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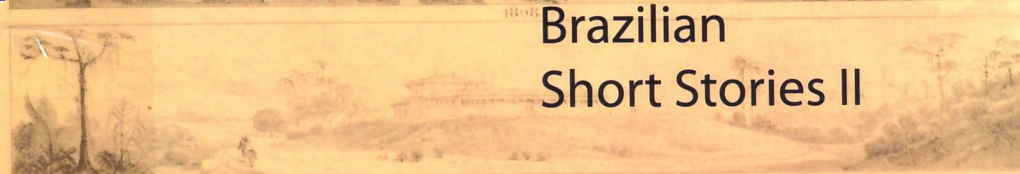
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Brazilian Short Stories II

J. B. Debret del.

Fonte: Arquivo Histórico Nacional do Rio de Janeiro.

AMELIORAÇÕES PROGRESSIVAS DE SÃO CRISTÓVÃO

Instituto de Letras - UFRGS

(Quinta de Boa Vista), depois 1806, jusqu'en 1831.



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Brazilian short stories II

Organizadora

Rosalia Neumann Garcia

Instituto de Letras - UFRGS



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Presentation

In this collection, readers will enjoy a second batch of Brazilian short stories translated into English (the first collection came out in 2008 in *Cadernos de Tradução*), a task carried out during a semester of Translation into English IV by students at Letras, UFRGS, Brazil. Once again, we joined the old and the new in stories stretching out from the beginning of the 20th century to the beginning of this one. The variety of styles and subject matter gave all those involved a chance to try out different strategies of translation and experience reading works in their native language (Portuguese) with new eyes and a fresh perspective.

Starting with a chronological view of the chosen works, a bit of information should be given regarding each of the stories and their authors. *The Sorcerers* (*Os Feiticeiros*) by João do Rio, was published in the very early 20th century, during the Belle Epoque of Rio de Janeiro. Do Rio was a journalist, interested in reporting the cultural and religious aspects of the grand city of Rio de Janeiro, and *The Sorcerers* is part of a collection of articles called *Religions of Rio de Janeiro* (*As Religiões do Rio de Janeiro*). Though the factual information of this amalgam of story and chronicle has been proven to have flaws, do Rio's exposure of some of the rites and the people involved more directly with candomblé and other religious ceremonies proves to be colorful and challenging at times. With a style that mixes, on the one hand, information about African languages, the different godly hierarchies and the customs of priests and followers and, on the other, his own comments revealing his doubts as to the veracity of the "magic" he witnesses, the translator must first of all face the terms he or she finds related to the rites of candomblé and try to understand it all in Portuguese before trying to pass it into English. The world do Rio is describing has disappeared to a certain extent, but the mixture of awe and skepticism, in the writer's attempt

to keep a certain journalistic distance from the object of his work, is fully there and the task of the translator is to understand this perspective.

Lima Barreto, another writer from the Rio de Janeiro of the early 20th century, had already featured in our previous collection of *Brazilian Short Stories* with *The Man who Knew Javanese*. This time the story chosen was *The New California*, a fable of greed and hypocrisy that falls right into Barreto's style of criticizing the Old Republic (1889-1930) in Brazil. His text is easygoing and was very influential for the generation that followed, that of the writers belonging to the Modern Art Week of 1922 (the year of Barreto's death), with its colloquialism and references to popular culture. Barreto strongly criticized the pompous style of so many Brazilian authorities (a habit that persists in our times), a fact that is clear in *The New California* in sarcastic comments made about the meticulousness with language of one of the characters. His work sees the downtrodden and the underdog with sympathetic eyes, leaving no respite for those whose behavior reveals all their narrow-mindedness and falsity. Being a mulatto himself, Barreto's sympathies plainly tend towards those of darker skin, the former slaves, the black population and its position in Brazilian society.

Running on the outskirts of the circles in which these writers worked, both in the eye of the storm, so to speak, of the carioca literary and journalistic scene (though Barreto was not as acclaimed at the time as he would later be), we find the gaucho writer João Simões Lopes Neto. The short story *The Gold Pouch* (*Trezentas Onças*) was published as a part of *Contos Gauchescos* in 1912. The world of the frontier cowboy of the southern lands of Brazil, known as the gaucho, is the subject matter of this little known writer not only internationally but also in other states of Brazil. Blau Nunes is the constant narrator of the stories in the collection, telling his young listener the varied adventures he experienced in a bygone age, a period which, by the time Lopes Neto writes his tales, had already passed, placing the gaucho in a mythical reality much like that of the cowboy found in Owen Wister's *The Virginian, a Horseman of the Plains* (1902). Wister and Lopes Neto were contemporary to each other, both writing about this mythical being, each in his own context, but close enough to each other in terms of what they knew about frontier life and its challenges. At another extreme of the planet was Henry Lawson who, from his native Australia, wrote of the outback and the rustic life of its inhabitants. The connections made between these different realities were crucial in thinking about the translation of Lopes Neto into English. Colloquialism, popular frontier life, dangers faced, the code of honor that must remain in order for there to be a sense of structure in life; all of this was necessarily taken into account as students dealt with country life and customs that no longer exist and attempted to translate to a similar context in English.

The Christmas Turkey, by Mário de Andrade, was part of a collection under the title *Contos Novos*, published posthumously (the author died in 1945). Andrade had, throughout his career, been working on perfecting his style in both the art of the short story and the novel, and his spontaneous account of a

Christmas dinner is both comical and endearing. Mário de Andrade was one of the many important intellectual and/or artistic figures to participate in the famous Week of Modern Art in 1922 in São Paulo, an event that brought together presentations and debates about the new courses of Brazilian art in the modern world. Andrade was considered a modernist poet, active in his role as forerunner among writers. It is his short stories that readers today can most identify with and enjoy; their subject matter is the slightly decadent society of São Paulo in the early 20th century whose members, gradually impoverished, were learning to deal with the city's faster pace and new demands; while others, never having had much to begin with, must learn, through pushing and shoving, to find their piece of Zion in a ever-changing metropolis.

Caio Fernando Abreu was a writer and journalist, having worked in many of the main newspapers and magazines in Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil. Abreu's curiosity took him to frequent trips around Brazil and Europe. He was one of the first homosexual writers to publicly reveal his sexual orientation at a time in Brazil in which this was neither common nor welcome. Nevertheless, in 1995, a year before his death from AIDS, Abreu was chosen to be the patron of the 41st Book Fair of the City of Porto Alegre. *A Confusing Story* (*Uma História Confusa*), a work written in the 1970s, perhaps, 1980s, brings up many of the issues the writer dealt with in his other works, such as the complications of love (especially between two men), the difficulties of communication and the feelings of inadequacy that come about when one is faced with the unexpected. Abreu's themes are those of the modern world, fully and clearly understood by the reader for, after all, this is his/her world, and the inadequacies and insecurities are felt by all.

Daniel Galera's *Clichê Romântico* is short and bittersweet: the narrator's first person perspective places him as at the same time a self-assured man in tune with his desires and an insecure lover who will have the rug pulled out from under him by the girlfriend sitting with him at a bar. The ups and downs of the narrator/character are made up of comments that mention, among other things, his girlfriend's body, her habits and "bar philosophy", as Brazilians like to refer to the often liquor-fueled serious observations individuals come out with while socializing in a bar. Daniel Galera's story is the newest of the six chosen, having been published in 2001. The writer has lived most of his life in Porto Alegre and works as a translator as well. He was chosen as one of the twenty best young writers by the British publication *Granta*, therefore he is a name to look out for in the literary scenario of Brazil. In terms of the students' difficulties with the translations carried out here, evidently, Galera's text was by far the one that offered the best possibilities with the colloquial tone of the language and the easily understood context in which the story unfolds.

Translating from Portuguese to English is never easy for most of our students, especially when the works are literary and from other periods. It has been a

challenge to motivate the students' confidence and get them involved in the work. But it has certainly been an even greater challenge for them to plunge into the work without feeling inadequate or insecure. Our class work was slow and meticulous at times, but certainly never dull. The translation into English required a great deal of knowledge of the language on the part of the translators, which meant everything from the reading of other literary texts that could offer mood, style and color; to researching vocabulary and terms that were not known even in the source language. All in all, it was a learning process that allowed students to not only get closer to English but to Portuguese as well, since most had never read any of the stories with the care needed for the transformation that followed – placing them all into English.

Therefore, though most students will rarely work as literary translators, it is essential that they learn to deal with all the possibilities of translation that can be offered. This will teach them to be attentive to style, tone, collocation, sentence structure, and cultural aspects that are not generally observed in the translation of academic or scientific texts (though it is a common mistake to consider cultural aspects secondary in this type of text – but that is the subject of another article!).

With this in mind, I would like to thank the students who participated in the work of translating these stories for all their effort and interest:

Alana Gonçalves Mendes
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 Veronica de Abreu Amaral

I am also grateful to Professor Ian Alexander who especially helped out by reading our version of *The Gold Pouch*. Our current projects are associated in that Simões Lopes Neto's stories are being translated into English in the Research Project I have been carrying out since 2008. From Machado de Assis to Mário de Andrade to Simões Lopes Neto, the works of these Brazilian writers has been the focus of research and translation and have offered a number of curious and, at times, difficult tasks. Professor Alexander's research of Henry Lawson's work and the paradox of proximity and distance between two cultures such as our gaucho one and the Australian outback have brought up enlightening debates.

I would also like to thank Daniel Galera for allowing us to work on his story and publish it here, as well as Caio Fernando Abreu's family for also offering the writer's story for translation. The authorization to use Mário de Andrade's work was graciously granted by Ediouro Publicações. All the others are in public domain.

I must also express my gratitude to the structure found at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul which has granted me, as a tenured professor, time and the possibility of choosing my area of research and study, now involved with literature and translation. Though, as professors here, we are often overwhelmed with several duties that are, by far, the ones we were least trained to carry out (administrative tasks among them), the silver lining is that we can also grow professionally in those areas we are most attuned to. We are given the chance to help students develop their own skills as well, and to see them learn in class and stand out in academic events, whether nationally or internationally is worth all the effort we make.

My thanks also goes out to our Dean, Professor Jane Tutikian for helping in several occasions in which either a single signature was needed or advice was given on how to proceed with the elaboration of this collection. It is always made clear by Prof. Tutikian that she is first and foremost a colleague who has not forgotten what it means to pursue a project and carry it out.

I sincerely hope all readers will enjoy their reading of these translations and expect them to comment on whatever calls their attention, whether errors or alternatives to a translation. It is, after all, true that translation is an ongoing process that needs constant re-readings.

Rosalia Garcia (rosalia0806@gmail.com)
 August 15, 2013

The sorcerers

João do Rio

Antônio is like the young Africans mentioned in the work of the English writer. The young people knew about both the Catholic gods and their own, but only venerated whiskey and *schilling*. Antonio is well aware of *Nossa Senhora das Dores*, he is familiar with the Orishalas from Africa, but he respects only paper money and Port wine. Thanks to these two powerful agents, I shared the intelligent and vivacious black man's affection. Thanks to Antonio, I was able to visit the houses on *São Diogo*, *Barão de São Félix*, *Hospício*, *Núncio* and *América* streets, where the candomblés take place and where the fathers-of-saint live. And I thanked the Lord, for there is certainly no better way to go about it in the whole city.

"You will enjoy a number of things, sir!" smiled Antonio. And he was right.

Of the large number of African slaves who reached Rio de Janeiro during the colonial and monarchist periods in Brazil, around a thousand black people remain. They are all from small nations of inner Africa. They belong to Ijesha, Oié, egba, Aboum, hausa, Itaquá, or consider themselves children of Ibouam, ishau dos Jêje and Cambindas. Some wealthy families send their Brazilian offspring to Africa to study the religion; others leave the tradition to their half breed children here, in the form of mysteries and magic spells. All, however, speak a common language among themselves - Yoruba.

Antonio, who has studied in Lagos, said:

"To Africans, Yoruba is like English to civilized folk. If you speak Yoruba, you can cross Africa and live among the blacks of Rio de Janeiro. Only the Cambindas do not speak Yoruba, but they ignore even their own language, which is very difficult. When the Cambindas speak, they mix all the languages ... As for the Orishas and Alufás, they speak only Yoruba".

"Orishas, Alufás?" I said in amazement.

"They are two entirely different religions. You'll see".

Indeed. The black folk from Africa are divided into two major beliefs: the Orishas and the Alufás.

The Orishas, in greater number, are the most complicated and animistic. Skilled in litholatri and phytology, they have a huge collection of saints. They fuse Catholic saints with their own, and live a double life, finding in every stone, in every turtle shell, in every herb, a soul and a spirit. This barbarous polytheism of sorts includes deities that manifest themselves and gods that are unseen. The black folk hold the idea of an absolute God like the Catholic God: Orixá-alúm. The list of saints is endless. There is Orixalá, which is the oldest; Axum, mother of fresh water; Ie-man-já, the mermaid; Exu, the devil, who is always lurking behind the door; Sapanan, the Blessed Sacrament of Catholics; Irocô, who materializes on the sacred fig tree; the Gunocô, formidable and large; Ogum, who is St. George or the God of War; Dadá, the Queen, who are all invisible. And many others, such as the saint of thunder and the saint of herbs. To add to this complicated assortment, black folk still have evil spirits and the Heledás, or guardian angels.

Naturally, there must be an ecclesiastic hierarchy if there is to be a celestial one. Creatures live in awe of the invisible and only those who have studied and trained know of the saints' wills. This is why there is such a large number of religious authorities. At times, on the streets, we find jetblack negroes chewing unceasingly. They are babalaos, brilliant mathematicians, keepers of the sacred secrets and people's futures; or babas who throw the endilogum; or babaloshas, venerable fathers-of-saint. They have dabbed the powder of salvation on the slashes you see on their faces, and their mouths are always chewing obi, or kola nut, which is good for their stomach and protects against curses.

Antonio, who spoke of the advancement of magic in Africa, told me one day that he was like Renan and Shakespeare: he was always in doubt. This, however, did not prevent him from believing in curses and the trouble African Saints can stir.

"You cannot imagine, Sir! Saints have annual celebrations; they suddenly appear to a person they want to take over, and he must immediately start celebrating; saints attend to the pledge of the Iauôs and soon enough they scurry from Carnival to Holy Week; but they still want to party more... They truly rest only from February to April".

"They are always on holiday".

"At Carnival negroes practice ebó".

"What is ebó?"

"Ebó is an offering. The saints all go to the fields and there they rest".

"Perhaps, they are in Petrópolis".

"No. Saints leave the city for the woods, to be surrounded by nature".

"But what are the religious ranks?"

"There are the babalaos, the açoba, the aboré - the highest position - little-mothers, the ogan, the agibonam..."

The list is similar to that of the saints', it's very long, and each of these characters plays a different role in sacrifices, in candombés, and in witchcraft. Antônio shows me the most notable, the fathers-of-saint: Oluou, Eruosaim, Alamijo, Adé-Oié, babalaos Emídio, Oloô-teté, which means stingray; and a crowd of sorcerers: Torquato requipá, or rain-halting fire; Obitaiô, Vagô, Apotijá, Veridiana, Crioula Captain, Rosenda, Nosuanan, the renown Chica de Vavá, who is the protégée of an economist politician ...

"So, Chica has political protection?"

"You bet she does. What do expect, Sir? There are important men who owe a load of money to the alufás and babalaôs and have reached the 32nd level in their Masonic Lineages".

Of these, very few read. In the past there were still sages who pored over the sacred book and knew why Exu was evil – everything was as crystal clear as water. Nowadays, learning is done by ear. The self seeking African father-of-saint teaches the aboré; he teaches the iauô when he hands them the knife. In other words, not only does the art lose many of its interesting steps, but the stories are altered and forgotten as well.

"Nowadays, you do not need to know the Saó Hauin either. Just by looking at a person and knowing his name, a black man can do a great deal of harm", says Antonio.

The orixas are usually polygamous. In the houses you cross on the main streets of a large city, there are men surrounded by women. Every night, just like in the African savannas, the bed of the babaloxás is occupied by one of his wives. There is no jealousy – the oldest announces who will replace her, and all work for the father's peace of mind. Oloô-Teté, an old man who is at least ninety, still has a partner for the pleasures of the marriage bed; and the savviest keep the daughters-of-saints as the most beautiful of the harem.

The alulás have a different rite. They are Islamic, but with a touch of mysticism. Almost all dedicate themselves to the study of the religion, and the rogues who usurp their titles know more than the orishas.

Right after the suma, or baptism, and circumcision, or kola, the alufás begin the reading of the Koran. Their obligation is the kissium, the prayer. They pray when they bathe, washing the tips of their fingers, their feet and nose; they pray in the morning; they pray at sunset. I have seen them, black as night, their faces shining behind white beards, doing the aluma gariba when the moon is rising in the sky. They wear the abadá for these prayers, a white tunic with large sleeves. They stick a red filá onto their heads, from where a white ribbon

hangs, and, in the evening, the kissium goes on while they are seated on the skin of a sheep or tiger.

"Only the wealthy alufás sit on the skins of tigers", Antonio informs us.

These creatures hold the rosary or tessubá at night, they hold the principle of not eating pork and write down their prayers on tables, the atô, with ink made of burned rice. They fast like the Jews, for forty days on end, only taking their meals at dawn and at sunset.

These people value their ceremonies and after the assuamy, there is no feast which is more important than the Ramadan in which they exchange the saká, or mutual gifts. Both their religious and judicial administration is absolutely independent from the land where they live. In several tribes there are general priests or ladamos, who obey the lemano, the bishop. The judiciary is in charge of the alikaly, the judges; sagabamo, the deputies of the judges; and the assivajiú, the master of ceremonies.

To be an alufá, you must have had a great deal of learning. These black fellows, who pretend to be serious and marry in great earnest, do not give up the amuré with three or four women.

When the young alufá ends his exams, the others dance the opasuma and conduct the novice on horseback through the streets to show triumph.

"But you can't have that type of parade here," I cry out.

"Of course we can. The ceremonies always take place in the suburbs, in remote places; and the alufás put on their white clothes and red caps."

Naturally, Antônio listed the names of the alufas:

"Alikali; the current lemano, a crooked-legged black man who lives on *Barão de St. Félix* street and who inspires respect and terror; Chico Mina, whose daughter studies violin. Alufapão, Ojó, Abacajebú, Ginjá, Manê, who was born in Brazil, and many others".

The *Alufás* don't like the people-of-saint who follow the African religion, who they call *auauadó-chum*, while these despise creatures who do not eat pork, calling them *malés*. Still, they are all related by language; and on the surface their customs are more or less identical; they also practice witchcraft. The *Orishas* make sacrifices, drown the saints in blood, give them food, ornaments and palm oil.

The superior *Alufás*, despite religious prohibitions, use the *aligenum*, imps invoked for good and evil, in a book of charms written in red ink. Some of them, the greatest, such as the *Alikali*, even practice *idams*, or great sorceries, in which a cabalistic word is enough to stop the rain from falling and *obis* materialize in empty plates.

Before studying the spells, the practices of the *iauô* run through the *camarinhas*, and the service rituals, I wanted to have some notion of what the houses and the men who lived there were like. Antônio first took me to the

home of an *Alufá* sorcerer. On the tables lay books with complex writing, herbs, rabbits, mats, and a fine bamboo nib.

From the door, the guide shouted:

"Salamaleco".

No one answered.

"Salamaleco!"

"Maneco Lassalama!"

In the corner of the room, sitting on a sheepskin, a black man was saying the rosary, eyes upturned.

"We can't speak to him now. He's praying and doesn't want to talk".

We walked onto the street and right away ran into Xico Mina. Like many of us, he was wearing a light suit and had closely-trimmed sideburns. I had already seen him in crowded cafes, talking to some politicians. When he saw us, he rushed by.

"He is afraid of questions. And he is a buffoon".

However, on our way from *Largo da Carioca* to *Aclamação* Square, besides a disciple of Alikali, Omancho, as they call him, we ran into two mothers of saint, an old babalao and two babaloxás.

We were off to the house of the old mathematician, Oloô-Teté.

The houses of the mynahs still retain the same appearance of yore, but are full of Bahian blacks and mulattos. These are often bleak abodes, where five, six or more people live with the main character. In the rooms, broken and dirty furniture, little mats, benches; on the tables, pitchers, bowls of water, straw hats, herbs, oilcloth cases where the opelé is kept; on the walls, drums, strange clothing, glasses; and often, in the backyard, tortoises, black hens, roosters and goats.

There is a strong smell of palm oil in the air; Ethiopian pepper and stench; the black people talk about the lack of work, and puff on thick straw cigarettes. If not for their candor, their life would be harsh - in each of their gestures lies a secular lethargy.

Some old men spend their whole lives sitting and dozing.

"They're thinking!" Some might say. Suddenly, the poor, naive old men wake up from a powerful dream into this troubled world of animated stones and herbs with souls.

"Xangô says that I have to make a sacrifice!"

While he was asleep, Xangô, the god of thunder, ordered him; and the opelé, made out of tortoise shells and baptized with blood, falls on the stained table to reveal the sacrifice that will please Xangô.

Others, the more cunning, spend their lives lying on the couch. The daughters-of-saints, some who are prostitutes, compete to make their existence easier; those who visit these women give them what they can spare. Their concern is to know more - the unknown spells; and when someone who knows all the

mysteries comes in, they kneel in fright and kiss his hand, sobbing:

"Tell me how to chant, and I all I have is yours!"

In the afternoon, the women arrive, as well as those who happen to work in some quarry. The sorcerers tell stories, criticize each other, talk with familiarity of the most relevant people in the nation, of the emperor, whose picture almost everyone has on the wall; of Cotegipe, of the Baron of Mamanguape, of the Presidents of the Republic.

The women listen while chewing obis and singing eerily sweet songs. These songs are almost always prayers, invocations, and the same phrase goes on and on, sung in monotone, endlessly.

It is only with the candomblé and sessions of high witchcraft, in which the babalaôes are absorbed and the fathers-of-saints work day and night, either in waiting rooms or making invocations in front of fires holding a tessubá, that these people's lives are drawn out of the fluid listlessness of acassá and palm oil.

When we entered the house of Teté Oloo, the old and sensual mathematician, an old miner, who was chanting somnambulistically, suddenly stopped.

"Don't stop, please".

She said something incomprehensible.

"She is asking if you can give her a couple of coppers," Antônio interpreted for us.

"Certainly".

The old black woman opens her mouth and begins to chant, clapping her hands:

"Baba ounlô, ó xocotám, o ilélê."

"What does it mean?"

"The festivities are over, and the saint is leaving. It means 'papa is gone, he's done, it's over; go away!'"

I looked at the narrow ray of sunlight in the yard where the land turtles slept.

"Is the land turtle a sacred animal?"

"No," tells us the wise Antonio. "Each saint likes his animal. Xangô, for example, eats land turtles, roosters and sheep. Abaluaí, father of smallpox, only likes goatlings. Umbanda fathers are forced by their nature to breed animals to sell and sacrifice. The land turtle is nothing but an animal that provides happiness. The sacrifice is simple. The saint's stone has to be well washed, sometimes even with champagne. After that it should be poured in a bowl. The animal's blood drains, some parts are taken to a place chosen by the saint, and the remains are served to the group.

"But are there any greater sacrifices that could harm people?"

"Yes! In these sacrifices even bulls are slaughtered".

"Spells never fail," pronounces the honorable Oloo-tete, with his admirable knowledge. "Nobody is unbreakable. But there are some people who are stronger.

Blacks are easily stricken, mulattoes are more resistant, and when it comes to white people, we sweat our guts out. But it always works. That's why black folk always wear the assiqui, the coverage, the brief. And they always chew obi, the protective kola nut".

For me, the gentle Oloo-Tetê disposed the opelé, in the presence of some of his companions. This opelé was baptized many years ago and predicted my future.

This future of mine will be interesting. According to tortoise shells, which always turn in pairs, I will be extremely happy, ascending Jacob's ladder of happy positions with the speed of an automobile. It is true that there is an insignificant enemy who wants to harm me. Nevertheless, I will crush him, all the while reaching high positions and inspiring admiration.

I respectfully embraced the mathematician who solved the square of the hypotenuse of the unknown.

"Place the money here," she said.

I gave him the notes. With trembling hands, the wise man smoothed them out for a long period.

"Now take this rock and shell. Ask the shell what you want, saying yes, and saying no to the stone.

So I did. The opelé fell back into the tarp. The shell was in Antonio's right hand, the rock in his left, and Oloo was shaking while talking to the saint, with black fingers trembling in the air.

"Open your right hand!" he ordered.

It was the shell.

"If it comes to pass, will you give Oloo a gift?"

"Certainly".

He quickly consulted the opelé. Then smiled.

"It will come to pass. The saint has said so". And he prescribed the protection that would make me invulnerable.

I also smiled. Poor old man, so naïve and such a rascal! I had merely asked the shell of the future, in all modesty, if I would become the Emperor of China...

In the meantime, the singing black man sang a happier tune, with wide gestures and open laughter:

O loô-ré, xa-la-ré

Camurá-ridé

O loô-ré, xa-la-ré

Camurá-ridé

"What does that mean?"

"It's an Orixalá chant. It says 'The man with the money is here. Let's lift him high...'"

I shook his hand, joyful and grateful. In the allusion of the primitive song, palaver remained in the enchantment of eternity...

New California

Lima Barreto

No one knew where the man had come from. The postal agent could only tell he answered to Raimundo Flamel, since that was the name on the mail. And what mail there was. Almost every day, the postman would go to the end of town, where the stranger lived, carrying a heavy packet of letters from the world over, thick magazines in backwards languages, books, packages...

When Fabrício, the bricklayer, returned from a day's work at the new resident's home, everyone at the store asked about his commission.

"I'm making a furnace," said the black man, "in the dining room."

Imagine the amazement in the little town of Tubiacanga, learning of such an extravagant construction: a dining room furnace! On the following days, Fabrício could tell he saw glass balloons, dull knives, cups like the pharmacist's... an assortment of peculiar things lying around on tables and shelves, like cooking utensils in the devil's own kitchen.

The village was alarmed. Some, more forward looking, thought him a coiner; others, the simple and the believing, that he had struck a deal with the devil.

Chico da Tirana, the oxcart driver, passing by the mysterious stranger's home with his squeaky old cart, watched the smoke coming out of the dining room stack and couldn't help but cross himself and mutter a prayer. Had it not been for the pharmacist, the deputy would have laid siege to the home of that suspicious individual who disquieted the imagination of the whole citizenry.

Reflecting upon the information provided by Fabrício, Bastos, the apothecary, concluded the stranger was a scholar, a great chemist, there exiled to further his scientific forays in peace.

A respected college man, a councilman and a physician too - since doctor Jerônimo didn't care for prescriptions and had become his partner at the

drugstore only to live his days more comfortably - Bastos's opinion stilled every conscience. Because of him, the population granted quiet admiration to the person of that great chemist who had chosen their town to reside.

In the afternoon, if they saw him walking by the banks of the Tubiacanga, sitting here or there, gazing into the clear waters of that stream, lost in thought before the melancholy dusk, everyone removed their hats, often adding a "doctor" to their "g'evening". The way he treated the children struck a chord with the townsfolk; the way he watched them, as if pitying them for having been born to suffer and die.

Indeed, on any sweet afternoon there was something Christ like in how kindly he doted on the black children, their skin so smooth and their manners so sad, deep in moral captivity, as well as on the white children, their skin dull, broken and coarse, withered by the tropics.

Sometimes, he wondered why Bernardin de Saint-Pierre had wasted so much feeling with Paul and Virginia¹ and forgotten the slaves that surrounded them...

Soon, there was almost universal admiration for the scholar, short of unanimous only because a single man would not hold the new resident's merits in high regard.

Captain Pelino, schoolmaster and editor of the *Tubiacanga Gazette*, the local newspaper, and affiliated with the government party, had it in for the scholar. "You will see," he would say, "who this man is... A deadbeat, a rogue, maybe a thief fleeing from Rio".

His opinion was baseless, or better still, based on hidden spite for a contender that could rival his fame as a scholar. Pelino was no chemist, far from it, but he was a scholar, a grammarian. No one wrote anything in Tubiacanga without a paddling from Captain Pelino; even when discussing some notable man from the Capital, he couldn't help but say: "The man has talent, it is undeniable! But he splits his infinitives..." And he pursed his lips as if he had swallowed something bitter.

The whole of Tubiacanga was used to respecting solemn Pelino, who corrected and amended the greatest glories of the country. A wise man...

In the evening, after reading a little something from an eminent philologist, Sotero perhaps, or maybe Candido de Figueiredo and Castro Lopes, and after having dyed his hair once again, the old schoolmaster walked slowly out of his house, denim jacket buttoned up to the collar, and headed down to Bastos's drugstore for a chat. Chat is merely a figure of speech, because Pelino was greedy with his words; he mostly just listened. When, however, someone committed the slightest slip of the tongue, he cut in and made an amendment. "Hopefully," said the postman, "it..." And the schoolmaster intervened with evangelical serenity:

¹ Refers to the novel *Paul et Virginie*, written in 1787 by Bernardin de Saint - Pierre.

"Do not say 'hopefully', Mr. Bernardes; in our tongue, we say 'it is to be hoped'."

And the conversation would continue after the amendment, only to be interrupted by another. Moments like these made more than one speaker move away, but Pelino remained indifferent to them, sure of his duty as an apostle of linguistic purism. The scholar's arrival had made him stray, even if only a little, from his mission. Now his every last strength was directed against the unexpected rival.

His words and eloquence fell on deaf ears: not only did Raimundo Flamel pay his bills on time, he was generous, a protector of the poor, and the pharmacist had seen him mentioned as a renowned chemist in a trade magazine.

II

The chemist had been living in Tubiacanga for years when, on a beautiful morning, Bastos saw him enter the pharmacy. The pharmacist's pleasure was immense. The scholar hadn't yet condescended to visit anyone, and, one day, when sacristan Orestes dared to visit his house, asking him for some donation for the coming feast of Our Lady of Conception, he received him and contributed with visible annoyance.

Seeing him, Bastos got out from behind the counter, hurried to welcome him with the most perfect demonstration that he knew who he was dealing with, and, with almost a cry, said:

"Welcome, doctor."

The scholar didn't seem surprised either with the pharmacist's demonstration of respect, or with the academic treatment. He mildly looked for an instant at the shelves full of medicine bottles, and replied:

"I would like to talk to you in private, Mr. Bastos."

The pharmacist was truly astonished. How could he be useful to a man whose name was known around the world and whom the newspapers talked about with such refined respect? Was it money? Maybe... Some delay in receiving his revenues, who knows? And he led the chemist inside the house, under the apprentice's astonished look - for a moment, he let his "hand" rest on the mortar where he was macerating some tisane.

Eventually, at the very back of the house, he reached the little room that he used for more detailed medical examinations or for small operations, for Bastos also operated. They sat down, and Flamel soon disclosed:

"As you must know, I'm devoted to chemistry, and I do have a respected reputation in the scholarly universe..."

"I know perfectly well, sir, and I have told my friends here."

"Thank you. Well, I've made a great discovery, extraordinary..."

Embarrassed at his own excitement, the scholar made a pause, and then continued:

"A discovery... But, for now, it won't do to communicate this to the academic world, do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

"That's why I need three reputable people to witness a specific experiment of the discovery, and give testimony on paper, to protect the priority of my invention... You know: there are unexpected events and..."

"Certainly! There's no question!"

"Believe it or not, it's all about making gold..."

"What? What do you mean?" replied Bastos, wide-eyed.

"That's right! Gold!" Flamel answered firmly.

"How?"

"You will find out", the chemist said dryly. "The issue at hand is who should be witness to the experiment, don't you think?"

"Absolutely, your rights must safeguarded, considering..."

"One of them", interrupted the scholar, "is you; the two other, you, sir, will do me the favor of suggesting."

The pharmacist thought for a minute, scrutinizing what he knew, and, after three minutes, he asked:

"How about Colonel Bentes? Do you know him?"

"No. You know I don't get along with anyone here."

"I guarantee you he's a serious, wealthy, and very discreet man."

"And is he religious? I ask", Flamel soon added, "because we shall have to handle the bones of corpses, and only these will do..."

"No! He's almost an atheist..."

"Well! He'll do. And the other one?"

Bastos started thinking again, and this time he took a little longer consulting his memory... Eventually, he said:

"Lieutenant Cavalhadas, the collector, do you know him?"

"As I've already told you..."

"Right ... He's a trustworthy, serious man, but..."

"But what?"

"He's a Mason."

"Even better."

"And when is it?"

"On Sunday. On Sunday, the three of you will come to my house to witness the experiment, and I hope you'll not refuse to initial my discovery."

"It's a deal."

On Sunday, as promised, the three respectable people of Tubiacanga went to Flamel's house, and, days later, mysteriously, he disappeared without leaving a trace or explanation.

III

Tubiacanga was a small peaceful town of three or four thousand inhabitants, at whose station express trains would, once in a while, deem it worthy to stop. There hadn't been a robbery or assault in five years. Doors and windows were only used ... because they were the style in Rio.

The only crime registered in its sparse records was a murder during city elections; but since the murderer was a member of the political party in office, and the victim of the opposition party, this event did nothing to alter the town's habits. It continued to export its coffee, and gaze at the small houses of the town reflected in the scrimpy water of the small river that gave it its name.

But the surprise of its inhabitants was nothing if not immense when they discovered one of the most hideous crimes in recent memory! It was not a dismemberment or a parricide, not the murder of an entire family or an assault on the tax collector - it was much worse, sacrilegious in the eyes of every religion and conscience: the violation of the graves of "Rest in Peace", the town cemetery, God's own acre.

At first, the gravedigger thought it was the work of dogs, but when he checked the wall, he did not find anything but small holes. He closed them, but to no avail. The very next day, a perpetual resting place had been broken into and the bones were missing; on another occasion, a mausoleum and a shallow grave. It was either a person or the work of the devil. The gravedigger did not want to pursue the matter on his own. He went to the deputy and the news spread through the city.

The rage of all in town took over every possible feature and purpose. The religion of death precedes all else and will certainly be the last to die in people's minds. Against the profanation, the six Presbyterians of the town - the Biblical folk, as they were called - cried out; as did the surveyor Nicholas, a former cadet and a positivist of the Teixeira Mendes line; Major Camanho, president of the "New Hope Masonic Temple" protested, the Turk Miguel Abudala, a haberdasher, did so as well, and the skeptic Belmiro, a former student, who did nothing for a living, and drank *cachaça* at the taverns. Even the daughter of the railroad engineer, who constantly despised the hamlet, ignoring even the sighs of the locals who had fallen in love with her, always waiting for the express train to bring her Prince Charming - the beautiful and arrogant Cora could not avoid sharing the outrage and horror that such an act had caused in the whole village. What did she care about the tombs of former slaves and humble yokels? What could it matter to her beautiful brown eyes what the fate of such humble bones was? Would their theft perchance disrupt her dream of showing off the radiant beauty of her mouth, eyes and bust on the sidewalks of Rio?

Certainly not, but it was Death. Death, relentless and powerful, to which she also felt enslaved, and which one day would also sweep away her beautiful

bones to the eternal peace of the cemetery. When that day came, Cora wanted her bones resting in a peaceful, quiet and comfortable coffin, in a safe grave, after her flesh had become the charm and delight of worms ...

The most incensed of them all, however, was Pelino. The Professor wrote a most choleric article, cursing, screaming, vociferating; "In the history of crime", he declared, "already full to its brim with the most repulsive facts ever, such as the dismemberment of Maria de Macedo, the strangulation of the Fuoco brothers, we have not registered any that is nearly as vile as the looting of the graves of 'Rest in Peace'."

And the village was constantly terrified. No longer did one see peace on people's countenances; business was paralyzed; all courting suspended. Day after day, dark clouds hung over the houses, and at night, they all heard noises, groans, supernatural noises... It was as if the dead were asking for revenge ...

The looting, however, continued. Every night there were two, three graves open and emptied of their funereal contents. The entire population, en masse, decided to guard the bones of their ancestors. They arrived early, but soon, yielding to fatigue and sleepiness, one after the other withdrew, and in the wee hours, there was not one on guard. On this very day the gravedigger noticed that two graves had been opened and the bones taken to a mysterious destiny.

All then organized a watch. Ten determined men swore to the deputy they would guard the mansion of the dead overnight. There was nothing irregular on the first night or on the second or third, but on the fourth night, when the watchmen were about to doze off, one of them saw an indistinct shape sneaking off down the block of mausoleums. They ran and managed to catch two of the vampires. Their anger and indignation, dormant until then, emerged, and they beat the macabre thieves with such violence that both looked dead in the end.

The news soon spread, and when the identity of the two malefactors was disclosed in the morning, before the entire population, they were recognized as the Collector Carvalhais and Colonel Bentes, a wealthy landowner and the mayor. The former was still alive, and in answer to the repeated questions that were made, he could only reply that he was gathering the bones to make gold and that the partner who had escaped was the apothecary.

There was surprise and there was hope. How does one make gold with bones? Is it possible? But how could such a wealthy and respected gentleman fall to the level of a thief of corpses if it was not true!

If it were possible to do so, if from those wretched funereal spoils it was possible to make some money, it would be a blessing for them all!

The postman, whose old dream was his son's graduation, saw right there and then the way to carry it through. Castrioto, the judge's clerk, who last year managed to buy a house, but had not been able to put up even a fence, thought about a wall that would protect his garden and livestock. In the eyes of the

farmer Marques, who for years had been pining for some pasture, the green meadow that belonged to Costa loomed, a place where his oxen could fatten and gain strength ...

The needs made plain by each and every one would be abated, fulfilled and satiated by those bones that were gold, and those two or three thousand people; men, women and children; young and old, as if they were all one person, ran to the apothecary's house.

With a great deal of effort, the deputy prevented all from sacking the drug-store and managed to keep them in the square, to wait for the man who kept within the immense secret of a Potosi. He soon appeared. Perched on a chair, in his hand a small bar of gold that sparkled in the strong morning sun, Bastos asked to say a word, promising to teach them the secret, if they saved his life. "We want to know now," they shouted. He then explained that it was necessary to write down the recipe, to record the progression of the process, the reactives - a long ordeal that could only be handed out in print the next day. There was a murmur, some started to shout, but the deputy said he himself would be responsible for the result.

Compliantly, with that peculiar passivity of angry crowds, everyone walked home with only one thought in mind: to immediately obtain the largest number of bones possible.

The event was heard of at the house of the railroad engineer. At dinner, the topic of conversation was nothing else. The engineer tried to recall what he had studied at college, and said that it was impossible. This was alchemy, a dead thing, gold is gold, simple matter, and bones are bones, compounds, phosphate of lime. To think you could transform one thing into another was "nonsense". Cora was quick to laugh at the tomfoolery of those primitive people, but her mother, Dona Emilia, believed the whole thing was possible.

At night, however, the engineer, seeing that his wife was asleep, escaped through the window and ran straight to the cemetery, Cora, barefoot, holding her slippers, looked for the maid to go with her to reap for bones. Seeing no sign of her, Cora went off on her own; and Dona Emilia, finding she was alone, guessed where they had all gone off to and cleared out as well. And the same went on throughout the whole town. A father said nothing to his son, and sneaked out; a woman, thinking she could deceive her husband, left; sons, daughters, servants, the entire population, under the eerie starlight, rushed to the satanic rendez-vous at "Rest in Peace". And nobody was missing. The wealthiest and the poorest were all there. Miguel the Turk, professor Pelino, Dr. Jerome, Major Camanho, Cora, the beautiful and stunning Cora, with her beautiful alabaster fingers, dredged up the graves, pulling off skin that still clung tenaciously to the rotten bones and filled her lap, which until that moment had never been used for anything else. This was the dowry she was gathering, and her nostrils,

which shivered like transparent pink wings, did not notice the fetid tissue that rotted in the malodorous mud ...

Disagreements soon arose, the dead were few and there was not enough to satisfy the hunger of the living. There was stabbing, shooting, shoving. Pelino stabbed the Turk over a femur and even among families issues arose. Only the postman and his son did not fight. They walked together in absolute agreement, and, at one moment, the astute child of eleven urged his father: "Papa, let's go to Mama's grave, she was, after all, so fat..."

In the morning, the cemetery was filled with more dead than it had buried in the last thirty years of its existence. Only one person had not been there, neither killing nor defiling graves: this was Belmiro, the drunk.

He went into a small grocery, door half open, and finding no one there, filled a bottle with cachaça and sat down to drink at the margins of the Tubiacanga river. He watched its waters flow by gently over the rough granite riverbed - both he and the river were aloof as to what they had witnessed, even to the escape of the apothecary with his Potosi and his secret, under the canopy of the eternal stars.

The Gold Pouch

J. Simões Lopes Neto

I was drovin' back then. This one time, it was just me and my horse and a leather pouch all stuffed with gold coins, when I came to cross this very ford that brought me up to the Coronilha ranch where I was meant to spend the night.

It seems like yesterday!... It was February, and I was dog-tired from the ride.

See there, in the shade by that spit of land, I unsaddled under that same clump of woods that is staring back at us. Stretched out on the sheepskin, head on the saddle and hat over my eyes, I lay down and slept like a log.

I woke up to the soft sound of the water, runnin' so fresh, so clean over the pebbles, I just had to dive in, to get rid of the sleepiness... so I slid into the water like a capybara.

I plunged again and again into the swimming hole under the gully, takin' a few strokes here and there, since there wasn't really room for a good swim.

Alone in the silence, I got dressed, saddled up the bay and mounted.

I went some twelve miles down that road and soon made it to the ranch, with the sun still at least a yard and a half up in the sky.

Ah!... I forgot to tell you that a dog was riding with me that day, a very smart, chestnut-colored *cusco*, a good watchdog. It was the young'uns pet, but sometimes he took to followin' me. After I went out the gate, you couldn't get that dog to turn back unless it was with me. He always slept by my side during those journeys, over the back saddle on the harness.

And, in fact, one night...

But that's another story. Let's get to the point.

As I rode, I noticed every so often the *cusco* would stop on the road, barkin' and runnin' back, then lookin' at me, lookin' at me and barkin' again, then runnin' back over our trail. It was like he was callin' me!... But since I kept on

goin', he'd come and catch up with me, then after a while it'd start all over again.

Well, you know, fello, what do you reckon, the moment I set foot in the stockyard, just about to greet my host 'Afternoon!', I felt a shot burn through my heart... I couldn't feel the weight of the pouch 'round my waist!

I had lost the three hundred gold pieces I had on me, to pay fo' the cattle I was meant to drive.

I was blinded by this white light, followed by some purple flashes... and then everything grayed into black.

I was dirt poor in those days, and even today, you know how it is... I was just startin' out in life, and the money belonged to the boss, owner of a salting works, an honest man who had a temper like hailstorm...

I was still collectin' myself, half shocked, when I heard someone ask:

"Hey, fello! Are you ill?"

"No, sir, thank you, it ain't no ailment. Somethin' horrible has chanced upon me: I lost a fortune of my boss' money..."

"You don't say!..."

"It's true... I'd rather die than this! What will he think of me now?..."

"It's a hell of a situation, but don't let it get you down, young man."

At this point, the cusco jumped up to the horse's muzzle, like he was tryin' to lick its snout, and rushed back down the road, barkin' like crazy. He looked at me, ran up and back, and then started barkin' up a storm again...

Ah!... All of a sudden it all came back. It was like I was seein' the spot where I had stopped, the swim, hangin' my clothes on a leafflower branch, and the pouch on a rock, my gun belt on top of it, and even the cigarette I'd taken a last drag of before I dived in, the butt stuck on a thorn, still glowin', lettin' out a thin little trail of blue smoke, goin' straight up in the windless air...; everything, I could see everything.

It was there, by gully, the pouch. And there was only one thing for it: ride back at full gallop, before other journeyers came along.

I was on my horse in a flash, and right then the dog started to jump and play and bark – Lord have mercy – like he was talkin' to me.

And off I went, back 'round the kink in the fence.

Pretty soon I came upon a host of drovers, a large herd of horses behind them, cert'nly headed to put up at the ranch. We all tipped our hats as we passed by, many of them deep into their ponchos. My heart was skippin' beats, keen to ask some questions... but I bit my tongue.

I leaned forward and spurred my horse into a full gallop.

The dog panted along, under the shadow of the horse, which was already gettin' long.

The road expanded before me, deserted; to my left, the fields stretched out as far as the eye could see, peaceful and green in the soft twilight sun, spotted

with cattle settlin' down for the night; to my right, the sun, very low, golden red, going behind a mass of clouds with silver edges.

Not a lapwing in the dry mudholes; a hidden partridge or two whistled softly in the tall grass; in the distance, between the last glimmers of light escapin' on one side and the night siftn' in from the other, there flashed the white of a big stork, flyin', serene, barely movin' its wings, like a sad goodbye when we don't wave our arms either...

A cool breeze began to fall, and an immense silence took over everything.

The bay was a fine animal, and the mutt was calmer now, off to my side, tongue out and tail up, pacin' fast and tight in the low dust raised by the horse's hooves.

And the sun set. It left a burnin' light in the sky, like a grass fire, then the twilight, and the dark night closed in; then just stars in the sky... just stars...

The bay kept champin' at the bit, groanin' with every gallopin' step, eatin' up the miles. Above my head was Orion's belt... so beautiful, so bright, so straight, it seemed to follow me. It reminded me of my little' uns, who were lookin' at it too, maybe; it reminded me of my mother, my father, who saw them when they were children themselves, and used to call it *Marias, As Tres Marias*. My friend! You're a young man, you spend your life joshin' – God bless you! – without ever knowin' the heavy sadness of the *pampas* when your heart aches.

I hadn't cried in a long spell. But right then and there I felt some tears in my eyes, slowly, as if crawlin'... quiverin' on my lashes, shimmerin' there a while. They dropped warmly onto the dusty ground as I took off gallopin'... they were like stray water drops that not even a fly or an ant would notice.

Through my tears, like a beam of sunshine comin' through the clouds, a tune from my hometown crossed my mind:

Sing! and let your soul fly

Singin' eases the pain

Sing! it's no time to die

Singin' brings life back again

But how could I sing?

The horse took a deep breath and came to a halt, shakin' his ears and sniffin' in the dark. It knew the place, this was it.

I could hear the dog breathin', petered out. I got off the horse.

Not a leaf rustled. The silence in the shadow of the trees caused a great deal of wonderment... it wasn't fear, mind you, fear never so much as grazes the heart of a gaucho!

Down the road, I could hear the water rollin' over the stones. Fireflies danced in the dark. I went down to the place where I had rested. I groped the

tree branches and found the stone where I had left the bag and guns. I reached out my hand and fumbled everywhere, here, there... nothing!... nothing!

I froze on the inside. My boss would say I stole the bag!... stole it!... Because how could I ever explain that I had lost it? How? A thief, thief, that was what I was!

A *discomposin'* idea sprang into my head: I should end it all, so I wouldn't be afflicted with the shame of suspicion. Yep, that was just what I should do: kill myself... right here, right now!

I drew my gun and set the trigger... I blessed myself and held the thick, cold, charged pistol against my ear...

I'll tell you one sure thing, son! There truly is a God!

In the heat of that moment, my eyes were drawn to... *As Tres Marias* glintin' on the water, the dog seated on the stone, next to me, lickin' my hand... and the horse that whinnied up on the road, by the bank of the stream. At the same time, a cricket started its lively tune in the hollow of trunk nearby! My good fello! I am not a man given to blasphemy, but it was God who made those stars shine there and made those simple critters shake that awful thought off of me...

The small, loyal dog reminded me of the affection of my people. My horse made me think of freedom, my work. And that singin' cricket gave me back my hope.

Damn it all, friend! I ain't got no learnin'... and we judge a book by its cover, without seein' the heart of the matter. Well, my heart, at that moment, was like a flower under the sun, in an open field at high noon. God's light was shinin' everywhere.

And, once again, at peace with myself, I put my gun back in my belt, rolled up a cigarette, stroke the lighter and began smokin'.

And I went on thinkin'. I reckon it was my fault entirely... I had lost three hundred gold coins, a fortune to me. I couldn't get my head 'round it... I usually took special care of everything. Now, what I'd do was sell my small farm, mos' of my poor cattle – except for a few dairy cows, for the sake of the young'uns, and the pair of field oxen – sell my herd of bay horses... done! That should be more than enough. And in case it wasn't, I'd find some other way. Now, for a man to end his life... a family man too... it just wouldn't do!

And slow-like I went back up the bank. As soon as my horse felt I was there, it pranced and bit the bridles.

I tied the halter around the horse. As it turned 'round, I mounted, relieved.

The happy cusco went 'round in circles,, I went galloping back to the farm.

As I rode 'round the fence, I could see the light comin' from the house. The dogs came out barkin'. The horse whinnied all cheerful, sensin' that its friends were near. In the barn, other horses whinnied.

In the barn, I got off the horse and loosened the halter. The horse carried on, joyfully.

I then went in: at the door I said, "God bless y'all, good evenin'!" and walked in, with the dog right beside me. In the room, there were a few countrymen, the group that was arrivin' when I was leavin'. They were sippin' *chimarrão*.

On the table was the kettle, and next to it, like a coiled snake, was my bag, stuffed with the three hundred gold coins.

"Why, yes, God bless you, partner! Good evening! So, was you ever scared so senseless?"

And the men chuckled, as good men would at an innocent prank.

And so did I. My eyes wandered from the bag to the dog, coiled around my feet.

Christmas turkey

Mário de Andrade

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Our first Christmas as a family after my father's death five years earlier had significant consequences our family happiness. We had always been familiarly happy in that vague sense of happiness – we were honest people, no crimes, a home without quarrels or severe economic trouble. However, due mainly to the gloomy character of my father, a creature who lacked any lyricism at all, of an exemplary incapacity, well-seated in mediocrity, we had never fully enjoyed life nor had any taste for material happiness – good wine, a water resort, the acquisition of a refrigerator, things like that. My father had been mistakenly right in an almost dramatic way, the number-one, pure-bred dullard.

When my father died, we felt sorry, etc. When Christmastime came around, I couldn't wait to get rid of the dead man's obstructive memory which seemed to have systematized forever the obligation of a painful remembrance at every lunch, in every single family gesture. Once I suggested that mother go see a movie. The result was tears. How could one go the movies in deep mourning? Grief was already being cultivated for the sake of appearances. I had always liked my father only moderately well, more out of filial instinct than a feeling of spontaneous love, and was on the verge of disturbing any good memory of the dead man.

This was probably the reason I came up with one of my so-called crazy ideas. Early on in my life this had been my splendid conquest against the family environment. From the time I was a young boy at school, where I managed to flunk every year; since I secretly kissed a cousin when I was ten and was found out by Old Aunt, an execrable hag; and especially from the time I gave lessons to or received them from, I am not sure, a relative's maid – I had obtained in the reformatory of my home and among our long list of relatives the conciliatory

reputation of being "insane". "The poor boy is crazy," they would say. My parents would say it with a certain condescending sadness, while the rest of the family looked for an example for their children, probably with the pleasure of those who are convinced of their superiority. There were no signs of insanity in their children. It was this very reputation that saved me. I did everything that life offered me and which my being demanded to fulfill my soul. And I was allowed to do it because I was crazy, poor boy. The result was an existence without any complexes, of which I cannot complain.

Christmas dinner had always been a family tradition. A spare dinner, as one can expect – a dinner just like my father: Brazilian nuts, figs, raisins, after midnight mass. Stuffed with almonds and walnuts (how we, the three brothers, argued over the nutcracker...), stuffed with Brazilian nuts and monotonies, we would then hug each other and go to our beds. It was while I remembered all of this that I came up with one of my "crazy ideas".

"I want turkey for Christmas."

There was such consternation, you cannot imagine. Soon my saintly single aunt, who lived with us, warned us that we could not invite anyone because of our mourning period.

"Who said anything about inviting anyone? It's always the same thing. When did we ever eat turkey in our lives? We have always had turkey as a festive dish, all those relatives from hell showing up..."

"Don't say that, son..."

"Who's to stop me?"

And I spilled all my cold indifference for our countless relatives of *bandeirante* ancestry, as they say, who cares! It was time to magnify the old theory of lunacy, the poor boy, and I wasted no time. I was hit by a sudden surge of affection for my mother and auntie, my two mothers, three with my sister, the three mothers who made my life divine. It was always the same – somebody's birthday would come up and only then turkey would be prepared at home. Turkey was a dish for parties – a vile band of relatives, prepared by tradition, would invade our house because of the turkey, the pies and sweets. My three mothers, three days before the party had no other life except working, working at preparing finely made sweets and cold plates, all those relatives would devour it all and still take small packages home to those who had not come. My three mothers could barely stand on their legs out of exhaustion. The turkey was reduced to a leftover of bones, of which mother and auntie would taste a morsel of the leg the next day, a vague dark piece lost amidst the white rice. It was mother herself who served, picking out everything for her old man and children. In fact, nobody really knew what turkey was like in our family, party-leftover turkey.

No, we wouldn't invite anyone; it would be turkey for the five of us, five people. And we would have two kinds of *farofa*, the fatty kind with giblets, and

the dry one, golden-brown with lots of butter. I wanted the crop stuffed with only the fatty kind, along with plums, nuts and a glass of sherry, just as I had learned with Rose, my very close friend. I evidently omitted where I had learned the recipe, but they all suspected. They all had that air of incense in the wind, wasn't it the devil's work to enjoy such a tasty dish? And very cold beer, I assured them, almost yelling. Of course, with my taste refined outside the home, I had at first thought of a good wine, very French. But affection for mother won over the craziness, mother loved beer.

When I finished reporting my plans, I noticed all were extremely happy, with a strong desire to carry out the insane proposal that had burst from my lips. They knew it was madness, but they imagined I alone was the one who wanted it all. There could be no easier way to place on me ... the guilt for their huge desires. They looked at each other smiling, like shy, lost doves, until my sister expressed the general consensus:

"He's nuts!"

The turkey was bought, prepared, etc. And after a midnight mass that was carried out as carelessly as possible, our most wonderful Christmas took place. It was funny – as soon as I came up with the idea that I was finally about to make mother eat turkey, I could do nothing else but think about her, feel affection for her, love my sweet, old lady. And my siblings were also taken by the same violent rhythm of love, all dominated by the new happiness that the turkey was impressing onto the family. Thus, still disguising my real intentions, I let mother carve the turkey's chest. For a moment, she stopped, having sliced part of the bird's chest, almost giving in to those laws of economy that had always stupefied her to the point of senseless semi-poverty.

"No, ma'am, cut it all! I myself could eat the whole thing!"

It was a lie. Familial love was so alight in me that I was incapable of eating much, to allow the others to eat more. And all the others carried the same tune. That turkey that we alone were eating in the heart of the family had revealed in each of us what daily life had completely smothered: love, motherly affection, filial affection. God forgive me, but I'm thinking of Jesus ... In that house of quite modest bourgeois people, a miracle worthy of God's Christmas was taking place. The turkey chest was reduced entirely to big slices.

"I can serve it!"

He's really crazy, for why would he serve if it was always mother who served in that house! Amidst laughter, the big, full dishes were brought to me, and I commenced a heroic distribution, while I asked my brother to serve the beer. I readily took an admirable piece of the skin, full of fat, and placed it on a dish. And, after that, I took big, white slices. Mother's voice, now in a severe tone, cut the nerve-racking space of time in which everyone yearned for his piece of the turkey:

"Remember your brothers, Juca!"

How could she imagine, poor dear, that that was her dish, my mother, my ill-treated friend, who knew about Rose, about my crimes, to whom I only managed to inform what could make her suffer! The dish was sublime.

"Mother, this is yours! Don't pass it around!"

At this exact moment she could no longer take so much commotion and started to cry. My aunt also, as soon as she realized the next sublime dish would be hers, joined the chorus of tears. And my sister, who had never seen a tear drop without starting to cry herself, broke down effusively. I then started to spurt out a number of insolent comments, so that I would not start to cry as well. I was only nineteen... What a hellishly foolish family, who ever saw such a thing, the sight of turkey making you cry! Things like that. Everyone made an effort to smile, but it was at this moment that happiness really became impossible. For the weeping had evoked by association the undesirable image of my dead father. My father, with his gray appearance, came to ruin our Christmas forever. I was furious.

Well, we started to eat silently, mournfully, and the turkey was perfect. The tender meat, of very light material, flowed joyfully amidst the flavors of *farofas* and ham, now and then nudged, disturbed and re-desired, through the most violent intervention of the plums and the petulant nuisance of the nutmeg. But, Father was sitting there, gigantic, incomplete, a criticism, a wound, an incapacity. And the turkey, so tasty... Mother finally realizing that turkey was in fact a dish worthy of the newborn Jesus.

An unscrupulous battle began between the turkey and Father's figure. I thought that by praising the turkey, I would strengthen it in the fight and, of course, I sided with the turkey. But dead people have their disgusting, very hypocritical means to win: I had hardly finished praising the bird when Father's figure loomed victoriously, unbearably obstructive.

"If only your father were here..."

I could no longer eat, I could no longer enjoy the perfect turkey, so involved was I in that battle between those two dead creatures. I began to hate my father. And I do not know where the brilliant inspiration came from, but suddenly I was hypocritical, political. At that moment, which now to me seems decisive for my family, I apparently sided with my father. I pretended, sadly:

"Yes... But Father who loved us so dearly and died from working so hard for us, Father up in heaven, must be very happy." I hesitated, but decided not to mention the turkey any longer. "Happy to see us all together, as a family."

And so everyone started calmly to talk about Father. His image began to fade, become smaller and smaller, until it became a little star shining in the sky. Now everybody ate the turkey with sensuousness, because Father was very kind, had always sacrificed so much of himself for us, he was a saint who "you, my

children, will never be able to repay". A saint, Father became a saint, a pleasant vision, a non-obtrusive little star in the sky. He could no longer hinder anybody; he was the pure object of calm contemplation. The only dead present was the turkey, dominating, fully victorious.

My mother, my aunt, all of us, were drunk with joy. I was going to write "gustative happiness", but it was not only that. It was a tremendous joy, a love of all, a forgetfulness of any other relationship that could distract us from our family's great love. And it was, I know that it was, that first turkey eaten in the heart of the family, the beginning of a new love, recomposed, more complete, richer and more inventive, more obliging and caring of itself. A family happiness was then born that, I am not an exclusivist, some may feel just as big, but I can't think of one more intense than ours.

Mother ate so much turkey that for a moment I thought it would make her sick. But then, I thought, oh, so be it! She might even die, but at least once in her life she ate real turkey! Our infinite love had transported me to such a level of lack of egoism... Later came some soft grapes and sweets, called "well-married" in my nook of the woods. But not even this dangerous term was associated to the memory of my father, who the turkey had already converted into dignity, into the right thing, into a pure cult of contemplation.

We stood up. It was almost two o'clock, everybody was happy and tipsy because of the two bottles of beer. Everybody would go to bed, sleep, or toss and turn, it doesn't matter, because a happy insomnia is a good thing. The problem was that Rose, who was Catholic before being Rose, had promised to wait for me with a bottle of champagne. To go out I lied, I said I was going to a friend's party, then kissed Mother and winked at her, my way of telling her where I was going and making her suffer her bit. The other two women I kissed without a wink. And now, to Rose!

A confusing story

Caio Fernando Abreu

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Com permissão especial

It was Thursday. Like each of the last few Thursdays, he was very nervous. After throwing the envelope he had in his hand on the table, he walked aimlessly around the room.

"Another letter?" I asked.

He didn't answer. He just shrugged impatiently, which could mean so many things. But he didn't say a thing. So, I opened the envelope and read the carefully typed letters:

I saw you behind the roses and there was a stifled yearning in your eyes. As if you wanted to talk to me. I swear I tried to approach you when you were leaving, but I was afraid. I know we are going to be friends one day. I don't want to push. Today is Sunday, a little before lunch. The house is empty. I wish I had written right after that night. It may seem incredible, but twenty years ago this same day – at this same hour – I was born.

"It's lovely", I said. "Perhaps a little juvenile. But, lovely. After all, youth is always charming."

"He's twenty."

"He? How do you know it's he and not her?"

"I can guess, I feel it. A woman wouldn't write things like that. I don't know, the style, there's something about it".

"Might be". I said.

"And there was another letter, I don't think I showed you. He said he was a tired man, that's it, *man*, not a woman".

"I don't remember", I lied. "and he could be lying. This date, for example, this date could be forged."

He avoided my eyes to say:

"I went to an astrologer. He was born September 22, 1954. Between about ten and noon. He's a Virgo, the astrologer said, the last day of Virgo. By his calculations, his ascendant must be Scorpio." "Ascendant?"

- You know, the sign that... whatever." he looked up, annoyed. "Hey, you're not expecting a lesson in astrology, right?"

"No, I just wanted to know what it meant."

"It means he must be smart. Really smart. And secretive, mysterious, intense. Just by reading the letters you can tell He has a certain ... a certain structure. The letters are well-written, the grammar is always correct."

"That's true", I replied, "never a mistake."

He sat on the edge of the bed, then sank into the pillow.

"He knows everything about me, my schedule, everything. Sometimes he talks about people I know, places I've been. He must have always been around, must know so many people I know." "You're in such a state."

"Of course. How should I feel? Every time I get one of these letters I feel like this. It makes me feel weird. I go out in the street and it's like I'm being watched. Someone I don't know follows my every step." "Lovingly," I said.

He lit a cigarette and gazed at the smoke floating up to the ceiling.

"Love? I don't know. It's a little paranoid. It's like he wants to slowly drive me crazy."

"Or make you take an interest in him."

He suddenly sat up and leaned over the table. From where I was I could only see his hunched shoulders and his hands holding his tousled hair.

"I keep imagining the most amazing stories. Sometimes I think someone is playing a joke on me."

"No," I said once again, "It's love."

"Is it? There are things, at least some of the things he writes, that feel like love. I don't know, they seem so sincere, you know? His words touch me, they move me. Maybe I'm flattered that someone appears to be paying me so much attention."

"It's love" I said for the third time.

He walked to the window. I noticed that he was looking at the palm trees lining the street, rustling in the cold wind.

"Sometimes I want to play the detective. But the clues are very subtle. Common stamps, a simple envelope, each letter with a different postmark. And this is the most common typewriter there is."

"Lettera 22."

He threw the cigarette butt out the window, turned to me suddenly and

looked me in the eyes:

"How do you know?"

"Well, anyone who deals with typewriters can recognize it right away. It's unmistakable." I stated. Then I changed subject: "But it is still beautiful."

"Beautiful and confounding".

"And old."

"Anonymous letters. It's like something from a last century novel. An epistolary novel. Platonic". He took a deep breath. "But I need to find out who this guy is soon. No one has ever taken such an interest in me".

He sat against the table, lit up another cigarette. I offered him the ashtray:

"You always smoke too much on Thursdays."

He laughed:

"And now on Wednesdays too. I keep wondering if another letter will arrive the next day." He inhaled deeply, eyes closed. And added, releasing the smoke: "I've written him too."

"What?"

"I have been writing him in secret."

"You haven't told Martha about this?"

"Are you nuts? You know how jealous she is, you're the only one I've told. I have to write in secret. Locked up in my office, I keep thinking that my words must release some kind of ghost that flies out the window - I always leave it open when I write him - and then, floats over the rooftops and through the streets and walls of the city until it reaches him, you know?"

"And what do you do with the letters you write?"

"I keep them. Under lock and key. Maybe some day I'll be able to deliver them to him in person."

I also lit a cigarette.

"And... what do you say in these letters?"

"I ask for help. I say my marriage is horrible, and it has been this never-ending horror for three years. Can you believe Martha started calling me 'muffin'? Is there anything more odious than that? On Sundays she asks me for a section of the paper and says 'hey muffin, we need to see this sale, muffin; it'll only last till the 15th, muffin.'"

"But Martha was such a... special woman".

"Before we got married. After that, every woman becomes a lamebrain. You're so lucky you didn't fall into that trap."

I put out the cigarette:

"What else do you say in these letters?"

He leaned over the table again, one hand on his head, the other softly smoothing out the timber table-top. Like a caress:

"I say that sometimes I wish I had a friend like when I was a teenager. The

kind you told everything to, absolutely everything. And in the end, you don't even know whether he is a friend or a brother".

"Or a lover".

"Or a lover," He repeated. Then he fell onto the bed once more, took a crumpled up sheet of paper from his pocket and read: "I can tell you I am willing to do anything", I say, "Get closer to me. Look at me, touch me, say anything. Or don't say a word, but come near. Don't be an idiot, don't let this disappear, go to dust, vanish. Soon, you'll grow older and think this was all so stupid. Before it all goes away, while I can still say yes, please, come closer."

He folded the paper and stuffed it into his pocket, crumpling it even more. We looked at each other. I didn't know what to say. He sank into the bed once again and turned to the wall. I went on listening. "I talk to you as if I were talking to him a little. If you could help, if he could help. It's all so complicated. I walk the streets and look at all twenty-year-old men, as if each and every one could be him. I feel things I don't really understand. I don't like not understanding what I feel. I don't enjoy dealing with what I don't know. I never felt like this before."

A gush of wind opened the window, spreading the ashes from the ashtray all over the table. He looked smaller, shrunken, on the bed. I kept on listening:

"I'm thirty-four, I can't feel things as if I were fifteen. You know how it is, we're almost the same age. How old are you now?"

"Thirty three," I said.

"You see, you get it. We are too old for this frenzy."

"You think so?" I asked. But he kept on speaking without listening.

"It's so uncanny to suddenly find out there is someone thinking about me all the time. Someone I don't know. And who's twenty years old. I keep picturing some crazy things, I can't help it."

"What kinds of things," I whispered, "do you think about?"

He slid his hand over the white wall.

"Lying down beside him. Naked. Holding him close in my arms. Kissing him. On the mouth." On the wall, his hand clenched and moved towards his body, resting between his legs. "It must be the North wind, this bright light, springtime coming, the almost full moon. I don't know, I'm sorry. I'm kind of confused."

He suddenly went quiet. He was looking out the window as if he saw something beyond the palm trees, something I couldn't see. I still didn't know what to say. I got up to stretch out my hand and touch his tousled hair. What if this fellow were not really twenty, I thought about asking, would you still love him? But I thought maybe I shouldn't say a thing. My hand stopped in mid air, I pulled it back and got another cigarette. But I still stood close to him. Closer, really close. It was another Thursday, this time in September, and ever since August, we were both very, very confused.

Romantic Cliche

Daniel Galera

© Daniel Galera.

Com permissão especial

It was imperative to convince her that I loved her. That's why I avoided looking directly at her lower lip, jutting out moistly, at the gracious stretch of bosom her low-cut top displayed, that spot of muscular softness where her breasts began. Any inkling of excitement would ruin my plan. Because, reader, I'm no fool: I have read enough by evolutionist psychologists to know that a man's chances of convincing a woman of his eternal love improve dramatically when he is not picturing sexual intercourse with her. Devising proof of your love is an intellectual endeavor.

Camila drinks more than me, and focuses her sad eyes on the glass. As any anatomic masterpiece, she is a selective girl. It is not her fault. Natural selection has not yet been able to assimilate the significance of a birth control pill. To Camila's genes, it makes no sense to invest in an unproductive sexual relationship. We actually had a lot of sex in the first few months. It has been a few weeks since she lost interest in carnal issues and what is left are these sad, analytical looks she sheds into the beer glass as a way to force me to say something; to say yes, I am happy with our relationship; to say no, I have not been interested in other women; to say that I love her, of course I do. And I'll say it, yes I will, that's the whole reason I arranged to meet her at a bar tonight. When a woman is in a stalemate, you need to transform her hopes into certainties. If I can't fool her, soon some other dude will.

I will admit, in advance, to all these charges: cynicism, egocentricity, male chauvinism, selfishness. Problem solved, I now suggest the reader imagine Camila: she's hot, a little snobbish, and she loves European films that she barely understands. My opinion is that she could read more, but this can be easily solved with proper guidance. I had already started working on this a few days

ago, offering her the challenge of reading and giving her some good works, and also some unpublished texts I wrote (I am a so-called writer), including a short novel-parody about Lolita whose title - "Rupert, the pediatric gynecologist" - she described as "sick." Oh, and she sings well, easily reaching high notes. But forget all that, forget about the generic descriptions. Imagine Camila as an exciting collection of idiosyncrasies in form: she has delicious scars, a special way of yawning, beautiful stretch marks distributed with the necessary restraint (she tells me that she grew too fast), all sorts of charming gestures. Right now, she is stretching in a very peculiar way, her body leaning over the back of the chair, the back of her hands resting on her forehead and purring impatiently. If the reader could picture the right image, he will understand my selfishness and my relative lack of character.

Ok, time to wrap things up. I'm going to refurbish romantic clichés with a thesaurus, make it rife with figures of speech and assure her of my true love. Thus, she'll once again be certain that I deserve to fuck her. But before that, just to resume the conversation, I ask her if she wants another beer. " 'Course". My love, my darling. I shall say everything you want to hear, and more. I eagerly await for the day when the Earth's super-population will bring back our polygamist nature, when hedonistic sex will prevail over utilitarian sex and intercourse will no longer be a reproductive method but a celebration of life. I kind of like this idea; I almost suggest to Camila, "let's leave all this bitterness behind and celebrate our existence?" The waiter sets the beer on the table, and I, feigning some anxiety, slowly fill our glasses. Then, when I had just opened my mouth to express all my affection, she cuts in: "I'm pregnant".

Camila says this and then stared at me with watery eyes. She seemed to be begging for an answer that would express a minimum of complicity. I went dumb, of course, maybe for some minutes, and she took my absolute silence as actually being ... absolute silence. She picked up her purse with torturous slowness and left, her glass still full.

Dear reader, if we are not chimpanzees it is because we have the melancholic ability to cry alone during late hours.





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