The Captive

by Jose Luis Borges, published 1960

The story is told in Junín or in Tapalquén. A boy disappeared after an Indian attack. People said the Indians had kidnapped him. He parents searched for him in vain. Then, long years later, a soldier who came from the interior told them about an Indian with blue eyes who might well be their son. At length they found him (the chronicle has lost the circumstances and I will not invent what I do no know) and thought they recognized him. The man, buffeted by the wilderness and by barbaric life, no longer knew how to understand the words of his mother tongue, but indifferent and docile, he let himself be led home. There he stopped, perhaps because the others stopped. He looked at the door as if he did not know what it was for. Then suddenly he lowered his head, let out a shout, ran across the entrance way and the two long patios, and plunged into the kitchen. Without hesitating, he sank his arm into the blackened chimney and pulled out the little horn-handled knife he had hidden there as a boy. His eyes shone with joy and his parents wept because they had found their son.

Perhaps this recollection was followed by others, but the Indian could not live within walls, and one day he went in search of his wilderness. I wonder what he felt in that dizzying moment when past and present became one. I wonder whether the lost son was reborn and died in that instant of ecstasy; and whether he ever managed to recognize, if only as an infant or a dog does, his parents and his home.

Source:

Borges, Jorge Luis. *Collected Fictions*. Trans. Andrew Hurley. Penguin, 1998.

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