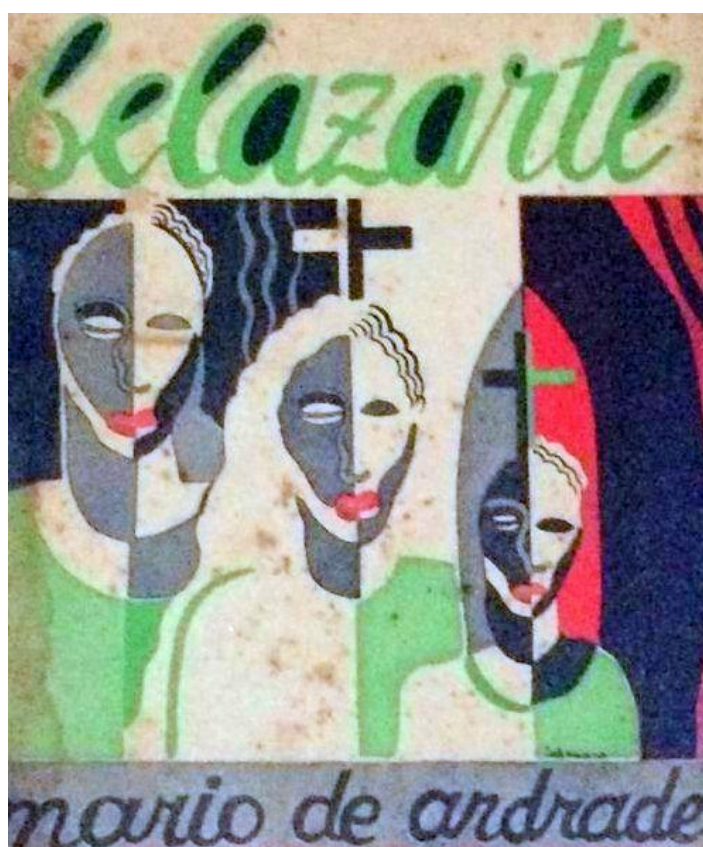


Mário de Andrade's *Tales of Belazarte* in English



Rosalia Neumann Garcia, ed.

THE BEETLE AND THE ROSE

Belazarte told me this story:

I don't believe in the Beast, but beetles... I don't know. Look at what happened to Rosa... Eighteen years old - and she had no idea. No one else had noticed. Neither Dona Carlotinha nor Dona Ana, both beyond their prime and old maids, both in their late forties. Rosa had come to keep them company, at seven, when her mother died. She died or gave her daughter away, which is the same thing as dying. Rosa grew and grew. Her lovely Portuguese type was gradually unfolding out of the physical vagueness of childhood. Ten years old, fourteen, fifteen... Finally, eighteen last May. However, Rosa was still seven, at least in terms of what souls are made of. She served the two old maids with the same meticulous fantasy of the old Rosinha. At times, she cleaned the house well, sometimes she didn't. Sometimes she would forget the toothpick holder while setting the table for lunch. And in her bedroom, she fondled the same doll, with the same incapacity of a pretend mother; it had been so long ago, I don't even know! that Dona Carlotinha had given her the doll to show what a kind person she was. Isn't it amazing? Yet, our world is full of these amazing incidents: Rosa, almost a grown woman, childlike and of a childish virtue. For virtues, like morals, are vast and varied... They change as time goes by and as we get older... It shouldn't be so, but it is so, and it's not our place to argue. But in 1923, when Rosa was eighteen, she had the virtue of the children who lived... at around the time of the Battle of Riachuelo¹... Yes: the children of 1865. Rosa... What an anachronism!

In the little house where the three women lived, halfway to Lapa², her womanliness had developed only physically. She hardly ever went out and, to her, going to the city was a once-a-year outing on All Soul's Day's³ if ever. Dona Ana and Dona Carlotinha would then wear black silk, yes, sir! They would wear silkish black rustling in such an uncalled-for flutter. Rosa escorted her mistresses wearing a brand-new muslin dress, carrying calla lilies and maidenhair, all from the garden. They would go to Araçá⁴ where the memory of the two old ladies' father, Captain Fragoso do Vale, rested. Dona Carlotinha and Dona Ana would cry over the thin marble slate. Rosa would cry as well, to keep them company.

¹ The naval Battle of Riachuelo was a key point in the War of the Triple Alliance. By late 1864, Paraguay had scored a series of victories in the war; on June 11, 1865, however, its naval defeat by Brazil began to turn the tide in favor of the allies. (source: Wikipedia)

² Lapa is a neighborhood in the city of São Paulo.

³ All Souls' Day commemorates the faithful departed. In Brazil, it is a widespread tradition to visit deceased loved ones.

⁴ The Araçá cemetery is in São Paulo and was built in 1887. The mausoleums of important and traditional families from São Paulo are found there.

Whenever she saw others crying she supposed crying was due, and in a twinkling, there would be endless boohooing ... she let out the waterworks from her black, black eyes, and they would glisten so much more. Then they would make comments by each Sunday decorated grave. And that scent... Melted candles, families bivouacking out in the open, such a fluster to catch the streetcar... What bewilderment, my goodness! The atmosphere full of fright was unpleasant.

This was Rosa's big annual trip. Aside from that, going to church at Lapa on some random Sunday and on Holy Week. Rosa neither dreamed nor mulled over anything. She was always tending the garden and over Dona Carlotinha. Tending for dinner and for Dona Ana. Everything done with the same childish parity that never once meant a lack of affection. Neither was it indifference; it was simply not imagining differences. We use ten fingers to prepare food, two arms to sweep the house, a tiny bit of friendship for John, three tiny bits of friendship for Jack who is nicer, a sideways look at the beautiful view of the big tenon of Our Lady of Ó with lingering aloofness, and suddenly, whoosh! We bet all our chips on Love. That's how we do it. Rosa did no such thing. It was always the same bit of body that she put into everything: fingers, arms, eyes and mouth. She cried about something and with that same something she took care of Dona Carlotinha. She was undefined and well swept. Empty. A little nun. The world didn't exist for... no, not a nun! She was a little saint in a church lost near Évora⁵. What I mean is the figurative little saint on the altar, made of painted plaster. The other one, the one being represented, as you very well know, is in heaven never intervening on our behalf. Rosa, if requested, would intervene. However, never knowing why. She intervened with the same portion of body, fingers, arms, eyes and mouth, nothing more. Her purity, childishness, poverty of spirit, were encased in a glass dome that withdrew her from life. Neighbors? Only the tiny house further up on the same street with no cobblestone, dark clay, green from the grass. The lane was suddenly swallowed by the unexpected civilized uproar of the streetcar road. But right on the corner, *seu* Costa's little grocery store blocked Rosa from walking onto that road. And *seu* Costa was in his mid-fifties, a widower, no children, puffing on a stinky pipe. Rosa stopped there. That grocery store propelled the entire dietary dynamics of Dona Ana, Dona Carlotinha and Rosa's existence. And this, all in the rush of the morning hours, after boiling the milk the delivery man would leave very early by the gate.

Rosa would greet the neighbors who lived in the other house. From time to time she would stop a minute to talk to Ricardina. But she didn't know what to say, what could she do? She'd leave hastily. With no concerns about living and enjoying life, how could she ever notice her own youth! She certainly could not. The only one who did notice was João. At first, he'd wrap two loaves of bread in grayish paper and throw the package onto the porch. He then clapped to let them know and rode away, ring-aringring ... on his cart. When there was a windy rain, though, he'd wait with the package in hands.

"Good morning".

⁵ Évora is a Portuguese city in the municipality of Évora.

“Good morning”.

“Awful rain!”

“Awful!”

“See you tomorrow!”

“See you!”

However, one fine day, while he was wrapping the loaves on his cart, he noticed Rosa, who was coming back from the store. Naturally, he waited; after all, he was no ill-mannered goon. The sun beamed on the body coming down the road. It was then that João noticed Rosa had changed. She was another person. Entirely a woman with shapely legs and two arresting breasts under the smoothness of her blouse like a ruby ring inside a glove. That is... João didn't see any of this; I'm embellishing the story. From the nineteenth century on, story tellers seem to feel the need to lay out these lewd details. Neither did he see the clear amber *camoesa* apple skin ... nor the eyes of sunny radiance... João only realized he felt uncomfortable and figured that the discomfort was Rosa's doing. Rosa was making him feel that way, no doubt. A stray smile spread from ear to ear. He left feeling dizzy without even saying a proper good morning. But from that moment on, he no longer threw the loaves of bread onto the pavement. He waited for Rosa to come and get them from his hands.

“Good morning!”

“Good morning! Why didn't you throw them?”

“Well... They could get dirty!”

“See you tomorrow”.

“See you, Rosa!”

He felt that so-called discomfort and was on his way.

João was almost a Rosa himself. Only he had a mother and a father, and that does teach us. And maybe because he was twenty years old... He had actually reached this age without any contact with women. But dreams incited him, and he constantly felt bitten by short temper. Still, he would bake bread, deliver bread, and sleep early. On Sundays, he would play soccer for *Lapa Atlético*. When he realized he couldn't live without Rosa, he came clean to his father.

“Well, son, get married. She's a good girl, isn't she?”

“Yes, father”.

“So, get married! The bakery is yours anyway... You're my only son... And if she is a good girl...”

On the same afternoon, Dona Ana and Dona Carlotinha received João's abashed visit. What an ordeal to speak! Finally, when they guessed that this tongue-tied boy with serene gestures was taking Rosa away from them, they were truly touched. They were touched because they thought the story was so beautiful, so touching. And in a split second they realized their little maid was almost a woman now. She must marry. How wonderful! Rosa was getting married. She would have children! They would be the godmothers... They were almost deflowered by the blissful thought of being the mothers of Rosinha's children.

They felt embraced and squeezed, and, Good God!, committed some awful wickedness unconsciously...

“Rosa!”

“Yes, ma’am?”

“Come here!”

“Right away, ma’am!”

They didn’t know yet if João was a nice boy but he looked as if he were.

And they wanted to wallow in the bashfulness of Rosa and the boy, how wonderful!

Pressed against the doorway beamed eighteen blooming years.

“Listen, Rosa! The boy came to ask you to marry him”.

“Ask me what...!”

“The boy says he wants to marry you”.

Rosa had made her mouth into a red wheel. Her straight teeth, extremely white. She wasn’t embarrassed. She didn’t look down. Rosa started to cry. She ran off inside, sobbing. Dona Carlotinha found her sitting on a stool by the stove. She was whimpering and sobbing, moving her shoulders, helpless.

“Rosa, please! Is this any way to behave?! If you don’t want to, just say so!”

“No! Dona Carlotinha, no! What’s going to happen now? I don’t want to leave you!”

Dona Carlotinha deliberated, teased, advised... Rosa didn’t know what would happen if she got married; she knew only how to take care of Dona Carlotinha...Rosa started to weep loudly. Her mouth had to be covered, Lord Almighty, so the boy wouldn’t hear, poor thing! Finally, Dona Ana came in, burning with curiosity, to know what was going on.

João was left alone in the living room, he didn’t know what was going on in there, though he guessed Rosa didn’t like him. Now more than ever he was truly dazed. He felt embarrassed in the room, of being alone, I don’t know, he slowly picked up his hat and left at the pace of a cart-ox. His eyes were round with bewilderment. Now he realized he really liked Rosa. The blow stung, poor thing...

It was a silent afternoon in his house. His father cursed, insulted the girl. Then, realizing he was doing more harm than good to his son, he clammed up.

On the next day, João threw the bread onto the pavement and left. Without warning, something odd filled his body, coming from all the way below, tight, almost suffocating, and Rosa’s image emerged from his eyes, meddling with the uncaring life of the street and the bread delivery. Thank God, he was finally home! But he was too unrefined and non-urban to nurture sadness. And Rosa didn’t show to nurture desire... That Sunday he was a wonderful defender. Because of him, *Lapa Atlético* won the game. It won because, out of the blue, she appeared in his body and kindled that urge, I mean, two urges: the one... already mentioned, and another, of forgetting and holding the reins of his life... So he saw the ball, guessed what side it was going to, threw himself at it, so what if he was

kicked in the face! broke his back! Let it all break down! Let him die! The ball would *not* cross into the goal area. João naturally thought it was all because of the ball.

When Rosa realized she wouldn't leave Dona Ana and Dona Carlotinha, she was on cloud nine. She sang. Now, this is when the beetle comes into the scene. Rosa felt immensely calm. And she didn't think of João any longer.

"You forgot the toothpick case again!"

"Sorry, Dona Ana!"

She went on cleaning the house, sometimes well, sometimes not. She went on lulling the porcelain doll. She just went on.

That night was so hot she wanted to sleep with her window open. She rolled over, filled with pleasure, her naked body inside her nightgown, and she fell asleep. A beetle flew in. Zzz, zzz, zzz, buuuuzzz, flap! Rosa, asleep, shuddered at the sensation of those metallic legs on her bosom. She opened her eyes in the dark. The beetle walked around slowly. He found the opening of her nightgown and went on through the burning valley between hills. Rosa imagined a horrible bite on her breast, she sat up quickly, her hands to her chest. With the movement, the beetle unfurled from her smooth skin and fell on her belly, zzz, tzzz...tz, etc. Rosa let out a sharp scream. She fell on the bed, curling up. The creature kept moving downwards, tzz... Finally, it got tangled, tzz... tic, it was stuck. Rosa stretched her legs, stiffened by a seizure. She rolled over and fell.

Dona Ana and Dona Carlotinha found her spasmodic, with froth dripping from the corner of her mouth. Lucid eyes burning like fire. But how could they guess what it was! Rosa couldn't speak, her body twisting this way and that. Then, Dona Ana, guided by the repeated gesture of the poor girl, found the creature. She plucked it out harshly to set the girl free as quickly as possible. And it was so hard to calm her down... She would slowly settle down... all of a sudden, everything would start all over again, like a seizure, she threw off the blankets, growling, twisting, eyes rolling up, hmm... A terror with no cause, as you can see. Again, they had a hard time calming her down. They bathed her; Dona Carlotinha even went to the trouble of lighting the fire for warm water, it's more comforting, they say. They changed her nightgown, a ton of sugar water...

"Why in God's name did you leave the window open, Rosa...?"

Only two hours later was everything at peace in the house again. Well, not everything. There were two eyes staring into the murk, watching for any lost sign of light and for silent figures in the dark. Rosa can't sleep all night. Finally, she hears the noises of the house awakening. Dona Ana comes to see her. Rosa pretends to sleep, unreasonably enraged. She hates the old hag! And Dona Carlotinha disgusts her... She hears the snap of wood in the fire. She hears the noise of the bread being thrown onto the pavement. Rosa rubs her fingers hard against her body. She stretches. Finally, she gets up.

Now she walks with deliberation. In the slit of her lips she carries a seriousness never seen before. What shadows on her eyelids! She thinks of work, and she works. She diligently cleans the entire house, putting ten fingers into preparing the food, two arms into sweeping, her eyes on the table so she won't forget the toothpick holder. Dona Carlotinha

has a cold. So, Rosa gives her a portion of her friendship. She makes tea for her. She sits by the headboard keeping watch without talking. The two old women look at her, warily. They don't recognize her anymore, and are afraid of this stranger. Indeed, Rosa has changed. It's another Rosa. She is an open rose. Imperative, alive. She is assertive. Dona Carlotinha is afraid to ask her how she spent the night. Dona Ana is afraid of advising her to get some more rest. It's Saturday; but she could clean the house on Monday... Rosa cleans the house like never before. She cleans her own bedroom thoroughly, as well. The doll... Rosa yanks off the last of its curly hair, a cold gesture. She pierces one of her eyes, Portuguesely, *à la* Camões. But she thinks Dona Carlotinha might be upset. We should never cause needless grief to others, life is already so full of sorrow!... she thinks. She sighs. She hides the doll at the bottom of the basket.

When she goes to bed, she is suddenly gripped by fear: to sleep alone! And what if she never gets married? This thought pops into her head just like that, for no reason. Rosa has a gripping fear of becoming an old maid. She has an avid fear, above all avid, of becoming an old maid. This is dreadful! HOW HUMILIATING!

It's clear that she had never suffered before, the poor thing. All night, not a wink. I don't know what time it was when the bed became unbearably lonely to her. She sits up. She leaves the window wide-open, her chest braving the night, desperately brash. Rosa waits for the beetle to come. There are no beetles that night. She gets tired, staying in the same position, waiting. She doesn't know what she is waiting for. But we do, don't we? But the beetle didn't show. It was a warm night... Life throbbed in the ardor of static bursting stars. Such silence!... The slumber of all men, sleeping unaware, heedless of her... The smell of burned soil thickened the air that had stopped circulating, it didn't enter her chest! There was really nothing in the empty night. Rosa waits a bit more. She then goes to bed, disappointed. She falls into a troubled sleep. She dreams of impossible combinations. She dreams that all the beetles in the world had disappeared and that a group of girls makes fun of her, buzzing; old maid! in peals of laughter! She cries in her sleep.

On the next day Dona Ana thinks they should take the girl out. They go to mass. Rosa walks in front of them to flirt with every man she comes across. She has to catch one. Any one. She has to catch one so she won't become an old maid. At *seu Costa's* store, Pedro Mulatão is already there to drink the first *pinga* of the day. Rosa gives him a line that sounds more like something a whore would use. Pedro Mulatão feels an easy desire for that body and follows her. Rosa is aware of this. Who is this man? She doesn't know. Even if she knew he was a bum and a drinker, he's the first man she meets, she has to catch him or she'll die an old maid. Now she won't be anybody else's girl. She pretends to be innocent, a virgin, virtues she no longer has!... But she's an actress and plays the role well. Once in a while, she turns around to look. To look at Dona Ana. She laughs at her with a saucy smile that fills bodies with urges.

At the end of Mass, another even dirtier look. Pedro Mulatão stops by the store. He drinks even more and is up to no good. Rosa pretends they are out of sugar just to go to the store. Pedro carries her package, talking to her. He invites her over for the night. She

refuses because she would never get married that way. To him, it makes no difference: married, not married ... He'll propose.

This time the old ladies don't even call Rosa; what a repulsive man, really! How could they marry her to those thirty-five years! He was at least between thirty-five and forty! And he was a mulatto, pale yellow, already weathered... by *pinga*, Our Lady!... They were sorry, but Rosa didn't want to get married. Then she shows up and tells them she wants to marry Pedro Mulatão. They couldn't advise her in front of Pedro Mulatão, so they show him the door. They'd get more information. He could come back on Thursday.

The information is as expected: terrible. A bum, a drunkard, a ruffian, not worthy of her. Rosa cries. She will marry Pedro Mulatão and if they don't let her, she'll run away. Dona Ana and Dona Carlotinha give in with death on their souls.

When João found out Rosa was going to get married he felt a terrible knot in his stomach. He went out, dizzy, to get some air. He ran into some buddies and started boozing. At dawn, they left him right there by the sidewalk, drunk out of his mind. The policeman made him stand up.

"Young man, you can't sleep here! Go home!"

He walked away weeping, claiming it wasn't his fault. Later, he lay down on a field by a street and fell asleep. The sun woke him. He had a headache, a bad taste in his mouth... and the shame! He doesn't even know how he'll face it at home. His father's anger was a thing to reckon with. What insults! You son-of-a-this, you son-of-a-that, shocking curses! Nobody ever imagined that such a good man could say such terrible things. Well! Every man knows how to swear; it's just a matter of feeling terrible pain and the words come out. The truth is, João's father's in a great deal of pain. As much as his mother, who can only cry. She cries and cries. João is disgusted with himself. That afternoon, when he's back from work, Carmela calls him at the hedge. She tells him that he shouldn't drink like that ever again, cause his mother had cried so hard. Carmela cries as well. João realizes that if he ever drinks again, he'll only do harm to himself. He swears he'll never fall so low again. He and Carmela sigh, staring at each other. They stand there.

Rosa was slipping my mind... I'll tell you about what else happened to João another day. A trousseau was quickly prepared for her, in less than a month. On the day before the wedding, Dona Carlotinha still insisted that she break up with her fiancé. Pedro Mulatão was infamous, a weasel even, God forgive me! Rosa didn't want to hear a word. She set her foot down. She wanted to get married and she would. She had a feeling she was wrong, but didn't want to think and so she didn't. The two old maids cried their eyes out when she left, married and victorious, without a tear on her face. Tough.

Rosa was very unhappy.

O BESOURO E A ROSA

Belazarte me contou:

Não acredito em bicho maligno mas besouro, não sei não. Olhe o que sucedeu com a Rosa... Dezoito anos. E não sabia que os tinha. Ninguém reparara nisso. Nem dona Carlotinha nem dona Ana, entretanto já velhucas e solteironas, ambas quarenta e muito. Rosa viera pra companhia delas aos sete anos quando lhe morreu a mãe. Morreu ou deu a filha que é a mesma coisa que morrer. Rosa crescia. O português adorável do tipo dela se desbastava aos poucos das vaguezas físicas da infância. Dez anos, quatorze anos, quinze... Afinal dezoito em maio passado. Porém Rosa continuava com sete, pelo menos no que faz a alma da gente. Servia sempre as duas solteironas com a mesma fantasia caprichosa da antiga Rosinha. Ora limpava bem a casa, ora mal. Às vezes se esquecia do paliteiro no botar a mesa pro almoço. E no quarto afagava com a mesma ignorância de mãe de brinquedo a mesma boneca, faz quanto tempo nem sei! Lhe dera dona Carlotinha no intuito de se mostrar simpática. Parece incrível, não? porém nosso mundo está cheio desses incríveis: Rosa mocetona já, era infantil e de pureza infantil. Que as purezas como as morais são muitas e diferentes... Mudam com os tempos e com a idade da gente... Não devia ser assim, porém é assim, e não temos que discutir. Mas com dezoito anos em 1923, Rosa possuía a pureza das crianças dali... pela batalha do Riachuelo mais ou menos... Isso: das crianças de 1865. Rosa... que anacronismo!

Na casinha em que moravam as três, caminho da Lapa, a mocidade dela se desenvolvera só no corpo. Também saía pouco e a cidade era pra ela a viagem que a gente faz uma vez por ano quando muito, finados chegando. Então dona Ana e dona Carlotinha vestiam seda preta, sim senhor! botavam um sedume preto barulhando que era um desperdício. Rosa acompanhava as patroas na cassa mais novinha, levando os copos-de-leite e as avencas todas da horta. Iam no Araçá aonde repousava a lembrança do capitão Fragoso Vale, pai das duas tias. Junto do mármore raso dona Carlotinha e dona Ana choravam. Rosa chorava também, pra fazer companhia. Enxergava as outras chorando, imaginava que carecia chorar também, pronto! chororó... abria as torneirinhas dos olhos pretos pretos, que ficavam brilhando ainda mais. Depois visitavam comentando os túmulos endomingados. Aquele cheiro... Velas derretidas, famílias bivacando, afobação encrocada pra pegar o bonde... que atordoamento meu Deus! A impressão cheia de medos era desagradável.

Essa anualmente a viagem grande da Rosa. No mais: chegadas até a igreja da Lapa algum domingo solto e na Semana Santa. Rosa não sonhava nem matutava. Sempre tratando da horta e de dona Carlotinha. Tratando da janta e de dona Ana. Tudo com a mesma igualdade infantil que não implica desamor não. Nem era indiferença, era não

imaginar as diferenças, isso sim. A gente bota dez dedos pra fazer comida, dois braços pra varrer a casa, um bocadinho de amizade pra fulano, três bocadinhos de amizade pra sicrano que é mais simpático, um olhar pra vista bonita do lado com o espigão de Nossa Senhora do Ó numa pasmaceira lá longe, e de sopetão, zás! bota tudo no amor que nem no campista pra ver se pega uma cartada boa. Assim é que fazemos... A Rosa não fazia. Era sempre o mesmo bocado de corpo que ela punha em todas as coisas: dedos braços vista e boca. Chorava com isso e com o mesmo isso tratava de dona Carlotinha. Indistinta e bem varridinha. Vazia. Uma freirinha. O mundo não existia pra... qual freira! santinha de igreja perdida nos arredores de Évora. Falo da santinha representativa que está no altar, feita de massa pintada. A outra, a representada, você bem sabe: está lá no céu não intercedendo pela gente... Rosa si carecesse intercedia. Porém sem saber por quê. Intercedia com o mesmo pedaço de corpo dedos braços vista e boca sem mais nada. A pureza, a infantilidade, a pobreza-de-espírito se vidravam numa redoma que a separava da vida. Vizinhança? Só a casinha além, na mesma rua sem calçamento, barro escuro, verde de capim livre. A viela era engulida num rompante pelo chinfrim civilizado da rua dos bondes. Mas já na esquina a vendinha de seu Costa impedia Rosa de entrar na rua dos bondes. E seu Costa passava dos cinquenta, viúvo sem filhos, pitando num cachimbo fedido. Rosa parava ali. A venda movia toda a dinâmica alimentar da existência de dona Ana, de dona Carlotinha e dela. E isso nas horas apressadas da manhã, depois de ferver o leite que o leiteiro deixava muito cedo no portão.

Rosa saudava as vizinhas da outra casa. De longe em longe parava um minuto conversando com a Ricardina. Porém não tinha assunto, que que havia de fazer? partia depressa. Com essas despreocupações de viver e de gostar da vida, como é que podia reparar na própria mocidade! não podia. Só quem pôs reparo nisso foi o João. De primeiro ele enrolava os dois pães no papel acinzentado e atirava o embrulho na varanda. Batia pra saberem e ia-se embora tllindliirim dlimdlrim, na carrocinha dele. Só quando a chuva era de vento, esperava com o embrulho na mão.

— Bom-dia.

— Bom-dia.

— Que chuva.

— Um horror.

— Até amanhã.

— Até amanhã.

Porém duma feita, quando embrulhava os pães na carrocinha, percebeu Rosa que voltava da venda. Esperou muito naturalmente, não era nenhum malcriado não. O sol dava de chapa no corpo que vinha vindo. Foi então que João pôs reparo na mudança da Rosa, estava outra. Inteiramente mulher com pernas bem delineadas e dois seios agudos se contando na lisura da blusa, que nem rubi de anel dentro da luva. Isto é... João não viu nada disso, estou fantasiando a história. Depois do século dezenove os contadores parece que se sentem na obrigação de esmiuçar com sem-vergonhice essas coisas. Nem aquela cor de maçã camoesa amorenada limpa... Nem aqueles olhos de esplendor solar... João reparou

apenas que tinha um mal-estar por dentro e concluiu que o mal-estar vinha da Rosa. Era a Rosa que estava dando aquilo nele não tem dúvida. Alastrou um riso perdido na cara. Foi-se embora tonto, sem nem falar bom-dia direito. Mas daí em diante não jogou mais os pães no passeio. Esperava que a Rosa viesse buscá-los das mãos dele.

— Bom-dia.

— Bom-dia. Por que não atirou?

— É... Pode sujar.

— Até amanhã.

— Até amanhã, Rosa!

Sentia o tal de mal-estar e ia-se embora.

João era quase uma Rosa também. Só que tinha pai e mãe, isso ensina a gente. E talvez por causa dos vinte anos... De deveras chegara nessa idade sem contato de mulher, porém os sonhos o atiçavam, vivia mordido de impaciências curtas. Porém fazia pão, entregava pão e dormia cedo. Domingo jogava futebol no Lapa Atlético. Quando descobriu que não podia mais viver sem a Rosa, confessou tudo pro pai.

— Pois casa, filho. É rapariga boa, não é?

— É, meu pai.

— Pois então casa! A padaria é tua mesmo... não tenho mais filhos... E si a rapariga é boa...

Nessa tarde dona Ana e dona Carlotinha recebiam a visita envergonhada do João. Que custo falar aquilo! Afinal quando elas adivinharam que aquele mocetão, manco na fala porém sereno de gestos, lhes levava a Rosa, se comoveram muito. Se comoveram porque acharam o caso muito bonito, muito comovente. E num instante repararam também que a criadinha estava uã mocetona já. Carecia se casar. Que maravilha, Rosa se casava! Havia de ter filhos! Elas seriam as madrinhas... Quase se desvirginavam no gozo de serem mães dos filhos da Rosinha. Se sentiam até abraçadas, apertadas e, cruz credo! faziam cada pecadão na inconsciência...

— Rosa!

— Senhora?

— Venha cá!

— Já vou, sim senhora!

Ainda não sabiam si o João era bom mas parecia. E queriam gozar o encafifamento de Rosa e do moço, que maravilha!

Apertados nos batentes da porta relumearam dezoito anos fresquinhos.

— Rosa, olhe aqui. O moço veio pedir você em casamento.

— Pedir o que!...

— O moço diz que quer casar com você.

Rosa fizera da boca uma roda vermelha. Os dentes regulares muito brancos. Não se envergonhou. Não abaixou os olhos. Rosa principiou a chorar. Fugiu pra dentro soluçando. Dona Carlotinha foi encontrar ela sentada na tripeça junto do fogão. Chorava gritadinho, soluçava aguçando os ombros, desamparada.

— Rosa, que é isso! Então é assim que se faz!? Si você não quer, fale!

— Não! Dona Carlotinha, não! Como é que vai ser! Eu não quero largar da senhora!...

Dona Carlotinha ponderou, gozou, aconselhou... Rosa não sabia pra onde ir si casasse, Rosa só sabia tratar de dona Carlotinha... Rosa pôs-se a chorar alto. Careceu tapar a boca dela, salvo seja! pra que o moço não escutasse, coitado! Afinal dona Ana veio saber o que sucedia, morta de curiosidade.

João ficou sozinho na sala, não sabia o que tinha acontecido lá dentro, mas porém adivinhando que lhe parecia que a Rosa não gostava dele. Agora sim, estava mesmo atordoado. Ficou com vergonha da sala, de estar sozinho, não sei, foi pegando no chapéu e saindo num passo de boi-de-carro. Arredondava os olhos espantado. Agora percebia que gostava mesmo da Rosa. A tábua dera uma dor nele, o pobre!

Foi tarde de silêncio na casa dele. O pai praguejou, ofendeu a menina. Depois percebendo que aquilo fazia mal ao filho se calou.

No dia seguinte João atirou o pão no passeio e foi-se embora. Lhe dava de sopetão uma coisa esquisita por dentro, vinha lá de baixo do corpo apertando, quase sufocava e a imagem da Rosa saía pelos olhos dele trelendo com a vida indiferente da rua e da entrega do pão. Graças a Deus que chegou em casa! Mas era muito sem letras nem cidade pra cultivar a tristeza. E Rosa não aparecia pra cultivar o desejo... No domingo ele foi um zagueiro estupendo. Por causa dele o Lapa Atlético venceu. Venceu porque derrepentemente ela aparecia no corpo dele e lhe dava aquela vontade, isto é, duas vontades: a... já sabida e outra, de esquecimento e continuar dominando a vida... Então ele via a bola, adivinhava pra que lado ela ia, se atirava, que lhe incomodava agora de levar pé na cara! quebrar a espinha! arrebentasse tudo! morresse! porém a bola não havia de entrar no gol. João naturalmente pensava que era por causa da bola.

Rosa quando viu que não deixava mesmo dona Ana e dona Carlotinha teve um alegrão. Cantou. Agora é que o besouro entra em cena... Rosa sentiu uma calma grande. E não pensou mais no João.

— Você se esqueceu do paliteiro outra vez!

— Dona Ana, me desculpe!

Continuou limpando a casa ora bem ora mal. Continuou ninando a boneca de louça. Continuou.

Essa noite muito quente, quis dormir com a janela aberta. Rolava satisfeita o corpo nu dentro da camisola, e depois dormiu. Um besouro entrou. Zzz, zzz, zzzuuuuuummmm, pá! Rosa dormida estremeceu à sensação daquelas pernas metálicas no colo. Abriu os olhos na escuridão. O besouro passeava lentamente. Encontrou o orifício da camisola e avançava pelo vale ardente entre morros. Rosa imaginou uã mordida horrível no peito, sentou-se num pulo, comprimindo o colo. Com o movimento, o besouro se despegara da epiderme lisa e tombara na barriga dela, zzz tzzz... tz. Rosa soltou um grito agudíssimo. Caiu na cama se estorcendo. O bicho continuava descendo, tzz... Afinal se emaranhou tzz-tzz, estava preso. Rosa estirava as pernas com endurecimentos de ataque. Rolava. Caiu.

Dona Ana e dona Carlotinha vieram encontrá-la assim, espasmódica, com a espuma escorrendo do canto da boca. Olhos esgazeados relampejando que nem brasa. Mas como saber o que era! Rosa não falava, se contorcendo. Porém dona Ana orientada pelo gesto que a pobre repetia, descobriu o bicho. Arrancou-o com aspereza, aspereza pra livrar depressa a moça. E foi uma dificuldade acalmá-la... Ia sossegando sossegando... de repente voltava tudo e era tal-e-qual ataque, atirava as cobertas rosnava, se contorcendo, olhos revirados, uhm... Terror sem fundamento, bem se vê. Nova trabalhadeira. Lavaram ela, dona Carlotinha se deu ao trabalho de acender fogo pra ter água morna que sossega mais, dizem. Trocaram a camisola, muita água com açúcar...

— Também por que você deixou janela aberta, Rosa...

Só umas duas horas depois tudo dormia na casa outra vez. Tudo não. Dois olhos fixando a treva, atentos a qualquer ressaibo perdido de luz e aos vultos silenciosos da escuridão. Rosa não dorme toda a noite. Afinal escuta os ruídos da casa acordando. Dona Ana vem saber. Rosa finge dormir, desarrazoadamente enraivecida. Tem um ódio daquela coroca! Tem nojo de dona Carlotinha... Ouve o estalo da lenha no fogo. Escuta o barulho do pão atirado contra a porta do passeio. Rosa esfrega os dedos fortemente pelo corpo. Se espreguiça. Afinal levantou.

Agora caminha mais pausado. Traz uma seriedade nunca vista ainda, na comissura dos lábios. Que negroses nas pálpebras! Pensa que vai trabalhar e trabalha. Limpa com dever a casa toda, botando dez dedos pra fazer a comida, botando dois braços pra varrer, botando os olhos na mesa pra não esquecer o paliteiro. Dona Carlotinha se resfriou. Pois Rosa lhe dá uma porção de amizade. Prepara chás pra ela. Senta na cabeceira da cama, velando muito, sem falar. As duas velhas olham pra ela ressabiadas. Não a reconhecem mais e têm medo da estranha. Com efeito Rosa mudou, é outra Rosa. E uma rosa aberta. Imperativa, enérgica. Se impõe. Dona Carlotinha tem medo de lhe perguntar se passou bem a noite. Dona Ana tem medo de lhe aconselhar que descanse mais. E sábado porém podia lavar a casa na segunda-feira... Rosa lava toda a casa como nunca lavou. Faz uma limpeza completa no próprio quarto. A boneca... Rosa lhe desgruda os últimos crespos da cabeça, gesto frio. Afunda um olho dela, portuguesmente, à Camões. Porém pensa que dona Carlotinha vai sentir. A gente nunca deve dar desgostos inúteis aos outros, a vida é já tão cheia deles!... pensa. Suspira. Esconde a boneca no fundo da canastra.

Quando foi dormir teve um pavor repentino: dormir só!... E si ficar solteira! O pensamento salta na cabeça dela assim, sem razão. Rosa tem um medo doloroso de ficar solteira. Um medo impaciente, sobretudo impaciente, de ficar solteira. Isso é medonho! É UMA VERGONHA!

Se vê bem que nunca tinha sofrido, a coitada! Toda a noite não dormiu. Não sei a que horas a cama se tornou insuportavelmente solitária pra ela. Se ergue. Escancara a janela, entra com o peito na noite, desesperadamente temerária. Rosa espera o besouro. Não tem besouros essa noite. Ficou se cansando naquela posição, à espera. Não sabia o que estava esperando. Nós é que sabemos, não? Porém o besouro não vinha mesmo. Era uma noite quente... A vida latejava num ardor de estrelas pipocantes imóveis. Um silêncio!... O

sono de todos os homens, dormindo indiferentes, sem se amolar com ela... O cheiro de campo requeimado endurecia o ar que parara de circular, não entrava no peito! Não tinha mesmo nada na noite vazia. Rosa espera mais um pouquinho. Desiludida, se deita depois. Adormece agitada. Sonha misturas impossíveis. Sonha que acabaram todos os besouros desse mundo e que um grupo de moças caçoa dela zumbindo: Solteira! às gargalhadas. Chora em sonho.

No outro dia dona Ana pensa que carece passear a moça. Vão na missa. Rosa segue na frente e vai namorar todos os homens que encontra. Tem de prender um. Qualquer. Tem de prender um pra não ficar solteira. Na venda de seu Costa, Pedro Mulatão já veio beber a primeira pinga do dia. Rosa tira uma linha pra ele que mais parece de mulher-da-vida. Pedro Mulatão sente um desejo fácil daquele corpo, e segue atrás. Rosa sabe disso. Quem é aquele homem? Isso não sabe. Nem que soubesse do vagabundo e beberrão, é o primeiro homem que encontra, carece agarrá-lo sinão morre solteira. Agora não namorará mais ninguém. Se finge de inocente e virgem, riquezas que não tem mais... Porém é artista e representa. De vez em quando se vira pra olhar. Olhar dona Ana. Se ri pra ela nesse riso provocante que enche os corpos de vontade.

Na saída da missa outro olhar mais canalha ainda. Pedro Mulatão pára na venda. Bebe mais e trama coisas feias. Rosa imagina que falta açúcar, só pra ir na venda. É Pedro que traz o embrulho, conversando. Convida-a pra de-noite. Ela recusa porque assim não casará. Isso pra ele é indiferente: casar ou não casar... Irá pedir.

Desta vez as duas tias nem chamam Rosa, homem repugnante não? Como casá-la com aqueles trinta-e-cinco anos!... No mínimo, de trinta-e-cinco pra quarenta. E mulato, amarelo pálido já descorado... pela pinga, Nossa Senhora!... Desculpasse, porém a Rosa não queria casar. Então ela aparece e fala que quer casar com Pedro Mulatão. Elas não podem aconselhar nada diante dele, despedem Pedro. Vão tirar informações. Que volte na quinta-feira.

As informações são as que a gente imagina, péssimas. Vagabundo, chuva, mau caráter, não serve não. Rosa chora. Há-de casar com Pedro Mulatão e si não deixarem, ela foge. Dona Ana e dona Carlotinha cedem com a morte na alma.

Quando o João soube que a Rosa ia casar, teve um desespero na barriga. Saiu tonto, pra espairer. Achou companheiros e se meteu na caninha. Deixaram ele por aí, sentado na guia da calçada, manhãzinha, podre de bebedeira. O rondante fez ele se erguer.

— Moço, não pode dormir nesse lugar não! Vá pra sua casa!

Ele partiu, chorando alto, falando que não tinha a culpa. Depois deitou no capim duma travessa e dormiu. O sol o chamou. Dor-de-cabeça, gosto ruim na boca... E a vergonha. Nem sabe como entra em casa. O estrilo do pai é danado. Que insultos! seu filho disto, seu não-sei-que-mais, palavras feias que arrepiam... Ninguém imaginaria que homem tão bom pudesse falar aquelas coisas. Ora! todo homem sabe bocagens, é só ter uma dor desesperada que elas saem. Porque o pai de João sofre deveras. Tanto como a mãe que apenas chora. Chora muito. João tem repugnância de si mesmo. De-tarde quando volta do serviço, a Carmela chama ele na cerca. Fala que João não deve de beber mais assim, porque

a mãe chorou muito. Carmela chora também. João percebe que si beber outra vez, se prejudicará demais. Jura que não cai noutra, Carmela e ele suspiram se olhando. Ficam ali.

Ia me esquecendo da Rosa... Conto o resto do que sucedeu pro João um outro dia. Prepararam enxoval apressado pra ela, menos de mês. Ainda na véspera do casamento, dona Carlotinha insistiu com ela pra que mandasse o noivo embora. Pedro Mulatão era um infame, até gatuno, Deus me perdoe! Rosa não escutou nada. Bateu o pé. Quis casar e casou. Meia que sentia que estava errada porém não queria pensar e não pensava. As duas solteironas choraram muito quando ela partiu casada e vitoriosa, sem uma lágrima. Dura.

Rosa foi muito infeliz.