. Death was upset with Tito: he was ungrateful and a bad friend. Death came to complete its mission and invited him to its house.

They got on a chariot made of human bones and it started to fly and travel around the world at incredible speed. Tito felt that time was not running in its usual way. The final destination was the North Pole.

Death revealed that it was 2316, the end of the world, and almost 600 years had passed. Tito killed himself when he drank the vitriol and Elena died of grief. Elena went to Heaven and asked God to give Tito a second chance. The experience had purified Tito’s soul. Judgement day came and the Earth exploded. The spirits of Tito and Elena went to Heaven and lived forever in happiness.