

NONADA – CAPÍTULO I

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TRADUÇÃO

Torin Spangler

It wasn't hard finding a spot. The beach was always empty on days with weather like that. Galeano shut off the car and took a deep breath. An extra dose of air in his lungs, he overcame his inertia and got up. He walked the length of his black car: a decent sedan, good enough for Uber Comfort. He got to the trunk. Inside, there was a towel. He tossed it aside with his left hand, uncovering a case shaped like a brick, which he grabbed with his right hand. He closed the trunk.

A few people were walking along the beach, others running down the boardwalk. The water was choppy. On the pier, a little way off to the left, a few reckless fools liked to stand close to the waves, just inches from being swept away by the ocean. Galeano walked along the sand in his jeans and button-down shirt, zipper open on his sweater, letting in the deep, yet not unpleasant cold of the ocean breeze. He kept his dress sneakers on. He glanced towards the pier again. Some people must enjoy flirting with death. His gaze left the pier and passed over the sand to the hill at the edge of the beach.

The late afternoon sun highlighted its contours. A large wave broke in front of Galeano. For an instant, he lifted his drooping eyelids. Before him stretched just a dozen meters of sand. That's where he would stop: close enough to the water, but still a safe distance.

He opened the case. Inside it was a tripod and a cylindrical object. He took out the tripod. He jerked about as he adjusted it, extending the legs too far, drawing them back, then starting all over again. Finally, he hit the sweet spot for a beginner. Face height.

He picked up the cylindrical object and fit it on top of the tripod. One end was narrow, the other wide. The wide end was pointed towards the sea. He squeezed his eyes into the narrow

end. He zoomed in too far, then out too far back, went out of focus, swiveled to the other side, now coming into focus, zoomed in – once again, too much – went out of focus again. Jesus Christ. He looked around him. To the left, the beach didn't extend much farther than the pier, but to his right he saw the sand stretch out into a spit, sand and sea almost blending together in his eyes. Ubering there wouldn't be cheap. Over in that direction there were a bunch of others like him, with their telescopes of different sizes and qualities. OK, zoom out now, focus, just like that, slowly, not too much. Now he could see the looming volcano. Needle-peaked, capped in the white of its eternal snow.

His eyes descended the steep slopes: the recesses, the bottomless ravines, the inscrutable forms of minerals he didn't recognize. Rocks sculpted by centuries of storms. He saw in them imaginary scenes. A puppy, frightened by the sight of a chasm, running towards the shelter of his mother's embrace. In another rock, Galeano saw the same puppy, now abandoned, staring at him with his lonely eyes. Gazing farther down, Galeano encountered a wildcat. It was exploring the mountains recesses. He followed it until, after some brief hesitation, it delved into a cavern.

He needed to continue the descent, but he found the terrain suddenly blocked. A less distant object had entered his field of vision. All blurry now. He messed up. Instead of adjusting the focus, he had zoomed out. Now the mountain was really far away. OK – adjust the focus, now. There. That's right. The outline of a coast. At that distance he was probably taking in hundreds of kilometers through his lens. He recalled the world map, the shape of the continent he was viewing. He zoomed in. There was the mountain in the background, out of focus. He decided to stick to sea level, zooming in gradually.

Skyscrapers, compact cars, traffic, zoom-zoom-zoom, people, thousands of them climbing up and down underground stairs, crowds lining up to cross avenues at stoplights, towers and antennas, neon lights, narrow streets, smaller buildings bunched in on top of one another, local businesses, luxury apartment buildings, workers and executives coming and going, brand names, gadgets, bicycles, electron-people changing shells, buses, taxis, chaotic frenzy. No. There was a system in place. Orderly frenzy. With patches of entropy. Here and there, an electron would make an unforeseen exit from its shell, causing some momentary imbalance. More skyscrapers.

He zoomed out and gradually turned the wide end of the telescope to the left.

Skyscrapers gave way to apartment buildings, then houses. One particular building grabbed his attention. It had three stories, each with a protruding roof much wider than its floor. The roofs were quadrangular but curved at the corners. In front there was a patio, with a fountain in the middle and a strange bell in one corner. The bell hung down from the middle of a hollow wooden structure. Inside the structure, there also hung a three-meter trunk, suspended horizontally from ropes. A man came out of the building wearing a brown, wide-sleeved robe, only his hands and feet sticking out. Barefoot, he walked calmly towards the trunk. He grabbed it, pulled it back and launched it towards the bell. The tone must have been resounding, authoritative. Within seconds, men and women appeared wearing the same robes, each one carrying a cushion. They walked with purpose and measured pace. They sat down on the cushions, arranging themselves in a rectangle around the patio, with a wide-open space in the middle occupied only by the fountain. Their heads and torsos faced outwards. Their legs were crossed, feet resting on thighs, their clasped hands resting on their laps. They closed their eyes.

Galeano's eyelids were open much wider than usual. He zoomed in on the stomach of one of the people sitting with their profiles turned to him. With each breath it swelled out... then shrank back in... Without realizing it, Galeano matched the pace with his own breathing... He adjusted the telescope and was now at face level with the seated figures. He closed his eyes and breathed in.

He opened his eyes again just as the people were giving a salutation towards the empty space, and then towards one another, their hands clasped and bodies bending forwards. They went back into the small building in as orderly a manner as they had come out. As they walked, one of them tripped on a small step. He came nowhere near falling, but a quick and nervous companion rushed to support him. Galeano zoomed out, leaving the scene behind.

He spotted a small beach. Zoom in. It was huge. The sand was a little grayer than the sand beneath his feet. Maybe it was approaching dusk. The matter of night vs. day on the other side of the world was a tricky question. He never understood those changes in daylight. Astronomy was never his strong point.

Some children were playing, adults swimming. No doubt it was hotter over there. Behind them was a boardwalk lined with pine and cherry trees. Their beach was more crowded than the one here, but still relatively empty. Everything seemed empty in comparison

with that frenzied metropolis he had been looking at some moments ago. In one spot, there was a small gathering of people, but... zoom in! All of them... each one of them seemed to be... a cultural voyeur like him! They're also spying on us! He chose a person at random and zoomed in. He went too far. What was that? Something kept jumping in and out of his field of vision at somewhat irregular intervals. It was mostly white, with a dark brown ball in the middle, and a small black hole at its center. It disappeared again, then quickly reappeared. He noticed that it kept reappearing from the middle of his field of vision, then moved upwards. Slender eyelashes. It was a different sort of eye, a horizontal eye, a calm eye. The total opposite of his own. An eye staring at an eye, inside a tube.

"Galeano?"

"Yeah."

"Roberto. How's it going?"

"Fine."

...

"Chilly today, huh? But they say the weekend's gonna be better."

"Hmm."

"Sure hope so, right? You just can't enjoy yourself in this cold."

"I prefer it."

"Prefer what? The cold?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

"I don't need to spend money on air-conditioning."

“You stay at home all day?”

“Most of the time. When I’m not working. But when it’s colder out I also save on air-conditioning for the car.”

“True. But com’on man, life is meant for living too, right?”

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“It is Galeano, right?”

“Yeah.”

“Hey, Galeano. Getting up to anything this weekend?”

“No.”

“I’m really hyped for this warm weather we’re supposed to get. I have a house up in the mountains, with a natural water pool. I’m gonna take a bunch of people up there and do some grilling.”

-- A slight nod of the head.

“We’ve got ping-pong, a pool table... and women! We’ve always got women around. Women are always good, right?”

“Sometimes.”

“You’re right, they can be annoying sometimes.”

...

“You married?”

“I live with my partner.”

“Better that way. You avoid all the paperwork. You got kids?”

“One.”

“How old?”

“Twelve.”

“A boy or a girl?”

“Boy.”

“You really attached to the kid?”

...

“You’re number 423, right?”

“Right.”

“That one there with the brown front?”

“Yeah, that’s the one.”

“Gotcha.”

“Hey, thanks for the lift. You have a good night, now. Gonna go for another spin or you done for the day?”

“I’m going to the beach.”

“In this weather?”

“It’s better. This way I don’t sweat.”

“What are you gonna do with no sun?”

“Observe.”

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Renato Amado is a Brazilian writer from Rio de Janeiro. An author of short stories published in several anthologies, he released his second novel, *Nonada*, after founding *Editora Flâneur* and the multi-arts collective *Caneta, Lente & Pincel*, which produced exhibitions and publications bridging literature, photography, and visual arts. He holds a Ph.D. in Portuguese and Brazilian Studies from Brown University and an M.A. in Brazilian Literature from UERJ. A former Petrobras attorney, he left his legal career to dedicate himself to literature and academia.