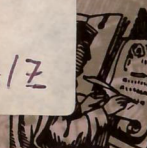


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Brazilian Short Stories 1889 - 2002

Instituto de Letras - UFRGS

Cadernos de Tradução

Nº 22, jan/jun de 2008

Brazilian Short Stories (1889-2002)

Tradução de alunos de Versão IV do
Curso de Bacharelado do Instituto de Letras

Organizadora

Rosalia Neumann Garcia

Angelika

LET 02

Revisão

Ian Alexander

Instituto de Letras - UFRGS

UFRGS
Biblioteca Setorial de Ciências Sociais e Humanidades



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The translations presented here are the result of a long process that started in my *Versão IV* classes, or, to clarify, classes directed towards the task of translating Brazilian literature into English. It became evident with each semester that there were basically two important factors for the successful outcome of our work: students needed to show a special interest in literature and, evidently, they needed to enjoy translation. It seems almost a bit naive when it is said in this way, but, of course, the work involved went a great deal further. One must love words, both their sound and effect; understand how they were chosen for that particular story or paragraph; one must enjoy their subtleness and evasiveness at times, the way words can tease and escape any attempt of being pinned down to a specific meaning. There must also be a special feeling for literature that goes beyond that of a mere spectator: it should touch you like very few things do.

All in all, I believe that the students who worked in those classes contributed to creating a final product (evidently never *absolutely* final) that went through some fine-tuning with the special attention of Ian Alexander, a graduate student in our doctoral program at the Instituto de Letras, and writer. I am grateful for having had such a wonderful group of students all these years and for Ian's readings.

The stories chosen are some of the best in Brazilian literature. They certainly offer us moments of enjoyment, laughter and reflection. *Midnight Mass*, by Machado de Assis, is a study of the impressions a young man has of the object of his desire; *The Man Who Knew Javanese*, by Lima Barreto, joins irony and compassion; *Turtle Dove*, by Lygia Fagundes Teles, is an example of fine storytelling, at times comical, at others, touching; *The Other*, by Rubem Fonseca, builds up to a surprising ending; *Those Two*, by Caio Fernando Abreu, portrays the delicate relationship of the main characters; while *Pale eyes big White horse*, by Jane Tutikian,

makes us wonder about how we relate to others and, in the process, are affected by this relationship.

I would have liked to have included other works in this collection (there are so many that deserve to be here!), but I am sure this is just the beginning of a task that can take students and teachers alike to many new projects of translation.

Rosalia Garcia
Professor of Literature and Translation
Instituto de Letras - UFRGS

Midnight mass

Machado de Assis

I never fully understood the conversation I had with a lady many years ago, when I was seventeen and she, thirty. It was Christmas Eve. Having decided with a neighbor that we would go to Midnight Mass, I preferred not to sleep; I said I would wake him at midnight.

The house where I was lodging belonged to Meneses, a public clerk, whose first marriage had been with one of my cousins. His second wife, Conceição, and her mother received me very well when I came from Mangaratiba to Rio de Janeiro, months earlier, for prep school. I lived peacefully in that two-story house on Senado Street, with my books, a few acquaintances, some outings. The family was small: the clerk, his wife, his mother-in-law and two female slaves. Old habits. At ten o'clock in the evening, we were all in our bedrooms; at ten-thirty the household was asleep. I had never been to the theater and, having often heard Meneses say that he was going, I would ask him to take me along. On these occasions, his mother-in-law would grimace and the slaves tried to muffle their giggles. He would not answer, got dressed, left the house and came back only the next morning. Later on, I found out that the theater was a euphemism in action. Meneses was carrying on an affair with a woman who lived separated from her husband, and would stay with her once a week. At first, Conceição had suffered with the knowledge of the concubine, but she forbore it all, became used to it, and eventually came to find it quite proper.

Kind, dear, Conceição! They called her "the saint" and she deserved the title, she bore her husband's neglect so well. In fact, she had a moderate temper, with no extreme emotions, no great sorrows, no great joy. In regards to the situation

* De Contos Consagrados de Machado de Assis, Edições de Ouro

I mentioned, she would have made a good Muslim wife; she would even have accepted a harem, as long as appearances were kept up. God forgive me if I am judging her ill. Everything about her was attenuated and passive. Her face was average looking, not pretty, nor ugly. She was what you could call a pleasant person. She was unable to speak unkindly of anyone and would forgive everything. She did not know how to hate; it is even possible that she did not know how to love.

On that Christmas Eve, the clerk went to the theater. This was around 1861 or 1862. I was supposed to have gone to Mangaratiba by then, for my vacation, but I stayed on for Christmas to watch the Midnight Mass in the Capital. The family went to bed at the usual time; I slipped into the front room, dressed and ready. From there I could reach the hall and leave the house without waking a single soul. The front door had three keys; one of them was with the clerk, I would take another, and the third stayed in the house.

"But, Mr. Nogueira, what are you going to do all this time?" asked Conceição's mother.

"I'll read, Dona Inácia."

I had a novel with me, *The Three Musketeers*, an old translation published by the *Jornal do Comércio*, I think. I sat at the table in the middle of the room and, by the light of a kerosene lamp, while the house was asleep, once more got on the back of d'Artagnan's thin horse and rode off on adventures. Soon I was completely drunk on Dumas. Time flew by, contrary to what usually occurs when you are waiting. I heard the clock strike eleven almost without noticing, a chance occurrence. However, a small noise coming from inside the house woke me from my reading. It was the sound of steps in the corridor. I raised my head and soon enough saw the figure of Conceição in the doorway.

"Haven't you gone yet?" she asked.

"Not yet, it's not midnight."

"How patient you are!"

Conceição entered the room, dragging her slippers. She was wearing a white robe, loosely tied at the waist. Being a thin woman, she had a romantic demeanor, in no way inconsistent with my adventure book. I closed it; she sat on a chair in front of me, next to the ottoman. When I asked if I had awakened her, with some accidental noise, she quickly answered:

"No! Really! I woke up for no reason."

I stared at her for a while and doubted her assertion. Her eyes were not those of a person who had just woken up, she seemed not to have slept at all. However, I quickly gave up this thought, which might have meant something in some other state of mind without realizing that maybe she could not sleep because of me and had lied so as not to concern or upset me. As I have already said, she was a good woman indeed.

"But it is almost time, I'm sure," I said.

"How patient you are, waiting awake, while others sleep. And waiting alone! Aren't you afraid of spirits from the other world? I noticed that you were startled when you saw me."

"I was a little when I heard footsteps, but then I saw it was you."

"What are you reading? Don't tell me, it's the *Musketeer* novel."

"You're right, it's wonderful."

"Do you like novels?"

"Yes, I do."

"Have you read *The Moreninha*?"

"By Dr. Macedo? I have it in Mangaratiba."

"I enjoy novels very much, but I read very little because I don't have the time. What novels have you been reading?"

I began to list some titles. Conceição was listening to me with her head lying against the back of the chair, gazing through half-closed lids, without taking her eyes off me. Once in a while, she slid her tongue over her lips to moisten them. When I stopped talking, she said nothing, and so we remained for a while. After that, I saw her straighten her head, cross her fingers and place her chin on them, with her elbows on the arms of the chair, without taking her large, clever eyes off me. "Maybe she's worried," I thought. Aloud, I said:

"Dona Conceição, I believe it's very late, and I ..."

"No, no, it's still early. I just checked the time, it's eleven-thirty. It's early. After having stayed up all night, are you able to stay awake throughout the day?"

"It wouldn't be the first time."

"Not me. If I stay up one night, I cannot bear it the next day, and need to take a nap at least for half an hour. But I am getting old, after all."

"Old, Dona Conceição? Never!"

The heat of my words was such that it made her smile. She was a woman of slow movements and calm attitudes; this time, however, she stood up quickly, went to the other side of the room, pacing from the street window to the door of her husband's office. In her candid disarray she caused a peculiar impression on me. She was thin, but there was some kind of sway to her movement, as if she had to make an effort to carry her body, and this had never seemed so clear to me as on that night. She stopped a few times, examining a section of the curtains, or changing the position of some object on the sideboard; she finally stopped before me, with the table between us. One thought kept coming back to her mind, and once more she mentioned her surprise at finding me waiting, awake. I repeated what she already knew – that I had never been to Midnight Mass in the Capital, and that I did not want to miss it.

"It's the same as mass in the country, they're all alike."

"I'm sure it is, but I think there is more luxury here, and more people too. You

know, Holy Week is more beautiful in Rio de Janeiro than in the countryside, though I wouldn't say the same of the feast of St. John or St. Anthony..."

Little by little, she had leaned forward. She set her elbows on the marble top of the table and kept her face between her open hands. Because they were unbuttoned, her sleeves naturally fell open, so I could see part of her arms, very white, and not as thin as one might imagine. This was no revelation to me, though it was also not a common sight. At that moment, however, I was overwhelmed. Her veins were so blue that, despite the poor light, I could count them from where I sat. Conceição's presence had awakened me even more than the book. I went on telling her what I thought about feasts in the country and in the city, and other things that came to my mind. I rambled on, without realizing why, skipping from one subject to another, going back to something I had said before, and laughing to make her smile so I could see her shining white teeth, all perfectly the same. Her eyes were not really black, but dark; her nose, plain and long, a little curved, gave her face an inquisitive air. When I raised my voice, she chided me:

"Speak lower! Mother may wake up."

And she did not change her position, which filled me with pleasure, for our faces were so close. There was really no need to speak in a loud voice. We both whispered, I more than she, for I spoke more. Sometimes she became serious, quite serious, her forehead wrinkled in a frown. Finally, she got tired; her attitude changed, and she moved to another place. She walked around the table and sat beside me on the ottoman. I turned to her and furtively caught a glimpse of the tips of her slippers, but this only lasted the time it took her to sit down. Her gown was long and promptly covered them. I recall they were black. Conceição whispered:

"Mother's room is on the other side of the house, but she is a light sleeper. If she awoke now, poor thing, it would take her a long time to fall asleep again."

"It's the same with me."

"What?" she asked, leaning over to hear what I had said.

I went and sat on the chair next to the ottoman and repeated what I had said. She laughed at the coincidence; she was also a light sleeper, we were three then.

"Sometimes I am like mother – if I wake up, it takes a while for me to fall asleep again. I toss and turn in bed to no avail. I get up, light a candle, walk around, go back to bed and it is no use."

"That is what happened tonight."

"No, no", she said quickly.

I did not understand her denial. Perhaps she did not understand it herself. She took the ends of her belt and slapped them lightly against her knees, that is, her right knee, since she had just crossed her legs. She then told me about a dream she had had, and said she had only ever had one nightmare in her life, as a child. She wanted to know if I ever had them. And so, the conversation picked up slowly,

leisurely, and soon I was no longer thinking about the time nor the mass. As I finished a story or an explanation, she would find another question or another topic and I would start all over again. Occasionally, she reprimanded me:

"Lower, lower..."

There were some pauses as well. Twice it seemed to me that she had dozed off, but her eyes, which had closed for a second, would soon open without a sign of fatigue or weariness, as if she had closed them in order to see better. On one of these occasions, I believe she caught me absorbed in her, and I recall she closed her eyes again, hastily or lazily, I do not know. Some impressions from that night seem fragmented or confusing to me. I contradict myself, I flounder. One of the impressions still clearly engraved in my mind is that, at a certain point, she, who had always been only pleasant, became pretty, became utterly beautiful. She was standing with her arms crossed. As a sign of respect for her, I moved to stand up; she would not allow it. She placed one of her hands on my shoulder and compelled me to remain seated. I thought she would say something, but she shuddered as if she felt cold, turned and sat on the chair where I had first been reading when she approached. From there, she cast a quick glance at the mirror, which was above the ottoman, and talked about two pictures that were hanging on the wall.

"These pictures are getting old. I have already asked Chiquinho to buy some others."

Chiquinho was her husband. The pictures represented the man's main interest. One of them was a picture of Cleopatra. I cannot recall the theme of the other, but both referred to women. They were both vulgar, but at the time, they did not seem ugly to me.

"They are nice," I said.

"They are nice, but stained. Besides, to be honest, I would prefer two images, two saints. These are more suitable for a young man's room or a barbershop."

"A barbershop? You have never been into a barbershop."

"But I can imagine the customers talk about ladies and courting while they wait, and the barber naturally pleases their eyes with beautiful pictures. I think it is not appropriate for a family home. That is what I think, but a great number of strange ideas go through my head. Be that as it may, I do not like these pictures at all. I have an image of Our Lady of Conceição, my patron, and it is very beautiful. It is a sculpture, though, and cannot be placed on the wall. In any case, nor do I want it to be, it is in my oratory."

The idea of the oratory reminded me of the mass. I remembered that it might be late and I wanted to mention it. I believe I even opened my mouth, but I promptly closed it to listen to what she was saying with such sweetness, such grace, such languidness that my soul filled with lassitude and I forgot the mass and the church. She spoke of her devotions when she was a girl and a young lady. Afterwards, she referred to some ballroom anecdotes, some outings, memories of Paquetá, all strung together, almost without interruption. When she got tired

of the past, she talked about the present, household chores, the burden of family life, which, she had been told were many before she was married, but which were really nothing. She did not tell me, but I knew she had gotten married at the age of twenty-seven.

She did not change places anymore, as she had in the beginning, and she almost did not modify her posture. She no longer stared with her big eyes, but started to look aimlessly at the walls.

"We have to change the living room wallpaper," she said after a while, as if to herself.

I agreed, if only to say something to awake me from that magnetic sleepiness, or whatever it was, that hindered my tongue and my senses. I both wanted and did not want to put an end to the conversation. I made an effort to take my eyes off her, and did so as a sign of respect. However, the idea of seeming to be bored when I was not led my eyes once again to Conceição. The conversation was dying out. The silence in the street was complete.

For a time – I do not know how long – we remained quite silent. The only occasional sound was that of a mouse gnawing away in the office, which woke me from the drowsiness I had fallen into. I wanted to mention it, but could not think how. Conceição seemed to be dreaming. Suddenly, I heard a knock on the window:

"Midnight Mass! Midnight Mass!"

"There's your friend," she said as she stood up. "How odd: you agreed to wake him up and he's here to wake you up. Go, it's time. Goodbye."

"Is it time already?" I asked.

"Of course."

"Midnight Mass!" were the words that came from outside.

"Go, go, don't make him wait, it was my fault. Goodbye. See you tomorrow."

And with the same swing of her body, Conceição made her way down the corridor, stepping lightly. I went outside and found my neighbor waiting for me. We went from there to the church. More than once during the mass, I found the figure of Conceição between the priest and myself. Blame it on my youth: I was only seventeen. The next morning at lunchtime, I talked about the mass and the people who were at the church, without exciting Conceição's curiosity. Throughout the day, I found her as always, natural, benevolent and without a sign that she recalled our conversation of the previous evening. At New Year's I went to Mangaratiba. When I returned to Rio de Janeiro in March, the clerk had died of apoplexy. Conceição had moved to Engenho Novo, but I neither visited nor met her. Later, I heard that she had married her husband's assistant clerk.

The man who knew Javanese

Lima Barreto

One day, at a coffee shop, I was telling my friend Castro about the scams I'd played on the great and the good in order to survive.

There was even a certain occasion, while I was in Manaus, when I myself forced to conceal my Bachelor's degree so as to gain the confidence of clients who flocked to my spells-and-fortune-telling office. I was telling Castro all about it.

My friend listened to me in silence, astonished, enjoying that Gil Blas life of mine, when, during a pause in the conversation, as we emptied our glasses, he said nonchalantly:

"You have been living quite an amusing life, Castelo!"

"It is the only way to live... This business of a regular job, leaving home at a certain hour, returning at another, gets you down, don't you think? I really don't know how I have coped at the consulate!"

"It's wearing, but that is not why I am amazed. What amazes me is that you have had so many adventures here, in this asinine, bureaucratic Brazil."

"No! My dear Castro, we can write the most beautiful pages of our lives right here. Can you believe that I was once a teacher of Javanese!"

"When? Here, after you came back from the consulate?"

"No, before that. In fact, that is precisely why I was named consul."

"Tell me all about it. Will you have some more beer?"

"Why not."

We ordered another bottle, filled our glasses, and I continued:

"I had been in Rio for a short time and was literally living in poverty. I kept running from boarding house to boarding house, not knowing where and how

* De www.bibvirt.futuro.usp.br

to make ends meet, when I read the following advertisement in *Jornal do Comércio*:

'Javanese language teacher needed. Letters to etc'. Now, I told myself, that is a job with very few competitors; if I could just get my head around half a dozen words, I would apply for it. I left the coffee shop and wandered through the streets, imagining I was a teacher of Javanese, making money, taking the streetcar without any unpleasant encounters with 'bloodhounds'. Without quite realizing, I had walked towards the National Library. I didn't know what book to ask for, but I went in, gave the doorman my hat, received my ticket and went upstairs. On the way up, it occurred to me that I could ask for the *Grande Encyclopédie*, volume J, and consult the entry related to Java and Javanese. And that is what I did. I learned, after a few minutes, that Java was a large island of the Sunda archipelago, a Dutch colony, and that Javanese, an agglutinating language of the Malayo-Polynesian group, had a noteworthy literature and was written in characters derived from the old Hindi alphabet.

"The *Encyclopédie* gave me references of works on the Malay language and I did not think twice before consulting one of them. I wrote down the alphabet, the approximate pronunciation, and left. I walked through the streets, rambling and digesting letters. Hieroglyphs danced in my head; every once in a while I would turn to my notes; I strolled through the parks and scribbled the odd letters in the sand to store them in my mind and train my hand to write them.

"At night, after I managed to reach my room without being seen, so as to avoid indiscreet questions from the landlord, I continued to chew over my Malay A-B-C. So seriously that, by the following morning, I knew it perfectly well.

"I was convinced that it was the easiest language in the world and went on my way; but not before bumping into the landlord:

"Mr. Castelo, when are you going to pay what you owe me?"

I answered with the most charming display of confidence:

'Soon... It won't be long... Be patient... I shall be hired as a Javanese teacher and...'

The man interrupted me:

'What the deuce is that, Mr. Castelo?'

I used this digression to take advantage of the man's patriotism:

'It is a language spoken in those parts around Timor. Do you know where that is?'

Oh! Naive soul! The man forgot all about my debt and said in his strong Portuguese accent:

'To tell you the truth, I don't know for sure; but I've heard it is a territory that we have somewhere near Macau. And what do *you* know about all this, Mr. Castelo?'

"I was so excited about the easy escape Javanese had given me that I looked for the advertisement again. There it was. I happily decided to apply for the job of

teaching that oceanic language. I wrote my reply, went down to the newspaper office and left my letter. Then I went back to the library and continued my Javanese studies. I did not make much progress that day, perhaps because I judged the Javanese alphabet to the only information necessary for a Malayan language teacher, perhaps because I worked more on the bibliography and literary history of the language I was going to teach.

"Two days later I received a letter asking me to go speak to Mr. Manuel Feliciano Soares Albernaz, the Baron of Jacuecanga, on Conde de Bonfin Street, I can't recall the number. You must not forget that, in the meantime, I continued studying my Malay, that is, my Javanese. Besides the alphabet, I had learned the names of a few authors, as well as how to ask and answer 'how do you do?', and a couple of grammar rules, all of this knowledge backed up by twenty words from the lexicon.

"You cannot imagine the difficulties I struggled with in trying to obtain the four hundred *réis* for my trip! It is easier – you can be sure – to learn Javanese... I went on foot. I arrived covered in sweat; with maternal affection, the venerable mango trees, which were lined up before the Baron's house, welcomed me, greeted me, and comforted me. In all my life, this was the only moment I actually felt the kindness of nature...

"It was an enormous house that seemed to be empty; it was in poor condition, but for some reason I thought this was probably more related to carelessness and ennui than to actual poverty. It had probably not received a coat of paint in years. The walls were peeling and the edges of the roof, made of those old glazed tiles, were missing ornaments here and there, like a set of deteriorating, mistreated dentures.

"I took a look around the garden and saw the vengeful strength with which the weeds and burrs had expelled the elephant ears and begonias. The crotons, however, survived with their dim-colored foliage. I knocked. It took them a long time to answer. Finally, the door was opened by an old black African man, whose cotton beard and hair gave his appearance an distinct look of age, mildness and suffering.

"In the living room there was a gallery of portraits: arrogant bearded gentlemen were lined up in immense golden frames; profiles of sweet ladies with braided hair, holding large fans, who seemed to want to rise up into the sky, inflated by the ballooning dresses. But, of all those old objects, to which the dust lent more antiquity and respect, the one I liked the most was a quaint porcelain jar, from China or India, as they say. That china purity, its fragility, the innocent design and that dull, moonlit shine, all gave me the impression that the object had been made by the hands of a dreaming child to enchant the tired eyes of disillusioned old men...

"I waited for the owner of the house for a while. He took quite some time. Somewhat shaky, holding a large handkerchief, inhaling the snuff of bygone days

in his ancient manner: I was filled with respect when I saw him enter. I wanted to leave. Even if he were not my pupil, it would always be a crime to hoax that old man, whose age brought to mind something dignified, something sacred. I hesitated, but stayed.

'I am', I said as I stepped forward, 'the Javanese teacher that you said you needed.'

'Have a seat, said the old man. Are you from here, from Rio?'

'No, I come from Canavieiras.'

'Pardon me?' he asked. 'Speak up a little, I am deaf.'

'I come from Canavieiras, in Bahia,' I repeated.

'Where did you study?'

'In São Salvador.'

'And where did you learn Javanese?' he inquired with the stubbornness peculiar to old people.

"I was not expecting that question, but I immediately elaborated a lie. I told him that my father was Javanese. As a crew member of a merchant ship, he had gone to Bahia, settled near Canavieiras as a fisherman, got married, prospered, and with him I had learned Javanese.

"And did he believe you? What about your appearance?" asked my friend, who until this moment had listened in silence.

"I am not that different from the Javanese", I objected. "My straight, hard, thick hair and my bronzed skin could easily give me the appearance of a half-breed Malay... You know very well that among us there is a little of everything: Indians, Malays, Tahitians, Malagasies, Guanches, even Goths – a fraternity of races that is the envy of the whole world."

"Alright", said my friend, "go on."

"The old man, I continued, listened to me carefully, contemplated my looks for a long time, and seemed to actually think I was the son of a Malay. He asked me gently:

'So you are willing to teach me Javanese?'

The answer came out involuntarily: 'Absolutely.'

'You are probably amazed', the Baron of Jacuecanga added, 'that I, at my age, still want to learn anything, but...'

'There is nothing to be amazed at. We have seen examples, very fertile examples...'

'What I want, my dear Mr...'

'Castelo', I said.

'What I want, my dear Mr. Castelo, is to fulfill a family promise. I am not sure you know that I am the grandson of Conselheiro Albernaz, the man who followed Pedro I when he gave up the throne. When my grandfather returned from London, he brought along a book written in a strange language, which he was

very fond of. It was a Hindi or a Siamese man who had given him the book, in London, as thanks for some favor my grandfather had done for him. When Grandfather was dying, he called my father and told him: "Son, here is this book written in Javanese. The man who gave it to me told me that it prevents harm and brings happiness to the owner. I am not so sure about this. In any case, keep it; but if you want the fate the wise oriental man described to come true, your son must understand the book, so that our descendants may always be happy". My father, the old Baron continued, did not believe the story very much, but, he kept the book. On his deathbed, he gave it to me and told me about the promise he had made to his father. In the beginning, I did not care much about the book. I set it aside and went on with my life. I actually forgot all about it; but for some time I have been going through so much sorrow, so many unfortunate events have accompanied my old age, that I remembered the family's talisman. I have to read it, to understand it, if I don't want my last days here to be the portent of disaster for my descendants; and in order to understand it, I obviously must know Javanese. There you have it.'

"The old man fell silent and I noticed his eyes had become misty. He discreetly dried his eyes and asked me if I would like to see the book. I said I would. He called the servant, gave him instructions and explained he had lost all of his sons and nephews, the only descendant left alive was his married daughter, whose only son, however, was a feeble boy of poor and unstable health.

"The book came. It was a big, old tome, an ancient *in-quarto*, leather bound, printed in large letters on thick, yellowish paper. The front page was missing, so there was no way of knowing when it was published. There were some pages with a preface, in English, where I read that the book was about the stories of Prince Kulanga, a very respectable Javanese writer.

"As soon as I said this, the old Baron, not realizing I had learned this through the English text, held my Malayan knowledge in high regard. I continued looking through the volume with the air of someone who understood that kind of gibberish magnificently, until we finally agreed on my payment and schedule, and I committed myself to teaching him to read the old thing within a year.

"Soon, I was teaching my first class, though the old man was not as diligent as I had been. He could not learn to identify and write even four letters. Thus, it took us a month to go through half the alphabet and the Lord Baron of Jacuecanga was not exactly lord of the subject: he learned and he unlearned.

"His daughter and his son-in-law (who had, I think, up to that moment known nothing about the book) learned about the old man's studies; they did not mind. They thought it was amusing and a good way to distract him.

"But what will astonish you, my dear Castro, is how much his son-in-law was impressed with the Javanese teacher. So unique! He never ceased to repeat: "It is astonishing! So young! If only I knew that, ah! Where would I be!"

"Dona Maria da Glória's husband (that was the baron's daughter's name) was a chief judge, a man of connections and power; though he was not embarrassed to show everybody how much he admired my knowledge of Javanese. For his part, the Baron was perfectly satisfied. At the end of two months, he had given up learning and had asked me to translate, every other day, an extract from the enchanted book. He only needed to understand it, he told me; he had nothing against listening to somebody else's translation. Thus, he avoided the fatigue of learning and fulfilled his mission.

"You know full well that I still do not know a word of Javanese, but I made up some foolish stories and imposed them on the old man as if they were from the *Chronicon*. How he would listen to that drivel!... He was enraptured, as if he was listening to the words of an angel. And I grew more important for him!

"He asked me to live in his house, heaped me with gifts, increased my wages. I had, all in all, an easy life.

"Much of it came from the fact that around this time he received an inheritance from a forgotten relative who lived in Portugal. The good old man assigned his good fortune to my Javanese, and I was close to believing it myself.

"I gradually lost any feeling of remorse; still, I was always afraid of finding someone who indeed knew that Malayan patois. My fear grew when the kind Baron sent me with a letter to the Viscount of Caruru so he would get me started in the diplomatic career. I made all kinds of objections: my ugliness, lack of elegance, dark complexion. – 'What!' he would answer. 'Go, lad, you know Javanese!' I went. The Viscount sent me to the Foreigners Department with a number of recommendations. I was a sensation.

"The director called the heads of every division: 'See here, a man who knows Javanese – what a prodigy!'

"The heads of divisions introduced me to the clerks and scribes. There was one fellow who looked at me with anger, rather than envy or amazement. Everyone said: 'So you know Javanese? Is it difficult? Nobody knows it around here!'

"The scribe who had given me the angry look rejoined: 'It is true, but I can speak Kanak. Can you?' I told him I couldn't and went to meet the minister.

"The high authority stood up, placed his hands on his hips, fitted the *pince-nez* to his nose and asked: 'So, you know Javanese?' I said I did, and, to the question about where I had learned it, I told him the story of my Javanese father. 'Well,' said the minister, 'you cannot become a diplomat, your build is not suitable... A consulate in Asia or the Pacific would be good, though. There are no vacancies now, but I will make a few changes and you will get in. From now on, however, you will be an attaché to my cabinet and, next year, I want you to go to Basel, where you will be Brazil's representative at the Linguistics Congress. Study, read Hovelacque, Max Müller, and others!'

"Can you believe it, I still knew no Javanese at all, but I had a job and was to

represent Brazil at a congress of scholars.

"The old Baron eventually died. He passed the book on to his son-in-law, so that he would give it to his grandson when he was old enough, and left me something in his will.

"I devoted myself to studying the Malayo-Polynesian languages; but I simply couldn't!

"Eating well, dressing well, sleeping well; I no longer had the necessary energy to fill my head with all that oddity. I bought books, I subscribed to magazines: *Revue Anthropologique et Linguistique*, *Proceedings of the English-Oceanic Association*, *Archivo Glottologico Italiano*, everything, and still no result! Nevertheless, my reputation only grew. On the streets, those in the know pointed at me, saying to each other: 'There goes the chap who knows Javanese.' In bookshops, grammarians consulted me about the position of the pronouns in that Sunda Islands jargon. I received letters from scholars from other parts of the country, newspapers mentioned my knowledge and I refused to accept a group of students who were thirsty to learn Javanese. After an invitation from the editorial staff, I wrote a four-column article about ancient and modern Javanese literature in the *Jornal do Comércio*...

"How could you, if you knew nothing?" the attentive Castro interrupted me.

"Very simple: first, I described the island of Java, with the help of dictionaries and a few geography books, and then I quoted everything I could."

"Didn't they ever suspect?" my friend asked me.

"Never. That is, there was one time I was almost caught. The police arrested a man, a sailor, a bronzed fellow who only spoke a weird foreign language. A number of interpreters were called, nobody could understand him. I was called, too; naturally, with all the respect due to my wisdom. I took some time to go, but I finally went. The man had already been released, thanks to the intervention of the Dutch consul, to whom he had made himself understood through a few words of Dutch. And the sailor was Javanese – phew!

"The Congress finally came, and off I went, to Europe. What a delight! I attended the opening and the preparatory sessions. They had signed me up for the Tupi-Guarani session and I decamped to Paris. Before that, however, I had my portrait and some biographical and bibliographical notes printed in the *Basel Messenger*. When I returned, the congress president apologized for having put me in that session; he didn't know my work and thought that, because I was Brazilian, I would naturally fit into the Tupi-Guarani session. I accepted his explanations and, to this day, have still not been able to write my papers on Javanese to send him, as promised.

"When the congress was over, I had extracts from the *Basel Messenger* article published in Berlin, Turin and Paris, where the readers of my work offered me a banquet, hosted by Senator Gorot. This whole nonsense cost me a great deal,

including the banquet: about ten thousand francs, almost my entire inheritance from the simple, good Baron of Jacuecanga.

"I wasted neither my time nor my money. I became the pride of the nation and, as I landed on Pharoux dock, I received an ovation from every level of society. A few days later, the president of the republic invited me to have lunch with him.

"In six months, I was sent to the consulate in Havana, where I was stationed for six years and where I will return to perfect my studies of Malayan, Melanesian and Polynesian languages.

"That is fantastic", observed Castro, as he picked up the glass of beer.

"Listen, if I weren't so happy, do you know what would I be?"

"What?"

"An eminent bacteriologist. Shall we go now?"

"Let's."

Gazeta da Tarde, Rio. 28-4-1911.

The other

Rubem Fonseca

Every day I would go to my office at 8:30 a.m. The car would stop in front of the building, I would hop out, take ten or fifteen steps and walk into the building.

Like all businessmen, I spent the mornings making phone calls, reading memos, dictating letters to my secretary and increasingly getting exasperated with problems. By lunchtime, I had already worked very hard. But, I always had the feeling I hadn't done anything useful.

I would take an hour for lunch, sometimes an hour and a half, at one of the restaurants in nearby; then I went back to the office. On some days, I would speak on the phone more than fifty times. There were so many letters that my secretary or one of my assistants would sign them for me. And, at the end of the day, I always had the impression that I hadn't done everything I was supposed to do. I raced against time. I was annoyed when there was a mid-week holiday, since it meant I would have even less time. I took work home daily, where I could produce more; the phone didn't ring so often.

One day I started to feel a strong palpitation. Coincidentally, on the same day, as I was arriving at work in the morning, a fellow appeared right at my side on the street. He walked along with me up to the door saying, "Mister, mister, I wonder if you could help me?" I gave him some change and went into the building. A bit later, when I was on a call to São Paulo, my heart took off. For some minutes, it pounded hard, leaving me exhausted. I had to lie down on the sofa until it slowed down. I was dizzy, sweating heavily, I almost fainted.

On that same afternoon, I went to a cardiologist. He ran detailed tests, including an electrocardiogram, and, finally said that I needed to lose some weight and

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change my habits. That was funny. Then he recommended that I stop working for a while, but I told him that was out of the question. In the end, he prescribed a diet and told me to walk at least twice a day.

On the next day, at lunchtime, when I went for the doctor's recommended walk, the same fellow from the day before stopped me and asked for money. He was a strong white man, with long brown hair. I gave him some money and went on my way.

The doctor had said frankly that if I weren't careful of myself, I could have a heart attack at any moment. On that day, I took two tranquilizers, but it wasn't enough to rid me of my tension. At night, I didn't take any work home. But, time didn't pass. I tried to read a book, but my mind was somewhere else, at the office. I turned the TV on, but I couldn't take it for more than ten minutes. After dinner, I came back from my walk and felt restless, sitting in the armchair, reading the newspaper, annoyed.

At lunch time, the same fellow was at my side asking me for money. "Is it going to be every day now?", I asked. "Mister," he answered, "my mother is dying, she needs medication. I don't know any people in the world who care, only you, mister." I gave him one hundred cruzeiros.

For some days he vanished. One day, at lunch time, I was taking a walk when he suddenly showed up by my side. "Mister, my mother died." Without stopping, I started to walk faster, saying "I'm sorry." He walked faster to keep up with me and repeated "died." I tried to get rid of him and sped up, almost breaking into a run. But he ran after me, saying all the while "died, died, died", stretching out his tightened arms as if straining to make an effort, as if his mother's coffin would be placed on the palms of his hands. Finally, I stopped, breathless, and asked "How much do you need?" He needed 5,000 cruzeiros to bury his mother. I don't know why, but I took the checkbook out of my pocket and made out a check in that amount, standing there on the street. My hands were shaking. "That's it!" I said.

On the following day, I didn't go out for my walk. I had lunch at the office. It was a terrible day when everything went wrong: papers couldn't be found in the files, an important account was lost by a slight margin, a mistake in financial planning meant new and complex budget calculations had to be done urgently. At night, even with the tranquilizers, I could hardly sleep.

Next morning, I went to the office and, in a way, things were a bit better. At midday I went out for my walk.

I saw the man who asked me for money standing, half-hidden on the corner, lurking, waiting for me to pass. I turned around and went the other way. I soon heard the sound of heels on the sidewalk, as if someone were running after me. I hurried, feeling my heart tighten, as if I were being chased by someone, a childish sensation of fear, which I tried to fight against, took over. At this moment, he caught up to me saying, "Mister, hey, mister." Without stopping, I asked: "Now

what?" Staying right by me he said, "Mister, you've got to help me, no one else cares about me." I answered with all the authority I could muster, "Get a job." He said, "I don't know how to do anything. You need to help me." We were running through the streets. I had the feeling people were staring at us in an odd way. "I don't have to help you at all," I answered. "Yes, you do, or you have no idea what could happen," and he grabbed my arm and looked at me, and for the first time, I really saw his face, cynical and vengeful. My heart pumped, nervous and tired. "This is the last time," I said, stopping to give him some money, I don't know how much.

But it was not the last time. Everyday he appeared, suddenly, begging and threatening, walking beside me, destroying my health, saying, "this is the last time, mister," but it never was. My blood pressure rose even higher. My heart exploded at the mere thought of him. I didn't want to see the fellow anymore. Was it my fault he was poor?

I decided to stop working for a while. I talked to the board of directors and they agreed to give me a two-month leave.

The first week was hard. It's no easy task to stop working all of a sudden. I felt lost and didn't know what to do. But I gradually got used to it. I recovered my appetite. I started sleeping better and smoking less. I watched TV, read a book, took a nap after lunch and walked as much as I used to, and it felt great. I was becoming a calm man, and was thinking seriously about changing my lifestyle; not working so much.

One day, I stepped out for my daily walk, when he, the beggar, suddenly appeared. How in hell had he found out my address? "Mister, don't abandon me." His voice was bitter and full of resentment. "You're the only person in the world I can count on, don't ever do that again, I need some money, this is the last time, I swear!" – and he leaned his body against mine as we walked, and I could feel his breath, rotten and sour with hunger. He was taller than me, strong and threatening.

I walked towards the house, he came along with me, his steady face set on mine, watching me curiously, suspicious, implacable, until we got to my door. I said, "Wait here."

I shut the door, went to my bedroom. I came back, opened the door and when he saw me, he said, "Don't, mister, no one else cares about me." He didn't finish speaking or, if he did, I didn't hear him because of the blast. He fell to the ground; then I saw that he was a skinny boy with zits on his face, and of such pallor that not even the blood that started to cover his face could hide it.

Turtledove or A love story

Lygia Fagundes Telles

She met him for the first time when she was crowned princess of the Spring Ball and as soon as her heart jolted and her eyes filled with tears she thought: I am going to love him forever. When he asked her to dance she felt dizzy, hastily dried her sweaty palms on the bodice of her dress (pretending she was smoothing out a crease) and, legs shaking, opened her arms to him and smiled. A crooked little smile, to hide the gap from a missing canine, which she had promised herself she would have seen to by Roni's dentist, Dr. Elcio, if she got promoted from assistant to hairdresser. He said only a few words, like, You should be the queen, because the queen is a real cow, pardon the expression. She replied that the queen's boyfriend had bought all the votes, unfortunately she didn't have a boyfriend, and even if she did, it wouldn't make any difference because she only got things the hard way, she was a Capricorn and Capricorns have to struggle twice as hard to succeed. I don't believe in that crap, he said, and excused himself to go out for a smoke, they were already dancing the encore of the *Myosotis Waltz* and it was hot as hell. She excused him. Better not to have, she would later say to the queen when they were going home. Because after that she didn't lay eyes on him again, although she looked for him all over the ballroom and with such determination that the director of the club came over to ask her what she had lost. My boyfriend, she said laughing, when she got nervous she would laugh for no reason. But is Antenor your boyfriend? the director wondered, holding her tightly while they danced *Nosotros*. Because he left straight after the waltz, wrapped around a black girl in a halter dress, he added, distracted. A nice guy but couldn't hold down a

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job, at the start of the year he was a bus driver, last month he was a tire repairman at a shop on Marechal Deodoro Square, but now he was at a car parts store on Guaianazes Street, almost at the corner of General Osório, he didn't know the number but it was easy to find. Not that easy, she thought, when she found him at the back of the workshop, polishing a part. He didn't recognize her, What can I do for you? She started to laugh, But I'm the princess of São Paulo Chic, remember? He remembered as he shook his head, impressed, But nobody has this address, damn it, how did you get it? He took her to the door: he had tons of work to do, no time to scratch himself, but he thanked her for the visit, she could leave her phone number, did she have a pencil on her? Never mind, he could remember any number by heart; he would give her a call some time, OK? He didn't. She went to the Church of the Hanged Men, lit seven candles for the most afflicted souls and started a Miraculous Novena in praise of Saint Anthony, all of this after having called several times just to hear his voice. On the first Saturday that the horoscope announced as a wonderful day for Capricorns, when the owner of the beauty salon had gone out to do a bride's hair, she phoned again and this time she spoke, but so low that he had to shout, Speak up, damn it, I can't hear a thing. She was frightened by the shout and gently hung up the phone. She only built up courage again with the shot of vermouth Roni got from around the corner, and then she tried again at the exact moment there was an accident on the street and everybody went to the window to have a look. She said she was the princess of the Ball, laughed when she denied having called other times and invited him to see a really interesting local movie that was showing at a theater right near his shop, on São João Avenue. The silence at the other end was so complete that Roni hurried to give her another shot, Drink, dear, you're almost fainting. I think we were cut off, she murmured, leaning on the table, a little dizzy. Sit down, dear, let me call for you, he offered, drinking the rest of the vermouth and speaking with his mouth glued to the receiver: This is Roni, a friend of the princess, you know, she's not very brilliant at this moment, and that's why I'm calling for her, it's nothing serious, thank God, but the poor thing is so anxious for an answer, of course. In a low tense voice (like those Mafia gangsters from the movies, you just *feel* something inside, Roni would say later, rolling his eyes), he calmly asked not to call the shop again, because his boss was pissed off, and besides, (his voice deepened) he couldn't date anyone, he was already seeing someone, if one day I feel like it, I WILL CALL HER MYSELF, OK? Let her wait, for Christ's sake. She waited. Throughout those days of hope she wrote him fourteen letters, nine romantically inspired, and the others based on the book *Erotic Correspondence* by Glenda Edwin, which Roni had lent her with recommendations, Because now, darling, sex is the thing, if he (what a wonderful voice!) is a Taurus, you have to put out right away, a Taurus talks a lot about the moon, about boat rides, but what they really want is to get laid. She signed *Turtledove*,

but when she was about to post the letters, she ripped up the erotic ones and only sent the others. Still during this period she started knitting him a green sweater, double thread (hot as hell, but you never know in this city) and twice she asked Roni to call him and disguise his voice, as if he were the radio announcer from *Intimacy on the Air*, to tell him that at such and such a time, Turtledove had dedicated a special bolero to him. He's very, very macho, Roni commented with a thoughtful smile after hanging up. And only after much insistence he told her that he had snorted angrily and said he didn't want to listen to any fucking bolero, Tell her I'm out of town, that I died! On the evening when the soap opera ended with Dr. Amândio happily by Laurinha's side, when, after so many obstacles, true love was victorious, she dried her tears, finished the hem of her new dress and the next day, claiming strong cramps, left early to catch him on his way out from work. It was raining so hard that when she got there she was a total mess, with one false eyelash clinging to her left eye, the other washed away in the downpour. He pulled her under the umbrella, said he was pissed off because Corinthinans had lost their game and asked through gritted teeth where her bus stop was. But we could go to the movies, she invited, trembling as she held his arm, her tears mingling with the rain. On Conselheiro Crispiniano Street, if she wasn't mistaken, there was a really interesting movie playing, wouldn't he like to sit out the rain at the movies? At this moment, he stepped ankle-deep into a puddle, swore twice at the goddamn rain and pushed her inside the crowded smoke-filled bus. Before that, he said right in her ear not to chase after him anymore because he couldn't stand it, he thanked her for the shirt, the little key-ring, the Easter eggs and the box of handkerchiefs, but he didn't want to date her because he already had a girlfriend, Get me out of your head, for God's sake, for GODSAKE! She got off the bus at the next corner, got on another across the street, went to the Church of the Hanged Men, lit another thirteen candles and when she got home, picked up her plaster Saint Anthony, took the baby Jesus away from him, hid him in a dresser drawer and warned him that until Antenor called her, she wouldn't release or return the child. She slept bathed in tears, a woolen sock around her neck because of a sore throat, Antenor's picture (which she had stolen from his São Paulo Chic membership card) with a little branch of rue under her pillow. On the day of the Hydrangea Ball, she bought a gentleman's ticket, tipped the ticket seller who worked on Guaianazes to take it to the workshop and asked the owner of the beauty salon to give her a Catherine Deneuve hairstyle, the one on the cover of the last issue of *Secret Lives*. She spent the whole evening watching the entrance to the ballroom. The following afternoon she bought the record *Ave-Maria for Lovers* on special, wrote on the card the line Lucinha says to Mario in the scene at the station, *I love you today more than yesterday and less than tomorrow*, signed TD, and after borrowing money from Roni, she went to the crossroads near Alzira's house to leave what Father Fuzô had asked of her two weeks before to cheer her

up and to fulfill her destiny: a bottle of champagne and a pack of Minister cigarettes. If she wanted a stronger kind of sorcery, she could ask, Alzira offered. An example? If she sewed up the mouth of a frog, the guy would start to dry up and wither and would only stop wasting away on the day he called her, it was surefire. The mere thought of doing anything so wicked made her depressed, imagine, how could she wish something so horrible on the man she loved so much? The black woman respected her will, but advised her to carry raw garlic in her purse, place some on her door and stick one clove right in there. In *there?*, she was startled and hung around listening to other spells, only out of consideration because they were impossible for a virgin: how could she take a hair from his privates to braid with hers and bury them together in a cemetery? On the last day of the year, during a break barely long enough for her to swallow a sandwich, Roni called her aside, caressed her hair (so soft, dear, it was the oil treatment, wasn't it?) and, after taking the cup of coffee from her hands, told her that Antenor's wedding was set for the first week of January. She fainted right there, on top of the costumer who was under the dryer. When she got home her Portuguese neighbor made her an eggnog (my girl, you are skin and bones!) and taught her an infallible spell, Did she, by any chance, have a picture of the animal? Well, she should glue it to a red felt heart and at midday she should stick a pair of steel scissors three times into the ingrate's chest and say, what was his name, Antenor? Well, as she stabbed him, she should say with all her might, Antenor, Antenor, Antenor, you will not eat nor sleep nor rest until come to my door! She also took a plate of sweets to Saint Cosmas and Saint Damian, left it in the garden with the most flowers she could find on the way (a very difficult task since public gardens didn't have any flowers and private ones were locked and guarded by dogs) and went to watch him from a distance as he left work. She didn't see him because (she found out through Gilvan, a very nice taxi driver and a friend of Antenor's) he was getting married that afternoon, with a little reception after the religious ceremony at São Paulo Chic. This time she didn't cry: she went to Mappin Department Store and bought a liqueur set on credit, wrote a card wishing him all the happiness in the world, asked Gilvan to deliver the gift, scrawled a big TD on the wrapping paper (she had forgotten to sign the card) and when she got home drank caustic soda. She left the hospital five kilos thinner, helped by Gilvan on one side and Roni on the other, Gilvan's cab was full of gifts the crowd at the salon had sent her. It's over now, she said to Gilvan in a whisper. I don't think of him anymore, she added, but paid close attention when Roni said that the gypsy was now working as a valet at a parking lot at Vila Pompéia, he heard it was on Tito Street. She wrote him a note telling him that she had almost died, but she regretted her reckless act which had given her a burn on the chin and another on her leg, that she was getting married to Gilvan who had been very good to her while she was in hospital and asked him to forgive her for everything that had happened. It

would have been better if she had died because then she would be off my back, Antenor had said when he received the note which he tore into a thousand pieces in front of an acquaintance of Roni's who spread the news at the feast of Saint John at the São Paulo Chic. Gilvan, Gilvan, you were my salvation, she sobbed on her wedding night, closing her eyes to better recall the night she had held Antenor's arm under the umbrella. When she got pregnant, she sent him a postcard of the statue of Christ the Redeemer (he was living in Piracicaba with his wife and the twins) telling him how happy she was in a modest but clean house, with her color TV, her canary and her little dog called Perereca. She signed just out of habit and crossed out the signature right away, but lightly, leaving *Turtle Dove* under the tenuous net of lines and a heart with an arrow. On Gilvan Jr.'s third birthday, holding a handkerchief to her mouth (she was so nauseous with this second pregnancy) she wrote him a letter wishing him all the luck in the world as a driver for the Piracicaba – São Pedro bus line. She pasted a dried pansy to the letter. During the engagement party of her youngest daughter, Maria Aparecida, just for fun, she asked a gypsy who was famous in the neighborhood to read her future in the cards. The woman shuffled the grimy cards, spread them out on the table and told her that if she went to the bus station next Sunday she would see the arrival of a man that would change her life completely, Look, there is the King of Clubs with the Queen of Hearts on the left. He would come in a red and yellow bus, she could even see what he looked like, gray hair, sideburns. His name started with an A, look here, the Ace of Spades with the first letter of his name. She laughed her crooked little laugh (the gap had been filled, but the habit remained) and said that was all in the past, that she was getting too old to think about such nonsense, but on the appointed Sunday she left her granddaughter with the girl's godmother, put on the turquoise dress from her silver wedding anniversary, took a look at the horoscope (it couldn't be better) and went.

Those two
Caio Fernando Abreu

The truth of the matter is, there was nobody else around. Months later, not right at the beginning, one of them would say the office was “a desert of souls”. The other agreed, smiling, proud, aware that he was excluded. And, slowly, between beers, they exchanged acid comments about voracious, unloved women, the chats they overheard about soccer, Secret Santa, gift lists, bookmaking, lottery, fortune-teller’s address, paperclips attached to the time clock, occasional snacks at the end of the shift, domestic champagne in plastic cups. In a desert of deserted souls, one special soul immediately recognizes another – perhaps that’s why, who knows? But neither asked himself.

They never used words like “special”, “different”, or anything like that. Despite the fact that, without show, they had recognized each other in the first second of the first minute. Fact is, however, they had no clue as to how to name their emotions, or even how to try and understand them. Not that they were very young, too ignorant or even a little stupid. Raul was a year over thirty. Saul, a year under. But the differences between them were not limited to that time, or those letters. Raul was coming from a failed marriage, three years and no children. Saul from an engagement so endless that it had to come to an end one day, and a frustrated Architecture course. Perhaps that’s why he drew. Just faces with huge eyes, no iris, no pupils. Raul listened to music and, sometimes, on a binge, would play the guitar and sing, especially old boleros in Spanish. And they both liked movies.

They were hired in the same selection at the same company, but had not met

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Texto de referência: www.releituras.com

Those two

during the tests. They were introduced to each other on the first day at work. They said nice to meet you, Raul, nice to meet you, Saul, then, what's your name again? grinning, amused at the coincidence. But, discreetly, since they were new with the company and the people, after all, you never know where you stand. They tried to withdraw almost immediately, deliberately limiting themselves to a daily hello, how are you, or, at the most, on Fridays, a cordial have a nice weekend. But, from the start there was something – fate, the stars, destiny, who knows? – conspiring against (or in favor of, why not?) those two.

Their desks were side by side. Nine hours a day, with an hour lunch break. And, lost in the midst of what, months later, Raul (or was it Saul?) would call precisely “a desert of souls”, so they wouldn't feel so cold, so thirsty, or simply because they were human, without wanting to justify them – or, on the contrary, justifying them completely and profoundly, whatever: what else could one expect from those two other than, little by little, to get closer, to get to know each other, to mix? And that is what happened. So gradually, they barely noticed.

II

They were two lonely young men. Raul had come from the North, Saul from the South. In that city, everyone came from the North, the South, the Midwest, the East – and by that I mean it's a detail that did not make them especially different. But, in the desert all around, everyone else had other references, a wife, an uncle, a mother, a lover. They had no one in that city – nor, in a way, in any other – except themselves. I was about to say they had nothing, but that wouldn't be entirely true.

Besides the guitar, Raul had a rented phone, a turntable with a radio, and a thrush called Carlos Gardel in a cage. Saul, a color TV with a ghost image, sketch books, bottles of Indian ink and a book of Van Gogh prints. On the wall, another Van Gogh print: that bedroom with the small crooked-looking straw chair, the narrow bed, the floorboards, hanging on the wall facing the bed. Lying down, Saul sometimes had the feeling the picture was a mirror reflecting, almost photographically, his own room, with just himself missing. Almost always, it was then that he would draw.

They were two handsome young men too, everyone thought so. The women in the office, married or single, got jittery when they appeared, so tall and proud, as one of the secretaries remarked, wide-eyed. Unlike the other men, some even younger than they, neither had a paunch, or the despondent attitude of someone who stamps or types papers eight hours a day.

Dark, a bluish tone under his shave, Raul was a bit more muscular and had a deep bass voice, so in keeping with the bitter boleros he enjoyed singing. They

were the same height, the same build, but Saul seemed slighter, more fragile, maybe because of his fair hair, tight-curved, his startled eyes, pale blue.

They looked good together, the young women would say. A sight for sore eyes. Without being exactly aware of it, when they were together both stood even straighter and almost glittered, so to speak, the inner beauty of one bringing out the outer beauty of the other, and vice-versa. As if between those two there were a strange and secret harmony.

III

They crossed paths, silent but amiable, at the table with the coffee thermos, commenting on the weather or their dull jobs, then went back to their desks. Once in a long while, one asked the other for a cigarette, and they nearly always swapped comments like, I really want to quit, but I've never actually tried, or I've tried so often, now I can't be bothered. That went on for a long time. And it would have gone on longer, since they were both so reserved, almost remote, it was a feature they brought from afar. From the North, from the South.

Except that one day Saul came in late, and in reply to a vague what happened, said that he had stayed up watching an old movie on TV. Out of politeness, or as a social ritual, or simply so that the other wouldn't feel so bad for coming to work at almost eleven, in a rush, unshaven, Raul rested his fingers on the typewriter keyboard and asked: what movie? *The Children's Hour*, Saul answered quietly, with Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine, a very old movie, no one knows it. Raul gazed at him slowly, more attentively, what do you mean, no one knows it? I know it and I really like it. Stunned, he invited Saul for a coffee and, during what was left of that chilly June morning, the ugly building looking more than ever like a prison or a psychiatric clinic, they talked and talked about the movie.

Other movies would follow during the next few days, and, as naturally as if somehow it were unavoidable, were followed by personal stories, the past, some dreams, small hopes and, above all, complaints. About that office, that life, that knot that they confessed, on a gray Friday afternoon, lay deep inside their hearts. For the first time, throughout that weekend they obscurely longed, one in his studio apartment, the other in the boarding house, for Saturday and Sunday to go quickly, to turn the corner of midnight and once again flow into Monday morning when they would meet again for: a coffee. And that is exactly what happened, and one told how he had had a few too many, the other that he had slept most of the time. They spoke of many things, those two, on that morning, but not of the longing they hadn't even clearly noticed they had felt.

On the lookout, the women around them arranged after-work gatherings at bars, dance halls, discos, private parties at one or another's place. Initially evasive,

Those two

they eventually gave in, but they almost always ended up hiding away in quiet corners or on balconies to tell each other their endless stories. One evening, Raul took up his guitar and sang *Tú Me Acostumbraste*. At the same party, Saul drank too much and threw up in the bathroom. On their way to their separate cabs, Raul spoke of his broken marriage for the first time. Staggering, Saul spoke of his long engagement. And in their drunkenness they agreed that they were sick of all of the women in the world, their complicated plots, their petty demands. That they enjoyed being the way they were now, alone, masters of their own lives. Even though – and this remained unspoken – they had no idea what to do with them.

The next day, with a hangover, Saul didn't go to work or even call. Restless, Raul spent the whole day wandering through the suddenly cold, deserted corridors, silently singing *Tú Me Acostumbraste*, between countless cups of coffee and half a pack of cigarettes more than usual.

IV

The weekends became so drawn out that one day, in the middle of some conversation, Raul gave Saul his phone number, if you need anything, if you get sick, you never know. On Sunday after lunch, Saul called just to know what the other was up to, and visited him, and for dinner they had the food from Minas Gerais that the housekeeper had prepared on Saturday. It was then, acid and united, that they spoke of that desert, those souls. They had known each other for almost six months. Saul got along with Carlos Gardel, who attempted a timid tune at nightfall. But the one who sang was Raul: *Perfidia*, *La Barca* and, at Saul's request, once, twice, *Tú Me Acostumbraste*. Saul especially liked that subtle little bit that went *llegaste a mi como una tentación, llenando de inquietud mi corazón*. They played a few rounds of all-fours and, at around nine, Saul left.

On Monday, neither of them said a word about the previous day. But they did talk more than ever and went for lots of coffees. The girls in the office kept watch on them, sometimes whispering, but without their noticing. During that week, for the first time, they had lunch together in Saul's room, since he wanted to go upstairs to show off his drawings; visitors were not allowed in the evenings, but now it was five to two and the time clock was inexorable. They left for lunch and came back to work together from then on, usually in high spirits. Some time after that, with the excuse of watching *Sandra of a Thousand Delights* on Saul's TV, Raul sneaked into the boarding house, a bottle of brandy in the inside pocket of his jacket. Sitting on the floor, their backs against the narrow bed, they paid almost no attention to the movie. They couldn't stop talking. Singing *Io Che Non Vivo*, Raul looked at the drawings and stared for a long time at the Van Gogh print, then asked Saul how he managed to live in such a small room. He seemed genu-

inely concerned. Isn't it sad? he asked. Saul gave a big smile: you get used to it.

Every Sunday, now, Saul would call. And come over. They had lunch or dinner, drank, smoke, talked all the time. While Raul sang – sometimes *El Día Que Me Quieras*, sometimes *Noche de Ronda* – Saul would stroke Carlos Gardel's tiny head, perched on his finger. Sometimes they looked at each other. And always smiled. One night, because it was raining, Saul ended up sleeping on the sofa. The next day, they arrived together at work, their hair wet from the shower. The girls didn't talk to them. The pot-bellied, disheartened clerks exchanged glances that the two would never understand even if they had noticed. But, they didn't, not the looks nor the two or three quips. When it was just ten to six, they left together, tall and proud, to watch the latest Jane Fonda movie.

V

At the beginning of spring, it was Saul's birthday. Because he thought his friend was lonely, or for some reason or other, Raul gave him the cage with Carlos Gardel. At the beginning of summer, it was Raul's birthday. And, because he was broke and his friend had nothing hanging on the walls of his tiny apartment, Saul gave him the Van Gogh print. But, between these two birthdays, something happened.

In the north, at the start of December, Raul's mother died and he had to spend a week away. Disoriented, Saul wandered through the corridors at the company, waiting for a call that never came, trying in vain to concentrate on the invoices, papers and records. At night, in his bedroom, he wasted his time watching trashy soaps or drawing eyes that became bigger and bigger, while he stroked Carlos Gardel. He drank a lot that week. And he had a dream: he was walking between the people at the office, all dressed in black, accusing. All except Raul, all in white, opening his arms to him. They held each other tightly, so close they could smell each other's scent. He awoke thinking, but he's the one who should be mourning.

Raul was not in mourning when he returned. Late on a Friday afternoon, he called the office and asked Saul to go see him. His low bass voice seemed even lower, even deeper. Saul went. Raul had let his beard grow. Oddly, instead of looking older, tougher, he was almost like a young boy. They drank a great deal that evening. For a long time, Raul spoke about his mother – I could have been nicer to her, he said, and he didn't sing. When Saul was about to leave, he started to cry. Without really knowing what he was doing, Saul reached out and, before he realized it, his fingers had touched Raul's beard. Too quickly to really understand, they held each other tight. And they were so close they could smell each other's scent: Raul's, like a wilted flower, a closed drawer; Saul's, after-shave, talcum powder. This went on for a long time. Saul's hand touched Raul's beard;

Raul stroked Saul's tiny curls. They said nothing. In the silence, they could hear a faucet dripping from afar. It lasted such a long time that when Saul reached out for the ashtray, his cigarette had become one long ash that he crushed without any idea why.

Then they drew apart. Raul said something like I'm all alone in the world, and Saul answered something like, you have me now and forever. They used big words – nobody, world, always – and they squeezed each other's hands at the same time, looking into each other's eyes, shot with smoke and booze. Though it was Friday and they did not have to go to work the next day, Saul said good-bye. He walked for hours through the empty streets, inhabited only by cats and whores. At home, he stroked Carlos Gardel until both fell asleep. But just before, without understanding why, he started to weep, feeling lonely and poor and ugly and unhappy and confused and abandoned and drunk and sad, sad, sad. He wanted to call Raul, but didn't have any change and it was so late.

Some time later, it was Christmas and then New Year, which they spent together, turning down invitations from their workmates at the office. Raul gave Saul a reproduction of the *Birth of Venus*, which he hung on the wall exactly where Van Gogh's room had been. Saul gave Raul a record called *Dalva de Oliveira's Greatest Hits*. The song they most listened to was *Nossas Vidas*, paying close attention to the part that said *even our kisses are like the kisses of one who's never loved*.

On New Year's Eve, after opening the bottle of champagne in Raul's apartment, Saul raised his glass and toasted to our friendship, which will never, never end. They drank until they were completely wasted. When they were getting ready for bed, changing in the bathroom, very drunk, Saul said he would sleep naked. Raul looked at him and said you have a beautiful body. So do you, Saul replied, and lowered his eyes. Both lay down naked, one on the bed behind the closet, the other on the sofa. Almost all night, one could see the other's cigarette burning, penetrating the dark like a devil with burning eyes. In the morning, Saul left without saying goodbye so Raul wouldn't notice the dark circles under his eyes.

January came, it was almost time for their vacation – they had planned it all together, maybe Parati, Ouro Preto, Porto Seguro – and they were surprised the morning when their boss called them, close to midday. It was sweltering. Sweating profusely, the boss cut to the chase. He had received some anonymous letters. He refused to show them. Their faces pale, they listened to words like “an ostensive and abnormal relationship”, “shameless aberration”, “sick behavior”, “deviant character”, always signed by A Watchful Guardian of Morality. Saul lowered his pale eyes, but Raul stood up. He looked very tall when, with one hand on his friend's shoulder and the other held boldly in front of him, he managed to utter the word never, before the boss, among other things, like the-reputation-of-our-company, said coldly: you're both fired.

They slowly emptied out their drawers, the office empty at lunchtime, without looking into each other's eyes. The summer sun scorched the metal desktops. In a big brown envelope, Raul put an enormous pair of eyes, no irises nor pupils, a present from Saul, who placed in his brown, slightly coffee-stained envelope the lyrics to *Tú Me Acostumbraste*, handwritten by Raul on some August afternoon. They took the elevator downstairs together, in silence.

But when they stepped out onto the sidewalk, leaving the huge, old building that looked like a clinic or a prison, seen from above by their workmates who all stood at the windows, one in a white shirt, the other in blue, they seemed even taller and prouder. They stood for a while in front of the building. Then took the same cab, Raul opening the cab door so Saul could get in. Ain't that sweet, someone called from the window. But they didn't hear. The taxi had turned the corner by then.

During the rest of the dusty afternoons that January, when the sun was like an enormous fried egg in the cloudless blue sky, no one else could work in peace at the office. Almost all of them had the unmistakable feeling they would be miserable forever. And they were.

Pale eyes big white horse

Jane Tutikian

When he arrived, it was like a gift. The kind you only realize you wanted after you've had it for a while, because you have to get used to its being a gift, and being yours. That is exactly how he arrived, even though he had only arrived after he arrived, because I didn't really know right away I wanted that gift.

When he did arrive, it was an enormous pair of pale eyes peering at me through the fence during a long period of silence.

It happened every time I went out to the back of the house. If I washed clothes, if I took them off the line, if I swept the yard, if I closed the windows, there were the pale eyes stuck in the middle of the fence.

At first, I wanted to be polite, me, who never really cared about being polite, so I greeted him cheerfully, but. There was no answer. Just those eyes. I smiled to myself and thought what a goose!

Over the next days, I tried again and again, just out of annoyance. Just the eyes followed me wherever I went. So, I gave up.

To be honest, by the end of the first week I was fed up with that game of being watched, which I hadn't been invited to play and that wasn't even funny. I thought about knocking on the neighbor's door and saying that things couldn't go on like that, that I was being harassed, he was being inappropriate, but just like I was cranky, because, yes, I was becoming a cranky old woman, my neighbor was evasive – actually, the whole family was aloof – and we didn't speak to each other. I only knew, by chance, that they were expecting a nephew to arrive – we did share a wall in common, after all. No, speaking to her did not seem to be the best measure.

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Texto de referência: A Rua dos Segretos Amores, WS, Porto Alegre, 2002.

So, therefore, I began to exercise self-control. Ignoring was the next strategy, so I ignored him. I could certainly feel his presence, always annoying and inconvenient, and feel him panting, but. I pretended he wasn't there.

Then, one damp and silent morning, when birds sing away the last drops of rain, on one of those mornings, while I hung out a line full of clothes under a wing of the laundry, I suddenly heard something that could have been

"G' morning!"

I turned calmly, I knew he had been standing there since early morning, and, though I couldn't swear to it, I thought I had heard g' morning!, I turned calmly and stared at those pale eyes. I won't reply, I thought, for all my frustrated attempts, but I couldn't resist: they were the strange eyes of a 12 or 13 year-old boy.

He placed his hand over his mouth, as if he had been caught doing something very naughty, and ran off into his house.

Maybe because I had never paid attention before, maybe because I was very annoyed at being constantly watched on my own property – me, having won my freedom at great cost, without having to ask for it, me, having transformed, at great cost, the last few years of loneliness into freedom; me, mature, at the brink of old age, emancipated, resolute and remorseless! – maybe because I was sincerely insulted with the rejection that came, for absolutely no reason, from the other side of the fence, though I hardly cared about rejection, maybe because. It was only after he ran, an awkward run where his hands were out of sync with his legs and his knees seemed like they couldn't keep up with his feet, it was only after he ran that I noticed. And because I noticed, I kept my eyes glued to the fence, not knowing what to say.

I was overcome with a feeling of disgust, when it's disgust at myself. My rudeness and coarseness fell on my head with no chance of pardon. And I was so uneasy that I barely slept that night. I prayed, like I hadn't in a long time, and I called out for Fatima and Francisco and asked them to watch over him and, if there was a chance, that I could manage to forgive myself.

For the next three days, I didn't go out to the yard and I didn't open the back door, out of pure shame for what I had done to the young boy and out of pure fear. I didn't want to run the risk of hurting him for anything in this world, as I certainly had hurt him. I, who had shut myself up, from sheer incapacity of hurting anyone at all, even that dose of pain you need for survival.

On the fourth day, there he was.

"Good morning!" I said without looking at him.

"G' morning!" he managed to reply. He put his hand over his mouth and ran inside.

It was quite a while before he managed to answer and stay. I smiled when he did.

"Today I'm going to make candy, you know?" I said, pretending aloofness.

"Soft chocolate candy. Do you like it?"

He answered with a silly, drooling laugh, nodding his head; his black fringe, straight and shiny, flitting over his eyes, almost banging his forehead on the fence.

"So, I guess I'll keep some candy for you."

He laughed and said something, like a long conversation I couldn't understand. From then on, we would have long conversations like that.

Ever since my children had left home and headed off to their own lives, I had no longer made sweets and I couldn't remember the last time I had bought candy or small toys – toys that could fit through the gaps in the fence. And every day I thanked the pale-eyed boy, whose name I couldn't understand, for the joy he gave me again and again, renewing me throughout the day, just from seeing his face stuck between the gaps in the wooden fence. He woke in me my capacity to love. It was a simple love that made us talk, laugh and run back inside our houses. I may not have understood everything he tried to tell me, but he also didn't understand everything I tried to tell him. But. What we did understand – the joy of being together – was enough for us and would be for a long time.

Little by little, I got to know him better. There were restless days and calmer days.

On one of the calm days, he gave me a beautiful drawing of something I thought was a horse.

"BiHg", he said, while his disproportionate hands made enormoussness in the air.

"Whide", he said.

I was afraid I wouldn't understand something that was so beautiful, so I just smiled.

The next day, very early in the morning, I went downtown to find a big white horse. Actually, a white horse that could fit through the gap in the fence. I found quite a few. But. I didn't want just any horse among the many I saw, I wanted the one with shiny eyes and drooling lips and tongue dragging over his teeth, constantly forming a sweet smile. One that could somehow fit into the enormous circle the disproportionate hands had made in the air.

I arrived home at lunch time and went straight to the laundry, next to the fence. I opened the faucet, slapped the clothes around, coughed, sneezed, sang, but he didn't show up.

I went back later, in the afternoon, repeated all of the previous strategies, but he didn't show up.

I went back other times, impatiently, my heart skipping, my soul wanting to rejoice in the size of the gift, but he didn't show up.

He did show up, at six in the afternoon, when I was sad and upset. His face was sleepy, his black fringe messed up, his pale eyes squinting from so much light. He came towards the fence, with his big-stepping, clumsy gait, and told me things I couldn't understand. What I know, I know from the two big hands stuck to his

childlike face, showing me he had been asleep, and his silly laugh, as if the whole situation – making me wait like that! – were very funny.

It was hard to get the package through the boards in the fence. We had to find a larger gap, and then it fitted, it finally fitted.

“My?” he said, and said it twenty times.

Even when I answered twenty times:

“It’s for you!” It was only when I asked him to open the package that he did so.

I can’t say what was going on behind those pale eyes. There was a deep silence and so happy so happy so happy that it hurt as if, in that strong body and huge hands of a 12 or 13 year-old boy, as if there were no space to be so happy!

The horse was right in front of him and he couldn’t touch it. A long time went by in silence, like this:

Then he asked:

“My?”

“Yours,” I answered, wanting to hold him with all a mother’s tenderness. “It’s all yours!”

“My?” he asked over twenty times, unable to touch the horse.

“Yours,” I replied twenty times, my face pressed against two boards in the fence.

When he touched the horse, he did it as gently as his huge hands would let him and, affectionately, he taught the animal that it was myyyyy. Then, he placed it against his strong chest and ran inside.

Me? I stood there a while with my face between the boards, moved by thoughts.

From then on, our encounters were a threesome: first, he arranged the horse’s face between two boards and, I believe, told it not to move – and the horse obeyed. After that, it was his turn to position himself, and he would watch me wash my clothes, hang them out, sweep the yard.

Sometimes he would ask me for a story and I would tell him one. His eyes would open even wider when I told him that Jack – the one with the beanstalk – met the giant. A giant was much more impressive than a big bad wolf and he would say over and over:

“Jaint?” to which I replied:

“Giant.” Until I could go on telling the story. Sometimes I just couldn’t because time simply ran ahead of us.

Sometimes he would ask for a song and I would sing. He would then clap his clumsy hands and sing along the last syllables of the last words. And we were happy.

One day he gave me a pretty drawing of something I thought was a heart.

“You,” he said happily.

“For me?”

“You,” he said. And no matter how many times I thanked him, he kept on saying you, until, no longer able to contain my emotion, I answered:

“I like you a lot too.”

He laughed and looked at the big white horse and looked back at me and I immediately answered:

“And I also like your horse a lot.”

He picked up the toy and went back inside the house, but not without first waving and saying goodbye many times.

But, then, one day it happened. One day he broke the board on the fence; he was a very strong boy, as 12 or 13 year-old boys usually are, and invaded my yard. And I was afraid.

I asked him, politely, to go back to his side and fetch the big white horse that was all sad on the other side, and we would talk like we used to, but. He wouldn’t listen to me and just kept on coming towards me, with his pale eyes and drooling laugh and huge hands, kept coming towards me and I was scared and he hugged me with too much strength, the strength of 12 or 13 year-old boys, and I was scared, and he started to kiss my face and hair and I was scared and started to scream and he was scared and screamed and I couldn’t get away and he wouldn’t let go and I screamed and he screamed.

His uncle came to take him away, not without a dry apology.

By the end of the afternoon, I heard a hammer adding some extra boards to the other side of the fence.

Over the next days, I no longer saw the pale eyes. I didn’t know what to do with a part of me that was all missing him and all guilt; he was just a child, I kept saying to myself, a child! And when I went over to my neighbor’s house to apologize, all I heard was that he was no longer there. I wanted to ask if he had taken along the big white horse, which might have made me feel better, but. I didn’t ask. I went back home with what, throughout my entire life as a mature, emancipated, resolute woman, would be my greatest loss – and for such a great loss, though the years may pass, there is no cure. It was lost in the threat I become when I am afraid of being loved like that, with a love so immense, like a shower of stars in my own darkness, a love like that. It was lost in the gap – between two boards in a fence, in the depths of two pale eyes and a silly, drooling smile – which I myself had caused.

Relação dos alunos participantes disciplina VERSÃO IV

Alessandra da Silveira Bez
Alice Fagundes Otero
Alisson Roberto Joenck
Amanda do Prado
Amanda Munari Alves
Ana Flávia Souto de Oliveira
Ana Paula Schizzi Paz
Ana Rita de Ávila Belbute Peres
Andre Schneider
Andrisa Pinzon
Antonio José Trevisan Teixeira
Barbara Rottmann
Camila Gregoski
Camila Molon
Camila Thomaz Telles
Carina Fogaça de Andrade
Carolina Paz Garcia
Caroline Vieira Guimarães dos Santos
Clarissa Apellaniz dias
Clarissa Regina Giani
Claudia C da S Gonçalves
Cristina Rodrigues Correa
Cristina Sandri
Cynthia Santos Mottola
Daiane Valeria Barrientos Garcia
Dandara Soares Santos
Daniela Kommers
Daviane Zottis Contini
Dayane Conceição da Silva
Débora Weirich
Dionifer Alan da Silveira
Dorisvelton Rosa
Eliane Lessa Caminha
Estevão dos Santos Cogoy
Fabiana Kanan Oliveira
Fabiane Lazzaris
Fausto Magalhães da Silveira
Felipe Salgueiro Lermen
Fernanda Montenegro
Fernanda Riegert Borba

Flavia Carpes Westphalen
Giuliano Egidio Reali
Grace Maria Prado Barra
Guilherme Cristovão Mohr
Guilherme Godinho Kolling
Helen Roberta de Souza da Conceição
Isabela Avila Vieira
Iuri Duquia Abreu
Ivan Eder Neto Nunes
Janaina Rangel Porto
Jaques Cristiano Ribeiro
Jouber Nunes Ferreira
Juli Moura Massia
Juliana Monteiro dos Santos Almeida
Kamila Bresolin Savaris
Karla Terezinha Costa dos Reis
Karoll Ribeiro e Silva Ferreira
Kleber Valenti Schenk
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Silvia Corti
Simone Rosso dos Santos
Suzana de Azeredo
Suzana Schutz
Tatiana Pires Cerveira
Tiago de Barros Coelho Cattani
Verônica Erthal
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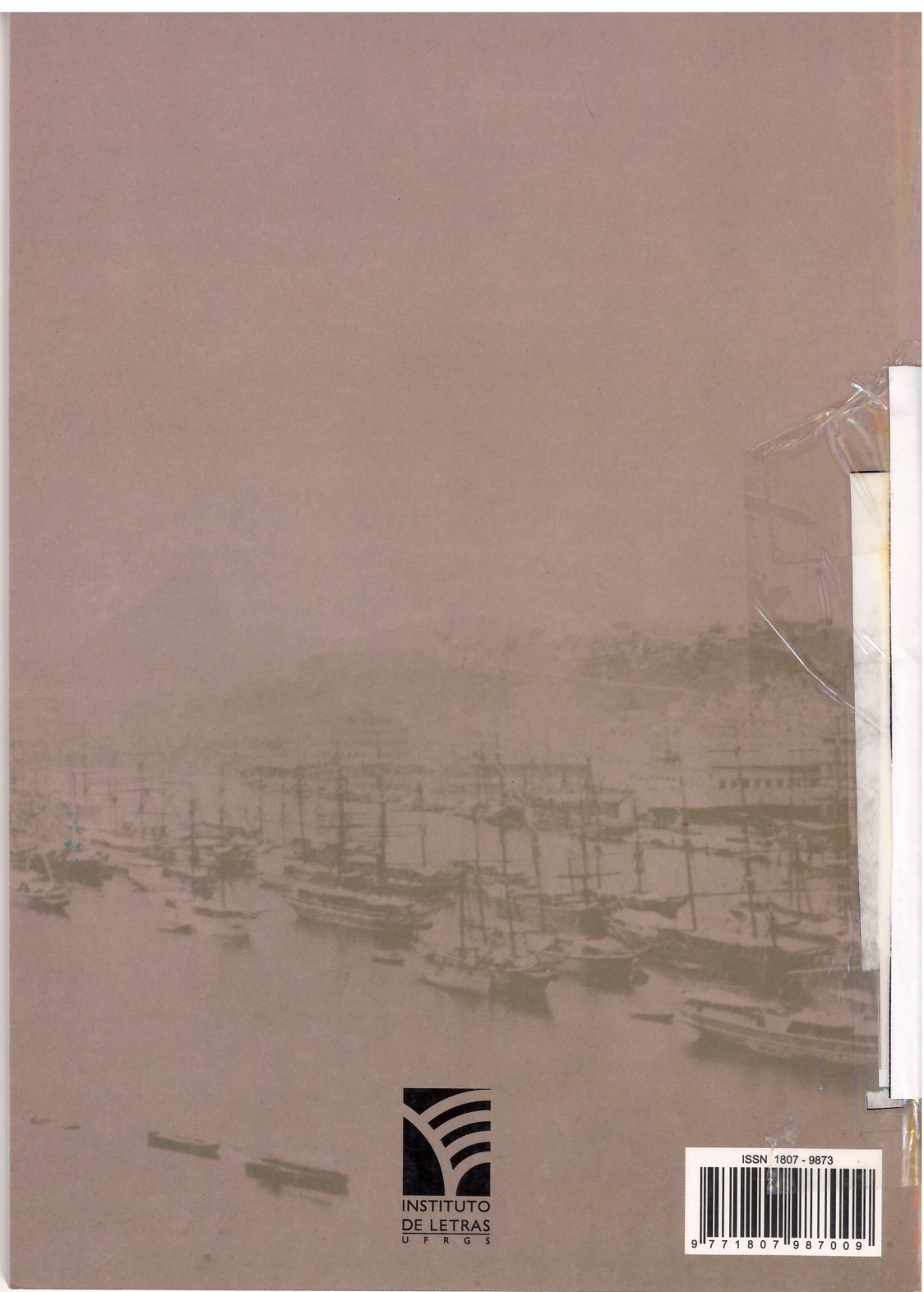
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