

**Forty Years Later:
Translating Erotic Writing Into a Different Age**

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ABSTRACT

In 1981, only two years after the end of the harshest years of government censorship in Brazil, the controversial erotica writer Cassandra Rios published the novel “*Eu sou uma Lésbica*” (I am a Lesbian), which is considered to this day her most polemical book. After being censored multiple times and consequently bankrupted by the military dictatorship for writing about female, and more specifically lesbian, sexuality, it seems that Rios saw the relaxation of censorship laws as a way of taking revenge on the system that had persecuted her for years. She released a book with much more subversive topics than her usual output. The book narrates the coming of age of a lesbian living in São Paulo, and presents themes like violence against LGBT people, pedophilia, fetishism, and the narrator’s perceptions of discrimination. This thesis is based on the translation of this work for a Canadian 2020 audience. In it, I discuss the specificities involved in translating into one’s second language, the choices regarding adaptation of cultural aspects of a source text that comes from a culture considered more marginal than the target one, the issues that the translator goes through when faced with sensitive topics, and the political power of female-written erotica.

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INTRODUCTION

From my first couple of months as an undergraduate student, I was already interested in the subject of translating women. I did not find much information on gender and translation through my Bachelor's courses, so I went on to find literature on the theme on my own. Even though I could find a reasonable number of books written on the topic, I noticed a lack of studies in the area when it came to Brazilian literature.

That being the case, I decided that I would study the translation of Brazilian literature written by women once my BA was over. Not only that, but considering my own political beliefs and opinions on what the military dictatorship did to the country, especially in the culture department, since a large number of my favorite artists had had trouble with the section of the government which was responsible for censorship, I was very inclined towards choosing a censored piece or author.

Having been given the choice to get my Master's degree in another country, I decided Canada would be the perfect fit especially due to the high value at which freedom and democracy are held in the country.

The fact that Canada has never gotten even close to becoming a dictatorship, much less one that has the military in power, got me really excited for two reasons: the first was knowing that I would never have to worry about having an issue with the theme of my thesis and my personal safety or my permanence in academia. I can see now that these worries were unfounded, but right before the election of the current Brazilian president, which is when my studies began, the political atmosphere in the country was fearful and confused, and no one really knew how bad the shift to conservatism would be during the next couple of years.

The second reason why the distance between Canada and conservatism called my attention was the opportunity to bring information and awareness on how bad things can get when freedom and democracy are not the core values of a nation. Even though I ended up choosing a piece that was not written under or about censorship, the anger Rios felt for being taken from her place as a popular, even renowned writer to bankruptcy and infamy can be felt throughout the narrative.

Cassandra Rios was not an obvious choice. Even having a lifelong interest in Brazilian literature, I had never heard about her and her work. This was probably due to a combination of the facts that she was never considered an erudite writer, even by the most progressive Brazilian intellectuals, and the sensitivity of the topics she approached in her books. Through sixteen years of formal education in Brazil, I was not once presented with a book that dealt with LGBT romantic or sexual relationships explicitly, even during higher education.

It was only after starting my postgraduate studies and beginning the search for a work to base my thesis on that I came across Rios' work. She does figure in plenty of lists of writers that were persecuted by the military, and is known for having been the artist who had the largest number of censored pieces during the ten harshest years of the regime: thirty-six books. Even though it eventually destroyed her career, she did use the persecution to her favor at first, releasing her books with the phrase "The most forbidden writer in Brazil" on the cover under her name.

After finding out about Rios work, I had to decide which of her works to use for my research. My choice was made simple for me, because due to how hard censorship came onto Rios, it is really difficult to find her books nowadays. A publishing house named

Editora Brasiliense released new editions of three of them in 2005, but they seem to have been out of print for years. I chose *Eu sou uma Lésbica* because it was the one I could find in pdf format, in a hidden lesbian literature blog.hA

About the author

Odete Pérez Rios (1931-2002), who wrote under the pseudonym Cassandra Rios (an homage to the Greek prophetess), was a Brazilian writer of erotica, and is mainly known for being the most censored author in the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985.

Rios wrote her first book *A Volúpia do Pecado* (*The Voluptuousness of Sin*, 1942), a love story between two teenage girls, when she was sixteen. She had to self-publish it because no publishing house was interested due to its subversion of “moral and good customs”, a phrase widely used both by the government and the general population to describe the supposedly honourable and correct way of living. Even though these values were so highly spoken about, Rios’ first novel was a huge success, being republished nine times in fourteen years, before it was censored and taken off shelves in 1962. Information on pre-military censored materials is hard to come by, because by then censorship was dealt with by the individual state, not federal government, so there is no available report on why this specific book was banned nor why it took so long for it to become a target, although Rios, in a 2001 interview, attributed it to jealousy caused by her then successful writing career.

Rios continued to write at a very fast pace, became the first female author to sell one million copies in 1970 and was one of the few full-time writers of her time. It was more

likely at the time for writers to work regular jobs, many times as journalists, and to publish books on the side, not as a sole source of income. Rios made the royalties she got from her books her main income source and was able to live comfortably from that for years, before the persecution by the military government started.

Because we are dealing with a time in which the government was not obliged in any way to inform the general population of its decisions, justifications and practices, some dates and numbers are difficult to pinpoint. In an interview given to *Globo*, the country's biggest media conglomerate, in 2019, Rios' niece, Liz Rios, states that the author was able to live a comfortable life until 1976, when fourteen of her books were banned and taken off shelves in less than six months. According to Liz, that was a decisive moment in Rios' life. Up until that point, she was the owner of three houses, some cars and a bookstore. After these events, she had to close the bookstore, sell most of what she owned and declare bankruptcy.

Despite all that, Rios did not stop writing or go on to find another job; she continued to publish erotica, but now under the pseudonym Oliver Rivers (Rios means Rivers in Portuguese). Curiously enough, Oliver Rivers never had an encounter with the censors, even though, still according to Liz, the texts published under this name had similar content as the ones signed by Cassandra Rios. This is not an easy fact to verify, because even though you can find records of the existence of Oliver Rivers as Rios' pseudonym, "his" books are no longer available even in second-hand bookshops. This, along with the fact that the military did not have an issue with the male persona, can be a sign of a huge decrease in popularity when Rios stopped signing what she wrote. Of course, a sexist, homophobic bias was also very likely to have been a part of this difference, but at this

point, the amount of trouble the author got from the censors had also become a kind of trademark for her, and for a long time was her own form of publicity.

However, even though Rios' books sold well, this did not prevent the author from losing everything to the military. In 1978 the Institutional Act number five was lifted and censorship softened. At that point, a big shift in Rios' work can be noticed: because the censors could no longer do anything about it, she decided to approach even more sensitive topics than before. In a 2001 interview to the women's magazine *TPM*, Rios states that she wrote some books out of spite for being called a pornographic author. About the book *A Santa Vaca (The Sacred Cow, 1978)*, she says "I wrote [it] out of spite. They persecuted me so much that I decided to write pornography, so I wrote this book. My intention is in the prologue: showing the strength of a woman who has been called a prostitute by a man. She ends up betraying him, becoming a prostitute, a cheater" (p.10).

About the book

In *Eu Sou uma Lésbica (I am a Lesbian, 1981)*, the shift in Rios' way of working can be deeply felt. The book presents the reader with the infatuation and subsequent sexual relationship between a seven-year-old girl and her adult neighbour, a relationship that is treated as normal and not unhealthy until the very end of the book, when a plot twist can be interpreted as a glance at how traumatizing the experience really was for the child. That being said, it is important to keep in mind that Rios' literature is not usually too deep or full of hidden meanings, so the twist can also be interpreted as nothing but a cheap way of surprising the reader.

The book describes the life and coming of age of a lesbian woman named Flávia. It begins with seven-year-old Flávia admiring the legs and shoes of her neighbour, Miss Kênia. In a whim, the girl licks the woman's leg and afterwards wonders why she felt like doing so. Sometime after that, Flávia's parents need to go out in the middle of the night due to an emergency and leave the girl at Miss Kênia and her husband Mister Eduardo's house. Because the girl will not stop crying, Kênia tells the husband to go sleep in the guest bedroom and lies down with her for the night. Flávia, who is also the narrator of the scene, sees an opportunity in that and pursues a sexual interaction with Miss Kênia, who, after offering some mild resistance, gives in. A short time after that, Miss Kênia supposedly moves to Italy and all that Flávia is able to keep as a memento is one of the woman's shoes, which makes an appearance every so often in the novel as an erotic object. At this point, it is clear to both the reader and narrator that Flávia is a lesbian, and through the next chapters, we witness her experience with this fact, her first time dating another woman and her struggles with acceptance, both from society and from herself, and throughout all that, she keeps fond memories of Miss Kênia.

In the penultimate chapter of the book, Flávia, now an adult, hears that Miss Kênia is back in the neighbourhood, and that on the day she moved away, her husband apparently committed suicide. This leads to a flashback in Flávia's mind, in which the reader witnesses Miss Kênia's last day there, when Flávia went to supposedly help her pack and the woman, now with much more agency than in the first sex scene between the two, has sex with the girl more than once and then says she can never tell anyone about it or Mister Eduardo will hurt them both. With jealousy and that fear in mind, Flávia steals the shoe that appears throughout the book, and starts grinding the glass from

broken lightbulbs until it turns into fine dust, which she dumps into Eduardo's plate of soup. This results in the injuries that were ruled as self-inflicted and causes Eduardo's death. In the last chapter of the book, Flávia visits Miss Kênia and they resume their "relationship". The book ends with the narrator wondering about homosexuality and acceptance, and asking:

I am a lesbian. [...] When should a homosexual woman be rejected, comprehended, or accepted? When she misleads the man with her dissimulations or when she openly defies society, not hiding what she is?". (p. 213)

In what follows, I present the original book, then my English translation of the text, and finally the analysis and discussion of that translation which takes as its focus the challenges of translating erotic writing into a B-language.

ORIGINAL BOOK



Cassandra Rios

EU SOU UMA LÉSBICA

2ª EDIÇÃO



EDITORA RECORD

VAMOS BRINCAR DE GATINHO?

Eu me lembro bem. Não eram só pernas de cadeiras que me rodeavam. Pernas de mulheres também. Eu estava sentada no chão, debaixo da mesa. E os meus olhos curiosos olhavam aquelas pernas com admiração.

Nada estava dimensionado no tamanho do meu corpo, mas numa visão extraordinária das coisas que me rodeavam e que assumiam significados especiais no meu mundo infantil.

E era especial a admiração por um par de pernas que me fascinavam, porque eram as pernas de dona Kênia.

Dona Kênia era a nossa vizinha mais próxima, e o marido dela era médico. Quase todas as tardes, as vizinhas vinham reunir-se em nossa casa para bater papo, depois dos seus afazeres domésticos.

Ninguém estava se preocupando comigo, porque eu era uma menina que não dava muito trabalho e não precisava de atenções e cuidados especiais. Assim parecia. Boazinha, quieta e obediente.

O caso era que ninguém estava interessado em atravessar as fronteiras do meu mundo infantil. Ninguém se preocupava em analisar a desarmonia

e as alterações da expressão dos meus sentimentos emocionais, a minha agressividade os meus conflitos.

Eu era, como toda criança, um organismo biológico diferente do adulto.

Entretanto, o meu comportamento de quando criança me dá um conjunto de fatos, que sem dúvida, servem de princípios básicos para determinar a minha natureza e personalidade.

Andando de joelhos, eu fora me infiltrando por entre aquelas pernas que me atraíam, até ficar bem no centro sob a mesa.

E olhava e comparava. Sem dúvida, as pernas de dona Kênia eram as mais bonitas, no meu inocente entender. Tudo para mim tinha uma cor e um formato que aguçavam a minha sensibilidade, principalmente tratando-se das pernas e da cor da pele de dona Kênia. Acho mesmo que a sensação do belo naquela idade estava ligada e era inerente à atração que dona Kênia exercia sobre mim.

As pernas de mamãe também estavam ali, mas não me interessavam, em absoluto; eu apenas me dizia interiormente que, por serem de minha mãe, naturalmente, também não tinham defeitos e eram perfeitas. Mas havia uma diferença estabelecida e firmada no modo como eu olhava para as pernas de dona Kênia e para as das outras amigas de mamãe, ali, todas à minha volta, formando como que uma cerca de canelas e sapatos.

Até os sapatos dela me fascinavam; eram sempre coloridos, e os seus pés ficavam muito lindos dentro deles.

A força onipotente e propulsora se manifestava de modo claro na minha primeira infância.

A sensualidade nasce com a vida, e no modo como eu olhava e admirava os pés de dona Kênia estava a primeira manifestação de sexualidade.

Cheguei a debruçar-me para cheirá-los com cuidado, pois tinha certeza de que eram perfumados.

Relmente, dela toda exalava um perfume suave e inebriante de sabonete e talco. Fiquei com a cabecinha inclinada, bem perto dos seus pés, aspirando o seu perfume, absorvendo o seu cheiro.

A minha boneca, o fogãozinho, as panelinhas, enfim, os meus brinquedos solitários, que eu pegara para me distrair, estavam abandonados perto do sofá da sala — eu preferira me pôr e ficar debaixo da mesa, cheirando as pernas e os pés de dona Kênia. O instinto poderoso do sexo, a força invencível da atração, tomava impulso.

O que eu estava fazendo produzia em mim uma sensação embriagadora; aos poucos, fui me debruçando, me aproximando, cada vez mais atraída, e, num impulso irresistível, segurei-lhe a canela com as minhas mãozinhas, ao mesmo tempo que lhe dava uma estranha e demorada lambida.

Ela puxou as pernas, recolhendo-as para trás, assustada, exclamando, eufórica:

— Meu Deus! Tem um cachorrinho debaixo da mesa, lambendo a minha perna.

Simultaneamente, as donas daquelas pernas feias (exceto as da minha mãe) abaixaram-se, erguendo a toalha, e me olharam com expressões arregaladas que eu nunca esqueci.

— O que você está fazendo aí, filhinha?

Mamãe estendeu os braços para mim, pondo-se de cócoras, chamando-me para que eu saísse de sob a mesa.

Havia um sorriso de ternura no rosto de mãe, e dona Kênia ria gostosamente, dizendo que aquela lambida na perna lhe causara aflição.

Saí de sob a mesa e dona Kênia beijou o meu rosto, achando muita graça no que eu fizera.

— Por que você lambeu a minha perna Flávia?

Fiquei calada, dissimulada e hipócrita, sentindo o meu coraçãozinho bater forte, emocionada por estar com o rosto metido entre os seios gostosos e belos de dona Kênia, que me abraçava e me beijava o rosto, causando-me forte e esquisita sensação. Uma sensação que parecia muito com angústia, mas não era angústia; algo assim como um prazer agoniado. Como eu não soubesse o que responder, deixaram-me de lado.

Afinal, o que poderia significar uma lambida na perna de uma linda mulher perfumosa, dada por uma menina de sete anos?

ALGO ALUCINANTE APODERAVA-SE DE MIM

Eu tinha sete anos. E sofria. Ardentemente. De ansiedade. E já sentia vergonha. Inusitadamente ou, de modo mais correto, intuitivamente, eu guardava segredo do meu sentimento ansioso, de expectativa, de espera pelas visitas de dona Kênia.

Eu vivia na janela e pelos jardins, com os olhinhos atentos à sua procura, na rua, na janela de sua casa, na porta da cozinha ou na varanda. Eu a procurava como uma criança procura o seu brinquedo predileto, colocado em lugar muito alto, fora do seu alcance.

Acho que era essa a sensação que me atormentava.

Dona Kênia me fascinava, e eu ficava aguardando o momento em que ela vinha à nossa casa pra matar hora, conversando com mamãe.

As vizinhas de mamãe gostavam de frequentar a nossa casa e lá passavam a maior parte da tarde, até a hora de irem preparar o jantar para os maridos e filhos.

Por isso, eu não gostava do seu Eduardo, o marido de dona Kênia. Era sempre por causa dele que ela ia embora às cinco e meia, dizendo:

— Eduardo fica uma fera quando telefona ou chega em casa e não me encontra. Ele vive reclamando: por que vou tanto ao supermercado, por que não compro tudo de uma vez ou não mando a empregada. Ele acha horrível mulher ficar metida na casa dos vizinhos. Eduardo é um horror. Bem, lá vou eu enfrentar a fera!

E eu comecei a assimilar e a comparar o que eu sentia quando dona Kênia não vinha passar a tarde com mamãe com o que o seu Eduardo sentia quando não encontrava a mulher em casa. Eu ficava uma fera. Era isso. Então eu deixava mamãe atordoada, sem entender as alterações do meu temperamento ainda incerto, preocupada com o meu comportamento agressivo e irrequieto. Eu ficava emburrada, não respondia quando ela me chamava, parecia mesmo noutro mundo.

Sentada no degrau da escada que conduzia ao jardim da nossa casa, eu olhava para a rua. Obviamente, para o outro lado da rua, numa mesma direção, olhos fixos na casa de dona Kênia.

— O que você tem, filhinha?

Um dia, mamãe se assustou e riu muito quando eu respondi, com uma inflexão de revolta:

— Estou uma fera!

— Por que você está uma fera?

Não respondi, sacudi os ombros. Mas logo minha expressão mudou, quando vi dona Kênia aparecer na porta da casa dela, atravessar a rua, abrir o nosso portão e dirigir-se a mim, carinhosamente como sempre:

— Como vai a minha bonequinha que virou cachorrinho?

Eu me retraía porque sabia da intensidade do meu sentimento. De algum modo, eu entendia que

não podia demonstrar o que sentia, o que se passava comigo; por isso cada vez mais eu me transformava numa criança arredia, intimista, muda, indiferente ao que normalmente interessa às crianças. Nem brinquedos, nem passeios, nem carinhos me agradavam, a não ser, neste caso, os que me eram feitos por dona Kênia.

Quanto a mamãe, eu também gostava quando ela me acarinhava, mas era uma coisa diferente, menos forte, não mexia com o meu corpo, não fazia o meu coraçãozinho doer, ao contrário; quando mamãe brincava comigo, eu ficava alegre, muito feliz, ria, enfim, era uma coisa natural, que não criava um certo medo de revelar ou deixar transparecer o que eu sentia, como, por exemplo, quando dona Kênia me tocava ou simplesmente se achava próxima.

Aos sete anos, portanto, eu agia com hipocrisia e dissimulação, não pela intimidação do método pelo qual eu era criada, mas por algo intuitivo que já me prevenia contra as pessoas e me fazia guardar segredo de tais emoções.

Eu queria que dona Kênia me apertasse nos braços, que me sufocasse entre os seus seios, que me levasse para a sua casa, não para ficar, apenas para me abraçar escondido, longe dos olhos de mamãe e das suas amigas.

Talvez isso pudesse ser explicado como timidez e receio de magoar mamãe pelo fato de desejar com mais ansiedade os carinhos e aconchegos de dona Kênia, mas eu sabia — possivelmente por uma excessiva precocidade, única explicação que encontro para justificar tal noção das coisas por parte de uma menina de sete anos — que não era esse o motivo; era algo relacionado ao prazer que

eu sentia e que não queria que ninguém soubesse ou mesmo percebesse.

Engraçado que eu nunca tenha apelado para a masturbação (sei que há crianças até de dois anos que, flexionando o corpo, por um movimento do tronco, quando sentada, masturbam-se). Durante os sonhos, porém, eu chegava a sentir uma sensação gostosa nos órgãos sexuais, alcançava um certo prazer, e a simples visão de dona Kênia era o suficiente para me transtornar.

Ela aparecia nos meus sonhos, despiame, abraçava-me, afofava-me contra os seus seios, e era tão forte o que eu sentia, que o perfume do seu corpo ficava grudado nas minhas narinas até quando eu acordava.

Algo alucinante se apoderava de mim, tremores, angústia, uma agonia lenta e agradável; meu coração acelerava e eu despertava, permanecendo como que num transe sugestivo.

E esse ato, que acontecia em sonho, repetia-se então durante todo o dia; quando dona Kênia aparecia lá em casa, as carícias imaginárias tornavam o desejo violento e grave.

Eu queria ficar sozinha com ela e lambe os seus braços, o seu rosto, os seus pés perfumados, para que ela risse de novo e me chamasse de "cachorrinho sem-vergonha", como quando, em uma segunda vez, numa tarde que ela fora passar lá em casa, esperei mamãe ir para a cozinha fazer o café costumeiro e meti-me sob a mesa.

Fascinada, fiquei olhando para as pernas de dona Kênia. As sandálias de tirinhas coloridas, o salto muito fino e alto, a cor da saia e o seu perfume me entonteciam. Ao mesmo tempo que alisava com os meus delicados dedinhos a barriga da

sua perna, dei-lhe uma demorada lambida na canela.

— Seu cachorrinho sem-vergonha, sai já daí! Sua risada me contagiou e eu ri muito junto com ela.

De repente, ela enfiou a cabeça sob a mesa, ficou muito séria e me pediu pra sair dali, apontando o dedo em riste para mim:

— Não faça mais isso, viu, Flávia? Você não é cachorrinho, e eu não quero.

Seu olhar ficou gravado para toda a vida na minha memória e eu devo tê-la deixado muito intrigada naquele momento, porque abaixei a cabeça, triste, com lágrimas saltando dos olhos.

Dona Kênia ficou preocupada (não queria que mamãe pensasse que ela fora indelicada ou rude comigo) e tentou acalmar-me com carinhos, afofando o meu rosto com os seus dedos longos, finos, macios, perfumados, as unhas pintadas de vermelho, brilhantes como lantejoulas convexas.

Para que mamãe não me visse chorar, saí correndo da sala e fui me esconder atrás de uma sebe no jardim e lá fiquei, chorando, tentando esconder-me de mim mesma, achando que dona Kênia fora má comigo.

Fiquei decepcionada e triste por saber que desse dia em diante eu não poderia mais lambe a perna de dona Kênia, que era, para mim, melhor do que um sorvete, melhor do que um chocolate, melhor do que um pirulito, melhor e muito mais gostosa do que todos os doces que pudessem me oferecer.

ELA PARECIA UMA FADA ILUMINADA

Era um ir de cá pra lá e de lá pra cá a noite toda que não me deixava dormir direito.

Ouvi a voz de papai muito aflito, mamãe respirando ofegante.

Papai falou ao telefone. Era tudo uma zoadinha compacta na minha cabecinha. Eu não estava entendendo nada do que se passava, até que tornei a acordar, com papai me chamando com cuidado pra não me assustar.

— Filhinha, vista o seu penhoar, você vai ficar um pouco na casa da vizinha, até que a gente volte.

Vizinha? Qual delas? Aquela gorda horrível que às vezes dava puns e me fazia sair correndo de sob a mesa, com mamãe ralhando comigo por pensar que fora eu? Dona Dulce? Dona Clotilde? Com quem iriam me deixar àquelas horas da noite, e por quê?

— Por que, papai? Cadê a mamãe?

— Mamãe vai para o hospital, mas volta logo. Enquanto isso, você vai ficar na casa da dona Kênia. Vai ficar boazinha, está bem?

Pulei da cama, vesti o meu penhoar e dei a mão a papai, que me levou no colo para o outro lado da rua.

A porta da casa de dona Kênia estava aberta e, na soleira, ela e seu Eduardo nos aguardavam.

Falaram com papai sobre mamãe e eu guardei a palavra que eles repetiam mais: aborto.

Tranqüilizaram papai quanto ao fato de cuidarem de mim durante o tempo que fosse necessário e fiquei feliz quando dona Kênia disse que gostava muito de mim, que eu era um amorzinho e não daria trabalho nenhum.

Mas eu dei sim. Não pude me conter. Assim que papai me deixou com eles e vi que ia dormir sozinha no quarto de hóspedes, dona Kênia continuando deitada naquela *camona grande* do seu quarto com aquele homem peludo, medonho, botei a boca no mundo, e de tal modo que, com sono, de saco cheio e me olhando com antipatia, seu Eduardo catou o seu travesseiro e disse para ela, dirigindo-se para o quarto onde eu iria ficar:

— Ponha-a na nossa cama, faça-a parar de chorar, parece que a estão matando. Estou cansado, preciso sair cedo, não quero passar o resto da noite acordado, acalmando-a.

Antes de se retirar, ele se debruçou sobre mim, como a querer ler nos meus olhos se eu diria a verdade, e perguntou:

— Você não faz xixi na cama, faz?

— Não! — berrei, fazendo-o erguer-se rápido, como se eu tivesse ameaçado abocanhar aquele seu narigão, e retirar-se para o seu quarto, resmungando qualquer coisa.

Dona Kênia pegou-me pela mão, carinhosamente, e me levou para o seu quarto; pegou outro travesseiro e colocou-o ao lado do seu.

— Vem, meu cachorrinho lulu, vem deitar aqui comigo. Não chore, nenen, mamãe vai voltar logo. Você não gosta de mim? Não quer ficar aqui comigo?

Não respondi.

— Você quer um copo de leite?

Sacudi a cabeça, negativamente.

— Então vem deitar.

Ela deitou na cama e bateu do lado, no lugar que seria meu naquele resto de noite.

Enxuguei as lágrimas e ela tirou de uma caixinha sobre o criado-mudo algumas folhinhas de papel macio.

Quando deitei, limpou o meu rosto, me fez assoar o nariz, sempre dizendo palavras carinhosas, mudando a voz, imitando criança. Eu estava achando o jeito dela gozado, mas preferia quando ela falava no seu tom e jeito naturais.

— Pronto, meu *bicinho*, não chore mais, agora você vai dormir bem quentinha com a sua mãezinha nova, a mãezinha desta noite.

— Mãezinha, não.

Fiquei emburrada e ela interpretou mal o que eu queria dizer com aquilo, intrigada com a diferença que eu estabelecia entre ela, como uma mulher, uma pessoa, algo que me fascinava, e a minha mãe, de quem eu gostava muito, de modo diferente, muito diferente.

— Ah! Isso me deixa triste. Eu não quero roubar o lugar da sua mãezinha, só queria ser que nem ela pra você esta noite.

— Que nem ela, não.

— Por quê? Você não gosta de mim?

Sacudi a cabeça afirmativamente quando ela insistiu na pergunta.

— Então a gente não pode brincar de faz-de-conta? Quer brincar comigo assim, Flávia?

— Como é brincar de faz-de-conta?

— Eu ensino. É assim: Você finge que é minha filhinha e eu faço de conta que sou sua mãezinha; assim eu cuido de você com todo o amor de quem muito ama e gostaria de ter uma filhinha assim, bonita, boazinha e quietinha. Está bem?

Não respondi. Não me agradava a idéia de dona Kênia fingir que era minha mãe. Isso estava ligado à idéia fixa de que eu jamais lamberia a perna da minha mãe.

— Não gostou da idéia?

Ainda não respondi.

— Você não gostaria de ser minha filhinha? Eu queria tanto ter uma menininha assim como você, pra cuidar, pra gente passear, pra gente ficar sempre junto!

— Não quero ser sua filhinha.

Fez-se um longo silêncio. Eu não queria que ela alimentasse a idéia de me ter como sua filhinha. Vendo que eu continuava com os olhos arregalados, olhando para o lustre no teto, ela perguntou:

— Está com sono? Faz naninha, tá?

— Não.

Eu não queria dormir. Queria sentir tudo o que pudesse viver daquele momento maravilhoso, pois via o meu sonho realizado, deitada ali na cama da dona Kênia, ao seu lado, sentindo o seu perfu-

me, encantada com a cor maravilhosa dos seus cabelos dourados e longos.

Ela parecia uma fada iluminada. Sim, para mim ela era luminosa, e a sua camisola longa e transparente era tão linda quanto o colorido e a música inebriante do filme a que eu assistia quando papai fazia cineminha em casa pra distrair a gente.

Os meus irmãos, Renato e Elisa, preferiam outros filmes, e ficavam chamando a minha atenção para as travessuras do Gordo e do Magro, explicando coisas que eles pensavam que eu não entendia.

Renato tinha treze anos, e Elisa, onze. Os dois estavam de férias do colégio e passavam temporada na casa de vovó, mãe de meu pai, no Guarujá.

Dona Kênia parecia aquela figura bonita que falava macio e gostoso na tela que papai pendurava num prego lá na sala, depois do jantar ou nos domingos à tarde, quando trazia novos filmes para passar.

Eu estava assim, num mundo colorido, de fantasia — o quarto de dona Kênia.

— Você não quer mesmo um copo de leite? Por que não tenta dormir? Não está gostando de ficar aqui comigo? Eu não sirvo pra ser sua mãezinha?

Dona Kênia estava empenhada em me distrair e me fazer dormir; talvez estivesse com sono, mas não queria que eu recomeçasse a chorar, já que vira nos cantos dos meus olhos lágrimas que se acumulavam.

— Você está com saudade dos seus irmãos? A sua vovó não a levou porque você ainda é muito

pequena e porque os seus pais iriam ficar com muita saudade.

Continuei mergulhando cada vez mais fundo na agonia que a voz dela me causava.

— Então você quer mesmo que eu seja sua mãezinha, não é? E eu gostaria tanto!

Dei um suspiro e me pus de costas para ela.

— Por que você faz assim, Flávia?

— Porque já disse que de mãe minha eu não quero que você brinque comigo.

— Está bem, Flávia, então vamos dormir e ter belos sonhos.

— Não quero dormir.

Eu choraminguei e ela me fez ficar de frente para si, puxando-me pelos ombros com delicadeza.

— Não fique assim, eu sei que você é uma menina boazinha, não vai estranhar dormir aqui, não é? Será só por algumas horas, logo seu papai virá buscá-la. Vamos pensar em outra coisa de que você possa gostar. Quer que eu conte uma história?

— Aí você vai ser que nem mamãe e papai, e eu não quero que você seja assim.

Eu estava complicando e ela me olhou curiosa e atenta, analisando-me. Vi o seu movimento de cabeça; depois, ela se mexeu na cama, apoiou-se no cotovelo e ficou olhando pra mim.

— É melhor a gente dormir.

Ela apertou o comutador ao lado da cama.

— Tenho medo do escuro.

Ela tornou a movimentar-se na cama. Uma luz fraquinha se acendeu. O quarto ficou suavemente iluminado pelo colorido do abajur.

Senti minha voz subindo como uma coisa táctil que nascia do fundo da minha barriga, de dentro do estômago, do mais secreto recôndito do meu

corpo, e fiz a proposta com a inocência e a ingenuidade diabólicas de uma criança — precoce, emocional, sensitiva, acho até que muito perigosa.

Eu era um capetinha, um sátiro, o pequenino monstro polimorfo definido por Freud.

— Vamos brincar de gatinho?

Ela primeiro me encarou, virando a cabeça para o meu lado; depois, ajeitou-se, apoiando-se no cotovelo e olhando-me dessa pose. Vi os seus lábios entreabrirem-se, e ela perguntou, curiosa:

— Como de gatinho?

Virei para o lado dela. Impulsivamente. Id. Libido. Pura e primitiva. Essencialmente id, quanto o id pode ser natural, o substrato da mente, o princípio, o provavelmente irracional, instintivo, primeiro, nato, no impulso da primeira impressão, a mais forte, que leva a criatura a agir, sem raciocínio, sem saber por que, apenas porque assim acontece, assim se processa e assim é.

Eu me aproximei como um gatinho teimoso que insiste no que quer e dei uma rápida lambidinha no rosto dela, recolhendo-me depressa, sentindo, pela arte que estava praticando, como que um rabinho dobrando-se pra baixo, por medo à sua reação, e achando que conseguira ludibriá-la, trocando o cachorrinho por gatinho.

Minha voz, lembro bem, foi tênue como um gemido, ou melhor, como um miado:

— Assimmm . . .

Ela ficou me olhando ressabiada, achando estranha a minha atitude, e custou a perguntar:

— Você gosta de lambe a gente, Flávia?

— Só a senhora.

— Por quê?

— Não sei. Eu gosto. Você é melhor do que . . .
— interrompi-me, alongando o olhar como a procura de algo com que compará-la, e completei:
— Você é melhor que todos os sorvetes, mais gostosa que todos os doces. Eu acho gostoso quando dou uma lambidinha na sua perna.

Ela estava me olhando de um jeito que me deixou um pouco receosa de que não quisesse brincar de gatinho, não gostasse daquela brincadeira.

— Você não quer brincar de gatinho comigo?

— Não é isso, Flávia. É que eu não sei.

Minha mente astuta, na sua instintiva idéia com o fim de dar-me aquilo que eu queria acima de qualquer outra coisa, já criara o que seria "brincar de gatinho", em cuja explicação empenhei todos os meus esforços, tentando fazer daquela brincadeira algo que a interessasse e agradasse.

— É assim . . . é quase como brincar de você ser a minha mãezinha, só que eu sou o seu gatinho e você é minha dona; você me comprou, me trouxe pra casa, me deu banhinho, e eu gosto de brincar assim . . .

E, unindo o gesto à palavra, me aproximei do rosto atônito de dona Kênia, dei uma lambidinha seca e rápida no seu queixo, segurei o seu rosto com as minhas mãozinhas inocentes e o lambi; descí para o pescoço e, antes que ela tivesse tempo de interceptar o meu gesto ou entender o que estava acontecendo, minha boca já arrepanhara o bico do seu seio, que tirei para fora do decote, segurando aquele macio e fofo volume com as minhas cariciosas e satânicas mãozinhas.

Foi tudo muito rápido para que ela tivesse uma reação de repúdio pela minha atitude. Estava muito perplexa e sem saber como analisar aquilo,

para censurar-me. Eu estava acelerada numa idéia fixa pela sensação da temperatura do seu corpo, pelo estímulo físico do aroma que trescalava dos seus cabelos, e pelo que julguei que haveria de saboroso no seu seio, cujo bico estava em minha boca.

— Agora o gatinho tá com fome e quer mamar.

Eu ri antes de começar a sugar aquele seio. Ri como um pequeno diabinho, um fauno, um pequeno ser diabólico. Ri e me sufoquei entre aqueles seios apetitosos, sentindo-a ficar ofegante.

Isso tudo, entretanto, não oferecia o menor caráter de obscenidade. Nada havia de repugnante e de proibido.

Naquele momento, a criança era uma mulher ainda que por breves instantes, para retornar em fração de segundo à verdadeira idade cronológica, com as misteriosas implicações psicológicas do secreto mundo infantil.

Dona Kênia apertou a minha cabeça entre os seus seios e eu, ouvindo-a suspirar e gemer, larguei aquele cujo bico prendera entre os lábios para sugá-lo, e perguntei, com medo e apreensiva:

— Eu machuquei a senhora? Desculpe, foi sem querer. Não quer mais brincar de gatinho?

— Não, Flávia... você não me machucou.

— Não mesmo? De verdade?

— De verdade.

— Então a gente pode continuar brincando. Sabe, o gatinho tá com fominha. Você dá mamaziinho pra ele?

Ela não respondia, mas os seus seios continuavam fora do decote e os bicos se mostravam crespos e duros.

— Acho que vai sair leitinho. Os biquinhos das tetinhas da Bibi ficam assim grandes quando os filhotinhos mamam neles. Eu vi. Bibi deu cria dentro do guarda-roupa da Elisa. Mamãe tirou eles de lá e pôs numa caixa forrada. A Bibi tá com as tetinhas cheias de leite. Posso mamar nas suas tetas também?

— Pode, Flávia... mame... mame à vontade...

Imitando miados de gatos, afagando e amassando aqueles exuberantes seios que enchiam as minhas mãos, eu lambia ora um ora outro, sugava-lhes os bicos, apertava-os, brincava, fossando com a cabeça entre eles, rosnando, enroscando-me nela, que ria, estorcia-se, ajeitava-se, segurava a minha cabeça, comprimindo minha boca contra o seio para que eu demorasse mais a sugá-lo.

— A gente pode brincar bastante de gatinho?

— Pode, Flávia, mas não conte pra ninguém...

— Você aprendeu a brincar?

— Sim, Flávia, eu também sei brincar de gatinho e vou ensinar tudo pra você... assim...

O MEU ESTRANHO MUNDO SECRETO

Meus pais eram normalmente afetuosos com os filhos; parece-me que os seus métodos de educar-nos teriam que produzir resultados favoráveis ao melhor desenvolvimento da nossa personalidade. Deles dependia a formação intelectual de três crianças, e eles estavam sempre conversando a respeito, preocupados com o nosso futuro.

Não eram indulgentes nem se excediam em dominação, não eram severos, mas não mantinham uma disciplina inconsciente, e quanto ao padrão moral não eram excessivamente rigorosos. Portanto, o ambiente familiar nunca provocou, em mim ou em meus irmãos, sentimentos de angústia ou insegurança.

Também nunca houve rivalidade entre mim, Elisa e Renato. Pelo modo como o tratamento de meus pais, referente à nossa educação, se processava e os acontecimentos e circunstâncias iam sendo percebidos e compreendidos por mim, não creio que houvesse uma só falha que pudesse servir de suspeita para justificar a minha personalidade.

Eu segui e cheguei a um caminho de vida preestabelecido pela minha própria natureza. Não

houve intimidações de ordem religiosa, nem necessidade de uma educação sexual exata, porque eu ia descobrindo e aprendendo todas as coisas referentes a sexo com muita naturalidade, como se tivesse a consciência lógica da natureza humana, das funções e necessidades do corpo — a excitação das partes genitais e o aparecimento dos pêlos em determinadas regiões do corpo na adolescência, nada me causava embaraço ou me surpreendia.

Mas os fatos primordiais, os acontecimentos que estabeleceram a genuinidade do meu modo de ser — ou mais acertadamente, a genuinidade do que eu era como ser humano, participando da sociedade — realmente concentraram-se todos na primeira infância, nos meus coloridos e fantasiosos sete anos de idade, tendo nas mãos os selos macios e perfumados de uma linda mulher que não se pudera livrar de uma sensação que a colhera de surpresa, deixando-se saborear por uma menina, como se num passe de mágica tivesse se transformado num delicioso sorvete de morango.

Mas talvez houvesse, por parte de dona Kênia, uma certa frustração por não ter filhos; nesse caso, o que eu confundo hoje com excitação poderia ter sido apenas a fantasia, a ilusão de que realmente estava dando de mamar à sua filhinha, que ela tanto queria que eu fosse.

Não, a explicação — embora eu queira arranjar considerações a respeito — vem pendendo para o lado sexual, pelo seu consentimento na brincadeira do faz-de-conta, brincando de gatinho e se deixando mamar e arrepiar pelas carícias precoces de uma criança de sete anos.

Eu era mesmo libidínosa. Eu ofegava e ficava com febre. Eu sonhava e sofria. Eu me revoltava

e calava. Eu queria e ficava na expectativa de poder aproximar-me de dona Kênia, que já não ralhava comigo quando eu ficava sob a mesa, passando as mãos pelas suas pernas e dando-lhe demoradas lambidas.

Minhas mãos, que lhe bolnavam as pernas, não lhe chegavam às coxas; faziam carícias, brincando de fazer cócegas em seus pés sempre perfumados e enfeitados pelas tiras das sandálias coloridas, de salto muito fino e alto.

A minha visão de sob a mesa criava um mundo diferente na minha imaginação de criança, e as pernas feias, peludas e gordas de dona Dulce, com pés rotundos e balofos de dedos que pareciam batatas, representavam postes, árvores, soldados — obstáculos constantes à minha aproximação dos encantados e fascinantes pés de dona Kênia.

E dona Dulce soltava as suas bombinhas malcheirosas e silenciosas, remexendo o seu volumoso bundão na cadeira e disfarçando com um tom de voz muito alto, uma gargalhada ou um pigarro.

Quando o cheiro atravessava o tampo da mesa e subia até as narinas das amigas de mamãe, logo eu ouvia uma ordem para sair de sob a mesa, que lá não era lugar para uma criança brincar. E o comentário me irritava:

— Essa menina não tem jeito, sofre de prisão de ventre, preciso lhe dar um purgante.

Na verdade, mamãe nunca ralhou comigo, porque ela sabia que quem soltava aqueles puns horrorosos era dona Dulce. E fiquei muito feliz quando, uma tarde, ela e dona Kênia, rindo e fazendo fofoca, disseram que nesse dia eu não iria pagar o pato pelos traques de dona Dulce — os quais mamãe, educadamente, atribuía a mim, conven-

cendo-a de que realmente assim pensava — porque ela viajara.

Eu preciso estudar o sentido evolutivo da sexualidade infantil para poder melhor interpretar o que consideram atos ou preferências anormais, do adulto, coisas que desculpamos com explicações de descuido, engano involuntário, distração ou tendências inexplicáveis ou adquiridas por influência do meio.

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Estava predestinado que eu jamais conseguiria amar a um homem, que somente outra mulher poderia fazer-me vibrar, excitar-me e fazer pulsar mais forte o meu coração.

E eu fiz do meu mundo um mundo secreto, desenvolvendo-me como um criptandro. Isso eu era, uma tenra plantinha que crescia, um criptandro.

Em minha mente, as palavras de Bia repetiam-se, como que selando um destino: "Sai dessa, Flávia, para nós, lésbicas, só restam as prostitutas."

Pare de resistir.

Não reprima.

Desabafe.

Ponha tudo para fora.

Eu não vivo preocupada com o meu inconsciente ou subconsciente. Eu me preocupo com o que eu tenho na consciência. Acho que sou essencialmente consciente, não tenho nada oculto ou a provocar traumatismos psicológicos.

Eu simplesmente sei o que sou e por que sofro. Eu não tenho conflitos para soterrar ou desen-

terror. Não há nenhum complexo de Édipo entre ser heterossexual ou homossexual.

Eu apenas tenho a minha verdade amalgamada à carne como ao meu espírito.

O fato de eu não ter conflitos, traumas ou neuroses não quer dizer que eu não tenha problemas. Tenho. Muitos. Alguns que o tempo se encarrega de solucionar e outros que eu vou fracionando, estudando, tentando resolver, como todo ser humano.

Já percebi que as pessoas costumam confundir lembranças e frustrações da infância ou da adolescência com neuroses, traumas, conflitos psicológicos, estes causados por outros tipos de repressão e recalque, jogados fora do plano consciente porque lhes causam sofrimento.

Mas eu não vou seguir a via régia da psicanálise para a interpretação da minha vida, pois a tenho toda no plano consciente, como um filme que eu passo e repasso, parando a cena tanto tempo quanto a emoção da evocação do momento me pede.

Eu não uso o meu passado, como certas pessoas o fazem, como argumento para justificar os meus fracassos e as minhas taras.

Eu acho que essas lembranças são apenas as dores emocionais da saudade, da insatisfação pelo que não foi realizado ou pelo que ficou perdido ante a impossibilidade de ter sido conquistado — exceto, obviamente, se se tratar de coisas chocantes, que debilitam mentalmente o indivíduo.

Sinto-me mentalmente sadia, mesmo quando sofro, quando a depressão me dá ganas de suicídio e eu me debato, rezo, blasfemo e estrebucho como um frango ao ser degolado — assim me sinto

quando a dor do amor faz sangrar a alma e queimar a carne.

Os sonhos se deformam por serem esquecidos detalhes, mas as minhas lembranças soltam as amarras e são como uma catarse para a minha descarga tensional.

A censura consciente impõe a minha verdade com toda a sua força, e eu não reprimo a energia dos meus desejos, que buscam a sua realização.

O que eu quero afirmar é que em mim tudo é natural, consciente, vivo, espontâneo. Sou definida, autêntica, honesta, mas um tanto covarde, ainda.

A dor emocional que me delicia e me arrasta em êxtase para o passado é a lembrança do dia em que, da janela do meu quarto, vi o caminhão de mudança, vi dona Kênia indo embora. Ela não foi no caminhão de mudança, pior ainda: foi sentada ao lado do marido no seu carro velho, sujo de barro, soltando fumaça preta de óleo queimado pelo escapamento barulhento, como se estivesse me ofendendo com desaforados puns, como os de dona Dulce.

Eu vi o gramado queimar diante dos meus olhos, as flores murcharem, a chuva fazer buracos na terra, os pássaros baterem as suas cabecinhas desgovernadas contra as telhas dos telhados das casas, num cataclismo de dor alucinante. Eu vi o céu se juntar com a terra, e o fogo que queimava a grama arder em minha cabeça. Adoeci. Tive febre. Delirei.

Sandálias coloridas sapateavam sobre o meu frágil corpo de menina. Cabeleiras loiras e lábios macios afagavam o meu rosto. Dona Kênia, que

deixou o bairro, ficou no meu ser como uma imagem sagrada.

Os cuidados de mamãe e os carinhos de papai, que me trazia presentes, faziam tanto efeito quanto as irritantes tentativas dos meus irmãos em me fazer rir.

Quanta dor num coraçãozinho verde de criança! Dor que chegou a enegrecer o meu olhar deslumbrado pelas sandálias coloridas de dona Kênia, fazendo com que o meu mundo secreto trancasse portas de veludo negro, descolorindo tudo.

No quintal da casa de dona Kênia, eu achei, entre as coisas velhas ali deixadas, um pé de sandália de tiras. Três tiras fininhas. Azul, amarela e vermelha. E aquele pé de sandália transformou-se num tesouro que eu escondi entre os meus brinquedos solitários.

Um fetiche, talvez — ou com toda a certeza — pois à noite, na solidão do meu quarto, eu levava a sandália para a cama, dormia abraçada a ela e, a qualquer ruído de passos, escondia-a sob o travesseiro.

Era como se dona Kênia estivesse ali representada. Como se aquele pé de sandália fosse trazê-la de volta, um dia, para mim.

Minha voz poderia ter sido fraca, triste ou ansiosa — não sei em que tom consegui balbuciar as palavras — mas nunca esqueci as respostas que me feriram.

— Pra onde dona Kênia mudou, mamãe? Ela não vem mais visitar a gente?

— Talvez um dia, mas acredito que não, ela foi pra muito longe...

— Pra onde?

— Pra Itália.

— Onde fica a Itália, mamãe?

— Na Europa.

— E onde é a Europa?

— Ih! menina... fica noutra país... é outro país.

— E o que é outro país?

Mamãe riu, achou graça na série de perguntas que, para ela, revelavam ser eu uma menina inteligente, sem desconfiar que o meu interesse tinha a finalidade de localizar dona Kênia.

E Itália, pelas explicações de mamãe, na escola, no mapa, na vida e no tempo, pra mim só tinha um nome: Kênia.

.....

Eu aprendi, durante os estudos, que todos os objetos longos representam o sexo masculino, até as facas, punhais, cenouras, guarda-chuvas, enfim, a lista não terminaria nunca se eu continuasse a enumerá-las, como também seria interminável a lista das coisas que representam o sexo feminino, como os recipientes, as caixas, barcos, estojos, casas.

Interessante que um objeto como uma sandália de salto fino e longo pudesse representar uma mulher. Paradoxal, intrigante, maquiavélico. Tudo isso porque a sandália de dona Kênia continha em si uma carga sexual violenta, que provocava em mim atitudes perigosas.

Eu amava aquela sandália que um dia estivera no pé perfumado, pequeno, de unhas pintadas de vermelho. O pé macio que eu beijara e lambera.

Minhas amiguinhas, a nova vizinha que foi morar na casa onde Kênia morara, as amigas de mamãe. ninguém jamais conseguia substituir ou

provocar o encanto e a fascinação que Kênia exercera sobre mim. Uma fixação infantil para a qual eu só encontrava lenitivo e tecia ilusões quando via nas revistas as cabeleiras loiras de mulheres lindas, mulheres que eu nunca via em lugar algum, a não ser no cinema e na televisão. Mulheres que tinham um certo quê de Kênia.

Os meninos me rondavam, me dirigiam gracejos, falavam em namorar. As meninas me bajulavam, gostavam de me convidar para as suas festinhas de aniversário, e havia até as que eu percebia gostarem de mim além do normal, mas eu estava fiel e firmemente amarrada à lembrança daquela mulher com quem eu brincara de gatinho.

E o objeto que ficara de lembrança, escondido entre os meus brinquedos solitários, recebia de mim todos os cuidados para a sua conservação. O saltinho fino Luiz XV, engrossando em direção ao calcanhar, recebia flanela, sabão de coco na pelica branca, e beijos da minha boca saudosa.

Um dia, meu irmão Renato surpreendeu-me lustrando a sandália. Senti medo e vergonha, senti minha vida atravessada no seu segredo mais caro. Expulsei-o do meu quarto e ele, atoleimado e confuso, acabou interpretando minha atitude do único modo que o seu pensamento limpo poderia entender — que eu estava querendo me exhibir como uma “mocinha precoce”, usando sandálias de salto alto — e riu muito por causa disso.

Escondi a sandália em outro lugar com a intenção de esquecê-la, como já me desligara havia muito dos meus brinquedos, e pela primeira vez comecei a raciocinar a respeito. Ponderei que não estava certo. Que não era normal. Que eu dava mais valor àquele pé solitário de calçado velho do

que a qualquer amiga ou menino que pretendia me namorar.

E pensar em namorar me causou um frêmito estranho de receio, de repúdio, como se fosse impossível qualquer aproximação minha de um ser do sexo oposto.

E era preciso tentar. Namorar para entender e estabelecer sem dúvidas a minha natureza. As outras meninas ficavam eufóricas diante dos meninos, nos bailes das festinhas do bairro ou do colégio, e eu me mantinha à parte, olhos perscrutando as salas, os jardins, como se de repente fosse ver uma réplica de Kênia — ou ela mesma — aparecer diante dos meus olhos cheios de sonho.

Sob as mesas, eu via pés que se moviam, bem calçados, pés que se arrastavam ou deslizavam pelo assoalho; eu reparava os sapatos e achava que havia falta de gosto em todas as mulheres ou que elas tinham pés muito feios para enriquecer e tornar mais bonita uma sandália de salto fino, como acontecia com as sandálias nos pés de Kênia.

Eu me determinei, partindo de um raciocínio lógico para uma atitude inteligente, que precisava namorar. E aproveitei a intenção na oportunidade que surgiu numa festa de aniversário na casa de Norma, uma amiguinha do bairro e do colégio.

Fábio me tirou para dançar e eu aceitei. Fábio era o namorado de Claudette, mas eu não me importei quando me avisaram e me alertaram que Claudette não estava gostando da minha atitude, aceitando os convites de Fábio. Eles haviam brigado, mas isso era por pouco tempo. Não fiz caso. Ele queria dançar só comigo. Eu dançava bem. Sempre fora considerada a garota difícil do bairro

e só me exibia no *twist* e *hully gully*, porque assim, podia dançar sozinha; agora, Fábio estava “cantando de galo”, conduzindo-me pelo salão, que era uma sala de visitas seis por oito, num espaço entre mesa, mesinhas, sofás, poltronas, cadeiras, televisão e uma porção de outros móveis.

Foi junto a uma estante de livros que Célia conseguiu me encontrar sozinha, quando Fábio fora buscar refrigerantes e sanduíches para nós. Alguém desligara a vitrola, tirara a seleção de boleros, sambas e *cha-cha-chas*, e pusera um *hully gully*. E eu entendi que Norma atendera ao pedido de Claudette, que olhava para mim e para Fábio com uma expressão de cadela hidrófoba.

— Ele está dançando de frente ou de lado?

Encarei Célia sem entender e achei-a ridícula e de uma curiosidade tacanha, além de feia, com o seu nariz adunco, olhos de pombo, juntos do nariz, boca fina e salivosa, um rosto sem estética, que parecia ter sido feito de sobras de outros rostos. A cara dela me pareceu um hibridismo de arara com jumento. Causou-me repulsa. Afastando-me sem lhe dar atenção, respondi, achando que talvez ela estivesse alcoolizada:

— De frente, claro, ou esperava que dançássemos plantando bananeira?

Fábio cruzou na minha frente e barrou meu caminho, estendendo-me uma garrafinha de guaraná com canudinho e um prato cheio de petiscos.

— Aonde vai? Não vai me deixar de garçom sem troco, vai?

Peguei a garrafinha de guaraná e levei o canudinho à boca. Fábio ficou me encarando e vi no seu sorriso alguma coisa enigmática.

— O que foi?

— Você é linda.

A voz dele era sincera e havia um certo sentimento modulando-lhe o timbre rouco de rapaz imberbe que começa a se sentir homem pelas primeiras manifestações do desejo sexual e que só pensa em ejacular.

Vi alguns pêlos apontando sobre o lábio superior, uma sombra de penugem, e calculei o quanto ele devia raspar-se para estimular o crescimento da barba e do bigode, pois percebi também que a sua pele estava irritada, talvez pela ação da gilete. O coitado quase se esfolara. Acho que até passava títica de galinha, como eu ouvia as meninas agradecerem, achando que isso fazia crescer pêlos.

— O que Celinha estava falando com você?

Contei a ele e achei esquisita a sua reação, pois enfureceu-se, pediu licença e foi falar com Celinha. Pelo seu jeito, concluí que a estava repreendendo; quando voltou para o meu lado, vinha como se tivesse derrubado um exército:

— Aquela indecente! Nunca mais ela vai lhe fazer uma pergunta dessas.

Fiquei sem entender e logo saímos dançando. Sem emoção. Sem prazer. Só ritmo. Isso cansou. Eu quis me despedir. Não gostava muita de festas e aquela idéia inteligente de namorar para me entender e atestar o que eu era só estava me aborrecendo, pois, embora Fábio fosse um menino bonito e apreciado pelas garotas, não me provocava sentimento algum, a não ser amizade. E, depois, eu ouvira comentários quando fora ao banheiro e entendera a pergunta de Celinha. As meninas fofocavam. Os meninos puxavam o membro para a

frente, dentro das calças, em posição para encostar nas meninas enquanto dançavam, a fim de terem as suas sensações; alguns até se protegiam com lenços nas cuecas, para não mancharem as calças quando ejaculassem.

Fábio insistiu para que eu ficasse, para que dançasse só mais uma; neguei, mas fiquei. Fiquei porque, nesse ínterim, vi entrar na sala uma jovem que fez o meu coração bater forte. Muito forte. Como só batera por Kênia e como só acelerava quando eu me masturbava, apertando a sandália dela contra o ventre.

A sandália era o meu único sentimento de culpa, pois eu a princípio achava normal masturbar-me. Só mais tarde, lendo alguns tratados sexuais, entendi que a masturbação era um ato natural, uma "válvula de escape". Se continuei preocupada, foi pelo fato de só conseguir atingir o orgasmo quando, sem conseguir vencer o fascínio que a sandália exercia sobre mim, ia buscá-la e apertava-a contra o ventre, beijava as suas tirinhas, apertava-a contra os seios ou ainda, numa atitude mais louca e excitante, apertava-a entre as coxas, enquanto os meus dedos práticos executavam a sua missão de acalmar o corpo em febre.

Eu tinha visões de Kênia, nas quais sugava-lhe os seios, mordiscava-lhe a boca e me embaraçava em seus cabelos como na rede de nervos que me retesava toda.

Eu buscava explicações para tais exaltações e loucuras, e me convencia de que, por mais que me estudasse e me entendesse, não iria mudar minha forma de prazer, de sentir prazer e de imaginar o

amor, evocando Kênia. Acreditava, contudo, que isso se extinguiria, um dia, naturalmente, sem mais nem menos, ou pelo surgimento de algo que substituísse tamanho delírio.

E ali estava, cabeleira loira, olhos azuis, boca polpuda, corpo esguio, sandálias de salto fino, tiras coloridas, unhas dos pés esmaltadas de vermelho. O detalhe excitante. Não era Kênia. Mas era tão linda quanto ela. Possuía o mesmo charme e ar de mistério. Parecia luminosa, como se uma aura a destacasse de todas as pessoas daquela sala. Ela veio como que para compensar todas as minhas noites de fantasias, para mostrar que o real também tem vez na vida de uma adolescente sonhadora que se julgava perdida por uma obsessão incurável.

Fábio sacudiu-me de leve e eu perguntei, num transporte emocional que me identificaria se ele entendesse de mulheres da minha natureza:

— Quem é ela?

— Núcia, prima de Norma.

Ele me puxou para que continuássemos dançando e eu vi que Núcia, do mesmo modo como eu a olhara, estava me encarando e continuou me fitando, numa comunicabilidade espantosa de pessoas que se identificam desde o primeiro minuto em que cruzam o olhar.

Uma chama ardente começou a crepitar dentro de mim. Os móveis, as pessoas, Fábio, tudo sumiu, e a minha mente se abriu numa força imensa tomando conta de toda a atmosfera, pela colisão do nosso pensamento, que trocava mensagens.

Foi deslumbrante. E ridículo. Ridículo o que senti, presa nos braços de Fábio, que me apertava

contra si e fazia certos movimentos indecorosos com o corpo quando nos misturávamos entre os outros casais que dançavam e se espremiavam pela sala, todos procurando oportunidade para se esfregarem, por alguns rápidos arrepios. Entendi o que significava dançar de frente. Entendi e senti. Cutucava. Mexia. Entranhava. Metia o meu vestido de tecido leve de verão para o meio das coxas, de algum modo, como se tivesse descido o zíper da calça e descaradamente se masturbasse contra o meu próprio sexo, que inexplicavelmente senti umedecer. Era físico, não emocional. Como se eu estivesse também me esfregando na ponta de uma mesa, com o olhar em Núcia, me excitando com ela, com a beleza dela. Fiquei com medo que percebessem e achei conveniente ficarmos espremidos entre os outros casais, que provavelmente faziam o mesmo. Tentei afastar meu corpo do seu, para que ele tivesse recato, para que percebesse o meu desespero repentino e guardasse *aquilo*, para que não abusasse de mim, levando-me a sentir vergonha de mim mesma por causa de uma excitação de minuto que nada tinha a ver com ele. Aquilo não alterava a minha natureza, mas feria a minha moral e eu me sentia vexada comigo mesma.

Mas ele não sabia de mim o que eu a cada momento mais constatava e definia, e continuou suspirando fioso e disfarçado, cutucando-me com o seu membro enrijecido, espetado para a frente, suando como se estivesse fazendo muito esforço para acertar os passos do samba-canção.

Ele estremeceu, recuou, disfarçou. Guardou. Não sei como, mas guardou. Movimentos práticos,

gestos disfarçados, ou fora tudo impressão minha? Ele não tinha nada para fora das calças, fora uma ilusão sensorial.

Fiquei onde paramos e olhei para Núcia, que não tinha segredos para mim e por isso me encarava.

Ela atravessou a sala, aproximou-se de mim, parou ao meu lado. Seu timbre de voz fez cócegas em meus ouvidos e ao mesmo tempo eu me senti enrolar numa vaga de decepção, porque ela apenas me confundira com uma amiga dos tempos de colégio, e eu nem sequer ouvira falar no colégio por ela mencionado. Ela repisou o quanto eu era parecida com a tal Miriam e eu pela primeira vez tive vontade de falar a respeito de Kênia, que eu também a estava confundindo com uma amiga da infância com quem eu brincava de gatinho, mas limitei-me a elogiar as suas sandálias, o que a fez olhar para os pés, envaidecida.

Ela sorriu e os seus dentes perfilaram-se, como se, de dentro de um estojo de veludo rosado, um colar de pérolas tivesse brilhado. Foi o que pensei, achando porém essa comparação uma sobra de poesia piegas, porque o que eu estava vendo era uma boca sensual de sorriso insinuante, deixando aparecer por entre os lábios a pontinha da língua cor-de-rosa, como a lingüinha de uma gatinha nova. Tive vontade de lhe perguntar:

— Vamos brincar de gatinho?

— O quê?

Eu perguntara mesmo. Não fora apenas pensamento. Ela estava sorrindo, achando graça na minha sugestão, esperando que eu respondesse que espécie de brincadeira era aquela “de gatinho”.

Fiquei sem jeito e tentei fazê-la ignorar a tal brincadeira. Fora só para puxar assunto, mas ela insistiu, dizendo que nas festas que freqüentava sempre havia uma brincadeira improvisada por alguém. Achou que seria muito interessante. Norma juntou-se a nós e Núcia falou sobre a brincadeira que eu inventara. Senti-me, pela primeira vez na vida, num beco sem saída. E a situação foi piorando, porque as meninas, todas da mesma faixa etária, entre catorze e dezessete anos, foram se aglomerando em volta de mim, exigindo que eu explicasse como era a tal brincadeira de gatinho.

Ah! feliz idéia! Nem sei como a coisa veio toda em minha cabeça. Uma idéia que aplaudiram, aprovaram e quiseram imediatamente pôr em prática. Não sei. Não sei mesmo como a idéia se fez em minha mente; acho que foi o desespero, o olhar de Núcia, a malícia, a vontade de ficar sozinha com ela em algum lugar, por um breve instante que fosse.

Todos começaram a se movimentar. Pegaram cadeiras, ajeitaram-se pelo chão, exultantes, evidentemente cada um com um plano, uma malícia, uma intenção.

Por sugestão minha, sortearam quem seria o primeiro gato ou a primeira gata a ficar no quarto escuro para, através de miados, identificar e escolher o seu gato ou gata.

Foi uma folia. A sorteada foi Cristina, uma moreninha muito engraçadinha que logo correu para o quarto, cujas luzes estavam apagadas. Fez-se silêncio na sala, e em meu coração, tumulto. Que idéia! Eu continuava sendo atrevida, esperta, maliciosa, dissimulada, pois, para que não percebessem a razão de eu ter sugerido aquela brinca-

deira, quando me coubesse escolher a “minha gata”, deixei que Fábio sentasse no chão ao meu lado e segurasse a minha mão, cruzando dedos como se já tivéssemos firmado um namoro definitivo.

Claudette olhava para mim não mais com ar de cadela hidrófoba, mas com sanhas felinas.

Os meninos e as meninas começaram, alternadamente, a dar os seus miados, finos, alongados, em todos os tons. Na sala, ouviam-se onomatopéias da voz do gato nos tons mais variados, uma verdadeira sinfonia felina nas tentativas de perfeitas imitações. Gargalhavam, riam, remexiam-se, meninos inquietos, loucos para tirar uma “casquinha”, meninas apreensivas, com medo de perder o seu gato para a gata que, no escuro, estava à escuta do miado ao qual corresponderia com outro miado, quando a agradasse; quando não a agradava, latia, fazia rosnados de briga, assoprava, como os fungos dos gatos.

Rogério miou, imitando gato ao seu modo, disfarçado, para confundir a gata. Cristina miou, numa resposta ao chamado. Ela acertara. Identificara o namorado. Rogério pulou contente e, asanhado, correu para o quarto escuro, enquanto nós fazíamos algazarra, imitando gatos no cio:

— Miiiiuurrasgaaaa...

— Minha calça é de seda...

Bobagens assim, para fazer gozação. Cristina demorou a sair do quarto. Foi vaiada. Perguntaram se ela estava inteira, se valia a pena o gato continuar no escuro para escolher outros miados. Rogério gritou do quarto para que comesçassem a miar.

Um por vez, recomeçamos, e assim, entre uma escolha acertada e a decepção dos gatos que vol-

tavam do quarto com cara de quem comeu e não gostou, chegou a vez de Claudette.

Fábio miou. Fino. Imitando gato numa perfeição que acho que assustou a ele próprio. Um miado capaz de confundir até uma gata de verdade. Mas Claudette miou, numa resposta ao chamado. Ela identificaria Fábio de qualquer jeito. Ele demonstrou desagrado por ter sido identificado, mas foi para o quarto, como a brincadeira exigia. Gargalhadas e apupos, vaias e gozações animaram mais a noite, ao som da bofetada que ouvimos.

Claudette apareceu, calada. Não fez caso do fiasco. Estava satisfeita por ter esbofeteado Fábio, que não contivera um grito de espanto ao receber no rosto a mão da moça, que o esperava no escuro para lhe dar uma sonora bolachada.

Eram esses os comentários — bolachada, tapona, quebra, rasga, chega, pára, há mais gatos na fila — até que chegou a minha vez de miar, entre doze meninas. Fábio, ouvidos atentos, imediatamente miou, satisfeito. Tive que ir. Trêmula e com raiva, achando que afinal tudo tinha o seu preço. Eu ia pagar só para tentar acertar com o miado de Núcia.

Entrei no quarto. Fábio estava a postos, ladino, escondido atrás da porta, e nem mal entrei agarrou-me pelas costas, apertando-me contra si com sofreguidão. Torceu o meu pescoço, puxando o meu rosto para trás de tal modo que pensei que quisesse quebrá-lo. A seguir, beijou-me na boca como um tarado sedento de saliva, pois sugou a minha boca e apalpou os meus seios com tal rapidez e prática que nem pude defender-me. O tempo que lhe fora concedido já estava esgotando, e os meninos começaram a valar, na sala. Senti-o todo colado no meu

corpo, e a sua voz, estremeçada de desejo, tensa, vibrátil, revelou os seus sentimentos, o que pensava de mim:

— Você é deliciosa, Flávia, adoro os seus cabelos lisos e longos, adoro a sua boca, os seus traços marcantes . . . a gente precisa fazer qualquer coisa, um dia . . . você precisa sair comigo . . . você é diferente, não é uma boboca, nem parece que tem só quinze anos . . . mie para mim . . . assim eu volto . . . — Isso era válido, repetir duas vezes a brincadeira, não mais.

As vaias. O “chega”, “larga”, “sai daí”, “nós vamos te buscar”. Minhas mãos empurravam e tentavam livrar-se das mãos febris de Fábio, que já alisara minhas coxas, apalpara meus seios e até conseguira pôr a boca num deles, de raspão, dando-lhe uma lambidinha. Fiz com que ele me deixasse, finalmente, depois de forçar-me contra a parede e esfregar-se pelo meu corpo, beijando-me na boca de tal modo que me cortou os lábios.

Fiquei com raiva. Passei a mão pela boca para limpá-la, ajeitei os cabelos, forcei a vista para enxergar no escuro, e o medo veio de repente. O medo e a verdade. A minha intuição vivia me dizendo que eu estava arriscando muito com aquela brincadeira perigosa.

Os risos cessaram. Fizeram silêncio na sala. O primeiro menino miou. Nenhum deles confundira o miado de um colega, todos haviam chamado as meninas com os seus miados; o mesmo se dera com as meninas. O que eu ia fazer seria realmente comprometedor, porque eu me lembrava bem do olhar de Núcia sobre mim quando eu fora para o quarto. Era um olhar que me pedia e avisava que,

de algum modo, eu identificaria o seu miado entre mil miados de outras moças.

Moça. Dezessete anos ou mais? Os seios, o jeito, a voz, o corpo, as formas — sem dúvida, ela era mais velha do que eu uns dois ou três anos, não podia precisar bem. O que eu pude precisar com exatidão foi o seu miado, ao qual, depois de uma pausa reflexiva, eu correspondi, miando. E me senti um gato. Um gato selvagem, ladino, parada atrás da porta, aguardando, ouvindo as vaias, apurando os ouvidos para distinguir os seus passos. Seria dela ou de Fábio, atrevidamente substituindo-a, num jogo sujo, forçado, entre eles.

Mas tudo era uma brincadeira, uma brincadeira maliciosa, e eles não desconfiaram que os meus ouvidos não eram tão ruins assim, achando que eu iria cair de costas quando sentisse que o gato ao qual eu correspondera não era um gato, mas uma linda gatinha que, de mansinho, fingindo brincar, entrava no quarto pé ante pé e miava baixinho, fininho, mas com medo:

— Miuuu... miuuu...

Saí para trás dela. Estendi as mãos. Nada me interessava ou me importava mais do que aquele momento, pelo qual eu pagara tão caro. Minhas mãos pousaram nos seus ombros. Ato contínuo, num giro do corpo, inesperadamente, para surpresa minha, ela se pôs de frente para mim, avançando o corpo contra o meu, enquanto as nossas bocas sequiosas se procuraram e se encontraram, no meu primeiro beijo, e se sugaram e se lambeiram, loucamente, com medo, tensas, mas com uma fúria tal que todos os meus poros se abriram e choraram de emoção o mais precioso suor da minha vida.

Ela apertou-se contra mim, sôfrega, pedindo: — Não fique mais perto de Fábio e não brinque mais de gatinho. Eu não quero beijar a ninguém mais. Só a você.

Meu coração parecia que ia arrebentar. Quantas vezes aquele pedaço de carne dentro do meu peito já estufara de emoção... Mas aquela era uma realização fantástica, que me punha frente a frente, ou melhor, que me punha nos braços uma mulher como eu, que gostava de mulher, uma homossexual e feminina.

Sáimos do quarto juntas. Hipócritas. Fingindo espanto e pilheriando. E fazendo gozação e comentando a respeito do susto que eu levara e da decepção que estava tendo por meus ouvidos não saberem distinguir o miado de uma fêmea do miado de um macho. Safei-me alegando que, com tal acontecimento, a brincadeira perdera o encanto para mim e eu preferia ir comer um pedaço de bolo.

Tornaram a ligar a vitrola. Eu não olhava para Núcia e ela não olhava para mim. Sentíamos-nos culpadas ou cúmplices de alguma coisa que não queríamos que os outros percebessem, e essa coisa era o fato de não pertencermos àquele clã, como se a própria cor da nossa pele fosse outra e nos sentíssemos condenadas por isso.

Foi o que pensei.

.....

OS HOMENS PREFEREM AS LÉSBICAS

Minha natureza definida. Eu, um criptandro, estendendo raízes, crescendo sob o sol das emoções, sob o calor de um olhar, sob o afago de um hálito perfumado sussurrando frases de amor sonhadas nas noites de solidão. Eu não gostava da palavra “lésbica”, e identifiquei-me nos estudos de botânica com o criptandro, sentindo bem guardado dentro da boca o meu órgão sexual não aparente.

Núcia e eu. E os “eu te amo”, entrecalando beijos, juras, afagos e confissões. Eu nunca tivera outras. Não tinha segredos. A sandália era algo sagrado, jamais a mencionaria. O beijo no escuro, durante a brincadeira de gatinho, fora um impulso instintivo irreprimível que definira aquilo que eu era e que nunca temera reconhecer — lésbica — só não tendo oportunidade de expandir. Jurei. Na verdade, eu não estava mentindo. As fantasias criadas em torno de Kênia não podiam contar. E Kênia era um segredo inconfessável, que eu jamais revelaria.

Núcia teve que acreditar que eu nunca tivera nada com nenhuma menina, pois era a verdade, mas não pude acreditar que ela não tivesse tido outras experiências, pelas suas atitudes, pela sua

prática lesbiana, pelo que aprendi com ela nos nossos momentos de intimidade.

Feminina, seios exuberantes, boca sensual, mãos cariciosas e macias, e o ponto alto das minhas excitações libidinosas — os pés. Delicados, macios, perfumados, calçando sandálias de salto fino, coloridas, de tirinhas.

Entendi a minha fascinação. O que significava aquela excitação, ao olhar para os pés de Núcia. De certo modo, isso se devia ao fato de me lembrarem os pés de Kênia, mas não era só isso. Entendi o fetichismo. A minha verdadeira perversão e anomalia sexual não era o fato de eu ser uma homossexual — ser homossexual era próprio da minha natureza, era natural. O meu interesse erótico, centralizado de modo exclusivo e predominante nos pés ou nas sandálias de salto fino, de tiras, era uma tara porque eu via nesse tipo de calçado uma certa sensualidade, uma beleza que me excitava, primeiro em Kênia e depois em Núcia.

Núcia logo percebeu o meu fascínio pelos seus pés e mantinha-os sempre bem tratados e perfumados. Quando ela ia à minha casa e ficávamos sós em meu quarto, eu a beijava dos pés à cabeça, ou descia da cabeça aos pés, fazendo carícias com eles em meu rosto. E o que mais eu queria possuir era um pé da sandália dela. Um só. O direito. O esquerdo eu já tinha. O de Kênia. Embora fossem de estilos diferentes, ambos me fascinavam.

E Núcia acabou me contando que existia uma turminha, um grupo de amigas, todas lésbicas, como nós, que se reuniam de vez em quando no apartamento de uma tal de Bia. Ela as conhecera por acaso, através de uma colega da faculdade. Fiquei curiosa, intrigada e enciumada. O pior de

tudo foi o ciúme. E da tristeza do ciúme veio a raiva, e da raiva, a primeira briga. E dessa briga, as revelações.

Núcia já tivera um caso, sim. Quando ainda era bem mais nova do que eu. Para meu espanto, disse com quem. Fiquei olhando para ela quase sem acreditar. Eu nunca reparara. Norma disfarçava muito bem. Não. Não era que Norma disfarçasse. Ela era *gilete*. Isto é, bissexual. Mas eram primas. “Que coisa horrível”, comentei, “isso é incesto”. Ela riu e explicou, com um certo desagrado pela minha ingenuidade, que tudo na vida tem um começo e que esse começo sempre depende das oportunidades, e que Norma fora quem a iniciara. Durante as férias, na praia, fora o calor, o afrodisíaco ar do mar, além da tendência das duas. Coisa assim, nada para causar espanto a outra lésbica. Norma logo percebera que eu era “ativa”, “pai”, que podia enganar aos outros — nunca, porém, a elas duas.

Norma já havia lhe falado a meu respeito, mas Núcia jamais pudera supor que fosse se apaixonar por mim, que fosse sentir uma atração tão irresistível, e que eu fosse tão ladina, quando lhe confessei que havia inventado a brincadeira de gatinho.

Núcia tinha dezoito anos. Estava fazendo faculdade. Pretendia ser odontóloga e por isso gostava de ficar arreganhando a minha boca e examinando os meus dentes, o que me irritava em algumas ocasiões.

E às vezes eu ficava pensando como Núcia podia gostar de mim, encontrar-se todos os dias comigo, tendo um círculo de relações só de lésbicas, como me contava, prometendo um dia me apresen-

tar a elas. Intuitivamente, eu já sabia que existiam muitas mulheres com sentimentos iguais aos meus, relacionados ao próprio sexo, mas ainda assim me surpreendia, ao mesmo tempo que ficava com raiva, por Núcia ter um passado tão experiente.

E Fábio continuava me assediando. Mandando cartinhas, telefonando, esperando-me pelas esquinas quando eu voltava do colégio. Eu dava desculpas relacionadas a Claudette. Núcia, que a princípio não se importava, começou a se aborrecer a insistir para que eu "abrisse o jogo" com ele. Fiquei indignada, ou melhor, contrariada: ninguém precisava atravessar a minha vida pessoal, devasar as minhas particularidades, penetrar o meu mundo; eu preferia disfarçar, passar despercebida; para que tornar-me alvo de achincalhes? Eu sabia bem o que pensavam e falavam de gente como eu. E Núcia me chamou de covarde. Disse que eu precisava cortar os cabelos, usar calças compridas, andar mais "esporte". Eu ia ficar uma gracinha, de cair o queixo. Se eu quisesse lhe dar um presente de aniversário, que fizesse uma trança dos meus cabelos, cortasse e desse para ela guardar.

Se eu cortasse os cabelos, mamãe teria um choque, e papai talvez até chorasse de desgosto, pois já andava implicando pelo fato de eu só querer usar as camisas de Renato, isto porque Núcia dissera que eu ficava muito bem de camisa, melhor do que com os meus vestidos. Vestidos não eram para mim. E eu comecei a só andar de calça comprida, camisa, jaquetas, sapatos de solões bem esporte, camisetas, sentindo-me cada vez mais liberta das apreensões e do medo de que os outros descobrissem o que eu era. Mas não era influência de

Núcia; eu apenas estava me encontrando melhor dentro da minha indumentária preferida.

Eu vivera sempre pensando que não era preciso me dar a reconhecer, que podia me manter à parte, sonhando, tendo o meu segredo simbólico guardado entre os meus sapatos, dentro de uma caixa, como uma relíquia. Mas percebi que tinha que seguir o meu caminho e me juntar às de minha classe. Eu não podia isolar-me e viver dissimulando, passando pelo que não era, e muito menos submeter-me à investida de homens.

Núcia me disse que eu tinha uma certa semelhança com Alain Delon e tentou pôr na minha cabeça que, se eu cortasse o cabelo bem curto, iria tornar-me outra pessoa, isto é, muito mais parecida com ele. Eu me irritei. Minha indignação cresceu. Que ela ficasse com o Alain Delon. Eu preferia continuar parecida comigo mesma ou com a Lauren Bacall, como mamãe achava. Eu era mulher, essencialmente feminina, apenas gostava de mulher. Só isso. Não gostava de homem para sexo, mas para amizade. Imitá-los, nunca! Eu me sentia muito bem na minha condição de homossexual, sem precisar caracterizar-me ou realizar *performances* de machão para agradar às mulheres. O modo como eu gostava de me trajar nada tinha a ver com masculinidade ou com a minha androginia. Núcia não discutiu. Ficou me olhando e, como se de um teste dependesse a sua análise a meu respeito, segundo o critério que adotariam as suas amigas, resolveu que iria me apresentar a elas. Foi o que subentendi.

Eu tinha hora para chegar em casa. Das sete às nove da noite, dava bastante tempo. E fomos ao apartamento da tal Bia. Como eu supusera: uma

machona, como as que eu já vira na rua e que me causavam repulsa e aversão. Metida a homem, andar de fanfarrão, impostando a voz, sacudindo as pernas arreganhadas, como se tivesse um enorme saco entre elas, gesticulando, falando do seu "caso" como se falasse de uma mulher-objeto. As expressões, o modo de andar, tudo nela me enojou, e Núcia viu, sentiu, notou, comparou e finalmente começou a entender o que eu era e o que era aquela mulher disfarçada de homem, que, para meu espanto, atendeu a um telefonema e nos disse que o seu "filho" estava no aeroporto, voltando de viagem, e ela precisava ir até lá apanhá-lo. Convidou-nos para acompanhá-la e foi até o banheiro trocar de camiseta. E eu fiquei acompanhando com o olhar aquela deformidade que até dera à luz.

Núcia olhou para mim sem graça e me pediu desculpas. Ela estava começando a perceber a diferença entre mim e aquele tipo. O aspecto, o nível, a classe, a genuinidade.

Ouvimos a porta abrir e logo uma morena dos seus vinte e oito anos, bem feminina, extravagante, bonita mas um tanto vulgar, entrou na sala cantando um samba.

Parou de cantar e, ao mesmo tempo que cumprimentava Núcia, perguntava, medindo-me com uma expressão de admiração:

— Oi, Núcia, quem é a franguinha de leite?

— Meu caso.

Marlene limpou os dentes com a língua, fungou — estava um pouco resfriada — espirrou, limpou o nariz e chamou por Bia. Ouvi e olhei para Núcia. Eu não conseguia evitar a expressão de censura. Que gente era aquela, afinal?

— Bia, oi, bem, o velho deu a gaita pro aluguel, pra prestação do carro, e mais uns cobrinhos pra gente ir por aí. Tudo bem aí com você ou tá cagando parafuso?

Marlene voltou para a sala, sentou na nossa frente, perguntou se a gente já tinha tomado uma cervejinha. Levantou, pegou uma garrafa na geladeira, abriu. Núcia não quis. Eu, muito menos.

— Puxa, gente, hoje foi duro me livrar do velho. O cara tava com o capeta. Toda vez que é pra me dar dinheiro, tenho que fazer hora extra. Puxa que los que tê, foi uma foda, mas é isso aí. Núcia, você não precisa, filhinha de papai, logo fica noiva, enruste, casa, mantém o caso e todo mundo respeita. Eu tenho mais que agüentar o velho, senão a gente *sífu*. Essa aí, coitada, não ganha nem pro cigarro. E o marido, que não manda o dinheiro da manutenção do menino há uns quatro meses! A gente vai pôr advogado, não dá, né? O desgraçado é amarrado nela, vive atormentando e faz chantagem com o garoto. Pode crer que ele está lá no aeroporto, senão o menino tomava um táxi, não é verdade? Mas aqui, ó, que ela vai sozinha!

Fez uma banana, num gesto com os braços, tomou mais umas talagadas de cerveja, me encarou, sorriu, falou que eu era um pão e continuou:

— Você não acha engraçado, Núcia? Os homens ficam louquinhos quando sabem que a gente anda com mulher, que a gente é lésbica. Os homens preferem as lésbicas...

Eu só escutava. Tinha até ânsia de vômito, a cada coisa que ouvia. Núcia foi se sentindo humilhada, envergonhada, e, com a desculpa de que eu tinha hora para chegar em casa, deixamos o apartamento de Bia. Elas desceram com a gente. Núcia

saiu do elevador na frente, com Marlene, e eu segui ao lado da machona pelo corredor, sem saber o que falar, enquanto ela demonstrava certa indignação por Núcia estar de caso comigo. Eu até menti sobre a idade, dizendo que tinha dezessete anos, mas ela continuou achando um despropósito — era a Núcia que não servia para mim. Perguntei por quê. Ela suspirou. Núcia era muito certinha, filhinha de papai, freqüentava faculdade, estava meio perdida, a fim de um ambiente de “entendidos”. Quanto a mim, estava agindo como os rapazinhos quando começam a querer mulheres e não sabem com quem vão se meter. Núcia não era de levar um caso em frente. Não ia dar certo. E eu fiz a asneira de perguntar:

— Por quê?

Ela respondeu como se o cansaço de longa experiência lhe impusesse tal assertiva:

— Sai dessa, Flávia, para nós, lésbicas, só restam as prostitutas, as mulheres cansadas de andar com homens, eu sei... é bom você aprender desde já. Você pensa que Núcia é virgem? Ela ainda vai casar com o tal Eduardinho, pode escrever. Foi por causa dele que ela me largou. Ela te contou que já foi meu caso? Uma garota e tanto, mas é mais pra homem. Mulher é assim, prova pica e repica.

Minhas pernas suavam. Eu suava nas pernas. Tive ganas de avançar para Núcia e rasgar toda a sua roupa. Mas não fiz nada disso. De qualquer modo, foi uma noite de revolta. De ciúme. De pensamentos negros. Núcia sob o corpanzil daquela caricatura que pusera no mundo talvez um veado, sei lá. Senti nojo dela. E o tal Eduardinho? Eduardo e Kênia. Eduardinho e Núcia. Uma desaforada coincidência. Núcia e suas amigas lésbicas. Eu,

uma franguinha de leite debochada por aquela prostituta sem escrúpulos. Que mundo era aquele que estava abrindo portas para visões tão feias? E logo para mim, que afirmara não ter conflitos, problemas emocionais graves. Eu estava me virando na cama e na fossa, mergulhada no ciúme, depois de ouvir as súplicas de Núcia, que me agarrou com sofreguidão e me lambuzara com os seus beijos molhados e lágrimas, lá no jardim, onde tentara me masturbar, ajoelhando-se aos meus pés e querendo sugar-me, como uma planta carnívora tentado devorar um inseto. Eu não quis, não deixei, menti que estava menstruada; ela disse que não tinha importância, que naquela hora de desespero era capaz de beber meu sangue todo. Brigamos, e ela confessou que não era virgem; que tolice, que mal havia em não ser virgem? Eduardinho, ora, ele que *sífu* sozinho.

O sangue fervendo nas veias, as evocações das minhas brincadeiras ingênuas de gatinho, das lambidas nas pernas de Kênia, dos momentos sob a mesa, a olhar para os seus deliciosos pés e as suas sandálias fascinantes, e eu ali, rolando nos lençóis alvos que nunca seriam manchados por outro sangue a não ser o da minha menstruação. Passos na minha mente. Um carro, sujo de barro, sumindo no fim da rua, soltando fumaça preta de óleo queimado, os puns de dona Dulce, a cara do marido de Kênia, a coincidência dos nomes dos homens das minhas mulheres, os gemidos de Kênia quando eu lhe mamava os seios sem leite, as expressões de Bia, e a idéia de Núcia tendo relações sexuais com ela. E com Eduardinho. A voz pastosa de Marlene, modulada pelo álcool, dizendo: "Os homens prefe-

rem as lésbicas." Para nós, lésbicas, só restam as prostitutas, como dissera Bia.

Meus dedos burilando os bicos dos meus seios. Os seios intumescidos, de menina-moça, nas minhas mãos, as mãos descendo, o sentimento de culpa, de revolta. Me senti como uma negra num festival de loiras, expulsa, escorraçada. Me senti uma judia no tempo de Hitler, obrigada a andar no meio das ruas, proibida de subir para as calçadas. Me senti dentro de uma armadura, a viseira do elmo descida, empunhando a espada para abrir caminho. Me senti uma mulher, não uma menina, uma lésbica, uma homossexual, uma pessoa de caráter definido, de objetivos firmes, não mais o raro criptandro crescendo entre falsas lésbicas, o vegetal sem órgãos masculinos aparentes. Para quê? Para que a protuberância, o apêndice, o pênis, a vagina, o hímen? Estava tudo na mente. E a língua, guardada dentro da boca, como uma arma.

E o fogo crepitando, o sangue agitando, fervendo a ponto de virar areia vermelha, quente. As mãos tentando arrancar arrepios do corpo, o demônio do desejo em mim, passos pisando macio, as sandálias prometendo orgasmos, o êxtase espancando os fantasmas da alma. O corpo desnudado em gestos nervosos, a boca entreabrindo-se e tentando arrepanhar bocas sedentas do próprio ar.

A sandália saindo da caixa. Esfregada pelo corpo. O salto fino. O meu olhar lúbrico. A lembrança da luva de borracha usada por mamãe para tingir os cabelos. Pensamentos conduzindo. Tudo em passo firme. Idéias firmes. Mamãe iria estranhar a falta da luva, mas nunca saberia da ausência de outra coisa. A luva que eu fui buscar no armário do banheiro, uma autômata dirigida pelo

sexo, por um pensamento profano, estuprador, por uma idéia conspurcante, por um desejo que me robotizava, que me magnetizava, que me conduzia. A tesoura abrindo tenazes de fogo. O dedo de borracha cortado da luva. O salto da sandália no seu simbólico desempenho. Os beijos e lambidas nas tirinhas. A saliva umedecendo a capinha fina feita de dedo de luva de borracha, que vestiu o salto da sandália que eu envolvi com os lábios, umedecendo-o. Os objetos longos simbolizando o sexo masculino. O salto da sandália. O passo que iria entrar na casa. A casa que era uma vagina.

Revirei na cama, acariciando meus próprios seios, num ritualístico preparativo, estorcendo-me sobre o lençol com medo, com um desejo maior do que o medo, empenhada em vencer a mim mesma, em não deixar em mim o que existia para ser rompido.

Úmida de suor, molhada de tesão, de vontade. Era Kênia quem estava ali. Não era a minha mão que segurava a sandália, era o pé de Kênia que a calçava e vinha, e chegava, encostava, afagava e friccionava o que havia de mais alta tensão entre as repartidas carnes no fim das coxas. Não era a maçã que se partia, eram os gomos da laranja em brasa que se abriam.

Uma loucura. Uma tara. Um fetiche. Eu, uma fetichista. Violação bárbara. A sandália e o sexo. O salto encapuzado, vestido de dedo de luva de borracha, lubrificado pela minha própria saliva, fincando, lento, com cuidado, abrindo caminho, forçando, sob a pressão das minhas mãos, que não mais vacilavam — nada as deteria — a dor fininha junto com arrepios e a loucura delirante da profanação do corpo virgem.

O estupro feito por uma sandália, um auto-estupro. O orgasmo crescendo com a dor arrepiante que me encurvava o corpo, como se as pernas quisessem dobrar-se até os joelhos para alcançar a cabeça. O salto adentrando, penetrando. Todo. Vencida a raiva. A vingança macabra contra a lésbica que destruía a menina. A lágrima pelas prostitutas, pela tristeza de acreditar que só me restariam sobras de mulheres desprezadas pelos homens ou insatisfeitas com eles. Tudo num vórtice de paixão, de autoflagelação, por sentir que no sangue manchando o salto da sandália, pingando no lençol, estava a prova da minha autodefinição. Eu, dona de mim. Uma lésbica que deflorara a si própria com o salto da sandália de uma mulher que se tornara uma fixação.

Uma definição oca como a vagina. Uma definição que me encheu a cabeça de interrogações, como a vagina que se contraiu como se quisesse guardar para sempre, dentro do meu corpo, o salto fino da sandália de tirinhas coloridas, como se fosse um apêndice de Kênia.

*
* *

Elas vinham da boate Lalicorne, dos inferninhos, da viração. Eram mulheres lindas, cansadas dos homens.

Mulheres que se voltaram para o próprio sexo, por carência afetiva, mulheres que eu comparava a flores que se despetalavam, que murchavam, que só tinham veneno, essências proibidas, como a das papoulas.

São raros os criptandros que florescem entre as lésbicas. São raras as liliáceas neste mundo mal-compreendido que todo mundo quer entender.

E as perguntas, inquestionáveis, irrespondíveis, continuavam tecendo idéias, ponderações e filosofias em minha mente. Por que os homens preferem as lésbicas? Por que as lésbicas aceitam as prostitutas? O que acontece com os fetichistas?

Tudo muito triste. Muito triste, mesmo!

NÓS ESTAMOS SEMPRE SÓS NA
MULTIDÃO, MAS O NOSSO
MUNDO É LINDO!

— Por favor, Flávia, me dê um pouco de atenção. Desde que você se tornou amiga de Núcia, nunca mais compareceu às festinhas da turma e me evita. Por quê? Todos sentem falta de você. A “brincadeira de miau” deixou de ser interessante.

— Ora, Fábio, uma única pessoa não pode acabar com uma brincadeira onde todos são elementos importantes.

— É que você dava brilho e força à brincadeira. A gente a vê assim como a gata-mestra.

Achei graça e ele se entusiasmou:

— É sim, como a abelha-mestra numa colméia. Tudo gira em volta dela. Há pessoas que são assim, você é assim. As pequenas luzes de uma sala iluminada por abajures desaparecem quando se acende o lustre central, como o sol que faz sumir as estrelas.

— Bonito isso.

— É um trecho de uma carta que escrevi para você.

— Essa eu não recebi.

— Não mandei.

Continuamos caminhando em silêncio. Entristecia-me ter que ser fria com ele. Era uma tristeza aguda, que vinha lá do fundo do coração, que freava a língua e prendia a voz na garganta.

Quando paramos no portão de casa, ele estendeu as mãos sobre os meus ombros e fez pressão, querendo puxar-me para si. Seu olhar tentou invadir-me e, através dos meus olhos, descobrir o mistério de minha alma. Queria que ele entendesse, e que só gostasse de mim como um rapaz aprecia um bom amigo ou como um irmão respeita e gosta de sua irmã.

Mas o brilho no olhar de Fábio era intenso e me chocava. Talvez eu devesse sentir por mulher o que estava sentindo por ele, um certo repúdio e aversão. Eu não queria que ele tomasse certas atitudes. Recuei e pedi:

— Por favor, compreenda...

— Você gosta de outro.

— Não é isso.

— O que, então?

— A gente é muito jovem ainda. Estou estudando muito. Não quero namorar...

— Por que você não deixa ela em paz?

A voz de Núcia foi como um tapa em meu ouvido. Ela surgiu de repente diante de nós, saindo de trás da macieira do jardim. Simultaneamente, eu e Fábio olhamos para ela, que surgia das sombras dos arbustos como um cão de guarda.

— Assustei os pombinhos? Anda, voa daqui, seu borracho bobo, não vê que ela não está interessada em homem, muito menos em você?

Passada a surpresa, Fábio enfrentou-a, **chocado** com a sua atitude inesperada:

— Por que não vai cuidar da sua vida?

— Vai andando, frango-d'água, deixa Flávia em paz, ela não é para o seu bico.

Fábio encarou-a. Mediu-a. Parecia ponderar sobre o que dizer e voltou-se para mim:

— Eu a estava molestando, Flávia?

Senti-me intimidada diante dos dois. Ele, com seus olhos expressivos pousados em mim, e ela, sacudindo as longas madeixas, como uma leoa agitando a juba; abaixei a cabeça e limitei-me a responder:

— Não.

Núcia só faltou pôr as mãos na cintura e cabriolar furiosa em volta de nós, mas a impressão que tive foi de que suas narinas se inflaram e ela bufou, soltando fumaça como se tivesse se transformado num dragão. Jogou longe o cigarro, encarou-me perplexa e facilitou a coisa, numa desafiadora revelação para Fábio:

— Você não percebeu ainda que ela tem nojo de homem? Não entendeu ainda que Flávia é uma lésbica, que não quer nada com você? Não está sabendo que nós somos amantes e que você está atrapalhando?

Fábio não fez expressão de espanto ou de surpresa e nem pareceu ofendido. Limitou-se a me encarar em silêncio e, quando Núcia perdeu o fôlego e começou a exigir que eu confirmasse o que ela estava dizendo, finalmente perguntou:

— É verdade isso, Flávia?

— Responda pra ele — vociferou Núcia.

Núcia parecia disposta a, agredir-me e desafiava Fábio com expressões sarcásticas, medindo-o, zombando dele, dizendo que ele era um idiota, que

não percebia as coisas, que só cego não via o que eu era, que estava se fazendo de tonto pra tentar uma guerra da qual sairia morto e fedido.

Minha língua parecia colada no céu da boca. Aquela cena me constrangia. Ia contra a minha educação e princípios. Não era verdade o que Núcia estava dizendo, que eu odiava os homens. Meu pai e meu irmão eram homens e eu os adorava. Ela estava falando uma porção de asneiras. Não era nada daquilo. Meus sentimentos eram outros. E eu queria muito bem a Fábio.

Ele insistiu. Em seus olhos vi um lampejo de súplica para que eu mentisse, para que dissesse alguma coisa que lhe permitisse não sair derrotado e humilhado diante daquela moça histérica prestes a chorar. Por mais rude que me tornasse, eu não podia mentir, não podia mais esconder o que eu era.

— Sim, eu sou uma lésbica.

E parecia que eu estava me condenando ou sentenciando algo muito grave. Parecia mesmo que eu estava dizendo: "Sou comunista, sou nazista, sou terrorista, sou subversiva... sou contra tudo e contra todos... sou o demônio... sou o terror para todas as nações... sou... o quê?"

Ele ficou me medindo e o seu olhar me fez muito mal.

— Está bem.

Não entendi o que ele quis dizer com isso, ao nos deixar. Pensei que tal resposta pudesse significar que não me assediaria mais, que entendia, que ia me deixar em paz, que Núcia ganhara a parada.

E Núcia, intrigante, ciumenta e nervosa, começou a vomitar as suas dúvidas e suspeitas:

— Você é o que, afinal? Tá aí com essa cara murcha porque o machão foi embora? Porque eu te entreguei?

— Você não devia ter feito isso.

— E por que não? Tava pretendendo enganar a quem? A mim? Aos dois? O que você é, afinal?

— Eu sei o que sou e isso basta. Não preciso sair gritando por aí e nem usar desses palavreados desagradáveis para manter um homem afastado de mim; acho que tudo precisa ter respeito e elegância...

Núcia gargalhou. Foi uma gargalhada de rai-va, de desprezo. Naquele momento, seu ódio pelos homens chegava a ter força de movimento para exterminá-los; ela parecia uma líder de partido contra os homens, capaz de trucidá-los com os dentes e esfrangalhá-los com as unhas. Seus olhos chispavam e ela cuspiu e se desesperou, querendo que eu sentisse pelo homem o mesmo desprezo e nojo que ela estava demonstrando sentir.

— Você gosta dele...

— Gosto. Quero bem. Admiro. Fábio é um rapaz educado, inteligente, e eu saberia como afastá-lo de mim sem criar esse problema... sei lá se ele não vai sair espalhando o que houve... será muito desagradável... não gosto que me apontem... eu sei quando e onde ser o que sou...

— Você é falsa. Tem medo.

— Tenho cuidados.

— Fábio jamais contará o que houve. Seria um vexame para ele ser passado para trás por uma lésbica.

— Mas você não devia mesmo ter feito isso. Eu sei como me defender sem precisar ferir ninguém...

— Você está com medo.

— Estou com receio. É muito diferente.

— E do que tem receio a boneca? De perder o pretendente? Se for isso, não tenha medo, é *receio*; nenhum homem se conformaria, muito menos Fábio. Ele voltará à carga, com mais veemência. Imagine, se ele vai se dar por vencido! E por uma mulher! Ele jamais admitirá ser passado para trás por uma lésbica... os homens não entendem isso... não aceitam, não se dão por vencidos.

.....

E Fábio realmente não se deu por vencido. Como de outras vezes, cercou-me na esquina de casa, quando eu voltava da faculdade.

— Não precisa olhar em volta, Núcia desta vez não vai aparecer.

— Seja razoável, Fábio.

— Você está com vergonha, não quero que tenha vergonha de mim...

— Não é isso. Estou triste.

— Triste?

— Não quero ser condenada por isso, não por você. Eu não queria que você soubesse... do modo como ficou sabendo.

— Eu sempre soube.

O que ele disse atingiu-me. Senti o rubor subir-me às faces. O pudor cresceu em mim como se ele tivesse me violentado, como se tivesse se aproveitado de uma certa ingenuidade e dos meus sentimentos de respeito e consideração por ele. A amargura daquela revelação fez como que um corte fundo em meu peito e ele percebeu que estava me decepcionando muito. Talvez tenha tentado consertar ou falasse a verdade, mas eu continuava

olhando para ele decepcionada e arrasada nos meus princípios morais.

— De qualquer modo, gostei de você . . . a gente gosta não por escolha, o sentimento acontece . . .

A explicação parecia razoável. Era uma justificativa que me deixava dúvidas, mas ele parecia sincero.

— Mesmo sabendo o que sou, interessou-se por mim?

Ele encolheu os ombros e arregalou os olhos, num trejeito de quem não tem resposta certa para dar, mas disse:

— Acho que isso é coisa de mulheres ardentes, solitárias, celibatárias, mulheres que se preocupam com a emancipação, mas que agem de modo errado. O homem pega mulher de rua por não poder satisfazer os seus desejos com a mulher que ama e quer ter na cama, porque precisa respeitar sua noiva até o dia do casamento, porque vê no ato sexual com a mulher virgem uma armadilha que o obrigará a casar antes do tempo ou contra a vontade — um caso de polícia . . . bem, por isso o homem procura a prostituta, que apenas vai lhe proporcionar o prazer físico, e pode crer que isso não é lá essas coisas . . . o momento sexual de um homem e de uma mulher tem que ter cheiro de desejo . . . de vontade recíproca . . . de amor. E a mulher ardente, a que tem fogo nas veias, a que não aceita esses preceitos, que a limitam e cerceiam a sua liberdade, acaba procurando a sua amiguinha . . . a que está para essas coisas . . .

— É válido, mas não é isso.

Não me agradava abordar tal assunto, mas Fábio parecia tão amargurado e ansioso, tão edu-

cado e paciente, que eu não sabia como encerrar a conversa; aliás, o assunto me ajudava a esclarecer mais ainda os meus sentimentos e a fortalecer a minha personalidade.

— Nós poderíamos ser bons amigos.

— Um homem não consegue ser amigo da mulher que ele deseja, eu não.

Parei no portão de casa. Meu olhar aguçado vasculhou o jardim. A macieira que vez ou outra dava umas poucas maçãzinhas e as plantas que cresciam à sua volta, bem cuidadas por mamãe, não ocultavam ninguém. Apertei os livros contra o peito. Lembrei do que Fábio me dissera quando se aproximara de mim.

— Por que você disse que desta vez Núcia não ia aparecer?

Ele olhou firme nos meus olhos. Estava indeciso. Por algum motivo, vacilava, mas achei-o mau e indiscreto, vingativo e golpista — acho que cheguei a odiá-lo — quando me disse:

— Núcia a estas horas está fazendo amor com Eduardinho.

Soou como uma notícia de morte. Senti minhas pernas tremerem e meu rosto empalidecer. Mas foi tudo muito rápido e esclarecedor. Fácil de entender, a jogada de Fábio. Ele conhecia Eduardinho. Os dois haviam entrado em contato e combinado tudo. Para finalizar, Núcia estava com Eduardinho. Isso era o que importava, para provar que Fábio estava certo no seu ponto de vista. Se eu quisesse comprovar o que ele estava me contando e constatar que Núcia não era o que demonstrava ser, bastaria entrar no seu carro e ele me levaria até onde os dois estavam.

Fábio falava e ao mesmo tempo pegava os livros dos meus braços e me conduzia para o seu Buick, estacionado ali perto.

Ele falava, fazia discurso, verdadeiros libelos contra o lesbianismo. Tinha certeza de que eu não era nada disso. Se eu quisesse, poderia me libertar do "vício".

Eu suava na nuca. Não podia acreditar no que ele estava decidido a provar que era verdade. Que Núcia estava nos braços de um homem. Bia mencionara Eduardinho. O Buick atravessava ruas que eu não reconhecia. Estava cega. Pensamento amarrado. Núcia demonstrara tanto desprezo e nojo de homem, brigara tanto comigo... Ofendera-me, duvidara da minha genuinidade; queria que eu visse os homens como inimigos, como uma raça desprezível. Não, absolutamente, não podia ser verdade o que Fábio estava dizendo.

— Núcia é assim mesmo, basta Eduardinho telefonar, acenar um dedinho, e ela vai correndo se encontrar com ele.

O mesmo que Bia havia dito. Ela bem que me advertira. Mas os dois eram suspeitos. Bia fora caso de Núcia. Fábio gostava de mim. Núcia e Eduardinho, Kênia e Eduardo, Marlene e Bia — elas e seus machos! Mundo porco. Gente nojenta. Sem escrúpulos. Fábio falando. Tentando me convencer que eu não era o que era, que aquilo de lésbica era desvio sexual, que era só querer e a mulher se reintegrava ao certo e melhor. As expressões de Núcia demonstrando nojo de homem, as palavras de Bia: "Quem prova pica, repica." Senti ímpetos de gritar. Eu não fazia parte daquele clã, eu não era assim, não pensava assim.

Fábio andava lendo psicologia e tudo que era livro que falasse a respeito das mulheres e suas emoções. Nem Freud, nem Deus e muito menos eu poríamos na sua cabeça o que eu era, porque ele tinha a sua própria filosofia a respeito. Por isso ele estava ao meu lado; queria me ajudar, queria me livrar de Núcia, queria me desviar daquele caminho que conduzia mulheres influenciáveis como eu à perdição, às doenças, à loucura e ao suicídio.

— Não sou influenciável e nem terei nenhum desses fins trágicos. Aonde você está me levando?

— Você vai ver Núcia com Eduardinho.

Fábio foi sarcástico. Sua voz soou vingativa pelo que ela lhe havia feito e dito. Achei-o sem escrúpulos, fazendo um jogo sujo. Seu sorriso feriu meus brios e o meu ciúme converteu-se em ódio. Talvez mais forte que o ódio foi o meu orgulho. E decidi:

— Não quero ver nada. Leve-me de volta.

— Você não acredita em mim, Flávia, mas devia acreditar. Você tem que sair dessa embroação enquanto há tempo... Núcia apenas usou você sexualmente, para satisfazer suas taras. Ela não passa de uma ninfômana, sabe o que é isso?

Claro que eu sabia. Eu sabia tudo. Era uma enciclopedia de conhecimentos gerais sobre sexo. Sexologia era o meu forte. Fábio desmoronava diante de mim, com as suas palavras ocas e a sua intenção de vingar-se de Núcia, com a idéia de provar o seu ponto de vista sobre lesbianismo e me ganhar.

— Leve-me de volta. Não quero saber nada a respeito de Núcia... o que ela faz não me atinge...

Minha voz tremeu. Fábio olhou para mim. Por um instante, demonstrou insegurança e pena, mas suas palavras me irritaram mais ainda:

— Você tem vergonha e medo de homem. Está amarrada a preconceitos impostos por uma educação rígida e errada, que deformou os seus desejos. O homem virou tabu para você.

— Que tabu, que nada, você não entende! — respondi, e frisei, soletrando, com uma coragem e uma determinação que jamais julgara ter: — Eu sou uma lésbica!

O sorriso de quem ouve fantasias e incoerências me atizou:

— Está bem, não me importa o que você pensa a respeito, o que eu quero é que me deixe por aqui mesmo; sei bem do que é capaz pra não se dar por vencido. Não acredito no que disse sobre Núcia... pare o carro, que eu quero descer.

Eram quase onze horas da noite e começara a garoar. Estava passando da hora de chegar em casa e os meus pais deveriam estar se preocupando. Renato devia estar no portão à minha espera, e Elisa, telefonando para a faculdade, tentando saber se alguma coisa poderia ter me retido por lá.

Fábio ligara os limpadores e o ruído deles raspando no vidro começou a me irritar. Desliguei. Ele sacudiu a cabeça, percebendo o meu descontrole, e tentou convencer-me:

— Está bem, Flávia, me dê só essa oportunidade. Você vai comigo, eu provo que não estou mentindo e depois a deixo em sua casa e nunca mais me aproximo de você. Eu prometo, a menos que você precise de apoio, de um amigo que fará tudo para ajudá-la...

Ele acelerou e quando estacionou eu levei um choque. Estávamos diante do edifício das amigas de Núcia.

.....

Fiz o que Fábio sugeriu. Fiquei de lado e ele se colocou diante da porta, apertando a campainha.

Foi Marlene quem atendeu. Sua voz e seu sorriso mostravam uma alegre acolhida, mas quando me viu surgir atrás de Fábio o sorriso encolheu na face e a voz caiu pros fundões de dentro dela. Bia apareceu em contraplano na sala, e estava igualmente atônita ao me ver. Não havia ninguém mais na sala, mas havia copos e garrafas de cervejas vazias. Mais dois copos. Quatro ao todo. Avançamos para o meio da sala e, à medida que as donas do apartamento — que fedia a cigarro — se sentiam embaraçadas, Fábio regozijava-se e olhava para a porta fechada, provavelmente de um quarto.

Bia passou a mão pelo rosto, refez-se, lembrando-se por certo da advertência que me fizera. Aproveitou a oportunidade, sacudiu a cabeça significativamente e ficou expectante, em silêncio, sabendo de antemão quais os propósitos de Fábio. E me ocorreu a idéia de que ela estivesse conivente, de que participara do plano de unir Núcia a Eduardinho e levar-me para o flagrante. Vi na expressão de Marlene uma ameaça, rancor por Fábio e raiva de Bia. Ela tentou salvar as aparências e mudar o clima tenso, mas Fábio cortou-lhe o gesto e a palavra, quando ela estendeu a mão para a geladeira a fim de apanhar uma garrafa de cerveja.

Fábio atravessou a sala e bateu na porta do quarto. Sua voz soou estranha e dura:

— Eduardinho, chega, é minha vez, preciso do quarto.

E o que me fez cambalear e sair correndo daquele apartamento foi a voz pastosa e nojenta de Núcia, bêbada, que gritou, enquanto uma risada de homem fazia fundo à minha dor:

— Não amole... nós não vamos sair daqui hoje...

.....

NO CARNAVAL TUDO ACONTECE MUITO RÁPIDO

Entendi desde então por que lésbicas genuínas como eu andam sós, escondem-se, têm medo de travar novas relações, evitam certos ambientes e formam pequenos grupos que se refugiam em apartamentos quando querem se distrair, jogando, batendo papo, numa festinha comum, como a de qualquer família respeitável.

Mas o episódio — Fábio, Núcia, Eduardinho e o resto da *gang* — não ficou naquele vexame que passei.

Entendi também que mulheres como Núcia criam uma falsa conceituação a respeito de lésbicas e que tipos como Bia e Marlene são realmente os responsáveis pelas coisas terríveis que propagam a nosso respeito.

Núcia procurou-me e tentou convencer-me e comover-me com suas explosões histéricas, dizendo que fora vítima de uma perversa trama de Bia, em conivência com Fábio, para nos separar. Chegou ao cúmulo de querer enfiar na minha cabeça que o musculoso e peludo Eduardinho, a quem vim a conhecer mais tarde, era veado, bicha, pederasta, que eles não estavam fazendo nada de mais no quarto, que Bia e Marlene lhe haviam pedido que

fosse lá naquela noite e se trancasse com Eduardinho no quarto para que, quando Fábio chegasse com uma das suas putinhas, querendo usar o quarto, este estivesse ocupado. Elas deviam favores a Fábio e não haviam encontrado outro meio de se livrarem dele, que estava fazendo do apartamento um verdadeiro *rendez-vous*. Ela é que estava decepcionada; provavelmente todos a estavam enganando, e eu fora lá realmente para ficar com Fábio. Isso doeu mais do que ter descoberto que ela não passava mesmo de uma falsa e depravada criatura indefinida.

Se havia algum sentimento em mim por Núcia, ficou tão mergulhado na dor que acabou afogando os meus desejos e ilusões a seu respeito.

Fábio escrevia-me cartas, barrava-me à porta da faculdade, dizia que se arrependia do que fizera, tentava de todo jeito aproximar-se de mim e conseguir que eu lhe desse atenção, mas o seu jogo sujo fizera com que eu entendesse que deveria ter sempre certas reservas com as pessoas e não tentar fazê-las entender a minha natureza, para me aceitarem como eu era.

Eu teria que manter uma certa distância, o que faria com que as pessoas tivessem consciência de suas posições e jamais tivessem oportunidade para fazer-me passar novos vexames e decepções.

Gravei as palavras de Bia... para as lésbicas só restavam as prostitutas... a mulher que prova... repica... e concluí que o certo seria fingir sempre e não confiar em ninguém.

Naquele tempo, as mulheres aproveitavam o carnaval para usar suas calças compridas, camisas, gravatas, caracterizando-se de homem para serem melhor identificadas pelas outras mulheres, as "passivas".

O carnaval nos clubes marcava momentos grandiosos na vida das lésbicas, que se fantasiavam de Zorro, de *cowboy*, usavam máscaras, cortavam os cabelos rente na nuca, riscavam bigodes com lápis de sobrancelhas e até costeletas. Era a liberdade. O diabo soltava-as pelas ruas e elas invadiam os salões.

A orquestra atacava os sambas e marchas, as serpentinas riscavam o ar, confetes atapetavam o chão, e as lésbicas confinavam-se no toalete.

E para lá iam, atraídas, as que tinham tendências para eclodir durante os três maravilhosos dias festivos.

Eu estava fantasiada de Zorro — ou Zorra, porque os meus cabelos compridos, sob o chapéu de feltro preto, disfarçavam bem o que eu era. Eu sabia da fama do Arakan, dos bailês nos salões do aeroporto, e fui para lá com um grupo da faculdade.

Já estava com dezoito anos, já tinha experiências, a sandália de Kênia continuava como um freio para as minhas emoções maiores; nos momentos de solidão e desejo, era ela que satisfazia o meu corpo, um instrumento de prazer onde eu buscava a compensação de ser uma lésbica genuína entre gente que não sabia o que era ou o que queria.

Fortes mulheres, com volumosas tetas, voz grossa e panca de homem, com filhos e até amantes — falsas pervertidas, sempre dispostas a fler-

tar, fosse comigo, com uma lésbica qualquer ou mesmo com homens — essas machonas, sacudindo os tetões como se fossem suas armas, granadas que iriam explodir nada mais do que leite na cara de todo mundo, é que saíam à frente de um falso movimento de emancipação da mulher, ridicularizando e levando ao mais baixo nível tudo o que se pudesse pensar a respeito de lésbicas, confundindo um movimento de classe social por direitos iguais aos dos homens, no recebimento de honorários e no reconhecimento de méritos vocacionais, com liberdade sexual.

Eu as vi chegando, ressabiadas, como que disfarçadamente, de braço com homens, subindo as escadas que conduziam aos salões do aeroporto, de braço com bichas, para tentarem passar pela portaria. O comentário de que seria proibida a entrada de homossexuais no Arakan já se espalhara havia meses.

Eu já atravessara a porta e vi o homem descer correndo em direção ao grupo que entregava ao porteiro os ingressos, gritando, neurastênico, brechando a entrada delas:

— Não deixe entrar, devolva os ingressos, devolva o dinheiro; “paraíbas” aqui não entram.

O grupo se comprimiu, o porteiro foi empurrado pela machona, o sujeito que impedira que elas entrassem foi agarrado pela camisa e a machona desferiu sobre ele golpes que eram estupendos socos de *boreur*. O homem caiu atordoado, a bicha pulou por cima dele e atravessou correndo em direção ao salão. Um grupo de guardas correu atrás da bicha e ergueu-a no ar pelos cotovelos. A bicha enroscou-se com pernas e braços no poli-

cial, que tentava livrar-se dela, enquanto ela gritava, agarrando-se a ele:

— Me solta, bofe . . .

Enquanto o cassetete descia sobre a machona, lá na porta, um tal “Manville” conseguiu sair de sob a massa fofa dos seus tetões. Ela entregou os pontos, erguendo os braços no ar, para proteger-se, e gritando:

— De cassetete não, seus putos, ataquem quem nem eu, de mãos limpas; aí, quero ver se sobra um.

O pau preto desceu na sua cabeça e as pernas da machona dobraram. Comprimi o peito com as mãos, sentindo algo estranho e violento. Revolta. Pena. Lástima — e acima de tudo vergonha.

Meu carnaval estava estragado. Virou quaresma. O espetáculo era triste demais para mim. A bicha, gritando com a sua voz esganiçada coisas que eu nunca ouvira antes, sendo posta para fora; a machona, carregada pelos guardas escada abaixo. Manville, medindo a jovem que se encolhera a um canto, medrosa e disfarçando não estar com a machona, toda fresca no seu *sarong*, cheia de colares e olhares de fêmea acuada, disse, estufando o peito que não estufou, ao contrário, ficou sumido sob a camisa rasgada:

— Você pode entrar . . .

Pensei que a moça fosse fazer meia-volta e seguir os guardas que levavam a machona desfalecida. Quatro deles carregavam, com esforço, o pesado fardo, e a sua bunda ia batendo nos degraus, enquanto os saltinhos da sua linda companheira seguiram tlac-tlaqueando para o salão regurgitante.

Acho que só não vomitei porque engoli demais as palavras que me subiam pela garganta, queren-

do xingar a cadela que, sem pestanejar, preferira o baile de carnaval a saber para onde estariam levando a sua machona.

Meu grupo estava igualmente atônito, assistindo ao deprimente espetáculo, e resolvemos que o melhor seria começar a criar um clima alegre entre nós, já que nada poderíamos fazer por aquela pobre infeliz que fora barrada por ser lésbica. Perto de nós passou saracoteando uma linda mulata, que revelou suas "tendências", dizendo-nos:

— Se ela fosse meu caso, eu arrancava os olhos desse merda despeitado. Quero ver ele barrar uma negra! Capo ele!

*
* * *

Foi o que pensei fazer, mas me contive. Parecia que a noite estava programada para mim. Em toda volta que eu dava no salão, cruzava com Manville — o meu coração se contraía e as palavras da mulata ecoavam em minha mente.

E chegou o momento em que anunciaram a apresentação das candidatas aos concursos Rainha do Arakan, Rainha do Carnaval, A mais Linda Foliona, A mais Rica e Bela Fantasia. Fiquei atenta, vendo o homem no palanque, estufando ou tentando encher o peito seco, imponente, dono do lugar e da noite carnavalesca.

Manville parecia, para mim, o demônio que precisava ser exorcizado, vencido pela minha cruz. Falaram, ouvi, não procurei certificar-me, acreditei, e logo decidi o que faria. Acima de tudo, porque a futura rainha era realmente linda e "fora eleita"

por ser amante do velho Manville e se virar na boate Big Holliday.

Ela se virava. O que mais pôderia fazer com aquela beleza toda? E eu? O que conseguiria, com o meu tipo?

Fui ao toalete. Prendi os cabelos dentro do chapéu de Zorro. Tirei o batom dos lábios. Ajeitei minhas grossas sobrancelhas, que minhas amigas queriam depilar e eu não deixava. Puxei um punhadinho de cabelo de cada lado do rosto, formando costeletas.

Meti-me sob o palanque e fiquei assistindo ao desfile. Observei e tomei nota de todos os movimentos do grupo. A "rainha" a todo instante debruçava-se para Manville, que lhe dava tapinhas no rosto, nas mãos, nos ombros, assegurando-lhe que o reinado seria seu, ele estava ali para garantir. Todos percebiam a mamata, o concurso era uma fajutagem.

Ouvi e nem fiz questão de saber quem estava falando; nem mesmo procurei saber quem eram elas, por que não levavam outro tipo de vida. Pouco me importava serem prostitutas; em minha mente, o cassetete descia ininterruptamente sobre a cabeça da machona, que desfalecia e era miseravelmente arrastada escada abaixo, batendo seu bundão nos degraus.

— São todas de viração. Vêm das boates Lalicorne, Big Holliday, La Vie en Rose... todas com os seus "coronéis". Depois, elas vão ao toalete e a gente papa uma por uma.

Ouvi risadas, cochichos, desmentidos, desacatos, desafios e brigas entre casaizinhos de lésbicas ciumentas.

E o fato se deu. Consegui. Em dado momento, o olhar da que já estava escolhida para rainha caiu sobre mim. Meu olhar grudou nela, segurou seu olhar; hipnotizei-a, com a força do meu pensamento, da minha intenção ou do meu charme e jeito especial atuando sobre ela.

Nesse exato momento, senti a mão de alguém pousar sobre o meu ombro. Voltei-me. Era Bia, e ao seu lado estava Marlene. Recuei, indisposta pela presença pegajosa e nojenta das duas.

— Quanto tempo, Flávia... viu Núcia? Ela está aí...

— Nem quero ver.

Bia insistiu no deixa-disso como já fizera outras vezes, tentando incutir suas mentiras em minha mente. Como eu não tinha interesse em acreditar ou desacreditar, encerrei o papo, pedindo licença para atender ao suposto chamado de alguém que estaria me esperando, e saí do lugar de onde eu conseguira flertar por breves instantes com a Rainha do Carnaval.

O surdo e o bumbo e a bunda da machona faziam batucada em minha mente. Tomei um refrigerante, minhas amigas fizeram gozação. Insistiram em que carnaval era pra dar samba no pé até de defunto, e me carregaram pro meio do salão. Vi a moça do *sarong*, saracoteando. Fui me aproximando. Disfarcei. Finquei-lhe o dedo nas costelas, como se fosse um punhal a atravessá-la. Ela se voltou para mim. Encarou-me. Vi em seus olhos alguma coisa que me deu medo. Um corte frio de punhal que me fez recuar e achar que não valia a pena meter-me com ela.

O palanque estava vazio. Para onde teriam ido as candidatas? As princesas e rainhas do ano an-

terlor e a nova coroada? Espantei o pensamento de vingança. A vingança doce que seria um ultraje aos meus escrúpulos, pelo fato de Desirée ser de viração e ainda por cima amante daquele sujeito despeitado.

Segui minhas amigas até o toalete. E lá deparei com ela. Viu-me através do espelho e me encarou. No carnaval, tudo transcorria muito rápido, depressa, pelo medo de que não acontecesse mais, se a gente perdesse a oportunidade; por isso, o flerte de momento atravessou o tempo e fez uma eternidade entre nós, que se abriu num sorriso da rainha.

Ela me pediu pente. Fingi entender "fósforos", deliberadamente.

— Não tenho fogo.

— Eu pedi pente.

— Sou careca.

Ela riu, ou melhor, sorriu sem graça; pedi desculpas e continuei encarando-a. Dei-lhe a minha escova de cabelos. Aquela troca de olhares era um verdadeiro ato sexual, enquanto ela escovava sensualmente os seus longos e ruivos cabelos. Eu sentia arrepios percorrendo o meu corpo. O entusiasmo me assanhava. Ela era uma mulher de viração. Isso me excitava, saber o que ela era, uma profissional do sexo! Um sentimento novo brotou em mim. Ela estava interessada. Algumas "paráibas" pediram autógrafos a ela. Uma prostituta dando autógrafos! Gravei isso. Rainha do Carnaval, uma *habituée* de boate! Um dia, talvez ela acabasse dona do aeroporto, se sorrisse para os donos das companhias como estava sorrindo para mim. Seus seios saltavam pelo decote e sua língua

passava pelos lábios, insinuando coisas que eu sabia de cor.

Tirou um frasco da bolsa que complementava o traje *cancan* do Folies Bergère. Apertou-o e o perfume esguichou em meu peito. O lança-perfume voltou para dentro da bolsinha — cheia de enfeites coloridos de pedras tremeluzentes — e ela se aproximou com o seu sorriso cheio daquelas estrelinhas dos anúncios de pastas de dentes, lindo sorriso, delicioso, olhar perfurante, narinas arfantes, que mais arfaram quando a sua cabeça desceu até o meu peito e ela aspirou o tóxico, fundo, bastante, repetindo a dose do lança-perfume que tornou a tirar da bolsinha, gelando os meus seios.

Cambaleei com ela agarrada em mim e ouvi a zoadada de gozação das minhas amigas, que estavam prestando atenção a tudo e me desafiavam a prosseguir, empurrando-me com ela para o reservado. Fecharam a porta. O vaso da privada estava cheio. Fedia. Um desencanto total. Alguém vomitara. Aquilo não era ambiente para me espremer com uma exuberante mulher, mesmo estando ela intoxicada, mas era lugar para poder livrar-me daquilo que a estava levando para o fundo da fossa. Tirei o frasco da mão dela e joguei dentro do vaso. Ela arregalou os olhos, achou ruim, quis dizer qualquer coisa, mas eu preendi a respiração e desci minha boca faminta contra os saborosos lábios de Desirée.

Eu não era Napoleão nem Zorro, mas me senti em cima de um cavalo, pisoteando Manville. Eu não podia deixá-la sair dos meus braços para os braços dele, de jeito nenhum! Minha boca resvalou para os seios dela. Eu bem sabia o que as carícias de uma mulher fazem a uma mulher e continuei com

as minhas mãos deslizando pelo corpo de Desirée, torturando-a com os meus frenéticos beijos e suspiros, empolgada pela idéia de, mais do que ganhar a Rainha do Arakan, tirar a mulher de Manville; tinha que ganhar o seu corpo e conquistar a sua alma.

Minhas amigas bateram na porta do reservado. Amparei Desirée pela cintura e olhei fundo dentro dos seus olhos, tendo a impressão vertiginosa de que estava girando um caleidoscópio para onde me arrastava a sensação que o seu olhar me transmitia.

— A noite está chegando ao fim. São quase quatro horas da madrugada. Venha comigo.

— Para onde?

— Por aí... vamos espichar o nosso carnaval.

— Não posso.

— Por causa dele?

— É. Ele me sustenta. Não posso sair daqui sem ele.

— Você já é a rainha. As rainhas sempre têm argumentos, principalmente quando encontram o seu Zorro ou uma Desirée encontra o seu Napoleão...

— É o que você pensa... amanhã é a última noite... você vai ver, ele vai me desclassificar... tá assim de putinha querendo ser Rainha do Carnaval!...

Ela juntou os dedos diante do meu nariz e tentou afastar-se de mim, pensando nas suas rivais que deveriam estar "salivando" Manville.

Beijei-a com toda a sofreguidão e ímpeto de quem quer vencer uma batalha, porque, acima de tudo, o meu desejo por ela crescia; algo fervia den-

tro de mim, estava totalmente embriagada pela sua beleza e feminilidade.

Ela começou a corresponder, ficou excitada; a música estourando ao longe trazia restos de frases, o lança-perfume que deixara seu aroma em mim e as nossas bocas se devorando elevaram ao clímax as suas emoções de mulher que sente atração por mulher, superando todas as suas resistências.

Saimos do reservado. Minha turma eclipsara-se. No salão, cruzei com Núcia. Ao lado dela estavam Bia, Marlene, Norma e Fábio, que demonstrou ter sentido um certo impacto quando me viu e, instintivamente, num gesto infantil, apertou o braço que rodeava a cintura de Núcia, puxando-a mais para si. Beijou-a na boca. Percebi que ele estava fazendo isso mais por raiva de mim do que por vontade de beijá-la.

Do alto do palanque, Manville procurava a sua rainha e protegida. Desirée tentou se esconder atrás de um grupo de pessoas e dos blocos que dançavam animados, mas fingi não perceber sua intenção de evitar que Manville a surpreendesse comigo e fiz tudo para que ele nos visse de mãos dadas.

Nesse ínterim, olhando para o palanque, deliciando-me com o nervosismo de Manville, que nos seguia com seu olhar em brasa, vi, por trás dele, uma jovem de *sarong* subindo as escadas do palanque.

Ela estava com algo na mão e a sua atitude era suspeita, pois se esgueirava enquanto os folhões tentavam encobri-la, pulando em volta dela. Era um grupo estranho, de machonas e bichas.

Ouvi a gritaria contrastando com a cantoria. Vi a corre-corre. Vi de relance o corpo de Manville

tombando, os foiiões descendo as escadas aos saltos e aos gritos.

A moça de *sarong* desferira violentamente a garrafa de cerveja sobre a cabeça de Manville. A cara dele estava uma pasta vermelha de sangue, que esguichava como de um suíno em dia de manança.

A gritaria e o corre-corre eram promovidos pela turma da mächona, que lhe dera cobertura, fazendo-a escapar sem que os guardas ficassem sabendo quem desferira o violento golpe na cabeça do branquicelo e despeitado amante da Rainha do Carnaval, que saía de lá, nesse ínterim, correndo pelas escadas do aeroporto, puxando pela minha mão.

Alcancei a moça de *sarong* num dos patamares que conduziam aos saguões térreos do aeroporto de Congonhas e gritei-lhe:

— Venha comigo... eu lhe dou carona...

Ela me respondeu com um novo brilho no olhar, um brilho de faca que já gotejara seu sangue de vingança:

— Não, obrigada, a minha turma me espera.

ATÉ QUE PONTO UMA CRIANÇA É INOCENTE?

A vagina é oca. Nela cabe a mão inteira. A minha coube. Senti-a entrando, penetrando, alargando caminho. Dedos unidos, espremidos. Todos. Dentro da vagina de Desirée. Socando, socando. Ela gemendo e eu assustada, mais do que isso, angustiada, ouvindo-a dizer, enquanto em minha mente uma cortina de pó branco rebrilhava, caindo como uma estranha chuva fina num prato de sopa:

— Mete mais, põe tudo, assim, nenen, com força . . . me rasga . . . faz forte.

Meu pulso doía, meus dedos lambuzavam-se, e pude até contornar com eles o útero. Meu braço parecia que ia enterrar-se todo naquela caverna úmida que era como uma boca ardente e faminta sugando a minha mão.

O corpo dela agitava-se num ritmo sinuoso das cadeiras e simultaneamente eu lambia-lhe o ventre e o mais que podia, alcançando, com a língua esticada, o seu clitóris. Já me doía a garganta, até a raiz da língua. Os músculos dos cantos da boca, que prendem a língua à mandíbula, doíam tanto que já estava se tornando difícil estirá-la.

Em nós havia um cheiro de resto de noite carnavalesca, poeira, lança-perfume, cerveja e sexo.

Desirée revirou os olhos, gritou, fez gestos obscenos, disse palavrões e outras tantas delirantes exaltações, das quais depreendi o coito, o ato sexual com homem.

— Descarrega... agora... esporra... me dá o seu leitinho... põe tudo dentro de mim... me-te...

Eu estava mais chocada do que excitada, e, sob o comando incentivador da bela e fogosa Rainha do Carnaval, dava aos impulsos do braço toda a potência de um membro cavalariço, que não cuspiu o que ela pediu, que socava dentro com a mão fechada, enchendo-lhe a vagina enquanto ela se agitava e se sacudia para chegar ao máximo do orgasmo. Cheguei a imaginar, num momento de loucura, que pelas pontas dos dedos o braço estava prestes a ejacular.

— Tira... tira... está me machucando... você meteu até o pulso... tarada... me chupa... chupa a minha b...

Era desse modo que eu valia para ela, como homossexual no sexo. E ela prendeu a minha cabeça com suas roliças coxas, movimentando o corpo com um ritmo frenético.

Gozou, estrebuchou, rolou na cama. Estava empapada de suor, saciada, e ainda mais histérica pelo que lhe surgiu à mente quando a embriaguez do gozo acabou e a modorra do após se fez.

Olhou bem para mim. Saltou da cama, agarrou a fantasia com gestos nervosos e rápidos, e, sem se lavar, subiu o *collant cancan* pelas coxas, pedindo que eu abotoasse os colchetes.

O seu desespero, a sua aflição eram inenarráveis. Nenhuma carícia que eu pudesse lhe fazer adiantaria.

Levei-a embora. Ressabiada, ela ficou olhando para o terceiro andar do edifício onde morava. Já constataria que o "coronel" estava no apartamento, esperando-a. Vira o carro de Manville estacionado ali na rua e vacilava. Inventava desculpas para enganá-lo.

— Será que eu vou ser a rainha?

Bufei. Era demais para a minha paciência e educação. Debrucei o corpo e estendi a mão para abrir a porta do lado dela:

— Vá saber.

Ela me olhou indignada e como se não compreendesse a minha incompreensão.

— Isso é muito importante para mim. Será um início de carreira, entende? Fotos para revistas, comerciais para televisão, filmes, novelas...

— Vá vender a sua beleza pro seu coalhada. Eu não tenho leitinho pra esse vaginão.

Aí ela me olhou chocada e curiosa:

— O que você disse?

— Nada. Vá depressa, antes que a coalhada do velho vire queijo.

Ela saltou do carro e bateu a porta com raiva. Eu a ofendera e assustara com a minha repentina agressividade. Assim mesmo ainda me olhou com uma expressão de quem pergunta: "O que eu digo pra ele?" Como eu continuasse em silêncio, estalou os lábios, nervosa, tentando ter uma idéia que enrolasse o homem.

Caindo de sono e decepcionada, eu analisava Desirée, achando-a vulgar e oca como a sua vagina, onde a minha mão coubera inteira. Meus dedos

ainda estavam amortecidos pela pressão. Ela custava a gozar e parecia precisar ser machucada para chegar ao orgasmo. Não acreditei que houvesse no mundo um membro capaz de satisfazê-la, tão larga era a sua vagina, surpreendi-me balançando a cabeça, admirada com isso, enquanto ela se mostrava perturbada e aflita, inventando a sua história para ludibriar o amante. Na certa, iria dizer que fora seqüestrada por uma da *gang* que o agredira.

Ela era sacana, e percebi que eu seria sempre apenas um instrumento para satisfazer taras e desvios de mulheres como Desirée, que não se chamava Desirée coisa nenhuma. Era uma simples Maria Rosa da Silva.

Antes que eu me arrancasse dali, ela, que já dera alguns passos, afastando-se, voltou se equilibrando nos saltos finos das extravagantes botas de verniz preto e debruçou-se na janelinha, beijando-me na boca com ímpeto.

— Não fique zangada, Flávia, você é uma delícia. Eu preciso dele pra chegar aonde quero, só isso. Quando a gente se vê de novo? Vá ao Arakan assistir à minha coroação, se é que o desgraçado vai engolir a mentira. Você vai?

— Pra ser barrada?

— Solte os cabelos. Você disfarça bem, não vá de Zorro. Eu dou um jeito de falar com você lá no toalete.

— Tá bem.

Outra vez os saltinhos ressoando na calçada, o arranco do carro, a ida para casa, decepcionada. Fora apenas uma madrugada de sexo. E só ela saíra saciada, eu a zero, mão doendo, cheirando a algo ácido que ativara as papilas gustativas e toda a ramificação nervosa da língua, que parecia con-

ter em si toda uma rede elétrica em curto-circuito. Degustei o sabor da flor negra com cheiro de lança-perfume. Uma flor macia de pelinhos negros, que parecia tão pequena mas que abrigava tanto!

Passei em frente ao hotel Rialto, onde havíamos estado, e, só pra fazer alguma coisa de louca que satisfizesse o meu ego constrangido, gargalhei alto e exclamei, ainda admirada com o que fizera:

— Que puta vaginão!

Por que as mulheres vinham com a gente, ficavam doidas pra se envolver, pra ter um caso, mas não dispensavam os homens, mesmo, que a gente pudesse sustentá-las? Seria vício mesmo? E por que isso não acontecia comigo? A maioria tinha “coronel”, andava com homem, já fora casada — pra disfarçar, diziam — mas diante dos homens se comportavam como verdadeiras donzelas indefesas necessitando de apoio. Por que eu só tinha inclinação e atração por mulher? Haveria no mundo pelo menos uma única lésbica passiva genuína que nunca tivesse deitado com homem e nem sequer o usasse para disfarçar e enganar a sociedade pelo que era?

As passivas que eu conhecera desde os meus primeiros contatos e relacionamentos com homossexuais, todas, sem exceção, haviam tido experiência com homens, todas haviam sido defloradas. Onde estavam as virgens? Eu não conhecia nenhuma. Só adolescentes, neófitas, indecisas ou indefinidas, medrosas ou meticulosas, tentando ocultar suas tendências; namorando e espremendo-se com rapazes nas árvores, nos muros, nos becos, nas aulas práticas de sexo, mesmo quando espichavam para mim um olhar inconfundível de identificação. Uma lésbica nunca enganava outra lésbica, por

mais sutil que fosse em ocultar sua tendência, isso eu podia jurar — e aí da mulher que caísse sob a mira do meu olhar, não escapava. Ou por curiosidade ou por sem-vergonhice mesmo, o certo é que ia para a cama comigo. Tudo sexo. Asas de borboletas peludas e negras batendo sempre na vertigem do gozo e no vôo do desejo.

Aquela assertiva já começava a inculcar definitivamente em minha mente a conformação de que para as lésbicas só restavam mesmo as prostitutas. Mordí com raiva a palavra: prostitutas! Todas as mulheres! Coitados de quem? Dos homens enganados ou das lésbicas genuínas como eu?

.....

Não fui ao Arakan. Fui ao Palmeiras. Fiquei assistindo à folia. Eu não queria e não podia me expor. Não dancei e voltei cedo para casa. Mulheres flertaram comigo, homens convidaram-me para brincar. Achei todas as mulheres vulgares e senti pena dos homens que passavam com elas diante de mim, conforme ia identificando-as. Todas hipócritas e egoístas. Foi uma revolta que me abateu. E o amor? O que era o amor? Parecia que ele estava soterrado sob asas negras de borboletas agitadas querendo ser sugadas por flores. Tudo invertendo dentro de mim, tudo caindo no amargo poço da frustração.

Congas, botas, sapatos, sapatões e sandálias, numa dança frenética, erguendo poeira. Pés sujos, que me irritaram.

Voltou com força o poder da sandália de Kênia sobre mim. Era como se eu tivesse a minha vida amarrada nela.

Não sei por que chorei nessa madrugada, abraçada à sandália, beijando-a, sentindo-me regredir no tempo e acomodar-me fofamente entre os deliciosos seios de Kênia. Era uma doce recordação, que suavizava a brutalidade da vida, a insensibilidade das outras mulheres e o significado do sexo.

Sexo. Só sexo. Tudo sexo. Mas da lembrança de Kênia ressaltava um carinho maior e único que eu nunca conseguira substituir por outro sentimento. O meu fantasma erótico. O meu brinquedo de criança. Ela era a ilusão colorida do meu secreto mundo infantil, com o seu pirata mau, que não gostava de bichos e nem de mim — seu Eduardo, sempre com aquela expressão carregada de quem estava de mal com a vida e desconfiado de todos e de tudo.

Como estaria ela? Eu nem sequer sabia a sua idade. Podia calcular, de lembrança, pelo seu aspecto, que devia ter naquela época uns vinte e três anos. Ou mais? E já se haviam passado quinze anos desde que ela saíra no fordeco velho com o homem que a levara embora para nunca mais voltar.

O nome de Kênia nunca fora sequer balbuciado por mim, nem mesmo quando mamãe falava sobre antigos vizinhos. Eu só ficava escutando, o coração doendo e uma curiosidade sempre alerta para saber coisas a respeito de Kênia.

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* *

Na primeira página do *Notícias Populares* eu vi a cara de Desirée com o seu sorriso doce, nascido da sua fascinação por ser modelo e acabar

artista de TV e de cinema. Ela seria capaz de tudo, até de agüentar aquele velho branquicelo. Como conseguia segurá-lo, com aquele vaginão? O que me veio à mente encheu-me de repulsa. Desirée devia ter muitas outras habilidades. Meu olhar se fixou no seu sorriso doce. E os seus lábios, belos, polpudos, macios e obscenos, como que me contaram tudo.

Ela fora eleita Rainha do Arakan e eu me senti um *clown*.

Mamãe entrou no meu quarto. Contei-lhe uma enfiada de mentiras e, de repente, prestei atenção ao que ela tentava me dizer. Perguntei por perguntar, pois eu nunca me interessava pelos assuntos do pessoal de casa.

— O que a senhora disse?

— Você nem imagina quem esteve ontem à noite aqui em casa. Chegou logo depois que você saiu. Estava tão linda! Mais bonita do que nunca, e tão simpática! Não esqueceu da gente. Perguntou muito sobre você. Queria saber se já casara, o que estava estudando, se trabalhava, tudo, adivinha quem?

— Nem calculo. A Neide? A primeira namoradinha do Renato?

— Kênia.

Fiquei sem fala. Acho que houve uma implosão em mim. Um impacto emocional tão grande que me senti uma menina de sete anos sob os frangalhos de uma mulher que se desmembrava em mil pedaços.

Mamãe não percebeu ou não entendeu, ou talvez a emoção não transparecesse em minha fisionomia. Dentro de mim, um vendaval revolucionava tudo. A voz de mamãe parecia uma canção de ninar

fazendo fundo musical para um mundo secreto que escancarava as suas portas.

— Ah! Você nem se lembra, era uma garotinha ainda. Mas sei que a adorava. Era com ela que a gente a deixava quando precisava sair, você se lembra?

— Não, eu não me lembro — acho que falei, ou tentei mentir. Mamãe continuava falando, emocionada e alegre:

— Quinze anos passados! Puxa! Kênia já está com quarenta e um anos. Coitada! Como sofreu!

A expressão e a voz de mamãe mudaram e tudo dentro de mim como que se refez. A idéia de que Kênia tivesse sofrido tanto quanto a inflexão na voz de mamãe revelava preocupou-me.

— Você nem pode imaginar que desgraça! Como essas coisas podem acabar assim? Ela ficou viúva.

— Isso?!

Acho que na indignação da minha voz havia uma certa euforia de repentina felicidade.

— Foi muito triste e trágico; mais que isso, foi algo absurdo! Eduardo não devia ter feito o que fez. Foi horrível!

— Mas, afinal, o que foi que aconteceu?

— Ele se suicidou. Com tantos meios que poderia ter usado, sendo médico, foi fazer algo que dá até arrepio! O seu Eduardo tinha câncer, um dos piores carcinomas, estava desenganado. Você não lembra porque era muito pequena para atentar para essas coisas. Eles se desfizeram de tudo o que tinham. iam viajar para a Itália, onde ele seria submetido a um tratamento com um médico que estava fazendo fama pelas curas que conseguia. Seu Eduardo não acreditava e por isso fez o que

fez. Ele deveria ter sido menos precipitado ou ter calculado melhor a coisa, para morrer em casa e não dirigindo o carro, pondo em risco a vida não só de Kênia, mas de tanta gente. Acho que ficou louco. A dor e a certeza da morte próxima enlouqueceram-no.

— A senhora está me intrigando. O que ele fez?

— Você já vai entender. Eles sofreram um violento acidente aqui mesmo, pertinho, na Avenida Brasil, logo após terem deixado a casa. Tinham vindo despedir-se de nós, você até ficou sentadinha na escada olhando eles irem embora. O que acontece é que ele não morreu do acidente, nem do câncer. É uma coisa até misteriosa. E gozado mesmo, como a gente nunca ficou sabendo de nada até a vinda de Kênia aqui... Pobre mulher, sofreu uma barbaridade! O que passou! Você precisava ouvi-la contando. Uma desgraça!

Fui entendendo e revivendo aquele tempo, com as tripas, o coração, o sangue, tudo doendo dentro de mim, numa contração de horror. A garotinha precoce, ciumenta, esperta, e que gostava de brincar de gatinho, era um pequeno monstro — o monstrinho polimorfo, como Freud classificava tão bem as crianças. Tive horror de mim, medo, susto. Sim, susto. O que mais poderia sentir senão um grande susto, que me esfrangalhava?

As lâmpadas, socadas até virar pozinho branco. A chuva fininha de vidro moído caindo no prato de sopa. Eu era uma criminosa em potencial! Isso doeu em minha mente. Mas eu só tinha sete anos! Eu era inteiramente incapaz de entender o caráter criminoso do fato ou de determinar-me de acordo com esse entendimento, e me excluía da responsabilidade penal devido à minha idade na ocasião.

Então, segundo o Código Penal, eu estava livre, mas por outro lado seria preciso examinar psicologicamente o problema e a minha real irresponsabilidade! Isso era medicina legal. Se tivesse caído em prova na faculdade, eu não lembraria com tanta exatidão, mas o medo, o pavor de mim mesma e do que estava entendendo que fizera aguçaram-me a memória, e o instinto de defesa me trouxe a segurança de que eu nunca poderia responder por tal crime. Nunca! Meus lábios estavam selados. Se Kênia tivesse desconfiado de algo e me acusado, eu não estaria ali, ou talvez quem sabe o que teria acontecido comigo! A aflição doía em minha cabeça.

Essas coisas todas estavam bem vivas em meu consciente. O que eu fizera estava bem vivo em minha memória, mas nunca me ferira por parecer apenas uma peraltice, uma maldade inocente de uma criança que queria se vingar do homem de cara de mau que não gostava de mim nem da Bibi, uma maldade que eu pensara não tivera consequências graves. Agora eu já não era apenas uma criança que sofria e que via em seu Eduardo o seu mais terrível inimigo — eu era a sua assassina.

Eu não tinha noção nem sentido da gravidade do que estava fazendo. Era apenas uma criança emotiva, induzida a uma atitude maldosa por impulso emocional, por uma paixão, por um estranho sentimento que me levou a vingar-me do homem que para mim era a pior pessoa do mundo, o monstro do meu mundo infantil. Se ele descobrisse as brincadeiras de gatinho! Eu sabia o que ele iria fazer. Kênia me avisara. Minha cabecinha, povoada de amor e de pavor! Uma tenra cabecinha sem noção do que era vida e do que era morte.

Uma agulhada fria de medo ministrou como que veneno de cobra pelo meu corpo todo. Era inacreditável! O que eu fizera! E fora diabolicamente intencional.

Me vi andando pela casa de Kênia, menininha esperta, o capetinha disfarçado na criança que todos achavam bonita, obediente e quieta, que se engolfava no silêncio da sua dor oculta, com os seus sentidos ativos e eróticos velados pela desculpa da inocência, o monstrinho que lambia as pernas de Kênia, que lhe sugava os seios, que se excitava com sandálias que viraram fetiches no simbolismo de um amor imorredouro, do mito, do maior sentimento que uma criatura pode ter até chegar ao clímax, ao paroxismo de todas as suas emoções. O monstrinho tirando as lâmpadas dos abajures da casa, enquanto observava Kênia encaixotando as coisas. Colocando-as no guardanapo com o qual ela me dera um pedaço de bolo e um copo de leite.

Minhas idéias ficaram confusas. Meu pensamento desfiou lembranças perturbadoras, num delírio de verdades que gritavam pavor dentro de mim.

Meu Deus! O que eu fizera! Meu Deus! O quanto eu amara! amara!

Kênia estava ajoelhada, guardando louças num caixote. Ouvi-a murmurar, embevecida, fitando uma baixela de prata, que era muito triste desfazer-se de suas coisas. Sua tristeza feriu-me e eu pensei que nunca mais teria Kênia para mim. Eram as suas últimas horas naquela casa, que depois, iria ficar vazia — e eu não dormiria mais com Kênia. Talvez mamãe me deixasse na casa da gorda dona Dulce quando precisasse sair, e ela me entonteceria com os seus famosos e fedorentos puns.

Aproximei-me de Kênia e, no único jeito que eu tinha pra demonstrar a minha dor, miei baixinho e pousei as minhas mãozinhas sobre os seus arfantes seios.

Ela ficou me olhando, pensativa. Um olhar grande, foi o que pensei olhando pros olhos dela quando a senti me encarando daquele jeito que quase me deixou com medo. Seus lábios separaram-se lentamente e ela perguntou, com voz tão estranha quanto a expressão do seu rosto:

— Você quer brincar de gatinho?

Exultante, fiz sinal que sim. Ela não comentou nada, apenas pegou-me pela mão e me levou para o quartinho no fundo da casa. Deitou-se na cama que havia lá. Seria que a gente ia dormir? Espichou-se na cama. Quieta, olhando para mim, além de mim, como se atravessasse o meu corpo. Bateu a mão no colchão para que eu deitasse ao seu lado. Subi na cama e ela tirou os seios para fora da blusa, que desabotoou, levando-os com as mãos para a minha boca:

— Quer mamar? Tá com vontade? Brinque com eles, chupe bastante, faça de conta que está saindo leitinho quente.

Lambi os lábios e senti as mãos dela segurando os seios contra mim para que eu os mamasse. Tirei as suas mãos e agarrei-os com as minhas diabólicas mãozinhas. Minha boca arrepanhou o bico teso e comecei a sugá-lo como um bebezinho faminto enquanto ela tirava a roupa e suspirava, movimentando-me sobre o seu corpo, onde me colocou, erguendo-me e abraçando-me com força contra si. Eu ia me movimentando em cima de Kênia conforme ela me dirigia, até que senti no meu rosto

os tufo de pêlos que descobri entre as suas coxas. Fiquei assustada, mas ela me explicou:

— Mame aí, queridinha... na sua gata peludinha, procura que você acha uma tetinha gostosa... a mais gostosa... é pequenininha como a tetinha da Bibi, mas é a mais gostosa... passa a língua... procure... assim... assim... achou... achou... mame agora, mame tudo... bastante...

Eu achei. Por absurdo que possa parecer, por inexplicável que seja, eu sabia o que estava fazendo, e agia incansavelmente até chegar ao fim, ou seja, quando a gata urrasse e se contorcesse.

Dessa vez, ela espremeu a minha cabeça com as coxas com tal força e desespero que eu comecei a chorar, pensando que ela quisesse me machucar castigando-me por algo errado que eu fizera. Ela sentou rápido, tirou-me de entre as suas suadas e deliciosas coxas que quase me haviam estrangulado, abraçou-me aflita e beijou-me muito, chamando-me de queridinha, agradando-me para que eu parasse de chorar, pois eu pusera o bocão no mundo feito sirene de ambulância. Disse que fora sem querer, que não era castigo, não, eu não fizera nada de errado, afagava-me, friccionava meu rosto, desfiava beijos pelas minhas faces úmidas de lágrimas; enxugou-as, riu, brincou, até que eu entendi que fora sem querer, um acidente que ocorrera durante a perigosa brincadeira.

Kênia depois pareceu nervosa e irritada. Disse que seria melhor eu ir para casa, mas quando eu fiz beicinho para chorar de novo ela suspirou, sem alternativa, e me deixou ficar.

Recomeçou a encaixotar o resto das coisas. Estava satisfeita. Eu, não. Criança não cansa nunca. Tem uma energia capaz de vencer qualquer

atleta. Até me lembro de uma história sobre Deus e o diabo. Deus queria castigar o demônio e não sabia como. Isso era impossível! E o demônio ria e cabriolava, dizendo desaforos e desafiando Deus a encontrar um castigo para ele. Absurdo, parece! Mão no queixo, quase desanimado, Deus ouviu risadas e folia de crianças que brincavam ali perto de onde os dois se enfrentavam. Sorriu sarcástico e, vitorioso, ordenou ao demônio:

— Já sei, vá brincar com aquelas crianças até quando elas queiram.

Antevendo seu fim pelo esgotamento, o diabo ajoelhou-se aos pés de Deus e suplicou aflito pelo perdão. Faria qualquer coisa, tudo, menos isso; que Deus tivesse piedade e o livrasse do castigo de ter que brincar com aquelas crianças tão cheias de vida e de maldade ingênua.

Kênia teve um sobressalto quando, me estirando no chão, me meti por baixo da sua roupa, rindo e estendendo as mãos para os tufos de pêlos entre as suas coxas.

— O gatinho ainda tá com fome.

Eu mexia e remexia lá, curiosa e excitada pela libidinosa brincadeira com aquelas “coisas” proibidas, e Kênia ajeitava-se e punha-se de modo a que minha mão chegasse até onde ela queria. De repente, ela juntou meus dedinhos, olhou bem nos meus olhos e foi dirigindo minha mão e me ensinando, ao mesmo tempo que falava:

É a última vez que a gente pode brincar de gatinho, por isso hoje vai ser muito bom... você gosta de mexer aí?

— Gosto sim, gosto de mexer em tudo de você.

— Então põe a mão aí... entra com ela devagarinho... assim... vai empurrando lá para den-

tro sem abrir os dedinhos, para não me machucar, viu? Tá entendendo? Assim... que menininha boazinha você é...

E foi enfiando a minha mão em sua vagina, enquanto me olhava com uns olhos cheios de sono, assim quase fechando as pálpebras, a boca semi-aberta, suspirando e remexendo as cadeiras como se dançasse um samba lento, dando nas cadeiras, primeiro devagarinho, depois bem agitada; eu olhava para as suas coxas separadas, vendo tudo dela. Tudo! E me fascinava.

Ela dizia coisas que eu não entendia e ia rebolando os quadris, pros lados, pra frente e pra trás, sentada no chão, e se ajeitava para que eu fizesse as coisas do modo como ela me ensinava, colocando-me entre as suas pernas, separando aqueles lábios cheios de pelinhos crespos para a gente brincar de gatinho e eu mamar na tetinha nova que achara ali.

Ela não me deixou tirar a mão lá de dentro e meti-a mais fundo, até o pulso. Dirigia os movimentos do meu bracinho com cuidado para não me machucar e excitar-se mais, enquanto eu lambia e sugava o botãozinho escondido entre os dois gominhos peludos que ela esfregava na minha cara, muito animada e empolgada com a brincadeira.

E a brincadeira acabou com gemidos longos e estalos dos seus lábios sôfregos, como se estivesse doendo; quando a campainha tocou, ela ficou de pé, ofegante e com medo.

— Não conte pra ninguém, nunca, viu, Flávia? Ninguém pode saber dessa brincadeira de gatinho, só nós duas. É o nosso segredo, você promete? Esquece isso que fizemos, porque eu vou embora pra muito longe e o Eduardo bate em você e em mim

se descobrir que a gente fica brincando dessas coisas. Você jura que não conta pra ninguém?

Cruzei os dedos sobre os lábios e beijei-os, jurando com ardor e convicção. Era o nosso segredo. Meu e de Kênia, que eu adorava tanto, a mulher mais linda e boazinha do mundo. Era a fada encantada do meu mundo infantil, a coisa mais maravilhosa da minha vida.

Insistiam tocando a campainha e ela gritou para esperar. Lavou o meu rosto na pia da cozinha, erguendo-me no colo, e riu quando eu ainda dei uma lambida em seu seio antes que ela abotoasse a blusa e promettesse que mais tarde, se o seu Eduardo, que fora ao Banco, demorasse, a gente brincaria de novo, só mais um pouquinho, como eu insisti, segurando-a pela saia, andando atrás dela como um cachorrinho quando foi abrir a porta.

Era um negrão, o homem do caminhão de mudança. Vi os seus olhos comerem num segundo o corpo bonito de Kênia sob o vestido azul com florezinhas miúdas de todas as cores.

Kênia fingiu não perceber ou não ligou para o olhar do negrão, que a seguiu, tesudo.

Um cãozinho latiu lá da boléia do caminhão e o negrão gritou para ele, rindo para mim:

— Pera aí, machão!

O cãozinho parecia com a Bibi. Foi então que comecei a tirar as lâmpadas dos abajures que estavam ainda em cima dos caixotes, antes que o negrão os levasse para o caminhão. Sobre o guardanapo, que sacudi para tirar os farelos do bolo que eu comera, comecei a socar as lâmpadas com o salto da sandália de Kênia. O couro estava gasto e o metal esmigalhava o vidro fino e transparente.

Eu moía com cuidado, num trabalho de mestre, para transformar aquilo em pó.

Na minha cabecinha, eu via Bibi inchada, caída no jardim de casa. Haviam dado bolinho de carne com vidro moído para ela.

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A CRIANÇA É O VERDADEIRO "MONSTRO SAGRADO"

E fui moendo as lâmpadas, que eram especiais para o meu intento maquiavélico e frágeis para as minhas não menos frágeis mãos, depois de tentar moer cacos de garrafas sem conseguir.

O pozinho branco foi enchendo o guardanapo. Fiz o meu pacotinho e fiquei rondando, quando o doutor chegou com a sua cara azeda para almoçar e levar Kênia embora daquela casa e de mim para sempre.

Ele sempre demonstrava desagrado quando me encontrava lá e procurava disfarçar tal sentimento passando a mão pela minha cabeça. Eu odiava aquele gesto e desviava o corpo, olhando para ele com os olhos apertadinhos, como se assim conseguisse esmagar sua figura entre os cílios de aço dos meus fantásticos olhos. Eu pensava assim. Incrível, a fantasia do absurdo mundo da criança, mas eu apertava os olhos para olhar pro seu Eduardo com todo o rancor que existia dentro de mim por ele.

Um caldeirão fumegava no fogão. Seria o último almoço na casa; depois, eles se despediriam dos vizinhos e iriam embora. O caminhão de mu-

dança já estava carregado. E eu achei a lâmpada fluorescente jogada no quintal. Moí. Junto com as outras. Eu ia matar um homem que não ficava com a língua dependurada pra fora da boca como cachorro ofegante, mas que me fazia careta e me mostrava a língua quando Kênia não estava olhando; depois, disfarçava, dizendo que estava brincando, que não era bicho-papão, mas eu sentia que ele não gostava de mim e que nós dois éramos os mais absurdos inimigos. Eu era parà ele o capeta, e ele, o inimigo em potencial.

Zanzei pela casa com o saquinho feito de guardanapo preso pelas pontas, cheio de vidro de lâmpadas moídas. Meu tenro bracinho estava doendo de tanto socar pra deixar feito farinha. Depois, ao socar alguma coisa, eu sempre fazia uma certa comparação com o ato de moer vidro, e via em minha mente a cortina de pó esbranquiçado e brilhante caindo num prato de sopa, mas era apenas a lembrança desagradável e curiosa de uma peraltice maldosa da infância. A atitude inocente de uma criança superemocionada que ia perder a pessoa que mais amava no mundo.

Kênia me chamou com carinho, não como se eu fosse o instrumento sexual que a fizera gozar, cheia de horror e tesão por sua coragem e falta de escrúpulos eu usar uma criança para saciar seus desejos reprimidos por causa de um marido doente e frio, mas como uma pessoa adulta se dirige a uma criança, cheia de dengo e meiguice:

— Quer um prato de sopa?

— Não, mamãe está fazendo uma coisa gostosa para mim hoje.

Kênia passou a mão macia e perfumada pela minha cabeça e eu quase ronronei feito um gatinho

mimado. Os pratos fumegantes de sopa passaram sob o meu nariz.

Seu Eduardo sentou num caixote na cozinha e pegou o prato que Kênia lhe estendeu. Ele seguia rigoroso regime alimentar.

— Graças a Deus, o nosso último almoço aqui — exclamou, olhando para mim, feliz por ir embora.

Apareceu o negrão na porta da cozinha perguntando se podia ir embora com o caminhão, se faltava alguma coisa ainda. Kênia apontou o caixote onde seu Eduardo estava sentado. Ele pôs o prato de sopa no chão, perto de mim, e se levantou. O negrão pegou o caixote como se erguesse uma trouxa de roupa e colocou-o no ombro musculoso. Seu Eduardo meteu a mão no bolso e tirou dinheiro pra dar a ele. Eu abri o guardanapo sobre o seu prato de sopa e saí correndo. Ouvi Kênia dizer:

— Pobre menina, está chorando, ela adora a gente.

Mamãe me viu chegar ofegante e eu disse a ela que dona Kênia e seu Eduardo já iam embora. Sentei no alto da escada de casa e fiquei esperando pra ver quando eles saíssem.

O caminhão partiu, com o cãozinho latindo. Kênia e seu Eduardo foram até minha casa para as últimas despedidas. Kênia me beijou no rosto e eu pensei, dando uma última chupadinha no lóbulo da sua orelha: "Nunca mais a gente vai brincar de gatinho."

No rosto de seu Eduardo parecia haver um sorriso mefistofélico, entre contrações de dor ou de escárnio; sentia-se vitorioso por me deixar ali, longe deles para sempre. Ele se livrava de mim, do meu olhar apertadinho que o esmagava, daquela

sensação fria e de antipatia que nos transmitíamos. Eu o encarei e vi os seus dentes como presas de animal: em vez de sorrir, rangiam e rosnavam para mim.

.....

Mamãe me contou tudo. O caso fora abafado pela família de Kênia, que era muito influente, toda de deputados, senadores, coisas que eu não entendia naquela época. Gente da política, de poder.

Quando o automóvel dirigido por seu Eduardo atingira a avenida, ele se sentira mal e desmaiara sobre o volante, calcando o pé no acelerador com o impacto do corpo ao cair. O carro foi arremessado contra outros automóveis, indo chocar-se finalmente com o muro de uma residência. Os dois foram socorridos e levados para o Hospital das Clínicas. Seu Eduardo, com violenta hemorragia, faleceu na ambulância. Dona Kênia, em estado de coma, com escoriações e fraturas, ficou na UTI vários dias.

Pela autópsia do corpo de seu Eduardo, constataram além do avançado estágio da doença fatal, a *causa mortis*: ingestão de vidro moído, do que resultara a ruptura de vasos sanguíneos e artérias, provocando violenta hemorragia, além de envenenamento decorrente das substâncias tóxicas contidas nos vidros moídos, identificados como de lâmpadas comuns e fluorescentes.

Naturalmente pela evidência de suicídio, o caso foi encerrado. O estado avançado da doença sem cura, o fim esperado, a tortura da dor haviam levado seu Eduardo à loucura e ao suicídio.

Kênia viajara depois para a casa dos pais, em Brasília, e nunca dera notícias porque custara a se refazer do choque. Nunca mais saíra de Brasília e só então, nessa primeira viagem a São Paulo em quinze anos, decidira visitar minha família e contar-lhe a sua trágica história.

Fiquei estarelecida. Com medo. Atônita. Até que ponto uma criança de sete anos é inocente? Até que entenda que não se mata um homem como se mata um cão? A criança é o verdadeiro "monstro sagrado". Perdoai-a sempre!

Tentei vencer minhas emoções e não deixei transparecer o que me perturbava. Era uma aflição terrível. Foi realmente uma sensação aniquiladora e angustiante. Eu não podia aceitar a idéia de que era uma criminosa, de que, friamente, calculadamente, aos sete anos de idade, praticara o mais hediondo crime. Matara um homem como se mata um cão. Matara por raiva e por ciúme. Por um sentimento que exorbitara para o domínio da paixão que monopolizou minha vida afetiva. E essa paixão foi a minha mais vigorosa força espiritual.

Quando Kênia e seu Eduardo foram embora no fordeco, eu ficara olhando, decepcionada e triste porque ele não caíra morto e com a barriga estufada como a minha cachorrinha encontrada no jardim. Fora Renato quem a encontrara, logo deduzindo que lhe haviam dado bolinho de carne com vidro moído e que quem fizera aquilo era um monstro, um grande filho da puta.

Eu chorei muito quando vi Bibi durinha e inchada, e de pronto me veio à cabeça que fora seu Eduardo. Uma vez, eu o vira sacudir a perna com raiva e jogar Bibi longe, porque ela agarrara a barra da sua calça com os dentes, rasgando-a. Bibi

não gostava dele. Acho que eu lhe transmitia a minha antipatia, e ela sempre latia, rosnavava e mostrava os dentes para ele. Meu irmão Renato também achou que fora o seu Eduardo quem matara Bibi.

Recapitulei tudo, enquanto mamãe fazia comentários a respeito da fatalidade que se abatera sobre Kênia pela morte estúpida de seu Eduardo. O pobre homem vivia amargurado, sofria muito, tinha dores incríveis. Sem dúvida alguma enlouquecera, para chegar a fazer aquilo, pondo em risco a vida de tanta gente; em sã consciência, não teria agido daquele jeito. Ou calculara mal e pretendia deixar Kênia em algum lugar antes que a coisa fizesse efeito.

Kênia tivera que fazer várias plásticas na perna e no rosto. Não, não ficara marca nenhuma, garantia mamãe, ela nem sequer mancava; continuava elegante e linda. Aliás, estava mais bonita. Meu coração doía e minhas idéias atropelavam-se, tumultuadas.

Teria Kênia rememorado tudo o que acontecera naquela tarde, quando ela encaixotava as coisas? Teria lembrado que me vira socando as lâmpadas no guardanapo? Que drama em sua mente! Ela jamais poderia fazer comentário algum sobre aquele dia sem condenar a si própria pelo que houvera entre nós.

Realmente, Kênia devia ter sofrido muito e passado maus pedaços até que fosse encerrado o caso, com a morte do seu marido sendo considerado suicídio por desespero de causa, por enlouquecimento de dor e de tortura ante a certeza de que tinha pouco tempo de vida.

Kênia poderia ter morrido no acidente, outras pessoas também! Tive horror de mim. O que teria passado pela cabeça de Kênia naqueles dias terríveis em que entendera o que eu fizera? Sentir-se-ia culpada por ter feito aquelas coisas comigo? Como acusar friamente, de libidinagem e crime premeditado, uma criança de sete anos? E as brincadeiras de gatinho? Teria sido tudo recitado pelos lábios febris de uma criança apaixonada ou eu realmente não deixara escapar nada, selando os lábios com a cruz feita pelos dedinhos quando jurara guardar segredo? Kênia devia ter vivido numa tortura, cheia de medo, tensão e expectativa.

Agora, Kênia queria me ver, saber como eu estava, mamãe lhe mostrara fotografias. Disse que Kênia me achara bonita. Eu quis saber tudo, se ela realmente me achara bonita, se de fato insistira ao me convidar para ir vê-la, se estava esperando minha visita. A tudo mamãe disse que sim, sem desconflar de nada — como poderia? Ficou feliz e me ajudou a escolher roupa para ir visitar Kênia. Por que eu não punha um vestido? Blue jeans era a moda padrão, a que vencera, a que fazia da gente um tipo mais descontraído e bem vestido para qualquer ocasião.

Kênia queria me ver! Delirei! Gostava de mim como se eu fosse...o quê? O instrumento que saciara sua sede de sexo nos dias de sofrimento, agüentando um marido doente, ou o instrumento que a livrara dele mais depressa que o curto tempo de vida dele prometia? Kênia não teria tais sentimentos negativos e egoístas. Devia estar ainda atônita com as conseqüências de tudo, e acreditar que o seu destino fora negro e estranho. Talvez ela quisesse me ver para ler nos meus olhos que real-

mente tudo aquilo acontecera e que eu realmente fizera o que ela não queria ainda acreditar tivesse uma menina de sete anos capacidade para realizar com tanta perfeição. O crime perfeito. O crime sem condenação. O crime jamais descoberto. Praticado por uma homossexual de sete anos apenas. O crime pelo qual eu jamais seria condenada.

Eu entendia agora as loucuras de Kênia. Pressa a um homem cujo tempo de vida, pela doença, servia como argumento para escravizá-la. Kênia não queria magoar o marido, por pena, por sentimento, por respeito, mas o seu corpo pedia sexo e o marido estava acabado. Minhas mãozinhas libidinosas, minha fascinação pelas suas pernas, minha loucura pelos seus pés enfeitados pelas sandálias, minhas lambidinhas em suas pernas, as oportunidades que faziam clima para ela se excitar haviam sido mais fortes e poderosas do que a sua resistência e a sua moral, e demais para a sua necessidade, por isso ela fizera das nossas brincadeiras de gatinho a sua válvula de escape. Com isso, induzira-me inconscientemente ao ódio pelo marido, de quem eu desconfiava como sendo o autor da morte de Bibi, e que ia levá-la embora de mim para sempre.

O que Kênia teria para me dizer? O que pretendia descobrir em mim? O que existiria em mim que, apenas olhando nos meus olhos, ela não descobrisse?

Não sei como me encontrei batendo no apartamento 21 do hotel. Não ouvi passos e me assustei quando a porta abriu.

Kênia! Finalmente. O mito. Diante dos meus olhos. O sonho de toda a minha vida. Meus olhos devorando o seu olhar.

Fascinação. Absurda emoção. Ficamos olhando uma para a outra. Ambas tremíamos. Falamos nossos nomes ao mesmo tempo. Ela se afastou, oferecendo passagem para que eu entrasse.

Flutuei sobre o carpete macio. Eu não me sentia. Eu não tinha vinte e dois anos, tinha sete. A caixa sob o meu braço continha a minha vida, na sandália de Kênia.

Senti. Entendi, li, ela me transmitiu, não era preciso dizer nada, ela confirmava tudo, entendia tudo, sentia tudo, como eu. Kênia estava emocionada e me achava bonita, interessante, mais que isso, excitante, único instrumento capaz de satisfazê-la.

Eu também tinha um significado importante para ela: amarrara a sua vida inteira na força da minha existência, não só pelo que houvera entre nós, mas pelo que eu fizera por um amor louco, jamais imaginado.

Mudas as duas no meio do quarto. Ela, linda na sua camisola longa de tecido transparente, os seios sempre emoldurados pelo decote, soltinhos lá dentro da névoa negra que a envolvia suavemente, embelezando o seu corpo. Meus olhos, os mesmos olhos, agora num olhar grande e faminto, colhiam-na toda.

Eu queria falar. Não sabia o que dizer. Ela queria dizer algo, inibia-se. Preferia que eu falasse, e na minha mente só vinham coisas de criança fixada em sandálias coloridas de tirinhas, como aquela que eu tirei de dentro da caixa, num gesto impensado, e lhe mostrei, como se fosse o apêndice de nossa vida. O saltinho gasto, o metal reluzente que amassara as lâmpadas. Calcei-o com o dedo da luva de borracha. Ela acompanhava o meu ges-

to e entendia. Eu sabia que ela estava entendendo tudo. Era o meu fetiche.

Beije a sandália, esfreguei-a pelo rosto. Não era preciso dizer nada. Lágrimas rolaram dos meus olhos e minha voz escorregou por entre os lábios, enquanto eu via sua língua acariciar os próprios lábios várias vezes, passando por eles significativamente, numa saudade e vontade de fazer loucuras. Chorei. Minha voz era algo assim muito triste, e roufenho, como lamento de gato agonizante:

— O que eu fiz?!

— Nada.

E outra vez me ouvi perguntando, e parecia mesmo um miado rouco e longo de gato na hora do cio:

— Vamos brincar de gatinho?

Eu estava concentrada no seu corpo, nos seus seios, nas suas coxas; a sandália em minha mão era o nosso apêndice, e eu, o criptandro, estendendo raízes fortes para envolvê-la.

Não seria possível distinguir essa emoção e paixão da loucura, tal o paroxismo a que chegamos.

O calor do seu corpo penetrou-me, num delírio de embriagadora volúpia.

As mãos nos seios, a boca na boca, a sandália entre os nossos corpos, o fetiche assassino, o fetiche estuprador, o fetiche simbólico que procurava seu esconderijo, o corpo que se movia para engolir o salto, a sandália metida entre os nossos corpos, rolando na cama, tecido rasgando, gemidos e palavras soltas, sem nexos, sôfregos e dolorosos, entre lágrimas e suor, pernas cruzando, coxas ajeltando-se, borboletas de asas negras entranhando-se numa dança frenética e sensual, numa fantasia que fez

uma criança virar mostro e uma mulher se sentir um anjo.

*
* *

E as perguntas continuaram renovando respostas a cada pensamento. Perguntas que torturam. Mas a gente vai seguindo, como borboletas sem rumo à procura de jardins.

Eu sou uma lésbica. Deve a sociedade rejeitar-me?

Uma criança que cometeu o mais chocante crime de amor de todos os séculos, como poderia ser condenada? Haveria castigo para ela? Julgamento? Até que ponto uma criança é inocente?

Em que situação uma homossexual deve ser rejeitada, compreendida ou aceita? Quando engana o homem com as suas dissimulações ou quando enfrenta a sociedade abertamente, sem esconder o que é?

*
* *

TRANSLATION

I am a Lesbian

Do you want to play pussy cats?

I remember it well. The legs surrounding me were not only the chairs'. They were women's legs as well. I was sitting on the floor under the table, staring at those legs in awe with curious eyes.

Nothing matched the dimensions of my body, but the sight of the things that surrounded me was extraordinary and gave deeper meaning to my childhood world.

There was also a special admiration for one pair of legs which fascinated me, because they were Miss Kênia's legs.

Miss Kênia was our closest neighbour and her husband was a doctor. Almost every afternoon, the neighbourhood ladies gathered at our place to chat once they were done with their household chores.

No one worried too much about me, because I was a girl who did not cause much trouble and did not require much attention or special care. Or so it seemed. Nice, quiet, and obedient.

The thing is, no one was interested in crossing the borders into my childhood world. No one cared to analyze the disharmony and the changes in the expression of my feelings, my aggressiveness, or my conflicts.

I was, like any child is, a different biological organism than an adult.

Nevertheless, my behaviour as a child now presents me with a series of facts which definitely serve as fundamental principles to determine my nature and personality.

On my knees, I crawled through those legs which I was so attracted to, until I was under the very centre of the table.

I stared, and I made comparisons. Without a doubt, to my innocent understanding, Miss Kênia's legs were the most beautiful. In my mind, everything had colours and shapes which sharpened my senses, especially when it came to the legs and the skin colour of Miss Kênia. I really think that my sense of beauty at that age was linked and inherent to the attraction Miss Kênia held over me.

Mom's legs were there too, but they did not interest me at all; I just told myself that because they were my mom's, naturally, they did not have any blemishes and were flawless. But there was a firm and established difference between the way I looked at Miss Kênia's legs and at the ones belonging to my mom's other friends, all around me – a fence of shoes and shins.

Even her shoes were fascinating to me; always colourful, and her feet looked very pretty inside them.

This propelling, omnipotent force made its presence very clear in my early childhood.

Sensuality is born along with life. In the way I looked at and admired Miss Kênia's feet lay my first manifestation of sexuality.

I even got to the point of lowering my head to smell them, because I was sure they had a sweet scent.

Really, her whole being exhaled a smooth and inebriating smell of soap and baby powder. I sat there with my little head to the side, inhaling her perfume and absorbing her scent.

My doll, my stove, my pans, all my lonely toys which I had brought to distract myself, were abandoned over by the living room couch. I would rather sit under the table, smelling Miss Kênia's legs and feet. The powerful instinct of sex – the invincible force of attraction – gaining momentum.

What I was doing left me in an inebriated state; I leaned forward slowly, getting closer, more and more attracted. Until, in an irresistible impulse, I held her shin with my little hands and awkwardly and slowly licked it.

She pulled her legs back startled, exclaiming agitated:

“Oh, my god! There is a puppy under the table, licking my leg.”

All at once, the owners of those ugly legs (except my mom's) leaned forward and raised the tablecloth, staring at me with big eyes that I have never forgotten.

“What are you doing there, child?”

Mom extended her arms to reach for me, bending down to coax me out from under the table.

There was a tender smile on her face, and Miss Kênia was pleasantly laughing, saying that the lick had given her goosebumps.

I came out from under the table, and Miss Kênia kissed my face, thinking what I had done was very funny.

“Why did you lick my leg, Flávia?”

I was quiet, deceptive and hypocritical, feeling my little heart thumping, excited to have my face between Miss Kênia's delicate and beautiful breasts. Being held and kissed by her left me in an emotional and weird state. A state very similar to anguish, but not

quite; something similar to a painful pleasure. Because I did not know what to answer, they stopped paying attention to me.

After all, what could it mean for a beautiful, perfumed woman to have her leg licked by a seven-year-old girl?

Wrapped in an insane feeling

I was seven years old. I was suffering. Fervently. Anxiously. And I was ashamed. Unexpectedly or, to be fair, intuitively, I kept my anxious feeling a secret. Biding my time, waiting for Miss Kênia's visits.

I was always by the window or in the yard, with attentive eyes searching for her. On the streets, at her window, by the kitchen door or at the porch. I would search for her like a child searches for their favourite toy, sitting on a very high place, out of their grasp.

I think this was the feeling that tormented me.

Miss Kênia fascinated me, and I waited for the moments she would come to our place to kill time chatting with my mom.

My mom's neighbours enjoyed coming to our place. They would stay most of the afternoon, until it was time to go home and fix dinner for their husbands and children.

That is why I disliked Mister Eduardo, Miss Kênia's husband. It was his fault she would always leave at five-thirty, saying:

"Eduardo always loses it when he calls or gets home and doesn't find me. He's always complaining 'why do you visit the store so much, why don't you buy everything at once or send the maid?' He thinks it's terrible for a woman to be holed up at a neighbour's house. Eduardo is the worst. Well, I should go and face the beast."

I started relating and comparing what I felt when Miss Kênia didn't show up to spend the afternoon with my mom to what Mister Eduardo felt when he didn't find his wife at home. I lost it. That's what happened. So I baffled my mom, who did not understand the ups and downs of my still uncertain temper and worried about my restless, aggressive

behaviour. I sulked, and didn't answer when she called. It really seemed like I wasn't in this world.

Sitting on the stairs that led to our garden, I looked at a fixed point across the street. Obviously, Miss Kênia's house.

"What's wrong, sweet girl?"

One day, my mom got startled and laughed a lot when I replied emphatically:

"I am losing it!"

"Why are you losing it?"

I shrugged and didn't answer. But my face soon changed, because I saw Miss Kênia come to her door, cross the street, open our gate and address me, sweet as always.

"How is my little doll who became a puppy?"

I withdrew because I knew how intense my feelings were. Somehow I knew that I couldn't show what I felt, what was happening to me, so I increasingly became introverted, elusive, and quiet – indifferent to usual children's priorities. No toys, walks or cuddles pleased me unless they came from Miss Kênia.

As for my mom, I also liked it when she cuddled with me, but that was different, less intense. It didn't have a physical effect on me, didn't make my little heart ache. Far from it. When mom played with me, I was happy, cheerful and laughing. Ultimately, it was a natural thing, and the possibility of revealing or disclosing what I felt was not present like it was when Miss Kênia touched me, or even just approached me.

At seven years old, then, I acted in an insincere and conniving manner, not due to being raised in an intimidating environment, but because of an intuitive feeling that sheltered me from people and made me keep such emotions secret.

I wanted Miss Kênia to hold me tight in her arms and smother me between her breasts, take me to her house, not forever, just to hold me away from everyone's eyes, away from mom's eyes and her friends'.

That may be explained by shyness and the fear of upsetting my mom for desiring Miss Kênia's cuddles and affections more ardently. Still, I knew – possibly due to extreme precocity, which is the only justification I can find for an understanding of things by a seven-year-old – that that was not the reason; there was something about the pleasure that I felt and didn't want anyone to notice or know about.

It's funny that I never resorted to masturbation (I know that children as young as two years old will sometimes move their body while sitting in order to do so). In my dreams, however, I would sometimes feel a pleasant sensation in my private parts, and reach a kind of elation. The mere sight of Miss Kênia was enough to drive me crazy.

She would appear in my dreams, undress me, cuddle me, hold me against her breasts. What I felt was so strong, her body's scent would linger in my nostrils even after I woke up.

I was wrapped in an insane feeling: shivers, anguish, a slow and pleasant agony. My heartbeats would quicken and I would wake up, remaining in a sort of suggestive trance.

This act, which would happen in dreams, would then repeat itself throughout the day; when Miss Kênia showed up at my house, the imaginary cuddling became a grave and violent desire.

I wanted to be alone with her and lick her arms, her face, her perfumed feet, and see her laughing again and calling me "naughty puppy". Just like the afternoon she spent

at my place, when I waited for mom to go to the kitchen and make the usual pot of coffee and I rushed under the table.

Fascinated, I stared at Miss Kênia's legs. Her sandals with colourful straps, the thin high heel, the colour of her skirt and her perfume made me dizzy. As my little fingers caressed her calf, I slowly licked her shin.

"You naughty puppy, get out from under there!"

Her laugh was infectious, and I started laughing along with her.

She then looked under the table very seriously and asked me to come out, with a finger pointed towards me:

"Don't do that again, you hear me, Flávia? You are not a puppy, and I don't want you to do that."

The look on her face was etched in my memory forever, and I must have really puzzled her in that moment, because I lowered my head, sadly, with tears in my eyes.

Miss Kênia was worried (she did not want my mom to think she had been thoughtless or rude to me) and tried to calm me down with cuddles, caressing my face with her long, thin, soft and perfumed fingers, with red nails shining like sequins.

To avoid my mom seeing me cry, I ran from the living room and hid behind the bushes in the yard. I sat there crying, trying to hide from myself, thinking Miss Kênia had been mean to me.

I was disappointed and sad because from that day onward, I could no longer lick Miss Kênia's leg. The leg that was better than ice cream, better than a lollipop, better and much tastier than any candy I could imagine.

She looked like a glowing fairy

Such comings and goings all night and I couldn't sleep well.

I heard daddy's worried voice and mommy's shallow breath.

Daddy was talking on the phone. My little head felt so confused. I could not understand anything until I woke up again with daddy calling me softly, trying not to startle me.

"Sweetie, put on your robe, you are going to stay at the neighbour's house for a while, until we come back."

Neighbour? Which neighbour? That horrible fat lady who sometimes farted and made me run away from under the table with mommy scolding me, thinking I had done it? Miss Dulce? Miss Clotilde? With whom were they leaving me at that time of night, and why?

"Why, daddy? Where is mommy?"

"Mommy is going to the hospital but will be home soon. Meanwhile, you are staying at Miss Kênia's. Be good, okay?"

I jumped out of bed, put on my robe and held daddy's hand. He walked me to the other side of the street.

The door of Miss Kênia's house was open, and at the porch, she and Mister Eduardo were waiting for us.

They talked to my mommy and daddy, and I noticed the word they repeated the most: miscarriage.

They told daddy not to worry, that they would watch me as long as needed, and I was happy when Miss Kênia said that she liked me very much, and that I was a sweetheart and would not be any trouble.

But I was. I could not help it. As soon as daddy left me with them and I saw that I was going to sleep by myself in the guest room while Miss Kênia lay in that ginormous bed in her room with that hairy, scary man, I started crying. So much so, that sleepy, impatient, unlikeable Mister Eduardo took his pillow and told her, walking towards the room I was staying in:

“Put her in our bed and make her stop crying, it sounds like someone is killing her. I’m tired, I have to leave early, and I do not want to spend the night awake and calming her down.”

Before leaving, he leaned over me, as if trying to read in my eyes if I was telling the truth, and asked. “You are not a bedwetter, are you?”

“No!”, I screamed, making him straighten up as quickly as if I had threatened to bite that big nose, and walk towards the other room, mumbling something.

Miss Kênia held me by the hand affectionately and took me to her bedroom; she got another pillow and placed it by hers.

“Come, my little puppy, come lie down with me. Don’t cry, baby, mommy is coming back soon. Don’t you like me? Don’t you want to stay here with me?”

I did not answer.

“Do you want a glass of milk?”

I shook my head no.

“Then come lie down.”

She lay on the bed and patted her side, which would be my place for the rest of the night.

I wiped my tears, and she took some tissues from a little box on the nightstand.

When I lay down, she wiped my face and helped me blow my nose. Always saying kind words, changing her voice and talking like a baby. I thought it was funny but I liked her better when she spoke in her natural tone.

“There, my little *nounour*, don’t cry, you will now sleep very quietly with your new mommy, tonight’s mommy.”

“Not mommy.”

I got grumpy, and she misinterpreted what I meant by that, intrigued by the differences I established between her as a woman, a person, a thing that awed me, and my mom, who I liked a lot in a different way, a very different way.

“Oh! That upsets me. I don’t want to steal your mommy’s place, I just wanted to be like her for you tonight.”

“Not like her.”

“Why? Don’t you like me?”

I nodded at the question.

“Then can we play make-believe?”

“How do we play make-believe?”

“I can teach you. It goes like this: You pretend you are my little daughter, and I pretend I am your mommy; then I’ll take care of you with all the affection of someone who loves you very much. Who wouldn’t like to have a little girl like you: pretty, nice and well-behaved. Okay?”

I did not answer. I did not like the idea of miss Kênia pretending she was my mom. That had to do with the fixed idea that I would never lick my mom's leg.

"Don't you like the idea?"

I still did not answer.

"Wouldn't you like to be my daughter? I would really like to have a little girl like you to care of, take on walks and to be together with always!"

"I don't want to be your daughter."

A long silence followed. I did not want her to entertain the idea of having me as her daughter. Seeing that my eyes were still wide open and gazing at the lamp on the ceiling, she asked:

"Are you sleepy? Why don't you try to get some sleep?"

"No."

I did not want to go to sleep. I wanted to soak up everything I could from that amazing moment, because I could see my dream coming true lying on Miss Kênia's bed, by her side, smelling her perfume, bewitched by the marvellous colour of her long golden hair.

She looked like a glowing fairy. Yes, to me, she glowed, and her long, see-through nightgown was as beautiful as the inebriating colour and music from the movie I watched when daddy made a home cinema to distract us.

My siblings, Renato and Elisa, preferred other movies and kept calling my attention to the pranks of Laurel and Hardy, explaining things they thought I did not understand.

Renato was thirteen, and Elisa was eleven. They were both on a school break, visiting my grandma, my father's mother, at the beach.

Miss Kênia looked like that beautiful character with a sweet, soft voice on the screen daddy hung from a nail in the living room after dinner or on Sunday afternoons, when he brought new movies to our screen.

I was like that, in a colourful fantasy world – Miss Kênia's bedroom.

“You really don't want a glass of milk? Why don't you try to sleep? You don't like being here with me? Am I not good enough to be your mommy?”

Miss Kênia was really making an effort to distract me and get me to sleep; maybe she was tired and didn't want me to start crying again, noticing the pooling tears in my eyes.

“Do you miss your siblings? Your grandma didn't take you along because you're still so little, and your parents would miss you a lot.”

I kept diving deeper and deeper in the agony her voice caused me.

“So you really don't want me to be your mommy, right? But I would like that so much!”

I sighed and turned my back to her.

“Why do you act like that, Flávia?”

“Because I already said I don't want you to be my mother.”

“All right, Flávia, so let's go to sleep and have sweet dreams.”

“I don't want to sleep,” I whined, and she turned me towards her, delicately holding my shoulders.

“Don't act like that, I know you're a nice girl, you're not going to act out because you have to sleep here, right? It is only for a couple of hours, your daddy will come back

soon to pick you up. Let's think of something else you may like. Do you want me to tell you a story?"

"Then you'll be like mommy and daddy, and I don't want that."

I was making things difficult, and she looked at me curious and attentive, analyzing me. I saw her head moving; then, she turned, leaned on her elbow and stared at me.

"We should go to sleep", she pressed the switch beside the bed.

"I'm afraid of the dark."

She flipped towards me on the bed again. A light came on. The room was softly lit by the colours of the bedside lamp.

I felt my voice rising like a palpable thing coming deep from my belly, from inside my stomach, the most secret corners of my body, and my proposal carried the devilish innocence and ingenuity of a child – precocious, emotional, sensitive, even very dangerous, I think.

I was an imp, a satyr, the little polymorphous monster described by Freud.

"Let's play pussy cats!"

First, she stared at me, turning her head; then she straightened herself, head in her hand and looking at me. I saw her lips part slightly and she asked, curiously "Pussy cats? How?"

I turned toward her. Impulsive. Id. Libido. Pure and primitive. Essentially id, as natural as id can be, the mind's substrate, the beginning, the probably irrational, instinctive, primary, innate, the first impression impulse, the strongest of them, which leads the creature to action, thoughtlessly, unreasonably. Just because that is how it happens, that is how it is processed and that is how it is.

I approached her like a stubborn and insistent kitten. I licked her face quickly, recoiling immediately, feeling, due to my own mischief, like a puppy with its tail between its legs. Fearing her reaction and thinking I was able to fool her by substituting the kitten for a puppy.

My voice, I remember it well, was as weak as a moan, or more aptly put, a meow:

“Like thiiss...”

She stared at me, wary, and finding my attitude weird, effortfully asked, “Do you like licking people, Flávia?”

“Only you, madam.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. I like it. You are better than...”, I stopped, looking sideways as if in search of something to compare her to, and followed, “You are better than all the ice cream flavours, tastier than all the sweets. I like licking your leg.”

She looked at me in a way that made me worry that she did not want to play pussy cats, that she did not like that game.

“Don’t you want to play pussy cats with me?”

“It’s not that, Flávia. I just don’t know how.”

My fierce mind, in its instinctive move towards giving me what I wanted more than anything else, had already made up what “playing pussy cats” was, so I put all my efforts into the explanation, trying to make the game seem fun and exciting.

“So... it’s almost as if you were my mommy, but I am your pussy cat, and you are my owner. You bought me, brought me home, bathed me, and I like playing this way...”

Then, joining words and actions, I approached a startled Miss Kênia and gave her chin a quick and dry lick. I held her face with my tiny innocent hands and licked it. I went down her neck and, before she had the time to stop me or understand what was going on, my mouth was around her nipple, which I had pulled out of her blouse. I held that soft volume with my caressing, devilish hands.

It was all too fast for her to have a repulsive reaction to my actions. She was too startled and did not know how to analyze them, how to chastise me. I was transfixed by the feeling of her body heat, the physical stimulus of the smell that came from her hair, and what I felt was the deliciousness of her breast, and the nipple in my mouth.

“Now the kitten is hungry and wants to be nursed.”

I laughed before starting to suckle on her breast. I laughed like an imp, a faun, a devilish little being. I laughed into my mouth, full of those tasty breasts, feeling her starting to pant.

All of this, however, did not seem at all obscene. Not at all repugnant or forbidden.

At that moment, this child was a woman, even if only for a couple of seconds, returning just a moment later to her real chronological age, with the mysterious implications of the secretive childish world.

Miss Kênia pressed my head between her breasts and I, hearing her sigh and moan, dropped the nipple I had pressed between my lips to suckle and asked, apprehensive, “Did I hurt you, madam? I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to. Don’t you want to play kitten anymore?”

“No, Flávia... you didn’t hurt me.”

“Really? Are you sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“Then we can keep playing? You know, your kitten is hungry. Will you nurse me?”

She did not answer, but her breasts were still out of the blouse, and her nipples were hard and pointed.

“I think milk will come out. Bibi’s little nipples get swollen like this when she nurses her babies. I saw it. Bibi gave birth inside Elisa’s closet. Mommy took them out of there and into a box lined with a blanket. Bibi has milk in her breasts. Can I feed on your breasts too?”

“Yes, Flávia... feed... feed as much as you want...”

Making kitten meows, caressing and kneading those lush breasts filling my hands, I licked one, then the other, suckling on their nipples, squeezing them, playing, pushing my head between them, growling, curling up to her. She laughed, moved, wriggled, repositioned my head, pushed my mouth against her breast so I would suck on it longer.

“Can we play pussy cats often?”

“Yes, Flávia, but do not tell anyone...”

“Did you learn how to play?”

“Yes, Flávia, I can play pussy cats, too, and I will teach you everything... like this...”

My strange secret world

My parents were normally affectionate with their children. I felt like their methods of raising us would've brought us close to an ideal personality development. They were responsible for the intellectual upbringing of three children and they were always discussing it, concerned about our futures.

They were not overindulgent or too dominating, not severe, but also not lacking discipline, and as moral standards go, not too rigorous. My familiar environment, therefore, never caused me or my siblings any kind of anguish or self-doubt.

Besides, there was never any rivalry among Elisa, Renato and myself. For the way my parents treated me – concerning education, and how I perceived the facts and circumstances surrounding me –, I don't believe there was a single flaw that would explain my personality.

I pursued and arrived at a way of life predefined by my own nature. There were no religious limitations, nor the need for an exact sexual education, because I discovered and learned everything about sex in a very natural manner. It was as if I had the logical consciousness of human nature and the body's functions and needs – the excitation in my genitals and the appearance of hair in specific areas of my body was never an embarrassment or a surprise.

But the primal facts, the events which established how true my way of being was – or better yet, how true a human being inserted in society I was – were all really formed in my early childhood, through the colourful fantasy year when I was seven, with the scented, soft breasts of a beautiful woman who could not get rid of the surprising feeling

of being tasted by a girl, as if having magically become a delicious scoop of strawberry ice cream.

But there might have been, on Miss Kênia's side, some regret at not having children; in that case, what I read today as arousal might have been just a fantasy, the illusion of feeding her baby girl, which is what she so badly wanted me to be..

No, the explanation – as much as I forcefully try to make sense of it – leans toward a sexual one, for her consent in the make-believe, playing pussy cats, and letting a seven-year-old nurse on her and arouse her with a precocious touch.

I was a child with a high libido. I panted and got feverish. I dreamed and suffered. I rebelled and kept quiet. I desired and looked forward to the chance to approach Miss Kênia. She no longer reprimanded me when I stayed under the table, caressing her legs and licking them slowly.

My hands, exploring her legs, never reaching her thighs, were provocative, tickling her feet, which were always scented and adorned by the colourful straps of her thin, high-heeled shoes.

The sight under the table built a different world in my childish imagination, and Miss Dulce's legs, ugly, hairy and fat, with rounded, chubby feet and potato-like toes, represented light poles, trees, soldiers – constant obstacles on my way to Miss Kênia's magical, fascinating feet.

Miss Dulce let out her ill-smelling little farts, moving her sizable butt on the chair and covering it with her loud voice or laugh, or by clearing her throat.

When the smell crossed the tabletop and reached my mom's friends' nostrils, I immediately heard the order to get out from under the table, which was no place for a child to play.

And the comment that annoyed me, "This girl is relentlessly constipated, I need to give her some laxatives."

My mom never really scolded me because she knew that those awful farts came from Miss Dulce. I was thrilled on an afternoon when she and Miss Kênia, laughing and gossiping, said that I would not have to take the fall for Miss Dulce's firecrackers – which my mom would politely blame me for, making her think she really believed it – because the old lady was away on a trip.

I need to study the evolutionary sense of children's sexuality in order to better interpret what are considered abnormal acts or preferences in adults, things we excused as carelessness, involuntary mistakes, distractions or inexplicable tendencies they might have acquired from their environment.

I was destined to never be able to love a man, to only feel vibrations, arousal and a quicker heartbeat for another woman.

And I made my world a secret world, developing like a pistillate. Which is what I was, a tender little growing plant, a pistillate.

My mind played Bia's words again and again, as if sealing my fate: "Snap out of it, Flávia! For us lesbians, there are only prostitutes."

Stop resisting.

Don't hold back.

Vent.

Let it all out.

I don't worry about my unconscious or subconscious mind. I worry about what is in my conscience. I think I am essentially conscious. I have no occlusive factors provoking psychological traumas.

I simply know what I am and that is why I suffer. I have no conflicts to bury or exhume. There is no oedipal complex about being gay or straight.

I only have my truth intertwined with flesh as well as spirit.

Not having conflicts, traumas or neuroses does not mean not having problems. I have them. Tons. Time has taken care of some of them, and others I try to divide, study, and resolve just like everyone else.

I have noticed that people usually mistake the memories and frustrations of childhood or teenage years for neuroses, traumas and psychological conflicts, which are actually caused by other types of repression, consciously disregarded for causing too much suffering.

But I don't follow the *via regia* of psychoanalysis to interpret my own life, because I can do all of it intentionally, like a movie I watch over and over, pausing for as long as required by the emotion of the moment it has evoked.

I don't use my past, as some do, as an argument to justify my failures and fetishes.

I think these memories are nothing but the emotional pangs of longing, of frustration about what didn't happen or for what was lost to the unconquerable – except, obviously, when it comes to shocking things, which weaken an individual's mind.

I feel mentally sound, even when I suffer, when depression brings suicidal desires, and I wiggle, pray, curse and squirm like a chicken being beheaded – that is what I feel when the pain of love makes my soul bleed, and my flesh burn.

My dreams become misshapen for lack of details. Still, my memories loosen the knots and work as a catharsis in discharging my tension.

Conscious censorship imposes my truth with all its might, and I do not repress the energy of my desires, which demand to be fulfilled.

What I want to assert is that everything in me is natural, conscious, alive and spontaneous. I am defined, authentic, honest, but still a bit of a coward.

The emotional pain that delights me and drags me in ecstasy is the memory of the day when, through my bedroom window, I saw the moving truck and I saw Miss Kênia leaving. She did not leave in the moving truck. Even worse, she sat by her husband in their old dirty car, which blew the black smoke of burnt oil through its exhaust pipe, making loud noises and offending me like the farts of Miss Dulce.

I watched the grass burn before my eyes, the flowers wither, the rain poke holes in the ground, the birds hit their unruly little heads against the roof tiles, in a cataclysm of mind-bending pain. I saw the sky engulf the earth, and the fire that burned the grass inflamed in my head. I became ill. I had a fever. I had deliriums.

Colourful shoes tap-danced over my frail girlish body. Blond hair and soft lips caressed my face. Miss Kênia, who left the neighbourhood, stayed in my mind as a sacred image.

My mommy and daddy's care, bringing me gifts and being affectionate, was as effective as my siblings' annoying attempts to make me laugh.

So much pain in a child's green heart! So much pain that it darkened my vision, amazed by Miss Kênia's colourful shoes, locking my secret world with black velvet doors, taking all the colours away.

In Miss Kênia's yard, I found, among so many old things left behind, one of her shoes with its colourful straps. Three thin straps. Blue, yellow and red. And that shoe became a treasure I hid among my lonely toys.

A fetish, maybe – or absolutely – because at night, alone in my room, I would bring the shoe to bed and spoon with it for hours, hiding it under my pillow at any hint of the sound of steps.

It was as if Miss Kênia were there. As if that shoe would bring her back to me someday.

My voice could have been weak, sad or anxious – I do not know in which tone I was able to mumble the words – but I never forgot the hurtful answer.

“Where did Miss Kênia go away, mommy? Won't she visit us anymore?”

“Maybe someday, but I don't think so. She went very far away.”

“Where?”

“To Italy.”

“Where is Italy, mommy?”

“In Europe.”

“And where is Europe?”

“My child... it's in another country... another country.”

“And what does another country mean?”

Mom laughed, amused by the series of questions which, for her, showed what a smart girl I was. She was oblivious to the fact that my interest had the sole objective of locating Miss Kênia.

Italy, through the explanations I got from my mom, from school, from maps, from life and from time, had only one name for me: Kênia.

I learned as I studied that all long objects represent masculinity, even knives, daggers, carrots, umbrellas, an endless list, as endless as all things that represent femininity, like pots, boxes, ships, cases and houses.

It's interesting that an object such as a thin, high-heeled shoe could represent a woman. Paradoxical, intriguing, Machiavellian. All because Miss Kênia's shoe contained a violent sexual charge, which triggered dangerous compulsions in me.

I loved that shoe, which had once been on the small, perfumed foot with red toenails. The soft foot that I had kissed and licked.

My little girlfriends, the new neighbour who came to live in Kênia's former house, my mom's friends, no one could ever replace Kênia or cause the delights and fascination she held over me. A childish fixation for which I could only find solace and create fantasies when I saw magazines with the blonde manes of gorgeous women, women I had never seen anywhere except in TV and movies. Women that somehow had a hint of Kênia.

Boys hung around me, joking around and talking about dating. Girls flattered me and liked to invite me to their little birthday parties. There were even some that I noticed liked me beyond what was normal, but I was faithfully and firmly tied to the memory of that woman I used to play pussy cat with.

The object that became a souvenir, hidden among my lonely toys, had my full attention and care for its conservation. The thin Louis heel, thicker towards the sole, was polished, the white leather cleaned with white soap and the whole shoe covered in kisses from my longing mouth.

One day my brother Renato caught me polishing the shoe. I was scared and embarrassed, it felt like my life's dearest secret had been exposed. I threw him out of my bedroom, and he, appalled and confused, interpreted my attitude the only way his innocence could conceive – that I was trying to be a “precocious young lady,” wearing high-heeled shoes –, and laughed a lot over that.

I hid the shoe somewhere else to try to forget it, as I had long forgotten my toys, and started rationalising it for the first time. I figured it was not right. It was not normal. That I valued that lonely old shoe more than any of my girlfriends or the boys who wanted to date me.

The thought of dating gave me weird chills of apprehension and repulsion, as if it would be impossible for me to get close to anyone from the opposite sex.

But I needed to try it. To date, in order to understand and establish my sexual nature without a doubt. The other girls were always so excited around boys in the neighbourhood or at school parties. I kept to myself, my eyes exploring the rooms, the yards, as if a copy of Kênia – or Kênia herself – might suddenly appear before my dreamy eyes.

Under the tables, I saw the feet that moved around in beautiful shoes or dragged over the floor; I noticed those shoes and thought that all women lacked taste or had feet too ugly to enrich and embellish a thin high-heeled shoe the way Kênia's feet did.

I was determined, coming from logical thinking to reach a smart plan of action, that I needed to start dating. I took the opportunity that presented itself at a birthday party at my school friend and neighbor Norma's house.

Fábio asked me to dance with him, and I said yes. Fábio was Claudette's boyfriend, but I didn't care when they told me and warned me that Claudette was not happy about my accepting Fábio's invitation. They had had a fight, but that would not last. I didn't mind. He wanted to dance with me alone. I was a good dancer. I had always been seen as the hard-to-get girl from the neighbourhood. I displayed my talents solely on the twist and the hully gully, that way I could dance by myself. Now Fábio was trying to be the man, leading me over the dance floor, which was a six-by-eight-meter living room, a space with a table, some stools, couches, loveseats, chairs, TV and a bunch of other furniture.

It was by a bookcase that Cecilia got me alone, while Fábio went to get us some sandwiches and pop. Someone had replaced the selection of boleros, sambas and cha-cha-chas with a hully gully. And I figured that Norma was complying Claudette's requests. She had watched me and Fábio like a rabid dog.

"Is he dancing in front of you or by your side?"

I stared at Cecilia, not understanding, and I thought she was ridiculous, and her curiosity was vulgar. She was also ugly, with a crooked nose, pigeon eyes too close to her nose, thin, moist lips, an unaesthetically formed face that looked like it was made from the leftovers of other faces. Her face looked like a mix between a macaw and a donkey. It revolted me. Stepping away without minding her, I answered, thinking she might be inebriated, "In front of me, of course. Would you rather we danced upside down?"

Fábio crossed my path, stopping right in front of me and handing me a bottle of pop with a straw and a plate filled with snacks, “Where are you going? You’re not going to leave me standing here like a waiter, are you?”

I took the pop and raised the straw towards my lips. Fábio stared at me, and I could notice something mysterious in his smile.

“What?”

“You’re beautiful.”

His voice was honest, and I could hear some kind of feeling in its rough pitch: a young man just starting to feel mature in one of the first manifestations of sexual desire and thinking about nothing but ejaculating.

I saw some hair starting to show on his upper lip, the shadow of a shadow. I wondered how often he must shave to try to make it grow thicker, because I could tell his skin was irritated, maybe because of the razor. Poor thing had almost skinned himself. I think he even put chicken poop on it, as I heard the girls joking, because he was under the impression it would make the hair grow faster.

“What was Cecilia talking to you about?”

I told him, and I was taken aback by his reaction, because he was furious, excused himself and went to talk to Cecilia. By the looks of it, I figured he was reprimanding her. When he came back, it looked like he had defeated an army, “Indecent girl! She will never ask you something like that again.”

I did not understand, so we resumed dancing. No emotions. No pleasure. Only rhythm. It got exhausting. I wanted to say goodnight. I didn’t really like parties, and that smart idea of dating to understand and figure myself out was annoying, because even

though Fábio was a handsome boy whom the girls admired, he did not provoke any feelings but friendship inside me. Besides, I had heard some gossip while I was in the washroom which made me understand Celia's question. Girls gossiped. Boys pulled their member to the front of their pants so that it would rub against the girls during the dances. They did this to stimulate themselves; some would even protect themselves with a handkerchief down their pants to avoid wetting the fabric when they ejaculated.

Fábio insisted that I stay for just one more dance. I said no, but I stayed. I stayed because at that moment I saw a young woman enter the room and she made my heart beat faster. Much faster. As fast as it had only ever beaten for Kênia and only when I masturbated, pressing her shoe against my stomach.

The shoe was the only thing that made me feel guilty, because at first, I thought that masturbation was normal. Only later, reading some articles about sex, did I understand that it was a natural action, a "release valve." If I was still worried, it was about only being able to orgasm when, unable to avoid the fascination the shoe held over me, I picked it up and pressed it against my belly, kissed the thin straps, held it to my chest or even, in a crazier, more aroused act, pressed it between my thighs, while my well-trained fingers executed their mission of soothing my feverish body.

I had visions of Kênia, in which I sucked on her breasts, bit her lips and intertwined myself in her hair as I did in the net of nerves which tensed me up.

I searched for an explanation for my elation and madness. I convinced myself that, as much as I studied and understood myself, my way of pleasing, of feeling pleasure, and of imagining love, by evoking Kênia would never change. I believed, however, that one

day it would dissipate naturally, out of nowhere, or due to the appearance of something to replace such a consuming delirium.

There it was, blonde mane, blue eyes, thick lips, slender body, thin high-heeled shoes, and red toenails. The arousing detail. It was not Kênia. But it was as beautiful as she was. It had the same charm and the same air of mystery. It looked radiant, as if an aura made her stand out among all the people in that room. She came as if to make all my fantasy nights worthwhile, to prove that reality was also part of the life of a dreamy teenager who thought herself lost to an incurable obsession.

Fábio shook me lightly, and I asked, in an emotional tone that would have given me away if he had any knowledge of women like me, “Who’s that?”

“Núcia. Norma’s cousin.”

He pulled me close so we could keep on dancing, and I saw that Núcia was staring at me the same way I’d been looking at her, and her gaze lingered, in an astounding act of communication between people who understand each other from the very first glance.

A glowing fire started burning within me. The furniture, the people, Fábio, everything vanished, and my mind opened with an enormous force, filling the whole atmosphere with the collision of our thoughts, exchanging messages.

It was stunning. And ridiculous. I felt ridiculous, locked in the embrace of Fábio, who pressed himself against me and made indecent moves with his body as we mingled among the other couples who were dancing and crowding the living room, all looking for an opportunity to rub up against each other in exchange for some thrills. I understood what it meant to dance facing each other. I understood it and I felt it. It poked. It moved. It invaded. It gathered the fabric of my soft summer dress between my thighs, somehow,

as if he had opened the fly on his pants and was shamelessly masturbating himself against my own sex, which, confusingly, felt like it was getting wet. It was physical, not emotional. As if I were rubbing against the corner of a table, staring at Núcia, letting myself be aroused by her, by her beauty. I was worried someone would notice and I thought it was convenient for us to be pressed against other couples, who were probably doing the same thing. I tried to inch my body away from him, so that he would have some modesty, so that he would notice my sudden despair and put *it* away, so that he would not abuse me or lead me to feel embarrassed because of a single moment of lust which had nothing to do with him. That did not change my nature, but it compromised my morals, and I felt flustered about myself.

He did not know what I had defined and verified about myself as each second passed by, and kept sighing, lustful and secretive, poking me with his hardened member, pointing outward, sweating as if making a considerable effort to get every step of the slow *samba* right.

He shivered, stepped back and tried to pretend nothing had happened. And put it away. I do not know how, but he did. Stealthy movements, discreet gestures, or was it all in my head? Nothing was poking out of his pants, as if it had been a sensorial hallucination.

I stood where we had stopped and looked at Núcia, who hid no secrets from me and just stared back.

She crossed the room, walked toward me and stood by my side. Her voice tickled my ears and, at the same time, I felt engulfed by a wave of disappointment, because she had mistaken me for a school friend, and I had never even heard of the school she

mentioned. She repeated how much I looked like a Miriam she knew, and I felt like talking about Kênia for the first time, telling her I, too, had mistaken her for a childhood friend with whom I used to play pussy cats. But all I did was compliment her on her shoes, which made her look at her feet, flattered.

She smiled, and her teeth lined up, like a pearl necklace shining inside a pink velvet case. That was what I thought, all the while thinking that comparison sounded like the leftovers of some cheesy poetry, because what I was seeing was a sensual mouth with an insinuating smile, letting the very tip of a pink tongue peek out, like the tiny tongue of a newborn kitten. I felt like asking, “Do you want to play pussy cats?”

“What?”

I had really asked aloud, not just in my mind. She was smiling, thinking my suggestion was funny, waiting for me to explain what kind of game was “pussy cats.”

Embarrassed, I tried to get her mind off the game. It was just a conversation starter, but she insisted, saying that at the parties she usually went to, there was always a game someone invented. She thought it would be interesting. Norma joined us, and Núcia mentioned the game I had created. I felt, for the first time ever, cornered. The situation got worse and worse, because the girls, all between fourteen and seventeen years old, started gathering around me, demanding I explain how the game of “pussy cats” worked.

I had a great idea! I don’t even know how it came to my mind. An idea everyone applauded, agreed on and wanted to put into practice immediately. I didn’t know. I really did not know how it came to me. I think it was a mix of despair, Núcia’s eyes on me, malice and the desire to be alone with her somewhere, even for a brief moment.

Everyone started to move. They got chairs, sat on the floor, exhilarated, each one with an obvious plan, malice, or intention.

As I suggested, they picked the first kitten randomly to go to a dark room and, by meowing, identify and pick their corresponding cat.

It was a blast. Cristina, a cute brunette, was the first one chosen, and she rushed to the room, in which the lights were off. The living room became very quiet as my heartbeats grew louder and louder. What an idea! I was still sassy, smart, malicious and cunning, because, to avoid anyone figuring out why I had suggested the game when it got to my turn to choose “my cat”, I let Fábio sit beside me and hold my hand, fingers intertwined as if we were already going steady.

Claudette looked at me, no longer resembling a rabid dog, but now appearing with feline features.

The boys and girls started, one at a time, meowing, high, long and in all pitches. From the living room, we could hear the most diverse cat voices, a real feline symphony in an attempt of perfect mimicking. They laughed, moved, boys excited, girls apprehensive, afraid of losing their male cat to a female who, in the dark, listened for the meowing she would answer with her own when she pleased. When she did not, she hissed and huffed like an angry cat.

Rogério meowed, trying to cunningly mimic a cat, to confuse the female kitten. Cristina meowed back, answering his call. She got it right, and was able to identify her boyfriend. Rogério happily hopped toward the dark room as we made a lot of noises, mimicking a cat in heat, “Ripmeooooowwwp...”

“My pants are made of silk...”

There was all this nonsense, just to mock them. Cristina waited a long time before leaving the room. She was booed. They asked her if she was still in one piece, if her cat should stay and pick another kitten. Rogério yelled from the bedroom, telling people to start meowing again.

One at a time, we resumed the game, and then, between right choices and the disappointment of the cats that came back with sour looks on their faces, Claudette's turn came.

Fábio meowed. A high-pitched meowing. Such a perfect imitation of a cat that I think he even impressed himself. But Claudette meowed back, answering his call. She would have identified Fábio anywhere. He looked displeased at being identified, but made his way into the room, as the game demanded. Laughter and mocking, teasing and jokes made the night livelier until we heard a slapping noise.

Claudette came back, quiet. She did not make a big deal of the fiasco. She was happy she got to slap Fábio, who couldn't help but shriek in surprise when his face received the hand of the lady who was waiting in the dark to deliver the blow.

There were comments – slap, smack, wack, get him, enough, stop, there are more cats in line – until my turn to meow came, among twelve other girls. Fábio, ears alert, meowed back immediately, satisfied. I had to go. Trembling and angered, I thought that everything had its price after all. I was going to pay just to try and pick out Núcia's meowing.

I entered the room. Fábio was prepared, smart, hiding behind a door, and I had barely come inside when he grabbed me from behind, passionately pressing me against himself. He twisted my neck, pulling my face backwards with such force I thought that he

might break it. Then he kissed my lips like a pervert, thirsty for saliva, because he sucked on my lips and squeezed my breasts so fast and so effortlessly, I could not even defend myself. The time that had been given to him was almost up, and the boys started booing from the living room. I felt his body up against mine and heard his voice, trembling with desire, tense, vibrating, revealing his feelings, what he thought of me. "You are delicious, Flávia, I love your long straight hair, I love your mouth, your memorable features... we need to do something sometime... you need to go out with me... you are different, you are not silly, you don't even look like you're only fifteen... meow to me... so I will come back..."

That was part of the rules, repeating pairs twice, but no more.

Booing. "Enough," "let it go," "get out," "we're going in." My hands pushed and tried to get rid of Fábio's feverish ones, which had already caressed my thighs, squeezed my breasts and even quickly touched his lips to one of them, licking it slightly. I made him leave, finally, after he forced me against a wall and rubbed against my body, kissing me on the lips so hard that I was left with a bruise.

I was angry. I wiped my mouth clean with my hand, combed my hair with my fingers and squeezed my eyes to try to see in the dark, and fear suddenly took hold of me. Fear and truth. My intuition always said that I was risking too much in these dangerous games.

The laughter stopped. They were quiet in the living room. The first boy meowed. None of them had mistaken other boys' meowing for girls', they all had called females with their meowing. The same thing happened to the girls. What I was going to do was going to be really revealing, because I remembered Núcia's eyes on me as we headed to the room. Her eyes pleaded and warned me that, one way or another, I would identify her among thousands of other girls' meowing.

A girl. Perhaps seventeen years or older? Her breasts, her behaviour, her body, her shape – she was without a doubt older than me by two or three years, I couldn't specify. What I could be specific about was her meowing, to which, after a short pause, I responded, meowing. I felt like a cat. A wild cat, cunning, standing behind the door, waiting, listening to the mocking voices, trying to hear her steps. I would either find her or Fábio in her place, in case they had a low, dirty game of switching places between the two.

But it was all a game, a malicious game. They didn't know my hearing was better than they realized, and they thought I was going to be appalled when I noticed that the cat I answered to was no cat, but a beautiful kitten who, softly, pretending to play, came into the room on tiptoes, meowing in a soft tone, sounding apprehensive, "Mewww... mewww..."

I came behind her. Reached out with my hands. Nothing else mattered more than that moment, for which I had invested so much. My hands touched her shoulders. A continuous act, as she turned her body, suddenly, to my surprise, and stood in front of me, her body coming close to mine, as our hungry mouths searched and found each other. During our first kiss, we sucked and licked, crazy, fearful, tense, but with such a passion it made all my pores open and cry in delight, the most precious sweat of my life.

She pressed her body to mine, panting, pleading, "Don't stay close to Fábio any longer, and don't play pussy cats with anyone else. I don't want to kiss anyone else. Only you."

My heart felt like it would explode. How many times had that piece of muscle inside my chest swelled up with emotion... It was a fantastic realization, that pulled me forward,

or even better, pulled me into the arms of a woman like me, who liked women, a female homosexual.

We left the room together. Secretive. Feigning surprise and joking. Mocking and commenting on how startled I was and how disappointed I was at my ears' lack of distinction between female and male voices. I got away with saying that the event had pulled the fun out of this game for me and I would rather have some cake.

The record resumed playing. I did not look at Núcia, and she did not look at me. We felt guilty, like accomplices in something we did not want others to know about, and this something was the fact that we did not belong in that group, as if our very skins had a different shade, and we felt condemned by that fact.

Or so I thought.

Gentlemen prefer lesbians

My defined nature. Me, a pistillate, extending my roots, growing under the sun of emotions, under the warmth of a look, under the touch of a scented breath murmuring loving sentences dreamed during lonely nights. I did not like the word “lesbian,” and all through my studies of botany I identified as a pistillate, feeling like I carried my disguised sex organ hidden in my mouth.

Núcia and I. The “I love you” between kisses, promises, touches and confessions. I had never had anyone else. I had no secrets. The shoe was sacred, I would never mention it. The kiss in the dark, during the game of pussy cats, was an irrepressible instinctive impulse that defined what I was and never feared to know: a lesbian. But a lesbian with no chance to grow. I promised. I was not actually lying. The fantasies created around Kênia did not count. Kênia was a secret I would never reveal, never confess.

Núcia had to believe I had never had a girl before her because that was the truth, but I couldn't believe she had not had her own experiences, judging by her attitudes, her lesbian skills, all I learned from her in our intimate moments.

Feminine, luscious breasts, sensual lips, soft, caressing hands, and the high point of my carnal exhilaration – her feet. Delicate, soft, scented, wearing stiletto heeled shoes with thin, colourful straps.

I understood my infatuation. Why I felt so aroused when looking at Núcia's feet. In a way, it was due to the memories they triggered of Kênia's feet, but that was not all of it. I understood my fetishism. My real perversion and sexual deviance was not the fact that I was a homosexual – being a homosexual was part of my nature, it was natural. My erotic interest, exclusively centred on the feet or the thin high-heeled shoes with straps, was

due to my seeing a certain sensuality in this kind of shoe, a kind of beauty that aroused me, first in Kênia and then in Núcia.

Núcia soon noticed my fascination with her feet and kept them moisturized and perfumed. When she went to my house and we were alone in my bedroom, I kissed her from her toes to her head, or starting at her head and moving toward her toes, softly touching them to my face. What I desired most of all was to own one of her shoes. Just one. A right one. I already had a left one. Kênia's. Even though the styles were so different, both fascinated me.

Núcia eventually told me there was a crew, a group of friends, all lesbians, like us, who met once in a while at the apartment of some girl named Bia. She'd met them by chance, through a university classmate. I was curious, intrigued, and jealous. The worst part was the jealousy. And from its sadness came anger, and from this anger, our first fight. And from this fight, the revelations.

Núcia had been with someone before. When she was much younger than me. To my surprise, she told me who it was. I stared at her almost in disbelief. I had never noticed. Norma hid it really well. No. It was not that Norma hid it well. She was a *switch hitter*, bisexual. But they were cousins. "That's awful," I said, "that's incest." She laughed and explained, a little put off by my naivete, that there is a first time for everything, and that this first time always depends on opportunities, and that Norma was the one who initiated her. During vacations, at the beach, it was the heat, the aphrodisiac of the sea breeze, in addition to their nature. It was one of those things, nothing that should astonish another lesbian. Norma soon noticed I was "a top", "a butch", that I could fool other people – but never the two of them.

Norma had mentioned me to Nucia before, but she'd never thought she might fall for me, and feel such an irresistible attraction, and that I would be so ingenious, when I confessed to her that I made up the game of pussy cats.

Núcia was eighteen. She was in college. She wanted to be a dentist, so she liked to force my mouth open and stare at my teeth, which was annoying sometimes.

I sometimes wondered how Núcia could like me, meet me every day while having a social circle made up only of lesbians, as she told me, promising to introduce me to everyone one day. Intuitively I already knew there were many more women with feelings like mine concerning their own gender, but it still surprised me and angered me at the same time, due to Núcia's experiences in the past.

Fábio kept harassing me. Sending me little notes, calling my house, waiting for me on my way back from school. I made excuses related to Claudette. Núcia, who didn't mind it at first, became increasingly annoyed, insisting that I "come out" to him. I was outraged, or rather, vexed. No one should enter my personal life, taint my personal preferences, penetrate my world. I would rather disguise it, fly under the radar. Why become the target of bullying? I knew well what people thought and said about women like me. Núcia called me a coward. She said I needed to cut my hair, wear pants, look more "casual". I would look cute, stunning. If I wanted to give her a birthday gift, I should braid my hair, cut it off and give it to her as a souvenir.

If I cut my hair, my mom would freak out and my dad might even cry in horror, because he was already uncomfortable with me only wanting to wear Renato's shirts, and that was because Núcia said I looked great in them, better than in my dresses. Dresses were not for me. I began to wear only pants, shirts, jackets, very sporty shoes, t-shirts,

feeling more liberated every day from the fear of people finding out what I was. But that was not due to the influence of Núcia; I was just getting to know myself better in my favourite clothes.

I had always lived thinking that it was not necessary to make myself recognizable, that I could stand aside, dreaming, keeping my symbolic secret among my shoes, inside a box, like a relic. I noticed I had to follow my path and join my peers. I could not isolate and hide in plain sight, pretending to be something else. On top of it all, I could not be the object of men's attention.

Núcia told me I kind of looked like Alain Delon and tried to convince me that if I cut my hair really short, I would become someone else, that is, someone who looked a lot more like him. I was mad. My anger grew. Let her look like Alain Delon. I would rather go on looking like myself or Lauren Bacall, as my mom told me. I was a woman, essentially feminine, I just liked women. That was all. I did not like men sexually, only as friends. Emulate them? Never! I felt really secure in my homosexual condition, with no need to dress or *perform* in a macho way to please women. The way I liked to dress had nothing to do with masculinity or androgyny. Núcia did not argue. She stared at me and, as if in need of a test to analyze me according to her friends' impressions, she decided to introduce me to them. That is what I supposed.

I had a curfew. Seven to nine was enough time. And off we went to that Bia's apartment. As I imagined: a dyke, like the ones I saw on the street, which I found repulsive and off-putting. All male-like, with a swaggering strut, a forced deeper voice, legs spread as if carrying a massive ballsack between them, gesturing and talking about her "new babe" as if describing an object. Her facial expressions, her walk, everything about her

made me sick. Núcia noticed it, made a comparison and started to understand what I was and what that woman disguised as a man was. A woman who, much to my surprise, picked up the phone and told us her “son” was at the airport, coming back from a trip, and she needed to go pick him up. She asked us if we wanted to join her and went to the bathroom to change her shirt. My eyes followed that grotesque creature who had surprisingly given birth.

Núcia looked at me, embarrassed, and apologized. She was beginning to figure out the difference between that type and me: the looks, the standards, the class, the authenticity.

We heard the door open and in came a brunette of around twenty-eight years of age, very feminine, extravagant, pretty but a little mundane, humming some samba.

She stopped and, as she said hi to Núcia, she asked, staring at me admiringly, “Hi Núcia. Who is that, you cradle robber?”

“My boo.”

Marlene ran her tongue over her teeth, sniffed – she was nursing a cold – sneezed, blew her nose, and called Bia. I listened and looked at Núcia. I could not hide my disgusted expression. What were those people?

“Bia, darling, hello, the geezer gave me some dough for rent, for the car lease and some extra change so we can go about. Are you okay, or are you shitting bricks?”

Marlene came back into the living room, sat with us, asked if we had already had some beer. Got up, took a bottle from the fridge, opened it. Núcia refused it. So did I.

“Oh my God, girls, it was hard to get rid of the geezer today. He was out of his mind. He’s supposed to give me money every time, I have to work extra hours. Holy shit,

it was fucked up, but it is what it is. Núcia, you don't need that, you're daddy's princess, soon you'll be engaged, back to the closet, married, then you'll keep your affairs, and no one will care. I have to put up with the old man, or we're fucked. That poor devil in the bathroom doesn't even earn enough for her cigarettes. And the husband hasn't sent money for the boy in about four months! We're calling a lawyer, there's no other way, is there? Sonofabitch is still hung up on her, keeps tormenting her and uses the boy for that. You can bet he'll be there at the airport, otherwise the boy would take a cab, right? But letting her go there alone? My ass."

She flipped the bird with both hands, had a few more sips of beer, stared at me, smiled, said I was a babe and went on, "Don't you think it's funny, Núcia? Men go crazy when they know we hang around with women, that we're lesbians. Gentlemen prefer lesbians..."

I listened, quiet. The things I had heard made me physically ill. Núcia felt ashamed, embarrassed. Using my curfew as an excuse, we left Bia's apartment. They came out with us. Núcia left the elevator first, along with Marlene, and I followed through the corridor side by side with the dyke, unsure of what to say as she showed some indignation that Núcia was hanging out with me. I even lied about my age and said I was seventeen, but she insisted it wasn't right— Núcia was not the one for me. I asked her why. She sighed. Núcia was too uptight, daddy's little girl, went to college, was a little lost, looking for an environment of "queer peers". As for me, I was acting like a young man starting to desire a lady with no idea what he's getting himself into. Núcia was not one to have long relationships. It was not going to work out. I was stupid enough to ask, "Why?"

She answered as if the weight of her lengthy experience was lending her wisdom, “Snap out of it, Flávia, for us lesbians, there are only prostitutes, women who are tired of being around men. I know... you should accept it sooner rather than later. Do you think Núcia is a virgin? She’ll marry that Eduardinho boy someday, you can bet on it. She left me for him. Did she tell you we used to be together? Great girl, but more into men. That’s women: they try a dick and there they stick.”

My legs were sweaty. I wanted to grab Núcia and rip her clothes off. But I did not do anything like that. Either way, it was a night of revulsion. Of jealousy. Of dark thoughts of Núcia under the enormous weight of that caricature of a woman who might have brought a faggot into this world, I didn’t know. I felt grossed out by her. And Eduardinho? Eduardo and Kênia, Eduardinho and Núcia. A messed-up coincidence. Núcia and her lesbian friends. Me, taken by a cradle robber, mocked by that low-level prostitute. What kind of world was that, opening the door for such horrible sights? And for me of all people, who swore not to have inner conflicts or severe emotional issues. I was tossing and turning in bed and feeling awful, filled with jealousy, after hearing Núcia’s pleas, feeling her grab me passionately and make me wet with her kisses and tears in the yard, where she attempted to finger me, kneeling down and trying to suck on my parts, like a carnivorous plant trying to devour a bug. I said no, lying to her that I had my period; she said it was no problem, that she was so desperate she might drink all my blood. We fought, and she confessed she was not a virgin; how foolish, what was the problem with not being a virgin? Screw Eduardinho.

The blood boiling in my veins, the memories of my games of pussy cats, of licking Kênia’s legs, of the moments under the table, staring at her delicious feet and her

fascinating shoes, and there I was, tossing and turning under my white sheets that would never be stained by any blood, except the blood of my period. The sound of steps in my mind. A car, splattered with mud, driving away, leaving a plume of black smoke and burnt oil, Miss Dulce's farts, the face on Kênia's husband, the coincidence with the names of my women's men, Kênia's moans when I nursed on her milkless breasts, Bia's facial features, and the idea of Núcia having sexual intercourse with her. And with Eduardinho. Marlene's slurring voice, modulated by alcohol, saying, "Gentlemen prefer lesbians." For us lesbians, there are only prostitutes, as Bia said.

My fingers touched my nipples. The hardened nipples of a pubescent girl in my hands, which made their way down my body, the feelings of guilt, of disgust. I felt like a black woman in a sea of blondes, expelled, kicked out. I felt like a Jewish woman in Hitler's time, having to walk in the middle of the streets, forbidden to step on the sidewalks. I felt like I was wearing armour, the visor on my helmet lowered, brandishing a sword to clear a path. I felt like a woman, not a girl, a lesbian, a homosexual, a person with a defined character, firm goals. No longer the rare pistillate growing among fake lesbians, the plant with no male organs. What was the point? What was the point of the protuberance, the appendix, the penis, the vagina, the hymen? It was all in one's mind. And the tongue, hidden inside the mouth like a concealed weapon.

The fire crackling, the blood in turmoil, boiling so much as to become red hot sand. The hands trying to rip out the chills from the body, the devil of desire within me, soft steps, shoes promising orgasms, ecstasy driving the soul's personal demons away. The nude body in nervous gestures, the half-open mouth trying to pluck thirsty mouths from thin air.

The shoe coming out of the box. Touching my body all over. The thin heel. My lustful eyes. The memory of the rubber glove mom would use to dye her hair. Persuasive thoughts. Firm steps. Firm ideas. My mom would notice the glove had gone missing but would never realize something else had vanished. The glove I took from the bathroom cabinet, an automaton driven by sex, by a profane, violating thought, by a defiling idea, by a desire that made me into a robot, magnetized me, led me on. The scissors opening fireplace tongs. The rubber finger cut out from the glove. The heel of the shoe on its symbolic performance. Me kissing and licking the straps. Saliva moistening the rubber finger, which covered the heel of the shoe, which I covered with my lips, lubricating it. Long objects signifying the male sex. The heel of the shoe. The step inside my house. The house that was my vagina.

I tossed and turned in my bed, caressing my own nipples, in a preparatory ritual, convulsing under the sheets, scared, with a desire greater than fear, committed to triumphing over myself, to taking apart everything that should not be whole inside me.

Sweaty, horny. Kênia was there. It was not my hand holding the shoe, it was Kênia's foot that put it on and approached me, and reached me, and touched me, and caressed me, and rubbed the tense flesh between my thighs. It was not like an apple cut in half, it was like the hot, glowing segments of an orange, splitting.

Crazy. Perverted. Kinky. Me, a fetishist. Barbaric violation. The shoe and the sex. The covered heel, wearing a rubber glove finger, lubricated with my own saliva, pushing inside, slowly, carefully, opening a path, forcing, under the pressure of my no longer shaky hands – which nothing could stop – the sharp pain along with the chills and the raving madness of the virgin body's deflowering.

Raped by a shoe, a self-rape. The orgasm growing with the burning pain that folded my body in two, as if my legs wanted to bend at the knee and reach my head. The heel entering, penetrating. All of it. The anger subsided. The macabre revenge against the lesbian that was destroying the little girl. The tears for the prostitutes, for the sadness of believing I would only have the leftovers of women who were despised by or fed up with men. All in a passionate vortex of self-inflicted wounds, of feeling that the blood staining the heel, dripping on the sheets, carried my self-definition. Me, owning myself. A lesbian who deflowered herself with the shoe of a woman who had become her obsession.

A definition as hollow as a vagina. A definition that filled my head with doubt like my vagina that contracted as if trying to hold forever inside me the thin heel of the shoe with colourful straps, like an extension of Kênia herself.

They came from the Lalicorne club, from the dives, from hustling. They were beautiful women, tired of men.

Women that reached out to their own gender in search of affection, women I compared to flowers that had withered, lost their petals, leaving only poison behind, forbidden essences like poppies.

A pistillate will rarely bloom among lesbians. It is rare for lilacs to survive in this poorly comprehended world that everyone tries to grasp.

As for the questions, unquestionable, unanswerable, they kept creating ideas, wondering, and philosophies in my mind. Why do gentlemen prefer lesbians? Why do lesbians abide prostitutes? What is the deal with fetishists?

It's all really sad. Very sad indeed!

We are always alone in the crowd, but our world is beautiful!

“Please, Flávia, spare me some attention. Ever since you became friends with Núcia, you’re never at parties anymore, and you’ve been avoiding me. Why? Everyone misses you. The ‘meow game’ is not exciting anymore.”

“Well, Fábio, one single person cannot spoil a game in which everyone is important.”

“It’s just that you gave the game sparkle and purpose. We see you as the queen pussy cat.”

I laughed, and he got excited.

“It’s true, like the queen bee in a hive. Everything revolves around her. Some people are like that, you are like that. The tiny lights in a room disappear when you turn on the main lights, like the sun that makes the stars invisible.”

“That’s beautiful.”

“It’s a piece of a letter I wrote you.”

“I didn’t get that one.”

“I didn’t send it.”

We walked in silence. It saddened me to be cold to him. It was an acute sadness that came from deep within my heart, stalled my tongue and stopped my voice in my throat.

When we got to the gates at my house, he reached for my shoulders and pressed them, trying to pull himself toward me. His eyes tried to penetrate me and, through my eyes, uncover the mysteries in my soul. I wished he could understand, and only like me as a boy appreciates a good friend or as a brother respects and cares about his sister.

The glow in Fábio's eyes was intense, and it shocked me. Maybe I should feel the same way about women as I was feeling about him right then, a kind of repulsion and aversion. I did not want him to take certain actions. I stepped back and pleaded:

"Please try to understand..."

"You like another guy."

"No."

"Then what?"

"We are still too young. I have been studying a lot. I don't want to date..."

"Why don't you leave her alone?"

Núcia's voice felt like a slap on my ear. She came out of nowhere from behind an apple tree. Fábio and I looked at her at the same time, she was emerging from the bushes like a guard dog.

"Did I startle the lovebirds? Come on, fly over here, you clown, don't you see she wants nothing to do with men, especially you?"

Once the surprise wore off, Fábio faced her, shocked by her unexpected attitude:

"Why don't you mind your own business?"

"Walk away, jerk, leave Flávia alone, she's not for you."

Fábio faced her. Took her in. Seemed to wonder about what to say and then turned to me:

"Was I harassing you, Flávia?"

I felt intimidated between the two. Fábio, with his vivid eyes on me, and Núcia, shaking her long mane like a lioness; I looked down and answered a simple:

"No."

Núcia was furiously circling around us, and I felt like her nostrils were flaring; she huffed, blowing out smoke as if turning into a dragon. She threw her cigarette away, faced me, baffled, and made things easier, in an audacious revelation to Fábio:

“Don’t you understand she’s disgusted by men? Don’t you understand that Flávia is a lesbian and wants nothing to do with you? Don’t you see we are lovers and you are getting in our way?”

Fábio did not look surprised or offended. He just stared at me in silence and, when Núcia started panting, out of breath, and demanding that I confirm what she was saying, he finally asked me:

“Is that true, Flávia?”

“Answer him!” Núcia snarled.

Núcia looked like she was ready to assault me and confronted Fábio with sarcastic expressions, glaring at him, mocking him, saying he was an idiot, that he was clueless, that he must have been blind to miss what I was, that he was just pretending not to see, so that he would enter a war that was going to end with him dead and stinking.

My tongue felt like it was stuck against my palate. The scene embarrassed me. It went against my politeness and principles. It wasn’t true what Núcia was saying, that I hated men. My father and my brother were men, and I adored them. She was saying a bunch of nonsense. Nothing about it was true. My feelings were something else. And I cared about Fábio a lot.

He pleaded. I could see a hint of begging in his eyes, asking me to lie, to say something that would stop him from leaving defeated and humiliated from this situation

with a hysterical lady who was about to burst into tears. As inconsiderate as it made me, I could no longer hide what I was.

“Yes, I am a lesbian.”

It felt like I was dooming myself or saying something very dramatic. It felt like I was saying, “I’m a communist, I’m a nazi, I’m a terrorist, I’m subversive... I’m against everything and everyone... I’m the devil... I’m a universal abomination... I’m... what?”

He stared at me, taking it in, and his gaze made me feel awful.

“Okay.”

I did not understand what he meant by that, as he left us. I thought it might mean he would not bother me again, that he understood, that he would leave me alone, that Núcia had won.

And Núcia, intriguing, jealous and nervous, started letting out her doubts and suspicions:

“What are you, after all? You have this sour expression because that macho guy left? Is it because I outed you?”

“You shouldn’t have done that.”

“Why not? Who were you trying to fool? Me? Both of us? What are you, after all?”

“I know what I am, and that’s enough. I don’t need to announce it or use these unpleasant words to keep a man away. I think it all requires respect and class.”

Núcia laughed out loud. An angry, spiteful laugh. At that moment, her hatred toward men had a life of its own in its intention to exterminate them. She looked like the leader of a party against men, able to break them apart with her teeth and savage them

with her nails. Her eyes glistened, and she sputtered as she despaired, wishing I would feel the same contempt and disgust for men that she was demonstrating.

“You like him...”

“I do. I care about him. I admire him. Fábio is a gentle, smart guy, and I would have known how to keep him away without causing all this trouble... who knows if he’s going to start a rumour... It would be very unpleasant... I don’t like to be talked about... I know when and where to be what I am.”

“You’re two-faced. And you’re scared.”

“I’m careful.”

“Fábio will never tell. It would be embarrassing for him to lose a girl to a lesbian.”

“But you really shouldn’t have done it. I can defend myself without hurting anyone else.”

“You’re scared.”

“I’m worried. It’s different.”

“What is the princess worried about? Losing her lackey? If that’s the case, don’t be scared, I mean *worried*. No man would admit defeat, especially Fábio. He’ll be back, more forcefully. Can’t imagine him throwing in the towel! Because of a woman! He will never admit being bested by a lesbian... men don’t understand... they don’t accept it, they don’t take no for an answer.”

...

Fábio definitely didn’t. As was his habit, he approached me on the corner of a sidewalk as I was coming home from school.

“No need to look around, Núcia isn’t coming this time.’

“Be reasonable, Fábio.”

“You’re embarrassed. I don’t want you to feel embarrassed with me...”

“That’s not it. I’m just sad.”

“Sad?”

“I don’t want to be judged for it, not by you. I didn’t want you to find out... the way you did.”

“I’ve always known.”

What he said hit me. I felt my cheeks getting red. Shame grew on me as if he had violated me, as if he had taken advantage of a certain naiveté and of my feelings of respect and esteem for him. The bitterness of that revelation cut me to the quick, and he noticed how disappointed I was. Maybe he was trying to fix it or maybe he was telling the truth, but I was still staring at him, disillusioned, my moral principles trampled on.

“Anyway, I like you... we cannot choose that, the heart wants what it wants...”

His explanation sounded reasonable. The content did not convince me, but he seemed sincere.

“Even knowing what I am, you like me?”

He shrugged and widened his eyes, looking like someone who doesn’t have the correct answer to offer, but said:

“I think that’s a thing for ardent women. Lonely, celibate, women who worry about emancipation but go about it the wrong way. Men search for women on the streets. After all, they can’t fulfill their desires with the women they love and want in their beds, because they have to protect their fiancée’s virtue until their wedding day. Because they see sex with a virgin as a trap that will lead them to getting married before they are ready or

against their will – a police matter, really. Well, that is why men go after prostitutes, who will only give them physical pleasure, and you can bet it's not even that good... a man and a woman's sexual acts need to smell like desire... like mutual craving... like love. The ardent woman, the one with fire in her veins, the one that does not accept these notions, which limit her and infringe upon her freedom, ends up going after her girlfriend... the one who is willing to do such things..."

"You have a point, but that's not the case."

I was not comfortable talking about it, but Fábio looked so bitter and anxious, so patient and polite, that I did not know how to end the conversation. It actually helped me clear my thoughts and strengthen my personality.

"We could be good friends."

"A man cannot be friends with the woman he desires. I can't."

I stopped in front of my house. My sharp eyes explored the garden. The apple tree, which would rarely produce a couple of tiny apples, and the plants around it, cared for by my mom, did not seem to be hiding anyone. I held my books against my chest. I remembered what Fábio said when he approached me.

"Why did you say Núcia wouldn't show up this time?"

He looked me firmly in the eyes. He was indecisive. For some reason, his purpose wavered, but I thought he was being mean and nosy, revengeful and cunning – I think I even hated him for a second – when he told me:

"Núcia is making love with Eduardinho at this very moment."

It sounded like a death announcement. I felt my legs trembling and the colour draining from my face. It was all evident and enlightening. Easy to understand, Fábio's

game. He knew Eduardinho. They had been in touch and had conspired about everything. Definitely, Núcia was with Eduardinho. That was what mattered, to prove Fábio was right. If I wanted proof that he was telling the truth and that Núcia was not what she seemed, I just had to get into his car, and he would take me to where the two of them were.

That was what Fábio said, as he took the books I was carrying and led me to his Buick, parked close by.

He talked, delivering a speech, a real manifesto against lesbianism. He was sure that was not what I was. If I wanted to get rid of my “addiction”, I could.”

The back of my neck was sweaty. I couldn't believe what he was determined to prove. That Núcia was in the arms of a man. Bia had mentioned Eduardinho. The Buick crossed streets I did not recognize. I was blind. My thoughts were all entangled. Núcia showed so much spite and disgust for men, caused arguments, offended me, doubted my honesty, wanted me to see men as the enemy, as a despicable race. No, it could not be true what Fábio was telling me.

“That's Núcia. All Eduardinho needs to do is call, beckon, and she comes running to him.”

The same thing Bia had said. She had tried to warn me. But they were not to be trusted. Bia had been with Núcia. Fábio liked me. Núcia and Eduardinho, Kênia and Eduardo, Marlene and Bia – them and their men! Dirty world. Disgusting people. No morals. Fábio talking. Trying to convince me that I was not what I was, that the whole lesbian thing was some sexual deviant phase, that all it took was a real desire to be educated on what is right and better, and any woman could do it. Núcia's face showing how disgusted she was by men, Bia's words: “They try a dick and there they stick”. I felt

like screaming. I was not part of that clan, that was not what I was, that was not how I thought.

Fábio had been reading some material on psychology and everything that discussed women and their emotions, Freud, God and specially I could not convince him to accept what I was, because he had his own philosophy about it. That is why he stood by me; he wanted to help. He wanted to rid me of Núcia. He wanted to guide my path away from what led helpless women like me toward damnation, disease, madness and suicide.

“I’m not helpless, and my life won’t end tragically. Where are you taking me?”

“You’re going to see Núcia with Eduardinho.”

Fábio was sarcastic. His voice sounded vengeful for what she had said and done to him. I thought he was being unscrupulous, playing dirty. His grin bruised my ego, and my jealousy turned into white-hot rage. Maybe my pride even outweighed my rage. So I decided:

“I don’t want to see anything. Take me back.”

“You don’t believe me, Flávia, but you should. You have to leave this mess while there’s still time... Núcia has only used you sexually to satisfy her needs. She is nothing but a nymphomaniac, do you know what that is?”

Of course I did. I knew everything. I was an encyclopedia of sex knowledge. Sexology was my thing. Fábio broke down in front of me, with his hollow words and his vengeful intentions, trying to make his point on lesbianism and win me.

“Take me back. I don’t want to know anything about Núcia... what she does doesn’t affect me...”

My voice trembled. Fábio looked at me. For a moment, he showed insecurity and pity, but his words annoyed me even more:

“You’re embarrassed and scared of men. You’re tied to prejudices forced upon you by wrongful and rigid education, which negatively affected your desires. Men have become taboo to you.”

“What taboo? You don’t understand,” I said, and reinforced it, spelling it out with courage and determination I never thought I had: “I am a lesbian!”

His smile was that of someone listening to fantasies and incoherent thoughts, and it annoyed me:

“Okay, I don’t care what you think about it, what I want is for you to let me go right here and now. I know well what you are capable of to avoid admitting defeat. I do not believe what you said about Núcia. Stop the car, I want to get out.”

It was almost eleven, and soft rain had started. I was almost late to get home, and my parents would start worrying soon. Renato was probably waiting for me by the gate, and Elisa, calling the school, trying to find out if something happened that had kept me there.

Fábio turned the windshield wipers on, and the scratching noise on the glass started to annoy me. I turned them off. He shook his head, noticing my lack of control, and tried to convince me:

“All right, Flávia, just give me this opportunity. Come with me, I will prove I’m not lying and then I’ll take you home and never approach you again. I promise, unless you need support, or a friend who will do anything to help.”

He accelerated, and when he parked, I was in shock. We were in front of Núcia's friends' building.

...

I did what Fábio suggested. I stepped aside as he stood by the door, ringing the bell.

Marlene was the one that greeted us. Her voice and her smile appeared happy, but when she saw me behind Fábio, her smile vanished, and her voice seemed to have been swallowed back down into her throat. Bia appeared in the back and was equally stunned to see me. There was no one else in the living room, but there were glasses and empty beer bottles. Two extra glasses. Four in total. We walked toward the centre of the room and, while the owners of the place – which reeked of cigarettes – looked embarrassed, Fábio proudly stared at the closed door, probably a bedroom.

Bia rubbed her eyes, then got her attitude back, probably remembering how she had warned me. She took the opportunity to shake her head meaningfully and waited, silently, knowing beforehand what Fábio's intent was. It had just occurred to me she might have known it all along and might have been a part of setting up Núcia and Eduardinho and then bringing me along to catch them. I saw a threat on Marlene's face, staring daggers at Fábio and resenting Bia. She tried to de-escalate the situation and relieve some of the tension in the room, but Fábio did not let her offer me a beer when she reached for the bottle.

Fábio marched across the room and knocked on the bedroom door. His voice sounded strange and imposing:

“Eduardinho, that's enough, it's my turn, I need the room.”

And what made me stumble and run from that apartment was Núcia's drunk, disgusting voice, yelling, while that man's laugh was the soundtrack to my pain:

“Piss off... we're not leaving here today...”

Everything happens so fast during *Carnaval*

Ever since then, I have understood why actual lesbians like me walk alone, hide, fear developing new relationships, avoid certain environments and form small groups which take shelter in apartments in search of leisure; playing cards, chatting, as if they were at a typical party, like any respectable family would do.

That event – Fábio, Núcia, Eduardinho and the rest of their gang – did not stop at the embarrassment I went through.

I also understood that women like Núcia give off the wrong impression about lesbians and that types like Bia and Marlene are really responsible for the terrible things that are said about us.

Núcia came after me and tried to convince me and change my mind with hysterical outbursts, saying she had been the victim of an evil plot created by Bia, with Fábio behind it, to split us up. She even got to the point of trying to convince me that muscular, hairy Eduardinho, whom I later met, was a fag, a queen, a sodomite, that they were not doing anything in the bedroom, that Bia and Marlene had asked her to go there that night and lock herself in the bedroom with Eduardinho so that, when Fábio got there with one of his whores to use the bedroom, it would already be occupied. They owed him favours and had not found another way to get rid of him, and he was turning the apartment into a true party house. She was actually the disappointed one; everyone was trying to mess with her, and I had actually been there to hook up with Fábio. That hurt more than finding out she was nothing but a depraved creature with two faces and no identity.

If there had ever been any feelings on my part toward Núcia, they were buried so deep within the pain that my desires and illusions ended up drowning.

Fábio wrote me letters, stopped me at the gate of my school, told me he was sorry for what he had done, tried to approach me by any means possible and make me pay attention to him. Still, his deceitful games made me understand I should always have some reservations about people and avoid trying to make them understand my nature or accept me as I am.

I would have to keep a certain distance, which would make people realize their place and never have the opportunity to put me through further embarrassment and disappointment.

Bia's words stuck with me... for lesbians, there are only prostitutes... they try a... and there they stick. I figured that the right thing to do would be to always pretend and never trust anyone.

Back then, women used *Carnaval* as a chance to wear pants, shirts, ties, dress like men to be better identified by other women, the "bottoms."

The *Carnaval* parties in the clubs marked grand moments in lesbian lives, when they were allowed to dress up as Zorro, a cowboy, wear masks, cut their hair short, draw mustaches with eyebrow pencils and even sideburns. It was freedom. The devil let them loose on the streets, and they took the clubs by assault.

The orchestra would play the *sambas* and *marchas*, colourful coiled ribbons would fly across the room, confetti littered the floor and lesbians gathered in the washrooms.

And there they went, the enticed women, the ones with the tendency to let loose during those three marvellous days of partying.

I was dressed as Zorro – or better, his female counterpart, because my long hair, under my felt hat, made what I was less obvious. I knew about Arakan's reputation, the parties in the airport rooms, and I went there with some friends from college.

I was eighteen then, and experienced, Kênia's shoe still acting as a damper for my stronger emotions; in my moments of loneliness and desire, it would always fulfill my body's needs, an instrument of pleasure in which I sought the payoff for being a genuine lesbian among so many people who had no idea who they were and what they wanted.

Strong women with huge tits, rough voices and masculine ways, some with children or even affairs – fake perverts, always willing to flirt, with me, with any other lesbian or even with men – those dykes, shaking their tits as if they were weapons, grenades that would explode milk all over everyone's faces. They were the ones in the front line of a fake women's emancipation movement, making everything ridiculous and lowering the standards for everything anyone might think about lesbians, mistaking a movement of social class towards gender equality, the end of the wage gap and workplace recognition for sexual liberation.

I saw them arriving, suspicious, as if trying to become invisible, arm in arm with men, walking up the stairway that led to the clubs, arm in arm with fags to try to make it through the door. The news that homosexuals would not be allowed into Arakan had been spreading for months.

I had already entered when I saw a man running toward the group who was handing their tickets to the doorman, yelling, shaking neurotically, blocking their path.

"Don't let them in, give back their tickets, give back their money; "homos" are not allowed here."

The group stuck together, the doorman was pushed aside by the dyke, the individual who prevented them from coming inside was grabbed by the collar, and the dyke hit him with punches that came right out of a boxing ring. The man fell, stunned, the fag hopped over him and ran toward the party. A group of cops ran after him and grabbed him by the elbows. He hung onto to the cop with arms and legs, as the cop tried to get rid of him, and yelled, still hanging on:

“Let me go, beefcake...”

While the cops’ batons rained down on the dyke by the door, some guy named Manville was able to escape the soft mounds that were her tits. She gave up, raising her arms to defend herself, saying:

“Not with a stick, you motherfuckers, fight like me, with bare hands; then I want to see if any of you are left standing.”

The black baton hit her on the head, and her legs folded. I grabbed my chest with my hands, feeling something weird and violent. Revulsion. Pity. Sorrow – and above all, shame.

My *Carnaval* was ruined. It turned into Lent. That scene was too sad for me. The fag yelling things with his high-pitched voice that I had never heard before, being thrown out; the dyke carried downstairs by the cops. Manville letting in the young woman who was crouching in a corner, scared and trying not to let it show that she had been with the dyke, all snobby, wearing a sarong, covered in leis and with startled feminine eyes, and said, trying to puff out his unpuffable chest, which caved in under his ripped shirt:

“You may come in...”

I thought the woman was going to turn around and follow the cops who were dragging away the passed-out dyke. It took four of them, struggling to carry the enormous weight, and her ass was thumping against the steps, while the heels on her pretty date's shoes clack-clack-clacked inside the room that kept regurgitating people.

I think the only reason I did not throw up was that I swallowed all the words that tried to climb out of my stomach, trying to curse the bitch who, without a second glance, chose the *Carnaval* party over finding out where her dyke was being taken.

My group of friends was as astonished as I was, watching the grand spectacle, and we decided it would be best to try to create a happy environment for ourselves, since there was nothing we could do for that poor devil who was kept out for being a lesbian. Then a beautiful *mulatta* strutted by us and revealed her "tendencies" telling us:

"If she had been with me, I would have clawed that piece of shit's eyes out. I'd like to see him trying to stop a black woman from coming in! I'd castrate him!"

That was what I wanted to do, but I refrained. It felt like the whole night was over for me. Wherever I looked around the club, I would see Manville – my heart would contract, and the *mulatta*'s words would echo in my mind.

Then the moment arrived for them to announce the candidates for the pageants: Queen of Arakan, Queen of *Carnaval*, The Most Beautiful Reveller, The Most Ornate Costume. I paid attention, seeing the man on the stage, puffing, or trying to puff out, that skinny chest, his imposing manner, the obvious owner of the place and of *Carnaval* nights.

Manville seemed to me the demon that needs to be exorcised, thrown down by my cross. They talked, I listened, I did not try to reassure myself, I soon decided what I was

going to do. Above all, because the future Queen really was gorgeous and had been “elected” for being old Manville’s lover and turning tricks at the Big Holliday Club.

And turn tricks she did. What else could she do with all that beauty? What about me? What could I accomplish being what I was?

I went to the washroom. I pulled my hair inside the Zorro hat. Removed my lipstick. Combed my thick eyebrows, which my friends asked me in vain to get waxed. Pulled a small strand of hair from each side, making sideburns.

I snuck to spot below the stage and watched the pageant. I watched and took notice of every movement the group made. The “Queen” would approach Manville every couple of minutes, and he would lightly pat her face, her hands, her shoulders, assuring her that she would get the crown, he was there to make sure of it. Everyone noticed how rigged it was, it was a phony contest.

I listened and did not care about who was speaking; I didn’t even try to find out who they were, why they didn’t lead a different kind of life. I could not care less about the fact that they were prostitutes; in my mind, the baton coming down repeatedly onto the dyke’s head, her passing out and being miserably dragged downstairs, her huge ass thumping on the steps.

“They’re all hustlers. They come from the clubs, Lalicorne, Big Holliday, La Vie en Rose... all with their ‘patrons’. Then they go to the toilet, and we snack on every single one.”

I heard laughter, whispers, denials, curses, dares and fights among couples of jealous lesbians.

And there was the event. I made it. At some point, the eyes of the one that had already been chosen to be the Queen fell on me. My eyes stuck to her, holding her gaze; I hypnotized her with my thoughts, with the intent of my charms and unique wiles directed at her.

At that exact moment, I felt someone's hand on my shoulder. I turned around. It was Bia, with Marlene by her side. I took a step back, disgusted by their filthy, distasteful presence.

"Long time no see, Flávia... have you seen Núcia? She's around..."

"No, and I don't want to."

Bia tried to convince me to let it go, as she had done before, trying to find a way into my mind with her lies. Because I had no interest in believing them, I ended the conversation, excusing myself to go find someone who was allegedly waiting for me and leaving the place where I had been able to, for brief seconds, flirt with the Queen of *Carnaval*.

The *surdo* drum, the bass drum and the thumping of the dyke's butt all echoed in my mind. I drank some pop, my friends mocked me. They insisted that even a dead body would rise and *samba* in that environment and dragged me to the dance floor. I saw the lady in the sarong enjoying herself. I approached her slowly, trying not to reveal anything. I poked her ribs as if I was trying to stab her with a dagger. She turned to me. Stared at me. Something in her eyes scared me. The cold edge of a knife which made me take a step back and realize it was not worth picking a fight with her.

The stage was empty. Where could the candidates have gone? The princesses and queens of the previous year and the new recipient of the crown? I avoided my

thoughts of revenge. The sweet revenge that would be an outrage to my morals, because Desirée was a hustler and on top of everything, the lover of that poor excuse of a man.

I followed my friends into the washroom. And there she was. She saw me in the mirror and stared. Everything happens so fast during *Carnaval*, rushed. The fear of missing your chance; that is why that instant flirtation seemed to bend time into an eternity between us, which ended in a smile on the Queen's lips.

She asked me for a comb. I willingly pretended to hear "matches".

"I don't have matches."

"I asked for a comb."

"I'm bald."

She laughed. Actually, she just smiled awkwardly; I apologized and kept on staring at her. I gave her my hairbrush. That staring was a real sexual act, as she sensually brushed her long red hair. I felt chills going through my body. The novelty excited me. She was a hustler. That excited me, knowing what she was, a sex worker! A new feeling bloomed inside me. She was interested! Some "homos" asked her for an autograph. A prostitute giving autographs! I took notice of that. Queen of *Carnaval*, one of the club's regulars! She might own the airport someday if she smiled for the owners of the airlines the way she was smiling at me. Her breasts were almost escaping through her neckline, and her tongue casually touched her lips, insinuating things that I knew by heart.

She took a small bottle from her purse, which complemented her Folies Bergère *cancan* dancer costume. She spritzed the perfume on my chest. The *lança-perfume*¹ bottle went back into her purse – covered in trembling, blinging, colourful stones – and she stepped toward me, smiling with teeth so white they looked as if they came right out

of a toothpaste ad. Her gorgeous smile, delicious, piercing eyes, flaring nostrils, which flared even harder when she lowered her head towards my chest and inhaled the substance, deeply, intensely, repeating the action with the bottle taken from her purse, cooling my breasts.

I stumbled with her grabbing me and heard my friends laughing, paying attention and daring me to go on, pushing me, along with her, toward a reserved stall. They closed the door. The toilet was full. Smelly. A total disenchantment. Someone had thrown up. This was no place for me to sneak into with a gorgeous woman, even if she was intoxicated, but it was the place for her to get rid of whatever was pulling her down. I took the bottle from her hand and threw it into the toilet. Her eyes widened, and she looked angry, trying to say something, but I held my breath and brought my mouth toward the delicious lips of Desirée.

I was no Napoleon or Zorro, but I felt like I was riding a horse, stomping on Manville. There was no way I could let her leave my arms and go to his! My mouth went to her breasts. I knew full well what the touch of a woman could do to another woman. I let my hands wander all over Desirée's body, tempting her with my frenetic kisses and moans, excited by the thought of, even more than getting the Queen of Arakan, taking Manville's woman; I had to take her body and conquer her soul.

My friends knocked at the stall door. I held Desirée by her waist and looked deep into her eyes, feeling the vertigo of staring into a spinning kaleidoscope where the sensation of her gaze dragged me.

"The night is almost over. It's almost four o'clock. Come with me."

"Where?"

“Around... let’s extend our *Carnaval*.”

“I can’t.”

“Because of him?”

“Yes. He supports me. I can’t leave without him.”

“You’re already the Queen. Queens always have convincing arguments, especially when they meet their Zorro, or when a Desirée meets her Napoleon...”

“That’s what you think... tomorrow is the last day... you’ll see, he will disqualify me... sleeping around and wanting to be the Queen of *Carnaval*!...”

She joined her hands in front of my face and tried to pull away, thinking about her rivals, who were probably “salivating” over Manville.

I kissed her with all the will and passion of someone who is trying to win a battle, because, above all, my desire for her was growing; something was boiling inside me, I was totally intoxicated by her beauty and femininity.

She started reciprocating, became aroused; the music, sounding far away, brought final verses, the *lança-perfume*, its smell lingering on me, and our devouring mouths took her emotions to the maximum level, the emotions of a woman who is attracted to women, overcoming all of her resistance.

We left the stall. My friends were nowhere to be seen. On the dancefloor, I walked by Núcia, surrounded by Bia, Marlene, Norma and Fábio, whose face betrayed his emotions upon seeing me and, instinctively, in a child-like gesture, swung his arm around Núcia’s waist, pulling her closer. He kissed her on the lips. I noticed that he was doing it more out of anger toward me than from a true desire to kiss her.

From the stage, Manville searched for his Queen and *protégée*. Desirée tried to hide behind the groups that were still dancing, but I pretended not to notice her attempt to avoid Manville seeing me with her and tried my best to get him to see us holding hands.

During that time, looking at the stage, delighting in Manville's anger, who followed us with his eyes, I saw, coming from behind him, a young woman in a sarong climbing up the stairs to the stage.

She had something in her hand, and her attitude seemed suspicious, because she snuck around while people tried to hide her, jumping around her. It was a weird crew of fags and dykes.

I heard the screams mingle with the music. I saw the commotion. I glanced at Manville's body falling to the ground and the group yelling and bouncing down the stairs.

The woman in the sarong had hit Manville's head ferociously with a beer bottle. His face was a bloody red mess, which squirted like a slaughtered pig.

The hustle and bustle was being instigated by the dyke's gang, who had covered for the young woman so that she could run away before the cops found out who had swung the bottle so violently at the head of the pasty, skinny lover of the Queen of *Carnaval*, who by then was fleeing the place and running down the airport's stairs and pulling me by the hand.

I reached the lady in the sarong further away and yelled:

"Come with me... I'll give you a ride..."

She answered with a new glow in her eyes, the glow of a knife that had already drawn the blood of its revenge:

"No, thanks, my friends are waiting."

How innocent is a child, really?

A vagina is hollow. It can fit a whole fist. It fit mine. I felt it entering, penetrating, stretching its way in. Fingers gathered, tight. All of them. Inside Desirée's vagina. Banging, banging. She was moaning and I was scared, more than that, anguished, hearing her speak, while in my mind, a waterfall of white powder glistened, drizzling like weird rain onto a plate of soup.

“Deeper, put it all in, like that, baby, stronger, rip me apart, go deep.”

My wrist hurt, my fingers were soaked, and I could trace the contour of her uterus with them. My arm felt like it was going to be buried inside that wet cave that was like a burning, famished mouth swallowing my hand.

Her body moved along with the sinuous rhythm of her hips, and at the same time, I licked her stomach and whatever else I could, reaching her clitoris with my tongue. My throat hurt right to the base of my tongue. The muscles at the sides of my face, the ones that joined the tongue and the jaw, hurt so much it was hard to stretch it out.

On us, there lingered a smell of the end of *Carnaval* night, dust, *lança-perfume*, beer and sex.

Desirée rolled her eyes, yelled, made obscene gestures, cursed and uttered many other exaltations, which for me related to coitus, the sexual act between a woman and a man:

“Spill your load... now... cum... give me your load... put it all inside me... fuck me...”

I was more shocked than aroused, and under the bossy encouragement of the beautiful and hot Queen of *Carnaval*, I gave the impulse of my arm all the potency of a horse-like member, which did not spill what she was asking for, which fucked her with a

closed fist, filling her vagina as she squirmed and shook to reach the maximum point of orgasm. I even imagined, in a moment of madness, that I was about to ejaculate through my fingertips.

“Take it out... Take it out... You’re hurting me... You put it up to your wrist... You pervert... Suck me... Suck on my p...”

That was what I was for her, as a homosexual in bed. And she pressed my head with her thick thighs, moving her body in a frantic rhythm.

She came, shook, rolled in bed. She was drenched in sweat, satisfied, and even more hysterical about what came to her mind when the inebriation of the orgasm was over, and the following drowsiness got to her.

She stared at me. Jumped out of bed, grabbed her costume with quick, nervous gestures, and, without washing, pulled the leotard that looked like it belonged to a can-can dancer up her thighs, asking me for help with the buttons.

Her despair and affliction were indescribable. My touch would not help in any way.

I took her home. Fearfully, she stared at the third floor of the building she lived at. She had already noticed that the “patron” was in the apartment, waiting for her. She had seen Manville’s car parked at the front, and she stalled. Coming up with excuses to throw him off her scent.

“I wonder if I’m still going to be Queen.”

I sighed. I had reached the limits of my patience and politeness. I reach over her to open the passenger door:

“Who knows.”

She looked at me, exasperated as if she could not understand my lack of empathy.

“It’s really important to me. It will be the beginning of my career, you see? Pictures for magazines, TV ads, movies, soap operas...”

“Go sell your beauty to old Mister Cracker. I have nothing to fill your big vagina with.”

She looked at me, shocked and curious:

“What did you say?”

“Nothing. Hurry. Before Mister Cracker gets stale.”

She got quickly out of the car and slammed the door angrily. I had offended her and scared her with my sudden aggressiveness. Even so, she looked at me as though she was asking, “What do I tell him?” Since I stayed silent, she smacked her lips, nervous, trying to come up with something to deceive the man.

Sleepy and disappointed, I examined Desirée, thinking she was as vulgar and hollow as her vagina, which I could fit my whole hand inside. My fingers were still numb from the pressure. She took a long time to cum, and she seemed to need pain to reach orgasm. I didn’t think there was one cock in the entire world that could satisfy her, her vagina being so stretched. I caught myself shaking my head, astounded by that realization, while she seemed troubled and afflicted, coming up with a story to fool her lover. She was probably going to say she had been kidnapped by someone from the gang that had assaulted him.

She was nasty, and I realized I would always only be a tool to satisfy the perversions and deviances of women like Desirée, whose name was not even Desirée. She was a mundane Maria Rosa da Silva.

Before I got out of there, she, who had already stepped toward the building, turned back, trying to balance on the thin heels of her extravagant black vinyl boots, and came to the window, to kiss me passionately on the lips.

“Don’t be mad, Flávia, you are delicious. I need him to get where I want to go, that’s all. When will I see you again? Go to Arakan to watch me get my crown, if the bastard swallows my lies. Are you going?”

“To be turned away?”

“Let your hair down. You disguise it well, don’t go as Zorro. I will find a way to talk to you in the washroom.”

“Okay.”

Again, the heels clicking up the sidewalk, the car driving away, the way home, the disappointment. It was just a night of sex, and she was the only one that left satisfied. I had only my sore hand, smelling like something acidic that activated my tastebuds and all the nerves in my tongue, and felt like it contained a whole electricity net in short-circuit. I had tasted her black flower, which smelled like *lança-perfume*. A soft flower with little black hairs, looking tiny, but housing so much!

I drove by Hotel Rialto, where we had stayed, and for the sake of doing something crazy that would satisfy my embarrassed ego, I laughed out loud and exclaimed, still impressed with what I had done:

“That was one big vagina!”

Why did women come after us, go crazy trying to get something, to have an affair, but could not let men go even if we could financially support them? Was it an addiction? And why did it not happen with me? Most had a “patron,” hung around men, had been

married – to try to conceal it, they said – but when men were looking, they behaved like real damsels in distress. Why was I attracted only to women? Was there in the whole world at least one real bottom lesbian who had never been with a man or used one to avoid society finding out what she was?

All the bottoms I had met since my first contact and relationships with homosexuals, all, with no exception, had had experiences with men, they all had been deflowered. Where were the virgins? I didn't know any. Only teenagers, neophytes, undecided or undefined, scared or methodical, trying to hide their tendencies, dating and rubbing against men behind trees, against walls, in alleyways, in practical sex lessons, even when they gave me looks of undeniable mutual identification. A lesbian could never fool another lesbian, as subtle as she was when concealing her tendencies, that I could guarantee – and the poor women that fell under my gaze, they could not escape. Either by curiosity or just plain horniness, they were sure to go to bed with me. Completely sexual. Black, hairy butterfly wings always beating in the rhythm of an orgasm and the flight of desire.

That assertion started to dominate my mind and confirm that for lesbians, there really were only prostitutes. The word tasted sour in my mouth: prostitutes! All women! Who were the victims? The deceived men or the real lesbians like myself?

...

I didn't go to Arakan. I went to Palmeiras. I watched the party. I did not want to expose myself, nor could I. I did not dance, and I went home early. Women flirted with me, men invited me to play. I thought all women vulgar, and I felt bad for the men that strutted arm in arm with them, as I identified their type. All hypocritical and selfish. A kind

of revulsion came over me. What about love? What was love? It felt like it was buried under the black wings of agitated butterflies who wish to be swallowed by flowers. Everything turning inside me. Everything falling into the bitter well of frustration.

Cheap running shoes, boots, small shoes, big shoes and sandals, in a frantic rhythm, kicking up dust. Dirty feet that annoyed me.

The power of Kênia's shoe took hold of me again. It was like my whole life was tied up in it.

I do not know why I cried that night, holding the shoe, kissing it, feeling like time was turning back, and I was resting between Kênia's soft breasts. It was a sweet memory that softened the brutality of life, the insensitivity of other women and the meaning of sex.

Sex. Only sex. All sex. But from the memory of Kênia came a more significant, unique caring feeling, one that I could never replace with another feeling. My erotic ghost. My childhood toy. She was the colourful illusion of my secret childhood world, with its evil pirate, who did not like pets or me – Mister Eduardo, always looking like he was displeased with life and not trusting anything or anyone.

How was she? I didn't even know her age. I could do the math in my mind, by her looks she must have been about twenty-three years old back then. Maybe more? And it had been fifteen years since she left in the old Ford with the man who took her away never to return.

Kênia's name had never even been muttered by my lips, not even when my mom spoke about old neighbours. I only listened, my heart aching and eagerly curious to find out anything about Kênia.

On the first page of *Notícias Populares*, I saw Desirée's face lit up with her sweet smile, born from her fascination with the idea of becoming a model and ultimately working in TV shows and movies. She was capable of anything, even dealing with that pasty old man. How could she hold on to him, considering the size of her vagina? What came to my mind filled me with disgust. Desirée must have a lot of other abilities. My eyes fixated on her sweet smile, and her lips, beautiful, lustful, soft, obscene, told me everything.

She was crowned Queen of Arakan, and I felt like a jester.

My mom came into my room. I told her a bunch of lies and, all of a sudden, paid attention to what she was trying to tell me. Just out of politeness, because my folks' conversations never really interested me.

"What did you say?"

"You won't believe who was here last night. She arrived right after you left. She looked so good! Prettier than ever. She never forgot about us. Asked about you a lot. Wanted to know if you were married, what you were studying, if you were working, everything, guess who?"

"No idea. Neide? Renato's first girlfriend?"

"Kênia."

I was speechless. I think I actually imploded. The weight of the emotional impact made me feel like a seven-year-old-girl under the shards of a woman who had shattered into a thousand pieces.

My mom didn't notice, or maybe my emotions didn't show on my face. Inside me, a whirlwind scattered them all around. My mom's voice sounded like a lullaby, a musical background of a secret world that suddenly opened its doors wide.

“Oh! You don’t even remember, you were so young. But I know you used to adore her. We used to leave you at her house when we needed to go out, do you remember?”

“No, I don’t,” I think I said, or tried to lie. My mom was still talking, happy and nostalgic:

“Fifteen years gone by! Wow! Kênia is now forty-one. Poor thing! How she suffered!”

My mom’s face and voice changed, and everything inside me kind of fell into the right place. The idea of Kênia suffering as much as my mom’s inflection revealed worried me.

“You can’t even imagine such a horrible event! How could this kind of thing happen? She became a widow.”

“Oh?!”

I think there was a kind of euphoria of sudden delight mixed with the indignation in my voice.

“It was all so sad and tragic. Even more, it was insane! Eduardo shouldn’t have done what he did. It was awful!”

“Okay, what happened, though?”

“He committed suicide. So many ways to do it, being a doctor, and he did such a horrifying thing, it gives me the chills! Mister Eduardo had cancer, one of the worst kinds, he was terminal. You don’t remember it because you were too young to understand. They got rid of everything they owned. They were going to travel to Italy, where he would undergo treatment with a doctor who was becoming famous for his treatments. Mister Eduardo did not have any faith in it, which is why he did that. He should have been less

reckless, or calculated it better, to die at home, not driving his car and risking not only Kênia's but a lot of other lives. I think he went mad. The pain and the certainty of nearing death got to him."

"I'm intrigued. What did he do?"

"I'm getting there. They suffered a violent accident right there, at Avenida Brasil right after leaving their house. They came to say goodbye, you even sat on the front steps to watch them leave. The thing is he did not die either from the accident or from his cancer. It's a mystery. Funny thing, we never found out about it until Kênia came back... Poor woman, she went through hell! All she's suffered! You should hear her tell it. Just awful!"

I started making sense of it and reliving those moments, with my gut, my heart, my blood, everything aching inside me in a terrifying contraction. The precocious little girl, jealous, smart, who liked playing pussy cats, was a little monster – the little polymorph monster, like Freud had defined children so aptly. I was scared of myself, terrified, startled. Yes, startled. What could I feel other than a big shock that left me in tatters?

The lightbulbs, ground to a fine white powder. The thin cascade of glass dust falling into the bowl of soup. I was a potential criminal! That pain in my mind. But I was only seven! I was utterly incapable of understanding the criminal aspect of the situation or understanding myself in that light, and I was not liable due to my age on the occasion.

So, according to criminal law, I was free, but on the other hand, it would be necessary to psychologically examine the problem and my real irresponsibility. That was legal medicine. If that had been the subject of a test at school, I would not have remembered it so clearly. Still, the fear, the horrific feeling I had about myself and what I now understood I had done sharpened my memory, and my self-preservation instincts

assured me I would never have to be judged for that crime. Ever! My lips were sealed. If Kênia had been suspicious and accused me, I would not be here, or who knows what would have happened to me! The distress made my head hurt.

All those things were very much alive in my subconscious mind. What I had done was very much alive in my memory, but it had never hurt me because it seemed like a trick, a harmless prank of a child trying to take revenge on the bad man who did not like her or Bibi, a misdeed I thought had not had severe consequences. Now I was no longer a suffering child who saw Mister Eduardo as her worst enemy – I was his murderer.

I had no idea, nor could I have understood the seriousness of what I was doing. I was just an emotional child, brought to a malevolent act by an emotional impulse, by a passion, by a weird feeling that led me to take revenge on the man who, for me, was the worst person in the world, the monster of my childhood. If he found out about playing pussy cats! I know what he would have done. Kênia had told me. My little mind, all filled with love and fear! A tender little mind, clueless about what was life and what was death.

I felt like fear's cold needle had injected snake venom throughout my body. It was unbelievable! What had I done! And it had been devilishly intentional.

I saw myself walking around Kênia's house, a smart little girl, the imp disguised as the child everyone thought pretty, obedient and quiet, who buried herself in the silence of her secret pain, with her active erotic senses veiled by the excuse of innocence. This little monster who licked Kênia's legs, who sucked her breasts, who got aroused by shoes that became a fetish, the symbol of undying love, of myth, of the greatest feeling a creature can develop until it reaches a climax, an eruption of all her emotions. The little monster taking all the lightbulbs from the lamps while observing Kênia pack everything. Putting

them inside the napkin on which she had served me a piece of cake along with a glass of milk.

My thoughts became confusing. My mind unravelled disturbing memories, in a delirium of truths that instilled fear inside me.

My God! What had I done! My God! How much had I loved! Loved!

Kênia was kneeling, putting dishes into a box. I heard her whisper, staring at a silver tray, that getting rid of her things was too sad. Her sadness hurt me, and I thought I would never have Kênia to myself again. Those were her last few hours in that house, which was going to be empty afterwards – and I would never sleep with Kênia again. My mom might start leaving me at fat Miss Dulce's home when she needed to go out, and she would make me dizzy with her famous smelly farts.

I approached Kênia, and, in the only way I knew how to express my pain, I meowed in a low tone and laid my hands on her heaving breasts.

She stared at me, thoughtful. A deep look, I felt, as I stared back into her eyes, fixed on me, almost scary. Her lips parted slowly, and she asked, her voice as strange as the expression on her face:

“Do you want to play pussy cats?”

Delighted, I nodded. She did not say anything, just took me by the hand and led me into a back room. She lay down on the bed that was there. Were we taking a nap? She spread herself out there. Quiet, looking at me, beside me, as if crossing through my body. She tapped the mattress so I would lie by her side. I climbed onto the bed, and she took her breasts out of her shirt, which she unbuttoned, bringing them toward my mouth.

“Do you want to nurse? Do you? Play with them, suck them well, pretend they are giving you warm milk.”

I licked my lips and felt her holding her breasts against me so I would nurse. I pushed her hands away and grabbed them with my impish fingers. My mouth surrounded her stiff nipple, and I started sucking like a hungry little baby while she undressed and moaned, moving me up her body where she put me, holding me close against her. I moved on top of her as she directed me until I felt on my face the mound of hair between her thighs. I was scared, but she explained:

“Feed there, darling... On your furry little pussy cat, search and you’ll find a nice little teat... The tastiest... It’s small like Bibi’s teats, but it’s the tastiest... Explore with your tongue... Explore... There... There... You found it... Found it... Feed now, feed a lot... A lot...”

I found it. As absurd as it may sound, as unexplainable, I knew what I was doing, and I acted tirelessly until the end, that is when the pussycat yelled and spasmed.

At this point she pressed her thighs against my head with such force and desperation that I started to cry, thinking she wanted to harm me, punish me for some wrong I had done. She sat up quickly, took me from between her delicious sweaty thighs that had almost strangled me, held me, concerned, and kissed me a lot, calling me dear, pleasing me so I would stop crying, because I sounded like a siren. She said it had been an accident, not a punishment, that I had done nothing wrong, she caressed me, touched my face, covered my tear-soaked cheeks with kisses; dried them, laughed, played, until I understood it had not been on purpose, just an accident during our dangerous game.

Kênia then seemed nervous and annoyed. She said I should go home, but when my pouted lip quivered to start crying again, she sighed and, having no other choice, let me stay.

She resumed packing the rest of her things. She was satisfied. I was not. Children are never tired. They have an energy that is capable of beating any athlete. I even remember a story about God and the Devil. God wanted to punish the Devil and did not know how. It was impossible! And the Devil laughed and strutted, saying nasty things and daring God to find a punishment for him. It seemed absurd! Chin in hand, almost giving up, God heard laughter and cheers from kids that were playing near the place the two battled. He smiled sarcastically and, victorious, told the Devil:

“I know, go and play with those children for as long as they like.”

Predicting his end through exhaustion, the Devil kneeled by God’s feet and shakingly begged for forgiveness. He would do anything, anything but that. May God have mercy and free him from the punishment of having to play with those children, so filled with life and a naive sort of malice.

Kênia was startled when, stretching on the floor, I went under her skirt, laughing and reaching out for the hair between her thighs.

“Kitten is still hungry.”

I fiddled around there, curious and excited for the libidinous game with those forbidden acts, and Kênia moved and positioned herself in such a way that my hand would reach where she wanted it to. All of a sudden, she gathered my little fingers, looked me in the eyes and started guiding my hand and teaching me, as she said:

“This is the last time we are playing pussy cats, so today it’s going to be really good. Do you like touching me there?”

“I do, I like touching you all over.”

“So put your hand there... Let it go inside slowly... Like that... Push it inside and don’t open your fingers, or you’ll hurt me, see? Do you understand? Like that... What a nice little girl you are...”

She pushed my hand into her vagina, as she stared at me with eyes that looked sleepy, lids almost closing, lips parted, sighing and moving as if dancing a slow *samba* song, her hips swaying slowly at first and then faster; I looked at her parted thighs, seeing all of her. All! And it fascinated me.

She said things I did not understand and moved her hips, from side to side, front to back, sitting on the floor and positioning herself so that I would do everything as she taught me, positioning me between her legs, spreading those lips covered in curly hair so we could play pussy cats and I could feed on the new titty I had found there.

She did not let me take my hand out, so I pushed it further in, up to my wrist. She guided my thin arm, careful not to hurt me, in a way that aroused her more, as I licked and sucked on the little button hidden between two hairy mounds that she rubbed on my face, very excited and thrilled with the game.

The game ended with long moans and her frantic lips smacking as if she was in pain; when the doorbell rang, she stood up, panting and startled.

“Don’t tell anyone ever, okay, Flávia? No one can know about our game of pussy cats, only us two. It is our secret, do you promise? Forget what we have just done,

because I'm moving far away, and Eduardo will beat us both if he finds out we play these games. Do you promise not to tell anyone?"

I crossed my fingers over my lips and kissed them, promising with intensity and conviction. This was our secret. Mine and Kênia's, whom I loved so much, the prettiest and nicest woman in the world. The enchanted fairy of my childhood world, the most wonderful thing in my life.

They kept ringing the doorbell, and she shouted at them to wait. She washed my face in the kitchen sink, lifting me up, and laughed when I got to lick her nipple one last time before she had to button up her blouse and promise that later, if Mister Eduardo, who was at the bank, took long enough, we could play again, just a little more, as I insisted, holding onto her skirt and following her like a puppy as she went to open the door.

It was a big black man, the man with the moving truck. I saw his eyes take in Kênia's beautiful body under the blue dress with tiny colourful flowers in a second.

Kênia pretended not to notice or care about the look on the face of the man, who followed her, horny.

A dog barked from the back of the truck and he yelled, laughing at me:

"Easy there, big man!"

The dog looked like Bibi. It was then that I started unscrewing the lightbulbs from the lamps that were still on top of the boxes before the man took them into the truck. I started grinding them with the heel of Kênia's shoe in the napkin I shook out to drop the crumbs of the cake I had earlier. The leather was worn, and the metal crushed the fine transparent glass. I ground it carefully, masterfully, turning it into dust.

In my little head, the image of Bibi swollen, lying down in our yard. Someone had fed her meat with ground glass.

A child is the real “sacred monster”

I kept grinding the lightbulbs, which were essential for my Machiavellian intent and frail enough for my even frailer hands, which had tried to grind pieces of bottles with no success.

The white powder slowly filled the napkin. I had made it into a little bundle and was walking around when the doctor got home with the sour look on his face to have lunch and take Kênia away from that house and from me forever.

He always looked displeased when he found me there and tried to disguise it by ruffling my hair. I hated that gesture and tried to escape it, looking at him with squinted eyes, as if I could smash him with the iron lashes on my glorious eyes. That was what I thought. It is amazing, the fantasy of a child’s absurd world, but I squinted my eyes when I looked at Mister Eduardo with all the spite that I held for him inside me.

A large, steaming pot of soup was bubbling on the stove. It was going to be their last lunch in that house; afterwards, they would say goodbye to the neighbours and leave. The moving truck was already loaded. I found the fluorescent lightbulb lying in the yard. I ground it along with the others. I was going to kill a man whose tongue did not hang out like a panting dog’s, but who made faces, and stuck his tongue out at me when Kênia was not looking. He would then brush it off, saying he was just kidding and that he was not the boogeyman. But I felt that he did not like me and that we were the most absurd of enemies. I was, for him, the devil, and he, for me, the potential enemy.

I walked around the house with the napkin made into a little bag filled with the ground lightbulbs. My tender little arm was sore from crushing everything like flour. After that, every time I had to grind something, I would compare it to grinding glass and in my

mind I would see a cascade of white glittering dust falling into a plate of soup, but that was just a curious, unpleasant memory of a nasty childhood prank. The innocent attitude of an overly emotional child who was about to lose the person she loved the most in her world.

Kênia called me tenderly, not as if I was the sex object that had made her orgasm, filled with horror and excitement for her own courage and lack of morals. Horror at using a child to satisfy her repressed desires brought on by a sick, cold husband. She called me like an adult would address a child, filled with sweetness and care:

“Would you like a bowl of soup?”

“No, my mom is making me something tasty today.”

Kênia ran her soft, perfumed fingers through my hair, and I almost purred like a spoiled kitten. The steaming bowls of soup passing under my nose.

Mister Eduardo sat on a crate in the kitchen and took the bowl Kênia handed him. He was following a rigorous diet.

“Thank God, our last lunch here”, he said, staring at me, happy to be leaving.

The moving truck man came to the kitchen door and asked if there was anything left to pack. Kênia pointed to the crate where Mister Eduardo was sitting. He set the bowl of soup down beside me and got up. The man picked up the crate as if he were picking up a bundle of clothes and put it on his muscular shoulder. Mister Eduardo put his hand in his pocket and took out some money to give to him. I opened the napkin over his bowl of soup and ran. I heard Kênia say:

“Poor thing, she’s crying, she adores us.”

My mom saw me coming, panting, and I told her Miss Kênia and Mister Eduardo would be leaving soon. I sat on the highest step that led to my house and waited to see them go.

The truck left with the puppy barking. Kênia and Mister Eduardo came to my house for their last goodbye. Kênia kissed my face, and I thought, as I stole a little suck on her earlobe: “We will never play pussy cats again.”

In Mister Eduardo’s face, there seemed to be a Mephistophelian smile, between bursts of pain and derision; he felt victorious for leaving me there, away from them forever. He was getting rid of me, my squinted look that crushed him, that cold antagonistic sensation we shared. I glared at him and saw his teeth as animal fangs: instead of smiling, they gnashed and snarled at me.

.....

My mom told me everything. The case had been muzzled by Kênia’s family, which was very influential, all congressmen, senators, positions I did not understand back then. People in politics, powerful people.

When the car that Mister Eduardo was driving hit the *Avenida*, he felt ill and passed out at the wheel, shoving his foot onto the gas pedal as he collapsed. The car rammed into other vehicles, finally hitting the wall around a house. They were both rescued and taken to *Hospital das Clínicas*. Mister Eduardo, with massive bleeding, was pronounced dead in the ambulance. Miss Kênia, in a coma, with bruises and fractures, was in the ICU for days.

In the autopsy they found out, that besides the advanced stage of his fatal illness, the cause of death was the ingestion of ground glass, which resulted in the rupture of

veins and arteries, causing violent internal bleeding and poisoning from the toxic substances contained in the glass, identified as coming from standard and fluorescent lightbulbs.

Naturally, due to the evidence of suicide, the case was closed. The incurable illness, the expected ending, the torture of pain had led Mister Eduardo to madness and suicide.

Kênia then travelled to her parents' house, in Brasília, and never let anyone know about it, because it took her a lot to recover from the trauma. She never left Brasília again and only now, on this first trip to São Paulo in fifteen years, had she decided to visit my family and tell them her tragic story.

I was appalled. Scared. Baffled. How innocent is a seven-year-old, really? To the point of understanding that you should not kill a man like a dog? A child is the real "sacred monster". Always forgive them!

I tried to get the best of my emotions and not let on to others what was disturbing me. It was a terrible affliction. It was really an anguishing, annihilating feeling. I could not accept the thought of being a criminal, of having, coldly, calculatedly, at seven years of age, committed the most heinous crime. Killed a man like a dog. Killed for rage and jealousy. For a feeling that invaded the realms of passion and had monopolized my love life. And that passion was my most dynamic spiritual force.

When Kênia and Mister Eduardo left in the old Ford, I stared, disappointed and sad because he had not fallen dead with a swollen belly like my puppy who was found in the yard. She was found by Renato, who soon realized that someone had given her meat with ground glass, and that whoever did that was a monster, a big son of a bitch.

I cried a lot when I saw Bibi stiff and swollen, and at once, it came to my mind that Mister Eduardo had done it. I had once seen him shake his leg and throw Bibi far away because she had grabbed his pants with her teeth and ripped them. Bibi did not like him. I think I passed my aversion onto her, and she would always bark, snarl, and show him her teeth. My brother Renato also thought it was Mister Eduardo who killed Bibi.

I went over it all again in my head, as my mom talked about the terrifying thing that happened to Kênia due to Mister Eduardo's senseless death. The poor man was always bitter, suffered a lot, felt terrible pain. No doubt he had gone mad, to do such a thing, risking so many people's lives. Had he been in his right mind, he would never have done that. Or he could have miscalculated and intended to drop Kênia somewhere before the substance took effect.

Kênia had to undergo many reconstructive surgeries on her face and legs. No, she did not have any scars, my mom guaranteed, she did not even have a limp; she was still classy and beautiful. Actually, she was even more beautiful. My heart ached, and my thoughts were all tangled up, tumultuous.

Did Kênia remember everything that had transpired that afternoon, as she packed her boxes? Did she remember seeing me crushing the lightbulbs into the napkin? What a tumultuous event in her mind! She could never say anything about that day without revealing what had happened between us.

Undoubtedly, Kênia must have really suffered and been through an awful lot until the case was closed, with the death of her husband ruled suicide due to despair, to madness caused by pain and torture in the face of the certainty of impending death.

Kênia could have died in the accident! Others could have, too! I was horrified with myself. What must have gone through Kênia's mind during those awful days in which she realized what I had done? Did she feel guilty for what she had done to me? How can one coldly accuse a seven-year-old of depravity and premeditated crime? What about the games of pussy cats? Would it all be spilled from the feverish lips of an infatuated child, or would I really keep it all inside, my lips sealed by the cross I made with my fingers and kissed as I swore secrecy? Kênia must have been through hell on Earth, filled with fear, tension and expectation.

Now Kênia wanted to see me, to find out how I was, my mom showed her some pictures. She said Kênia thought I was beautiful. I wanted to know everything, if she really thought I was pretty, if she had actually insisted that I come to see her, if she was waiting for me. My mom said yes to it all, completely clueless – how could she not be? She was happy and helped me choose an outfit to go visit Kênia. How about a dress? Blue denim was in style, and it was my choice, the one that made me look cool, yet well-dressed for any occasion.

Kênia wanted to see me! I was delighted! She liked me as a... What? An instrument to satisfy her lust during tormented days, caring for a sick husband, or the instrument that had gotten rid of him earlier than his short lifespan would have allowed? Kênia would not entertain such negative, selfish thoughts. She must have still been astounded by the consequences of it all, and still believe her destiny to be weird and dark. Maybe she wanted to see me to try and read in my eyes that everything had really happened and that I had really done what she still could not believe a seven-year-old capable of doing

so flawlessly. The perfect crime. The unpunished crime. The undisclosed crime. Committed by a seven-year-old homosexual. The crime I would never be sentenced for.

I now understood Kênia's madness. Trapped by a man whose lifespan, due to his illness, had a way of enslaving her. Kênia did not want to hurt her husband's feelings, for pity, for love, for respect, but her body craved sex, and he could not help her. My libidinous little hands, my fascination with her legs, my infatuation with her feet adorned by the shoes, with me licking her leg. The opportunities that provided her with an environment she could get aroused in were too strong and powerful for her resistance and morality, too much for her needs. That was why she turned our games of pussy cats into her release valve. Like that, she subconsciously led me to hate her husband, whom I'd already suspected as the perpetrator of Bibi's death, and who was going to take her away from me forever.

What would Kênia have to say to me? What did she intend to find out? What was there about me that she could not find out by merely looking me in the eyes?

I don't know how I found myself knocking at the door of room 21. I did not hear footsteps, and was startled when the door opened.

Kênia! At last. The myth. Right before my eyes. My lifelong dream. My eyes devouring her stare.

Fascination. Absurd emotion. We stared at each other. Both shaking. We said each other's names at the same time. She stepped back so I could come inside.

I floated over the soft carpet. I could not feel my body. I was not twenty-two, I was seven. The box under my arm contained my life in Kênia's shoe.

I felt it. I understood it, I read it, she transmitted it to me, we did not need to say anything, she confirmed it all, she understood it all, she felt it all, like I did. Kênia was touched, and she thought I was pretty, interesting, more than that, exciting, the only instrument capable of satisfying her.

I, too, had given her a special meaning: I had tied her whole life around the force of my existence, not only for what had happened between us but for what I had done for a crazy, unimaginable love.

Both of us were quiet in the middle of the room. Her, beautiful in the long, see-through nightgown, her breasts framed by its neckline, loose inside the black fog that softly surrounded her, making her body even more beautiful. My eyes, those same eyes, now in a huge hungry gaze, held all of her.

I wanted to speak. I did not know what to say. She wanted to say something but shied away. She preferred that I speak, and in my mind, there were only childish thoughts, fixated on shoes with thin coloured straps, like the one I took from the box in a spontaneous gesture and showed her, as if that was a physical extension of our lives. The worn heel, the shiny metal that had crushed the lightbulbs. I dressed it with the finger of the rubber glove. She accompanied my actions and understood. I knew she understood. That was my fetish.

I kissed the shoe, I rubbed it against my face. Nothing needed to be said. Tears spilled from my eyes, and my voice slipped through my lips as I watched her tongue caress her own lips again and again, sliding over them with meaning, with a longing and a desire to do unimaginable things. I cried. My voice was very sad and hoarse, like the laments of an agonizing cat:

“What have I done?”

“Nothing.”

One more time I heard myself asking, and it indeed sounded like the long, hoarse meowing of a cat in heat:

“Do you want to play pussy cats?”

I was focused on her body, her breasts, her thighs; the shoe in my hand was an extension of our bodies, and me, the pistillate, reaching out my roots to embrace her.

This emotion was indistinguishable from the madness of passion, such was the paroxysm we reached.

Her body heat entered me in a delirium of mind-numbing lust.

Hands on breasts, lips on lips, the shoe between our bodies, the murderous fetish, the rapist fetish, the symbolic fetish which searched for its hiding place, the body that moved to swallow the heel, the shoe shoved between our bodies, rolling on the bed, fabric being ripped, moaning and loose meaningless words, suffering, pain, surrounded by blood and tears, intertwined legs, hooked thighs, black-winged butterflies in a frenetic sensuous dance, in a fantasy which made a child become a monster and a woman feel like an angel.

The questions went on, renewing their answers with each thought. Questions that torture. But we go on, as wandering butterflies looking for a garden.

I am a lesbian. Should society reject me?

A child that committed the most shocking crime of passion in all of the centuries, how could she be sentenced? Would there be a punishment for her? A jury? How innocent is a child, really?

In which situations should a homosexual be rejected, understood, or accepted?

When she fools men with her deceptions or when she openly defies society, not hiding what she is?

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this chapter I am going to present the authors and theories on which I have based the translation analysis and which have helped me view the issues I have faced while translating this specific work in a more objective way. This background literature has allowed me to see my own translating process in a more scientific light instead of just as a personal set of choices and impressions.

Given the multidisciplinary aspect of Translation Studies, there are different ways of approaching the text. I chose three separate but related themes: the political relevance of female-written erotica, the difference between the effects of censorship and self-censorship when translating, including the adaptation techniques involved, and the specificities of translating into one's second language, especially when the source text comes from a culture considered more peripheral than the target one.

In regard to the first point – the political relevance of erotica written by women – I refer to Audre Lorde's essay *The Uses of the Erotic: The erotic as power* (1978), in which she discusses the power erotica can have in women's liberation, as well as the reasons a patriarchal society may try its best to suppress it. The author describes a male world which "values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibility of it within themselves" (p. 88), and which is further threatened by the fact that the power gained by women when they are in charge of their own erotic feelings is too great. It is interesting that this essay was published at the same time that Rios was building what might have been an immensely successful career as a writer had it not been for the

persecution she suffered from the military, which was definitely a male-centered regime. Besides being an important and acclaimed piece of feminist writing, Lorde's essay speaks closely to my choice of field of study, since it focuses on the shift in power that happens when women are in charge of their own sexuality and the dangers this may represent for any patriarchal society, but even more so for one that is based on totalitarianism and conservatism.

Susan Sontag, in the essay *The Pornographic Imagination* (1967), writes about pornography as a "modality or convention within the arts" (p. 205). It is worth mentioning she admits a certain resistance to the use of the word. In order to make her case, the writer uses the novel *Story of O* (1954) as an example, presenting and debunking arguments that try to separate the pornographic from "serious" literature. Even though Sontag mostly deals with male authors and the issue of gender is not explicit in this essay, it is useful to partly explain why Rios was not only persecuted by the Brazilian authorities, but also dismissed by the so-called revolutionary or intellectual groups in the country, which protested in defense of many censored artists at the time. Sontag's essay communicates with my choice of text, which may have been less than obvious considering what is seen as high literature in Brazil even nowadays. I could have chosen books written by women in the 1970s or 1980s that have become classics, such as by Lygia Fagundes Telles (my actual favorite writer), or Clarice Lispector, and my choice would hardly have been a topic of discussion. The problem with that, for me, is that, as Sontag mentions, literary criticism loses depth and sophistication if themes considered too sensitive or immoral are automatically excluded from the discussion. The sensitive nature of Rios' text makes it a great source of understanding of the relations between

women, and especially queer women, and their sexuality, their place in society and even other queer women. I do not feel like such deep observation onto these aspects of 1970s Brazilian society would have been possible by analyzing any other genre.

On the discomforts of translating erotica, Pauline Henry-Tierney makes a really interesting point in her article *Parameters, Thresholds and Liminal Spaces: Designing a Course on Sex, Gender and Translation* (2019). After giving her students translation tasks that involved erotica and sensitive topics, she described their discomfort when put in the delicate position of making statements they might not make in other cases. This text was particularly interesting for me, because I saw myself in many parts of the description of her subjects. Even though I do not consider myself anything resembling prudish or sexually repressed, Rios' book did make me feel frequently uncomfortable, both as a reader and as a translator/academic, not only by the most obviously shocking passages involving pedophilia and taboo, but also by how detached the narrator seems when talking about sexual acts, sexuality and even feelings. Henry-Tierney's point on how first-person narratives may increase discomfort by forcing the translator to approach whatever they are writing from a more personal perspective seems to partially explain how it felt for me.

As for the second point: the issue of censorship and self-censorship which I have encountered throughout the translation, José Santaemilia (2008) describes self-censorship as the translator's struggle to produce a text that fits his or her ethical and moral standards while still pursuing the utopian faithfulness that is so often the subject of discussion among translators and translator scholars. While censorship is often described as coming from totalitarian governments or extremist religions, it can occur in many other ways. Santaemilia explains that even in periods in which freedom of speech is

guaranteed, there are institutions and hierarchies involved in the decisions around what can/should be translated and how. One of the aspects that called my attention the most while translating the book was the differences between what I knew must have been viewed as inappropriate by the censors – the sexually explicit passages and the detailed description of LGBT lives and relationships, for example – and what felt inappropriate to me when reading and working on the book forty years after its publication, which were aspects much more related to discriminatory comments made by the narrator or, as previously mentioned, the detached and uncritical way used to describe her feelings and experiences. In my opinion, these impressions are a good example of the difference between censorship and self-censorship as described by Santaemilia.

Encompassing two of the challenges I have faced in this thesis – censorship/self-censorship and the translation of cultural aspects –, is the use of adaptation in translation. Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) list seven methods for translating, with adaptation being the last one and referred to as “the extreme limit of translation” (p. 39). They define it as situational equivalence, which can be used when an element described in a source text does not exist in the target culture or will impact the target audience in a different way than originally intended. Furthermore, the authors state that, although the use of adaptations is not mandatory when translating, refusing to resort to this device can affect a text in a negative way, which can produce a final product that “does not sound quite right” (p. 39). Both the self-censoring aspects of my approach to this translation and the need to bridge the gap between 1970s Brazilian culture and 2020s Canadian culture made adaptation an invaluable tool in my work, and the existence of literature that understands adaptation as a means to produce a more appropriate translation, and not

as a sin committed against the “sacred faithfulness” to the original is invaluable. Bastin (2005) has similar views on the matter, arguing that preserving character and function in the text is more important than worrying about the closeness in formal or semantic aspects or the utopian idea of “transparency” in translation.

Regarding indirect translation, or the act of translating into one’s second language, I will discuss the issues that arise from this practice and present the mainly ideological reasons in support of this practice despite the difficulties it entails. In his article *Towards a Sociology of Translation* (1999), Johan Heilbron presents a centre-periphery model to explain the cultural flow in the translation of books. He separates languages into three groups: the central languages are English, French, German and Russian, and each of them accounts for over ten percent of the translated source texts around 1980, with English books in a hypercentral position, representing over forty percent of the translated source texts. In a more peripheral position than that, but still with significant representation, are the six languages he calls semi-peripheral, each representing about one to three percent of translated source texts in the same period: Spanish, Italian, Danish, Swedish, Polish and Czech. Other languages are considered peripheral. As a woman and someone who comes from a peripheral-language-speaking country, I see being a scholar in an English-speaking country as an opportunity to defy the *status quo* twice: my first choice, made before I finished my undergraduate studies, was to work with literature written by women as the main theme of my research, given that the presence of women in the western, and even more so, the South American literary canon is still so overlooked. The second choice, made not long after the first, was to work with literature written in my own country, even though I knew I would find a different, and maybe bigger,

set of issues than I would have found if choosing to translate into my own language. This second choice was motivated by the cultural flow described by Heilbron. Since academia does not rely on the potential to make money from book sales, the openness of a Canadian readership for such a text did not have to be part of my decision, I chose a text that was not likely to ever be chosen by a publishing house, because of its origin, its author and its theme.

Apart from its ideological aspects, inverse translation (translating into one's second language), is still a polemical and understudied theme, with a large number of scholars saying it should not be done or that it yields less than desirable results, especially when it comes to literary translation. All the literature I was able to find on this theme will either try to make a case against inverse translation as a whole or describe it essentially as a "necessary evil" and contain it to technical texts.

ANALYSIS

This analysis will focus on the issue of translating lesbian erotica. The source text is *Eu sou uma Lésbica*, published in Brazil in 1981 and written by Cassandra Rios, and my translation *I am a Lesbian* (2020) has a contemporary Canadian audience in mind. This translation experience has been very different from anything else I have done in translation, both as a professional and as a scholar, for a number of reasons.

Erotic literature seems particular both in its making and in its reception. Although there are no up-to-date statistics on reader demographics, some newspaper articles, like one published in the website “The Bookseller” in 2018, assert that the Canadian website audiobooks.com released data that the popular erotic series *Fifty Shades of Grey* was the most listened to piece of erotic literature among men, with 25% male buyers. This seems to imply that the vast majority of readers/listeners of the genre (75% in the case of *Fifty Shades of Grey*) are women. Audre Lorde mentions in *The Uses of the Erotic* (1978), that the erotic is a female-based source of power. That may seem contradictory at first, considering that according to Lorde, women are usually taught to repress their erotic impulses, but, as explained by Susan Sontag in her essay *The Pornographic Imagination* (1969), this state of repression explains why literature about sex is written and read by women, as an escape valve. Sontag’s view may go some way to explaining Rios’ popularity during the military dictatorship, since, as Brazilian writer Nelson Rodrigues is popularly said to have stated, prudishness is the best aphrodisiac.

From the perspective of feminism, opinions on the uses of sex as art or entertainment are not unanimous in any way. In an interview with Adrienne Rich that was published in *Sister Outsider* (1984), Lorde, for example, reports that she was called

antifeminist for writing about eroticism as empowering to women. Even though Lorde does move towards condemning pornography, these critics (who remain anonymous in the text) consider that putting the erotic in a place of power diminishes women, "reducing [them] again to 'the unseen', 'the unusable'" (p. 102). While it may seem an exaggeration to think that even speaking about being in control of her sex life might make a woman antifeminist, the battle between feminism and all types of sex-related work for women, from writing erotica to having sex in exchange for money, is long and well-documented, both in and out of academia. Famous scholars who have spoken against it include Katherine A. MacKinnon, Andre Dworkin and Nancy Huston, and according to Lori Saint-Martin (2006), their arguments usually revolve around the fact that both mainstream pornography and erotic literature perpetuate sexist views of women being in a submissive place. According to Saint-Martin, anti-pornography scholars advise women to find their own erotic voices, but state that such a task is basically impossible give the patriarchal conditioning everyone is subjected to.

There are, on the other hand, plenty of feminist authors who defend the possibility of a shift in power where women are in charge of their own sexuality, and this includes talking/writing about it. These authors state that consuming erotic fiction will not change men's behaviour, and, if anything, can be a cathartic component in fulfilling fantasies without real-world consequences. Marcia Pally (1994) calls the idea that being in touch with pornography will make someone more violent in real life antiscientific. Laura Kipnis (1996) regards pornography as subversive in what might be considered a good way if one takes a revolutionary perspective.

Between these two points of view, there are a group of scholars who think the biggest issue to be avoided is censorship. They may not condone pornography/erotica, but they understand its censoring as worse than any consequences the genre can have. According to Saint-Martin (2006), these are the same thinkers that oppose the idea of separating pornography from erotica as unacceptable/acceptable, since these concepts are subjective and may lead to more censorship, which is seen as too simplistic a solution to sexism.

The issue of translating erotica seems to still be understudied by translation scholars. In the entry for “Translation” in “The Encyclopedia of Erotic Literature” (2006), Terry Hale reminds the reader that the translation of erotic texts, albeit peculiar in a number of different ways, is still inserted in the logic of translation in general, which may account for the decline in erotic works translated into English since the shift of the language into a hypercentral position (the author states that in 2003, translated works in Britain and America accounted for less than 2% of the newly published titles). Hale does point out that, historically, the translation of erotic works had been marked by censorship and omission, and left in a niche or marginal place.

In a series of essays about literary censorship published in his personal blog, awarded writer and researcher Bráulio Tavares (2011) refers to Cassandra Rios and makes the following statement:

No one remembers Cassandra Rios, who was never a great writer, but was persecuted for decades because of her erotic novels: *Tessa, a gata, A Paranóica, Eudemônia, O Bruxo Espanhol...* In my teenage years (at my cousins’

house), I read *A Lua Escondida*, a story on lesbian love; and years later, I read *As Mulheres dos Cabelos de Metal*, an erotic science fiction novel that even the censors overlooked. When people campaign for the liberation of erotic literature, they are usually thinking Joyce or Miller. I wonder: when the ship sinks, would these intellectuals be brave enough to save Cassandra Rios a place in their lifeboats? Or is salvation reserved only for other intellectuals? Does art “redeem” eroticism? Does it take a great piece of literature to mobilize intellectuals against its prohibition?

Tavares’ questioning says a lot about the peculiarity of Rios’ work. I do not intend to dwell on the matters of high literature vs. mass culture, especially because I myself do not condone the existence of such dichotomy, but Rios’ style was relevant to the translating process, since her use of a cruder type of language played a big part in the challenges I faced, mainly regarding vocabulary choices.

The process of translating this book brought up a significant number of issues related to the erotic basis of the book. The challenges that arise when translating explicit and sometimes paedophilic sex scenes are the central problematic of this discussion. This problematic has seen the further challenge of uncertainty in language since I have translated from my native language into my B-language and so insecurity regarding my choice of vocabulary was present most of the time, especially during the most explicit sex scenes. Finally, the particular context of the source text - written in post-dictatorial Brazil, where there was a general derogatory disregard for minorities such as lesbians or bisexual people, and which brought on a form of self-censorship as I was translating for

a contemporary Canadian readership, is a further topic of discussion deriving from this translation project.

Translating erotica into my B-language

I decided on Rios' text specifically for my MA thesis. Unlike my previous literary translating experiences, it was not a special text for me before; it is a full-length book instead of a short story and its main theme is sex, even though the author once said in an interview that she writes about love, and sex only appears as a consequence (which is not how I see her work.) Sex scenes as explicit as the ones in this book are mainly present in a very niche type of literature, and they either become infamous due to the polemics they cause (such as De Sade, Bataille or Desclos), or do not even get published, like the texts that can be found in online forums or in independent writers' platforms dedicated to erotic or pornographic literature. This fact made it difficult for me to feel what the appropriate vocabulary in English might be: the post-*Carnaval* sex scene between Flávia and Desirée is a good example¹:

Desirée revirou os olhos, gritou, fez gestos obscenos, disse palavrões e outras tantas delirantes exaltações, das quais depreendi o coito, o ato sexual com homem.

- Descarrega... agora... esporra... me dá o seu leitinho... põe tudo dentro de mim... mete...

¹ In order to allow quicker consultation of the material, all citations from the source text and the translation refer to pages in this thesis, not in the book itself.

Eu estava mais chocada do que excitada, e, sob o comando incentivador da bela e ferosa Rainha do Carnaval, dava aos impulsos do braço toda a potência de um membro cavalariço, que não cuspiu o que ela pediu, que socava dentro com a mão fechada, enchendo-lhe a vagina enquanto ela se agitava e se sacudia para chegar ao máximo do orgasmo. Cheguei a imaginar, num momento de loucura, que pelas pontas dos dedos o braço estava prestes a ejacular.” (p. 91)

And its translation:

Desirée rolled her eyes, yelled, made obscene gestures, cursed and uttered many other exaltations, which for me related to coitus, the sexual act between a woman and a man:

“Spill your load... now... cum... give me your load... put it all inside me... fuck me...”

I was more shocked than aroused, and under the bossy encouragement of the beautiful and hot Queen of *Carnaval*, I gave the impulse of my arm all the potency of a horse-like member, which did not spill what she was asking for, which fucked her with a closed fist, filling her vagina as she squirmed and shook to reach the maximum point of orgasm. I even imagined, in a moment of madness, that I was about to ejaculate through my fingertips. (p. 188)

I found this scene especially disturbing, and so have other people who have read it. It is ironic that in a book that depicts explicit pedophilia scenes, a sexual relation

between consenting adults can be perceived as one of the more shocking scenes, but Flávia's (and maybe Rios') lack of respect for bisexual women is very clear throughout this chapter, and, albeit consensual, the scene feels aggressive and violent.

Regarding the translation process, I had to ask native English speakers for help with the "dirty talk." It is not abnormal, even though it is very vulgar, to refer to sperm as "*leite*" (milk) in Brazil, especially in obscene contexts. That being the case, my first instinct was to translate the word literally. Knowing how figurative speech changes between cultures, however, I was unsure about this usage and went on to ask some native friends if the word 'milk' would fit in this passage. As it turned out, not only it did not fit, but Canadians tended to find the connection between the two words actually bizarre, which was interesting, because for me, however vulgar the relation between the two words might be, it was very obvious. I ended up opting for "load" in this case, which seems to be a less vulgar but more obvious choice.

My first impression as a reader was that this full passage felt less vulgar or aggressive in English than it did in Portuguese, and I came up with three different hypotheses for that. One possibility was that the Portuguese language itself offers a wider variety of "dirty" words to choose from, which may result in an "obscenity spectrum" not offered by English. The second one was the idea that English being my second language, obscene words and passages do not affect me as much as the same ones with the same connotation would in Portuguese. The third, which I fully hoped was wrong, was that the people who helped me might have aimed for a lower point in the "obscenity spectrum" due to their own sexual modesty or prudishness. Some reading into the issues of

translating erotica confirmed the second hypothesis: Mossop (2017), while discussing French-to-English erotic literature translation, affirms that:

Unless such a translator has lived for a considerable time in a place where the source language is spoken, the emotional impact of sex talk will probably not register fully. One can know intellectually that a word is 'coarse,' but that is different from feeling the coarseness. (p. 338)

Mossop's description fits my experience. The fact that I have not lived in an English-speaking country for a long time made me less sensitive to what he calls "coarseness" in my final text.

One interesting aspect that can be seen when comparing the sex scenes in the book is how much more "cleanly" the sexual interactions between Flávia and Kênia are described. In this example, we can see Flávia engaging in the same act with Kênia as she does with Desirée, with the added issue that what the scene describes is statutory rape, since Flávia is a child here:

E foi enfiando a minha mão em sua vagina, enquanto me olhava com uns olhos cheios de sono, assim quase fechando as pálpebras, a boca semiaberta, suspirando e remexendo nas cadeiras como se dançasse um samba lento, dando nas cadeiras, primeiro devagarinho, depois bem agitada; eu olhava para as suas coxas separadas, vendo tudo dela. Tudo! E me fascinava

Ela dizia coisas que eu não entendia e ia rebolando os quadris, pros lados, pra frente e pra trás, sentada no chão, e se ajeitava para que eu fizesse as coisas do modo como ela me ensinava, colocando-me entre as suas pernas, separando aqueles lábios cheios de pelinhos crespos para a gente brincar de gatinho e eu mamar na tetinha nova que achara ali.

Ela não me deixou tirar a mão de lá de dentro e meti-a mais fundo, até o pulso. Dirigia os movimentos do meu bracinho com cuidado para não me machucar e excitar-se mais, enquanto eu lambia e sugava o botãozinho escondido entre os dois gominhos peludos que ela esfregava na minha cara, muito animada e empolgada com a brincadeira. (p. 105)

The translation:

She pushed my hand into her vagina, as she stared at me with eyes that looked sleepy, lids almost closing, lips parted, sighing and moving as if dancing a slow *samba* song, her hips swaying slowly at first and then faster; I looked at her parted thighs, seeing all of her. All! And it fascinated me.

She said things I did not understand and moved her hips, from side to side, front to back, sitting on the floor and positioning herself so that I would do everything as she taught me, positioning me between her legs, spreading those lips covered in curly hair so we could play pussy cats and I could feed on the new titty I had found there.

She did not let me take my hand out, so I pushed it further in, up to my wrist. She guided my thin arm, careful not to hurt me, in a way that aroused her more, as I licked and sucked on the little button hidden between two hairy mounds that she rubbed on my face, very excited and thrilled with the game. (p. 201)

Both scenes describe the same act, Flávia pushing her whole fist into another woman's vagina. However, the source of discomfort differs. With Desirée, the discomfort comes from how aggressive and unattached the narrator seems to be when describing this act, even calling Desirée's vagina wide and hollow and mocking it afterwards. Moreover, the words used to describe the act are words considered "dirty" in this context, like "*esporra*", "*leitinho*", or "*soca*" (*leitinho* means milk and *socar* means to punch, but under sexual connotations, they do sound obscene. *Esporrar* is downright obscene).

The second scene, however, is described in a much more delicate and mild manner, which adds to the discomfort, since the seven-year-old narrator is being molested by Kênia. Not only are there no dirty words in this scene, even explicit words with negative connotations, such as *vagina*, are suppressed and changed to euphemisms. It makes sense considering the scene is remembered through the mind of a child, who might lack the vocabulary to be more specific, but it also adds a layer of fantasy to the whole scene, as if the act is not at the same obscenity level as the first. This is an almost ironic juxtaposition, considering not only that it is the exact same act, but actually far more immoral, and also criminal, since the 1940 Criminal Code, which was in effect when the book was published, ruled that any sexual act done to someone

younger than fourteen years old was performed under what was called “presumed violence”, which meant that it was treated as forceful or coercive even when the victim had given consent, verbally or otherwise.

Another peculiar aspect of the passage in the original is the use of diminutives. There are seven words ending in “inho” or an equivalent. Not all of them could be simply translated by a diminutive, since this requires the addition of a size adjective in English, and would compromise the reading flow of the text. Instead, I used two adjectives related to size (thin arm and little button), two adapted words (pussy for *gatinho* and titty for *tetinha*) and suppressed the diminutive in the other three. In retrospect, I wonder if a part of me was self-censoring to try to lower my own levels of discomfort by writing a translated passage that sounded less child-like.

The tendency to use euphemisms is also present when Flávia sexually interacts with Kênia as an adult, although the diminutives are not present:

As mãos nos seios, a boca na boca, a sandália entre os nossos corpos, o fetiche assassino, o fetiche estuprador, o fetiche simbólico que procurava seu esconderijo, o corpo que se movia para engolir o salto, a sandália metida entre os nossos corpos, rolando na cama, tecido rasgando, gemidos e palavras soltas, sem nexo, sôfregos e dolorosos, entre lágrimas e suor, pernas cruzando, coxas ajeitando-se, borboletas de asas negras entranhando-se numa dança frenética e sensual, numa fantasia que fez uma criança virar monstro e uma mulher se sentir um anjo. (p. 117)

In English:

Hands on breasts, lips on lips, the shoe between our bodies, the murderous fetish, the rapist fetish, the symbolic fetish which searched for its hiding place, the body that moved to swallow the heel, the shoe shoved between our bodies, rolling on the bed, fabric being ripped, moaning and loose meaningless words, suffering, pain, surrounded by blood and tears, intertwined legs, hooked thighs, black-winged butterflies in a frenetic sensuous dance, in a fantasy which made a child become a monster and a woman feel like an angel. (p. 212)

This passage is no less descriptive than the other two, but everything is written in a much more subtle manner. Because Flávia is now an adult, the diminutives are no longer present, which leads to the conclusion that this resource was used specifically to convey childhood, not Kênia. The whole scene is written in a completely different tone than in the scene with Desirée, however. The use of euphemisms makes it look poetic. The use of the term butterflies for vaginas makes it sound much more mature than the term “hairy mounds” described by seven-year-old narrator but does not let the text become as vulgar and obscene as the word choices for the post-*Carnaval* Flávia experience.

Another passage that felt confusing to me, this time due to what I saw as a contradiction, is when Flávia is explaining some of her views on sexuality and starts talking about the shoe (again):

A sandália era meu único sentimento de culpa, pois eu a princípio achava normal masturbar-me. Só mais tarde, lendo alguns tratados sexuais, entendi que a masturbação era um ato natural, uma “válvula de escape” (p. 41)

In English:

The shoe was the only thing that made me feel guilty, because at first, I thought that masturbation was normal. Only later, reading some articles about sex, did I understand that it was a natural action, a “release valve.” (p. 146)

If Flávia first “thought masturbation was normal” and then thought “it was a natural action”, what changed through her readings? It makes no sense to me or to anyone I have shown this passage to. “*Normal*” could be a typo of “*anormal*”, the Portuguese word for “abnormal”, but at the same time, I find it weird that Flávia would admit that she had found masturbation abnormal at any point in her life, considering how much of an effort she puts into seeming very comfortable and in touch not only with her own sexuality, but with the idea of sex in general, so I must admit I could not really find a reason for this passage to be what it is. After going back and forth with whether or not to “fix” it, I decided that if the reader of the original would go through some moments of confusion in the middle of the novel before going back to the main subject, it would not be a huge issue for the reader of the translation to go through the same. After making this decision, however, I ended up having access to a newer edition of the original Brazilian book, printed in 2006, in which the passage has been “corrected” and now says at first she

thought masturbation was “abnormal”. I still stand by my original decision, since I do not know when the passage was changed, since it may have happened anytime between 1979 and 2006, and, being that Rios passed away in 2002, it may or may not even have had the author’s approval.

One last passage involving sex that was the cause of long discussions was Flávia’s first time in Kênia’s bed. It is not uncommon in Brazil to sleep in the same bed as a child as a way of comforting them, even if you are not immediate family. When I first translated the book, I had no idea that this habit was as frowned upon as it is in Canada, which led to a fairly funny discussion when I read the following passage to my supervisor and a colleague:

Dona Kênia pegou-me pela mão, carinhosamente, e me levou para o seu quarto; pegou outro travesseiro e colocou-o ao lado do seu.

- Vem, meu cachorrinho lulu, vem deitar aqui comigo. Não chore, nenen, mamãe vai voltar logo. Você não gosta de mim? Não quer ficar aqui comigo? (p. 21)

In English:

Miss Kênia held me by the hand affectionately and took me to her bedroom; she got another pillow and placed it by hers.

“Come, my little puppy, come lie down with me. Don’t cry, baby, mommy is coming back soon. Don’t you like me? Don’t you want to stay here with me?” (p. 128)

My small audience was taken aback by this scene, while I was taken aback by their reaction. I think my exact words were “Well, the child was crying. What else can you do?”.

When I got home, I gathered a good number of Brazilian friends and acquaintances and sent them all this chapter to read, asking if anything before the sexual interaction scene felt strange or absurd to them and getting a unanimous negative answer. This little experiment led me to believe that was one big difference between Canadian and Brazilian cultures. In my opinion, this difference has a major impact in the reader’s interpretation of Flávia and Kênia’s relationship, and therefore the whole book. While a Brazilian reader may see their first sexual interaction as a product of Kênia’s irresponsibility, and might mostly fault her for not being firm enough in stopping Flávia’s advances, a Canadian reader may actually view Kênia as a predator, someone who may have planned to do something to the child beforehand. Because this first interaction leads to their subsequent “full-on” sexual relations, a Brazilian reader has a bigger tendency towards being surprised when seeing Kênia actively pursuing Flávia sexually in the end of the book, while for a Canadian reader, this may already be expected.

This cultural gap made me spend a long time debating whether or not to adapt the whole chapter. I considered trying to make it softer or ambiguous through suppression and manipulation, diminishing Kênia’s acceptance of Flávia’s advances or making the

reader unsure of what had really happened in order to keep the penultimate chapter as shocking as it was for a Brazilian reader. What stopped me from doing that was the possible risk of erasing Kênia's responsibility for what happened, which was far from my intention. I ended up translating the chapter as closely as possible, but this was one of my favorite events during the translation and editing process, since it represented the impact of culture in literary interpretation so well.

Self-censoring “sensitive” passages

A problem that arose from translating a book that is a few decades old and from a rather different cultural context was the conservatism that, albeit not the central theme of the story, shows through in the text, sometimes between the lines and sometimes very bluntly. Brazil in the 1980s was a much more conservative country than Canada is today, and human rights considered basic in other countries are even now fairly new concepts there. Homophobia only became a crime in the country in 2019. Racial discrimination has been described in the criminal code since 1967, but until 1988 it was a contravention, not a crime.

Being a subversive writer in terms of her erotic texts did not prevent Rios from reproducing the general discourse of the time and place she lived in. The book is filled with derogatory descriptions of LGBT people and there is at least one scene that I consider racist.

Even though both author and narrator are openly lesbians, Flávia has strong negative opinions about the only other lesbian she describes in the book: Bia, a friend of her first girlfriend Núcia.

This is Flávia's first impression of Bia in the original:

E fomos ao apartamento da tal Bia. Como eu supusera: uma machona, como as que eu já vira na rua e que me causavam repulsa e aversão. Metida a homem, andar de fanfarrão, impostando a voz, sacudindo as pernas arreganhadas, como se tivesse um enorme saco entre elas, gesticulando, falando do seu "caso" como se falasse de uma mulher-objeto. As expressões, o modo de andar, tudo nela me enojou, e Núcia viu, sentiu, notou, comparou e finalmente começou a entender o que eu era e o que era aquela mulher disfarçada de homem, que, para meu espanto, atendeu a um telefonema e nos disse que o seu "filho" estava no aeroporto, voltando de viagem, e ela precisava ir até lá apanhá-lo. Convidou-nos para acompanhá-la e foi até o banheiro trocar de camiseta. E eu fiquei acompanhando com o olhar aquela deformidade que até dera à luz. (p. 55)

And in English:

And off we went to that Bia's apartment. As I imagined: a dyke, like the ones I saw on the street, which I found repulsive and off-putting. All male-like, with a swaggering strut, a forced deeper voice, legs spread as if carrying a massive ballsack between them, gesturing and talking about her "new babe" as if describing an object. Her facial expressions, her walk, everything about her made me sick. Núcia noticed it, made a comparison and started to understand what I was and what that woman disguised as a man was. A woman who, much to my surprise,

picked up the phone and told us her “son” was at the airport, coming back from a trip, and she needed to go pick him up. She asked us if we wanted to join her and went to the bathroom to change her shirt. My eyes followed that grotesque creature who had surprisingly given birth. (p. 159)

Earlier in the narrative Flávia says that she wishes she could meet another “real lesbian” like herself, but she then sees Bia, who seems to fit her standard, as a grotesque creature who carries the most obnoxious characteristics of a man, plus an extra layer of inadequacy for trying too hard to be manly. There are seven references to characteristics that fit societal expectations for men and four references to the fact that Flávia finds Bia literally disgusting. Further, Flávia uses the word *filho* (son) between quotes, as if it were unimaginable for Bia to have a child, and describes the fact that she does as surprising. When I first read this passage, I wanted to try to soften it, to make Flávia – and in a way, Rios – seem less judgemental and less akin to the censors of her own time. After giving it some thought, I decided that her discriminatory views against other lesbians were a relevant piece of context and could help shed some light on the fact that people who are discriminated against may sometimes discriminate against others, too.

Male characters are not described in much detail throughout the book, with the possible exception of Fábio and Mister Eduardo, and gay men are never mentioned during Flávia’s considerations of sexuality, but one is seen at the door of the *Carnaval* party where Flávia meets Desirée. It is a particularly uncomfortable scene, because not only is the gay man being humiliated by the club’s security staff, but he is also described in a scornful way:

O grupo se comprimiu, o porteiro foi empurrado pela machona, o sujeito que impedira que elas entrassem foi agarrado pela camisa e a machona desferiu sobre ele golpes que eram estupendos socos de *boxeur*. O homem caiu atordoado, a bicha pulou por cima dele e atravessou correndo em direção ao salão. Um grupo de guardas correu atrás da bicha e ergueu-a no ar pelos cotovelos. A bicha enroscou-se com pernas e braços no policial, que tentava livrar-se dela, enquanto ela gritava, agarrando-se a ele:

- Me solta, bofe... (p. 80)

In English:

The group stuck together, the doorman was pushed aside by the dyke, the individual who prevented them from coming inside was grabbed by the collar, and the dyke hit him with punches that came right out of a boxing ring. The man fell, stunned, the fag hopped over him and ran toward the party. A group of cops ran after him and grabbed him by the elbows. He hung onto to the cop with arms and legs, as the cop tried to get rid of him, and yelled, still hanging on:

“Let me go, beefcake...” (p. 180)

The scene is humiliating for the gay man from the very start, when he is denied entrance to the club. Rios makes it more humiliating, in what can even be seen as an attempt at humour, when he tries to make a run for the party anyway and then clings to

the cop while yelling to be let go. This kind of loud, dramatic scene is stereotypical of and derogatory for gay men, who are often seen as histrionic. This image reminded me of Jorge Lafond's character in the supposed comedy show *A Praça é Nossa*, which started airing in 1987 and is still on air. Lafond's persona, Vera Verão, was recurring in the show from 1992 to 2002, and his catchphrase "*Bicha, não! Eu sou uma quase... (substantivo feminino variável)!*" or "Not a faggot! I am just about a... (variable female noun)!" is still present in the country's collective imagination. Vera Verão was a very effeminate man, wearing make-up and women's clothes, and the plot was the same for every episode in which he appeared: he would arrive in the middle of someone else's sketch being obnoxiously loud, pick a fight with a woman, and then find a man he was interested in and lead him off stage, usually forcefully. The fact that this was still considered funny even twenty years after Rios' book had been released says a lot about how gay men are seen in the country's culture. And the lack of other forms of representation becomes very clear in an essay in the book "*New Queer Cinema*" (2015), in which Vinícius Ribeiro tells a childhood story about his homosexual identity formation:

Saturday evenings were true marathons. Doused in sleep, I would bravely resist. Such battle had a reason: to watch "*A Praça é Nossa*" (SBT, 1987) and see Vera Verão. Re-watching Jorge Lafond's sketches, it is impossible to overlook the misogynistic tone and his competition against cisgender femininity, but, at the same time, his presence and fierceness were clear even to the most inattentive or uninterested viewer. His voice, his gestures and his fierce body still live in our

imagination. His pleated miniskirts, dresses, ruffles, scarves, earrings, necklaces and high heels tell us: “Not a faggot, I am just about... Vera Verão!” (p. 104)

One detail in Portuguese makes the Carnival scene even more disrespectful in my opinion: the word *bicha*, used to refer to a gay man, is feminine, so the character is referred to with a feminine pronoun throughout the scene, which is not abnormal in Portuguese, but may sound deeply disrespectful depending on who is using this language. It was not without some degree of relief that I found out from Canadian friends that this pronoun inversion would not be read as obviously in English, which led me to the decision to suppress the pronoun change for clarity, and call the “*bicha*” “he”, instead of “she”. It did require some adaptation and repetitions of the word “cop” to avoid creating ambiguity, since the gendered pronouns in Portuguese were enough to distinguish the characters.

The scene that I consider as having a racist tone nowadays is not nearly as blunt as the ones that I consider derogatory toward LGBT people, but it still called my attention from the first time I read it. It occurs towards the end of the book, on Kênia’s last day in the neighbourhood:

Era um negrão, o homem do caminhão de mudança. Vi os seus olhos comerem num segundo o corpo bonito de Kênia sob o vestido azul com florezinhas miúdas de todas as cores.

Kênia fingiu não perceber ou não ligou para o olhar do negrão, que a seguiu, tesudo.

Um cãozinho latiu lá da boléia do caminhão e o negrão gritou para ele, rindo para mim:

- Pera aí, machão! (p. 106)

In English:

It was a big black man, the man with the moving truck. I saw his eyes take in Kênia's beautiful body under the blue dress with tiny colourful flowers in a second.

Kênia pretended not to notice or care about the look on the face of the man, who followed her, horny.

A dog barked from the back of the truck and he yelled, laughing at me:

"Easy there, big man!" (p. 202)

Even though nothing negative is said about the man in this passage, he is referred to as "negrão" whenever he is mentioned, never "the man" or "he", both of which would be completely adequate. Until relatively recently, it was acceptable to call a black man "*negrão*" or "*negão*" in Portuguese (note that the word *negro* in Portuguese does not have the same connotation as the n-word in English, as it is the standard way of referring to black people), but the recent rise in discussions about racism has made it no longer tolerable. There is nothing wrong with him being described as a big, black man once, but repeating it three times in seven lines makes it feel racially charged and unacceptable for a contemporary reader, especially in 2020 North America, with the rise against systemic racism and police violence. As a way of first mitigating that impression and second

producing a translation that reads fluently, I described the character once as a big, black man, and then referred to him as “the man” and “he”.

It is interesting to notice that one might expect the sexually charged passages to be the self-censored ones due to the Western tradition of viewing sexual impulses as impure or inappropriate, especially when the translator is a woman, since, according to Lorde (1978), we are taught to repress any erotic factors in our lives. Instead, the passages that were sensitive to me were more related to what I considered to be ideological divergences. I think Mossop’s (2007) explanation on how we tend to perceive coarse vocabulary in second language as “softer” than in our first partially explains that. Additionally, the fact that I consciously chose to research and translate erotica may have made me more prepared to apply only minor self-censoring impulses, perhaps unlike someone who was less-prepared.

Translation Fun Facts

I am going to end this analysis presenting some issues that, although not directly related to the major theme of my thesis – translating lesbian erotica –, were interesting enough to deserve a deeper discussion.

Translating into one’s second language is an amusing experience not only for the issues previously mentioned, but also because you are conveying cultural aspects that can be like second nature to you. It requires a kind of detachment from your own world views that, at least in my case, did not come naturally. Before I started the translation process itself, I had decided to attempt a domesticated translation of the book. My reasoning derived from the fact that, coming from what Johan Heilbron calls a peripheral

language and translating into a hypercentral one, a more submissive attitude might be ideal to make the book more palatable for my audience. As I began the translation work, however, it felt as though domesticating the book would leave me with a final product that I considered bland, as if whatever made it worth reading was getting (and I apologize for the cliché) lost in translation.

Once I realized that, I decided to allow myself to work in a more spontaneous way, without being constantly worried about either domesticating my text or foreignizing it. In the end, that led me to creating a piece of work that I considered very foreign, but at the same time fairly pleasant to read. I do feel that my final text has enough Brazilian elements to constantly remind the reader that they are reading something written somewhere else, but not enough to disrupt the reading experience.

One detail that I felt very strongly about was leaving the word *Carnaval* as it is in Portuguese. While I know about the existence of the English word Carnival and the fact that it is not an exclusively Brazilian party, I also feel like there is something special about my country's way of celebrating it. That, along with an honest concern of someone thinking the party might be happening at an amusement park (which was later subdued by Canadian readers who guaranteed people were very unlikely to get this confused), led me to keep the Portuguese word for it. I did compromise by keeping the word in italics throughout the text, which I feel calls the reader's attention to the fact that they are reading a foreign text.

One thing I always find interesting when translating or reading texts translated from and into languages I can speak is when the translation process ends up allowing for an added layer of meaning to the text. Two instances came up in this specific work. The first

one was the name of the game Flávia plays with the women she is interested in: *gatinho*. In Portuguese, the word has no connotations other than a small or newborn cat, but when translating into English, I was able to play with the word “pussy”, and its ambiguous meaning in English added a touch of humour that I quite appreciated. Another passage that I felt like gained a deeper meaning in translation was when, after narrating Kênia’s departure from the neighbourhood and her own reaction to it, Flávia exclaims “*Quanta dor em um coraçãozinho verde de criança!*”, or “So much pain in a child’s green heart!” While the color green in Portuguese is only used in this context to refer to how young and unripe the heart was, in English it can also be read as an analogy for the jealousy that we later find out actually led the child to murder.

Translating humour tends to be challenging, and wordplay usually adds to it. There was one such occurrence in the original that took me over a week to find a solution. In a conversation with Flávia, Bia explains what happens to women who have sex with men. In the original, she says “quem prova pica, repica”. “*Repicar*” is a very culturally specific verb. It is related to *escolas de samba*, in which large groups of people play different types of drums to accompany the songs that are played during *Carnaval* parades. *Repique* is a specific type of drum that produces a fast, joyful, repetitive sound, similar to a drum roll, but more musical. *Pica* is a vulgar slang for a penis. So, Bia is basically saying that women who have sex with men tend to be happy about it and willing to repeat the act. When translating the sentence into English, I felt that trying to keep the *escola de samba* reference might be a lost battle, so I focused on maintaining the rhyme and the comical aspect of the sentence, and ended up choosing “They try a dick and there they stick”,

which is longer and may not represent the joyful part of the original, but is still quirky and gives the general idea.

Still regarding cultural aspects, I found that a loss occurred in the translation of the word “*paraibas*” to “homos”. Paraíba is a state in the northeast of Brazil, and in one historical event, it was the only region that opposed the federal government. That event entitled the state to a song by popular singer Luiz Gonzaga, who, based on the sexist notion that females must always be fragile, wanted to describe the state as brave and strong despite its small size and female name. The chorus says “Masculine Paraíba, macho-woman, yes, sir!”. Because of this chorus, *paraíba* became a derogatory slang for lesbians. Because the women in the passage are accompanied by gay men, and to ensure the maintenance of the offensive tone of the sentence, “homos” was the translation of choice.

The cultural gap also presents itself in an interesting way in the penultimate chapter, when Flávia promises not to tell anyone what she and Kênia had done. The girl crosses her fingers over her lips and kisses them. That is a common gesture made in Brazil especially by children to make a “serious” promise. In English speaking countries, people say “cross my heart and hope to die”, and, probably because of the direction of the cultural flow between both countries, it is not that uncommon for Brazilian children to trace an “X” shape onto their hearts when making a promise. The reason not to adapt this passage, which would be simple enough on its own, is that in the last chapter Flávia mentions how her lips are sealed by the promise. It also felt like an easy enough concept for the reader to deduce, and a fun piece of information for an unfamiliar audience to discover.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

As I approach the final steps of my research, I notice that while some of the outcomes of it aligned with my expectations, a fair number of the findings were surprising. I expected to have a more definitive answer to whether or not translating literature into one's second language is feasible, but, instead, my experience has made me see it in much less objective terms. As a scholar or someone with ideological reasons to do so, I can say inverse translation is definitely possible, and it is a rather interesting process, in which the translator has the opportunity to observe some peculiar phenomena regarding language use, cultural differences and the difference in their treatment of elements as they move from their own culture to a foreign one. It would have been different if the translation had been done for profit, however. It seems to me that the amount of time, effort and intercultural discussion required might make it less viable financially. It would be interesting to observe how and how much the time spent living abroad could influence the effort one needs to put into translating inversely with confidence, and if the direction might influence it, too, considering that cultural references from English speaking countries might be better known in Brazil than the other way around.

As for translating erotica, I expected the more sexually explicit passages to present the most challenges, which they did. I did not expect so many issues to arise from non-sexual passages. I do not think I have faced such frequent ideological issues in a source text before, and especially revising the text, seeing the marks left by self-censorship on it and making decisions as to leaving them there or trying not to get that close to the material was a first, too.

All things considered, it feels like a successful journey to me. I am proud of having been able to lend my voice to an author who suffered as much injustice as Cassandra Rios did, regardless of my own personal level of fondness for her style and literary choices. I think talking, writing and reading about sexuality may be freeing and empowering for women, and I do hope erotica, and especially LGBT erotica, becomes more and more prevailing as a genre in world literature. Preferably through translation. Preferably from stories written by the oppressed.

I would like to conclude this work with some words from Audre Lorde's essay "Transformation of Silence into Language and Action", published in her book *Sister Outsider* (1984):

For those of us who write, it is necessary to scrutinize not only the truth of what we speak, but the truth of that language by which we speak it. For others, it is to share and spread also those words that are meaningful to us. But primarily for us all, it is necessary to teach by living and speaking those truths which we believe and know beyond understanding. Because in this way alone we can survive, by taking part in a process of life that is creative and continuing, that is growth. (p. 43)

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