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## **Manuscript Found in Accra**

Written by Paolo Coelho

Translated from the Portuguese by Margaret Jull Costa

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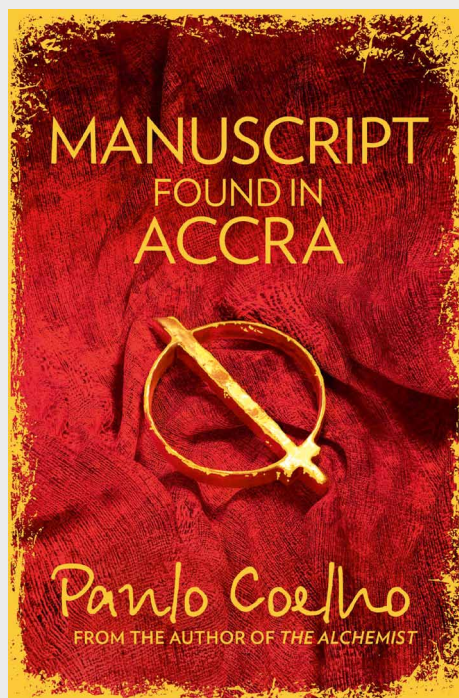
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**And a man who was listening to the war  
chants coming from beyond the city  
walls and who feared for his  
family, said:**

**'Speak to us about anxiety.'**

And he answered:

\* \* \*

There is nothing wrong with anxiety.

Although we cannot control God's time, it is part of the human condition to want to receive the thing we are waiting for as quickly as possible.

Or to drive away whatever is causing our fear.

This is so from childhood onwards, until we reach the age when we become indifferent to life. Because as long as we are intensely connected to the present moment, we will always be waiting anxiously for someone or something.

How can you tell a passionate heart to be still and to contemplate the miracles of Creation in silence, free of tension, fear and unanswerable questions?

Anxiety is part of love, and should not be blamed because of that.

How can you tell someone not to worry when he has invested his money and his life in a dream but has yet to see any results? The farmer cannot speed the progress of the seasons in order to pick the fruit he planted, but he waits impatiently for the coming of autumn and harvest-time.

How can you ask a warrior not to feel anxious before a battle?

He has trained to the point of exhaustion for this moment, he has given of his best, and although he believes he is prepared he fears that all his efforts could prove to be in vain.

Anxiety was born in the very same moment as mankind. And since we will never be able to master it, we will have to learn to live with it – just as we have learned to live with storms.



For those who cannot learn to do so, life will be a nightmare.

The very thing they should be grateful for – all the hours that make up a day – becomes a curse. They want time to pass more quickly, not realising that this will also hasten their encounter with the Unwanted Visitor.

Even worse, in an attempt to drive away anxiety, they do things that make them even more anxious.

The mother, waiting for her son to come home, begins to imagine the worst.

The lover thinks: 'My beloved is mine and I am his. And in the broad ways I sought him, but I found him not.' With every corner I pass and with each person I ask and who fails to answer my questions, I allow the normal anxiety of love to be transformed into despair.

The worker, while he awaits the fruits of his labours, tries to occupy himself with other tasks, each of which will bring him more moments of waiting. It will not be long before each single anxiety has combined to become one larger anxiety, and he can no longer see the sky or the stars or his children playing.

And mother, lover and worker alike all cease living their lives and simply expect the worst; they listen to rumours and complain that the day seems never-ending. They become aggressive with friends, family and employees. They eat badly, either consuming too much or unable to keep anything down. And at night, they lay their head on the pillow but cannot sleep.

That is when anxiety weaves a veil through which only the eyes of the soul can see.

And the eyes of the soul are bleary with tiredness.

At that point, in walks one of humankind's worst enemies: obsession.

Obsession arrives and says:

'Your fate now belongs to me. I will make you look for things that do not exist.

'Your joy in living belongs to me too. From now on, your heart will know no peace, because I will drive out enthusiasm and take its place.

'I will allow fear to spread throughout the world, and you will always feel afraid, but without knowing why. You don't need to know, you just need to stay afraid and thus feed and fatten your fear.

'Your work, which was once an Offering, has also been taken over by me. The others will say that you set a fine example, because you drive yourself so hard, and you will smile and thank them for the compliment.

'But in your heart, I will be saying that your work is now mine, and I will use it to distance you from everything and everyone – from your friends, from your son, from yourself.

'Work harder, so you won't have to think. Work harder than you need to, so that you can stop living altogether.

'Your Love, which was once a manifestation of the Divine Energy, belongs to me too. And the person you love will be unable to leave your side for a moment, because I am there in your heart saying: "Careful, she might go away and never come back."

'Your son, who once would have followed his own path in the world, will now be mine as well. I will have you surround him with unnecessary worries that destroy his taste for adventure and risk, that make him suffer whenever he displeases you and that leave him feeling guilty

because he has failed to live up to your expectations.'

\* \* \*

Therefore, although anxiety is part of life, never let it control you.

If it comes too close, say: 'I'm not worried about tomorrow, because God is there already, waiting for me.'

If it tries to persuade you that taking on lots of jobs means having a productive life, say: 'I need time to look at the stars in order to feel inspired and to be able to do my job well.'

If it threatens you with the ghost of hunger, say: 'Man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'

If it tells you that your beloved might not come back, say: 'My beloved is mine and I am hers. She is grazing her flocks by the river, and I can hear her singing, even from afar. When she returns home, she will be tired and happy, and I will make her some food and watch over her sleep.'

If it tells you that your son has no respect for the love you lavished on him, answer: 'Excessive caution destroys the soul and the heart, because living is an act of courage, and an act of courage is always an act of love.'

That way you will keep anxiety at bay.

It will never disappear, but the great wisdom of life is to realise that we can be the masters of the things that try to enslave us.