

A BOWL OF NARD AND THIRTY PIECES OF SILVER

BRIEF NOTE ON A TIGER

Mariana Ianelli

Translated by Eloína Prati dos Santos

A bowl of nard and thirty pieces of silver

Offer a little more than enough, write a long letter, handwritten, when a note would be enough, make the glass overflow instead of the measured shot, and a sensation of discomfort will hang heavily in the air. It is not fitting to be that generous. As a rule people get suspicious. As when one asks the price of a beautiful jewel and this jewel, being free, perversely goes from the worthy to the worthless concept. If it is free, something is the matter with it. A suspicious something, surreptitious.

Didn't Jesus cost thirty pieces of silver? There, it is the celebrated soul of business. Better to sin by excessive caution than to risk a mistake of naïveté. As Martin Amis once said, "we have come up as non-innocent". From lack of innocence to the strangeness, when faced with a magnanimous gesture there are only a few steps, precisely the distance between the irreproachable and the reprehensible. For wasn't it exactly the one who received the thirty pieces of silver the one who was shocked when he saw Mary Magdalene anointing Jesus' feet with an ounce of pure nard when she could have sold the perfume for three hundred denarii.

The house smells of balsam one day before the Supper and Judas is angry at such squandering.

Say that your left hand knows not what the right one does and for the suspicious one the proverb proves the wrongdoing. So that it is an offering but looks

like an accident, as if the bowl had, unfortunately, slipped from one's hands and only for that reason the feet came to be oiled and the house perfumed, as if the cup overflowed by distraction, as if, after all, not the entire thing and for this very reason is priceless, commit the crime well: and say nothing.

Brief note on a Tiger

Joy is a word hard to live by. Something rare, as rare as a tiger. It takes a while to happen, but when it happens, a person cannot go back to what she was before she felt what she felt. An event like this is what excites a poet to throw himself in the dark, searching. Because if there exists a place beyond a temple in Thailand where today this tiger still walks free, away from traps, this place is a poem.

It needs silence to exist, which is why joy is so rare. It is not something to be said, it is something to be felt. It needs a time that lasts and, about this time, a poem does not lie. It does not matter how many days of work are necessary, roaming and searching, the time of the poem depends on the brightness of a moment and this moment depends on a life. It may be near and nearer, it may make itself felt in a pause in the wind and, even so, it is not certain it will come. Joy is not to be understood, one is understood by it, involved by it, embraced, possessed. Tracing a search plan, studying a probable crossing of routes to find this striped animal would be to miss the explosion of stars that comes in being surprised by it. To look for it demands a vague thought, anything like distracted desire, a reverie without any pretense of efficiency, without an aim to be met, the suggestion that all is well as it is, come joy or not. It is to look indefinitely until the moment, the moment of presence comes, this pure instant of discovery in which the poem says love and love is made. She, who enters the poem, enters these woods without a word, in the eroticism of profound communication.

But everything said about joy is too little, too little beyond its happening. Joy happens in freedom and in silence. It is a rare joy that lasts, the pleasure of melody when it breaks out, when a body is seized and becomes translucent. It cannot be caught in a word. Even if caught, grabbed, enmeshed in a trap, it would no longer be joy; it would be only a sad animal.

Mariana Ianelli is a poet, essayist and literary critic from São Paulo with a M.A. in Literature and Literary Criticism. She contributes to anthologies, literary journals and newspapers, and has published several books. *Treva Alvorada* (Illuminuras, 2010) received an Honorary Mention from Casa de Las Americas Prize. The two chronicles are from *Breve anotações sobre um tigre* (ardotempo, 2013).