

TWO SHORT STORIES ON THE IMPOSSIBILITIES OF LOVE

Caio Fernando Abreu

Translated by Fernando Gorab Leme

ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE AFTERNOON

For Maria Zali Folly

Yes, there must have been a first time, although I don't remember it, just as I don't remember the other times, also firsts, right after this one when we met completely unprepared for this meeting. And I say unprepared because I know you were not expecting me, the same way that I was not expecting you. Certainly there was, because I have a faint memory - and every memory is faint now - there was a time in which we didn't know each other. And that very time in which we went by unknown to and unsuspected for each other, that time without you I do remember. After, that first time, and right after other times and others more, everything leading us to that moment.

Sometimes I am astonished and I ask myself how we were able to dive to such extent in what was happening, without any attempt of resistance. Not because it was horrible, or because it marked us profoundly, or because it dilacerated us - and maybe it was terrible, yes it is possible, perhaps it did mark us profoundly, or even dilacerate us - the truth is that I still hesitate to give a name to what remained after everything. Because something remained. And it was that thing that just now brought me to the window where I noticed it was raining. And, diffusely through the rain drops, I kept on watching a Ferris wheel. Absurdly. A Ferris wheel. Because no one lives anymore at places where there is a Ferris wheel. Also, because Ferris wheels maybe don't even exist anymore. But it was those two

things - rain and Ferris wheel - it was those two things that suddenly made some mechanism disarticulate within me, to the extent that I could not go beyond that moment.

Suddenly I could not go ahead. And I needed to. You always need to go beyond any word or any gesture. But suddenly there was no after. I was standing still by the window, while obscure memories unraveled. It was these memories that I wanted to tell you about. I tried to organize them, thinking that by building an organization I would be able to somehow appease what had happened. And I didn't know if it would end bitterly - I tried to organize them to avoid bitterness, let's put it like that. So, I tried to find a chronological order for the events: first, when and how we met, and in which way this meeting developed until I could get to the point that I wanted, which was the end. Although even now I ask myself if it was really an end. But I couldn't. It was not possible to organize those events, just as much as it was not possible to avoid for longer a wave that grew and halted every other gesture and every other thought.

During all this time that I spent thinking, I only knew that you used to come over every afternoon, before. It was so natural for you to come over that I didn't even wait or build small surprises to receive you. I built nothing - I knew that all along -, just as much as you came completely blank, for any word that was said or any deed that was done. And many times nothing was said or done. And we did not feel frustrated because in fact we did not expect a single thing. That I knew all along.

And it was always afternoon when we met. Until that time when we went to the amusement park. That I also remember diffusely. The thought only starts to become clear when we go on the Ferris wheel. Since our childhood we hadn't gone on a Ferris wheel. So long, I guess, that we even bought popcorn or something like that. It was just us in the Ferris wheel. You were afraid: when we got to the very top, you felt this funny scare and suddenly you would grab my arm, as if I wasn't just as helpless as you. We talked little, or we didn't talk at all - at least before this no phrase of mine or yours remained. Those things were enough, I mean your fear or my fear, your arm or my arm. Things like that.

It was then right there on the top that the Ferris wheel stopped. There were a few lights that suddenly turned off and the Ferris wheel stopped. We heard a voice from underneath saying that the lights had turned off. We waited. And I think we ate popcorn as

we waited. But suddenly it started raining. I remember your hair got all soaked and the rain drops ran through your face exactly as if you were crying. You threw the popcorn away and we remained there on the top. Your wet hair, the fine rain, the lights turned off.

I don't know if we ended up hugging, but I know that we talked. There wasn't much to do there on the top, except to talk. And we had so little experience in it that we talked and talked during a very very long time. And, among endless meaningless things you said that you loved me. Or I said that I loved you. Or maybe both of us said it, the same way we were talking about the rain and so many other things, small, silly, insignificant. Because nothing would change our script. Maybe you called me a fatalist, because I said all the things, just as much as I believe that you said all the things. At least the things we had at that moment.

Later, I don't know how much long after, the lights turned on, the Ferris wheel concluded its rotation, a man opened a little iron door so we could get off. I remember it so well, it is so easy to remember: the hand of the man opening the little iron door so we could get off. Then I saw your wet hair, and at the same time you saw my wet hair, and at the same time we said to each other that we needed to be very careful about wet hair. We vaguely thought about drying it, but it was still raining. We were so wet that it was absurd to think about getting out of the rain. Sometimes I think whether I reached out with my hand to remove the wet hair from your forehead. But then I think I didn't make any movements, although I thought about it.

I can't see more than that. That is the memory. Besides that, we talked for a long time in the rain until it stopped. And when it stopped you went away. Besides that, I can't remember anything else, although I desperately try to add one detail more. But I know perfectly when a memory stops being a memory to become an imagination. Maybe if I told someone I would add or enhance a detail, as those who write stories and try to be interesting. It would be beautiful to say, for instance, that I slowly dried your hair out. Or that the streets and trees became renovated, being washed after the rain. But I won't tell anything to anyone. And when I think, I cannot think constructedly. I don't think anyone can. But none of that matters. What I wanted to tell you is that reaching the window just now I saw the rain falling and, behind the rain, diffusely, I saw a Ferris wheel. And then I

thought of some afternoons when you would always come over, and one afternoon in particular I don't know how long ago. And after thinking of that afternoon and that rain and that Ferris wheel, a phrase remained spinning, vivid, almost harsh on my mind. Something like this: after our talk - after that talk of ours in the rain, never again you searched for me.

(O ovo apunhalado, 1975)

THE SURVIVORS

(To read listening to Angela Ro-Ro)

For Jane Araújo, the thin one

Sri Lanka, who knows? She tells me brunette and ferocious and I respond why not? But unyielding she continues: you can at least send postcards from there, so people might think wow, how did he end up in Sri Lanka, what a crazy guy that is, huh, and they might miss you so bad, isn't that what matters to you? Being missed: in Sri Lanka, playing Rimbaud, who didn't even get that far, so everyone might bemoan woe how nice he was, and we didn't even offer a fraction of the attention he needed to stay here among us, palm trees, and pineapples. Without a pause she fans herself with the sleeve of Angela's vinyl while without a pause she smokes and drinks without a pause her national vodka without ice and lemon. On my side, hoarse voice, I remain here to attend public demonstrations, in between a line and another, tagging walls against nuclear power plants, mid hangover, one day of a nun, one day of a whore, one day of Joplin, one day of Teresa of Calcutta, one day of shit while I hang on to that lousy job to be able to pay for this authentic leather chair where you, Most Reverend Eminence, sit your precious ass and that exotic center table of Indian rush that holds your tired bare feet at the end of another week of useless battles, escapist delirium, bad orgasms, and late bills. But we've tried everything, I say, and she says that yes, of couuuuuuuurse we tried everything, including fucking, because so many borrowed books, so many watched films, so many socio political artistical philosophical existential shared perspectives bababá in common, could only take us there: bed. We really

tried, but it was shit. What happened, my God, what happened? I would think right after, lighting up one cigarette on the other, and I didn't want to think about it, but it wouldn't get out of my mind, your limp dick, and my nipples didn't even get hard, it was the first time in my life, you said, and I believed, it was the first time in my life, I said, but I don't know if you believed. I try to say that yes, I did believe, but she wouldn't stop, such a mental, spiritual, moral, existential hard-on, and no physical, I didn't want to accept that that was it: we were different, oh, how different we were, we were better, we were more, we were superior, we were the chosen ones, we were slightly sacred, but in the end, my nipples didn't get hard and your dick didn't get up, too much culture kills our body, man, too many films, too many books, too many words, I could only have you when I was rubbing myself, there was the library of Alexandria in between our bodies, I would shove deep the finger in the pussy night after night begging fuck me deep, my love, burst with me, then I would turn around and cry in my pillow because at that time there was still guilt, disgust, shame, but now it's alright, *The Hite Report* allows jerking off. Not that it wasn't enough love, you would say after, on the contrary, it was too much love, did you really believe in that? In that sloppy bar where we used to drown our shortcomings in prepubescent, stupid lyricism, I said no, what happens is, as good-intellectuals-petty-bourgeoisie, your thing is men, and my thing is women, we could even be an incredible couple, like that lover Virginia Woolf had, how was it? Vita, Vita Sackville-West, and that faggot of a husband, calm down, my darling, I have nothing against faggots, can you pass me the vodka? What? Do I even have money to buy Wyborowa? I have nothing against lesbians, I have nothing against decadents in general, I have nothing against whatever it is that sounds like an attempt. I ask for a cigarette and she throws the pack on my face, as if she was throwing a brick, I have been feeling so anxious, my good friend, that's such an ancient little word, anxiety, two decades of daily companionship, but I go on, I go on, I have something tightening my chest, a breathlessness, a thirst, a weight, don't come at me with those ideas that we betrayed-all-of-our-ideals, I have never had any ideals, I just wanted to save myself, just look at that, how much of an individualist, elitist, capitalist, I only wanted to be happy, dumb, fat, alienated, and completely happy, man. It could have worked out between us, couldn't it, after all at that time you hadn't decided to get fucked

in the ass, and I hadn't decided to lick pussy, oh, how cute our books of Marx, then Marcuse, then Reich, then Castañeda, then Laing under our arms, those colonized dreams in our idiotic minds, scholarships to the Sorbonne, tea with Simone and Jean-Paul in the 50s in Paris; the 60s in London listening *here comes the sun here comes the sun little darling*, 70s in New York dancing to disco-music at Studio 54; 80s and here we are, chewing this manure, not being able to swallow nor spit out and without forgetting this bitter taste in the mouth. I've read everything, man, I've tried macrobiotics, psychoanalysis, drugs, acupuncture, suicide, yoga, dance, swimming, cooper, astrology, roller blades, Marxism, Candomblé, gay club, ecology, the only thing left is this chest pain. Now what can I do? I am not plagiarizing Pessoa but on every corner of my bedroom I have a Buddha, and a mother Oshun, and a little Jesus, and a poster of Freud, sometimes I light up candles, pray, burn incense, take a rue infused bath, throw coarse salt in the corners, don't ask you for any solutions, you go delight in the natives of Sri Lanka, and later you send me a postcard telling something, anything, like, last night I was by the river, there has to be a river over there, a muddy river, full of dark reeds, but yesterday by the river unexpectedly I met a guy with olive skin and oblique eyes that. Right? Of course, there has to be some sense of dignity to it all, the question is where, not in this dark city, not in this putrid poor world, inside myself? Oh, don't come here with this redemption-through-self-knowledge, I know everything about me, I did acid over fifty times, I've been in therapy for six years, I got put in the psychological clinic, do you remember? You would bring me apples from Argentina, and soap operas from Italy, Rossana Galli, Franco Andrei, Michela Roc, Sandro Moretti, I would look at you with mandrix up my ass and drooling I'd sob I lost my joy, I turned into nightfall, they stole my hope, while you in solidarity and uplifting would hold on to my shoulder with your hand despite everything, and manly you'd repeat come on, my comrade, get out of this, our cause needs this privileged head of yours, your creative potential, your libertarian lucidity, bababá bababá. People would turn into decomposing cadavers right in front of me, my skin was sad and dirty, the nights would never end, no one would touch me, but I reacted, I came out of madness, but where is the cause, where is the struggle, where is the creative potential? Do I kill, do I not kill, do I quench my thirst with the little lezzies from Ferro's bar, or do I get smashed alone on Saturdays waiting for

the phone to ring, and it never rings, listening to samba-canção and blues with a vodka lemon caipirinha in this apartment that I pay for with the sweat from the creative potential of the ass that I let that fucking multinational ravish for eight hours daily. And I want to say, but mellow she cuts me, of course it is not your fault, my love, we fell in the same trap, the only difference is that you think you can escape, and I want to relish in the pain of this blade shoved deep in my dry throat, can you pass me a cigarette, no I am not desperate, not more than I've always been at least, I'm not drunk, I'm not crazy, actually I am pretty clearheaded, and I know vividly that I have no way out, don't worry, after you leave I will take a cold shower, and have hot milk with eucalyptus honey and ginseng, then I will lie down, then I will sleep, then I will spend the week on bancha and brown rice like a saint, completely purified, completely cleaned, then I soak up in booze again, and I snort five grams, crash the car in a corner, or call the suicide hotline at four in the morning and talk to random nitwit mourning things such as I-so-much-need-a-reason-to-live-and-I-know-that-that-reason-exists-only-inside-of-me-bababá-bababá, until the sun comes out behind those buildings, I am not taking any drastic measures, except to go on, is there anything more destructive than persisting without any faith? Caress with your hand slowly my head, my heart, I've had so much love once, she stops and begs, I need it so much, so much, man, but they didn't let me, so I offer her my fingers, and suddenly she turns so small pressed against my chest, asking if she is really getting ugly, and kind of a whore, and very old, and completely drunk, I didn't use to have these marks around my eyes, I didn't use to have these creases around my lips, I didn't use to have this old dyke demeanor, and I repeat that no way, that she looks beautiful just like that, disheveled and alive, and she asks me to play some music, and I choose Chopin's *Nocturne 2 in E-flat*, I want to leave her just like that, sleeping in the dark, on the couch, right by the wilted flowers, enveloped by the distant piano like a lullaby, but she contracts violently and asks that I play Angela again, then I spin the disk, *amor meu grande amor*, queasy we stumble to the bathroom where I hold her head over the toilet for her to throw up, and unintentionally I throw up too, at the same time the two of us holding each other, bitter mouths, acidic fragments over our tongues, she flushes and starts pushing me to the door, asking me to go, and kicks me out to the hallway saying don't forget then to send me a postcard from Sri Lanka, that muddy river,

that olive skin, I hope something wonderful happens for you, I wish you a tremendous faith, in anything, it doesn't matter what, just like that faith we had once, wish me something great too, anything marvelous, that might make me believe in all things again, that might make us believe in everyone again, that might take this rancid taste of failure away from our mouths, of defeat without any heroism, it is what it is, my comrade, we got lost in the middle of the road and we never had any map, no one gives rides anymore, and it is getting dark. The key turns in the door. I need to lean against the wall to avoid falling. Behind the wood, mixing to the piano and the husky voice of Angela, *nem que eu rastejasse até o Leblon*, I can hear her repeating to herself that everything is fine, everything continues to be fine, everything fine, very well. *Axé, axé, axé!* I say, and I insist until the elevator arrives. *Axé, odara!*

Sources: Caio Fernando Abreu, *O Ovo Apunhalado*, Porto Alegre: L&PM pocket, vol. 260, 2016 (Reimpressão da edição de 2001. Apresentação do autor e prefácio de Lygia Fagundes Telles): “Do outro lado da tarde” (pp. 161-165); Caio Fernando Abreu, *Morangos Mofados*, São Paulo: Editora Brasiliense, 1987 (8ª edição): “Os sobreviventes” (pp. 15-20).