

# THE SAGA OF A SHY FELLOW



**R. MIRANDA**

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## Brief Remarks

One of the characteristics of human beings is a willingness to accept both what is possible and impossible but to reject what is merely unlikely. In our daydreams, while reading fiction, we jump from one extreme to the other, as long as coherence prevails.

Joman's story has elements from these two extremes; indeed, some of these elements are quite real. But his tale does not represent any clinical case or any life among the hundreds I have attended to in my thirty-six years as a psychiatrist and psychotherapist. This story starts in the 1930's and ends in the 1960's. I considered present-tense narration to be fitting because the character's many problems—and those of others—are real and will continue to be real for decades to come (but not for centuries, I hope).

R. Miranda

*Humanity plods forward with ordinary efforts but only makes forward leaps through the creativity of people who are exceptions. (R. Miranda, in *Mysteries in Crystal Land*)*



# Chapter 1 – The End at Hand

The unexpected—both that gut-feeling, bad hunch that comes when all is well and routine, or that good feeling one feels when all hope is gone and one’s fate rides on randomness—happens to Joman de Oliveira O. The first time the unexpected comes through adversity, an illness which could take him prematurely to his grave.

At night, before the sleeping pill hits him and takes hold, Joman makes a decision that started as an idea that tormented him all day long. *I think I am going to die. Perhaps this will give me strength when the time comes. I have to be sure whether I really want this,* he argues with himself. He gets up slowly, goes to the room, takes his working notebook, sits down at the desk, and, hands shaking slightly, starts to write.

## *A Diary of Despair*

*3/18/1965 – Life has always been hard for me, but I thought things would improve, that one day my sacrifices would be rewarded. Now, this illness. Everything else changes in this world, so why can’t my luck also change? It is as if God never looks my way, or, if He does, it is only to send me suffering. I feel angry and am beginning to think that God does not exist, or, if He does, He is unfair. I mean, how can it be that I walk the straight and narrow path, struggle so much and so hard, never harm anyone, act kindly to everybody, help so many people, refrain from drinking and smoking, try to be a paragon of virtue, and yet, lo and behold, suddenly death is at my doorstep and I suffer so much from this illness? I was thinking today about how to avoid this suffering and now have decided to end my life when the pain and the disease become unbearable. A gunshot to the chest and all will explode: me, God, and everyone who has harmed me so much. A pause. My father also.*

He interrupts his writing and thinks. For the first time, he wants to hurt his father. For the first time, he has a chance to hurt somebody and this tragic death will be his weapon. He will have his revenge on his

father, on God, on the world. His final moment will involve noisy pain, quite unlike his shy existence. The image of his chest exploding is terrible but there is the slightest hint of pleasure: revenge brings about, the pleasure of anger holds back so far but, no longer reins in, now gushing out at will.

When someone like Joman dies, the initial impression is that there is nothing special about it, even if the death is announced. Joman is but one more face in a huge crowd, just a serious-looking face on a sidewalk, waiting for the traffic light to turn green, so that he can cross the street. Just one more common Joe Doe, under thirty and already convinced that his fate is just to work hard and to overcome an endless string of troubles.

Someone like that would be so uninteresting that nothing would justify telling his life story. After all, everybody has to face and overcome an endless string of troubles. To be aware of death's closeness is unavoidable, even for people as young as Joman. A decision to anticipate death, to avoid greater suffering, is also a run-of-the-mill occurrence everywhere in the world. However, the unexpected appearance of his fatal illness was just the beginning of a domino-effect cascade of events which subverted and inverted his very being. It triggered a revolution that can hit anyone, even if for different reasons and in different ways.

But prior to completing what Joman wrote in his diary and to grasp what took place in the following months, it is necessary to back step a while in time and to narrate things which happened even before Joman's birth.

## Chapter 2 - Prior Events

### A Portuguese Man and a Brazilian Woman Meet

In 1930, a strong man named Manoel Pereira de Oliveira, at the age of 21, comes ashore at the seaport of Rio de Janeiro. Born and raised in Northern Portugal, he too comes with no money, but he is full of dreams about getting rich in Brazil, like most other Portuguese. He has no fixed profession and is really a jack-of-all-trades, working hard mostly as a handy man. Slowly, his hard work begins to pay off and he starts to pile up some money. Dreaming of having his own business, in 1933 he heads to the Rio Doce (Sweet River) Valley, which starts in the state of Minas Gerais and ends as the river discharges into the Atlantic, in the state of Espírito Santo.

At this time, the entire river valley is suffering from forest devastation. Lands are being cleared everywhere, as mighty trees in the Atlantic Forest are felled to give way to farms and, mostly, to cattle ranches and some small urban centers, usually founded by pioneers along the trail-blazing Vitória to Minas railway. The whole region lures adventurers, tough people who are ready and willing to tackle and tame a wild, adverse environment.

Manuel, the young Portuguese, starts in the state of Espírito Santo as a traveling salesman of domestic and personal objects. Three tame mules and one donkey haul his objects and food, while he rides a mule. He travels through farms, large and small camps, peasants' homes—hard traveling and hard work under a scorching hot sun most of the year—but he never complains. He saves all the money he can because he has two immediate dreams: to establish his own business somewhere and to find a young girl he can marry.

In May of 1934, he stops at a dirt-floor house for cowboys and travelers, in a Minas Gerais village named Cachoeirinha ("Little Waterfall"), in the middle of the Rio Doce Valley. The house, with masonry walls on three sides and hard wooden pieces to support the roof, is not dif-

ferent from so many others on road-sides. A busy traveling salesman who cannot afford to waste any time, Manoel will be ready to travel again the next morning, par for the course for him, just one more no-rest, no-comfort, tiring trip full of long days and lonely nights.

For the first time, he is following a recently-inaugurated 60-km-long dirt road, linking Cachoeirinha to a town called Itanhomi, located to the Southwest. Near Itanhomi in this new road there is a village known as Cafezinho ("Little Coffee"). Travel time is unpredictable: it can be a whole month, depending on the number of stops to do business. In late afternoon, he always fixes himself supper and prepares the food for the next day. After supper, he lies down on a mattress-like piece of straw and goes to sleep.

After traveling some 15 kilometers and having already made some sales, he comes to a small farm. He leaves the road, takes the animals about a hundred yards to the right, and is greeted by a couple and their teenage daughter. They are interested in his merchandise and he begins to show it to them in their living room. The three of them examine the articles and are fascinated by his Portuguese accent. Actually, it is no longer one hundred percent homeland Portuguese; nevertheless they had never heard anything like it.

Manoel cannot help but notice how pretty the young girl is. *A true flower in full bloom. How can such a jewel be in a place like this?* he wonders to himself. The girl's skin is white, yet different from that of others he has seen, revealing that she has not been exposed to too much sunshine. Her long black hair is loosely tied at the back of her head, not really in a bun, but flowing down to her shoulders and back in smooth waves of black. Her brown eyes are sweet, and her sparkling white teeth occasionally flash a shy smile. Her dress is simple and she wears slippers, which on occasion she takes off, resting her feet on top of them. She speaks little but her sweet voice could not sound any nicer. Beauty being in the eye of the beholder, Manoel only sees beauty in her. After a while, when everyone is feeling at ease with each other, he says politely to her, "Well, I say! You remind me of a beautiful young wench in Portugal."

She opens her eyes wide and runs into the interior of the house, her mother following hard on her heels. A serious-looking father gets up, goes to the door, spits on the ground, and stares hard towards the faraway horizon. A scared Manoel cannot understand what is going on and just remains seated, not knowing what to say. Pedro, the father, his voice irked, finally says without looking directly at him, "You spoke ill of my daughter!" and turns again to look at the horizon.

"Me, I did?! I don't understand."

"You called her a young wench," the man replies, without turning to look at him.

"Well, I say! A young-wench is any young woman!" He reflects and then adds, "At least in my homeland, it is, I can tell you."

"For us here, it means a woman who's up to no good."

The young Portuguese is suddenly afraid. He knows that the river valley is inhabited by rude, hard-working, little-educated people who are unwilling to swallow any insult, people who would often kill because of a minor insult. He figures that he had better say something right away. "Please forgive me, then. I meant no offense, and I apologize. In fact, I meant exactly the opposite. Some words here in Brazil take on a different meaning than in my native land. Do you understand what I am saying, senhor Pedro? By the way, what is your full name, please?"

"Pedro Horácio da Cruz," he answers in a hard tone of voice, still looking out of the door to the far horizon.

"Very well then, please don't be offended, senhor Pedro Horácio da Cruz. I assure you that I did not mean anything bad, sir, believe me!"

Pensive, Pedro has one hand on his face, on his light gray beard, and now he holds the edge of his chin, still thinking. He turns around, looks quickly at a very tense Manoel, and looks out the door again. Manoel thinks about the tight spot he is in. He remembers all the effort he has put into being aware of different words and expressions meaning different things in Brazil than in his native Portugal—and, sure enough, 'wench' seems to be a word that offends these river-valley people. A very long minute goes by and Pedro finally turns, and, looking at the floor, asks very slowly, "So, you mean to say that you didn't mean to offend us?"

"No, in no way, believe me!" And he adds emphatically, "I meant that your daughter is as beautiful as the... er, young women in Portugal. Please, call your wife and your daughter because I would like to apologize to them too. What are their names?"

"My wife's Risoleta Santos da Cruz and my daughter's Maria das Dores Santos da Cruz."

"Please, senhor Pedro...," the salesman goes on, holding both hands to his chest and intertwining his fingers.

Pedro is still hesitant, but he notices how Manoel is afraid. At last, he goes into the house. While waiting, the salesman hears with apprehension the hushed conversation going on inside. After a few minutes, the three of them come into the living room. Pedro sits down and his face seems to show that the misunderstanding is over. His wife seems slightly uncomfortable but she too sits down. Visibly shamed, the girl remains standing at the doorway between the living room and the rest

of the house.

Manoel stands up and says slowly and solemnly, looking towards the woman, "You, senhora Risoleta Santos da Cruz, and you," he nods in the other direction, "senhorita Maria das Dores Santos da Cruz, please accept my apologies. I meant no offense, I didn't know that..."

"Your apology's accepted," the mother interrupts him.

"Your apology's accepted," the young woman echoes her mother and sits down.

Still somewhat embarrassed, the family goes back to examining the merchandise and, soon, everyone is perfectly at ease again. The couple purchases a few objects.

Desiring to continue his trip with the knowledge that he leaves behind him no ill feelings, Manoel tells them some tales of his native land, which they hear attentively. When he finally begins to stash his merchandise away, Pedro offers an invitation: "It's gettin' late and you can stay here overnight if you want to."

"Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all! I accept with much pleasure, indeed!" he answers joyfully.

Manoel has reasons to be happy at the invitation. First off, it shows some deference. It is by no means common to invite strangers to stay overnight. Usually, the traveler looks for the nearest roadside lodge. Secondly, he will spend a comfortable night, and, most importantly of all, he will see the young girl once again.

The invitation is understandable because the traveling salesman is different and shows better manners than the usual travelers, not to mention that he has a rather curious accent when he speaks.

The two men go and unsaddle the animals, feed them corn, and let them loose in a nearby pasture. All the time, they talk in a lively way.

"Well, I say! I see these flowers," Manoel says, pointing to some plants by the house walls. "They're so beautiful and well cared for."

"My daughter takes care of them. She likes flowers."

*In addition to being so beautiful, she also has a sensitive soul,* the traveling salesman thinks.

At the kitchen table during dinner, Manoel sees the girl again and they very subtly exchange glances. *How beautiful this girl is,* he repeats to himself several times. Then they gather in the living room and talk in a lively way.

The couple's three married sons, who also live on the same farm, arrive with their wives and children. The place becomes even livelier. They are all interested in seeing the merchandise, which is shown to them, and they buy some items. While the children play outside, under gas lighting, Manoel tells more tales of his land and his travels in Brazil.

They listen with great attention. He speaks far more than he usually does, the more so because he wants to impress the girl. Patiently, he repeats sentences which they do not understand.

"You are very polite and have such good manners, senhor Mané," Risoleta remarks.

"Manoel, senhora Risoleta," he politely corrects her. "Thank you for the compliment, but I was not always this way." He pauses and remembers that even in Rio de Janeiro he was called "dumb" and "stupid" because of remarks he made and questions he asked that would have been perfectly normal back in Portugal. He realized then that he had to change, to polish his manner; otherwise, misunderstandings would go on forever. "I changed after I came to Minas Gerais," he says, resuming his story, "after I got here, in the Rio Doce Valley. I met many angry people who would fight at the drop of a hat, who got offended for any little reason. So I became more careful with what I say and how I say it. Even so," he interrupts himself, as he was about to mention what had happened in the afternoon. "Even so, I still have much to learn."

"Did you go to school?" Risoleta asks.

"Not really. My family was poor, but I went to a good school in Portugal. My father died when he was barely thirty years old. I and my brothers had to go to work when quite young. My mother descended from the Galicians and she still lives there."

"Your mother was what?" the curious girl asks him.

"Well, I say! Her parents were Galicians. Galicians are people born in Galicia, a region in Spain which borders on Portugal."

She does not understand any of that, but she pretends she does.

"That little knife there, where did you buy it?" one of the sons asks, pointing to the right side of his belt.

"Well, I say! I brought it from my homeland," he replies enthusiastically. To satisfy their curiosity, he shows them the knife with a white horn handle, engravings in yellow metal, and a blade a little over four inches long. "Well, I say! Be careful that you don't cut yourself," he warns the son, as he hands him the knife. "I always keep it sharp and I can even shave with it," he adds proudly.

They all examine the knife, appreciating its beauty and its sharpness, which reminds them of a barber's razor.

The conversation goes on and on, and every once in a while, he discreetly steals a look at the girl. He is sure that she is looking back at him and he really feels like speaking to her but holds himself back, afraid that the family might be offended.

"Das Dor, go and fix the room for senhor Manoel to sleep," Risoleta suddenly orders her daughter. She obeys and goes into the

house.

The three sons and their families bid farewell, and, shortly after that, das Dores comes and says in a very sweet voice, "Senhor Manoel, the room's ready."

"Can you show me?" She nods and he follows her.

"It's here." She shows him the room. "You wanna wash your feet?"

"I was just thinking of that."

"Then you just wait here a spell."

Manoel is used to hearing folks in these regions speak incorrectly, and, in fact, he is amused by it all. In the girl's case, he is downright spellbound—and keeps thinking about the expressions she used while he waits. She comes back with a basin, which she places next to the bed, and then goes out and brings in two pitchers. He is already barefoot, his feet on the wooden floor, his pants rolled up to his knees. Das Dores bends her body and pours the water from one of the pitchers. Then, she slowly pours the cold water from the other pitcher, controlling the temperature with her hand.

"I reckon' it's good enough," she says after a few seconds, her hands still in the water. "Check it!"

He bends down and, as he tests the water, his hand brushes against hers. She reacts as if hit by a shock, but she does not withdraw her hand. He continues as if he were checking the water temperature, but in fact he is touching the back of her hand slightly again and with pleasure. She turns her hand instinctively, and, for a while, the two palms touch. The noise of Pedro's footsteps makes her get up and leave the room, leaving the two pitchers behind. Later, she comes back for the basin and leaves the room quickly. The traveling salesman says his prayers and falls asleep, mindful of those light sensual touches.

In the morning, prior to leaving and in front of her parents, he takes a bottle and hands it to das Dores, saying, "Accept this hair oil as a gift to add more perfume to your young beauty."

"Thanks," she says, moving back a bit and lowering her head.

His interest in the girl is thus sealed.

## Joy and Pressure

Manoel continues his trip, the girl's image ever in his mind, inspiring thoughts of a sweet courtship and a happy marriage. In his moments of solitude, he recalls with much longing her backwoods way of speaking. He keeps asking himself whether maybe God has reserved her for him. Das Dores strengthens his dream of settling down some place some day. *All I want is a business and a woman to love.* Yet, every once in

a while, he is slightly troubled. *Would her family accept a foreigner?* He avoids, as much as possible, thinking about this doubt, for he has so many good things to think of—and there is no reason to harbor any negative thought. In less than forty days, on a Wednesday, he is back on that farm, driven by a desire to see her again.

He finds Pedro and Risoleta at their doorstep, dismounts, and somehow manages to make a lame excuse for his return: "Well, I say! Senhor Pedro, my animals are tired and I was wondering if maybe they could stop here for a day and recover their strength."

"It'll be very good to have you here with us, senhor Manoel," he answers with a smile.

He does not see das Dores. He wants to ask about her but controls himself. He and Pedro go and take care of the animals, letting them loose in the pasture. About an hour later, they go back to the house and see that the girl and her mother are in the living room.

*Oh, my, look at that! She is no longer just a girl!* Manoel is so awestruck that his thoughts nearly jump out of his head. Das Dores is sitting on a chair, near the table, erect and holding her head high. Her dress is simple but new and she is wearing shoes. Her shiny eyes show unbound joy. Her hair shines as much as her eyes, tied on either side of her head by a pair of white ribbons, which reach down to the neck, shoulders, and part of her breasts. She smiles shyly as the young Portuguese approaches her.

"How are you, Maria das Dores?" As he extends his hand to her, he feels the stirring smell of a bath mixed with the perfume of the hair oil he had given her.

"I am very well, and what about you, senhor Manoel?"

"Well, very well," he answers, unable to hide his joy. "Well, I say! It seems that you have grown up!"

"She's big for her age," Risoleta proudly remarks. "She's only sixteen. Sit down, senhor Manoel," the mother adds, offering him a chair.

"Sixteen?! Goodness! She looks older," he states, trying to be gentle and taking a seat about a yard from her.

"She's already old enough to get married," Pedro says, and Manoel feels wonderful, taking the remark as a subtle hint.

In less than five minutes, Risoleta says that she is going to brew some coffee and leaves the room. Pedro immediately stands up and also leaves, claiming that he has to take care of some pigs.

Manoel turns around in his chair and faces the girl. He bends slightly and tries a more intimate remark. "I kept thinking about you these past days."

"Me too," she replies, rather shyly.

He smiles at her remark and looks at her tenderly. "You're even prettier than in my memories." She moves in her chair, a bit uneasily. "Do you have a boyfriend?"

"Me, no!" she says hurriedly.

"Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all! I was thinking maybe we could date..."

"You know what's best," she replies, with a small, shy smile.

"May I ask permission from your parents?" She nods, her smile wider now. Manoel's joyful smile is large. A long silence follows. His muscles react to the aphrodisiacal fragrance, and he slowly moves his head sideways. His tender, shining eyes examine her sweet face, move down to her hands on her lap, and embrace her virgin body.

"You're so beautiful!" he sighs and whispers. Das Dores is pleased, the ever-present shy smile on her face. "You're so pretty!" he repeats again and again, not really certain whether she is here or in his mind.

He hears Risoleta's footsteps and straightens in his chair. She brings coffee, places the ware on the table, goes to the left-side window, and shouts at the top of her lungs, "Pedro, come and have some coffee."

The three of them drink. Mother and daughter sit side by side and Risoleta asks him to tell stories of his trip to Itanhomi.

A sweaty Pedro comes in, and Manoel interrupts the story he is telling, gets up and, while Pedro is serving himself some coffee, tells the couple in a firm and solemn voice what he has dreamt of saying every day since he has been to this farm.

"Well, I say! I would like to ask your permission, senhor Pedro Horácio da Cruz, and yours, senhora Risoleta Santos da Cruz, to court das Dores."

Apparently surprised at the request, Pedro sits close to the table, beside his wife, takes a sip of coffee, sets the cup down on the table, takes a hanky out of his pocket, and dries his face. He drinks more coffee, places the cup down again, looks out the side window, and lightly taps his face and gray beard, as if wondering and doubting. The young traveling salesman is nearly bursting with anxiety. At last, Pedro turns to his daughter. "Is that what you wanna do?" The girl nods, and he turns to Manoel. "We'll be mighty pleased," he says on his wife's behalf, as is the habit in that region.

Risoleta smiles slightly, but enough to show that she, too, is happy.

The traveling salesman's eyes shine; his joyful smile is a mile wide because in his dream there was room—albeit small—for a refusal to his request. The way is now open for the change in life he is seeking.

The two young people are again alone in the living room and in the kitchen, but they do not touch each other. Manoel waits anxiously

to go to bed, to wash his feet. The whole family meets again in the evening and everyone learns the news. Pedro announces a dance for Saturday, at their house, and he does not have to explain the reason why. Everyone is happy that das Dores will be married. As soon as her brothers are gone, she does not ask Manoel about washing his feet but simply tells him, "I'm gonna get water for you to wash your feet." She no longer uses formal language in addressing him, but she now treats him as if he were on equal footing with her.

"Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all!"

He sits on the bed and waits. When bending down to check the water temperature, he holds das Dores' hand. She seems initially startled, starts to pull her hand away, but then allows him to hold and caress it. It is just a few seconds, but long enough for their hearts to beat faster and their desires to surface. Das Dores leaves the room and the silence in the house is broken by Manoel throwing water on his feet. He prays, as he does every night, lies down, and wishes Saturday would come soon, so that he can hold her in his arms, even if in the watchful presence of her family.

In the intervening days, Pedro invites Manoel to see his small farm. On Thursday, he shows him the property, some 150 hectares altogether. The Cachoeirinha-to-Itanhomi road slashes right through its middle. The land is flat on both sides of the road. On the right side of the road bound for Itanhomi, roughly in the center of the farm, stands Pedro's modest, low, colonial-roofed house with a large door in the center and a window on each side. Some fifty yards away, there is a smaller house. Between the houses there is a corn-storage shed. In front and to the right of the smaller house is a cattle pen.

Beyond the houses, the land declines gently for some eighty yards towards a shallow North-east-flowing creek, roughly parallel to the road. The three sons live far from one another. Wood pile fences are found in the back of each house, staking out a small backyard. A barbed-wire small pasture, for animals to stay overnight, is found near each house. "It makes it easier to get the animals to travel at dawn," Pedro explains. A wooden pigpen full of pigs lies by the creek, and, farther down, there is a large barbed-wired area for planting corn and beans. As it moves away, the land becomes more irregular and there are some low hills. Pastures are nearly everywhere, there are no fences, and here and there some preserved stands of Atlantic Forest trees are found.

On Friday, Manoel watches the cows being milked, the pigs and chickens being fed, the fences being mended, the shrubs being trimmed, and some other farm activities, all of which are being done by the four men—Pedro and his sons. Pedro explains the farming system: "What-

ever we harvest is divided among the four of us. Whenever we sell something, we split the money among the four of us."

"Don't you divide the property and the work?"

"No. Everybody works and everybody earns the same."

"Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all!"

The young Portuguese notes that this is a harmonious family, whose members are dedicated, hard-working, and responsible. Pedro's leadership comes naturally, but everyone acts in the collective interest of everybody else.

In this meantime, boyfriend and girlfriend can only touch each other when he washes his feet in the evening.

Saturday finally dawns and the traveling salesman gets up, full of life and hope. During the day, Risoleta, her daughter, and daughters-in-law fry biscuits and bake cookies. They roast and grind lots of coffee. The men take turns keeping company with Manoel and doing odds and ends, in preparation for the feast. In the evening, the large, rectangular-shaped, wooden-floored room in the front of the house is prepared: table, chairs, stools, and benches are removed so that the whole space is wide open and unimpeded. Kerosene-fueled lamps are hung on the walls and, on the outside, a large well-lit table features enameled cups, plenty of cottage cheese and other dairy products, as well as a large plateful of biscuits.

The neighbors begin to arrive and are greeted by Pedro and his sons, who are next to the large table. Manoel is introduced to those who have not met him yet. There is widespread curiosity about him. Pedro's daughters-in-law keep the table full of milk and coffee, and folks help themselves. Das Dores and Risoleta remain inside the house. After a while, the accordion player arrives and Pedro invites everyone into the house. People stand everywhere around the walls but most remain outside, since there is no room for everyone inside. Manoel is surrounded by Pedro and his sons.

There is much expectation regarding das Dores' entrance and, from time to time, people look towards the interior of the house at the door she will come through. When she does appear at her mother's side, looks of expectation become looks of admiration. The young traveling salesman stands ramrod straight and says to himself, *She is a princess!*

The young girl wears a pink dress with a wide, shiny red silk ribbon tied around her waist, the ends reaching down to her thighs. The ends of her hair, down on both shoulders, are also tied by two red ribbons below her breasts. A little red flower on the right side of her head completes the harmonious picture. She is wearing new shoes and walks slowly towards her sisters-in-law.

Sitting on a chair in a corner of the room, the accordion player swings into action. Those who were standing outside crowd in at the door and near the front and side windows, but no one begins to dance. Pedro nudges Manoel and whispers, "Go ahead, start it!"

Manoel realizes that he has the honor of starting off the festivities. He solemnly walks towards das Dores, bows, extends his right hand, lowers his head, and moves his right leg backwards, pressing his right boot on the floor. He does the same thing with his left leg. She comes to him, places her hand on his, and the two of them go to the center of the room. Everyone around admires the sophistication of their moves.

Their hearts beating fast, the young couple begins to dance. *I just can't believe this is happening! Well, I say, say, say, say say!* He is delighted after the first few steps. *She's light as a feather!* Everyone is mesmerized by their moves, and under the attentive looks of all—especially of her family—they dance while paying attention to their steps. After a few minutes, the others join them on the dance floor and the sound of the accordion mixes with that of new boot leather and dancing feet sliding on the wooden floor. The young couple at last begins to relax.

They now dance and concentrate on each other. The young Portuguese lightly presses das Dores' hand and she responds by pressing his. He is now on Cloud Nine. Occasionally, their bodies touch and their desire is almost irresistible. She trembles and presses his hand. They only stop dancing after almost one hour, and they go eat and drink, as do the other dancers once in a while. Their rest is brief and they are back on the dance floor, stopping again only when the accordion player asks for a much-needed break.

As the music resumes, Manoel euphorically tells his girlfriend, "Well, I say! We're not going to rest tonight. The music is playing again, so let's get back to the floor!" No rest, indeed. They had started dancing shortly after 7 PM and are the last to stop, around midnight, having persevered in a show of stamina and energy.

At feet-washing time, das Dores appears in a light dress, and neither one of them is thinking about checking the water temperature. The house is quiet, as is usual at this time. Manoel stands, pulls her tenderly to him, and they embrace. Suddenly, she vigorously and quickly rubs her thighs against his; he responds in kind and they kiss passionately. It all takes less than a minute, but it is time enough for their pent-up desires to explode. She pushes him away tenderly and leaves the room.

After washing his feet, Manoel says his night prayers and gets into bed, feeling that his dream is beginning to come true. His memory of the short time their bodies pressed one another is stronger than the remembrance of all the hours of dancing. *She wants me as much as I want*

her! he exclaims enthusiastically amidst his whirlwind of thoughts. No doubt, his life is at an all-time high.

On Sunday, the young traveling salesman wakes up and decides to speed things up. He anxiously waits for das Dores' father to finish milking some cows and addresses him right there, at the entrance to the cattle pen. "Senhor Pedro," he starts, as he kindly holds one of the milk buckets, "I am thinking of marrying Maria das Dores and would like to know if you agree."

"We'd be much pleased, senhor Manoel," he replies and then smiles.

"Well, I say! I was thinking of a wedding soon, without much delay."

"And when would that be, senhor Manoel?"

"In a month, two at the most."

"Just where would you be livin'? You travel the whole time..."

"Well, I say! I'm thinking of settling down in Cachoeirinha. I have some savings."

Manoel knows that Cachoeirinha is a homeland with a bright future. Right by the river, it is a stop for the trains that go from Vitória to Minas. Roads have recently linked Cachoeirinha to some grain-producing towns, especially to the North, on the other side of the river. This has contributed to the land's initial transformation into an economic center, a transformation driven also by the railroad, which makes it easier for merchandise to flow in and out. It is the ideal place for him to make his dream come true, namely, to get rich.

"You could live right here on the farm, so the whole family's together. With your savings, you could buy some separate cattle, yours only, and you could farm with us."

"I have no experience with either cattle raising or farming, senhor Pedro."

"But it's easy to learn."

The young Portuguese remains silent, thinking it best not to discuss this matter. As someone who has traveled far and wide and who is used to a lonely life, it is impossible for him to imagine that their might be a problem with living away from the family but in a close by town. Thus, he replies vaguely, "That isn't exactly what I was thinking, but I'll talk with das Dores." Quickly changing the subject, he asks, "Don't people have the habit of praying here?"

"Sometimes. Once in a while, folks get together and pray in a house; 'matter of fact, it'll happen this evening."

"You don't say!? Where will it be? I'd like to go."

"Near here. You a Catholic?"

"Yes, I am a practicing Apostolic Roman Catholic and I pray every

night."

"That's good," Pedro remarks.

"Well, I say! I am also a Benedictine Oblate," he concludes, not noticing the puzzled look of incomprehension on Pedro's face, for Manoel is referring to a layman's affiliation with the Benedictine Order and his special participation in some ceremonies.

In the afternoon, he speaks with das Dores, when the two of them are alone. She already knows that her father has agreed to their wedding.

"Do you want to?"

"I do, but I wanna live here."

"Well, I say! In a city or a hamlet like Cachoeirinha we would have a better future, das Dores!"

"Mother will die if I move away from here."

"Why, if Cachoeirinha is close? Just fifteen kilometers!"

"We don't like streets, Manoel."

He smiles and shakes his head incredulously. He had thought she would support him, even more than that support him, but now he hears this!

The news that das Dores might leave the farm after her wedding hits the family hard. Not only is she the only daughter, she is younger than her three brothers, aged 23 to 27. All this has contributed to making her the center of everyone's care and affection, especially that of her oldest brother Cândido. Although they make no formal agreement, all of them are bent on changing Manoel's mind about living somewhere else. They wait for their habitual evening get-together to discuss this matter.

As night falls and the family gathers in the living room, the young Portuguese gets up and announces that he is going to the prayer meeting.

"Anyone like to go?" he asks off-the-cuff.

They all look at each other, for they are not particularly religious. Not only that, but what they really want to talk about is the girl's fate after her wedding. No one says anything and Manoel remarks, "Well, I say! If no one wants to go, I'll go by myself. Can you show me how to get to the house?"

Pedro breaks his family's uneasy silence: "Das Dor and Antonho" (Antônio, his youngest son) "will go with you."

Manoel goes into the bedroom and comes back wearing, over his normal clothes, a long sleeveless black cape reaching down to his knees. Everybody stares at him in surprise.

"What kind of clothing is that, Manoel?" das Dores asks, expressing the puzzlement of all.

Standing proud in the center of the room, he replies, "Well, I say! It is called an opa!"

"Opa?" she is still surprised.

"That is right. O-p-a, opa, a Church garment for lay people to wear!"

They do not understand, but they ask no further questions.

When they get to the house where the prayer meeting is to be held, people stare in wonder.

"It's known as an opa," das Dores whispers to those around her.

During the services, he is the center of attention. People pray rather mechanically, being more interested in hearing his accent or appreciating his fervor or stealing quick looks at his fancy-looking black cape.

Following their return, the whole family strives to convince Manoel to settle on the farm after his wedding.

"You can have your cows to yourself, and, if you want, you can make cheese and cottage cheese and sell them," argues Irã, the middle brother, reinforcing the proposal made by his father in the morning.

"You can also have your pigs separately," adds Antônio.

"Well, I say! I know nothing about farming or livestock. I've always thought about having my own business, some kind of shop or store!"

"We can teach you," Pedro remarks.

"Yes, and we can help you," adds Cândido, the oldest son.

"Later, you two can move away from here," says Risoleta, suggesting a possible postponement and not a definite change of plans.

"And you'll move away then with more money," argues Pedro.

Manoel resists through his silence. All looks are upon him, awaiting his answer. He figures that one of his long-held dreams—a happy marriage—is now about to be realized, but his other dream seems to be threatened. He finally says, "I've always thought about going into my own business, some trade which would promise a better future."

A worry-filled silence now envelops the room, despite the fact that his response was not actually very concrete.

"You could stay here a few days longer," Pedro insists, in a maneuver designed to buy some more time.

"Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all!" Manoel replies, encouraged by the thought of spending these days with das Dores.

In the next few days, the two young people have opportunities to be by themselves, which they enjoy, kissing each other several times. These are explosive encounters, reined in by prudence, and their mutual passion are increased. On the other hand, the family keeps insisting that they not leave the farm, using different types of arguments. For instance, Pedro tells him one time, "You can also have your separate farming land, if you want, and we can even do business separately."

So, in order to keep das Dores on the farm, her family is willing to give up joint work and grant total independence to Manoel.

On another occasion Cândido, the eldest son who cares so much for his sister, tells Manoel in a pleading voice, "You stay here and I'll give you the white horse."

The promise of such a gift shows how much he wants his sister to remain on the farm. The horse is practically a beloved pet, his color unique in the entire region, a fiery and agile animal, admired by everyone, Manoel included.

The young man in love finds it hard to understand their insistence. Their pat explanation is that they "don't like the streets." Pedro goes so far as to tell him that "a street is a place where we go, sell what we have to sell, buy what we need, and come back." Usually farm dwellers wish to move to an urban center's greater facilities, but with this family it is just the opposite. *To each his own* is the only explanation which seems plausible to Manoel. Nevertheless, he waits patiently for the end of such resistance.

Yet, one day, Antônio, the youngest son, remarks off-the-cuff, "Ain't no way we gonna let das Dor leave here."

This remark unsettles Manoel. He sees his marriage is at risk, and to live with das Dorens is now his top priority. He realizes that he faces not simple resistance but strong opposition, and finally he gives up. *You can't have everything at once*, he says to himself and puts his plans on hold. He tells his bride what he has decided, "Well, I say! I'll travel to sell the remaining merchandise and then come back and we get married and live here on the farm. But for how long I don't know."

The family feels relieved and happy.

## The Wedding

One week after Pedro's approval of the marriage—which seems too short a time when Manoel and his bride are together yet too long a time because of the pressure caused by her family's opposition—he travels for the last time, to sell his remaining inventory. On Saturday, August 11, 1934, they are married.

After changing out of their wedding clothes, Manoel and das Dorens leave the house they will live in, next to Pedro's, and join the small crowd gathered for the celebration. Cândido brings them the white horse, pulling it by the reins.

"Here's your horse," he says, smiling.

Manoel is quite scared.

"Well, I say! I didn't figure that you were serious."

Still smiling, Cândido adds, "I bought this saddle and this cloth."

"Well, I say! Wonderful! How marvelous!"

The horse is beautiful, and the huge red sheepskin cover over the brand-new saddle makes for a harmonious whole admired by everyone. Manoel cannot resist and rides the horse, its majestic head always up, the long, smooth, white mane gracefully shaken by the long neck. The animal gallops smoothly and responds promptly to the slightest touch of a spur.

"Thank you, Cândido, thank you so much!" he says enthusiastically, getting down from the horse. "It's beautiful and it's a great ride!"

The wedding night fulfills them. Deeply in love, they give all of themselves to each other. Their insatiable desire allows them no sleep. At dawn, by the light of a gas lamp, *das Dores* gets up, leaves the room, and soon comes back, stopping at the doorway.

Manoel is astonished by her image. In the long, loose hair adorned with neither ribbon nor flower, in the serene eyes sparkling with desires fulfilled, in the body enveloped by the thinnest of nightgowns, in a young girl just made a woman, nature appears at its glorious best. He gets up, never taking his loving eyes off her and tenderly brings her back to bed. They look at each other for a long time, saying nothing—they do not need to—because any words now would be just empty sounds lost adrift in space. Feelings, especially those they experience now, are essentially indescribable. It matters not to them now whether the Earth moves around the Sun or vice-versa, whether life is eternal or not, whether they will be rich or poor.

"Am I dreaming or is this really true?" he whispers tenderly, after contemplating his beloved wife for the longest time.

*Das Dores* just smiles sweetly.

They make love to each other again, this time even more tenderly, so that their very souls may be forever joined.

## Nicknamed

A quick wedding after an engagement is rather common in that region, and married life is quite predictable. Yet, when someone of another nationality is involved, one never knows how things will go, here or anywhere else in the world. Now, as the couple lives day to day, the young Portuguese will be known as he really is.

To him, his wife is a gift from God. He thinks that a happy marriage is one in which the wife is happy. So he goes out of his way to shower her with affection and attention.

He has accepted that his other dream, that of having a business in an urban center, is temporarily on hold, yet he prepares himself to fulfill it some day. He purchases cattle, brands it with his own name, puts

up his own wooden pigpen, and farms alongside the family.

He does his best to become part and parcel of the farm life, and, in fact, his willingness to work and to learn is such that his in-laws become very proud of him.

He takes part in the Sunday prayer meetings, always clad in the long black opa vest, and is soon leading the small group of worshippers. He thinks that they need a church and goes to visit fellow farmers and peasants, trying to get them involved in such a project. At one of the farms, after explaining his ideas, he undergoes a life experience that will be passed on to his descendants. The farmer says to him, "Senhor Manoel of the opa..." The Portuguese smiles at being addressed in such a fashion, never having heard such a thing before. In fact, he likes it so much that he hardly pays attention to the actual question: "There ain't that many folks around here to fill a church, don't you agree?"

*Manoel of the opa...Manoel of the opa...* he repeats mentally, half smiling and head held high, appreciating its sound, while the farmer, his wife, and their children wait for his answer. Since he provides no answer, the farmer insists, "Don't you think so?"

He then awakes from his daydream and, his mind still a bit fuzzy, manages to rejoin the conversation. "I'm sorry. What did you ask me?"

"I was saying that there ain't that many folks around here who like to go to church and pray." *Manoel of the opa...* he is repeating mentally, again not paying attention to the conversation. "Not enough to warrant building a church, don't you agree?"

Manoel, still torn between his daydreaming and the conversation, weakly manages to retort, "Well, I say! The children are growing up as pagans," which is true enough, as far as it goes, but it is no longer the chief topic of his interest now.

"I ain't sure, maybe building a church is too much," says the farmer's wife.

His central topic of interest occupies him fully now, and he remarks, "Perhaps you and your wife are right, after all."

"So, maybe a small chapel will do," the farmer suggests.

He thinks for a while.

"Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all! That isn't exactly what I was thinking, but it seems like a good idea."

The nickname "Manoel of the opa" had already spread far and wide, without his knowing it. For some people it is a natural way to identify him precisely. For others, who think his long black robe rather odd and weird, it is a veiled way of making fun of him.

The chapel project is eventually well accepted and a decision is made to start construction in early 1935, after the rainy season. The loca-

tion chosen is on the farm belonging to the Pedro Horácio da Cruz family.

These encounters cement his closer relationship the local residents; he begins to address them more informally, and vice versa. After a while, the formal treatment is reserved only for his father-in-law and mother-in-law. Everybody else calls him by his new nickname, which makes him quite proud, as a matter of fact.

In time, he incorporates many regional expressions into his vocabulary, but a slight residue of his original Portugal accent is always and deliberately preserved, for esthetic reasons—the neighbors think it rather charming—and as a sentimental link to his native land. In time, he also develops a reputation as a simple, hard-working man not bothered by practical jokes, but a man who does not cultivate very deep friendships.

## Chapter 3 - Tormented Passion

### The Family Grows

The young couple is now awaiting the arrival of their first-born. Four months after the wedding, on a Christmas Eve, Manoel returns home after a Christmas vigil service, and das Dores simply tells him the good tidings: "I'm expecting a baby."

He has just gone into the house—has not even unsaddled the horse—to remove his black opa and put on a coat, for he had been hit on the way back by a fine yet persistent drizzle. He stands silently and nearly breathlessly for a few seconds, just staring at his wife.

"Are you sure?" he finally asks her.

Das Dores, standing about a yard from him, nods her head and breaks into a wide smile.

Manoel hugs her. They both laugh, and he raises her and spins her in the air and shouts joyfully, "I'm gonna be a dad! I'm gonna be a dad!" He looks lovingly at her, still holding her, and goes on to add, "Well, I say! The Blessed Mother has heard me. She always hears me." His eyes shine, as often happens to those who see their faith confirmed. "The Holy Virgin Mary heard me, you can believe that, das Dores! She sends the signal now, on the eve of Her Child's birth and after our prayer service! Isn't that just amazing?"

He then treks under the rain all the way to his in-laws' house and knocks at the door but does not wait for it to be opened. He simply shouts the good news. "This is very good, senhor Manoel!" Pedro shouts back from inside the house. In fact, he and Risoleta already know. The future father goes back home, tells his wife that he is going out again to tell everybody within earshot, puts on some dry clothes, and describes his itinerary, which includes the houses of his brothers-in-law and fellow worshippers at the prayer services.

Holding the gas lamp at the doorway, puzzled and moved, das Dores sees her husband throw the raincoat over his shoulders, get up

on the white horse, and disappear into the dark night.

The prospect of being a father seems to give him even more energy. He now wants to enlarge the house they live in, to throw a big celebration when the child is baptized, and to build that chapel, for otherwise where is the baptism going to take place? The rainy season put the building of the chapel off, but it has to start now.

He leads and rallies everyone around the chapel project. For the overall coordination, he picks José Vítor, a fellow in his early thirties, cordial, helpful and hard-working, who gets along very well with everyone. He is also the most experienced in the region on these matters. The location chosen for the chapel is right in front of Manoel's house, across the road.

The work starts and Manoel spends much of his time there, almost always with José Vítor, observing how he works and doing a bit of practically everything himself. The two of them become good friends. In less than a month, the chapel is ready, save for the pews and altar, which José Vítor will make at home, but at a slower pace. Manoel goes to Cachoeirinha and, through a trader, orders several sacred images. Prayer meetings are now held every Sunday in the unfinished chapel.

When the inside of the chapel is ready, a tireless Manoel resumes enlarging his own house. He and José Vítor quickly do the work, and the house is now almost twice as spacious.

In early August, prior to their first wedding anniversary, his wife goes into a long, difficult labor, so painful that she thinks she is going to die. Manoel watches everything in deep anguish, praying to the Virgin Mary in the chapel or in his bed. In utter despair, he makes a vow in the chapel that he promises to carry out if his wife and child live. They do, and the baby is born crying, apparently protesting that his birth took so long. It is a healthy boy, and the father is proud to see that, despite some swelling, the face resembles his own.

The first time the young couple talks about naming the child, the proud father says what he has in mind: "I was thinking about Manjo."

He explains that the name mixes the first two syllables of his own and his father's name, which was Joaquim.

"Manjo? That's not a boy's name. Men are named Zé, Antonio, Pedro, Mané, I mean, Manoel, Quinzim... but Manjo? I never heard such a name!"

He insists, saying that the name pays homage to himself and his father, but his wife remains adamant that Manjo is not a proper name.

Actually, Manoel's idea for this name is old. Back when he was in Rio de Janeiro, he overheard someone asking somebody else, "Você manja disso?" (Do you know anything about this?). The other fellow

answered: "Manjo" (I do). Manoel was instantly in love with this word, not only because it united the initial syllables of his and his father's name, but also because it was a Brazilian word. '*Manjo, Manjo, Manjo, Manjico...* he would repeat to himself from time to time, marveling at its sounds. He finally decided that if one day he had a son, Manjo would be his name.

Maria das Dores asks for her mother's help because it is difficult to change her husband's mind. Her father and brothers also jump into this discussion, but a stalemate ensues, a deadlock that is only broken when the family talks to José Vítor, Manoel's sole friend, whose opinions he values dearly.

"Manoel of the opa, we have to respect the elderly," his friend starts, having prepared the argument beforehand. "The respect has to start with your own father. How about if you call the boy Joman?"

José Vítor already knew that it would be useless to insist on a name which would not convey the homage Manoel intends to pay to his father and himself. Exchanging the two syllables still results in a rather odd name, but, at least, it will not give the boy as many problems when he grows up as a name like Manjo would.

"Joman? Joman... Joman..." Manoel keeps repeating attentively, as if hearing his own voice. "Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all! It's not exactly what I had in mind, but then again it doesn't sound bad either."

The respect he harbors for his father's memory plays a decisive role in his accepting the suggestion.

Das Dores recovers well from the labor and for forty days she is basically fed chicken broth. She and her mother Risoleta become even closer, so much so that one's house now seems more like an extension of the other's.

The time has now come to take care of the baptismal ceremony.

Manoel leads a movement in the community to have a priest come to that region for the first time. He comes, blesses the chapel, says Mass, and, as he collects the full names of the children to be baptized, Manoel, without consulting anyone, says, "Joman de Oliveira Opa."

José Vítor and his wife Matilda, a.k.a. Tilda, are chosen to be the boy's godparents, which is the greatest show of friendship one can demonstrate. At the moment that the child is being baptized, das Dores hears the surname Opa. Leaving the chapel with the child in her arms, she shows that she is displeased. "This is the name of a cape, not of a people, Manoel."

He explains to her, "When Joman was about to be born, I thought that you and he might die. So, I made a promise to the Blessed Mother that, if you two lived, all my children would carry the name Opa. Thanks

to that promise, we are all here happily together.”

Surprised at this revelation, the young woman no longer looks upset and remarks, “Then the name was well given.”

As planned, Manoel throws a major celebration, with plenty of roast goat and bread to eat, he himself having prepared these delicacies.

Das Dores gives birth to a girl in July, 1936, when Joman is eleven months old. On the one hand, she is very happy because she wanted a daughter so much, but she is also increasingly concerned about the boy, who is beginning to walk, is very active, and has to be watched the whole time so that he will not get hurt. Manoel names the girl Belma, honoring his mother Belen and his wife Maria, adding the surnames Oliveira Opa.

As his family grows, Manoel thinks about making more money. The farm so far has yielded barely enough income to survive. He even thinks about moving from the farm, but he puts this thought aside because he realizes how important his mother-in-law is while the children are still small. He has to find some business right on the farm. After some time of observation, he realizes that rice is frequently bought in Cachoeirinha, since practically no one plants it in the region. He sees the opportunity he was looking for and talks with his friend about it.

“Rice has to be planted in wet land,” José Vítor starts to explain, “but it’s really a good business. If you find some good land, you can sell everythin’ right here.”

“Do you know any such piece of land?”

“‘Matter of fact, I do but I ain’t sure if the owner’s willin’ to sell. He plants rice in a plot, but not every year.”

They decide to check it the next day, a Wednesday. In the evening, Manoel invites his father-in-law and brothers-in-law to be his partners, but they show no interest, arguing that the distance is the main hurdle.

### Florinda, the Temptation

Very early in the morning, Manoel heads for Cachoeirinha, and, less than a kilometer down the road, he veers south on a trail for another two kilometers; then he heads down another trail to the left, and, five hundred meters later, he arrives at José Vítor’s place. The two of them go back along the main trail, south-bound. Six kilometers farther on, they arrive at the farm, which is marsh land fed by a creek that floods every year in the rainy season. The place seems to be some five hectares. There is a mud-wall shack, with a dirt floor and a thatched roof. They look around and walk about a kilometer to the main house,

where they meet the elderly owner.

"Well, I say! I've got a mind to plant some rice, and you have that marshland which interests me. Would you sell it?"

"No, I can't 'cause I need it to do just that."

"But I see that it's seldom used."

"Yeah, but I ain't selling."

"Maybe you can lease it," José Vítor suggests.

The old man is willing to discuss leasing, and they finally come to an agreement in which Manoel will use the land for five years in exchange for a modest sum paid after each harvest.

He now needs workers experienced in rice cultivation and asks the farmer whether there are any around. "There are some good at it," says the farmer, explaining how to get to two houses.

In the first house lives Zeca, a strong man of few words. When asked whether he is interested, he mumbles, "How much you paying?"

"Ten tostões a day; is that good enough?"

"No way!" he replies curtly. "Fifteen hundred réis."

That is fifty percent more than what Manoel intended to pay, but he tells the man, "I'll think about it."

"It ain't expensive, senhor," says Zeca's wife. "It's the wages every farmer pays."

Manoel insists that he will think about it.

In the next house, they meet two blacks, brother and sister, Abidias and Florinda. She starts the conversation by saying that the marshlands are very fertile and that Manoel will make money there. As regards wages, she says, "Around here, menfolk get paid fifteen hundred and women a thousand."

Manoel looks to José Vítor and shrugs his shoulders.

"Well, I say! Good enough. We can start at once."

"It's about time," the young woman remarks. "We gotta plant in October 'cause come December, the place's full of water."

"You two working, then?"

"The two of us, for sure. We ain't doin' nothing now," she says, and she is the one doing the talking.

"Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all! We're all set for next Monday."

She makes some recommendation about the tools needed initially. Manoel and his friend then go back to Zeca's house and hire him, too.

On the way home, Manoel remarks, "Well, I say! Pretty smart young black woman! Did you notice that?"

"She sure is; and pretty decisive, too. She does all the talkin' and makes all the decisions."

"And she knows what she's talking about."

The Portuguese is so impressed by the young black woman that he tells das Dores about her. In that region, white women are very passive and submissive, black women even more so. He recalls how that woman remarked that it was about time they start planting rice. She seems so unique to him that he feels like seeing and talking to her on the first day of work.

Because of the distance, and to save time going and coming back, he decides to ride his fast white horse every day.

He arrives early on Monday morning, hands the tools to the workers, who are waiting in the shack, unsaddles the horse, and takes it to graze in a nearby pasture. He comes back and asks them about the best way to proceed with the work. The young woman does the talking. "We gotta start clearin' out the low grass here and, then that high grass and 'em weeds over there, takin' out all them stumps." She gestures as she speaks. "We split the labor: one of us clears out the low grass, another the weeds, and the third one takes out the tree stumps."

"Is it necessary to root them out?" asks Manoel.

"It is," she says, "so that we can till, and also it ain't gonna be in the way when it's all full of water. That dam over there's gonna have to be fixed," she says, pointing to a pile of earth at the end of the terrain, "to hold in the water. Rice likes water down below and sunshine up above."

Manoel eyes the area carefully, also thinking how interested that eager girl seems to be. He talks to the two men and they agree with her. They decide to split the work.

Abidias and Zeca go over to see what has to be cleared out, and Manoel and Florinda face each other, at the door of the shack, talking about how best to proceed with the work ahead. She leans her right arm against the hoe handle and suggests, "The two of us can do some labor, workin' next to each other."

Manoel tries to think but is not able to—his eyes are fixed on her. She waits for his answer, but, upon noticing him staring at her, she smiles slyly and joyfully, showing sparkling white teeth and eyes as shiny as polished black onyx. Her hair and face round out the hypnotic image. Manoel's eyes travel her body from the top to bottom, covering her large firm breasts, thin waist, well rounded hips, what little of her legs her simple dress allows one to see, and her strong, sandal-clad feet. He tries not to stare and, without thinking, says automatically, "Well, I say! Fine, sounds like a good idea to me. Let's go."

Florinda moves ahead, and again his eyes are fixed on her, this time on her large, curved behind. Obscene thoughts take over his mind.

He makes the sign of the cross and, remembering how happy and fulfilled he is with his wife, asks sadly, *Most Holy Mother, why do I always have to want more and more?*

They start clearing the land, side by side, he at times stealing a quick look at her and finding it highly pleasurable when she strikes the ground with the hoe. He makes the sign of the cross several more times. *Most Holy Mother, why do I always have to want more and more?*

"I think I'd better work on that part over there," he says to her, without further explanation, hoping that distance will drive away his impure thoughts.

Some twenty yards behind, he follows an imaginary working line and thinks his ruse will work. He concentrates on the work for a few minutes and tries to think of his wife and children, but soon he has one eye on the ground and the other on the young woman. It is even worse now because he sees her almost continuously. Again and again he makes the sign of the cross, muttering, *Most Holy Mother, why do I always have to want more and more?*

He now moves some forty yards ahead of her and feels more confident. *What the eyes don't see, the heart doesn't feel*, he thinks and hopes that this expression holds true. Yet he now sees her through his imagination. *Those shiny black eyes are killing me!* He comes to make the sign of the cross. *I exorcise!* He feels relieved, but, lo and behold, the shiny black eyes are soon back. *Most Holy Mother, why do I always have to want more and more?*

He tries thinking about the farm and the work he will have to do there after he gets home past four in the afternoon. It works for a while, but before he can perceive it, that shrewd smile comes to his mind like a portrait. *It's a curse!* He makes the sign of the cross. *Most Holy Mother...*

He is thinking of a way out, any way out; he goes to the shack, kneels, and prays. He needs divine help in the face of this temptation. He goes back to work, full of hope.

Before long, those large firm breasts invade his mind. Again a curse, again the sign of the cross, again ... *why do I always have to want more and more?*

He recalls when he came to the farm for the first time and how das Does had enticed him. He dwells on the details, thinking of her removing her slippers, but suddenly those feet are no longer his wife's but the hard black feet of this fiery young woman waiting for a male. *Get away from me, Satan!*

And on and on it goes, a struggle the whole morning long. At lunch time, the four of them go to the shack. Manoel takes the container wherein das Does has placed his food and goes outside, under a shady

tree. *She seems like the devil incarnate. I'd better keep my distance.*

After lunch, Zeca and Abidias go back to work, and Manoel enters the shack to drink some water and to put away his food container. Florinda is preparing to go back to work. The temptation is now stronger, as they are so close to each other. To his despair, he thinks she has noticed his interest in her inviting body. Her hip movements seem even more tempting as she begins to move outside. Manoel can no longer resist, goes to the door, and says, "Well, I say! You're so very beautiful."

Florinda stops, stands kind of sideways, places her hands on her hips, half smiles, and stares long and hard at him, confident that she is a desirable female in body and soul. She replies, "You're a married man, senhor Manoel." She starts to walk again and, knowing that he is looking at her, she walks in an even more tempting fashion.

Just now Manoel notices her fine contralto-like voice, its sound so pleasing to his ears! He remains rooted to the ground, staring in wonder, and then he follows her.

He spends the afternoon with one eye on the ground and the other on Florinda, at times glancing at her real body and at others constructing it in his imagination. *God did not make man perfect; in fact He expelled him from paradise*, he says to himself, a comforting thought for a while. He no longer feels so guilty about fantasizing about her, although he is sure that he is sinning.

The work ends, and all four of them head for the creek to wash. She goes to a creek bend, where the others cannot see her. They return to the shack and, since she has not dried herself, her cheap calico dress clings even tighter to her body. Manoel finds it almost impossible to get a hold of himself. On the way back home, her image never leaves his head.

The same afternoon, he goes to the chapel to do penance for his sins. He rolls his pants above his knees, places some corn on the floor, and kneels on them, opening his arms wide so that his body is now in the shape of a cross.

"...Most Holy Virgin, forgive my sins and deliver me from this temptation..." He continues the prayer in front of the image of saint adorned by flowers planted and harvested by his wife. He prays to the point of exhaustion, until he can no longer hold his arms wide open.

However, his struggle goes on, and, at the end of the fourth day, desire has overwhelmed him. After bathing in the creek, he and Florinda stay behind in the shack, putting away their tools. Wholly out of control, he grabs her.

"What's this, senhor Manoel?" she asks, feigning surprise even as she moves to get her body closer to his.

Like a stud in heat, he lays her on top of his saddle cloth and pos-

sesses her wildly.

"Now I'm only yours," she says somewhat enigmatically, her voice relaxed, as they rest.

A few minutes go by, and then they get up and go their separate ways.

Manoel slows down his horse, as he likes to do when he is not in hurry or needs to think about something. *What a female! Full of heat, she has the fragrance of deep woods.* He pauses and asks himself, *What about das Dores?* The answer comes at once: *She, too, is always ready; she wants me passionately, smells like a garden. I lack nothing.* He feels oppressed and asks himself, *Why have I done this? Well, I say! It can only be the devil's work.* He begins to feel like a dirty traitor. *Most Holy Mother, forgive me.* He promises her that he will not repeat what he has done, that henceforth he will live for his family only.

Arriving home, he lets the horse loose and goes at once to bathe in the creek, rubbing and scrubbing hard many times, as if trying to wash away his sin. He now is even more tender with his wife and children. At bed time, he remembers his wedding night with das Dores, her getting up at dawn. Once again, like that night, he possesses her tenderly.

The next morning, he finds a radiant Florinda working with the same dedication but with a much wider smile, that of a happy person. *God will forgive me, but Florinda is not the devil. The devil is suffering, but she is sheer joy.* As the day moves on, he no longer feels the torture of the past week.

At night, he again displays tender loving care for his wife, but he also longs for the young black woman. He begins to rationalize, thinking, *If I could, I'd live with both of them. It's not a sin to have Florinda, if I love das Dores so much. If it is a sin, then may God forgive me.*

On Saturday, he wants Florinda again, now feeling almost no guilt because he loves his wife the same as before and is convinced that he is not perfect. He says to Florinda, "Well, I say! I was wondering if there's a safe place for us to meet."

"I know one."

"Which is where?"

"When we finish work today, I'll go in front, followin' the trail, and wait for you."

In late afternoon, after bathing, she is the first to go. Minutes later, Zeca and Abidias are also gone. Manoel remains in the shack, giving Florinda some time, not knowing how far she will have to walk. He is in no hurry as he saddles his horse, and when he judges that enough time has gone by, he mounts it and follows his usual path. After some three hundred yards, he finds her sitting by the roadside.

"Right over there," she points to some shrubs, away from the road. He dismounts and follows her, pulling the animal behind.

"What a nice patch of grass!" he exclaims, when they get behind the shrubs.

There is another advantage: although close to the pathway, the shrubs are high and dense, forming a perfect curtain against passers-by. Furthermore, at his time of day, they provide a refreshing shade.

He ties the horse, removes the red saddle cloth, and spreads it on the ground. Florinda takes off all her clothes, revealing her sculptured body. He gently places her down, lies by her side, and looks at her lovingly, holding her breasts. "My ebony doll," he whispers in a loving voice. He then takes off his clothes and possesses her, with alternating fury and tenderness.

That place becomes their regular meeting place.

Manoel now works even harder. He is up at dawn, takes care of the pigs, milks the cows, and handles the cattle. When he gets to the marshlands, the other three are already at work. He comes back home around four in the afternoon and works until dark. On days he is a bit late, he works even later at night.

Das Dores too works very hard, washing, ironing, cooking—including her husband's lunch. She has to be up at daybreak, and she takes care of her children. Joman is very active and curious, requiring special attention. Several times a day, she loses patience and shouts at him.

One afternoon, José Vítor is riding the trail to the rice patch, and he sees Manoel's white horse apparently tied to a shrub. Manoel had been in a hurry and was not careful enough to tie it behind the shrubs. José Vítor's initial thought is that his friend had to answer nature's call. But as he nears, he notices the absence of the red saddle cloth. He dismounts, walks into the shrubs, and sees his friend having sex with Florinda on top of the saddle cloth. Surprised, Manoel turns around, exposing the girl's naked body. Quickly, both of them cover themselves partially—she with part of the saddle cloth and he with the first piece of clothing he can grab. Not knowing what to do or say, Manoel ends up asking dumbly, "Well, I say! How about a little piece yourself?"

He obviously does not mean it. It just comes out of his mouth because he is scared he has been caught. He speaks it as one would speak when offering to share food or drink. *How about having some coffee?* Having asked such a stupid question, Manoel is now even more embarrassed, and he decides to be quiet.

"Don't you worry none. I ain't seen nothin'," José Vítor assures him. He then goes back to the trail, mounts his horse, and rides away.

Manoel is now somewhat apprehensive about being caught in the act, but nevertheless, he and Florinda continue to see each other.

His heart is now definitely torn between the two women — this one and his wife. Although he no longer thinks that he is sinning, he feels guilty enough to feel obliged to have sex with das Dores almost every time he does with Florinda. He also feels obliged to be even more loving with his wife and children, showing great patience and unbound tolerance.

But nothing is perfect in life, and one day, Florinda tells him, "Senhor Manoel, Zeca sure is suspicious."

"Suspicious of what?"

"I ain't sure. I reckon it's 'cause I no longer want to spread my legs for him."

"You were having an affair with that fellow?" She nods. "But have you stopped?" After some time, she nods again. "When did you stop?"

"After I met you."

Manoel smells trouble in the air. He and the girl are sentimentally linked, and there is a jealous man in the middle. He tries to think of something he can do to prevent eventual danger, but, as so often happens in most situations like this, he cannot translate his intentions into actions.

In early March, he hires two more men to help with the rice harvest. As the work goes on, he tries to think of a reason to justify his coming back regularly to meet his lover. On the last day, he gathers the workers, pays them, and says, "Well, I say! I hope I can count on all of you for the next harvest. Until then, I need someone to look after the rice to be used for the next planting." He turns to Florinda, "Would you like one thousand réis a week to do this?"

She does not answer immediately but compress her eyelids and blows her cheeks as a slight smile rises to her face — indeed she is mentally focalizing the Manoel's maneuver. No one would dare come in here and mess with the rice; therefore there was no need for anyone to be guarding it. A little anxious, Manoel adds, "You can also do other chores and look after the rice in your free time."

"Fine, I'll do it!" she finally says.

He smiles a smile of satisfaction.

Zeca does not like this conversation one bit, and his angry expression accentuates a dimple under the chin. He goes out without saying good-bye.

Eight days later, in late March, Manoel stops working early on his farm, bathes, mounts his white horse, and goes to Florinda's house, dying to jump into the hay with her. He arrives around four in the af-

ternoon and is greeted at the door by her and her father.

"How are things, Florinda?" he asks after the greetings.

"Everything's just fine, senhor Manoel."

"Well, I say! I've come here to pay you, but I would like you to show me how the rice is."

She starts walking and Manoel follows her on his horse. They talk about trivial matters, but the only thing he is really interested in is that fine body swinging its way on the road in front of him. They go straight to the shack, and, as soon as they get in, Florinda becomes a different person, taking off her clothes quickly and saying, "Today I want all of you inside me!" Her anxious loud voice expresses fiery desire: "All of you! All! Everythin'! Everythin' inside me!" she is practically shouting, but her cries sound nervous.

Next, she begins to undress him—something she has never done before—while she goes on babbling, "I'm all yours, do with me anythin' you want, even kill me. I ain't never ever gonna have another man in my life. Get inside me! I wanna die with you inside me!" She is anxious, cannot control her desire, and in her despair seems nearly crazy.

Her wild behavior wakes the devil lurking in him. On fire, they grab each other, moan, cry out, invoke God's name, and for several minutes border on insanity. Exhausted, they pause, but Florinda seems possessed and soon says, "I want more!" even as she starts to arouse him again. They go at each other, as if life was ending and they would like to die of love and pleasure. Their ecstasy seems eternal and they only stop when overcome by sheer exhaustion.

"Ah! I was forgetting it," Manoel says on his way out, reaching into his pocket. "Your payment." He extends to her the money.

Florinda hesitates. She needs the money; yet the feeling that she is being paid for what they just did makes her remain silent. He insists, "Here's your money."

"I don't want it, senhor Manoel," she says finally.

"But we've agreed on this. You mean to say that you don't want to take care of the rice any more?"

"No, not that, but you don't need to pay me."

He continues to insist, but it is in vain. Then they bid farewell to each other.

## Ambush

Manoel rides his horse slowly on the way home, happy with life and feeling like a vain stud, remembering their bodies together and how she deliciously made him feel a complete male. He even appreci-

ates the yellow sunset at the end of the day.

Then, suddenly, Zeca appears on a curve, as if out of nowhere, holding a heavy stick over three feet long, and, before Manoel can grasp what is going on, he is hit on the left side of his back. Surprised and in pain, he lets go of the reins and spurs the horse, which takes off at a gallop. Manoel is unbalanced, his feet dangling loose in the air, and he tries to straighten himself up, holding on to the saddle and to the horse's mane, but he realizes that he is going to fall. He decides to jump off the horse, falls down sprawling, and rolls on the ground until he hits some shrubs. Zeca is immediately upon him, stick held high.

In a fraction of a second, Manoel realizes that his head will be split. He manages to leap up and avoid the smashing blow. The two of them fall, Manoel underneath, feeling that Zeca is about to grab the stick again. He resists with his left hand and, with his right one, pulls his little knife from his waistband and strikes Zeca on his neck. Blood gushes forth. They look perplexedly at each other, both still struggling for the stick, but in a matter of seconds Zeca falls down, blood still coming out of his wound.

Astonished, exhausted, and crazed of out his mind, Manoel manages to get up. When he sees the full scene around him, he is overcome by despair and limps around Zeca.

"Woe to me, Blessed Mother! How could this happen to me?! Lord in Heaven, stick by me." Over and over again, he blesses himself with the sign of the cross.

The gushing blood is making a large pool. Zeca moves for a while and then stops. In growing despair, Manoel bangs his head against a tree trunk several times, moaning: "Woe to me! Woe to me!"

He sits down on a piece of wood and goes on wailing, in a low voice, addressing Zeca's dead body, as if the dead man could hear him, "I can't believe you made me do this! I can't believe it! I just can't!" He starts to cry. "Blessed Mother, help me!" he says, crying and making the sign of the cross again and again.

He now dries his tears, gets up with difficulty, and looks for his horse. It is getting much darker now, and, in twenty minutes, he finds the horse grazing on the roadside. He mounts and heads for a nearby creek, washing as much as he can. There is no moonshine, and the little light from the stars does not allow him to see well the blood stains in his clothes. He sits by the creek, not knowing what to do. He surely could use some help, but he does not know whom to go and see. *All of a sudden, my whole world is upside down!* he remarks to himself.

He remembers his friend José Vitor, who lives nearby. He is his only true friend, deserving of full trust. He puts on his wet clothes,

mounts the horse, and rides the horse trail leading to his friend's house, shouting for him as he arrives.

Seconds later, the door opens and José Vítor appears, a gas-lamp in his hand. His wife and two small boys are right on his heels.

"Is that you out there, Manoel?" he asks, moving the lamp sideways, so that he can see better what is around him.

"Yes, it's me."

"You around here at this time of the night? Come on in."

"No, thank you," he replies anxiously. "I fell from the horse and hurt myself."

"Come on in, then!" insists José Vítor, in a friendly voice.

"No, thank you. Could you please help me home, because I'm feeling a lot of pain."

Tilda offers to see to his wounds, but he says there is no need, arguing that das Dores must be worried that he is not home yet.

"I'm going with you," remarks José Vítor.

He hands the lamp to his wife and walks towards the horse trail.

"How did you fall?"

"Something spooked the horse," he says, attempting to hide his affliction.

"It happens. It must've been some animal, right by the road side."

They go on talking, and, upon reaching the main trail, Manoel asks his friend to stop, and all his despair comes to the surface.

"A terrible thing has happened, it couldn't have been more terrible! Zeca, that fellow who worked for me, tried to kill me. It turned out that I killed him! Woe to me!"

"You don't say!"

"It's true, woe to me! What will happen to me now? Why would a thing like that have to happen to me? Woe to me, poor me!" he goes on moaning.

After a few seconds, recovered from the shock, José Vítor says, "Calm down, take it easy now and tell me what happened."

He tells him, barely managing not to cry, "I'm afraid of being arrested, maybe, sent back to Portugal. What will happen to das Dores and the children? Poor me!"

"Did anyone see you?"

"I don't think so!"

"Then, there ain't no problem at all! Take it easy now, there ain't no problem, I said. No sweat. You know how many people are killed around here. All you have to do is to keep quiet."

"I'm not sure I can do that."

"You have to grab a hold of yourself and hold on. You could've

been the one dead out there now. You wouldn't be here now, if you weren't strong." He pauses and asks, "Do you have the knife with you?"

"Yes, right here," he answers, more at ease now.

"Give it to me, with the sheath. At dawn, when it's still dark, I'll put it in the shack." Manoel hands him the knife and José Vítor adds, "No one will think that it was you, especially with your knife in the shack. I'll also get rid of the wooden stick."

"Thank you so much. Well, I say! But I want to know for sure that you won't tell anybody. Do you swear to that?"

"Yes, I do!"

After a brief silence, Manoel is moaning again, "I'm worried about his family, his wife and children."

"They'll manage somehow. Life always works out."

"But his children are small."

"There's his family and her family, they all help and she can also find another man," his friend says, trying to comfort him.

"But it's not the same thing as having a father. Blessed Mother, how did this happen? It must have been because of Florinda."

"The two of 'em had an affair?!"

"They did, but that was before I met her."

"That explains it then. Nobody knew. How come everybody knew about you? He must've spread the word, out of anger."

Surprised, Manoel asks, "Folks knew about me and her?"

"Everybody knows. I didn't tell, I swear! It had to be him. Maybe he figured if everybody knew it, you would end it. Then he saw that didn't happen and decided to kill you. Folks have known it for a short spell and you've been seeing her for several months." He paused for three seconds and asked, "But how come he knew? You figure maybe she told him?"

"No, I don't think so. She only told me that he was suspicious."

"Two men and one woman – that's what happens. But everything'll be fine. You can relax now."

"Well, I say! I was just thinking and remembering now. Last week, after I paid them, I noticed that he was angry." He paused, and asked in alarm, "Then, that means that folks were talking about me and her, right?"

"Right, they were. Something like this travels faster than a wind-driven fire. Your wife's family must know it by now."

"What a heck of a mess did I get myself into, my friend!"

"That's life. No one knows what tomorrow will be like. What's done is done, and that's it."

"Thank you very much," he repeats. "I think you can go back now."

You gave me the help I needed. Tell your wife that I'm fine."

"Don't say a word 'bout any of this," José Vítor warns him, closing the conversation and saying good-bye.

### It Could Be a Nightmare

Getting home, Manoel finds das Dores very worried. He quickly tells her about the fall but avoids exposing his clothes to light.

"You hurt?"

"Well, I say! Nothing that you should worry about. All I need is a little water with some salt to rub in after the bath."

He quickly grabs clean underwear and a gas lamp and heads for the creek. He washes himself and then his clothes, which are still blood-soaked. He leaves the clothes in soapy water outside the house and returns into the house. He walks in his long-john underwear, telling das Dores that it is better for the wounds this way. He unsaddles his horse and lets it loose. His wife rubs the salt and water on all his scratches. On the back, towards the left, there is some swelling.

"Well, I say! This is where I hit the ground hard."

He lies down but cannot manage to sleep. The horror flashes in his mind, over and over again, in all its gory details: being suddenly hit with the stick, the horse galloping, him jumping off, a hateful Zeca in front of him, holding the stick with both hands and about to hit him, the two of them fighting, and suddenly all that blood gushing forth. *It could be a dream... more likely a nightmare...*

The night is infernal, and he realizes that he cannot even pray. He even begins to doubt José Vítor. *Why did I tell him? Now my life is in his hands!*

He pictured a Vítor-led mob shouting, *Manoel is a criminal! Manoel is a criminal!* as a soldier marched in front. *It could be a dream...more likely a nightmare.*

On and on these thoughts go, and he wishes daybreak would come. *No wonder they say that disgrace follows pleasure.* He makes up his mind to hide somewhere on the farm, so that when they come for him perhaps he can get away. *It could be a dream...more likely a nightmare...*

He gets up at dawn, takes the basin with the soaked clothes back to the creek, and washes them again. He then hangs them to dry on a distant tree, where nobody can see them. Back in the house he drinks just a little coffee and uses a wet cloth to remove a few blood stains from the horse's saddle. He decides to leave the house.

"Have you seen my pocketknife?" he asks his wife, pretending that he does not know where it is. "I forgot my knife in the shack."

"The pocketknife is in the drawer," she tells him.

He gets it along with some tools.

"I'm going to fix some border fences today," he says, meaning that he will be far away and in uncertain locations. "I'm not milking the cows. Ask your father to take care of the pigs for me."

He spends the morning deep in the woods, a tormented morning of long hours of permanent restlessness, filled with guilt and regret. Small monkeys moving and jumping in tree branches seem to look down accusingly at him. He heads home for lunch, more to make things seem normal than because he is hungry. He forces himself to eat a little and goes back to the woods. The uncertainty of what may happen is almost unbearable. Images of the tragedy keep tormenting him. He feels that at any time an accuser might appear before him, maybe his friend José Vítor.

As the afternoon wears on, he notices that someone is looking for him. His heart beats faster; all of a sudden he is out of breath. He begins to sweat. He hides behind some low vegetation and looks through the foliage. When he identifies the person, he is not sure whether he should be afraid or at ease, whether he ought to run away or just wait. He stands slowly, but not enough to be seen, and sends a signal: "Psst!"

The person does not see him but walks towards the noise. Manoel's heart beats even faster and he is still panting. He reckons he is about to find out something, either good or bad.

"You there?" It is José Vítor's cordial voice.

"I am," he replies in a low voice, without being seen.

"Everything's just fine, ok?"

Manoel takes a deep breath and his heart slows down somewhat.

José Vítor keeps talking, even though he cannot see him. "I did as we agreed. The dead man has been buried. No one knows who did it. Some names were mentioned, folks who had quarrels with him, but nobody mentioned you."

"Thank you, my friend, thanks so much!" he says, still breathing hard and coming out through the vegetation.

"How about your wounds?"

He takes a couple of deep breaths and says, "Better now, and the pain is more bearable."

"I reckon you should go to work every day; otherwise folks might get suspicious. Not even your wife knew of your whereabouts!"

Manoel reflects on this advice. "I figure you're right. Let's go to the house and drink some coffee."

On the way they talk, and José Vítor mentions that somebody else, in addition to das Dores, should know that he did not have the knife at

night.

At home, Manoel picks up Joman and tells him, "Ask for your godfather's blessing."

The boy extends his right arm.

"Your blessing, godfather."

"God bless you. You getting smarter all the time, ain't you?"

"Well, I say! He talks like a parrot."

"He never stops fooling around the whole day long," says das Dores, as if complaining, while she serves them coffee. "He sure keeps me busy and he gets his hands in everythin'."

"That's how kids are," says José Vítor.

They keep talking about many things and Manoel struggles to seem natural. Risoleta appears and interrupts them, asking with grave concern, "Senhor Manoel, das Dores told me you fell from your horse yesterday. Did you hurt yourself much?"

"Well, I say! It's true that I fell, senhora Risoleta, but it's nothing very serious, nothing that can stop me from working normally."

"That horse is very good, but sometimes it's as wild as can be!" remarks das Dores.

The two male friends now start the conversation they had planned.

"Where is your little knife?"

"I forgot it yesterday in the shack. Well, I say! In fact, I was just thinking of asking you a favor."

"You just name it."

"Since I don't have to go there anytime soon and you live near there, could you pick it up and bring it to me whenever you come this way again?"

"Where exactly is it?"

"I can't recall exactly. I think I left it on top of a rice sack."

"The sheath, too?"

"That's right. I removed it for a small repair."

"Sure thing, I'll get it for you."

Manoel now has an alibi in the unlikely chance that somebody might suspect him. The two friends will keep this secret forever. In late afternoon, Manoel gets the clothes he has left hanging in the sun, rinses them, and sees that the blood stains are gone. Still, not even all of this is enough to put his mind at rest.

Zeca is just one more of the many victims of unknown killers in the region. Not even one single policeman appears to ask questions of anyone.

But for Manoel, the incident has become a torment that prevents him from working normally, even though he has accepted José Vítor's

advice. He changes some habits. For three days, he carries the knife on his belt, hating it the whole time. He buries it far from the house and says that he sold it to a traveler. Every late afternoon, unless he absolutely cannot, he prays in the chapel, wearing his opa. At times he repeats the penance ritual because of the tragedy, but he continues to feel as if the heavy burden of his guilt is stamped on his forehead. He avoids people and concentrates on lonely, heavy work, as some sort of self-punishment. He keeps away from houses, fearful that any day a soldier might show up to arrest him. He also feels bad about the widow and her orphaned children. The whole drama makes him suspend his encounters with Florinda.

Thirty days after the tragedy, he goes to see the widow. He has to know how she is living and what she is thinking.

"Well, I say!" he starts off after the greetings. "I'm very sad about your husband's death."

"He was very angry with you," she says suspiciously. "Why would that be?"

Suddenly afraid, he widens his eyes.

"I didn't know that, madam," he stammers lightly, and then they fall into silence. He attempts an explanation: "Well, I say! One day I complained he was working slowly. That might have been the reason. He'd get upset for very little." After another short silence, he continues, "You must be going through some hard times."

"Things are hard; the children are so small."

"I was thinking of helping you. After all, your husband worked for me until one week before."

"I need to work so the children can eat."

"Well, I say! You can work in the rice paddy, replacing your late husband. Until the actual work begins, I'll pay you one thousand réis a week, to watch the rice in the shack, which is going to be used for seeding the next harvest. How about it?"

"Sure, I wanna do it!"

Manoel takes her to the shack and leaves pleased with himself. The pain in his conscience is diminished and now he has an excuse to come to the region once a week.

## Definitely On

The first time he and Florinda are together on the grass, after the tragedy, the young woman is a bit quiet.

"What's the matter with you, my ebony doll?"

"My monthly blood run didn't come."

"Didn't it?" He half smiles and then exults, "I'm gonna be a father again! How wonderful!"

His reaction scares Florinda, who has expected him to curse her or abandon her or, at the most, to be indifferent. Recovering after a few seconds, she finally breaks into a rather shy smile.

"Will it be a boy or a girl?" He is really enthusiastic now, lying on his side, elbow on the grass, head on the palm of his hand, smiling. "What do you think?"

"I don't know," she replies, not yet sharing his enthusiasm. "I'm sure worried."

"Don't you worry. Well, I say! I won't let you lack anything. I'll register the child!" he concludes, looking at her and wishing her wide smile was back.

"But I'm scared."

"Well, I say! No reason to be. The only thing is we won't say that it's my child." He pauses. "Ah, I have to tell you that I'll pay Zeca's widow to watch the rice in the shack, so you don't have to worry about that anymore."

He then possesses her but restrains his thrust so as not to harm the baby she is now carrying.

The rice is sold at a good profit, and for the first time Manoel has more than enough money to buy cattle. Life gradually gets back to normal. Always a polite man, he is now even more so to everyone.

However, as Florinda's womb grows, word spreads through the community that Manoel is the father and that he also helps Zeca's widow financially. A local gossip remarks to all within earshot, "That Manoel of the opa is quite something, yes sir. He can handle three women and still has energy left to work harder than a jackass."

The malicious comments intensify at the time the marshland is prepared for another planting. Manoel hires two more men, and the two women now have lighter chores. The widow, who is also pregnant, and Florinda enjoy special privileges: they can go home whenever they need, without notifying anyone. The widow abuses this privilege, but Florinda rarely leaves her work.

Manoel's relationship with his three brothers-in-law turns sour. Initially, they ignored the rumors that he was having an affair with Florinda. But now it is different: she is carrying a baby, and, still worse, there is all this talk about his affair with Zeca's widow. The three brothers meet him in a remote area of the farm, without warning him, and each one gives him a message. "We know 'bout you and that little Negress and we sure don't like it!" the eldest tells him in a hostile tone.

The same man who gave him the white horse is now aiming a racial slur at Florinda.

Manoel says nothing.

Florinda is third, perhaps fourth generation after the slaves were freed, and the blacks are still lowest in the social totem pole. Any out-of-wedlock sexual relation offends the betrayed spouse and his or her whole family – the more so if a black person is involved.

Irã, the middle brother, speaks next, and he is just as hostile. “It sure is best if you end the affairs.” His use of the plural suggests more than one affair.

Manoel still says nothing.

“My thinking is that you should stick only to your rice business,” says Antônio, the youngest, effectively excluding him from the farm.

Cândido speaks again, saying, “And I reckon you keep only the rice business, without das Dor and the children.”

They then leave, clearly not expecting any answer or remark from him. Their intention is only to let him know what they think.

Manoel panics. It is unthinkable to be without das Dores and the children. He immediately goes to his wife.

“Are you thinking about a separation?”

“Not me, not at all! I can’t live without you, Manoel.”

“Your brothers are talking.”

He notices the slightest hint of sadness in his wife and concludes that her love for him remains unshakable, but that does not seem enough. He knows that her family is very united and can act together against him. He has to know if Pedro and Risoleta think like their three sons, so he goes to see them.

“My brothers-in-law are talking about a separation,” he begins, looking seriously and apprehensively at the two of them.

“Hot heads,” replies Risoleta, “so that they talk...”

“Brothers are like that,” added Pedro. “They share each other’s pain.”

“I don’t see any reason for all of this! Well, I say! If I like das Dores and she likes me, who else do we need?”

“You’ve gotta be more careful,” warns Pedro. His voice sounding understanding, as if he were in fact saying, “If you are up to any foolishness, at least be discrete about it.”

Manoel is now convinced that the two of them are not part of any plot, and this realization reduces his apprehension.

However, the brothers-in-law are zeroing in: they avoid talking to him; they are always serious in his presence, and they neither offer nor ask for any help. On the other hand, Pedro and Risoleta are just embar-

rassed and do not know what to say in his presence. Das Dores, once the initial stage of suffering is over, does not show any wear.

Life goes on and the community awaits yet another birth.

## A Family Split

In December, 1937, Florinda gives birth to a boy and the news travels fast.

"He's dark skinned and his face is just like that of Manoel of the opa," they gossip.

One afternoon, the three brothers call das Dores to their parents' home to discuss this matter. She arrives with Joman and Belma, plus another child in her womb, and at once realizes how heavy and tense the climate is. Risoleta is sitting with her eyes wide open, moving constantly and very anxiously. Sitting near her, Pedro repeatedly raises his hand to his face. The brothers are standing against the walls, looking very stern.

"We're discussin' this situation," Irã begins. Then he continues in a hard voice, "Manoel stays with you or with that little Negress, not both. He'll have to choose."

Das Dores is perplexed and says nothing.

"Or he disappears from here," Cândido says, sounding upset. "In fact, I think that you should leave him."

Das Dores opens her eyes wide.

"Senhor Manoel is a fine person," Risoleta says in an attempt to be a peacemaker. "He's good to das Dor, to the children, to us. Everybody likes him."

"I reckon that if everybody would just be quiet, in a little while this conversation will fade away," the father suggests.

"Say something, das Dor!" Cândido commands roughly.

She tries to speak but cannot. That scares Belma, who starts to cry.

"Mommy! Mommy!" exclaims a fearful Joman, holding on to her dress.

"Tell us if you're gonna leave him or not!" insists Cândido, even more roughly.

Das Dores does not answer. She wants to lose neither her husband nor her brother's affection. She walks back and forth, trying to calm her little daughter, and her fearful son never lets go of her dress.

"Let's just let some time go by," pleads the father.

"I ain't waiting!" replies Cândido. He shouts to his sister, "If you don't leave him, then I'm leaving here."

"Cândido!" exclaims das Dores, again starting to weep.

Joman is also crying. Risoleta takes Belma in her arms and walks around. Pedro tries to hold the boy but he will not let go of his mother's dress. She sits down, places her left arm around the boy's waist, keeping him close to her, and with her right hand she attempts to hold back and dry the tears, rubbing her eyes and dress.

"Mommy! Mommy!" the scared boy continues to weep and to call her.

Cândido's threat shakes everyone and the conversation abruptly ends, each son heading to his house. The family, always united, is now running the risk of breaking up.

Das Dores feels a mixture of several moods and emotions, chiefly fear and sorrow.

That same day, as they do every day now, Manoel and two workers keep busy plucking out weeds and high grass which have resisted the flooding, controlling the water and clearing out areas to ensure uniform irrigation. In the afternoon, as he prepares to go away, Manoel asks Abidias, one of the workers, how Florinda and the child are.

"They are fine," he says shyly, as is his way.

"Well, I say! I want you to tell me if they need anything."

"They don't." He stops and then stammers, "My father..." But he does not finish.

"What about your father?"

"He..." Again he hesitates. "He is sad because folks are saying bad things."

Manoel's heart is in pain and he needs to ask no further questions to humiliate young Abidias. Returning home, he rides the horse slowly. He imagines that Florinda too suffers humiliations, and he feels responsible. He thinks about his son—whom he does not know yet—and wonders what future he will have raised under such circumstances. He just has to find a solution for this problem.

In the evening, when the children are asleep, Manoel notices how worried his wife is and asks her what is the matter. She tells him the essentials of the meeting with her family, without going into details.

"It's the female problem," she whispers. It is the first time she has ever mentioned this subject, and she seems sad or ashamed, perhaps both.

"What is the problem?" he asks delicately.

"Cândido's very upset. He says either I leave you or he moves away from here."

Manoel embraces her, feeling sad. He understands her drama and that of her family.

In bed, he feels oppressed by his wife's suffering and feels bad for

having gotten involved with Florinda, forgetting how he struggled in the beginning against that overwhelming passion. He thinks of how Florinda and her family are also suffering. His heart, divided before between the two women because of passion, is now torn due to pain. How to solve such a complex problem? He thinks about it long and hard. Finally, he sleeps a troubled sleep, waking up several times. At the crack of dawn, he is up, feeds the pigs, gets the white horse in the small nearby pasture, and, while saddling it, tells his wife that he is going on a trip.

"Where're you gonna go?"

"Well, I say! Couple of places around Itanhomi. I figure on being back tomorrow. I'm thinking of a solution to this problem."

She rushes to the kitchen and fixes him some food, as she always does.

Manoel goes by his father-in-law's house, and, without dismounting, asks him to look after the livestock while he is gone for two days.

The family waits to see what will happen. No one knows what he intends to do. Concerned, das Dores avoids any contact with her brothers.

The next day, in the evening, Manoel is back, but, before coming to the farm, he goes to the region where Florinda lives by another trail, arriving at her house when it is dark.

The first thing he does is to ask to see his son. Florinda removes him from a straw basket, which is suspended by ropes from the ceiling. Manoel sits and holds the child in his lap. His emotion is expressed not in words but in the long, moving silence, as he simply stares at the baby under an oil lamp. Then he says, "Well, I say! I figure you best leave here. The best place I found is near Itanhomi. What do you think?"

"I reckon it'll be a rest for us," replies Chico, Florinda's father.

"Then, get ready. The day after tomorrow, before daybreak, I'll be here with the animals to haul all your stuff."

He heads home now, by the other trail habitually used.

Das Dores is relieved to see him, but she dares not ask about his plans. She is afraid he might tell her that he has decided to go away.

In the morning, he goes to the house of a neighbor, a rural worker with a teenage son named Zezito. After Manoel talks to the father and son, the boy goes with him to get to know his basic chores on the farm. In the late afternoon, as it gets dark, the two of them let loose in a small pasture the white horse, five donkeys and mules, and two horses. Zezito then goes home, but he has promised to come back every day.

Das Dores finds all of this quite odd, but asks no questions, afraid of what the answer might be. Before they go to bed, Manoel tells her, "Well, I say! I'm gonna take a long trip."

Such enigmatic information really tells her nothing and her doubts remain.

"I'll fix your things then," she says.

"No need to."

That only increases her anguish. For the first time her husband is going to travel without taking food along. She has a sleepless night.

Manoel, on the other hand, sleeps deeply, certain that he has found the best solution. He gets up around 3 AM.

Das Dores lies in bed, listening intensely to his movements as he saddles the animals, preparing the troop. She then gets up and makes coffee.

Once the animals are ready, Manoel enters the house to get his things. It is still dark. He goes into the kitchen, has some coffee, and sees that his wife is weeping quietly in a corner. He grasps her arms and makes her stand, hugging her. On the way out, he stops by the children's room to watch them sleeping.

Das Dores has the impression that this is a farewell embrace and that he is also seeing his children for the last time. She can barely refrain from giving into despair. She automatically follows him to the door and asks, "Are you goin' away for good?"

Manoel stops, turns around, and looks at her for a few seconds by lamplight. "No. I'd never leave you for anything in this world."

She believes him; she has to. Yet she still feels that he has hugged her to say goodbye for good. The moonlight allows her to see him go, taking the Cachoeirinha road. That must mean he is going to his lover, and what if he is going away with Florinda? Her legs crumble. Yet he is not taking practically anything with him. Nevertheless, she recalls that when he came to the farm for the first time, selling merchandise, his personal belongings were minimal.

She suddenly remembers something that cheers her a bit: the opa! She can believe that her husband could leave her, despite all their love, but he would never leave behind his black cape. She dashes to his wardrobe but then hesitates to open it. She at last manages to, very slowly, with a mixture of fear and hope, prepared for either unhappiness or joy. The room is semi-dark; the light is poor and her fear increases. She continues to open the wardrobe door slowly and fearfully, and, as she sees the first sign of the cape, she yanks the door wide open—and there is the opa, hanging from its usual hanger.

"Thank God!" she shouts and starts weeping in joy.

That item of clothing means that her husband will come back. She cannot explain to herself why, but she just knows that there is a connection between him and the opa, a connection that surpasses anyone's

understanding.

She now calms down, looks at the opa, and for the first time thinks it is beautiful. She removes it from the wardrobe and hugs it. The sorrow of her husband's departure is replaced by the certainty of his presence. She replaces the opa and lovingly touches it from top to bottom.

The community gets the news that Florinda has moved away.

"Manoel of the opa has left das Dores!" There are excited remarks everywhere, typical of people who seem to enjoy their neighbor's misfortunes.

This community, like every community in the world, harbors those who love to see things slide from bad to worse, especially if successful people are affected, no matter what his or her type of activity. A farm hand meets Cândido on the road, that same day, and adds fuel to the fire by remarking, "Goodness gracious, what a thing to do, Cândido! Manoel of the opa is so in love with Florinda that he's gone with her and the family, taking all their stuff."

Upset out of his mind, Cândido calls his brothers; they go to the farm and do not find the animals. They call their sister immediately to their parents' home. She arrives with her children and at once realizes that the atmosphere is even denser and heavier than the last time they met. Fearful, she does not sit down but remains standing near the door. Cândido is very upset; he keeps walking back and forth and says to her, "That no-good Portuguese scum has gone away with the Negress, her family and everything. When I see him, I'll kill him, and it'll give me pleasure!"

"They're both no-good scumbags, he and the nigger woman," adds an angry Irã.

"A shame to all of us," adds a furious Antônio. "All that praying in the chapel, it's all a shameless fake. He fooled all of us. That black cape was to fool us even more."

In a lower voice, Cândido tells his sister, "You don't deserve any of this."

"We'll take care of you and the children, my daughter," Risoleta consoles her.

"I ain't sure. Maybe there ain't no need to. Perhaps he's gonna be back," replies das Dores.

"Be back?" retorts Cândido, indignant. "You, my sister, ain't got no shame?" Then, he shouts an ultimatum to her: "If he ever comes back one day and you let him, I'm leaving, I tell you. If you ain't got no shame, I do. I'm telling you now so that you know it!"

Das Dores starts to weep.

"Mommy! Mommy!" exclaims Joman at her side.

"Mom! Mom!" Belma echoes her brother.

"Let's take it easy, folks," says Pedro, holding his grandson in his lap. Risoleta holds her granddaughter.

Cândido stomps out, not saying anything further, and his two brothers follow him, mumbling something about "acting shamelessly." They are now furious with their own sister.

Manoel, on the other hand, is traveling with Florinda's family. She rides a horse with her baby, and her mother is on another horse. Her brother and father walk. Beasts of burden haul their stuff. In two days, they reach a farm near Itanhomi. The owner, Tónico, has agreed to let the family stay in a small house which is not being used. Manoel stays there for three days, making sure they are safe and comfortable. He leaves some money with them and says that he will send more from time to time. He makes sure that Tónico will assist them in the first few days of adaptation. Seven days after leaving his farm, he is back.

In the meantime, the three sisters-in-law have taken turns to provide assistance to das Dores. She misses her husband fiercely and, when he returns, greets him with a mixture of joy and concern.

"Manoel, don't leave the house. Cândido's very angry."

"What's he been saying?"

After a few seconds of silence, she answers in a low voice, "He's been talkin' about killin' you and then goin' away."

Manoel thinks it prudent to pay attention to his wife's warning.

Cândido begins to carry out his ultimatum. As soon as he sees that his brother-in-law is back and has been welcomed by his sister, he rides a horse to Cachoeirinha, where he rents a truck to move his family. He takes them to Figueira do Rio Doce. His two brothers sell one-fourth of the livestock and send him the money. A while later, Cândido moves to Belo Horizonte, the state capital.

Those who remain on the farm are now changed, following a period of feeling lost. The two brothers do not talk to Manoel, not even to greet him. They demand total separation of goods and belongings and insist on internal fences so that the cattle will not mix. Das Dores feels guilty for what has happened, although she is not able to figure out what she has done that would lead her husband to take a lover. She keeps asking herself whether she is getting ugly, whether she is no longer good in bed, or whether she has been showing less affection and paying less attention to him because she is busy with their children. However, as time moves on, her husband's tender loving care helps her recover.

Given these circumstances, Manoel thinks about moving away,

but it is quite complicated. For obvious reasons, he cannot move to either Cafezinho or Itanhomi. In Cachoeirinha or any other place, he would be too far from Florinda and their son, making it difficult to assist them, especially now when they need him so much. *Why move now, when I am making some money off the rice?* he argues with himself. *And it's safer here on the farm; there is not even any police.* So, for practical reasons and because he is afraid, Manoel decides to stay. Naturally, there is a price: he must put up with the rejection of his two brothers-in-law. *If they don't want me, I will just have to ignore them,* he says to himself, and that's that. Pedro and Risoleta were quite shaken for a while, but now they treat him more normally. Residents in the area continue to like him.

In secret, and through José Vítor, he provides monthly financial assistance to Florinda's family, and his friend brings him news—always good news—of her and her kin. He longs for them and strives to figure out some way to assist them personally, without embarrassing das Dores and his own family; he also struggles to make more money, buying coffee in the region and selling it elsewhere.

In May of 1938, Peri is born, his name honoring Pedro and Risoleta. The surname is also Oliveira Opa. As soon as he is sure that mother and child are well, Manoel starts buying coffee in Cafezinho and Itanhomi, selling it in Cachoeirinha. There are no actual coffee plantations around the village of Cafezinho ("Little Coffee"), which is named after a creek whose waters are dark and coffee-hued. However, the village's location at the road side is a privileged one for buying and selling. Business soon proves to be limited because too much time is spent coming and going, each animal hauling a small amount of cargo. On the upside, he can provide assistance to Florinda and their son.

Joman by now is almost three years old, restless all day long, which earns him some occasional spankings—"so he will learn how to obey," says das Dores. He is curious, has his hands on everything within reach, and constantly asks interesting questions, which his father always answers. Das Dores is not so patient. A struggle begins between mother and son, a no-win situation.

## Chapter 4 - Struggle

### Maternal Spankings and Repression Consolidated

**D**as Does is aware that her unflinching dedication to the children may jeopardize her relationship with her husband, yet she is unable to change. On the contrary, her zeal becomes a torment. Afraid that the children might get hurt or sick, she is always around them, aided by Risoleta, who insists on such good care and permanent watching.

Das Does's intention is to keep the two oldest in or near the house, certainly not any farther than their grandparents' house, under her ever-present watchful eyes. Joman, on the other hand, wants to explore the world about him, and his energy is boundless.

One morning, when the two children are playing in front of the house and Manoel is traveling on coffee business, Risoleta arrives and starts talking to das Does, who gets distracted and then notices Joman's absence. Upset, she starts yelling for him.

"He's here, das Does," Pedro shouts from the cattle pen, where he is milking a cow, the boy at his side. Das Does runs over there and grabs him by the hand. Her father asks her to leave the boy there, but she refuses, arguing that some cow might hurt him. Pedro tries to dissuade her but to no avail.

She threatens the boy, "You just try to run away again!"

The days in Manoel's house are filled with das Does's nervous shouts and cries, plus the children's constant weeping, especially Joman's.

"Just take a look at what you done now!" she shouts, when the boy tries to climb into a shelf in the kitchen to get some cookies and ends up knocking pots and pans all over the floor. He gets spanked.

"You're so mean," das Does complains again, this time because he has pulled his little sister's hair and taken away her doll.

"What's the matter with you, ain't you got no head?" she shouts, when he enters the house triumphantly, holding a struggling chicken

by the neck. "Let the chicken go right now!" and she slaps him a few times.

One day, the boy discovers that by removing one of the wood poles in the backyard fence, he can escape and walk around. His mother misses him and starts shouting. Risoleta comes to a side window in her house to see what is going on.

"Is Joman there?" das Dores asks from the opening in the fence.

Her mother says no, and she asks her to look after the other children. Das Dores jumps over the fence and starts running around and shouting. She finds her son in a guava tree, about three feet high. "There's no way you can obey me. I live frightened the whole day long," she yells at him, in a mixture of relief and irritation.

She violently yanks him down from the tree and spansks him right there and then. Paying no attention to his cries, she shouts things like, "I reckon I'll have to tie you down" and "You're just too wild" and "You always disobeying your mother and grandmother."

At home, it is grandmother's turn to scold him, "Joman, Joman, you could fall from that tree and break your arm. How come you can never obey us?"

Wild, bad, mean, disobedient and similar adjectives are constantly leveled at small Joman. None of that and no amount of shouting and spanking tame his spirit, not until das Dores confronts him more dramatically. She notices his disappearance, spends a long time in anguish looking for him, and finally finds him in the shallow creek, water up to his knees. He gets the biggest spanking of his young life and has to hear his mother's frightening and incomprehensible question: "You wanna kill me, is that it?"

Joman, who is now four, stops crying and starts recovering from the pain, and then he feels what might be best described as anguish. From then on, he is no longer so wild and his escapades become few and far between.

Whenever Manoel witnesses such scenes, he feels sorry for the boy and asks his wife to be patient.

"The way he's always behaving himself, he's gotta be spanked and yelled at," she invariably answers.

Manoel takes the children with him, whenever he can, and while he farms, they play as much as they can, to their hearts' delight.

Only at night, after the children are asleep, can das Dores rest easy. Only then can she be tender and loving with her husband, as she was before Joman's birth. Then she can even engage in sensible conversations. Manoel almost always seeks out these opportunities for them to talk. He hopes that his wife will change her behavior towards the

children. On one such occasion, he brings up the subject again, the more so because that day she had spanked the boy for a trivial matter.

"Your fears and worrying hurt the children. You have to change, das Does, you have to give them more slack, more freedom..." he starts to say.

"But if anythin' happens to any of them, I reckon I'll go stark crazy."

"Sometimes I figure in your mind and in your mother's, too, the children are always in danger." She remains silent, as if agreeing with him. "I've been told that when you were a child, she felt the same worries and fears about you."

"I don't recall."

"And when you were grown-up, you always stayed in the house."

"That I remember."

"You're repeating now what your mother did then. And the children are fearful, like you were."

"I wanted so much not to worry, Manoel. You don't know how tired I get."

"I can guess."

"Children mean a whole lot of work."

"Only if we have so much worry and concern about them. If we just raise them normal and simple, there's no problem!"

Manoel shows good perception, but, if he had even more knowledge, he would at least add that das Does should strive not to punish Joman so much and that she should be less protective of the children to allow them to enjoy life's normal experiences, which would make them more self-confident.

"It sounds easy when you talk about it, but tomorrow..." she remarks, indicating that there is a great difference between what is suggested to her and what she can actually do.

Sure enough, the following morning she is shouting again, "Don't do this!"; "Be quiet!"; "Don't you go out!"; "Be careful!"; "If you don't obey, I'll spank you!" Manoel's words to her mean nothing and he loses all hope that his wife can ever change.

Joman begins to lose the struggle with his mother, and, by the age of five, he is no longer so active and daring, like a candle whose light and fire are about to be extinguished. He seldom goes out and now even helps his mother with the home chores. Once so talkative, he is now quiet most of the time. When a visitor comes, he asks to be blessed, as his mother taught him to, answers questions with monosyllables, leans against a wall, and follows openmouthed the conversation around him, so absorbed in it that saliva drops from his mouth to his shirt. Once in a while, das Does censors him in front of the visitors: "Close

your mouth, Joman!”

He obeys her, but, in a few minutes, it is happening again.  
What can the future hold for this little boy?

## A Gap

It looks as if sweet das Dores has become a witch and Manoel a weakling, but perhaps that is not really true. This brief description of how little Joman changes from being so active to being like a candle about to be extinguished is missing some essential elements that are necessary for a fair judgment. Thus, the t's have now to be crossed and the i's dotted.

To be fair, das Dores is driven by the need to ensure the children's physical health—and they are indeed physically healthy. Of course, they get mumps and measles and smallpox and other children's illnesses, but das Dores performs well in her role as she perceives it. In the time and place das Dores inhabits, there is no knowledge of how important emotions are to a child's future. Das Dores should not be labeled a bad person, despite her nervous shouting, the negative language she uses with Joman, or the children's constant crying. At times, she can be tender with the children. “Mommy thinks you're so smart” and “Mommy loves you so much,” she frequently says to Joman, holding him in her lap and kissing him, even if she has spanked him a few minutes before. It ought also to be taken into account that she was a child so protected by her parents and brothers, who never had to do any major task; and then, suddenly as a teenager, she is beset with work and responsibilities for her children—one of whom is exceptionally active. What is more, she suffers humiliation from her husband's adultery.

Manoel should also be better analyzed. First off, he possesses a deep love for his wife and believes that a good marriage is one in which the wife is happy. Thus, he is wholly dedicated to this end. In all likelihood, he developed this belief, whether consciously or not, based on his every day experiences. In this respect, his own father must have had a major role, having fallen in love with a descendant of the Galicians, and having loved her passionately; the Galicians were outcast and looked down upon by most Portuguese. Secondly, when he began his relationship with Florinda, guilt made Manoel more and more permissive in his relations with his wife. Thirdly, the sorrow and fear that followed Zeca's death made him more careful and tender in his relations with everybody else. Fourthly, a lesser guilt caused by the family split inhibited him significantly. In hindsight, and depending on one's view, Manoel may exhibit signs of weakness, but the fifth point to be

considered — last but not least — is the fact that he is by nature a friendly and simple person.

As regards little Joman, it is necessary to make clear a few things which are implicit, starting with his ambivalent relationship with his mother. On the one hand, *das Dores* transmits to him her fears, represses his active nature, and overloads him with negative judgments; but, on the other hand, she is tender in words and deeds. A second ambivalence is to be found in the family nucleus, her parents. *Das Dores*, always worried, uses force, and *Manoel's* boundless patience provides her with plenty of room to do so, while at the same time he makes plain his disagreement with some of her behavior. Conversely, while *das Dores* hugs and kisses the children, *Manoel* does so only while they are small, until about the age of two. As a result, despite the balance between good and bad influences, negative experiences prevail, and the small torch becomes a tenuous candle light. Negative experiences (in this case, punishment and fear) prevailing over positive ones (in this case, attention and care) is common to all human beings and is a source of unhappiness.

(Those interested only in the narrative flow may skip this information without impairing his or her understanding of the story.)

### Fear and Trust

If Joman receives both care and punishment, why do the effects of the punishment prevail? Why does he become shy and timid? Experiments in neurophysiology are shedding some light on this process. There seems to be a biological basis for such a personality change.

In all animals with brains, there is a system called the limbic system, which apparently controls emotional behavior. This system comprises several anatomic structures at the brain stem, which are complexly interrelated. One such structure is the hypothalamus, whose mass is less than 1% of the cerebral mass, roughly situated in the system's core center. It powerfully influences emotions. In tune with other structures in and out of the system, the hypothalamus also rules most of the organic functions that are independent of one's will, such as regulation of water in the body, uterine shrinkage, bodily temperature regulation, and hormonal secretion. Our interest here is how the hypothalamus and other limbic structures impact behavior.

It has been observed in laboratory experiments with monkeys that electric stimulation of some of these structures generates physiological

and emotional reactions. For instance, stimulating one region of the brain causes a feeling of hunger and, at the same time, restlessness and anger. Stimulus of another region makes one feel sated and at ease. It may be said that some loci in these structures function as centers to control physiological and emotional moods. However, stimulating some centers inhibits others.

Stimulating fear-related centers inhibits stimulation applied to pleasure centers. In all likelihood, repeated experiences of fear and pleasure in a child's day-to-day activities build strong links to memory, and, since fear inhibits pleasure, the expectation of threat and danger remains more vivid than the expectation of good things. This has both positive and negative effects.

So far, little Joman's story has exhibited the supremacy of fear over pleasure, timidity over self-confidence, which is not good. Certainly, he and all of us would be a lot happier with the opposite phenomenon, that is, if pleasurable memories overrode negative ones.

However, if we look at the evolution of the species, this phenomenon has several positive effects. Whatever threatens the survival of a species is avoided by most of the individuals in that species, and this must bear a considerable weight in the evolutionary process. It might be speculated that human beings would not have evolved if in previous species the fear centers had been inhibited by the pleasure centers.

Furthermore, negative occurrences, which are a disgrace and a source of unhappiness to an individual, are actually positive if analyzed within the framework of human evolution as a whole. Bad experiences, such as Joman's, are being avoided because of human discernment, and slowly—very slowly, as history shows—a system of better conditions for mankind is being built.

### The Barriers Are Back

In March of 1941, Manoel receives some bad news from the farmer who owns the rice marshlands. After the next harvest, when the five-year lease is up, he wants his land back. *How is it going to be from now on?* he asks himself with a hint of fear. He regularly gives money to Florinda and, occasionally, to Zeca's widow. Losing the rice income reverses his prospects: he had more than enough money and was purchasing cattle, but now he may well lack funds. How might he avoid this downturn? And what about his long-held dream of getting rich in Brazil? He cannot just bury this dream. To give up on one's dream is to give up on life itself, and he is not about to do that.

He reflects long and hard about all this and concludes that the time has come to go live in Cachoeirinha. Manoel sees financial and economic benefits to the move, but he also hopes that, far from her mother, das Dores may be better with the children and that they, attending school, will get to know other children. In the evening, when the kids are in bed, he brings this subject up with his wife. "Ain't no need for us to move," she replies. "You find another business and Joman go to school right here."

"There aren't any schools here! This teacher who comes here can barely read and write herself. Our children have to go to a real school. We have to think of their futures."

Das Dores is now worried. She knows that her husband is right, but, deep inside, she resists. The next day, she goes to talk to her mother about what Manoel has proposed.

"You just tell him that you ain't gonna go!" Risoleta says forcefully. "How about that, to live in a godforsaken place like that, is he out of his mind? There is a train over there, plus a river, horses on the street, people getting killed every day." She pauses and asks dramatically, "You wanna see your children dead? Crippled?"

"He says there's a school..."

"Rubbish, don't be silly. If you say you don't go, he don't go."

Das Dores follows her mother's advice and once again her husband gives in and postpones moving to the town.

However, a bout of sadness hits him hard. His dream of getting rich seems ever more distant. He figures that all these hurdles and barriers will make him accept a compromise, some sort of intermediate solution at best. There is also the possibility that, living in that place, the children will face a very uncertain future.

This funk lasts no more than one week, and, once he gets over it, he recovers his energy and faces reality. He realized he has to find, within the confines of that region, some way of making more money. He sees the possibility of increasing his coffee business. In May, shortly after selling the last rice harvest and as the coffee harvest is about to begin, he goes to the Itanhomi region with only two donkeys. He now plans a different strategy.

On the way, he stops at the house of Zeca's widow. Following the last rice harvest, she moved to a little house near the road, a couple of miles from the farm. He asks her how she and the children are.

"Our situation is very, very difficult." She is nearly weeping. "We ain't got nothing. I reckon I may have to bark myself, to save the dogs' throat."

He thinks this is a pretty funny remark, but he realizes she means

to emphasize how dramatic their plight is. Nevertheless, he argues, "Three of your children are grown-up and can do some work."

"You know that there ain't no work around here."

Feeling sorry for them, Manoel gives her some money.

He stays more than thirty days in Cafezinho, purchasing coffee from small nearby farmers and storing them. When he has enough, he hires a truck and makes three hauling trips to Cachoeirinha. He has his best year ever in terms of profits.

Every time he goes by on the road, he stops and listens to the widow's complaints. Feeling sorry, he always gives her some money.

In early 1942, as the school year is about to start, Manoel talks about moving again, but das Dores does not budge, arguing that it won't do any good to move now because Joman will not be seven until August, and seven is the minimum age to attend regular school.

"But I can get a jump start in setting up a business this year."

"I'll die in that place; I won't rest for a second. Let's wait until next year, ok?" she begs him, like a child asking a father. "Until then Joman can grow up some more."

Once again, love bows to reason.

Manoel, however, tries for a compromise: the boy will start attending school now, in that teacher's house, located a couple of miles from the farm. He wants his son to be acquainted with other children. On the farm, he only has his cousins, and he is always under das Dores's watchful eyes. He believes it will be good for the boy to spend part of the day away from his mother and grandmother. The teacher may have little to teach, but it will be good for the boy to have other children his age around him. That way, he may become more active and dynamic again. He says nothing of his intention to his wife, afraid that she might get offended. He argues instead that the boy needs to learn how to read and write, reminding her that she herself said the year before that the children could attend school in the region.

She keeps suggesting problems with the idea. "It's so far; how is he gonna walk all that distance?"

"I've thought of that, too. Don't worry, because Zezito can take and fetch him every day on horseback."

Das Dores is not pleased but gives in.

The first school day is a torment for her. Again and again, she tells Zezito to ride slowly, not trotting and not even dreaming of galloping. At home, she imagines the most dramatic things happening—Zezito not following her instructions and Joman falling from the horse or leaving the classroom and going into the woods. On the second school day,

she follows the horse on foot to make sure her instructions are being followed. She asks the teacher to pay special attention to her son. After all that, she is a bit less anxious—just a bit though, and every day she remains worried the whole time he is out of the house.

On the other hand, the boy shows an uncommon interest in learning. At home, he spends hours reading his school booklet and working on a tiny wood-framed blackboard.

One day, during the first month of school, Manoel himself takes his son and, taking advantage of the situation, speaks to the teacher.

“How is Joman doing?”

“He learns easily, but he’s very quiet and doesn’t play during the break. He seems sad,” the teacher explains.

“But he likes to come here. I believe that, in time, he’ll become very playful.”

However, time reveals that Manoel has been wrong. The most the boy does is watch his schoolmates play. He prefers to walk around the school house, observe the animals, and catch butterflies and small insects in the plants.

After six months, the teacher calls Manoel in for a talk and tells him that she has nothing more to teach the boy. He can already read the whole school booklet as well as write.

“I had noticed that,” he says. “He’s always reading and re-reading the booklet or writing on the blackboard. How is he doing about playing with the other boys?”

“He has improved very little and is still very shy.”

Manoel insists that his son continue attending school and convinces the teacher, promising her that he will buy a more advanced booklet. He does buy it, plus a notebook and a pencil, all of which makes Joman even more dedicated to learning.

At the end of 1942, Manoel decides to face his wife’s resistance to moving from the farm. He makes a definite decision in favor of Cachoeirinha, which has been a district since 1938. He goes there regularly to buy and sell and sees the thriving progress of the place. In addition, the urban zone is no longer a riskier place to be stuck than on a farm. So, this time he does not even consult his wife but simply tells her about his decision.

“But Manoel...”

He interrupts her, saying, “Remember that you promised me. I can’t wait any longer.”

“What are you gonna do there?”

He answers enthusiastically, “I’m gonna set up a bakery, of course!

There's none there, so it's a surefire good business. And I'll make additional money in the coffee business. In here I'm halfway, neither buying nor selling." He pauses and then continues, "I'll go first, start building the house, and we'll move when it's ready. I'll come here every Saturday afternoon."

With his wife under control, Manoel now has to face his mother-in-law's ferocious opposition. Risoleta insists on several alternatives, such as purchasing a farm, chopping down trees, selling wood—she suggests he start in what remains of the farm itself—and planting coffee, but he fends off every one of her arguments. Pedro Horácio supports him. It is important for him to leave in peace, especially since he was the key reason that Cândido moved away.

He also looks for his two other brothers-in-law, who, after more than a year of enmity, are now treating him formally.

"I'm very sorry," he begins, "about everything that happened between us." He pauses and then continues, "I want to tell you that we'll soon go and live in Cachoeirinha and that our door will always be open to everyone in the family."

They say nothing. Manoel waits for a while and says good-bye.

"Bye," Irã says.

"Bye," Antônio echoes his brother.

He starts selling his goods as enthusiastically as a teenager getting ready to go on vacation. He sells cattle, pigs, and service animals, including the white horse, which is old now. All he keeps is a travel mule. In all the hectic preparation, he draws up a plan not only to continue with his coffee business but also to increase its scale. He goes to his friend José Vítor and proposes that he sell his small land plot and buy another one closer to Cafezinho or Itanhomi, becoming his buyer there. At harvest time, he should buy and store, as he did in the last two harvests, but on a larger scale now. He would also handle the transportation to Cachoeirinha and receive a percentage of the profits.

José Vítor hears him out, very interested, and answers, "It's a pretty good idea, and I'm basically standin' still here, starin' at my navel. On top of it, the coffee business seems to be a pretty good one."

"And you can also do me the favor of providing assistance to Florinda and the boy. After I move, it'll be harder for me to go there." Following a pause, he adds, "I reckon I don't have to say that this remains just between the two of us."

They work out the agreement's details. When the harvest starts in May, José Vítor will already be purchasing and hauling. Manoel, besides to nail the feet in this trade, will once again link business and feelings.

## Chapter 5 - Life's Defeats

### Towards Another Dream

**A**t last, in January 1943, Manoel goes to Cachoeirinha, satisfied and happy. This trip is nine years late...nine years! *How time flies and how much has happened!* he says reflectively to himself. *But I'm gonna start in a better situation than I'd have had at that time,* he thinks, satisfied with himself. He is convinced that the other dream, which made him cross the ocean, will become concrete now – undoubtedly, he will get rich.

He enthusiastically buys a piece of land, hires skilled people, and begins building. He works long and hard himself.

As happened before in the countryside, his Portuguese accent and his outgoing pleasant personality bring him popularity and esteem. His well-known nickname is secured as he proudly wears his opa, almost every afternoon, on his way to pray in church. People make jokes and he takes it in stride and with good humor.

"Manoel of the opa, are you going to church to pray or to find yourself a black girl?" Some evidently know about his relation with the young black woman.

"Maybe I'm going there to look for your mother!" he replies, but laughing.

"Manoel, you might as well wear a cassock rather than this foolish black opa cape."

"No, I'm saving it to give you the last rites."

"May I have your blessing, Bishop Manoel?"

"God bless you, you son of a not-so-worthy lady."

On and on this goes, nearly every single day; at times people tease him solely to hear his homeland accent.

But the jokes and tricks are not limited to his coming and going to church. Anywhere he goes, there is always someone ready to kid him.

"Manoel of the opa, would you cross a cattle-preventing road

bridge?"

"No way," he replies in good humor. "You won't take me for a donkey!"

The cattle-preventing road bridge is a wooden structure, usually a couple of tree trunks laid to receive perpendicular slats with spaces in between, that is placed to prevent animals from crossing. The joke is in bad-taste, but it is also the question most commonly asked of him.

The construction work moves along speedily. Two rooms are inter-linked in front; the one to sell bread is much larger than expected and leads to the inner house; the smaller one will be used to store coffee and grain. The residence is behind these two rooms. After four months, he goes to fetch his family. Zezito will be with him—Manoel plans to teach him how to bake bread and how to provide other services.

The men continue building another room in the back for the oven and as a place to prepare the bread dough. The place is halfway down a street named Barge St. because it leads to a river port, where a wood barge crosses the mighty Rio Doce.

### A Boy's Disappointment

When they arrive in Cachoeirinha in the late afternoon, das Dores nearly goes out of her mind spotting so many dangers for her children. People and merchandise move everywhere along the streets, all of which amazes her. The nearby river, seen both from the front and the back of their house, seems like a treacherous mirror to her. She sees the train as a monster that will crush her children if she takes her eyes off them for a second. Her hair just about stands up when she sees so many idle youngsters everywhere. She has been to this place a couple of times before, with her father and then her husband, but always in a hurry. To live here with her three children seems the utmost of horrors! On the other hand, the children are excited about so many things new to them. Das Dores simply cannot manage to sleep her first night there.

In the morning, she warns all the children, "Don't any of you go out in the street."

Joman goes to the front of the house and observes the rising sun hitting him full in the face, in a straight line. Down below on the left, some two hundred yards at the end of the street, the river seems to flow towards the sun. Another street starts in front of their house, ending after about a hundred yards, on a high wall. Folks say that it is the local cemetery. Farther up, where Barge Street starts, there is a huge space that they went through as they arrived. His young heart beats fast and excitedly. All these new things seem about to wake the curious

boy, who has hibernated for so long.

Noticing that his mother is busy organizing things, he slips out of the house and goes to the river edge, admiring its huge width and how powerful the water is, which flows all the way down to a waterfall. He is fascinated by the barge sliding smoothly on the water surface and by the men with long wooden oars working the sleek canoes. He returns home and sticks for a while at his mother's side, so that she will think he is following her instructions.

Out he goes again, after a while, heading towards where the street starts. He comes to the edge of the two rail lines, a long and spacious area, whose end cannot be seen either to the right or to the left. "Don't you go there!" he remembers his mother saying when they arrived, and that obviously aroused his curiosity. He goes back and hangs around for a while on the street corner by their house. On both sides there are a few houses, some long, some odd looking, some so huge (for wholesale grain) that he had never thought they could be so big. Huge trees, far from each other and randomly distributed, remind him of the woods in the farm. Animal-pulled carts are everywhere, hauling things and raising dust. People are either on foot or on horseback, talking, going in and out of shops and stores. He is flabbergasted, awestruck by all that he sees.

Very soon, he is surrounded by some boys who are wearing short pants like him. But unlike him, they are barefooted. He shies away from them and they start kidding him.

"Is your name Manezinho ("little Manoel") of the opa?" one of them asks, and all the others laugh at the allusion to his father's nickname.

Joman does not reply but wonders whether there is something wrong with him.

"Is it Manezinho of the opa?" insists the boy.

"Name's Joman," he barely manages to whisper.

"Say what!?"

He repeats it, louder this time.

"Joman? What kind of name is that?" asks the same boy.

"Them hicks from the woods sure have some odd names," remarks another boy, and everybody laughs. "Can you cross a cattle-preventing road bridge?"

He knows what a cattle-preventing road bridge is and, thus, offers no reply, because to him the question makes no sense. More laughter and the bunch of boys go away, leaving him wandering around.

Someone points to a steam locomotive, far away, moving East to West, and most people stop whatever they are doing to stare at it. His

first reaction is one of fear, of wanting to dash home at once, but he notices that no one is dashing anywhere. He decides to wait and comes closer to a man, figuring that *if he runs, I run*. When he sees that the locomotive follows the rail, he calms down a bit. In amazement, he observes and tries to make sense of its shunting, but soon his mother appears, looking half out of her mind, and shouting at him, "Joman, go home now! Right now!"

All the way home she is screaming in his ears.

"Mommy, don't hit me, please!" he begs her.

The begging does no good. At home, he gets a good spanking. "This is so you ain't gonna disobey me no more!" She continues to shout and then asks him dramatically, "You wanna die under the train?"

Zezero soon arrives. He had been looking for him on the river bank.

Later on, his mother is in the kitchen preparing lunch, and he tells her what the boys in the street said.

"These no-good brats ain't got nothin' to do all day long," das Does remarks. "So, they hang around on the streets the whole time, lookin' for trouble." She then warns him, "Don't you go fight any of them, you hear me!? They could beat you up pretty good!" She interrupts what she is doing, looks at him, and issues a stern warning: "Joman, don't you trust nobody ever, you hear me?! You can't trust the shirt you're wearin'. Everybody is out to get us, remember that." She then turns back to the stove and the lunch she is preparing.

He pensively observes his mother for a few seconds.

The same day, he hears a smiling man asking his father whether or not he crosses a cattle-preventing road bridge.

"Nope," replies Manoel, also smiling. "I ain't nobody's fool, you got that?!"

There is something weird in these questions and remarks, but he has no idea what it is. In the evening, he asks his father, "How, how, I mean, come these folks laugh at us?"

"They are idiots, the whole bunch of them, Joman."

"What's a hick?"

"Hick is a backward person from some farming backwoods!"

"Why, er, did that man, I mean, ask you if you cross a cattle-preventing road bridge?"

"Just another darn idiot pretending to be funny."

"How come, I mean, there's this Opa in our name?"

"It's a promise I made."

Such brief answers contribute very little to help the boy grasp what is going on.

On the third day, he risks going out again. Again, he meets that

bunch of boys and they all kid him mercilessly.

"There's the hick who's always hanging on to his mother's hem!"

Laughter aplenty follows this remark.

"He sure talks funny." More laughing.

"And he don't cross a cattle-preventing road bridge neither."

Laughter galore.

"Hey, do you or don't you cross it?"

"Cross what?"

It follows in a chorus: "Cross?"

"Cross?"

"Cross?"

"Cross?"

"You go figure. It could be his name! Cross!"

Joman remains mute, though upset and angry. He wants to take off but he also wishes to see what is going on in the streets, so he stays until his mother shows up.

The mocking goes on for the next several meetings: "Look at the Cross again!"

ZeZito has explained the meaning of these nicknames to him, so he just says to the other kids, "Look, I mean, I ain't no dumb-ass hick."

That only makes them go wild and the chanting of the nickname goes on.

The more he insists on replying, the more the hazing continues and the louder they shout.

He decides to stay home for a while, to see whether things improve, but it is no good. Apparently, the boys have decided on some sort of rotation system, so that one of them is always walking in the street in front of the bakery, and, after making sure that Joman is inside, he shouts the nickname and takes off.

Since being in the house does not do any good, Joman decides that he might as well go back outside. He knows that this means ZeZito and his mother will be looking for him and that he will receive some hard spankings. He finds out how widespread his nickname is.

At this time, the district's name is changed to Tumiritinga, an indigenous name, more adequate than the previous one, since it means "small river rapids"—and indeed there are some small rapids farther downstream that the people call a waterfall.

## Sudden Horror

Out of curiosity, one day Joman and his brother Peri enter a street alley, at the end of which is a construction site with plenty of vertical

wood walls. The door is open and somebody calls from the inside, "Come on in!"

They do, and a man gets up, pisses into a can, and hands it to Peri, who is just as dumbfounded as his brother.

"Drink the tea!" he orders and sits down on a bed.

Peri starts crying and the man shouts the order again. Joman is flabbergasted and rooted to the ground. Peri drinks a sip and continues crying. The fellow, with a hard-on, is now before Joman, who says something, gets slapped on the face, falls down, and spills the urine. The fellow grabs him and both desperate boys keep calling for their mother.

A voice is heard from behind a side wall and the man gets back in bed. The boys take off running and Joman warns his brother, "Don't you say a word to mom because she will then spank the two of us."

He stays home for the next couple of days, shocked by what happened. He confusedly remembers it and feels both terror and anger at the man, but there is nothing he can do, not even talk about it with someone, especially after his mother told him not to trust anybody. He fantasizes about grabbing a knife, going back there, and killing that fellow. Since he is neither brave nor big enough to do that now, he promises himself that he will get his revenge once he has grown up.

## An Unhappy Practical Joke

Some ten days after they moved from the farm, the bakery is operating and the construction is almost finished. Manoel looks for the school teacher, wishing to enroll Joman in the second grade. Although he is not yet eight years old, she is willing to study his case, to see if he can handle the curriculum, but she needs his birth certificate.

Manoel now has to register his children. Such delay is rather common in rural areas, no documents being needed for one to live on a farm. Oftentimes, it is done by the person himself when already a teenager or adult, and then he gets to choose his surname. If the individual has not been baptized yet, he or she is then known only by the first name coupled to, at the most, the father's or mother's name; for instance, "Júlia, daughter of Mariquinha" or "Zé, son of João." In the public notary office, Manoel is received by one Carlito, who makes the usual jokes about the Portuguese, making fun of him for liking black women and wearing a black religious cape; to his credit, Manoel takes it all in stride.

He leaves the notary office with the three required documents. To save time, he does not even examine them but goes straight to school. It is class time now and he gives Joman's paper to a twenty-year-old girl named Valdete, who is responsible for cleaning the school.

The next morning, das Dores tells Zezito to teach her son all the necessary caveats and cares he should take to cross the railway tracks on his way to school every day. They wait for a locomotive to go by and the boy shows that he has learned the instructions well. Around one in the afternoon, das Dores goes out with her son, and, as they near the rail tracks, she asks him to show her how Zezito taught him. She sees that the lesson was well learned and then leaves him at the school door for his first day of classes. As soon as Joman gets to the yard, he hears shouts.

“Look at the Cross! Look at the Cross Ôpa!” (TN: ‘Ôpa’ is an interjection denoting surprise.)

“The Cross Ôpa!” Peals of laughter echo in the yard.

They circle him and go on chanting the nicknames:

“Ôpa Cross!”

“Little opa! Little ôpa!”

“Ôpa! Ôpa!”

“Ôpa! Ôba! Ôba!” (TN: ‘Ôba’ is an interjection that means surprise with admiration and enjoyment.)

“Cross Ôpa Ôba!...”

Poor Joman is astonished at all the yelling, the laughter, and the mocking references to him, even though it is all rather meaningless to him, the noise and the kidding, the ribbing and the teasing, the endless shouting. His eyes wide open, he just listens passively until the teacher arrives and tells everybody to be quiet. She brings him into the classroom and tenderly explains to him that there is a mistake in his birth certificate.

“Take it to your father, so that he can have it fixed,” she says, handing him the sheet of paper. To calm him, she adds, “Today you can just remain seated, watching the class. Tomorrow we can see how you are doing in reading and writing, all right?”

Class starts and Joman remains astonished. His father has not told him anything about the birth certificate, and he has not the faintest idea what is going on. From time to time, a boy whispers, “Little Ôpa!...” and laughter cascades across the room.

Class ends at four-thirty and a final chorus greets the end of the school day: “Ôpa Cross! Ôpa Cross! Ôpa Cross!”

Joman takes off running, leaving all the shouting behind.

At home, out of breath, he gives the teacher’s message to his mother. She, who can barely sign her name, tells Manoel, who says there must be a slight mistake in the certificate, nothing that cannot be easily fixed. In the space reserved for the name, it says Joman de Oliveira Ôpa!

Since the interjection “ôpa” is not known to him, for its use is limited to Brazil, Manoel does not see any problem, because opa, a noun,

his passion, has no accent—he is sure of that.

“All we have to do is take out the circumflex accent on top of the letter O and exclamation on the end,” he says, looking at the paper. “No problem, it just shows how ignorant that jerk in the notary office is. Ignorant asses like him abound here in Brazil.”

He picks up the two other certificates and sees that they have the same mistake.

Joman and das Dores listen to his comments but have no idea what he is saying. However, they are convinced that the problem will soon be corrected, although Manoel has to wait for the next day.

Very early he goes to the public notary office with the three birth certificates.

“I need a favor from you,” he says to Carlito, handing him the papers, “please correct the names of the children.”

From the other side of the counter, the boy pretends to read the documents and answers, half smiling, “Everything is fine, I wrote just as you said.”

“You placed this accent here,” Manoel points to the name in one of the papers. “Plus this exclamation at the end! You did it on all three documents!”

“It’s the way you spoke,” replies Carlito, in visible good humor. “Repeat the name of your oldest son.”

In doing so, Manoel indeed utters a closed “O” in Opa, but not so much as to be confused with the accented interjection. On the other hand, his eloquence in pronouncing his son’s name might indeed convey the impression of an exclamation.

“See?” the boy is still smiling. “I wrote it just as you said.”

“Are you trying to fool me?”

“No, no way. Just look here.” Carlito now talks to a man standing by the counter. “Isn’t that the way he spoke?”

The person reads it and looks uncertain.

“Say the name of your son, so he can hear it,” the boy speaks forcefully, pretending to be serious.

Manoel repeats it patiently.

“See?” says Carlito to the man. “Didn’t I write it the way he spoke it?”

Although still uncertain, the man agrees, flashing a yellow smile.

“But I would like you to do me the favor of removing the accent and the exclamation.”

“No way. Once it’s registered in writing, that is it,” replies Carlito in a grave tone of voice.

“What do you mean, that is it? All you have to do is write it on another paper!”

"The other paper has to be the same as this one. It is the law."

"Law?" exclaims a totally surprised Manoel.

"That's right. It can only be changed by a judge's order," explains the boy.

"What judge?"

"The county judge. He lives in Tarumirim," he says, referring to the county-seat.

"In Tarumirim?" Manoel makes it sound as if this means some kind of trouble. Tarumirim is pretty far, beyond Itanhomi.

"Tell you the truth, I ain't sure the judge lives there or in Caratinga," remarks Carlito, conveying the impression that this could be even more difficult than it already seems.

"Caratinga?" Manoel sounds really discouraged now.

"That's right," says the young man. "You have to get a lawyer and pay him, so that he can ask the judge to order the name changed. I can only change it if the judge orders me to," and he adds, "in writing! The judge's order has to be in writing!"

Puzzled at this information, Manoel sits down on a bench and looks at the papers with a look of disbelief. Tarumirim is two days away on horseback. Actually, going there is not a problem, especially since he loves the region. *At least I'll see Florinda and the boy*, he thinks, as a consolation. But then he remembers that this is a bad time for him to travel. If he has to go to Caratinga, that is another two days, not counting the trip back. Then there is this red-tape legal headache of getting a lawyer. He is puzzled and discouraged as he leaves the notary office.

That same morning he looks for the school teacher and explains the problem to her. She agrees to evaluate Joman's knowledge and to be tolerant regarding the birth certificate.

As Joman is about to leave home for the school, the boy feels nausea and vomits. Das Dores thinks he is ill and lets him stay home. The illness goes away at once.

The same thing happens the next day, except that there is no vomiting. His mother decides to take him to school herself. The teacher evaluates his knowledge and places him in the second grade.

That same week, Belma is enrolled in the first grade morning session.

Word of what happened in the notary office gets around and the jokes become more frequent and more intense.

"So, you now moved from Manoel of the opa to Manoel of the ôpa?" they ask kiddingly.

But, if anything, Manoel is a hard-headed obstinate man, bent on

overcoming any and all hurdles. He begins to plan the Tarumirim trip or even go to Caratinga, if necessary. But on the eve of the trip, the boy from the office sends for him and recommends that he take the birth certificates with him.

"I was looking at the registration book and saw that the names are right," he shows him the open book. "In making the copies I was careless and paid no attention. Please, excuse me, Manoel of the opa," he adds, pretending to be sincere.

Manoel reads carefully what is written in the book. The names are indeed correct, and now he is undecided. "Which are the valid ones: those in the book or on the sheets of paper?"

"In the book. No need to see the judge. What's in the book is what's valid. Give me the certificates and I'll do it right."

"Blessed be the Holy Virgin!" exclaims Manoel, with a deep sigh. He hands him the papers, which are immediately torn by the young man.

In a couple of minutes, he has three sheets of paper with the correct names.

"Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all! Thank you, Carlito!" says Manoel, fully relieved that on the new certificates there are neither accents nor exclamations. "You saved me a trip and some money."

The young man smiles and presses his lips, trying to hold back a major guffaw.

## Early Sexual Initiation

Despite his enormous tension at going to school, frequently not feeling well and never having courage to ask any questions from the teacher, Joman learns his subjects well, including math, which was previously unknown to him. He is still shy and never reacts to his schoolmates' taunting.

One afternoon, during class break, Valdete, the twenty-year-old cleaning girl, asks him, "Could you help me to sweep and clean up things after class?"

He naturally agrees, since it is his way to please people. After they sweep the two rooms and the yard, closing the doors and windows, the girl seductively invites him, in a sweet voice, "Let's go to my house and I'll give you something."

She lives alone in a small house, just a few yards from the school. They enter and Joman is taken directly to the room with a single bed. Although the window is closed, there is some light because there is no ceiling, just the roof.

"Take off your shoes and lie down here," she says in the same

sweet voice, sitting on the bed. He obeys her, despite being a little scared.

"I'm gonna take your pants off," she says, watching for his reaction.

He does not move and she slowly lowers his suspenders and takes off his short pants and shirt, looking at his face the whole time. Down in the bed, belly up, arms by his side, the wide-eyed boy now sees the scene that follows.

Valdete takes off her dress, the underdress, and bra and panties, climbing into bed. Her body is not huge—quite to the contrary, it is well proportioned—but it seems enormous to Joman. He cannot take his eyes off her breasts and hairy genitalia. She lowers herself and spreads his legs as much as she can. Finally, she bends over him, supporting the elbows on both sides, and starts to rub her vulva against his flaccid and ingenuous penis.

Initially, he finds it quite uncomfortable, but then he begins to appreciate it as her body rubs against him, her breasts moving above his head. She carefully avoids placing her weight on him. His penis shows the slightest sign of an erection. Valdete continues the rubbing, only increasingly, so that her breathing is coming quicker now. Then she suddenly stops and Joman waits to see what will happen. After less than a minute, she gets up, grabs a piece of cloth, and uses it gently on his penis to dry the humidity. Then she dries herself and tells him gently, "Put your clothes on."

Joman obeys while she dresses herself. On the way out, she tells him in a much harder, completely different voice, "Don't tell anyone, ok?! If you do, I'll beat you up." She then tells him what to say if anybody asks any questions.

His mother does indeed ask questions, as she, nearly in panic, meets him on the way home.

"Where were you?"

"I was helpin' Valdete clean the school."

"I looked for you there and everythin' was closed!"

"I was, er, helpin' her sweep her yard."

"I've told you: as soon as school's over, you come home. Me and Zezito were lookin' all over for you."

The boy spends the rest of the day, until he falls asleep at night, thinking about what happened. Suddenly he has this fixation on Valdete's body, her exposed vulva, the rubbing feeling, and her sounds of pleasure. All of this he recalls with pleasure and wishes it would happen again.

It does. The next day, a Friday, she asks for his help one more time. He understands that this is like a password for the great happening. He goes out of his way to do everything quickly. Once they are both fin-

ished, things proceed as they did the day before, save that this time he undresses himself. When it is over, she again warns him not to tell anybody. This second experience has a greater meaning for him, inasmuch as he thinks that Valdete loves him.

He wishes that Saturday and Sunday would go by quickly. Monday arrives and he waits for the password, but Valdete does not invite him and behaves as if nothing ever happened between them. Class ends, but he remains in the classroom. She ignores him and does her work. Brave enough, Joman comes close and asks her, "Could I, I mean, could I help you?"

"No need to!" she says crisply.

He is now downcast but sticks around, hoping against all hope. She pretends not to see him, and, when her work is done, she heads home. He is still waiting. He waits so long that das Dores comes for him.

"I was playin' after class," he says.

"Don't do that. School's over and you go home. You wanna get another spanking?"

He still vividly recalls all the details of his two experiences with the young woman and ardently wants to repeat them. A few days later, he hears Valdete calling another boy to help her. He is shocked and saddened at not being her darling any longer. Nevertheless, he still hopes and dreams of receiving another invitation.

## Fenced in by Others

Joman continues to be the butt of all sorts of jokes and kidding by his schoolmates. For no reason, they zero in at the end of class, and, one afternoon, they add other insults, now questioning his manhood: "Cross Ôpa, little girl!" shouts one of them, soon echoed by the others: "Little girl! Little girl!"

"I ain't no girl," he replies in a low voice.

"Yes, you are too!" says the same boy. "A girl and the daughter of a priest."

"I ain't, I mean, no priest's child!" he now protests in a louder voice, displaying some mild irritation.

"You wanna fight this out, is that what you wanna do?" the bully insists, grabbing a stick and drawing a line on the ground. He stays behind the line, closes his fists, and challenges Joman: "If you're a man, cross this line, Cross!"

Joman remembers his mother's warnings, and, in fear, lowers his head, turns around, and prepares to go away. He takes a few steps and hears the chorus: "He's scared shitless and gonna hightail his ass home!"

He stops and turns around, as the boys walk towards him. Scared, he starts running and leaves the chorus behind.

To downplay his suffering, he starts going to school late and is the first one out as soon as classes are over, running home immediately. That works to some extent, but the kidding and the jokes do not stop altogether, because he meets some of his schoolmates outside of class hours. This suffering continues into the third grade.

At this time, the coffee business is doing well. International prices rebound following the crisis started in the twenties, which forced the Brazilian government to burn every year one-third of the national output between 1931 and 1940. The coffee prices are going up now and Manoel – through José Vítor, who has moved closer to Itanhomi – pays low prices to ill-informed farmers, selling later with hefty profits. Their friendship is ever more solid, and, coffee or no coffee, José Vítor is a monthly guest of Manoel's. Manoel, in turn, visits the coffee farmers from time to time.

The bakery turned out to be just the beginning of a business. Soon the large room is full of cereals, cans of pork fat, cod boxes, olive oil cans, jars of olives, sweets, candies, and cookies, as well as other foodstuff and delicacies. The bread loaves are confined to a rather small window. The bakery, in fact, has become a general store. After more than a year, it now sells home utensils, pots and pans, hardware, farming tools and instruments, appliances, and goods in general, so that it comes to be informally known as Manoel's General Store. He had this in mind when he built a room so large, far larger than necessary for the bakery business. The business is booming and another person has to be hired to help Manoel while das Dores and Zezito deal with the customers.

One day, during a class break in school, a boy named Joel, usually a hothead, asks Joman in a friendly tone of voice, "Get a little mirror from your store and bring it to me." He is referring to one of those small, round mirrors, usually with color photos of women on the back, which men like to carry with them in one of their pants pockets.

Joman is initially scared and tempted to say no. But he is puzzled. He keeps swinging his arms back and forth and does not say anything. At home, he is tempted to do it because Joel spoke to him in a friendly voice. In the evening, he offers some excuse, goes into the store and takes a mirror, giving it to the boy the next day without a word. When school is over and the daily suffering starts, Joel defends him. "Stop fooling around with him!" he shouts to the others.

"I say what I want to say and nobody bosses me around," replies Zé Malta. "You, too, don't you cross a cattle-preventing road bridge?"

"Your momma does not!"

"Yours!"

The discussion ends when Joel challenges the other boy: "Why don't we settle this tonight, my gang against yours?"

They decide to meet at 7 PM at the end of Capybara Street, which starts in the wide space they are in and runs opposite to Barge Street.

Joman is happy because he has finally found a protector, something which he had not counted on before.

"You're coming, ain't you?" Joel asks him, as they move away.

"Sure," he answers hesitantly, seeing no alternative, and he swings both his arms parallel to his body.

In the evening, he is scared and thinks about not going. *I don't even know how to fight*, he thinks. Then he figures it will not look good for him if he does not go. After all, he is the reason for the fight. He finally goes and the place is not well lit. There are four boys, all from the other gang, and no one from Joel's side, not even Joel himself. Zé Malta draws a line on the ground with his bare feet, takes a fighting stance and challenges him, "Cross this line if you're a man, come on, let's see you dare to cross it!"

Joman remains still and the boys walk towards him. In horror, he can neither speak nor run. Urine runs down his pants. "Let me have him," shouts Zé Malta, who is much larger and stronger than him, which hardly makes any difference in this case anyway.

Zé Malta advances on him and starts swinging his fists. All that Joman can do is turn sideways to soften the blows. The slugging ends only when Zé Malta hits him squarely in the face. Joman bends over and starts to cry, while the boys shout the usual insults. He is barely able to run away, with the group right on his heels, shouting and laughing because he is hightailing home once again.

He is still crying as he gets home. He briefly describes what happened.

"You poor thing," his mother hugs him. "Why did they do this to you?" Then she says forcefully, "Don't you leave home again! I told you they would beat you up. These brats are just a bunch of no-good street thugs."

"You should avoid fighting, but don't let them hit you," advises his father.

"There were many of them and they sure were big."

"Grab something to defend yourself, anything, a stone, a stick, anything."

"No, don't you do that!" His mother is alarmed. "They could have weapons and kill you."

"What are you talking about, woman? The boy has to learn to defend himself!"

"These people are dangerous. It's best if he stays at home."

Joman is encouraged by his father's advice, and, tears still in his eyes, asks him, "How come you, I mean, I mean, don't fight the men?"

"It's different with me! I pay no attention and don't let it go beyond talking."

"Then do as Peri and Belma and stay put at home," remarks his mother. "None of these things happen to them."

Indeed, they seldom leave the house, at the most playing on the sidewalk or in the backyard with neighboring boys and girls. Moreover, they are very attached to their mother.

Joman's situation is complicated. He was just betrayed by Joel and beaten by Zé Malta. His father encourages him to react but does not do that himself when other men make fun of him. His mother says that it is dangerous to react and conveys the impression that she does not think he is strong enough to defend himself. He finds himself at a critical crossroads, with no way to handle such hostilities.

At least he learned something when he gave Joel the mirror, as Joel no longer pesters him. So, he discovers that he can soften the situation by giving things to others. At times, he takes a mirror, a marble, a lollypop, some candy, offering these things to the boys, including Zé Malta. They stop tormenting him, and, at least for a while, he can control the group.

Although they still call him by a nickname, their hostility in school is now nearly nonexistent. However, in the streets, other boys haze him, as other adults do to his father. By showing that he hates it, he only fuels the other boys' actions. One day, the school problems come back via Zé Malta, who asks him, "Loan me one tostão."

"I don't have it."

"Get it from the store."

Joman is suddenly afraid and repeats the movement of swinging his arms back and forth, which he always does when he wants to deny something to someone but is not able to. One tostão is tantamount to a hundred réis, enough to buy two dozen bananas or lots of candies. (The Brazilian currency was changed from réis to cruzeiros and three zeros were chopped off, but the old currency is still used in the district.) At home, he thinks long and hard about it but resists the suggestion.

As they meet again, the boy asks about the loan.

"I don't have it," he says, stuttering out of fear.

"Why don't you get it from the store?"

"My mother would spank me."

The boy sing-songs threats in a low voice, implying that Joman is scared shitless.

Joman gets the message: either he gets the money or everything will be as before. He now faces a drama. All the kidding and the jokes exasperate him. On the other hand, he thinks that taking money from the store is more wrong than taking little toys, objects, and food.

But one day Zé Malta threatens him again and he makes up his mind. He takes money from the store, under the counter, and nobody notices. The threat from the boys is neutralized, but his conscience is heavy.

Apparently, the boys talk to each other because Joel uses the same tactic and gets his loan, too. Joman knows that this is lost money, which he will never see again, but, try as he may, he cannot visualize any other way out.

The peaceful truce is short-lived. One day, Zé Malta asks for a lot more money.

"Lend me ten thousand réis."

"Ten thousand?!" He is scared. "That's a lot of money," he adds, stammering and swinging his arms.

"It ain't much! It's just one bill."

The following day, Zé Malta is really scary and cruel, leading the other boys in the merciless singing and shouting.

Exasperated, Joman wants to run, to disappear. In class, he can hear the boys teasing him. The pressure is so heavy that the next day, at lunch time, when only his mother is in the store, he grabs a ten-cruzeiro bill.

In the evening, checking the sales for the day, Manoel discovers that the money is missing. He counts again, looks under the counter, looks everywhere. The boy eyes him from a distance.

"Blessed Virgin, where is that bill? Ten cruzeiros! Have you seen it, Joman?"

"No," he answers, coming closer and pretending to look for it.

Das Dores, Zezito and the hired fellow help in the search.

"I've been robbed!" Manoel exclaims at last.

Later, alone with his father, Joman says to him, "I'm gonna, so, say five Our Fathers and five Hail Marys tomorrow, so the money will appear."

Manoel looks at him suspiciously. "Is that some self-penance?" His son remains silent, and Manoel adds, "If you need money, all you have to do is ask me!"

His father has just found out that he took the money, since a desire to do penance is an acknowledgement of sin, but he does not go be-

yond the recommendation. In fact, this is a casual discovery since the boy cannot tell a promise from penance. When he mentioned the Our Fathers and the Hail Marys, he had only a promise in mind.

Thank goodness, to his relief, the loan-request extortions are reduced to a hundred réis, a small enough amount for him to grab without anyone noticing.

Joman has now become a hostage to threats. He is very careful to avoid a repetition of the hostile scenes of before by pleasing this or that boy, giving a little extra money to Joel and Zé Malta, and changing his voice so that it will sound friendly.

One day on the street, a boy smaller than him and in the company of three others asks him, "Go to the store and get some candy for us."

His initial reaction is to be quiet, swinging both arms beside his body. He wants to say no, but that is not what comes out of his mouth.

"I'll see if I can do it, ok?" his voice is soft and kind.

"We want it now."

"Couldn't you wait until tomorrow?" He is almost pleading, his arms still swinging. "Lots of folks in the store now; otherwise, I'd go."

"Do you swear on your mother's soul that you will bring it tomorrow?"

"I do!"

The next day, at the same time, Joman arrives and finds only the boy who had asked him. He hands him the candies, expecting a smile, which in fact is what he gets.

To be good and act kindly, in word and deeds, to be different from what he is, what he thinks and what he feels, to violate his conscience—that is the price he has to pay for freedom and tranquility. However, if purchased, freedom and tranquility breed a pent-up inner anger which increases as time moves on. The pent-up anger ends up breeding anguish in little Joman.

Being social costs him such a high price that he seeks refuge and solace in solitude and loneliness, in a natural, non-deliberate fashion. Solitude is not bad in itself; in fact, it can even be constructive and awaken creative forces. However, in Joman's case, he is going against his own nature as a curious and active boy, and his solitude is therefore annihilating.

The silent dramas are the worst. They corrode the person and seem to attract further disgrace. In Joman's case, besides all the personal drama, there is another one at this time, the family's. He becomes aware of it when a youngster who has come to town to do some shopping asks him point blank, "Do you know that you have a dark-skinned brother?"

"Me? ... A dark brother?"

"Then you didn't know?! Ask your dad. He has two more women as well as your mom."

In shock, Joman runs home. He looks for his mother and tells her what the boy told him.

"You just shut your mouth!" she orders him angrily, interrupting him from talking any further, and she gets away from him.

Later, he throws the slightest of hints in his father's direction and receives a stern look of disapproval. He concludes that the stories are true, but that they are not to be discussed. He vaguely recalls rumors back on the farm about his father being interested in other women. One more drama for him to bear. *But how can this be?* the boy thinks, really troubled now. *He never hits me, never fights me or anybody else; he prays so much. How can he have a son with another woman? And have other women besides Mom? Come on!* If he could understand things better, he would have added that his dad also goes to Mass and receives Communion when the priest comes to town and that his dad leads processions and contributes generously to the church. He is puzzled at the incongruities, perplexed at so many dramas kept in the shadows. It is all just too much for a boy to bear. No wonder Joman's mind is so screwed up and his face forever scared.

## A Saving Hand

One morning, at this troubled time, he goes to the river port to see the barge and spots some naked boys playing in the river, about a hundred yards upstream. He walks towards them, looks around, and sees that the river is shallow.

"Come into the water and play!" one of them shouts, and Joman hesitates.

"Come on in!" insists another one.

The happy boys look so joyful that he cannot resist. He takes off all his clothes and joins the group. The boys don't know him but accept him at once. He has a lot of fun, really enjoys himself, and forgets all the problems. This is really his first social experience of being accepted naturally by other boys, without any demands. He goes back there other times, making sure that his mother is not aware of it. He plays marbles, cowboys and Indians, runs wild, plays hopscotch and soccer with a ball made of cloth—always briefly, so that his mother will not find out and be alarmed. He befriends a boy his age, named Noel, who is very poor like all the others and lives in a river-side shack.

One day, in the river, one of the boys pushes him and he starts to drown. He surfaces for the first time, sees so much water around him,

struggles, breathes hard and yells in despair, "Mom!"

He sinks again and surfaces for the second time. His vision is a blur, and he can no longer shout. At this time, a boy about fifteen is going by, jumps into the water, and rescues him. He is now lying on firm land, dizzy, out of breath, and coughing and vomiting water.

"It was Neneco over here who saved him," Noel explains to two women who have arrived to see what all the commotion was with that bunch of boys.

His vision still blurred, Joman can barely make out a lanky, dark teenager, whose clothes are all wet and who is holding his feet up to help him bend over and expel water from his lungs.

When Joman recovers, Noel takes him to his river-side home, a very poor, small house among half a dozen others like it. They are about a hundred and fifty yards from the river. Upon being told what happened and seeing how pale Joman is, Noel's mother quickly gives him water with sugar. As he leaves, he begs the woman not to tell his mother.

The horrible experience makes him cease that type of activity and realize that his mother is right when she warns him about the dangers of the world. He still goes there once in a while and watches the other boys playing and splashing in the water. He takes part in the other fun and games but only on dry land.

## A Hurdle to Studying

Between the ages of ten and eleven, the boy witnesses the first serious quarrel between his parents. He has just finished the fourth grade and Manoel brings up the subject of him continuing his studies.

"Well, I say! Joman, now you have to attend junior high and I was thinking about which city we could send you to. Perhaps..." He is interrupted by an alarmed das Dores.

"To leave here and go alone to some other place?!"

"Of course! He can only continue to study in some real city," he explains patiently.

"To send a child alone to a big city? What's the matter with your head, Manoel?" She is really getting angry now.

"Well, I say! You continue to see our children as defenseless little ones. Take a look and see how much he's grown, don't you see?"

"He's still too much of a child to go out into the world."

"You're exaggerating, das Dores," he argues patiently.

She dramatically raises her voice. "It's dangerous enough with me here, imagine what it will be like far away! You wanna kill me and kill him, too?"

"Look, then we can all move to a city that has a junior high school," Manoel suggests.

"Go to a city, to a big place? How can I watch over them in a big place, Manoel?" she is still speaking dramatically.

"Goodness gracious, you have to think about their future! What kind of a future will they have if they don't study?" he argues forcefully. This is the first time Joman sees his father even slightly irritated.

"No need to study, Manoel. You didn't study and our life's good. Belma gets married, the boys get into some kind of business, and that's it!" She sounds like a judge handing down a final sentence, which is her way of speaking when she feels that the children are in danger.

"Well, I say! I hope you won't be sorry in the future, woman." He then turns to his son and asks, "What do you think, Joman?"

"I don't know..." With so many conflicting opinions, he cannot assess what is good or bad for him.

"Belma, go and iron your father's opa!" das Dores shouts to her daughter, who is in another room, and then she goes away, ending the discussion.

"All right, mother," the girl answers.

Manoel discusses this matter several other times, but his wife does not budge one inch. In time, her will prevails.

Joman is aimlessly adrift in life, spending most of the time at home, doing nothing, dealing with his sadness or doing little odds and ends. He thinks about things past, such as the fellow making Peri drink urine and wanting him to do the same, plus the attempt at sexual harassment, all the teasing in school, and the meanness to him. He rebels and wants to have his revenge, but he does not know how to get it.

One day, he decides to examine two books that are at the bottom of a trunk. They belong to his father, who brought them from Portugal. Time has turned them yellowish. One of them is entitled *Grammática*, which Joman does not understand well, but it talks about how to write words and sentences. He leafs through the book and puts it aside. The other book goes by the title of *Almanaque*, and features texts in prose and verses. The book delights him: beautiful stories, no longer than one or two pages, and plenty of poetry. The book becomes his companion and it encourages his fantasy. He memorizes some of the poems, especially those of a sentimental nature. The book gives him pleasure and improves his vocabulary. He now speaks better.

Attention to words makes him notice the huge difference in how his parents speak, and he asks his father, "Mom, I mean, speaks so wrong, but you never, I mean, correct her..." His friendly manners when speaking as well as his soft voice are now a fixture.

"Well, I say! Speaking of correcting, it is not 'wrong' but 'incorrectly.' Why not? I think everyone has to learn by himself or herself. Haven't you noticed how much she has improved, since we moved here?"

"What about me? You, I mean, very seldom correct me."

"Tell you the truth, I find it funny how incorrectly Brazilians speak. I always thought you would improve with the passing of time. But, if you wish, I can call your attention to it from now on."

"I think, I mean, that would be good."

Manoel now frequently corrects him.

### Pre-Teenage Passion

Joman is free to go out but seldom does so because there is always somebody—child, teenager or adult—who teases him about his Portuguese background or asks whether his surname is Opa or Ôpa. He spends most of his time at home and starts to resent his father. He discusses this with his friend.

"You know somethin', Noel, people're always callin' me by a nickname, teasin' and makin' fun of me, of my dad too, and he never reacts. I wish he would strike back and mock them, too."

"If he strikes back, there could be a fight, but they sure would stop it."

"He thinks everything is funny, just a great big joke..." His voice makes it clear that he is complaining. "I'm very upset with him."

"They might stop teasing him, but not you. It's gone on too long for that now."

"Why was he born in Portugal?" He seems to be thinking aloud. "I wish he'd die!" he adds aggressively.

"Gee whiz, Joman, you don't know how bad it is not to have a father."

"What did your dad die of?"

"He was killed when I was small. To this day I still miss him."

"But what good is a father who's afraid, I mean, who never fights back?"

"I don't figure your dad is afraid. Everybody thinks he is a good man. You should thank God for that."

For a few days, Joman is actually sorry that he wished his father would die, but he is still not happy with the way Manoel acts.

He still seldom goes out, except occasionally to see a passenger train arrive or depart at the rail station—one of the few local distractions—or he watches new rail tracks being laid down in the Southern area of the district, so that trains may avoid the urban area, or he sees

new streets being opened. These new streets have reduced a lot of the open space downtown. New city blocks have appeared to the right of the rail tracks, running East to West, starting near the school and ending very far away, where the train turns right. In the initial third stretch, the oldest of three soccer fields was preserved, right across from the rail station, the station itself allowing vehicles to maneuver, loading and unloading freight material through a large back door accessing the station. Houses, shops and stores, saw mills, Protestant churches—all sorts of buildings—are being put up in this space, so much so that open spaces can now be found only to the East.

One afternoon, on one of the few occasions he leaves his house, Joman is struck by a girl. He has not seen her for months and now he thinks she is somebody else. Her body has changed to that of a young woman. He notices her face, hair, legs, and her whole body and voice. *How pretty she is!* he exclaims in his thoughts. He follows her and she enters a house in a distant street, in the outskirts of the city, towards the Northwest. For the rest of the day her image never leaves his mind.

Later, he finds out that her name is Vera and that she is the thirteen-year-old daughter of a carpenter. She is only one year older than him.

Vera's presence is now constantly in his mind and in his daily and nightly dreams. He wants to date her, but he does not know how. For hours, he thinks and thinks, looking for a solution.

*I was thinking maybe we could date,* he imagines himself saying to her. *No, that's no good. She could say I'm ugly. Maybe I just say to her: "How about if we go for a walk together, Vera?" That's better because if she thinks I'm ugly, she won't have to say so.* Next, he argues with himself, thinking, *All I want is to be her boyfriend!*

On and on it goes, this talking to himself and searching for a way to approach her. He does not even know how this business of his being ugly crept into his mind.

One day, he has this idea of writing on a sheet of paper *Vera, I want to be your boyfriend,* giving her the paper, and taking off running before she can reply. But on second thought, he abandons this plan; she might find his actions ridiculous.

Then he speculates it may be better to talk to her, and he imagines their conversation: *"I am Joman, do you know me?" She will say, "No." Then I will say, "I live on Barge Street and my father has a store." Then she will know that I'm not just any poor guy. But...but...but what if she says, "Ah...your father is Manoel of the opa?" and then laughs? I would just die of sheer embarrassment.*

He promptly eliminates this approach.

Another day he thinks of a different approach. He will praise her

before asking for a date. *"I think you're so pretty, the most beautiful girl in town, and I would like us to go on a date."* That seems perfect. He practices it day after day. *What if she says that I am ugly and laughs at me?* he asks himself. *Ah, I know*—he is angrily talking to himself now—*if she says that, I will recite some poetry from the Almanaque that she will never forget:*

*"O rose that blooms in the rose bed,  
Laughing at my woes,  
Remember that in this world,  
Everything changes and goes."*

He practices this for a few days. When he thinks he is ready to hear her say "Yes" or "No," he marches straight to her house. As he gets near, his heart beats faster. He is short of breath and his mouth is suddenly dry. He considers going back but decides against it. He walks in the middle of the street, pretending to be there by accident, and looks quickly at her house. He does not see anyone, although the doors and windows are open. He turns around, walks back, and looks again. Again he sees no one. He stops, leans against a light pole, calms down, and plans his next move. *I've come so far and have to talk to her. I'll knock at the door; she'll come and I will say, "I think you're very pretty, indeed, the most beautiful girl ..."* Once he thinks he has it all memorized, he heads for the house. His heart is beating fast again, and the closer he gets to the house, the faster it beats. It is practically leaping out of his chest as he nears the door. He wants to run away, but a stronger power makes him move forward. He knocks at the door and claps his hands. *I hope she is not in,* he thinks, sorry that he has come this far. A lady comes to the door, whom he recognizes as the girl's mother. He feels relieved and relaxes a bit, stammering what comes to his mind. "If it is not too much to ask, could you, I mean, please give me a glass of water?"

*"Just wait here,"* the woman says and goes into the house.

*Thank God it wasn't her.* He relaxes completely and waits.

Moments later, as he is looking toward the street, he hears someone say, "Here is the water."

He recognizes the voice and does not know whether to stay or to run. She says again, "The water you asked for."

The voice is too nice for him to run. He turns around slowly, trying to rein in his emotion. Vera is so close, three feet away, offering him a cup. He shakes like a leaf in the wind as he holds the cup. He takes a sip, but he is out of breath and his mouth muscles are tight. He makes a funny noise as he drinks the water. *Now is the time!* he thinks. He drinks some more water, trying to remember the sentence he memorized. "I think..." he rehearses in his mind, "I think..." *Think what? Think that...What? What?...* His mind is a total fog. *It can't be!* he is mad at himself. He

finishes drinking, hands her the cup, and just stands there looking at her, trying to remember what he memorized.

"Would you like some more?" she asks and smiles.

He manages to stutter, "No, thanks."

He turns around, his head bowed, and goes away. On the way home, he is kicking himself for the lost opportunity. Will he have another one? But he is happy that she smiled and then it hits him: *That smile meant "Yes"!*

He returns several times to her street. At times, he sees her speaking or playing with other girls. He stops, leans against a wall or a light pole, looks at her, and sometimes has the impression that she, too, is looking at him.

This goes on for days on end. In his mind, they are now a steady date. Whenever he is sad, her image cheers him up. This platonic yet passionate love makes him think that one day all his torments will go away.

More than a year goes by, and one day he sees her with a boy who looks like he might be around seventeen years old. Mentally, he knows how to solve this predicament.

"*Vera is mine!*" he will say angrily to his rival.

"*No, she is mine!*" the other one will answer.

Joman will charge into him and they will fight. Although smaller in size, Joman will beat him pretty badly.

"*That's so you learn not to mess around with another boy's girlfriend,*" he will say arrogantly. The boy will go away, ashamed. Vera will be his again.

But reality insists on being different. Joman sees the girl and the boy together again. He feels betrayed and a terrible melancholy overwhelms him. He is perplexed and puzzled by the world. He asks himself, *Why is everything against me?* Convinced that he cannot beat his rival in terms of physical attraction, he daydreams, thinking, *One day I'll be rich and she will want me.* However, that will take some time and, meanwhile, he has to face hard reality.

Joman no longer plays with friends by the river side. He sees little of his friend Noel, who now works in a brick-making outfit near the river. In fact, the group no longer exists—some others are also working and still others have moved away. Neneco, who saved him from drowning in the river, moved out of town a long time ago, making Joman feel perpetually indebted because he never could overcome his shyness and thank Neneco for saving his life.

Old ghosts of his relationship with Valdete come back to haunt him, even though he has discovered that she was the one who told the

boys about the mistake in his birth certificate, which turned his first school day into a hell he will never forget. But he holds no grudge against her; after all, she also provided him with two fantastic experiences, the smallest details of which remain vivid in his mind, making him feel what it is like to be wanted, even if only for a few days.

He has never forgotten how good it was on that Friday, waiting to go to bed with her again, then wishing the weekend would zip by, so that on Monday they could be together once more. Then came the disappointment a few days later, when she invited another boy to help her sweep and clean the school—but, despite it all, he had still hoped against hope to be invited one more time. He was not, but at least he had hoped to be.

Now, in early adolescence, his body in the full vigor of life, his penis no longer ingenuous, he fantasizes about her. *It's gonna be easier. She's no longer a virgin. In fact, she has a daughter.* His imagination runs wild. Valdete is now a single mother. In his fantasies, it is a piece of cake for him, and he has sex with her whenever he wants to. He waits for the right moment to invite her and make his dreams come true. Several times, their paths cross in the streets.

"Howdy, Joman," she says and smiles. "How you doing?"

"Just fine," is all that he invariably manages to say.

*But one of these days I'll have her,* he assures himself.

## Fear of One's Self

Progress has come to the Tumiritinga district; due to its location, it is now a center for exporting wood, either logs or lumber, and grains from the neighboring areas, especially from the very fertile North, where the farming output is exceptional. Tumiritinga also attracts merchandise from the state capital and even from outside Brazil, through the Vitória seaport, in the neighboring state of Espírito Santo. The railway from Vitória to Minas was transferred from English ownership to the Brazilian government in the early forties, becoming part of the Companhia Vale do Rio Doce mining complex. This railroad makes all the booming trade possible.

Even though the Atlantic Forest has been nearly wiped out in the region, Manoel decides to operate a saw mill. He builds a huge wood shed, open on the sides, and assembles two sets of mills and circular saws, all self-powered. His output includes all sorts of planks and boards, beams and slats. He makes good money with wood and also with coffee, the international price of which increases sharply after the Second World War.

Because of all this growth, several work projects dot the district. One of them is the construction of a new cemetery, to the South, far beyond the new railroad tracks. Another project is the extension of the street starting in front of Manoel's store and ending inside the old cemetery. Part of its wall has to be brought down. Local folks feel that, where the new stretch of the street is going to be, the bones of the deceased must be unearthed and transferred to the new cemetery. Joman is very curious about this operation. His mother and his own experiences have taught him to be afraid of people and of nature. At home, they never talked about ghosts or phantoms or anything remotely similar. The dead were never regarded as dangerous. Several times, he entered the cemetery to pick flower seedlings for his mother. "What a silly thing, to go and see dead folks being transferred from one cemetery to another!" his mother would say.

In the morning of the transfer day, the city stops, and its streets are empty. The church is across from the cemetery, and its bell tolls sadly, as it does for every burial. Several men start to dig and to remove bones from the graves, placing them in small wooden boxes. Some hauling carts are parked in front of the church. Joman follows the operation, standing with a few curious men. When the first boxes are placed in a horse-drawn cart, he asks the horse owner, "Could you, I mean, let me ride alongside you?"

"Ain't you scared?"

"No."

"Fine, come then, 'cause I sure am afraid."

He climbs aboard, and the man makes the horse move. As they go along, doors and windows are closed and he sees people peeping out of little holes and cracks.

"Why are, I mean, they closing the doors and windows?" he asks the horseman.

"I reckon they're scared, too."

*Let's see if they're going to continue saying that I'm afraid,* he says to himself, pleased as can be, remembering the teenagers who tease him.

The next day the story is on everyone's lips, and exaggeratedly so. *The Cross even helped to dig out and to bury all them dead folks.*

He finds out about these remarks, and, for the first time since living here, he enjoys a feeling of superiority over the others.

However, this episode does not change his habits. He helps with sales in the store and with baking bread. He prefers working in the back area, baking bread, even though it means waking up at dawn. Baking had long been Zezito's exclusive responsibility. Joman finds it painful to work the counter, because it means having to talk to and argue with

customers. So, he always finds some excuse to go out during the day. Sometimes he just heads for the backyard and spends hours sitting under a mango tree, fantasizing, feeling resentment or anger, or just re-reading the Almanaque.

On other occasions, if he feels even sadder, he goes to the river beach, a sand stretch of some two hundred yards, right downstream from the river rapids. It is always deserted and the water makes a lot of loud noise. He identifies himself with the solitude and the restlessness of the place. This identification with nature dampens his suffering, at least while he is there.

One evening, he meets his friend Noel, who bears the bad news that he and his mother are going to move.

"Move? You putting me on?" Joman hopes it is a joke.

"It's true. Mom has decided to go back to my granddad's house in the woods."

"When is that gonna happen?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"But what about me, I mean, without a friend now?" he asks hopelessly, with a hint of despair in his voice.

That night, at bed time, he feels overwhelming sorrow. Very early the next morning, he goes to his friend's house and sees all the things on the back of a small truck. When Noel and his mother say good-bye and the truck drives away, he feels a huge emptiness and feels compelled to cry. He just follows the truck with his eyes, as it follows a river-side road upstream, until it disappears from sight.

Deep melancholy overwhelms him. He sits on the river bank and stares at the mirror-like water. Its endless vastness beckons him, and he suddenly wants to walk into the river, never to come back. For a while, silence and peace take over his imagination, but then he recalls the despair he felt, not so long ago, when he was nearly drowning, and he thinks of how Neneco came to save him. He goes back home as depressed as when he had left a couple of hours ago, still puzzled that he wished to end his own life. *How could I have thought about that? Dying is so bad!* he says to himself. *But what good is life, anyway? It would have been better for me to have been born an earthworm, which doesn't think and doesn't feel these things...To live is also very bad.*

Around four in the afternoon, that same day, he is sitting on a stump, under a mango tree, when das Dores comes to the kitchen window and tells him, "Joman, get the opa from the dryin' line."

He shouts back aggressively, "No, I ain't gonna do that! And you know something, this darn foolish opa is a piece of shit!"

"Joman!" She is shocked and cannot believe what she has just

heard. After a few seconds, she manages to say, "I ain't gonna tell your father what you just said. It'd kill him with sadness."

In a while, his brother Peri comes out of the house and gets the opa.

*Apple polisher, brownnoser, ass kisser!* he thinks about his brother, but he does not say it aloud. *I hate that opa! I hate this house! I hate this place! I hate the people here! I hate; I just hate! I hate my dad and my mom!* he continues thinking.

In the evening, he is deeply shaken by his daytime thoughts. He is perplexed as he recalls the morning by the river bank and the fierceness of his afternoon thoughts in the backyard. *Am I going crazy or what?!* he exclaims to himself. He has the impression that, if he lets it all out, he may not be able to control himself and that he will go crazy indeed. For the first time, he is afraid of himself. This fear increases over the following days. *Being afraid of myself is worse than being afraid of others,* he realizes in horror.

## The Radio Brings Hope

Progress has come to town and Manoel buys a radio. It is a huge gadget and it forces some changes. The first is in the house, in the living-room furniture. The image of the Virgin Mary is moved from the center of a wall to one of its sides. A special, long-legged table, made especially for the radio, is placed next to the same wall, so that the sacred image and the radio are now side by side and roughly at the same height. The chairs are clustered next to the opposite wall. The flower-filled, small center table is moved to a corner to make access to the radio easier.

The second change affects the family habits. The store now closes at six rather than at seven PM. Dinner follows immediately, so that everyone may listen to the 6:30 soap opera on the radio. Manoel now goes less frequently to church in the late afternoon, because to close the store, count the money for the day, and have dinner is all too much for his crowded agenda. His schedule permitting, he goes to church earlier. Otherwise, he makes up for it by praying at home, at the feet of the Blessed Mother, duly wearing the opa. It is not rare for him to pray in the living-room, remove the opa, eat a quick dinner, and rush to join his family, which is anxiously waiting for him so that everybody can worship that other item on a pedestal, the radio. The soap opera is followed by a government-sponsored program called "A Hora do Brasil" ("The Hour of Brazil"). Nobody listens to that but they all come back together again to hear the 8 PM soap opera on Rádio Nacional.

As usual, Manoel goes to church on Sunday morning. The family

lunches at 11:30 AM, and he then turns on the radio, powered by a truck battery because regular power, from a motor and a generator, carried through wires, is only available to the population between 6 and 10 PM. Everybody listens spellbound to the radio. "When the two hands of the clock meet at noontime, you, the listeners of Rádio Nacional all over Brazil, have a date with singer Francisco Alves. They do not call him 'The Voice' for nothing." The King then starts singing to everyone's magical delight, Manoel's especially.

This program is followed by another one, "A Hora do Pato" ("The Hour of the Duck"), led by famous emcee Jorge Curi, who has a deep baritone voice. The program is so named because candidates applying to be a singer hears a sonorous duck-like "quack, quack, quack" if they flunk the singing test. Manoel turns off the radio at 2:30 PM and turns it on again in the evening, to listen to music and comedy programs. The flagship program "Edifício Balança mas não Cai" ("The Building that Balances but does not Fall") makes everybody roar with laughter, except the introvert Joman, who only manages a few smiles.

The shy teenager's perspective is also changed by the radio. The world out there, coming to him through voices and music, seems a huge place, wherein everybody lives happily—a world just the opposite of his own. He begins to dream of moving to that world, even though initially it seems an impossible, absurd dream. But he enjoys thinking that in that world no one will tease him, kid him, or call him by nicknames he hates, for it is a world where nobody knows his father, and so he will not be ridiculed for being Manoel of the opa's son. At the same time, he begins spelling his last name 'O.'—just a capital O followed by a dot. He knows about the promise his father made, but he thinks this change minimizes the chances of him being laughed at.

His adolescence remains lonely and unhappy. The fear of going crazy has taken over his soul and surpasses all other fears. *My only hope of salvation is to leave this place*, he begins to tell himself, again and again.

He begins to throw hints that he would like to go to a larger city in order to go back to school. Several times, he mentally rehearses a conversation with his parents on this topic, but it only takes place when he is seventeen, when the three of them are together.

"If you want to study, that's good," Manoel remarks. "But if you're thinking of a business, of having your own business, then it's better if you start here."

"The thing is that, I mean, in other words, what I mean to say is..." But he can't say it; he just swings his arms back and forth. "I reckon I don't like it here much, I mean, I don't like the place, this city, only the city is what I mean." The fear of going crazy has now made him more

careful when he speaks.

"But we love you so much," his father says, his voice nearly cracking.

It is the first time that Joman hears his father say directly that he loves him. He feels moved, but not enough to offset the feelings of shame, anger, and hurt that his father inspires in him. "I think," argues Joman, after a brief silence, "that in a big place I can work and study. Here, things are going from bad to worse. I mean the trade is; the business is. The sawmill has almost stopped, and so has the coffee trading. I don't see any future, nothing that could make money."

Manoel remains silent; he seems to agree. His mother also holds her silence. Two negative economic factors have converged and stopped economic development right in its tracks. Grain trading has dropped sharply and suddenly in the wake of a bridge built on one of the tributaries of the Rio Doce. Northern grain producers can now drive their trucks to Governador Valadares, formerly known as Figueira do Rio Doce, a much larger city with better business alternatives. This shuts down at once the wholesale depots and warehouses in Tumiritinga. The other negative factor is a lack of wood for the sawmills. Woods and forests are now nearly gone; Manoel's operation is idle most of the time. To top it all off, the coffee business is practically at a standstill because of the lack of buyers. The once prosperous Tumiritinga, a chartered city since 1949, is now heading downhill.

Manoel has thought of moving, but a heart problem, detected by a doctor in Governador Valadares, has made him choose a quieter life. He can no longer wish for more and more but has to settle for less and less. For all these reasons, he understands his son's aspirations.

Following a long silence, das Dores reacts unexpectedly. "I know that you don't like it here. I think it's time to try your luck some other place." Her voice is a mixture of acceptance and sadness.

She has her reasons for making this remark. Deep inside, she feels she is the cause of her son's sadness and that one of the reasons for his melancholy is her opposition to his going away to school. Two of his high school classmates are now in college. Another way she has contributed to his sadness, which she does not face squarely, is by instilling so much fear in her children, to the point that it limits their possibilities in life.

"I'll send you money whenever you need it," his father says, having somehow recovered his voice.

Despite this support, he himself postpones going away. He struggles with himself. The other world is attractive but he also fears it. He wonders whether there is something wrong with him, since he sees nothing wrong with his brother and sister. His father has dismissed the

second hired hand in the store not only because there is not much business but also because Peri spends almost all of his time there, serving the customers and always in good humor. Belma has her girlfriends and occasionally dates one boy or another.

### In the Red Light District

At this time, unable to make up his mind if he should leave home or not, Joman decides to visit the "Lagoinha" red light district to have his first mature sexual experience. He arrives in the evening at a cluster of houses on both sides of the rail tracks, in the Western outskirts of town, on the way to Governador Valadares. The place is badly lit and he is afraid of the strangers moving back and forth. He walks the streets slowly, close to the houses with women at their doors.

"Hey, nice guy, come on over here!" one of them invites him. He stops and takes a look, feels terribly afraid, and starts walking again.

"Got a cigarette?" another one asks him.

"Come here, you big hunk!"

He goes by seedy bars, where men and women drink and make a lot of noise. He crosses to another street, on the other side of the rail tracks. It is the same there and he cannot build enough courage to accept any invitation from the many women. He walks the same two streets again and gives up for good. He thinks it is better to come back in the daytime.

He is back the following afternoon. Things are much quieter; the women are not outside inviting customers in, and he feels altogether better. He comes to the door of one of the houses, takes a peek inside, and sees people moving around, but he cannot gather enough courage to go in. He goes to another house, and again courage fails him. This is repeated several times until he suddenly meets a girl who is coming to the door.

Joman cannot move at the door's threshold, so impressed is he by the girl's beauty and youth. She stops less than a yard from him and just stares, saying nothing. She cannot be a day older than he is, seventeen, and her blond hair and blue eyes are not common in that region. She wears no make-up on her tender face. Her simple, gray checkered dress features pleats above her breasts. Struck by her, he thinks, *She doesn't look like a wench. Maybe her mother is one.* A few seconds go by; she still says nothing but now comes even closer to him and leans against the wooden door, sort of facing him sideways. Without saying a word, they look at each other; he is disturbed and she is not. Suddenly, she grabs the top of her dress with both hands and yanks it down, baring

her breasts. Joman is wide-eyed as he sees those two white protuberances and pink nipples. He next looks at her face, which seems to be asking him, "How about it?"

His answer is in his own face, a mix of admiration and puzzlement. He tries to say that he wants to go to bed with her, but he cannot manage to. He is afraid, almost panicked. Feeling foolish, he watches her as she covers her breasts and asks him, "Would you like to?"

"No, not today," is all that he can manage to stammer and stutter, swinging his arms wildly.

He goes home with her pretty image in his head, kicking himself all the way. *Not even with a wench?* he says to himself.

## Chapter 6 - The Other World

### Initial Progress

Several months go by, and, when he is eighteen, in 1953, he finally makes up his mind.

"I think I'm going, I mean, to move to Belo Horizonte," he tells his parents.

"You stay at your uncle Cândido's place," das Dores says, referring to her brother.

But Manoel says immediately, "No!" His voice is sharp and hard, something rare for him. "Until you can have your own house, you stay in a hotel, in some rooming house. I'll send you money."

Joman cannot understand why he cannot stay at his uncle's, although he vaguely recalls hearing as a child that there was a problem between his uncle and his father. But this was something no one ever talked about, and he feels now is not the time to bring it up.

"First off, I'll see if I can get some kind of a job and, I mean, then I'll start school."

He delays his trip for another month.

In the state capital at last, he stays at a small hotel for a few days and then moves into a rooming house for boys in the Santa Efigênia neighborhood, in the Eastern part of town. He visits his uncle Cândido, who is somewhat under the weather, and gets to know his family. After that, he's soon looking for a job.

The opportunity arises for Joman to work, on a trial basis, as a helper to a diamond craftsman, who has his machines in a room in his own house. Despite not knowing this trade, Joman is attracted by the fact that there are only two people, the owner Timóteo and one employee named Aristides. The owner seems fortyish and the employee appears to be under thirty. Discretion is their hallmark and neither of them speak much. This plays heavily in his decision, since he himself finds it hard to communicate. Another positive factor is that the place is

close to the rooming house he is lodged in.

Joman's timidity, often taken for humility, is regarded positively from the start. Timóteo and Aristides like him at once and patiently teach him the cutting-and-polishing trade. They help him to avoid military service, and he is encouraged to learn. When he masters working with diamonds, he receives a substantial pay raise. He is now able to support himself and writes his father saying that he need not send any more money. Upon receiving his letter, Manoel and das Dores travel immediately to Belo Horizonte. They are afraid that their son may need things. They meet him at his place of work and want to make sure that everything is fine. When they arrive, Joman is finishing working on a gem.

After the greetings and introductions, Aristides suggests, "Show your father and mother this gem."

A little shy, he shows them the tiny stone.

"Did you do this by yourself?" his mother asks him in admiration.

"He is very skillful," his boss says to the couple.

"Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all!"

He leaves work early and takes his parents to the home he lives in. They want to know all about him. Das Dores complains, "You don't write much. Sometimes you don't even answer my letters."

"It's just that there isn't much that's new. I mean, if there is, then I write you."

"Do you like your work?" his father asks him.

"I do, very much so," he begins enthusiastically. "With the pay hike I got, there's going to be some money left over every month."

"Are you going to school?"

"Yeah, I'm taking this high school course for older students."

"'Yes' is what you mean to say. What kind of course is that?"

"It's, I mean, for people over eighteen, dropouts. I mean, you study at home, there are no classes, and you only take the exams. You can do high school in one or two years...I mean, as long as you know the subjects. I've been studying hard."

"In one year, did you say?"

"Yes. Then, I'll do the same thing for junior college."

"What's that?"

"It's a course, I mean, for a couple of years, mainly for those interested in the humanities or becoming a lawyer."

"Is that what you want?"

"I think so, in order to fight injustice. If I could be a lawyer, I reckon I might stop working with diamonds, although I like it."

Joman shows them the books and notebooks.

"I've been studying every evening, and I read, I mean, a lot of nov-

els and poetry. I borrow stuff from the public library and really enjoy it. Given all this, I mean, I think it's going to be right for me to study law."

His desire to study law is inspired by his own history. The humiliations and injustices he suffered, along with his love for reading, steer him toward this profession. Deep inside, he feels that law will provide him with world-reforming tools.

"You sure you ain't gonna need money?" his mother asks him.

"No, no, you can rest assured."

The parents are convinced that their son is fine, and they go back home.

Four years later, his boss, Timóteo, suddenly decides to move to Rio de Janeiro. Joman, who has bought the modest shack he lives in, who has finished high school and is about to conclude junior college, who dreams of being a lawyer to fight injustice, now has to review all his plans. *I have to find another job. Survival comes first*, he says to himself. His is a bitter experience of unemployment. He is undecided and does not know whether to look for a job in the diamond industry or in some other one. Afraid of the future, he begins to have digestive problems. *I may be having liver problems*, he imagines, snowballing his own indecision.

Aristides comes to him a couple of weeks after they are both unemployed and proposes that the two of them go into diamond crafting.

"You mean set up a business like that?!" He had never thought about having his own business, and thus he is amazed.

"That's right. The equipment is not expensive and we can pay in installments." Joman remains pensive and Aristides insists, "I'm telling you, it's not expensive."

"But, but, I mean, what if we don't get much business?"

"Of course we will. There's a lot of business in this field."

He remains thoughtful for a while and then argues, "There's the rent and other expenses... diamond dust is expensive." He is referring to a dust used with castor oil to cut and polish diamonds. "Maybe we'll lack money for these things. Have you thought of that? Unless... perhaps here in my shack...I mean, we wouldn't have to pay rent."

"No. It has to be downtown; it's easier to go to and people will give it more value." Aristides speaks convincingly. "The expense of diamond dust means that we have business, and, if we have business, it's money coming in."

"But the rent must be very expensive."

"Not that expensive. We can use an older building. But it has to be downtown, really downtown."

"I wonder if this will work out, Aristides," he says, but his tone of

voice reveals that he is already being seduced.

"I'm sure it'll work out just fine."

The two of them start looking at the prices of everything. Joman is very afraid, and to his digestive problems are added erratic pains in the legs and back. He asks for one week to think things over before giving his answer.

When they meet again, he argues, "But what about business, Aristides? I mean what if we don't get any orders? I think we would have to be sure."

"Nonsense. But, if you want, we can take a look around."

"I think we'd have to be sure," he insists.

They start visiting potential customers and one of them, Jessé Primo, just ten years older than Joman, has a business in the Western part of town, buying and selling all sorts of raw precious gems in addition to polishing and finishing them for sale. He decides to give the two young men a break.

"I'll send you guys the same business I used to give to Timóteo."

That cheers Joman up. The businessman knows that they are good and trustworthy craftsmen. Jessé will guarantee them a regular flow of business and that should cover all expenses. Business from other sources will mean profits.

They rent a room in a very old building—downtown, as Aristides wanted—and set up a shop with a sawing machine common to both of them and separate equipment to assemble and polish stones. They will work as freelancers and expenses will be split in half. They may be able to receive orders separately or jointly.

The first order, a lot of small diamonds, comes from Jessé to the two of them. When they finish, they take the merchandise to Jessé to be paid.

"The service is very good, equal or even better than before," the businessman tells them.

They leave with the payment and with another small lot of stones. They are also far more confident now.

Joman holds Jessé in the highest regard: he is active, full of energy, uninhibited, and bold and daring in his business deals. He always treated Joman kindly when Timóteo sent him on some errand. So Joman has always enjoyed talking to him and will have more opportunities to do so now that they have a new business relationship. He and Aristides decide that he will be their contact with Jessé, while the outgoing Aristides will handle other clients.

When he takes or picks up some diamonds, he usually has to wait a while, as Jessé is busy with someone or overseeing his workers. On

these occasions, Joman pays close attention to him and feels an overwhelming desire to get rich, not only to have a better material life but, even more so, to be recognized and respected and to fulfill his old dream of finding himself a girlfriend.

### Diamond Buyer

One day something unexpected pops up. Jessé is talking to a prospector, who is bent on selling him a small lot of tiny diamonds, weighing no more than half a karat each.

"Your price is high and I have a lot of diamonds in inventory," Jessé argues.

"How much do you pay?" the prospector asks. He clearly wants to sell.

Jessé makes an offer, but it is turned down.

"Why don't you buy it?" Jessé suggests to Joman. "Buy, craft, polish and bring them here. I'll buy them from you."

The suggestion scares Joman. He does not know what to say and swings both arms. He wants to get rich, but he has never thought about purchasing diamonds.

"The diamonds are all good," argues the prospector, talking to Joman now. "You can check them."

Joman quietly examines them and feels the stirring of ambition inside him.

"Make an offer," Jessé encourages him.

Joman does just that, and it is a little higher than the one Jessé had made. The prospector complains, tries to bargain, but misinterprets Joman's shy silence as firmness. They close the deal.

"Give him your address," Jessé advises. "Next time he can look for you directly."

Jessé is being very friendly, a real buddy. Maybe he would not do this with somebody else. However, Joman also knows that he has a limited interest in diamonds, his core interest being in precious and semiprecious gems, which he buys by the kilogram and, at times, even by the ton. When the prospector leaves, Jessé takes advantage of the opportunity to give him a piece of advice. "If you hadn't bought them, I'd have bought a small stone so that he wouldn't go away empty-handed. In this business, you have to please people, even if with little things. If he comes to you and you buy some little thing from him, he will come to you again and again—and on one of these occasions you may strike pay dirt."

Back in the office, he tells Aristides what he has done.

"Messing around with prospecting is very dangerous," his friend warns him. "There's a lot of funny stuff going on."

"I didn't consult you because I had to decide right then and there, on the spot. I thought of running the risk all by myself, in case you didn't want in. But if you want to be a partner, fine. If you don't want to, that's fine too."

"Joman, I'd rather be on the safer side, working only with the crafting."

"Let me tell you something: I'm a bit scared. I offered more than Jessé, and he is nobody's fool."

After working the diamonds, he sells them to Jessé, earning a little profit. "Well, I say! Not bad, not bad at all!" his father would say, if he were there.

Through this prospector, others come to him, offering small diamonds. He always buys a bit, following Jessé's advice, so that he will hold on to these prospectors. He becomes so well known that some of these prospectors—usually simple folks with little purchasing power—know that coming to him is always worthwhile. They will sell something, even if it is only tiny, less-than-a-fourth-karat diamonds, which will be enough to cover their expenses in the state capital. Slowly, Joman is opening a new business front. Aristides, sensing a good safety margin and encouraged by Joman, starts doing the same.

Pleased with the results, he puts off going to college and does not even take the entrance exam. Bit by bit, he makes more money than he spends and starts saving. Every time he makes a larger purchase, even if he knows it is a good one, he becomes concerned and some aches and pains of a minor nature start bothering him—this pain here, that ache there, worse digestion.

## Cleide

When he returns from work one afternoon, he notices a young woman sitting at the porch in a house beside his own. He had noticed that a family had moved there a few days before.

"Good afternoon," he says off-the-cuff, as is the habit in small towns.

"Good afternoon," she replies.

This neighborly exchange takes place several other times, always in a natural fashion. He does not even notice that she is always handling some small objects. One time, she says good-afternoon to him and then startles him by asking, "You never stop, do you?" Joman recovers from being startled, but not from being speechless. He just swings

his arms. She smiles slightly and adds, "Why don't we talk a bit? You're Joman, right?" He nods. "Nice name...different..." Somewhat embarrassed, he shuffles his feet, puts his hands in his pockets, takes them out, and repeats the motion, in and out, in and out again. The girl says, "I understand that you work with diamonds, isn't that right?"

"That's right," he answers, still restless.

"It must be interesting. A lot skill is needed, isn't it?"

"It is, yes."

"Do you work at some company?"

"No...I mean, on my own," he stammers back.

"No kidding!?" Her tone is one of admiration. "I work as a hospital attendant. My name is Cleide."

"Very pleased, I mean, to meet you."

"Would you like to come in?"

"No, thanks. I'm, I mean, kind of in a hurry," he lies, swinging his arms and stuttering. Then he just says good-bye.

At home, he feels something he cannot quite put his finger on. *To say that she is very nice is the understatement of the year...and she wanted to go on! She invited me in!* He cannot believe what he is thinking. *She sort of reminds me of Vera*, he thins, recalling his pre-teenage flame. Some girls have attracted his interest in the six years that he has been in Belo Horizonte, and he thinks about them now. Yet his shyness always precluded any further contact. *I should have gone into her house, should have talked to her some more.* He kicks himself for his typical shy behavior.

Two afternoons later, Cleide is sitting on the same spot.

"Howdy, Joman, how was your work today?" she asks warmly, interrupting whatever she was doing with a couple of small objects.

"Well, well, very well indeed," he answers, stopping in his tracks. He is not stammering now.

"Do you know what I am doing?" He shakes his head. "I'm making a few toys. I like these little trinkets and gadgets. Come in here to see."

He hesitates, then opens the gate and goes to the porch, a couple of yards away.

"Sit down over here," she invites him, pointing to a chair next to hers. Joman plops down into it. "What do you think of these little earrings?" She shows a pair in her hand, placing in her lap two tools similar to small pliers and pieces of a very thin wire.

"They're very pretty..." He strives to be polite when, in fact, he has not seen them well.

"Here, hold them." She hands them to him, and, while he examines them, she adds, "They're almost ready. You must understand this, since you work with diamonds."

"No, I don't." He is more at ease now. "They are, I mean, two different things. I don't recognize these stones."

"They are leftovers from jewelers, amethysts of little color. The wire is silver."

"They are really beautiful."

"Do you see this bracelet?" She stretches her right arm. "I did it myself. It has four different stones."

He takes a look and is tempted to hold her arm as an excuse to examine it better, but he restrains himself. Since he cannot think straight, he just keeps repeating, "Beautiful, beautiful..."

"These diamond earrings must be very expensive, right?" she remarks, pulling her arm back and expanding the conversation.

"Ah, atrociously expensive. I have no idea about the price, but, I mean, I could tell you that they are very expensive."

"Don't you put them together, assembling them?"

"No, I mean, I mean, all I do is just cut and polish."

Cleide remarks again about his hobby and Joman for the first time attempts to take the initiative in the conversation, saying abruptly, "You weren't here yesterday," as if he were wondering about her intentions. Cleide smiles.

"It's because I work every other day. I was working yesterday." She smiles again, curves her head 45 degrees, thus looking at him from below, and adds, "It's so nice that you noticed."

Back at home, he feels satisfied. He was able to feel more at ease and has only one complaint: *I should have held her arm.*

They almost always meet in the afternoons when she is not working. One of these times they are talking in the living room and he is introduced to her parents and her sister. As he is about to leave, she interrupts him. "Wait a moment," she asks, getting up. "I got something for you. Let me get it," and she disappears behind a door.

*What kind of trinket did she make for me?* he wonders while waiting.

She comes back into the livingroom.

Utterly surprised, he can only manage to stutter, "A cake?"

"Yes, it's a chocolate-covered carrot cake." She is all smiles. "Take it," she goes on, getting closer to him. "Later, you bring the dish back and tell me whether you liked it."

In his shack, Joman eats a slice of the cake and finds it delicious. He cuts off another slice, then another and another. In no time he has eaten half the cake. *I can't recall having eaten anything so delicious.*

The cake is delicious, indeed, but he has another reason to appreciate it. People living alone usually feed on limited food for any number of reasons—they do not know how (or do not want) to prepare

diversified meals, or they have no motivation or no time. The fact is that they get used to basic, easy-to-prepare food. When they are offered something different—as Joman was offered this cake today—they really enjoy these delicacies.

Still sitting at the table, he looks around. *This hut is a mess...I just have to find some way to clean and fix it...but it's hard, with all these aches and pain, these liver and stomach troubles,* he rationalizes to himself. The silence catches his attention. *Nothing happens, no one talking, no door being slammed, nobody going in or coming out ... there seems to be no life in this shack,* he thinks, remembering all the commotion and liveliness in Cleide's house. *I wonder whether I need to get married. Who knows, maybe I'm not eating right, no fixed time for meals. Perhaps this is what is giving me all this health trouble?*

The two of them meet regularly and are soon dating. This is his first steady dating experience ever. *What could she possibly have seen in me?* he thinks frequently. Six months after meeting, they are engaged. Joman uses his savings to fix his shack. Cleide offers important suggestions, which he usually accepts, provides construction materials, and watches the work on her time off from the hospital. The place looks like quite a nice house, considering that it was basically adapted. They get married in 1960, a little over a year after their initial contact, and Joman is now twenty-five.

At this same time, there is another change in his life. Encouraged by him, Cleide leaves her job and now makes gadgets and trinkets for sale.

"I think you have a natural knack for this and there's the upside of staying at home," he tells her. Revealing that he has a dream, he says, "Who knows, maybe someday we could set up our own business."

"Do you think we could handle it, honey?"

They decide and vow that, in time, they will search for ways and means to make this dream come true.

Manoel dies in early 1961, struck down by a heart attack. Joman goes to Tumiritinga, arriving just in time for the burial, and finds it odd that he does not feel any loss. *It is as if I had lost an acquaintance,* he reflects, striving to look as if he were suffering. This feeling is not really that odd, inasmuch as he has broken his bonds with his family. He has not been back in the city for the past seven or eight years, not even for his sister Belma's wedding. His only contact with them was through letters or when one of them would go to Belo Horizonte. He stays for a few hours and heads back shortly after the burial.

Das Dores decides to sell what her husband left after the children

give up their share of the estate. She finds a buyer for the store, the bakery, and the house, and another buyer for the sawmill machinery, which has been idle for several years. Everything is sold at a low price. No buyer is found for the shed. The city is in the grip of a bad economic downturn; several business and residential buildings are closed. With the proceeds from the sales, das Dores buys a small farm near her parents', to be run by Peri. Belma lives in the neighboring state of Espírito Santo. No relative of Joman's remains in the city. Zezito, now married with children, goes back to farming the land.

### Prospecting for Diamonds

Business is good and his life with Cleide is even better, but now he has a new problem. Some people ask him to loan them money; he finds it hard to refuse, and they do not pay him back. These are small amounts of money, which the borrowers pretend to forget. Unwilling to collect, he becomes resentful but cannot manage to refuse the next request.

One day, a cousin of Cleide's comes to his office, pretending to encourage him. "Joman," he says, "big buddy, I'm buying a car but don't have all the money. Could you lend me some?"

He hesitates, swings his arms back and forth, and hesitates some more. The friendly approach, although patently false, pleases him; nonetheless, he reflects, *He hasn't paid what he owes me and is coming back for more.*

"It's a very good deal," the man keeps at it, "so good that I can't wait for some money I'm about to receive. As soon as I get it, I'll pay you."

Joman continues to hesitate, swinging his arms. *And to think that I ride a bus*, he wonders in amusement. Finally he speaks but what comes out of his mouth is different from what he would like to say, "Fine, I'll see what, I can do, I mean, I'll see if I can. How much is it, anyway?"

He asks for one day to gather the funds, and, upon hearing that the amount of money is more than he has in the bank, he asks Aristides for the rest.

"Joman, this guy is taking advantage of you," his friend warns him.

"I reckon he's gonna pay me back and you know how these things are, relatives, family, if you know what I mean."

Joman holds on to false hopes to rationalize his inability to refuse a request. In his imagination, a refusal is tantamount to a confrontation with unpredictable consequences—at best, he will lose a friendship he believes exists, and, at worst, he will lose control or perhaps even go crazy. These false hopes also make the wear and tear more manageable. It is not that these hopes make him less worried about the money he

may never get back, but that they enable him to avoid anger for having given in. Anger breeds resentment towards those who treat him like a fool. When he feels such resentment, the emotion brings with it a varied array of aches and pains—erratic discomforts (especially in the spine), digestive troubles, and lack of sleep. He thinks he is ill and starts seeing doctors, private physicians initially. Then he goes to the teaching hospital of the main Medical School in the state, which is free of charge because it is part of a public federal teaching institution.

Sometime later, an uncle of Cleide asks him for help, and the situation becomes more serious. Cleide's uncle is a small businessman who needs collateral for a bank loan, which he does not pay back. Joman, married for little over a year, has to sell his house to pay the bank. He feels so ill about the whole thing that he does not even enjoy the birth of his first son. He and his family now go to live in a rented house.

At the age of twenty-eight, with two children, he again lives in his own house—actually, more like a shack—and owns an old car, which stays put most of the time to save fuel. For a long time, no one hits him up for any loans. Then comes the final episode in which he risks high amounts of his own equity.

One day in 1964, a prospector named Epaminondas, from the Dores do Indaiá region, is sent to him by Jessé, and he has a rather curious way of starting to talk.

"If I don't tell you nothin', let me tell you this right off the bat." The easy-going voice always halts for a brief pause in the middle of the sentence. "I have two small diamonds here, first class stuff really." He removes from a small bamboo vial two roughly-one-karat stones. "Now, you just take a look at this white!"

Joman examines the two extra white stones, something relatively rare indeed. He buys them, paying more than a common run-of-the-mill diamond would cost.

Epaminondas switches to another topic. "If I don't tell you nothin', let me tell you this right off the bat. My work front is gonna yield lots of stones, but it so happens that I got a problem. The thing is that I need to change the engine and the pump," he says, meaning the mining equipment. "The engine has little compression, which uses the oil a lot, and, even if it were good, I'd have to change to a bigger one because the workin' load is gettin' to be too heavy. The pump is too small and already no good."

None of this impresses Joman. He knows that every prospector thinks he is about to make a fortune. But, as usual, he listens attentively and tries to show interest in the topic at hand.

"Have you found, I mean, another engine and another pump?"

"I can exchange it for a rebuilt engine, but the pump has to be new."

"Then it should be easy, a piece of cake."

"If I don't tell you nothin', let me tell you this right off the bat. You can make lots of money with me from all them stones, yes sir."

"What do you mean?"

"I ain't got no money for the engine and the pump, and nobody knows me here, so I get no credit to buy stuff." *Here it comes again, a request for a loan*, Joman was thinking. It was, indeed, but in a slightly different form. "You change the engine for me, buy the pump, and I'll give you a commission on the stones."

Surprised at such a proposal, he goes into his usual reaction of being quiet and swinging his arms. Curious, he then asks how much money they are talking about.

"Three hundred and twenty dollars," the prospector says. He uses a dollar figure because diamonds are quoted worldwide in U.S. currency. Diamond dealers and more enlightened prospectors use this currency even for other business. Furthermore, high inflation makes it difficult for Brazilians to use their own currency, known as the cruzeiro.

"Three hundred and twenty?!" This is far too much money for Joman.

"I'll give you twenty percent of the stones we find," the prospector proposes.

Joman is tempted to refuse, but, deep inside, he wants to run this risk. It is something new to be partner to a prospector, even though he does not know a lot about this activity. He thinks, wishes to agree, scratches his head, and consults Aristides, who is witnessing the conversation.

"What do you think?"

"My business is to cut and polish," his friend answers, which is a roundabout way of discouraging him.

The prospector keeps insisting and says to Joman, "You don't need to put all the money up front. The remainder can be in three installments, the pump and the other stuff in two."

"What kind of stuff?"

"Muzzle, hose, fittings and connections, the kind of stuff a larger pump needs."

Aristides, realizing that his friend is in a bind and that he will end up agreeing against his better judgment, decides to help out. "If you go into this business, it has to be thirty percent."

"Thirty percent is way too much," replies the prospector.

"But three hundred and twenty dollars is also way too much," remarks Aristides. "And, let's face it, it's a shot in the dark."

"Not so dark, it ain't," the prospector argues. To Joman he insists, "You just bought this merchandise, which shows how promising this site is. I'll take you there to see for yourself. It's a one-day bus trip."

"Whereabouts is this site?" Joman asks him.

"By the Rio Indaiá (Indaiá River)."

There follows a brief silence and Joman is strongly tempted to go into the business. He says, "Look, I figure I could go there with you and, I mean, if I like what I see, it's a deal between us, but it has to be for thirty percent, I mean, as Aristides said."

Conditioning his proposal on first seeing the place has nothing to do with his knowledge of the subject—indeed, he knows next to nothing about it. He just wants to make sure that the prospecting site actually exists.

"How about twenty five percent?" argues the prospector, in the typical Brazilian fashion of splitting the difference.

"Nah, stick to the thirty percent," Aristides jumps into the bargaining. "Look, it could well be that there ain't gonna be no money."

"But I have lots of expenses. Fuel, lube, component parts, food for the men, a percentage for them..."

"On the other hand, for a long time you won't have problems with parts and will remove a lot more gravel," argues Aristides. (The gravel he refers to is the stony material within which diamonds are found.)

"For thirty percent I reckon, I mean, I could go there and take a look," Joman stammers and then falls silent. The prospector interprets his shy silence as a sign of toughness.

Epaminondas gives up, and the next day he and Joman are on their way in Joman's old car. The site is near a district known as Cedro do Abaeté. At a dirt-poor ranch, by the river side, three idle men are waiting for the equipment.

"There's the dragging equipment over there," the prospector points to a barge tied to a riverbank tree, reminding Joman of the barge that used to cross the Rio Doce, except that this one here is smaller and the equipment floats on two steel-plate beds. "Let's go down there, so that you can see."

They go down to the river bank and then climb into the dragging barge.

*No way this thing could possibly be operational*, Joman thinks, as he sees parts scattered everywhere, rust all over the place, and just plain emptiness where the engine ought to be.

"Look! There's really good diamond here, don't you agree?" says the prospector, as enthusiastic as any dreamer, pointing towards the small river and its banks.

"I guess so," replies Joman. He is being sincere, although he has never seen a prospecting site. His judgment is based on the presence of other similar equipment operating in the area. "Let's see if we can get this thing to work," he states almost in defiance, and Epaminondas smiles broadly.

The two of them go back to Belo Horizonte.

Joman offers a share of the partnership to Aristides, but he refuses. In the shop, he signs a paper authorizing the exchange of engines and, at a store, he buys the pump and its necessary accessories.

He thinks about putting their partnership in writing, in a legal document, but since the prospector said nothing about it, he feels embarrassed to raise the subject. The prospector's attitude is not uncommon in this part of the world, where partners simply trust each other's word. Tricking a partner in diamond prospecting is nearly always tantamount to signing a death sentence.

Joman pays the installments and never hears from the prospector again. Months go by and now he thinks that he was taken for a ride once more. Maybe he ought to abandon his ambition of making tons of money, for making money must only be a matter of luck, and luck is something that surely eludes him. Perhaps he should lower his sights, control his expenditures, and be satisfied with little, like Aristides.

## Chapter 7 - The Hand Tremors

### Shaky Hands

On a Thursday afternoon, in early February 1965, Joman is attempting to quickly fix and saw a half-karat diamond, which is the beginning of the cut and polish procedure, when the stone falls from his hand.

"You got a loose, shaky hand today?" Aristides kids him, interrupting his own work.

"It sure looks that way."

Joman is embarrassed. He picks up the stone, makes sure it is undamaged, and goes back to work. He muses that this has not happened more than five times in the twelve years he has worked in this profession. Thus, what happened just now is a simple accident, period. He has always had a steady hand, but he now decides to be more careful and continues his work.

At the end of the week he recalls this episode because sometimes he feels that his hands are no longer as strong as they used to be. He also remembers that he has felt this same sensation lately, although it is something vague and undefined. Yet, early on Monday morning, another diamond drops from his hand.

"What's the matter, Joman?" Aristides asks incredulously. "Is there some problem?"

"It's odd."

Before bending over to pick up the stone, he raises his right hand and observes it. He thinks that he sees some slight shaking. He then lifts his left hand and looks at both hands; his initial impression seems to be confirmed. Aghast, he widens his eyes. His companion has interrupted what he was doing and now looks at him and asks, "Any problem?"

"Woe! Woe! Woe! I am afraid my hands are trembling...or is it just an impression? Take a look here."

Aristides comes closer and remarks, "It looks that way...but I ain't sure."

They remain silent, but they need not say anything. In their business, any trembling, no matter how slight, is a major threat. Steady hands are a must. For a diamond to become a gem, it has to be handled many times. The initial stage of setting and fixing the stone to be cut on a given plane demands the utmost precision. The other stages, face shaping and polishing, demand correct fixation in several positions. These precise and delicate maneuvers are impossible if one's hands are shaking. Moreover, if a diamond falls it may break, which is a major financial loss. Joman picks up the stone, sits on a stool, and continues to observe his hands very apprehensively.

"Maybe you should see a doctor. It won't cost anything," his friend suggests, slight concern coming through in his voice.

"Do you think I'm sick?" he manages to stammer. "Do you know the causes of hand tremors?"

Aristides quickly changes his tone of voice and tries to convey tranquility, using the same sentence he has used so many times before. "No, but I'll bet it's nothing and it'll soon go away." However, he knows that this new complaint is the worst thing that could possibly happen to his friend.

"I'm going for a walk," Joman decides, hoping that a stroll around the block and a cup of coffee at the corner cafeteria will bring things back to normal.

Out in the street, he tries to forget his hands, but it is no good. He keeps looking at them. Sometimes they shake; sometimes they do not. *My God, if I can't cut and polish, what am I going to do with my life?* He is alarmed, because it is the only thing he knows how to do. He decides to seek help urgently.

"I think I'll follow your advice," he says to his friend when he gets back. "I'm going to see a doctor."

"Leave the stone there and I'll do it for you." He is very friendly. "You just go home and rest. Maybe you'll get well before going to see the doctor."

It is not common for either of them to need help. They are both so experienced that seldom do they exchange ideas on how best to work a diamond. They just concentrate on their daily work, and, when they talk, it is not shop talk. They depend on each other for secondary things, such as taking down or conveying messages.

"No need for you to do it," says Joman, trying to disguise his concern. "After lunch I'll try to finish it, or tomorrow." He leaves some uncertainty hanging in the air.

On the bus, he continues to examine his hands. At times they shake; sometimes they do not. *I wonder if I will ever be able to be sure*, he thinks, feeling a bit sorry for himself. At home, he tells his wife all about it, but she is not as understanding as he had expected her to be.

"This will probably go away soon, my dear," she says matter-of-factly, even as she continues to work on her trinkets.

It might seem that Cleide is indifferent, but she is not. Joman has seen several doctors and has taken a lot of tests and exams; he is always complaining of some physical problem, but no problem has ever been found. So she no longer worries much when he complains of some ailment.

Her calm attitude somehow makes him less concerned. He comes to the table and helps her. He keeps one eye on the trinkets and the other on his hands. There is some trembling, despite the fact that this work is far less demanding than cutting and polishing diamonds. He stretches his arms and shows his hands to his wife.

"Take a look."

"What's the matter?"

"Don't you see them shaking?"

She takes a closer look and says, "No."

"But they are shaking. I think I'll see a doctor."

"Nonsense," she states calmly. "Play but don't fight!" she now tells their two sons, who are having some difference of opinion about their little cars and other toys.

Joman comes closer to the two boys, who are aged four and three.

"Daddy, Júnior won't let me play with the truck," complains Marcos, the oldest.

"He has already played too long, Daddy," replies his brother.

Joman tries to make them come to some agreement regarding the toy truck; then he just observes them. At times, he steals a look at his hands. His wife's tranquility rubs off on him, and he puts aside the idea of seeing a doctor.

On Tuesday, he goes back to working on the diamond, being more careful than usual, but his easy, natural skill is no longer there. He finds it hard to place the stone in the correct positions. He realizes that he may damage the stone if he insists.

"I think I'll need your help," he tells Aristides, embarrassed, as if he has done something wrong. "I'm supposed to deliver this gem at five PM today." He then adds, concern evident in every word he utters, "I'll try to see a doctor right now!"

"Just leave the stone there and I'll do it," his friend says, trying to put him at ease.

Joman is now convinced that he needs medical help. *All this shaking seems pretty serious trouble to me*, he thinks forebodingly, although there are no objective reasons for him to feel this way.

### The Physicians' Opinion

At the Clinic Hospital, a teaching hospital, he is already well known to the staff. They send him to a G.P., who looks at his historical data and asks him about the tremors. The G.P. asks about his personal and family background and does a physical exam, especially of the hands. Then he says, looking again at his papers, "As far as I can see, a colleague of mine wrote here that you are a hypochondriac. This shaking could be a manifestation of that."

"I didn't know that, doctor. What kind, I mean, of illness is that?"

"It's a psychic disturbance, which makes people feel physical things. Are you facing some kind of trouble now? Any problem at work, at home, any major concern of any kind at all?"

"No, doctor. I guess, I mean, I am having the normal problems of life. I mean, until this shaking of the hands appeared."

"Are you sure that no one in your family ever had a similar problem?"

"I reckon I couldn't be sure because I have some kin folks in Portugal, and, I mean, I don't know any of them."

The doctor notices that he seems scared, his face muscles contracted, so he thinks for a while and then says, "Tell you what, I'll prescribe a mild tranquilizer so you can sleep better, and then I'll send you to a gland specialist and another specialist of the nervous system—neurologist is the name—for expert evaluations. I'm sure one of them will discover the causes of the hand tremors."

That same day, he remembers his uncle Cândido, who has been dead now for ten years. He calls a cousin, Cândido's son, who works in a public office, and finds out that his uncle's illness started with tremors. The news scares him out of his wits.

He saw his uncle twice in Belo Horizonte, the first time when his uncle was under the weather and the second when the disease had already reached its terminal stage. Joman recalls vividly his second visit. His blind uncle, very thin and frail, was confined to bed, wailing and shouting all the time. He associates the two cases, and fears he will meet the same fate as his uncle. On the edge of despair, he spends a practically sleepless night, even after having taken the doctor-prescribed relaxant.

The next morning, he goes to the Neurology Hospital, a building

next to the Clinic Hospital. Doctor Claudiano V. Souto sees him, gathers the general information, and dwells on his uncle's history, which Joman does not know that much about. The doctor obtains details of a flu Joman had one week prior to the hand tremors and asks at last, "Any problems with your eyes, your vision?"

"My eyes?"

"Blurred vision, for instance."

"Blurred vision? Maybe, I mean, I ain't sure." He blinks his eyes many times, as if testing his vision. "I guess it's a bit blurred."

"Sometimes do you see double? Double vision, as if you were seeing two things?"

"Double? I never paid attention. Could be, though."

"Dormancy some place?"

"I couldn't be sure, but I reckon I've felt it."

Joman is so unsettled that he is not able to provide reliable information about himself. The doctor's questions make him feel that several symptoms are taking over his body.

The physician does the physical exam, tests several parts of his body, and finally tells him, "The neurological exam is practically normal." But before Joman sighs in relief, he adds, "Except, of course, for this tremor, which has lessened the strength in your hands."

"Do you, I mean, I mean, think that this is something serious, Doctor Claudiano?" He is really stammering and stuttering now.

"Too early to tell. I'm requesting some exams."

That same day, Joman sees the gland specialist, who also asks for a battery of lab exams.

Joman is now walking a Via Crucis: every day he has to wait in line in several sectors he is sent to. Some exams are done at the hospital, others at private medical services.

Cleide becomes unsettled by this problem. In the five years they have been married, no health problem has ever made Joman miss a whole day's work. Granted, once in a while, he would come home earlier than usual when feeling unwell. But this seems a more serious case, and she tries to follow all the facts and details closely.

Prior to finishing the exams the neurologist asked for, Joman goes back to the gland specialist. In the waiting room, he sweats it out, waiting for his turn. A man beside him removes some sweets from his pocket, unwraps one of them, whitish and rather transparent, and pops it into his mouth. He then stretches his hand towards Joman.

"Would you like one?"

Joman shakes his head.

"Why don't you have one? Sometimes it makes the shaking go away."

Whenever I have the shakes, I have a few of those, and I feel better."

That interests Joman.

"Do you also tremble? I, I mean, don't see it."

"It happens only when I get a hypoglycemic attack."

"What name was that?"

"Hypoglycemia," the man says slowly, in order to be better understood. "It means little sugar in the blood. That isn't your case, is it?"

Joman shrugs his shoulders and remarks, "Who knows? What's the name, I mean, of that problem again?" The man repeats it. "This doctor here prescribed those sweets, did he?"

"No, I was taught it. I came here because I was told that this doctor has a good diet in which there is no need for sweets."

When his turn comes, Joman is hopeful. *Hypoglycemia, hypoglycemia*, he mentally repeats, so he won not forget it. *At last, a little light at the end of the tunnel.*

The doctor puts on his glasses and examines the papers. Joman eyes him intently. *I hope it's Hypoglycemia. Imagine that, to chew on some sweets and, bingo, all is solved! Or a diet, just a little tiny diet!* he thinks with mingled feelings of concern and hope.

Raising his head, the doctor takes off his glasses, rubs his hair from front to back, smiles at Joman, and says, "Congratulations! You have no gland problem."

Joman lowers his head, raises it again, and seems disappointed. "Not even, I mean, a little bit of hypoglycemia doctor?"

"Nope. Your glucose is about as normal as it could ever be." The doctor smiles again.

Joman feigns happiness at the news to please the doctor. It's par for the course for him to make sure that people are pleased. But behind his pretense lurks the dark cloud of his uncle's illness.

Cleide notices that after this visit to the doctor, Joman sleeps a very restless sleep, despite the tranquilizer he takes. She also notices that he looks worried all the time.

When he enters the neurologist's office, after undergoing all the exams required, his legs feel weak and he is short of breath. He is very afraid about the results of the exams. Doctor Claudiano looks at the papers, the X-rays, and the graphics and asks him some questions. "Any change in the eyes, the vision?"

"No, I don't think so, I mean, I think it's the same."

"What about the strength in your hands, arms, and legs? Any change?"

"Strength? Ah, yes...I reckon it's about the same, I mean, maybe a little less..." he answers, no conviction in his voice.

The doctor takes him to a table and tests the strength in his legs and arms. Joman offers less resistance than usual, not because he wants to, but because he thinks that his muscles are compromised. For the same reason, he does not shake hands as strongly as he could when the doctor asks him to. They go back to their chairs.

"The exams I asked for are normal, but, then again, I already expected that," the doctor tells him. "One of them enlightens me about some features of the tremor, but, in isolation, it helps little in the diagnosis. However, there is this new thing about the strength."

Joman gathers his energy and asks, "Could it be...could it be that I have some illness, I mean, a serious illness, doctor?"

"I couldn't say that, at least for now. By itself, a tremor doesn't mean much. It could remain just that for the rest of one's life, an idiopathic tremor, meaning of unknown origin. It might even disappear in time. But when we put together other signs and symptoms, such as less strength, vision problems...that makes me worried about your case."

Nothing frightens a patient more than to hear a doctor say that he is worried. Joman crumbles inside; he cannot manage to speak and feels that he is going to faint. For perhaps a couple of minutes, he sees the doctor speaking as if in slow motion and hears scattered words rather than sentences.

"...the flu...encephalitis...your uncle...sclerosis..." They are like loose words being imprinted on his mind.

As he regains some balance, he asks, stammering, "What's, what's that disease again, doctor?"

"Suspicion of idiopathic tremor. Although it is a very remote possibility, it could be the initial stage of multiple sclerosis. Only time can allow for a more definite diagnosis."

"Are these illnesses difficult to cure?"

"Unfortunately, there is no current treatment for idiopathic tremor. There is no specific treatment for multiple sclerosis, but some medication and much care can mean a little improvement. I'll write a prescription, and you will need to come back here regularly so that eventually I may be able to have a diagnosis."

Joman gathers his remaining forces and asks a question, fearing the answer. "This other disease, doctor, I mean, this sclerosis?" The physician nods his head. "Can someone survive long with it?"

"A patient could survive years: twenty, thirty, fifty years..."

"Are you able, I mean, to tell whether a patient would survive less time than that?"

"Perhaps, but let's not think about the worst. Let's give time a chance."

But for someone like Joman, it is not easy to think about worse things.

"Doctor, could it be that this illness is a family thing, I mean, that it could be passed on within a family?"

"You mean, is it hereditary?"

Joman nods.

"Some tremors can be hereditary, but there is no evidence that this applies to multiple sclerosis."

While he waits for the prescription, he does all he can to avoid tail spinning into despair. *What will become of me? Even a simple tremor will prevent me from working. If it's the other disease... he dares not finish this thought.*

His heart nearly leaping out of his chest and driven by a feeling of urgency to know more about his own case, he goes straight to the place where his cousin, his late uncle's son, works.

"About my Uncle Cândido," he starts, "do you, I mean, remember how long his illness lasted before he died?"

"Less than two years," replies his cousin.

Joman nearly shakes in his boots.

"Do you know what the disease was?"

"The doctor said something called multiple sclerosis."

Joman has the chills; his head is suddenly empty; his mouth is dry, and he is short of breath. Fear just overwhelms him.

"What is it, Joman?" asks his cousin, frightened by how he looks.

"Nothing...Bye now, thank you," he stammers, his voice barely audible.

He leaves quickly. *If he lived less than two years, I won't survive even one,* he keeps on thinking. He feels so weak he cannot cross the street and just sits on the sidewalk curb, staring at the asphalt, an empty, blank look on his face. He finds it hard to breathe. Astonished and aghast, he no longer feels the world around him; he does not feel anymore the warmth of the sunshine bathing his skin. People walk all around him, but it cannot be life that is driving them on. Cars do not seem to be going anywhere. Nothing inside or out, no heat, no life, no fate—all a slow blur. He remains there for a few minutes.

Gathering his strength at last, he gets up and walks with uncertain steps. On the bus, he is barely aware of the sounds and colors and sights all around him. "End of the line!" the bus driver shouts at him. He did not get out where he should have; he was just taken along for a ride—again, par for the course, the story of his life.

At home, he goes straight to his room and breaks down crying on his wife's shoulder. He tries to stop the tears, to tell her what happened.

Wholly discouraged, he shows her the papers the doctor has given him. "Look, take a look at how much medication I'm prescribed, the diet, how I have to rest so much..."

"Honey, but didn't he say it could be just the tremor?"

"He said there is no treatment for it and then prescribed all these things, Cleide! I can put two and two together. I'm no fool."

Cleide examines the papers. Her husband is right, at least partly right. It is a long list of prescriptions. Worried, she goes out and buys the medicine at once. Coming back, she attempts to soften his despair.

"We stick with God, darling. God is great."

She goes to see Doctor Claudiano without telling Joman. The doctor is very helpful, answers all her questions, and describes the evolution of the two scenarios.

"Do you think it is multiple sclerosis?"

"As I said, this is the less likely hypothesis. However, in its earlier stages, it could show signs and symptoms so small and so variable as to make a diagnosis difficult. So, often the doctor treats it as if it were another disease. The opposite could also happen: indications can point to sclerosis but actually result in is some other problem. I'll keep a keen eye on how his body reacts to the prescription." He pauses briefly and then adds, "And I have replaced the tranquilizer with a sleeping pill so that he can sleep better."

"Joman says that his uncle's disease lasted less than two years and that he went crazy when he died."

"Some cases can indeed evolve very rapidly, in a matter of only a few months. As to insanity, it might occur in a small percentage of cases, at the terminal stage."

Cleide goes back home deeply depressed. She knows she faces a serious problem. Suddenly, the future of her family is uncertain at best. However, she says nothing at all about this to her husband.

## A Radical Decision

Joman spends most of his time at home, just walking aimlessly around. Gradually, a silent anger at God sets in. *Is this the reward the Lord gives me for having always walked the straight and narrow? Where is His justice?* he thinks with greater frequency.

As time moves on, the shaking becomes more evident, especially in his arms and hands. It is hard even to pick up a pen, and this embarrasses him, the more so if there are people around.

On March 18, he is having breakfast and has to hold the coffee cup with both hands, so that the liquid will not spill. For him, this means

the disease has evolved quickly, confirming his suspicion that he has less than a year to live. *For someone down on his luck like me, even a disease moves fast*, he says to himself, deeply angry.

The day is an intensive mental torture as he feels alternately anguish, anger, and sadness. The image of his uncle's suffering never leaves his mind. In his mental whirlwind, he sees a way to avoid what his uncle went through. In bed at night, he decides to end his life when the disease gets worse.

Slowly he gets up, so as not to wake up Cleide, and, in the living room, he begins to write in the same notebook he uses for work notes. Under the title *A Diary of Despair*, he jots down what he has decided to do. Then, upon reading what he has just written, he realizes that he will use his own death as a means of revenge; through it, he will strike at God, at the world, and at his late father. He imagines a noisy death, quite different from the shy timidity of his existence.

He goes back to writing.

*My sole concern is for Cleide and the boys. I don't want them to suffer, but if I allow this disease to finish me off, it will be much worse.* Thinking of his wife and sons makes him cry, and he dries the tears with the sleeve of his old pajamas and then reflects some more before signing his name, *Joman de Oliveira O.* He closes the notebook, puts it away where no one will find it, and goes back to bed.

However, he is restless with his decision. He assesses and reassesses the consequences of his future act, especially for his wife and boys, but he concludes that suicide will be the lesser evil. The sleeping pill is beginning to take hold; he yawns from time to time, but he is not able to fall asleep.

Another concern suddenly jolts him. *What if someone finds what I wrote? It's well hidden, but one never knows.* Nobody but nobody can know about his plans, yet he admits that, if he is careless, his wife could discover what he wrote. *On second thought, it is foolish to write a diary. It doesn't do any good, doesn't help any.* He gets up with the same care as before, so as not to wake his wife. He grabs the notebook, tears out the page, rips it into many pieces, and throws them in the wastepaper basket. He goes back to bed and rides out a sleepless night.

Thirty days after having been to the neurologist's office, he is back, this time taking Cleide along.

"I think, I mean, I'm getting worse," he wails to the doctor.

"What do you feel is different?"

He reports on the difficulties of holding a coffee cup or—for that matter—of drinking water or any other liquid if the container is too full. He speaks in a confusing fashion about vision and strength. At the

end, he describes his conversation with his cousin about his uncle Cândido's illness.

The doctor does another neurological exam and says to him, "As I see it, the situation has not gotten any worse. The only thing is that the tremor has become more constant."

"Isn't there any new medication?" Cleide inquires.

"No, unfortunately there isn't."

"I want nothing from life, doctor, except to live. I would be so happy for the rest of my life if I could be cured."

He is being utterly sincere. All the problems and hurdles, the troubles and difficulties he has faced in life, whatever harm has come his way, it all seems so insignificant now. Nothing is more precious to him than life, and, if he can be cured, he will be the happiest person in the world. Yet he is not optimistic when he makes this remark because he believes that his fate has already been sealed.

"But you will get well, dear," remarks Cleide. "I have faith in God."

"I can't accept having to go now." He uses the verb 'go' instead of 'die'. "I have so many things to do in life."

"What kind of things?" The doctor is now curious.

He reflects and says, "I don't know exactly, but I do have things to do."

He continues following the prescription, but the disease does not recede. His very precarious mood alternates between anger and sadness. *Only a miracle can save me, only a miracle*, he constantly thinks. He walks around aimlessly in the house or in the backyard, or just stays in bed for the longest of time.

## Desperate Attempts

Cleide never gives up searching for a solution. She finds out about a woman who, though not a physician, offers homeopathic treatment, and she tells her husband about this. "Who knows, maybe a miracle can happen with this woman?" she hopefully suggests.

They go to see the lady, who is direct and to the point. "Stop all this medication," she says, "and take some pills I'll prescribe."

"Do you, I mean, think, I mean, I can be cured?"

"Cured!" she replies with conviction. "Within one week you'll be much better."

Joman hangs on to this hope, puts aside the medication prescribed by the neurologist, and takes the pills recommended by the lady, but nothing changes after one week. Disappointed and upset, he stops taking the pills and now takes no medication whatsoever.

Without the sleeping pill, he practically gets no sleep and has frequent nightmares, one of which occurs almost every night and really impresses him. Out in some open field, he is being chased by a whole bunch of people. He is not sure where they came from, and he runs, in panic, without looking back, but he is sure that they are catching up to him. This scene disappears and now he is entering a huge, roofless, abandoned construction site, and the same chase goes on. He goes through rooms and a corridor, then more rooms and another corridor, on and on, until coming to a room with very high walls and no way out. A very high wooden ladder rests against a wall. He starts climbing it quickly and sees only open space on top. Whatever he will find at the end cannot be worse than falling in the hands of those chasing him. As he is climbing the final steps on the ladder, his strength decreases abruptly and his steps slow down. Try as he may, he cannot move fast. The ladder is being tugged and pulled, and he panics. He starts falling; it is horrifying, but before hitting the ground he wakes up, scared out of his wits.

As he realizes it is just a nightmare, the panic subsides, but he still vividly feels that his pursuers are hard at his heels.

Cleide does not give up and decides to use their religious faith.

"Dear, why don't we ask Saint Jude Thaddeus for grace?" she suggests to him one day.

Despite his father's devoutness, he himself has never been much involved with religion. In the last few days, his belief in God, never very deep to begin with, practically disappears.

"Ah, Cleide, that's nonsense," he answers in discouragement. "If even God has abandoned me, how can a simple saint cure me?"

"Oh there, Joman, don't you say that about God." She is not rebuking him but pleading with him. "St. Jude Thaddeus is a strong saint for impossible causes, didn't you know that?"

"I've heard something about it," he says, but he is still uninterested.

"Then, dear, let's go there, let's give it a try."

He remains undecided. *Maybe this could be it. Since I have no faith, God does not help me. After a brief pause, he thinks, It could be...I wonder...with so many things to take care of, perhaps He leaves some things up to the saints...and the saints are less demanding.*

Cleide interrupts his thoughts, saying, "Let's go, dear, let's try it!"

"Fine, let's go." He seems a bit more encouraged now.

In the church, bearing the saint's name, he lights a candle in the appropriate place and goes to the front of the image, while Cleide sits

in one of the pews. He kneels down, and, silently starts the prayer to Saint Jude, using the prayer given him by his wife, striving to be as fervent as his father was.

*Saint Jude, glorious Apostle, faithful servant and friend of Jesus, thou who bear the same name as the traitor and was thus long forgotten by many, the Church honors thee and thou art universally invoked as the patron of hopeless causes, of business with no remedy. Pray for me...* As he finishes reading, he is not satisfied with the prayer, so he now continues in his own words, *If thou cure me, if I get well, I shall come back here to thy church every month to thank thee. I shall light candles and give money to the church. If I am healed, I shall attend Mass every week and pray every day. If I am healed—* now he comes to the greatest promise—*I promise that every year, on thy feast day, I shall walk on my knees the last block to get here.*

He leaves the church convinced that he will receive this grace. He has never prayed before with so much devout conviction. He takes a long look at the image of the saint on a card. Young St. Jude has smooth, black hair and a long beard, and his wide open eyes seem to be saying to him, *I have heard your request.*

The first thing he does as he wakes up the next morning is to examine his hands. He nudges his sleeping wife.

"Cleide, Cleide, my hands!" he nearly shouts.

Still sleepy, she is jolted by the sight of the two hands right in front of her and asks, "What happened? What's going on?"

"They are still shaking, same as before. I was hoping that St. Jude of Thaddeus..."

"Dearest," she interrupts him, "grace does not come so quickly. We just have to bear it and wait."

But Joman's time is short. In less than one week, noticing no improvement, he goes out to meet a customer he has not seen in a long time and who once told stories of a man who cured many people. He had given it no importance at the time, being wary of quacks. But now, neither ethics nor religious scruples can hold him back. His sinking ship will moor in any port. He wants to be healed, no matter where the cure may come from.

"He works wonders, real miracles," the customer confirms when they meet. "He's cured many hopeless people, and he charges nothing, absolutely nothing!"

At home, he talks this over with his wife.

"You know that I will follow you anywhere. Let's try, sure, let's give it a shot!" She is highly encouraging.

As they get to the address, a small shed in the outskirts of the city,

a man gives them directions where to go.

"It's right over there." He points to a single line of some twenty persons.

"How much is it?" Cleide asks, just to be sure.

"Nothing," replies the man.

They follow his instructions and soon see that the healer, a middle-aged man, sitting at a small table. Consultations are swift and people are coming all the time into the fast-moving line. When Joman's turn comes, the healer looks up at him and asks, "What do you feel?"

"My, my hands shake," he says, stretching his arms.

The healer looks at them quickly, asks his name, and writes on a piece of paper. "Here is your prescription," he says.

A woman takes him by the arm to a second woman, who takes him and his wife to an adjoining room, resembling a pharmacy. "This is the only place you find this medication," she says and goes out.

"Let me see the prescription," asks a man on the other side of the counter. He reads quickly and says, "This will cost six thousand cruzeiros." He then waits for the payment.

Upon receiving the money, he goes inside through a door, and, in less than two minutes, is back with a bottle containing a liquid as transparent as water.

"The label tells you how to take it," he explains.

Joman and Cleide leave with the bottle. It all transpires so quickly that only now can they stop and take stock of their situation. Joman's name is on the label, in bad handwriting, followed by this typewritten notice: "Take one tablespoon every two hours, from 7 AM to 9 PM."

Back home, Joman reflects, *He never even took a good look, and then they charged for the medicine...ah, never mind.* He dismisses his suspicions, for he might as well hang on to any hope instead of delving deeply into the subject. *Curing me is all that matters.*

Four days later, he wakes up with a strange feeling in his arms. His wife is already up, so he runs after her.

"Cleide, Cleide, I reckon I'm going!" he says in alarm.

She is equally alarmed. "What is it, sweetheart?"

"It's neither pain nor dormancy, just something weird inside my arms, apparently in the nerves." He begs in desperation, "Saint Jude, save me!"

The odd sensation seems to behave like the tremor. Convinced that the illness is now more serious, he wails, "I bet I got worse because of that quack's medication. Why did I ever have to go there?"

He angrily throws the bottle, with the remaining liquid, into the backyard, smashing it to bits. He then goes back to bed, curling into a

fetal position. There is nothing else he can do.

In the following days, he alternates between total silence, when he is alone with his own thoughts, and excessive talking. In these latter times, he speaks even to himself: "There is no way I can accept this godforsaken disease!"; "There ain't no God, it's just some invention"; "What's my crime? What have I done?"; "I've always got the shaft in life, even to this day, so it's about time I learn"; or "What's the point of being good? Folks always take advantage of me." And so it goes, on and on.

### Turning Life Upside Down

In the disease's third month, he is sitting in the living room one morning, thinking long and hard, when suddenly memories jump out of his past in rapid-fire sequence, a whirlwind of images and sounds, starting with the nicknames he hated so fiercely:

*"Hey, Cross!"*

*"Hey, Cross yellow-belly ôpa ôba!"*

*"Cross Little ôpa!..."*

*"Your birth certificate is wrong."*

*"He's scared shitless and gonna hightail his ass home!"*

*"Don't you tell anyone, you hear?! If you do, I'll beat you."*

*"If you're a man, cross this line, Cross!"*

*"He's hightailing it out of here!"*

*"Your dad sure don't cross any darn cattle-preventing road bridge."*

*"Joman, go and get your father's opa cape from the wardrobe!"*

*"Belma, go and wash your father's opa!"*

*"Drink this tea or you get the crap beaten out of you!"*

*"Lend me some money."*

*"Give it to me."*

*"You're all right."*

*"It's hard to find a nice guy like you."*

Images and sounds are turmoil in his mind and his rebellion grows, reaching a level so high that, all of a sudden, his mind goes silent. Then it refocuses.

*I'm really gone now, there's no way back—here it comes again—too late for that, I've taken crap all my life, all sorts of shit from people, never striking back. Lots of things I did that I sure didn't want to. Folks just pressed and cornered me from every which way, scaring me shitless. Why don't I just send it all to hell and live now the life I never have, even if for just a few months?* At long last, his mind finally made up, he screams at the top of his lungs, "Everything, and everybody to boot, can all go to hell and kiss my ass!"

Cleide hears him from the kitchen and comes charging into the room. She had never heard him shout, let alone use foul language. She now remembers what the neurologist said about sclerosis: a few patients go crazy at the end of the disease. Aghast and out of breath, she asks, "What happened, Joman?"

He screams again, "That's right, you heard me! Everything, and everybody to boot, can all go to hell and kiss my ass!"

Cleide is rooted to the floor, puzzled, in pain and in shock. Her dear Joman is about to cross the threshold into crazy land. Convinced that he does indeed have multiple sclerosis, she sits by him, holds his hands, and starts to say soothing things, which actually have nothing to do with what is taking place.

He pays no attention to what his wife is saying but continues to think. Ever so slowly, his countenance changes from anger to contentment. *To do all I wanted to do and never did...to fight...curse...love...while this illness allows it. Then and only then will I shoot myself and fade happily into the everlasting sunset.* He jerks himself away from his wife, leaps up in the air, stands, and shouts, "Freedom! I'm gonna be free! Freeeee!" Now he whispers, walking back and forth, in front of a puzzled and astonished Cleide, "Freeeee, freeeee, freeeee, freeeee, great goodness gracious, free at last."

He goes back to his musing. *That's it! That's it! That's what I gotta do...I can't go out like a prisoner, no way! My whole life they've been after me, and I've been trying to escape this whole time. Ah!...the nightmare...they yanked that ladder from under me...but it will be different from now on...no more escaping, no more running away, no more hightailing. I'll just face them head on.* He decides to do a complete about face in his life.

Joman has just discovered why he has not accepted death, why he told the doctor that he still has so many things to do. He has all this time been longing to be free from the fear that has burdened him since childhood.

He can also see the way now, a completely different way from the path he has trekked so far. *In the few months I have left, I have to live and relive as much as possible what I could not live before! I'll get even with those who took advantage of my weaknesses. I'll get back at those who harmed me and made me suffer loss. I'll challenge those who humiliated me, let loose my pent-up desires, curse whenever I want to, and declare my love.* He thinks about all this and a whole lot more, walking back and forth, a wide smile on his face. He is willing to become another man altogether, the man he should have always been.

"Take it easy, Joman, dear, just calm down," Cleide begs him, visibly concerned.

All of a sudden, he stops to walk, meditates, and, in a few seconds, has a plan all worked out. *I'm going back to Tumiritinga and relive my life as much as I can, but in a different way. What the heck, I have nothing to lose. The worst thing that could happen is somebody might kill me, but that would only anticipate my demise by a couple of months.* He looks outside through the window, as if he were seeing something far in the distance, and muses, *How much have I still to do in this life.* He then decides, *I'll follow an order, starting with my childhood.*

"In fifteen days I'm going to Tumiritinga," he announces in a firm voice, which gives him a certain amount of pleasure.

Amazed at his decision and his way of talking, Cleide retorts, "Tumiritinga? What you need to do is stay here and take care of your health."

"I have no health. I'm a body about to rot and decay," he says, continuing to speak firmly. *I'm beginning to feel free and independent,* he thinks as he considers how he is talking to his wife now.

Without going into details, he tells her that he intends to spend most of the time he has left, if not all of it, in his home town.

"I'm going with you."

"No!" he shouts imperatively.

This short answer has a special meaning. He has been so afraid of people, so bent on pleasing them—or at least not displeasing them—so accustomed to never denying them anything, that he now finds himself yelling a sonorous, "No!" Cleide, so used to his docile and cordial behavior, can only see this reaction as one more sign that he is really going crazy.

"I'm going, going to take care of you, dear," she insists, almost pleading.

"No!"

Evidently, Cleide doesn't fit into his plan. How can he approach some women with her at his side? What if she finds out about his nicknames and the coward he was when facing provocation? Moreover, he is going to live a life of adventure, run risks, reap failures and glories, and feel sadness and joy; he is not—as she thinks—going away to passively wait for death as elephants do when their time comes.

"The children, Joman; we'll take them along and remain together," she continues, almost weeping now, referring to their two sons.

He does not answer and moves away from her. If she is not part of his plan, the children are even less so. Sitting under the shade of a backyard tree, he examines another facet of his predicament. *Over these past couple of months, I have barely given Cleide and the boys a thought. What am I going to leave them? This shack and that's about it. But it could have*

*been different, if people had acted honestly with me and paid back the money I loaned them.* He blames others for his economic and financial woes. He believes they were responsible for his losses, and he imagines himself and his family as victims.

A concerned Cleide goes back to the neurologist and attempts to abort her husband's plan.

"Joman is just not thinking straight, doctor," she starts, in a private conversation with the physician. "He said he's going to Tumiritinga, his home town. He sure looks different, looks happy, but kind of like he's going crazy, know what I mean? Can you imagine that, going back to a hick town just now, when he needs treatment the most? Oh, and he's adamant about going alone. Couldn't you put him in some institution so that he'll calm down?"

"No, madam. At this stage, that is not possible."

"But what about him being crazy? You said yourself, doctor, that it could mean he's getting worse, didn't you?"

The doctor nods.

"I'm very scared about what might happen."

"I think it's a bit too early for dementia to set in, but if he's showing these signs, then we need the help of a psychiatrist."

Joman will not even hear of a psychiatrist, and Cleide now has run out of alternatives. Her sole remaining hope is that, in case of any trouble, her mother-in-law and brother-in-law, who live on the farm, will be of assistance.

## Back to the Past

In the next few days, Joman acts as if he is saying farewell to life. He disposes his diamond-business equipment and settles his office agreement with Aristides. He also sells his car. One morning, he leaves home decisively, walking as if with springs under his feet, and meets some debtors to whom he either loaned money or for whom he paid debts as their guarantor. *I have to stop being good and talking kindly to people, beating around the bush, as if I'm apologizing just for talking to them. What's the matter with me?* He is kicking himself now. He has made up his mind to be firm with his debtors, as he was with his wife.

As he meets the first debtor, he really begins to talk tough.

"I need that money!" he nearly shouts, and immediately he is so afraid that his heart beats faster. His arms are swinging; he is embarrassed and lowers his voice. "What I mean is that I need the money." His stuttering is painful. "Please, don't misunderstand me, but perhaps you could get me part of the money, I mean, you remember, the money

for the car which I loaned to you?"

"Sorry, Joman, big buddy, but can't you wait just a while longer?"

"But I need it, I'm sick." He is still stammering.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!" But it is fake pity in the voice. "They told me, but I had no idea it was something serious. I'll see if I can get part of the money... next month, ok?"

Joman is fuming after this meeting, upset that he did not get the money back, that he was afraid, and that he mentioned his illness. But he learns a lesson: *It's not enough to say that I'm going to be free.* Making the heroic decision to be free is not sufficient to bring about liberation. It is one thing to speak freely with a loved one, like his wife, or a good friend like Aristides. But it is a very different talking and dealing with outsiders. Going back to Tumiritinga seems even more important now because, in reliving the facts that oppressed him, maybe he will be able to rid himself of fear. Perhaps he will find freedom at last. *I want to taste it before I go for good.*

He goes after the other debtors and has the same difficulty in collecting from them; that reinforces his need to return to his past.

He still has to talk to the diamond prospector, the one with whom he invested \$320 U.S. dollars to form a partnership. In the Brazilian currency, that is now tantamount to nearly six-hundred thousand cruzeiros. After so many months of no news, he now has a slight hope that some stone was found and that he will receive money equivalent to his percentage in the partnership. He gets on a bus heading for the prospecting site and meets the prospector on the ranch. After the greetings, he says, stammering and stuttering, "Epaminondas, I need money. You haven't found anything? I mean, is it really bad?"

"If I don't tell you nothin', let me tell you this right off the bat. It was so little that it was not worth a trip to Belo Horizonte. But don't worry 'cause your part is written down here, so that I can pay you whenever I can," he shows him a notebook. "Then it started rainin', the river flooded and everybody had to quit workin'. We just started again recently. I'm workin' with borrowed money."

"I'm in a bind, in a real tight spot, I had to stop working," he stammers.

"Why?"

"My hands suddenly started shaking."

The prospector quickly looks at Joman's hands, and his facial expression reveals that he is sympathetic.

"As soon as I can, I'll settle with you. I'm very encouraged by all this gravel here. Take a look." He picks up a mix of small stones and mud, piled up on the river bank. "This is good gravel from the old river bed."

Joman is no expert, so some hope hangs in the air, but he goes back to Belo Horizonte feeling down in the dumps. *I no longer believe there are any diamonds there. I can plain forget it and kiss it goodbye. There might be some tiny little stuff at best.* He is now convinced that he will have to travel on very little money.

His final action is to purchase a gun. Through contacts he learns that he can buy one at a bargain price from the police. He is given the name and phone number of a detective. The police detective answers his call and, having identified the man, Joman stutters, "The thing is that I'd like, I mean, to buy a 38, I mean..."

The policeman interrupts him roughly. "What kind of talk is that? Do you know whom you're talkin' to?"

"I..."

He is interrupted again. "What's your name and address?"

Joman provides them, convinced that again he has been the butt of some practical joke. "You'll have to come here to give some explanations."

"Me? Go there?"

"That's right." The man's voice is even tougher now. "You'll be called within one hour."

In less than one hour, a police car and two men are in front of his shack, one man staying in the car and the other coming to knock at his door. A worried Cleide comes to the door and calls her husband.

"Let's talk in the car," says the policemen authoritatively.

Scared, Joman realizes he has really gotten into trouble. Sitting in the back seat, he hears: "What do you do for a living?"

"I cut and polish diamonds," he replies, fearful and stuttering.

"Who told you to look for me?"

He continues to stutter. "This guy named Antônio Tremembé, who was referred to me."

"Ah, Antônio..." Now the cop's voice switches to a friendly tone. "We're in a revolution and have to be careful whom we negotiate and do business with." He was referring to the dictatorship, which started out as a bloodless coup on March 31, 1964, when the military took over the government. "You got any brand in mind?"

"Brand?"

"Yeah, the gun brand."

Now Joman gets it: the tough talking on the phone was just in case anybody might have been listening. He now relaxes.

"No...as long as it's a good gun, I mean, I mean, which won't misfire or, I mean, anything like that."

The cop opens the glove compartment and removes a revolver. "I

have this one here. See if you like it."

Joman examines it, although he is no gun expert. It is the first time he has actually held one. He fiddles around a little bit, here and there, and the cop interrupts him.

"Take it easy, there's no need to shake. I see you're no expert," and he stretches his hand, reaching for the weapon.

The policeman deftly loosens the drum, turns it over, shows how the numbers have been scratched out, and says that the gun is very good. They settle on the price.

"Will you need bullets?"

"Ah, yes, I, I mean, forgot that I do."

"How many?"

"One."

"One?!" The cop looks puzzled. He and the other policemen look at each other.

"I mean, two...that's right, two, I mean, in case the first one misfires."

The detective presses his lips and shakes his head, as if he does not understand what is going on. He looks again at his colleague and then back at Joman, insisting, "Are you sure you need only two?"

Joman nods.

They settle on the price and Joman goes into the house to get the money.

A worried Cleide asks him, "What happened?"

He gives her the answer he had thought of on the way from the car to the house: "Nothing. Things of the revolution. They want to know the price of diamonds."

In the bedroom he gets his briefcase and goes back to the car. The payment is made. The gun and two bullets are placed in the briefcase. He and the cops go their separate ways.

Despite the fact that the amount of money spent was small, he has a heavy conscience, as he thinks about the financial and economic situation his wife will be left in. In addition to the shack, a small balance in a savings account and perhaps some eventual payback of debts outstanding, she will have to make do with trinkets and gadgets to raise their two sons. He will leave her no pension because he does not contribute to the Social Welfare system. So, he takes on the trip only the bare minimum amount he will need to survive for a few months.

After promising his wife to be in touch regularly, Joman finally boards the train to Tumiritinga. As he sees Belo Horizonte receding in the background, sharp doubts and conflicts overwhelm him. *What am I*

doing? What will happen? Am I doing the right thing? Shouldn't I stay with Cleide and the children? This seems so crazy. His body goes hard and he begins to rub his hands quite briskly.

Very soon his mouth is dry and he is breathing faster. *Maybe it's better if I get off at the first train station and go back.* His tension increases. *But I have to go on...or do I indeed? What difference is this trip going to make? Leaving my family just like that, for the sake of being free? What is freedom, anyway? To live without fear? What good is freedom, if you're gone? But I want to taste it, I deserve it. I've never done anything for myself.* These thoughts bring him some peace of mind. *That's uncanny...to need a disgrace, a major disgrace at that, to think about myself!... My God! What have I done with my life?!*

Minutes go by and he is restless again. *What about the children? So defenseless... "Abandoned by their father," people will say.* He feels sorry for his sons. The tension reaches a peak; he is anguished, and his mind goes temporarily silent, utterly blank. Time goes by and his thinking goes on. *Even if I go back—he will not let go of the subject—they will always remember a weak father who was always complaining about something. Worse yet, they will see me desperate with the illness. It's best to move on.* He feels somewhat comforted for having decided to spare his sons from seeing him dying and crazy like his uncle Cândido.

Again the comfort is short-lived. *I could go back and spend some months with them, playing with them. Playing... My God! I never played with them! Never took them out anywhere...Never saw in their face that joy of happy children...Poor little ones.* The thoughts stop and he feels a weight on his chest. Then the thoughts return. *If I go back, nothing will change; because of the way I am, I won't give them any joy.*

He vacillates between going on and going back, ebb and flow, accusation and redemption. The first train stop is approaching, and his doubts increase. The train slows down and his tension is now almost unbearable to the point that he can no longer think. Anything he does will be driven by sheer impulse. The train stops and he remains for a while rooted in his seat. Suddenly, he gets up but sits down again. Once more he stands; this time he takes a few steps, comes back, and sits down. Again he makes a move to stand up, but just stays in the seat. *This confounded doubt is killing me!*

He hears someone say, "Excuse me?" as he heads towards the window seat.

"Sure..."

Momentarily he is distracted, standing so that the other person can take his seat by the window. He finally makes up his mind to get off the train, but before he reaches the exit door, the train starts mov-

ing. He goes back to his seat. *My fate is to go on.* He tries to see the train movements as indications that this troubles will soon be over. *May God's will be done.* Acceptance has finally set in. The tension is reduced, and, in time, it almost goes away altogether.

He now lives in the expectation of what will happen to him. From time to time, images from the past haunt him. *Will I be brave enough to fight the fights I didn't fight, to say the things I never said? What if I go crazy all of a sudden, how is it going to be? All that anger spilling out... I don't think I can stand it. I'll go crazy rather than bear it.* Now he has to bear the risks of his decision.