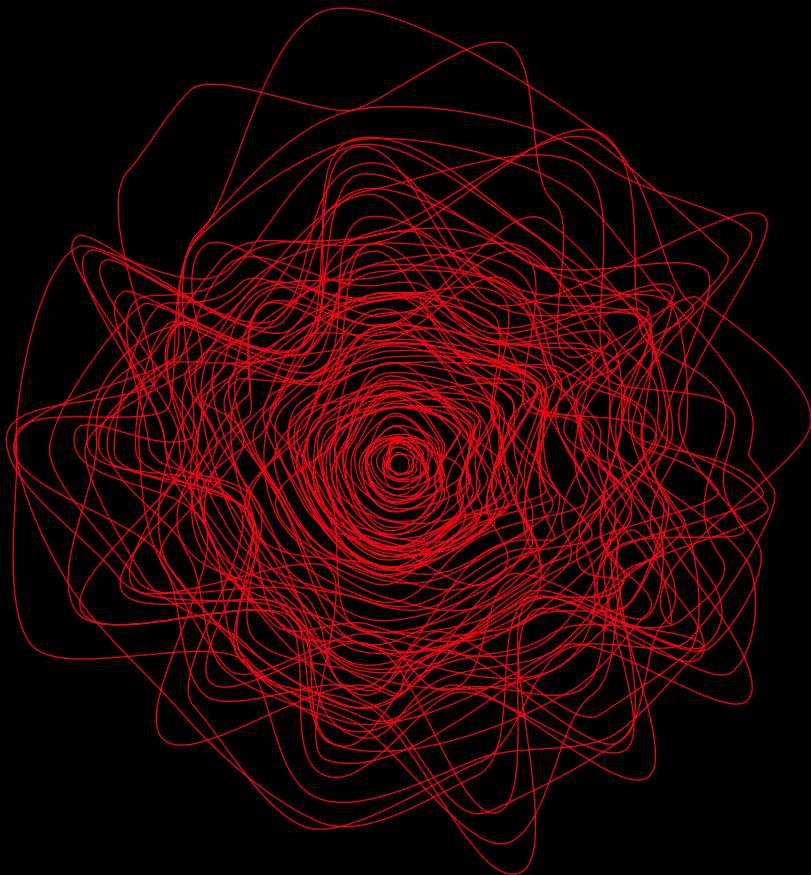


Pandemonium

NINE NARRATIVES BRIDGING
SÃO PAULO-BERLIN



ALEXANDRE RIBEIRO + ALINE BEI
CAROLA SAAVEDRA + CARSTEN REGEL + CRISTINA JUDAR
FRED DI GIACOMO + JORGE IALANJI FILHOLINI
KARIN HUECK + RAIMUNDO NETO

EDITED BY *Cristina Judar & Fred Di Giacomo*
TRANSLATION ORGANIZED BY *Lara Norgaard*

Pandemonium

NINE NARRATIVES BRIDGING
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DESIGN, COVER AND ILLUSTRATIONS
Rodolfo França

2020

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This book is dedicated to:

Antonio Bivar (1939 — 2020)

Aldir Blanc (1946 — 2020)

Ciro Pessoa (1957 — 2020)

Sérgio Sant'Anna (1941 — 2020)

★

*And to all of the victims of the covid-19 pandemic,
aggravated by the authoritarianism
and incompetence of the Brazilian state.*

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We would like to thank all of the authors and translators who participated in this collective effort to create an independent anthology in the midst of a serious pandemic. We also appreciate the help and labor of: Antke Engel, Edney Meirelles, Marcelo Nocelli, Mekko, and, in particular, the elegant, stunning (not to mention voluntary) work of our art director, Rodolfo França, who is responsible for the layout and graphic design of this anthology.

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PANDEMÔNIO EDIÇÕES
(e outros atos ilícitos)

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Pandemonium
São Paulo – Berlin

Liebe Cristina,

WIE GEHT'S DIR? Here in Germany, coffee shops, kindergartens and pubs are opening up to the new normal, while local fascism hibernates. What about in São Paulo? “How’s the cognitive plague that’s eroding Brazil?” Even with the pandemic sweeping an ocean of people every day, I see that streets are filling up, shopping malls are packed, police are still killing the same people as always and soy plantations continue murdering forests. I see the virus flying from capitals to indigenous villages, to smaller cities; to my hinterlands. What is there to be done, Cristina?

I believe that our *Pandemonium* can be some relief for those at home “washing the cups and counting the corpses^{1*},” while the Imp rules our fate. The tales that Raimundo Neto, Aline Bei and Jorge Filholini psychographed from São Paulo are Polaroid pictures of the trance that makes the largest democracy in Latin America convulse. Your *Bodies in Sight* in sight is, for me, the queer Apocalypse of a John (Joan?) from the Anthropocene. Your prophecy moves through the mind of the reader, driven by your ability to create images in a Ginsberg–esque cadence. I am very happy that you have joined me in organizing this oasis, amplifying the original idea of a São Paulo–Berlin anthology, two major cities that have dealt so differently with the pandemic.

Here, those who live the Global south diaspora do not forget. My friend Alexandre Ribeiro, son of the Favela da Torre, in Diadema city, is reminded of his color every day by the German authorities. *The police, which humiliates here, does not kill as they do there.*² Carola Saavedra, a professor and researcher at the University of Cologne, known for the breadth of her literary production, sculpted a literary bonsai that reminds me of the flash

¹ This is a citation from rapper Criolo’s song *Lion Man, a Brazilian*. In Portuguese, the lyrics read: “Lavar os copos, contar os corpos”

² Here we have a paraphrase of the famous Brazilian poem “Canção do Exílio”, by Gonçalves Dias. In the original: “As aves, que aqui gorjeiam, Não gorjeiam como lá.”

fiction that she mastered in the *escritoras suicidas website*. Karin Hueck stopped to observe her neighbor, trapped at home, and plunged into her grandfather's experiences as a holocaust survivor. One cannot forget that this city was the epicenter of global Nazi-fascism. You can't think that hell is a Brazilian invention. Like Karin's grandfather, the star of the local underground scene Carsten Regel was born in the German capital. His amusing and underground tale about the relaxed approach to the pandemic in Berlin reveals that the virus may not choose social class, but they who suffer most from it are still in the Global South.

There is something urgent in this time capsule that we are burying together, each one of us in a corner of the globe. It registers more than the pandemic caused by a virus, but a global anthropocene earthquake, the metastasis of savage capitalism and the crisis of democracies. We are witnesses and photographers to all this. Is there any world to come?

*Mit freundlichen Grüßen,
Fred Di Giacomo, Berlin, May-July, 2020.*

My dear friend Fred,

FROM THIS PLACE WITHOUT A SOUL, all we have left are ruins of memories. From a city formed from motion and noise all its life, only one uncomfortable presence remains, to occupy the streets. Death, in his silent procession, can be identified from miles away.

We all become a bit like prophets and visionaries, guessing how many bodies we'll find around the corner. Bodies that reach us in waves of information: on TV screens, via internet-drone-delivery – and even in the air signals that surround us.

And we've been dreaming of invasions. Of aliens and locusts, which today ravage plantations in Argentina. Of men dressed in green and yellow carrying insults and guns. The lack of sufficient respirators has also haunted us. As well as the annihilation of our villages and communities, be they indigenous, quilombolas³ or LGBTQIA+. The decimation of all forms of life deemed less valuable in the world of our current politics has never been so close that it's practically at our fingertips.

There is no way to create stories without these horrors being present, implicitly or explicitly. After all, we mourn the lost hugs and smiles, something Brazilians value deeply, you know what I mean. And the loss of a Brazil that was taken from us little by little, in pieces, like the decomposing body of someone who was very much loved. Someone of whom, in spite of everything, we do not want to be deprived.

As they were written and assembled, the short stories created on this side of our Pandemonium – or rather, this intercontinental pact that allows the realities of the pandemic in two cities–symbol of world–local culture and art to be known through fiction – ended up growing in strength and meaning. I see them now as immune cells, which contain fragments of the

³ Quilombolas are the descendants and remnants of communities formed by fugitive slaves (the quilombos), between the 16th century and the year 1888, when slavery was abolished in Brazil.

trajectory and narratives of our time, even if, originally, that was not the precise idea we had in mind.

Jorge Filholini, through his distinct mode of constructing imagery, presents us with an apocalyptic and surrealist diary, one capable of keeping us up at night as it makes us confront that fearful and unbelievable thing which might still lurk in our laps.

In his lyrical style that aggregates seemingly irreconcilable realities, Raimundo Neto crafts a story in which the inefficient control of the pandemic, when added to the problems involving the adoption of children, represents a practically incurable wound in our country.

Aline Bei presents us with her renowned literary style, characterized by her broad and deep reach. She gives body and voice to a part of the conservative Brazilian middle class that treats the pandemic as a “minor” issue or collective illusion, and that then creates for itself new illusions and insists on spreading them as truth.

In fact, Fred, I love the “Berlin-style western of the end of time” atmosphere in your short story, a poetic and arid narrative that had me walk through landscapes, through the possibilities of (in)existence and (inter)relationships already practiced today. I reflected on the layers above and below the skins of the old man and the girl, which grow even more evident in the pandemic.

As storytellers of today’s unreality, we bring here a piece of that which represents not only ourselves, but the collective to which we feel attached despite the destruction of our identity as a nation.

Our stories, with the power of the content produced by you, Alexandre Ribeiro, Carola Saavedra, Carsten Regel and Karin Hueck, make up the “cultural bridge” that we would like to build, in line with the conversation we had in a café in São Paulo this year (at the time, you asked me if I’d already heard about the new virus that was beginning to spread around the world. Life really is full of ironies).

As for the partnership established here, I am happy and grateful that you have entrusted me with part of the organization of *Pandemonium*.

Despite its thematic roughness, each stage of the project was carried out with absolute lightness, generosity, professionalism and collaboration.

Fred, I think that with this anthology, we have at hand a high-powered tool of transformation. From these narratives and connections established between São Paulo and Berlin, new ideas may arise related to the safeguarding of our own bodies, as well as the bodies of our cities and countries. The front established here may inspire debate, exchange and the search for solutions, no matter how distant and impossible they seem today.

I wave from the other side, with high doses of love and fury, still confident that better days will come.

Cristina Judar, São Paulo, May–July, 2020.

Dear Cristina and Fred,

WHEN PANDEMÔNIO WAS PUBLISHED IN PORTUGUESE, I was getting ready to move across the United States by car. I soon passed through areas of the country and saw the social dynamic of the pandemic shift; laws and norms differed in tandem with existing divisions, which seemed to grow more serious at the same rate as the pandemic. In one city, I saw an open fitness center, hot with perspiration and filled with open, incredulous mouths: you could almost see the virus traveling from exhale to inhale across a row of bodies running to nowhere on treadmills. In another, a person simply walking down an empty sidewalk without a mask could inspire anxious glances from behind the thick protective glass of a passing car window. It is in this context of collective division that *Pandemônio* was rendered *Pandemonium*.

When you suggested the translation of the anthology, I was drawn to the transnational nature of the collection's content. Many of the texts express not Brazil or Germany in isolation, but movement between the two nations. Alexandre Ribeiro's short story "Møns Klint" is narrated from the airports and bus stations of border crossings; Karin Hueck's "The Implausibility of Trees" moves transnationally through the tenuous medium of memories. Others, like Raimundo Neto's "The Furniture," traverse social boundaries of race and class rather than those of the nation-state, exploring the pandemic as a problem that layers on top of existing crises. In my reading, the anthology as a whole confronts the myriad borders of the current moment and expresses what it means to physically move between them or communicate across them, to exist in limbo between them or to lose part of ourselves on one side or the other.

What a perfect textual territory in which to engage in translation: to traverse linguistic borders and wrestle with the constant and inevitable loss that comes from attempting to reinvent creative expression in a new tongue.

In light of these reflections, I have brought together a team of translators who wanted to embark on this project, and who similarly felt this

collection of transnational narratives should have a bridge in the English-speaking world. All of us dedicated time and labor without remuneration to make this a free-access publication. I do not mean to romanticize that decision: the ethical questions of organizing such a project at a moment of increased precarity within creative fields are many. And yet, I do feel a radical optimism in seeing a group of people come together without material aim to support the free movement of fiction across language and space. At a moment of pandemic, and at a moment of viral nationalism and fascism, I can only hope that these efforts to circulate critical stories are similarly contagious.

For English-language readers, perhaps these narratives will function as mirrors that allow us to reflect back on our own experiences of pandemic through a frame of non-English- and non-US-centric perspectives. In fact, I imagine that practice will be especially fruitful for readers in the US, whose own experiences in recent months find so many parallels to issues coursing through Brazil. What does it mean to think about race in the current moment – but to focus our reflections on experiences of black Brazilians? How can we approach the perspective of someone from the white middle class that refuses to wear a mask – not in a gym in Indiana, but in a grocery store in São Paulo? And what is the apocalyptic future we face when confronting not only a pandemic, but also the rise of authoritarianism that accompanies this virus?

Cris, Fred, I have never met either of you in person, but through this project we have built a series of bridges: linguistic, national, and even interpersonal, despite all of the constraints that would prevent us from doing so. I hope that someday, somewhere, we will be able to see each other face to face.

Abraços, and in the name of building bridges and crossing borders, força,

*Lara Norgaard, somewhere between Colorado
and Massachusetts, June-August 2020*

Restitution

CAROLA SAAVEDRA

Translated from the Portuguese by Jennifer Shyue

RESTITUTION

I REST MY FOREHEAD AGAINST THE GLASS, window to nowhere, close my eyes, inside, of the room, of my body, of the landscape, the crumbled certainty. I'm writing a book about the end of the world and while I'm writing the end of the world, the world begins to crumble, reality infiltrating fiction, I write by hand, with a pencil, I throw out the notebook, sole witness, shred it so there can be no doubt, but still the words accompany me. Time passes with a strange cadence, a subtle acceleration, I reorganize drawers, when I open an envelope, out falls an old photo, in Berlin twenty years back I cover my face with my hands, I'm laughing, on my left hand a silver ring with a blue stone, lapis lazuli? the stone seems to stare into the camera, my hands always fluttered too much, that last moment, soon afterward with a casual flick, my hands always fluttered too much, the ring was jettisoned into the depths of the depthless Landwehrkanal, into the winter waters, a duck hastened over and swallowed it, I stood staring in disbelief, leaning over the bridge, the duck went downriver, -stream? from time to time I think about the fate of that ring, duck-down-river, one day someone at Sunday lunch or the duck consumed by another creature, consumed by another creature, but today, I force myself toward a different narrative, in the gut of a bird flying over the Atlantic, farther south, always farther south, in its body, a ring that returns to the earth, to the gut of the mountain where once it gestated, for a few years it adorned my fingers, I put my ringless hands on the window glass, on the other side of the time that never passed. Objects demand their restitution. The landscape outside collapses. Inside the room I begin to write a new book, this time about the beginning of the world. Fiction infiltrating reality. Magic words embedded in the earth.

†

CAROLA SAAVEDRA is the author of the novels *Flores azuis* (2008, Associação Paulista de Críticos de Arte's 2008 Best Novel and finalist for the Prêmio São Paulo de Literatura and the Prêmio Jabuti); *Paisagem com dromedário* (2010, Prêmio Rachel de Queiroz and finalist for the Prêmio São Paulo de Literatura and the Prêmio Jabuti), *Com armas sonolentas* (2018, finalist for the Prêmio São Paulo and the Prêmio Rio de Literatura), among others, all published by Companhia das Letras. In 2020, *Flores azuis* was published in English as *Blue Flowers* (tr. Daniel Hahn).

RESTITUTION

JENNIFER SHYUE is a translator focusing on contemporary Cuban and Asian-Peruvian writers. She has an MFA in literary translation from the University of Iowa and a BA in comparative literature from Princeton University, and was the recipient of a 2019 Fulbright grant to Peru. Her translations have appeared in *Words Without Borders*, *The Margins*, and *Inventory*. She can be found on the web at shyue.co.

Ruth, fearless

ALINE BEI

Translated from the Portuguese by Daniel Persia

RUTH, FEARLESS

RUTH NEEDED TO PICK UP A FEW THINGS AT THE MARKET, rice,
bleach, two or three bottles of
Liquor.

she had never been much of a drinker, it's true
lately, however, her neck was so stiff, her back so tight.
the doctor said it was her nerves, always her nerves.
he prescribed some drugs but her aches persisted and so
apart from the pills, on pure
instinct

Ruth began taking
a small shot
of liquor
at night and

God knows how relaxed her muscles felt, nothing in the world
had a similar effect to alcohol entering
and thinning
her age-old solitude.

who can bear it, after all? she thought, picking out a coat on her way out.
these times we're in

are the worst, they've taken away almost everything from me, church
is still closed, gatherings banned, but even gatherings of the Lord?
she didn't have company at home, either, her husband
had been dead for so long and her dog
too. goddamnit, how am I supposed to go on living
like this, cut off at the knees and bored stiff?

now,

if Ruth could give some advice to a young woman just starting out
it would be this: never marry someone who's older than you. never have
dogs. or kids. basically, don't get attached to anything, or only to things
you can buy. for the time being, of course, since money is a fickle thing.

in short, my dear: take a little shot of
liquor
at night, to relax your muscles
that's the truest thing I can tell you.

Ruth buttoned her coat, she liked to bundle herself up before heading out.

opening the front door to her apartment, she felt a shiver run
down her spine. she had already been stabbed metaphorically
several times in her life, and so she knew what that tingling
meant: a bad omen, sometimes it's just not our day.

she stepped into the elevator.

on her idyllic nights, one epiphany or another would bud from within.

Ruth adored having those
luminous thoughts dwelling in her mind, just the other day
a brilliant one
blossomed:
death was blind
for
if death could see
she would be sorry

for taking people from their lives, forever.

Ruth was so satisfied with her reflection that she wrote it down in her
little notebook, the one she was holding in her hands, which she also
used to make grocery lists, like today's: rice, bleach, fruit, and her magical
nocturnal (sometimes diurnal) elixir, oh
what a relief to have that ruby-red liquid
to flesh out her epiphanies at breakfast, too, why not?
to Ruth, time was no longer the God of all things,

her sweet little liquor made the hours
bend, nothing mattered to the point of hurting
anymore, quite the contrary, life gained its own
new glimmer. not even when she had fallen in love way back when
with her deceased husband Jorge Alcântara, not even when
she had been young and loved
a whole life ahead of her
had she felt so light, so creative.
she greeted Mr. Jonas, the doorman.

good morning
good morning, Dona Ruth, and your mask?
my what?
your Mask

she waved him off.

you have to wear it, Dona Ruth, haven't you been following the news?
there's no time to lose, my dear, look how old I am.
and Cátia, didn't she offer to go to the store for you? Cátia, Vânia, Mr. Paulo...
just what I needed. look, Jonas, if I ever need someone to go to the
store for me, you can go ahead and bury me, do you hear?

she banged on the gate.

you can bury me.

Jonas shook his head.

Ruth was so tired of that meddling doorman. couldn't everyone
just mind their own business, hunh? if people wanted to spend their

precious dimes on disposable masks that blocked their nostrils, very well then, let them. she wouldn't surrender to this kind of "collective despair," not at this stage, she had much more important things to do.

*it's the Apocaaalyypseeeeeee! someone shouted
from the window of a car flying by.*

Ruth was so frightened she stumbled.
she leaned against the wall
to catch her breath, the city was upside down,
deserted, and the few people
who appeared were utterly crazy.
she continued her walk
heading confidently toward the market, which was near, though
she still arrived gasping for air,
perhaps the coat
had been excessive
and suddenly Ruth realized
that
her Naked face had become
first an object of observation, as if they were
asking, what planet are you from?
and then
an object of indignation, who do you think you are?
she felt cornered, a tiny animal in the forest.
her, of all people, a woman who time
hadn't knocked down.
she went straight to the drink aisle
grabbed five bottles of her favorite liquor
and headed to the register. the rice, the bleach,
the fruits, well, all of that could wait.
the store workers

were all wearing masks, not ones made of fabric, like the rest, but ones made of plastic, as if they were metallurgical workers. Ruth thought people were losing their identities, turning into livestock, oxen and cows. the woman at the register asked her something.

I'm sorry, come again?

the girl repeated
one
two
three times, but
it was impossible, it seemed like she was behind a sheet of glass.

lift up that mask! Ruth shouted lift up that goddamned mask!

the security guard approached.

everything alright here, ma'am? his was made of cloth and his voice was perfectly audible.

Ruth took a deep breath.

she found her wallet in her purse and paid.

it's the Apocalypse she recycled the phrase

like a rumor running through a small town

and left,
walking home, the bag scraping her heels.

what's happening to the world?

a month ago this street was packed with people celebrating
who knows what.

Ruth never liked parties, even on her birthday she always felt a
discreet kind of happiness. celebrations, in her opinion, were
one notch above reality, look around: what was there
to celebrate, exactly?

she opened the liquor

and took a big swig

to calm her chest, she knew that somewhere around
the middle of the bottle her soul would soar

free

through unimaginable terrain,

while Something much more than that liquid itself

entered her body

through the mouth.

†

ALINE BEI was born in São Paulo in 1987. She holds a degree in Literature from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) and in Performing Arts from the Célia-Helena School of Theatre. She is a columnist for the cultural site *Livre Opinião — Ideias em Debate*. She was an invited author at the 2018 Brazilian Literary Spring (Sorbonne University, France) and the 2018 Guadalajara International Book Fair (Mexico). Her first book, *O peso do pássaro morto*, was awarded the Toca Prize and the São Paulo Prize for Literature.

DANIEL PERSIA has served as Regional Leader for the US-Brazil Fulbright Commission and Editor-at-Large for *Asymptote Journal*. His work has appeared in a number of literary journals, including *Asymptote*, *Exchanges*, *Your Impossible Voice*, and *KRONline*. His translation of *Escritos (Writings)*, by Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida, was published in 2019 for the re-opening of the Chillida-Leku museum in Hernani, Gipuzkoa, Spain. Working primarily from Spanish and Portuguese, his research explores collaborative frameworks for translating Afro-Brazilian literature. He is a PhD candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and a Lassen Fellow in Latin American Studies at Princeton University.

Mens Flint

ALEXANDRE RIBEIRO

Translated from the Portuguese by Daniel Persia

WAITING HURTS AT BERLIN CENTRAL STATION. A world in decline is the aesthetic that paints my eyeliner. It's me and forty-some others waiting for the bus, at the platform, terrorized. My vision atrophies like the smashed-up baggage at the bottom of the bus. Here, we are all anxiety. Ready to go home, for life to end, to vomit. I'm alone, plural. A virus infecting humanity shows how small we are. Running home is all we have.

It's not my first time in the city. In the '90s, I came to Berlin three times in the same year. Sebastião, a brother given to me by the violent streets of Cidade Tiradentes, was the one who first introduced me to the German capital.

Tião moved to Berlin after being persecuted by the governor of São Paulo, our home state. To think about blacknesses is to rebuild societies, and our governor was never keen on revolution. Together, we wandered the streets of Schöneberg and Charlottenburg. Each step of my swollen feet was a history lesson. Tião, like me, was a black man with light skin, bordering on obese (for someone who's lived through hunger, that sounds like a victory). Whatever Tião carried in weight, he doubled in memory. He was the founder of Black History Walks, an organization that sought to boost the self-esteem of the black population by sharing the history of the streets.

Yes, I was born of a generation hardened to jump over bodies and keep on walking. Those years are in the past, though. Today I'm someplace else. Our parents faced the dictatorship, faced racism so that we could pursue a decent education. At least in this, I've succeeded.

O colorido brasileiro. That was the term I proposed to explain the failed plan of whitening that we are, *pardos*. *Pardo*, one of the oldest terms in the history of our country. Upon the arrival of the Portuguese to Brazil, in 1500, Pero Vaz de Caminha wrote a letter to the King of Portugal, in which he described the natives as “dark [*pardos*], somewhat reddish, with good faces and good noses.”¹

¹ Translation from *The Voyage of Pedro Álvares Cabral to Brazil and India: From Contemporary Documents and Narratives*, edited by William Brooks Greenlee. First published in 1938.

Pardo: of a poorly defined color, somewhere between yellowish, grayish and chestnut. Pardo; someone born out of miscegenation, whether mulatto, caboclo, cafuzo, mameluke or mestizo. Pardo: dirty white, darkened. Pardo: me.

The word *pardo* was used to erase rapes, kidnappings, and genocides, and to transform the mixing of races into something occasional, something that, at some point, was bound to happen. A way of putting out hate's fire with masked cordiality. For us, within the black movement, the term *pardo* was useful only on paper. We agreed to call ourselves black, a dark-skinned movement.

Carrying this nomenclature on my birth certificate, I decided to read up on the subject. Thanks to Sebastião, during the opportunities I had to travel abroad, I was able to see the issue firsthand: how do we define *pardo* in the world? In declaring ourselves black, our African, European and Caribbean companions would say: you all aren't black, you should call yourselves *colored*. Interestingly enough, even in German there was a term for this: *farbenfroh*, which means *colorido*.

My love for poetry brought me to the word *colorido* on a mission: to implement a poetic-aesthetic that would unite our younger generation through an organized movement. That's how *o colorido brasileiro* was born. I presented a series of scientific articles that highlighted the benefits of identifying people, and how that identification moves various aspects of society. I suggested to my comrade, Luís Inácio,² that we implement several public policies. The campaign *Brasil dos coloridos* reached the federal level and became the new ethnic-racial definition of the Brazilian majority.

In light of this theory, I was invited to share my thoughts at the *Black Identities* conference, at the University of Humboldt. The virus had already been circulating in Brazil days before my arrival in Berlin. Still, none of us

²Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, former President of Brazil (2003-2010).

were taking the pandemic seriously. Not once did it cross the organization's mind to cancel the event; they had already begun selling tickets, and various venues had sold out.

It was Tuesday. I woke up at 5:45am. I went to shave. A disheveled face stared back at me in the mirror. A notification, from my sister. In Brazil, it was two in the morning. I read the message, anxious:

Roberto,

I know you're probably really busy at the moment, good luck, and I hope things go well at the conference. Don't get all worked up over this message: everything's fine.

I'd been home for about three days when mom started to get a cough. She was having trouble breathing, I took her to the hospital and we both got tested for Covid-19. The results came back positive.

We're not feeling bad, and mom's symptoms are gradually fading away. I just want you to take care of yourself over there, okay? You know what I mean.

With love,

Ju

We've been here before, the three of us; I know my sister, alone again. I take a deep breath; my beard came out crooked. There's nothing I can do from here. Again. The symphony of chaos plays on with another message:

Dear Dr. Soares,

In accordance with recommendations from the Gesundheitsamt (Ministry of Health), we deeply regret to inform you that the conference Black Identities, at the University of Humboldt, has been cancelled.

Due to such a critical, rapid decline in the availability of international flights, we have determined it best to end the conference and ensure a swift return home for all participants.

Given that no more flights will be departing from Germany, we have arranged for a bus to take you to Møns Klint, in Denmark. From there, you will catch the first flight back to Brazil.

I laughed at myself, realizing I was grumbling while reading that email in a four-star hotel. I wasn't worried about the fact that the world was being devastated by a pandemic. I was thinking about something that struck much deeper: I was angry about being forced to take the bus.

15 March 2020

Berlin Central Station, Germany

I CAN'T EVEN REMEMBER the last time I was in a bus station. I came to Berlin by plane, on a flight that cost more than ten times the monthly minimum wage. And now, embracing my own resentfulness, I surrender to the ancient nightmare of being poor: eight hours on an overcrowded bus.

My chubby legs hold my Swiss luggage in place while the sleep twitches try to take over. The fight is important. I know because I've been on the losing side: eight at night, on my way home from work, sleeping on the bus to Diadema. They took my fanny pack, with a cassette tape and half my wages.

Bus *N80 – Berlin – Møns Klint* reaches its destination, shifting me back to the present. I try to balance myself, my body, my luggage and ticket. My right leg falls asleep as the driver announces our current location. We've arrived at Terminal Swinemünde-Møns Klint. They instruct us to get off the bus and make our way through immigration.

A snail-shaped line. Five employees sit at countertops slightly above eyeline. False images of power, that foolish will of oppression only man can appreciate. As usual, during each brief interview, the officer in charge induces psychological torture and questions one's belonging to the land.

A few minutes pass and I see two young black men being taken to a room next door. Two young Arabs are leaving that same room, weighed down by handcuffs.

Aside from the theory of *o colorido brasileiro*, I've thought about writing the theory *no border guard will ever miss an opportunity to be a brazen racist*. During our brief, three-minute interaction, I was questioned intensely and had to present a series of documents before I was released.

"Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your patience and understanding. In light of Covid-19, the terminal is now full and tickets for the express train through the tunnel have sold out. We have made adjustments to our route accordingly and will be taking the ferry boat. Please remain on the bus until further notice."

The ferry boat! The light of the sunset intensifies the whiteness of the cliffs at Møns Klint. Giant cliffs made of chalk brighten my field of vision. Ocular magnetism, as if my body needed such a glow. The wind caresses my curly hair, and the atmosphere sweeps me back into the fields of memory.

July 1993
Hamburg, Germany

MY LEFT EYE COULDN'T QUITE CLOSE with the wind blowing. It was just the two of us, on the open-air deck, on the last ferry boat crossing the Port of Hamburg. Our beauty was the color of clay. We were enjoying the late-setting sun. It was almost ten o'clock when he took my hand and held it, tightly, pulling me to the far-end of the boat. We bent over to look at the water, intertwined.

"You're scared, aren't you?"

He already knew the answer. My fear of depths was born from water, but it was reflected in relationships, too. He let go of my hand for a moment, then pulled out a piece of paper from his pocket. The strong winds rustled the flimsy little sheet. He read a poem. I kept silent, my natural re-

action to beauty. He was hoping for something else. My silence made the air uncomfortable.

He always had to have the last word. Laughing, he asked, “You didn’t get it, did you? What I meant was that I want your name, Roberto.” My name? He was interrupted by the noisy apparatus of the boat docking. That space, now free of curious children and tarnished adults, was ours. A strong kiss, a fear of being rejected. We didn’t know that we were making memories. We were just having fun.

*March 2020
Denmark*

THE CHAINS OF THE BOAT COLLIDE WITH CONCRETE. Time to get back on the bus. Walking, I feel a vibration in my pocket. My youngest sister’s picture lights up the screen. Juliana is calling.

“Roberto, where are you?”

“Roberto?! How long before you’re back?”

“Roberto, please say something...I can’t do this all on my own, not this time.”

All on my own. She was referring to the death of our father, a victim of dengue and neglect. Juliana had to deal with all the paperwork, the burial arrangements, the mourning. And me? I was at a conference, in Zurich, a long, long way from my family, and home.

“Our mother, Roberto, she didn’t make it.”

The silence was broken by my abrupt coughing, followed by a solitary tear. No reaction. No crying.

Juliana knew about it all. She had witnessed, helplessly, the day I had been thrown out of the house. Packing to run away, I was hunched over on the floor, gathering my clothes, when he came into my room and kicked me in the ribs.

“Shame on you, you faggot!”

We knew the wardrobe was at its breaking point a long time ago. Our father saw it too, and he didn't hesitate. He ripped off the door with obvious intent: to smack me with the metal of its dangling hinges. As I stumbled onto the street, my torso started to bleed.

"And don't you go crying, you little pansy. This is so you'll stop being a fag!"

Our mother could never get a word in. She was paralyzed, sobbing, in the corner of the room.

"Roberto?!"

My sister had always been there for me. This time, she wouldn't be alone. I promised her that, in a few hours, I would be back to São Paulo.

The virus that infected Mom came straight from Italy. Dona Fátima had been her employer for at least twenty-five years. And, every single year, Dona Fátima vacationed in Europe. This time, when she returned, she already knew she was infected. And still, she insisted that her maid — my mother — come to her house. Dona Fátima was afraid of dying alone. The world stopped, the borders closed, but the slave quarters were still standing. And me? I wanted to get Mom out of there, but she hadn't spoken to me since the day I had been kicked out of the house.

1 January 2001

Møns Klint, Denmark.

Dear Roberto,

This isn't one of those "come back to me" letters. It's one of those "when will we come back to ourselves again?" Love doesn't end, it just transforms. Remember?

The moving boxes are still here in the living room. I try and try and try and try, but without you, you bastard, none of these stories make any sense. I got sick of Berlin, so I went to live in Hamburg. I got sick of Hamburg, so I went to live in Venice. I got sick of Venice, so I ended up in Møns Klint, Denmark.

You know we're both made of the same clay. But I'm tired, you know? I'm tired of running, tired of pretending to be who I'm not just to be a part of a movement. A movement that doesn't respect us and isn't ever going to respect us. I want to love you, I want to be complete. I want to forget my political body, I want to be happy in that dream we created together. Do you remember the ferry boat?

You are light, Beto. Light made of the purest dark matter. And to stray from that light is stupidity. They'll tell you I've disappeared, but the truth is I've moved. I've moved for us. If one day the world ends, know that you can come home. At the end of the day, running home is all we have.

Yours,
Sebastião Maia
Stengårdsvej 8,
4971, Møns Klint, Denmark.

†

ALEXANDRE RIBEIRO is a writer and poet. A columnist for Itaú Cultural, he is the author of the poetry collection *Inflorescência* (Miudeza, 2018) and the novel *Reservado* (Miudeza, 2019), winner of the 2018 ProAC Award (Cultural Action Program of the Department of Culture of the State of São Paulo), which independently sold more than 2,000 copies. A high-school student active during the 2015-2016 school occupation in Brazil, he participates in literary projects in quebradas around the world and in chapters of Fundação Casa. He grew up in Favela da Torre, in Diadema (São Paulo), and currently lives in Germany.

DANIEL PERSIA has served as Regional Leader for the US-Brazil Fulbright Commission and Editor-at-Large for *Asymptote Journal*. His work has appeared in a number of literary journals, including *Asymptote*, *Exchanges*, *Your Impossible Voice*, and *KRONline*. His translation of *Escritos (Writings)*, by Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida, was published in 2019 for the re-opening of the Chillida-Leku museum in Hernani, Gipuzkoa, Spain. Working primarily from Spanish and Portuguese, his research explores collaborative frameworks for translating Afro-Brazilian literature. He is a PhD candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and a Lassen Fellow in Latin American Studies at Princeton University.

Bodies in Sight

CRISTINA JUDAR

Translated from the Portuguese by Lara Norgaard

I SMOKE YOU EVERY DAY. I roll, into a tight cigarette, your substance and your defeats, which I have the pleasure of pressing at different frequencies and intervals with the tips of my fingers.

I don't intend to crush any part of your body, be it liquid, solid, or gaseous. All I want is to approach the limit that lies between the pain and the hope of existing as flesh, blood, bone, skin, and authentic expression, preserved in their original state, without blemishes, without trauma. Lighting up, I seek to insert you into me, a smooth undulation, white and residual, that no touch can achieve.

The sounds began to beat down on our heads right before the clocks lost their hands and their digits. Before I had you whole, woman and within reach of my lips, inhaling the smoke you emit, only somewhat similar to that exhaled by the bodies, which sprout everywhere.

The earth returns human bodies.

The sea gives back offerings when they are not accepted.

The earth became an amalgam of misguided steps and now has no vacancy.

The sea lost its desire to offer us its uterus, its gentle arms, its wide hips.

The sea is a man with breasts and a vagina.

The earth, a woman with a penis.

Lava, flux deep in the depths of the earth, is the non-binary force.

Nature emits its signs: it is clear that no animal, land, stone, sea, or spirit wants to be reduced to a cemetery for the rest of its life.

Now that land, sea, spirit, rock, and animal stopped ceding to humanity their private spaces, world leadership tries to name the sky as "the inverted floor of the dead." And so, the following step-by-step solution was established, with far from impressive significance:

1. While alive, bodies stay warm;
2. When these bodies are occupied by the dead,
they are frozen and packed into mobile freezers;

3. For them to become smoke and rise to the sky,
they should be incinerated.

But it is a useless task to generate such a significant shift in temperature and material state, with the aim that bodies [taking the shape of buildings made up of disparate forms, lowlands lined with stones, an indigenous village in flames, homes built from decaying teeth, and rivers of bloodied water in which politicians fish for future votes] disappear, all at once, from sight.

The pain that accompanies them has limbs of lead; it cannot rise up to the sky. And, contrary to what one might think, the bodies of clouds are not made of smoke born from pain. Therein lies the inconvenience, the truth so undesirable to our captain-keepers. Pain pushes the ground downwards, making the floor even heavier. And memories stay right by its side, in a procession feared by businessmen and men of pulpits.

Mourners, these memories slide across the ground as though on roller skates. They flank pain like women covered in black shrouds. They cry as though their tears were intrinsic, pouring out shallow streams. They help to compose a spectacle at once beautiful and sinister, underneath the gaze that sees all.

The heavens are a huge eyeball that turns to the right and creates day; it turns to the left and creates night; when it blinks, a lightning bolt falls. It observes us from its eternal post, which began the same instant the universe was created. There's no way to know if behind it a head, mind, or saint exists. Or if within there lies a certain intelligence, embedded and inherent, or if it is self-sufficient.

Perhaps it knows something about the sounds. They've plummeted in drops of aluminum cadence and frighten me because of the simple fact that humanity has never heard them. Who knows by which composer in which galaxy they were orchestrated. Perhaps it is the restoration of all that we'd hoped to impose on the Greatest Being, at the heights of our profundity and our shame.

I'm in a daze. I'm an erupting volcano, with all the pros and cons that such a strange condition carries. And I can fly with the wind. Under certain moons, the four seasons alternate, dominating me: I am fury, tenderness, royalty, and rest in one single day, in a combination that is hard to handle, even more so than a business in a late stage of collapse or a country gone off course.

In these moments, I go back to rolling you with my fingers – smallest woman, packed tight and present. With my tongue, I seal the paper that envelopes your gaps, I light the embers and inhale, with the illusion that I make you fit inside me, full of curves and sun, not some ghostly streaks that contain neither ground nor sky.

Sometimes I want to give up on the world, stop knowing about its news, about its community networks in ruins. It's too much pain for this overloaded chest of mine. Only you should stay with me, by way of inhalation, by way of hand-rolled cigarettes. The earth within me dies and lives again every time you invade me, instantaneous, and then leaves me immediately, ephemeral. Within each pull, I die and live again, in the hopes of having you inhabit me, in time that can no longer be counted, this coffin-body of mine, a repository without a soul, a pit with no one in it; you, alive and dead, a fistful of ash, one body no longer in sight.

†

CRISTINA JUDAR is the author of *Roteiros para uma Vida Curta* (Honorable Mention in the 2014 SESC Literary Prize) and wrote *Questions for a Live Writing* during her residency at Queen Mary University of London in 2015. She has presented her literary works in Mexico at the 2018 *Guadalajara International Book Fair* and in France at the 2019 *Brazilian Literary Spring* (Sorbonne University). Her novel *Oito do Sete* was a finalist for the 2018 *Jabuti Prize* and won the São Paulo Prize for Literature in the same year. She also acted as the co-organizer of the anthology *A Resistência dos Vaga-Lumes* in 2019.

LARA NORGAARD is an essayist and literary translator from the United States. Her recent writing and translations have been published in *Public Books*, *The Mekong Review*, *The Transpacific Literary Project*, and *Asymptote Journal*. She was the recipient of a Labouisse Fellowship (2017) and a Henry Luce Foundation Grant (2019) to pursue public-history initiatives in Brazil and Indonesia. Currently, she is a PhD student in comparative literature at Harvard University, where her research centers on Latin American and Southeast Asian literatures and collective memory of anti-communist military dictatorships.

Closing Distances

CARSTEN REGEL

IT WAS DAY 9 OF THE LOCKDOWN when my ex called me. Something she hadn't done in months. Since we broke up. Everything I heard from her in the meantime was that she was telling everybody that I have my first vodka of the day for breakfast, which was a bit bitchy behavior.

"What's up?"

"I need help", she said.

"Always told you so", I replied.

"Mark, listen", Franziska used a way more warm-hearted voice. "I am running out of mineral water and toilet paper."

It sounded like a joke. Sure, the media was full of pictures from supermarkets with empty shelves, but these stores were still open. And the filling stations had shops 24/7.

"Try tap water. It's cheaper anyway", I was still slightly pissed about her rumors about my drinking habits. "And for the other purpose: you've got a wardrobe full of designer clothes!"

"Back then you liked my stylish looks."

"Till I found out what's behind the superficial beauty!"

The connection was silent. Then she took a deep breath.

"You've got a key for the nightclub. It's all I ask for."

"What? I lose my job, if I hand it over to someone else!"

"You don't have a job anymore! The place is shut and will be for months! If not for a year!"

She definitely had a point here, but it was my ex and I wasn't willing to give in. I realized that neither Berlin nor I had a business model beside the party scene. "Come here and party your brains out!", was the unwritten but well-known slogan of the German capital and a lot of people made their living from it. Like in no other industry in this town.

"So, what do you want me to do?", I asked.

"Let me in the place. Just for two minutes."

"And then?"

"I pick some bottles of water and toilet paper from the bathrooms. I pay for it."

"It is fair trade mineral water from the south that will cost more

than usual?”

“Fuck off! It is a local company from the south of the city.”

“The tissues might be a problem. I have no idea if we have some rolls left in our stash.”

“So, let’s meet and check.”

“Meetings are not allowed,” I remembered her. The restrictions were heavy. The streets looked like a neutron bomb from outer space had hit planet earth and we were all damned to stay in the shelters for a long time. Right in the moment when the beautiful springtime was coming and ending a five month-long period of cold and darkness.

“Be there in an hour”, I told her.

“Keep the distance”, she said, when I opened the tradesman’s entrance of the club and offered her to enter.

“I’ve kept the distance to you before the virus broke out”.

Even though she had to ask me for a favor it was her lucky day. The stock was packed with toilet paper. Big packages that put a smile on her face.

“Never thought one can make you happy with ordinary gifts! Could have saved me a lot of money.”

Franziska controlled her fingers and neck. “No rings, no jewelry. Which of your presents do you mean?”

“All the free drinks that ran down your throat.”

“Listen, Mark, if I would have been in this relationship for the money, I would have picked the club owner, not the poor bartender.”

Instead of an answer I looked around at the empty seats and dance floor. No people. No music. No party. No money. Quite a perfect image for what was going on outside and everywhere. Franziska handed me the box that carried 9 bottles of water. She tried to get all the bags under her arms.

“My car is right in front of the shop next door”, she said when we noticed a key was turned around in the lock of the main entrance. Shit! I signaled her to keep her mouth shut and moved her towards the ladies’ rooms, when I heard my boss entering his place and talking on the phone. I pushed my ex and all the stuff into a stall and locked it from inside.

“Isolated within an isolation,” she mumbled.

“Shut up!” I whispered.

“If I scream now you lose your job,” she grinned at me.

“And you lose your toilet paper,” convinced her to stay calm.

I tried to listen to what my boss was telling somebody on the phone. It wasn't easy. But I understood he was running out of cash because of the shutdown. The landlord wasn't willing to give him a credit for the rent which was 4000 euro monthly. He came closer to take a piss in the men's room while talking on.

“Best would be you break in here”, he offered the person he obviously trusted. “Just take out as much of the expensive stuff as possible. And when everything is hidden in your van you crack the back-entrance with a heavy bar. But that must happen at the end of the action. So that you can drive away immediately!”

Not bad, my boss. Clever plan! First you enter with a key, you steal everything and right before you start the engine you crack the lock of the place from the outside so that it looks like a professional job for the police and the insurance company he wanted to betray.

Which brought me to the idea that Franziska and I can put like ten cases of liquor into her car and copy this plan. Which would be about 60 bottles and a total value of more than a thousand euro. I needed that money as desperately as my boss.

“Can I trust you?”, I asked Franziska. She learned her lesson and nodded instead of beginning a verbal conversation.

“Let's be partners again,” I offered my ex.

We came back with her car after dark. Usually lots of tourists would hang out in the area, but not since a week ago. The district was a zombie. Not even all the street lamps were lit. The city saved the power and these dim lights helped us.

We stayed in the parked car to observe the neighborhood. For half an hour. I put on the face-mask and the gloves on everybody was told to use to protect themselves from the virus. With the hoodie over my head and a crowbar hidden under my outer garments I entered the club with my key through the backdoor.

In the stockroom I piled up the most expensive stuff on a cart. Whiskey. Rum. Gin. Vodka. I pulled the heavy load outside, stopped before I touched the pavement, checked the street and the windows of the houses around. Franziska opened the trunk and it took us not more than twenty seconds to stash the cardboard boxes full of bottles. She lit a cigarette and watched the surroundings till I returned with the next six packages. Another half a minute and everything was arranged properly. I locked the trademen's entrance with my key, positioned the iron bar and cracked the wooden door open. It took a moment and made some noise. Then I quit the crime scene.

We drove the next two hundred meters with no lights on like she must have seen in some gangster movies. Then she turned right and decided to use only side streets. Franziska smiled. And looked at me. She gave me a big kiss on my lips.

“What you did was ruthless, but very sexy,” she admitted.

“My boss will get money for the damage from the insurance. And I refill my account with the stuff. I sell it for half prices to other bar owners, they will be happy to save money. You see, these times need flexible business models.”

“He will have a fight with his companion. The one he phoned!”

“You mean, he thinks the guy fucked him?”

“Probably. Like your boss tried to fuck me. He grabbed my ass when you and I were a couple.”

What a wanker! Trying to seduce my girlfriend behind my back!

“By the way,” I tried my luck, “do you think we should fuck?”

Franziska put her eyes back on the empty street. “Why not?”, she greenlighted our comeback as lovers and the first romance in my life thanks to a lack of toilet paper. Social distancing was now over between us. She could be infected with the virus, but I was ready to take that risk.

†

CARSTEN REGEL was born in Berlin, 1966. His published novels are *Hosen runter* (2012), *Slumlords* (2017) and *SED, LSD & ein Hippie mädchen* (2019). Regel wrote and directed the Warner Bros movie *Wie Männer über Frauen reden* (2016).

Bernardo, a Cat and I

JORGE IALANJI FILHOLINI

Translated from the Portuguese by Dylan Blau Edelstein

Day 1

The government declared the end of quarantine. It lasted a long time. Days, months, years. We've lived in isolation for two and a half years. Where rats once ruled, human feet take the smallest steps, awkward, staggering, cautious, inconsistent with their desired direction. Untouched by pavement. No longer unpunished for their choices. So often, legs are well-written poems. No need for poets when legs can stimulate. I searched for food, found nothing but desires and pigeons pecking away aimlessly at the gray concrete. Only the infected were still imprisoned. Contained in a pop-up field hospital in a smaller city in the state of São Paulo. Your first time on the street feels like taking your first steps, like you're drunk on anxiety, unsure of the ground you were born on. The end of a pandemic doesn't come when the government says so, but the mind.

Day 2

A Leonard Cohen song wakes me. I'm caught between my dream and this jarring reality. Did my mind or my neighbor start playing that scratchy voice? My stomach grumbles. It was happy with the attention from the sardines last night. There's still stuff in the corner store by my building. To get in, go to the roof, and you'll find an asbestos-covered hole that drops down into the canned goods aisle. The store was inky, illuminated only by the entry above. I groped my way through dust-coated merchandise. I took thirty cans of tuna and sardines. I'll be well-fed this week.

Day 3

Words, disjointed during the pandemic. Poems accumulate. Poems don't give up amid chaos. Note: find a post-pandemic poem. Do poems have phobias? What do poems like to do in isolation? They say that good poems take cold baths in the winter. Bold. They walk around with wet hair in the rain. And without a coat. Poems feed on fear. A big helping at lunchtime. Bernardo came to visit. Dragged a chair over to sit in front of me. Bernardo died in the first wave of infection. There was no funeral. I couldn't see him.

Or say goodbye. He inspects me like a ufologist exploring the first ship on Earth. Bernardo was an architect. He drafted the blueprints for my apartment. We were friends for 25 years. When I heard about his death, I felt the symptoms of the virus. Transmitting a debt, a game of Pass the Ring. Serving a deadly wine in a jagged-edged glass. Bernardo doesn't speak. Bernardo's lips are sewn shut. He extends his hand towards me. No, Bernardo, not today.

Day 4

A cat entered my apartment. My first visit in years. He wriggled his little body and jumped from the windowsill to my bed. He stretched out, pulled at loose threads on my comforter. It's warmer in here than outside, he told me. Can I spend the night? I said yes. Bernardo was jealous. He didn't want to sleep in my bed. Today, I slept cuddling the cat.

Day 5

Why won't you tell anyone about us? I spent the entire morning chewing over this question from before isolation. It still reverberates in my head. Helena and I had broken up that day. I had no answers, and she was tired of me never having answers. She was tired of Bernardo. Tired of me getting back drunk in the early morning. Tired of me not bringing her along to see friends or go to cultural events. Tired of having no pictures together on Instagram or Facebook. Tired of the Barra Funda neighborhood. Tired of São Paulo, where I lived. Tired of Brazil. She left for Berlin. She was still sending me messages when the city lost power. Copper theft went up and they stopped making wires. Candles are scarce and should only be lit in desperate moments like this one. In the corner of the room, Bernardo, still jealous, won't look at me. The cat snores. Helena appears in the dim candlelight. She inhales the smoke. The indulgent, waxy aroma. She smiles a smile I can't remember anymore. Was I projecting? Her yellow, decomposing teeth didn't scare me. What I really wanted to see was Helena's smile. I drew closer to her dry, purple lips, that raw flesh. I kissed her until I felt my beard burning in the candle flame.

Day 6

I'm choking as I write this entry. I can still feel the burn of the mass grave in Ibirapuera Park. The bodies flung into the flames. The crackling of bones and faces, all with the same disfigured gray expression, a model for some futuristic funereal exhibit. Feet twisting and hair flying in a tortuous rhythm — that's what the eyes look at to avoid witnessing the unsurvivors, a word that might not even exist in a post-pandemic world. I made it up. I'm a survivor, a pity. There's no word in the dictionary for the feeling that took hold during the infection's second wave in Brazil. A hollow-faced doctor. Tears. I'd never seen a doctor cry before. The helicopters compose a symphony to the beat of the burning flesh. The broadcast networks might have recorded the largest catastrophe to take place at a São Paulo landmark.

Day 7

What is happiness? the cat asked me. I looked up the meaning to push him away with a quick, easy response. But none appeared. That's the thing. Happiness is nothing. You know? The nothing that does nothing more than swim in the face of happiness. Big armfuls of nothing. Butterfly strokes of it. Pirouettes in front of a wall where nothing is painted. Where, only in a corner, the word "nothing" is written. You need to see what that feeling's like. The nothing that tickles you. Makes your hairs stand up. Toys with your nostrils. Pulls on your little mustache just to annoy you. The nothing that gets off on us. The nothing that scoffs in our faces. Laughs. Humiliates. And without doing anything, it fills a whole life. Highs and lows. Ridicule. The nothing that is nothing more than happiness in the shadows of chaos, waiting for everything to normalize, to have nothing more to do. Except to carry with it a kind of vulgar happiness. Later, I kicked the cat off the bed and fell asleep smiling.

Day 8

I lay down. I stretched and felt a hankering for coffee. I need to get some more at the corner store, the one that only I know how to enter. My tongue was still cottony with morning dryness when I saw Dad in the

kitchen. He was preparing fish. Fugu, your favorite, remember? Where'd you put the salt? In the jar that says sugar. Why? To confuse the ants. Dad cut some limes and squeezed the juice on the fish. He waved me over to show me the fillet on the baking sheet. Touch it. I touched it. It's smooth. Smooth. I went fishing in the Tietê River. Right next to the highway? That's the spot. Some of the fish even had wings. I had to see it. I had to. I caught one for you. Look in the freezer. I opened the freezer and there was a winged fish, frozen and over a meter long. Gotta let it marinade for five hours, okay? Okay. Don't eat the wings. They're very acidic. Are we having it tonight, Dad? It's going to be real juicy. He winked at me. I woke up tired.

Day 9

On the way to the corner store, I passed by a moto-tree, bars with trunks growing out of windows and doors, car frames with dry leaves covering the hoods, worm-eaten lamp posts, a feast of decomposing bodies for dogs, rats, and people. Bernardo came with me. I wanted to show him my secret entrance. We filled up our cart with cans. Our party in the drink aisle was cut short by shouts in the street. Slinking over to the entrance, we watched through a slit in the door. A group was chasing a shirtless man. He was all bloodied. His eyes, black and blue. His mouth, open. He begged them to stop beating him. He choked on his own spit. A member of the group, maybe the leader, had a thick log in his right hand. He told the group to stop. The man got on his knees and thanked them. He pled for mercy. The leader asked where he'd gotten infected. He was sick again. Could pass it on to us. I wanted to stay. I hadn't seen a death in a while. The leader lifted the huge club and cracked the man's skull in two. The man was still writhing. Bernardo shook his head. He pulled me back. I left him in the store. Right in the dental hygiene aisle.

Day 10

The cat scratched me below my left eye. I didn't give him any more food. Let the little brat open his own tuna can. Humans are funny. They create

their own pandemic. Their own laws and procedures. The world has changed, but of course hate endures. Hate that tightens your throat. Survivors with no desire to live. I wanted the virus to take me during the first or second wave. Now, I fight with a cat and eat fish preserved in liquid sodium. No government help out here. They're not playing games. All the politicians are in bunkers. Barra Funda is too far. The "post-" is inscrutable. It infects your mind. I saw dead bodies piled up outside my building. I still see the mothers' desperation every night when I close my eyes to sleep. That's poetry. I only find quiet in dreams, when I bring the image of Helena to the front of my mind. There, in a packed bar, playing with her phone, ready to snap a photo of us. And me, hesitating. That's poetry. From my 16th-floor window, I can see São Paulo itself. People still surviving. Still selfishly not sharing food. Many died alone. Without funerals. Without goodbyes. It almost seems like a normal day in the city. That's poetry. A Leonard Cohen song plays on my next-door neighbor's record player. He died two months ago. That's poetry. I didn't have fish for dinner today. I set the cat on the stove to boil.

†

JORGE IALANJI FILHOLINI is a writer, producer, photographer, and editor. He is a founder of the cultural site *Livre Opinião: Ideias em Debate* [Free Opinion: Ideas in Debate]. In 2016, he published his first book of short stories *Somos mais limpos pela manhã* (Selo Demônio Negro), which was a finalist for the 2017 *Jabuti Prize*. In 2019, he released another book of short stories titled *Somente nos cinemas* (Ateliê Editorial). Currently, he lives in São Paulo.

DYLAN BLAU EDELSTEIN is a translator, writer, and researcher. He spent 2018 in Brazil on a Fulbright scholarship, investigating the life and work of psychiatrist Nise da Silveira. In August 2020, after two years translating and making theater in New York City, he moved to New Jersey to begin his PhD in Spanish and Portuguese at Princeton University.

Spring

FRED DI GIACOMO

Translated from the Portuguese by Robert Keiser

WHEN THE ANIMALS BEGAN TALKING, they finally realized that nothing would go back to normal.

They walked beneath the sun, which was punishing without its filtering womb of ozone. The Old Blind Man and the Sad Girl. The man's white skin covered with rags darned in times past. Pink burns and dark moles marking his face. The pack upon his curved back, a staff in his right hand for protection and support, a Great Dane christened Basset trotting behind him.

The girl with deep brown skin believes the man is her father, but it's not certain. Nothing is.

Yes, after the calm came a second wave. And then a third and a fourth. After the fourth, few remained. The children, who'd recovered so quickly, dissolving from the inside, eroded by their own broken white blood cells. "Kawasaki," the helpless expert explained; the horror. And then, yet to come, the years of Great Abandon.

Regretted optimism. Anyone who believed our moderate government and escaped to city parks during that summer of record-breaking heat no longer breathes. The Blind Man with gnarled hands was not one of them. He'd learned from his grandfather. The times of the world wars were simply a rehearsal for what was to come. Don't get rid of anything. Take precautions. Trust no one. He stashed away canned goods, a gun, and gallons of water. They had a well, but its drinkable liquid turned to acid.

Of the great city only ruins remained. The once enormous TV tower, now archaic. The kiss on the Wall, now just a place for crows to roost. The angel atop the Victory Column in the great park, now circled by unbridled forest. They slept beneath the angel when they could. The Sad Girl gazed up at its wings trying to ingrain the golden image in her mind.

They eat what's been left behind. Or they hunt. But many animals vanished too. For the plague came from the fauna, and unto the fauna it did return. Cows, goats, sheep, and horses eaten away from within. Running wild in agony, their insides aflame. From the park sprout foxes, wolves, crows, and wild boar. Mad.

One day the rain dried up.

“What’s going on, father?”

“It’s a sign.”

The Blind Man is always seeing signs. He guides his daughter through the fields that wither with unthinkable resolve. “Today will be a magnificent day, a magnificent day!” The gray clouds, the wind that never quiets. She says nothing. She follows him.

They pass by an acrobat balancing on a rope tethered between two trees. A pack of starving, sunburned children observes. The Sad Girl remembers the path that leads to the smile.

“Who’s applauding me, my dear?”

“They’re applauding the acrobat, daddy.”

“Charlatan, wretched . . . These kids are a band of savages!”

“They’re children, daddy.”

“Tomorrow they’ll be corpses.”

From the father’s pack springs a can of food. They share it, silently. The dry, thin kindling yields a small fire. “Tomorrow will be a magnificent day!” The old man sleeps. The young woman keeps watch.

A tall Bavarian comes by selling dried meats, which hang upon the branch of an oak tree. The child drools. The blind man wakes up, stands in front of the salesman, and then begins to revolve around his own axis, putting his weight on his left leg. He lets go of his staff, and spins, stretching out his arms. Like this, he revolves for a few moments. Out of breath, he opens his eyelids and spits at the salesman, who laughs, indifferent.

“Those who feed off poverty die by choking.”

The Bavarian gives them a devilish wave. And the strangely familiar meats say goodbye swaying.

“Daddy, what’s happening here?”

“Nothing.”

They wake up itching all over. White spots nibble at the girl’s brown skin. “It’s nothing. Today will be a magnificent day.” Poor old Basset. First, the swarming crows, then the mad foxes, and now the dead squirrel. “Can we eat him?” The father points to the cans in the pack. The sausage.

“Can you hear them?”

“The crows, father?”

“Those are canaries, my dear. They’re singing for us. It’s a warning.”

Her eyes contradict the blind man, but it’s better to stay quiet and go along.

“Who’s calling me, dear?”

“He’s a pastor.”

“Of sheep?”

“No, of men.”

The pastor’s words are sometimes swift and cutting, other times delicate and captivating. He claims false kings invented the plague, a lie and nothing more. He calls on the people, pleads for a return to normal. “For a red light shines in the north. For a star will lead us to our savior!” The father spills salt from his eyes. The Sad Girl holds his hands, like those of an ancient tree. He is a human trunk. For a brief eternity he permits the touch, then brusquely pulls his hand away. “The pastor is right. Tomorrow will be a magnificent day.”

Days and nights pile up like the wrinkles on the father’s face. Their trek each day more desolate. Fruit rotting in clusters. Nourishing leaves giving way to weeds. Anti-manna on the ground. Fewer cans each day. The man’s certainty always echoing. “Could he really be her father?” A cadaverous woman regurgitates a litter of rats.

Perched in a dry willow tree, the Sad Girl sees the distant silhouette. The old man's heart begins to beat fast. "Destiny speaks through omens." They follow them on a circuitous route that prolongs their journey. A song of distant sirens. From the enormous tree dangles a man in his cheap and sagging suit. It is the pastor who once preached, a rope wrapped around his neck, lifeless.

The Old Blind Man ignores the hanging body. "Tomorrow will be a magnificent day. On we go!" And, for the first time, the Sad Girl says no.

†

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The Furniture

RAIMUNDO NETO

Translated from the Portuguese by Lara Norgaard

*“What makes one name more a person than another?
Is the name the real thing, then?”*
The Bluest Eye, Toni Morrison

I - Exhumation

THE DAYS WERE NOT AS EMPTY as one would have expected of the future. Dead days, dead people. In the Temporary Home, time opened up, ravenous for all the children.

Everything had fallen apart since they'd left their homes, not knowing where they were going; the legs of time were dragged by a force far greater than their stillness. The children weren't hungry anymore; their rage didn't drop a tear until they felt their old clothes left behind, until the mornings when they didn't know how to wake up without their mothers. The infinite ways in which they had been sons and daughters boiled down to nothing, lost forever along with absent mothers.

One of them was dragged out of his first house; then, upon leaving the second house, the temporary one, after an urgent decision had been made, he felt his body empty out through a poisonous cry, time broken on his wrist, the future announced like some sort of ending. A more stable home is better for a child, they said. *Let it be now, with the Chaos out there killing people and upending their pasts.* A childhood cut short and soon, a new way of living.

His arrival inspired bliss in apartment 1720, under São Paulo's reckless clouds, the air infested with squalor. He was six years old when he arrived, that child. Everything moving so fast that he doesn't even remember whether it happened one or ten years ago. And he still doesn't understand how he turned out to be what he is today, piled onto that leftover family, the one that stuck him with a name that no longer fills him with life or vigor. *Elias.*

There, the new family's blooming, calculated joy irritated the other son, the third one, who was older: Julian, primary resident of his parents' (Edith and Thomaz) greatest dreams. *He won't sleep in my room.* Elias slept.

He won't eat at the same table with me. Elias ate. He won't play with my toys. Elias had other toys, ones that were just as colorful and interactive. Elias just didn't have any peace. A week after his sudden arrival, the parents already hoped for more from the child, who wasn't reinventing himself as their new son.

Elias didn't know what he was trying to prove all those years. He didn't know if he was searching for his first name, his first mother, or if he was trying to conjure up some kind of certainty about how much time had passed since that first ending, which all the adults around him called a new beginning. *It's what's best for you. Your last chance. Who doesn't want to have a family like this, to live in an apartment like that?* They told him he'd been saved when liberating him from the first family. Now, he was made to swallow stretched-out filaments of fear and the perverseness of affection. They didn't tell Elias what he wanted to know.

Good things are gonna happen to you, kid. Good. Things. Anything that the Great Norms allow. Elias wanted to know what was behind all of those codes; he didn't know what he carried in his flesh anymore, in his life that had melded into the space of the apartment, immense, silent as a tomb. Elias, empty, asked me to take a good look into the depths of his eyes. We were alone, slipping into the night, and no one saw us. Elias no longer knew how to tell his story when he wasn't running away.

I should say that there's a dead child here who guided Elias to the Family Photo Album. He was the one who didn't survive, or who lived in this woman's dreams all of these years, in this mother now busy polishing the image of the age of Elias. *This is where you were born. On the first page, an Official signed documents and made you go away, leave behind your first mother, and just like that, take the quickest route here.* Time laminated, protected by the pages of the album and the imperious declaration that the child would have another name, different from that of the ghost child. *Your name is my name, Elias. That's the only way you'll ever be their son.*

For many people, the world seemed to have started ending. For Elias, the world had already ended. I'm talking about an interminable day that

seems not so unlike a simulated reality, in which parents enter and leave an apartment, immaculate, organized, and just as spacious as any insanity. Elias's past seemed like it would have fit there, had he known all that it was. His parents' eyes were monotonous, grim despite their love, and when their mouths opened, they stank of burnt meat. The brother's skin was translucent and valuable, Elias knew.

I'd known, ever since he'd arrived, that it wasn't his name. No one thought it was important. The world was ending. That first name was moving farther and farther from Elias's lips. *This is where you'll live, this is your name, Elias.* Six years old, a child. *And the other mother? And that dead child who wakes up every night? Where are my sisters? Did I have a grandmother? My house wasn't dirty, my mom smelled good. What was my mom's name, the first one? How could it be that she disappeared without saying my name one last time?* And the unearthed memories of his first mother waking up the sun with a cup of coffee spilling onto her hand, and her licking it, laughing, wiping buried nightmares from her son's eyes, those terrible dreams he had: a man in combat uniform hidden beneath the bed was shouting at the child, *I'm gonna end your life, kid.*

Elias, a child, heard only his new parents, Edith and Thomaz: *You should be more grateful. Just look around.*

And he looked and saw the ravenous eyes of his brother Julian. He also felt a hand – the dead child – scraping at the sadness pushing up against his body, bringing about that terrible feeling of continually transforming into something else. Elias felt an explosion in his bones, then a fever drying up the place of his tears, and flames pouring down when he turned his cries inside out and tried to empty himself of anger. Elias burned as he let out his screams; he could see the echo of his words dragging the furniture and decorations – which held the remote calm of apartment 1720 – out from where they'd been meticulously placed.

With each rejection of his first name from his parents' mouths, his new days were cut short, lost in a daze. Elias's groans resounded through the furniture. The place seemed offended by the presence of this child, who

had been born six years before in some different, other place that now everyone refused to remember. Was Elias ready? Was he mature enough? What kind of leap was it that took him so far, and that now seems like an un-birth, a transformation into something immobile that neither his parents nor Julian, the second child, can handle.

They can't bear Elias's cries, when he's afraid. Elias tries to say that he sees a dead child, with his same name, wandering through the house, opaque and starving, stumbling across the clean floor and dragging pieces of his old body all around the house. Elias tries to say that in his dreams lives a man in uniform, armed to the teeth, strangling the pregnancy of that woman, his first mother, who was carrying him in her womb. His new parents do not tolerate the screams of Elias's ghosts.

Elias resolved that, somehow, he would be heard. He told me about the same dream over and over. *They tell me to forget that woman, my mom, the first one, to pretend that she died.* And the dead child growing in Elias's footsteps, older by the day, accompanying his un-birth. *Is this what dying is for them?*

And I felt that if Elias found out what he was, I would be able to be born for the first time, and say what it is to not exist and still be here, so that's why I insisted. I offered myself up to tell his story, though he remains dead. Is there any surer way to talk about something as sinister and eternal as love?

I pulled Elias by the arm during the night, through the traffic of the shadows and the cadence of silences, through the uninterrupted dying of people in the city. My hands, cold rags, gripped Elias's fingertips. *Your name is my name.* In the days that followed, Edith and Thomaz grew more and more irritated with Elias's rebuttals and his infernal exhaustion. I tried to help Elias to be un-born, to experience some sort of revelation, to embody the mystery within him that seemed more like a kind of dreadful freedom. *Your name is my name.* And the parents were disappointed that Elias wasn't what they had imagined. They decided he was evil, the somber insanity of the rejected, they thought.

Elias cried so many times, he wanted his other mother, his other name; he yelled, tired of hearing them inventing some story to stunt the growth of those old years. *There's something wrong with this child. You should forget all of that. Look around, your new home. You should be grateful, kid.*

It was only a matter of days before they moved from unthinking compassion to outright contempt. They wanted Elias out of their lives just as much as Elias wanted to flee, to stay, to love; to blend in with the insults, to claw, with the infancy of his doubts, at the essential fabric that made Edith, Thomaz, and Julian a family.

II - The Name that Became Defeat

TODAY, EDITH AND THOMAZ ARE COMMEMORATING Elias's arrival and have decided to socialize. A celebration, despite the chaos accumulating bodies in the city.

Masks and invitations. Then hugs and drinks in hands that hold bags filled with protective equipment. There are strict measures in the city, decrees, they say, cataloguing who enters and exits some buildings, residences, businesses. Still, Edith and Thomaz are proud of knowing how to deal with it all, using the hard and fast strategies of those who don't always have to follow the law, and for whom everything turns out fine in the end.

In the Jardins neighborhood of São Paulo, the visitors arrive in pairs, man and woman, so immaculate, unembellished; it's possible to see the size of their smiles, masks on their necks, covering the slick shine of their glowing skin. They hug one another, celebrating their victories over the irritating sound of the news anchor who announces death no. 907,218 in the capital. No one hears, except for Elias and the dead child. One of the women is suffocating Edith with *Congratulations I am so happy that everything worked out and that you're so fulfilled.* She turns, suddenly, extricating herself from feigning surprise, and moves towards what seems to be a grown child. A grating smell of varnish invades the nose of the one who's been discovered. The golden woman is glowing. *What a precious little thing, Edith!*

Some of the women surround Elias until they frame him perfectly for a photograph (which will be shared on social media, with some caption about being happy, being a family); they want to turn Elias into news, with agile fingers, masks blocking their view, smiles hidden in protected breathing. Some sit on Elias's lap. These women, their souls cold, are heavy. The husbands move around Elias, crouching, playing along. Most of the women set their purse straps on Elias's most narrow parts. All of them fit into the photo, together with the furniture.

I see the scene, my sour-faced death, fingernails stuck into the ceiling, pieces of my body like old trinkets dripping fragments of fury that no one sees, except for Elias. I laugh so much rage that I keep myself occupied with the white, expensive hell that I learned to love in this apartment. I laugh, indignant and sad, that Elias had become *that*. Me, this death that lives within me, I'll be with Elias for an eternity that neither of us wanted. Elias didn't ask to be ripped from his first mother who never wanted him to leave. I wanted to have lived, I wanted to have had my name to myself, even if I died. Elias.

I help him quiet the rigidity of new flesh that started to take form. If I could still feel Elias, I would say his skin is mahogany, sort of an ebony-wood. Lustrous. Firm.

He hadn't wanted to run away. A guilty numbness made him welcome the transformation that carved his name into the history of those rooms. In one of the photographs, pasted onto an article about Savior Parents, the family wears whiteness as a totem. Edith and Thomaz are sitting on the recent comfort that Elias had become. Elias, that other, living child who I was not. *Don't leave me here alone*, Elias had asked before turning into *that*.

Elias and I will still be here when the world stops ending, our future. It's for a good cause, they told us.

What beautiful furniture you have become.

THE FURNITURE

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The Implausibility of Trees

KARIN HUECK

Translated from the Portuguese by Laura Folgueira

I LOOKED FROM ABOVE AT THE ORANGE VEHICLE, far too noisy for such a muted city. The ambulance had stopped in front of the house, but no one came out. The siren was still on, its hysterical blue lights reflecting against the bakery's window. They had come for Robert, finally. It had been days since I had last seen him, he must have been in really bad shape. Underlying conditions, I guess. Ten minutes passed. I gave up and went back to my coffee, which was getting cold on the table.

On a regular day, Robert would keep me company. He had a habit of airing out the house at 10:40 a.m., the same time I'd sit at the table. He used to go over to the window in his pink terry cloth robe. With trembling hands, he'd open first the inner pane, then the outer one, and put his head out directly beneath the drywall angel that adorned the façade of his building in Berlin. Robert seemed to like the heat; he would close his eyes to enjoy it. Sometimes, I joined him and also tried to get some sun from behind the glass. Vitamin D.

I finished my coffee and, with colossal effort, got up to go about my day. I checked if the ambulance was still blocking the street, and yes, there it was, lights flashing against the windows of the bakery, the post office, and the pizza place, all closed for the holiday. The siren had been turned off, though. Robert's window remained closed.

On the same date, exactly 75 years ago, Robert had also been forbidden to leave the house, on orders from his mother. The family had been living in the basement for weeks. They spent their days in almost total darkness, illuminated only by the two beams of light that snuck through the misaligned boards of the kitchen hatch. They all sat together, the mother, the father, Robert, and his sister. They'd brought down just the essentials. Two mattresses, a few kitchen utensils, a latrine they kept in the furthest corner of the basement. It was spring, but still the cold was relentless. They touched each other every chance they got. A hand on another hand, a foot over a foot, heads on shoulders and on laps. They wanted to make sure that yes, they still existed, still emanated body heat.

Once a week, the father went upstairs to look for food. He sometimes spent the whole day away, each hour stretching into infinity. On these occasions, each member of the family mentally projected, in silence, horror stories that would explain his prolonged absence. The Russians, the bombs, the battalion of child soldiers. But the father would always come back with something to provide for the next week in hiding: a bag of potatoes, some day-old bread with rancid butter. Once, there was even a white sausage. Most often, however, he would only bring us a bag full of dandelions, nettles, and mushrooms. On these occasions, Robert knew his father had been forced to forage the woods. They then spent their days eating salad and nettle soup. "Go to sleep, kids. Sleep is as nourishing as food," said their mother. Up to this day, Robert couldn't stand mushrooms, not even the giant Portobellos or the delicious chanterelles that crowded the markets in September. He never ate them. Other than that, he wouldn't refuse food.

Robert used to end his morning sunbaths right when I made it to the kitchen. Chaos had taken over my house, came crawling under the front door like the two sun beams in Robert's basement and made itself comfortable. I would wash the platters slowly while thinking of lunch, which would be followed by more dirty dishes. When I came back to the living room, I would see that the neighbor's windows were still open, even though he was no longer there.

In 1945, Robert resisted the idea of being locked in the basement. "All my friends are fighting. And I'm underground like a mouse!" he screamed in whispers. It was true. His friends had all been summoned to hold down Berlin, but not him. He had felt emasculated, infantilized. He said he would volunteer anyway to defend the motherland. He didn't know it yet, but while he was hiding in the basement, his friends were being thrown in front of the Russian tanks like speed bumps of human flesh to delay the enemy onslaught for a few useless minutes. The top officials of death fled in retreat, burning bridges behind them, abandoning the boys to their own luck. Of the six hundred children summoned to the front, only a handful came back.

Ten calendar days saved Robert from sharing the same fate. Born on the tenth day of 1931, he had been excluded from the children's battalion, unlike his friends born in 1930. Later, it was his mother who made sure that, at fourteen, he wasn't mowed down. She said she would tie him to the bed if he didn't let go of these ideas of war. She didn't have to, though. The spanking was enough. Robert was grounded like the child he was, pouting with frustration into the darkness.

As the sound of gunfire grew constant and explosions shook the house with increasing intensity, his rebelliousness faded. The boy realized he didn't want to die. At first, he became resigned; then, quiet; and finally, grateful. He was the first to volunteer to empty the full latrine in the middle of the night and the most devoted to making sure everyone was quiet during the day. Consistency was key. The condition on which life would last just one more day, then another and another. He understood then, as we all do now, that life's great tragedies can be coated in terror and boredom.

It must have been easier for him this time. He had experience. In some weird way, I actually envied him. I mean, his routine probably didn't change much. What could a 90-something-year-old be deprived of, when he barely left the house before? It wasn't fair, I know, but I couldn't stop comparing our suffering. In the suffering Olympics, I take the podium every day. So many plans crumbled in my face. But Robert couldn't have had any plans. I always saw how satisfied he was by the window, with his eyes closed. I bet he was so senile that he couldn't even remember it was Friday, that winter had passed, that the sun would set later that day.

"Women pay the highest price during the pandemic." I read online analyses during one of my self-commiserating delusions. My son would come up to me holding a miniature lion and with hope-filled eyes that his mother would finally say yes, I can play with you, no, I don't need to work right now. He put on his sweetest face and blinked his enormous eyelashes in the hopes that my commiseration also extended to him, an only child locked in the house, out of school for months. I would look at his chubby fingers, the last remnants of a baby, the ten perfect fingers

I loved most in the world clutching that plastic animal as hard as they could. And then, I'd repeat: "I can't, baby. Mommy has to work." He didn't even express frustration anymore. He would leave quietly only to come back the next minute holding two illustrated books, his round little eyes full of hope again. He knew mommy liked to read.

What he didn't imagine was that I wasn't always working. The news crushed me. Did Robert's mother get tired of her children? Where did she come up with the idea that sleep is as nourishing as food? What desperate part of her brain came up with that sentence? So I'd come down from my podium and sit on the floor. I'd ask him to bring the miniature lion, the elephant, the seal. I would build an imaginary world with my son, a zoo that was still open, a sandbox with other children in it. This was a nice universe. He would give me a script: "You're a baby tiger, and I'm his mommy. Now, jump." His words went right through me and filled me with guilt.

Robert was alone. I don't know whether he'd never had anyone or if he just didn't have anyone anymore. I bet the house had once been inhabited by a woman. The lace curtain, the violet paintings, the printed couch. And the pink robe, of course. It was a curious thing to see, a bald elderly man, so tall, wearing only that robe. Every day he would come to the window the same way, maybe because he liked pink, I don't know, but I was sure that wasn't it. If this were a soap opera, I'd say the velvet still carried the traces of perfume and that he was recently widowed. It reminded me of my grandmother saying she'd want to be in a plane crash with my grandfather. It would be worse to go on living without him.

I don't know how he carried groceries up to the fourth floor. It was hard enough for me. I climbed one flight of steps and already had to stop to catch my breath, as well as to negotiate with the miniature version of myself. Climb a few more steps on your own, just a few more, please, baby. I was always surprised at how quickly my son would break into tears.

I decided to cook pasta. During the first few weeks, cooking had been a way of healing. Nothing was in my control except for what I put on my plate, so it felt good. I stood on the shoulders of cooks who, before

me and by trial and error, had figured out the right amount of time to cook each dish. Platters became colorful, plates abounded on the table as small monuments to my dedication. I took photos for posterity before it all turned into, well, what food turns into. My god, how does one prepare nettle soup? Soon, that eagerness went away.

I thought about sending a message through the window. "Do you want me to get your groceries?" I went so far as to make the sign, drawing beautiful letters so Robert could read them across the street. If they were large enough, he might accept my generous offer, be touched by this stranger's selflessness. I read in the newspaper about acts of generosity that were spreading around the globe, the violin concertos on balconies, the notes on buildings' common areas, the applause every night at eight. *These small gestures will restore your faith in mankind.* They didn't.

At fourteen, Robert carried a lot of rocks with his father. They needed the space, the basement wasn't very large and, with all the debris that fell, they could barely move. The job was terrifying. The pieces of destruction had to be carried upstairs one by one, which risked causing the ceiling to cave in. It didn't, but moving the rubble created new debris from the crumbling walls. They went upstairs in the middle of the night to minimize the risk of being seen and then scattered the rocks so as not to leave any evidence that they were still there.

The bomb had been dropped in the early hours. Robert woke up with a clap of thunder and the certainty that this was the end. The earth shook, but what was really frightening was the noise of the house caving in after the air attack. When they first left to assess the extent of the damage, they saw that the bomb had missed the house by just over six feet. It had created a hole the size of a grand piano in the garden and tumbled the entire roof, but the house was standing. Only one wall in the kitchen had crumbled, as well as the one over the basement. Hence, the debris. Robert and his father moved rocks for five nights in a row, in a delicate, possibly fatal balancing act. But the roof stayed put. Ten days, six feet. Who said there's no luck in terror.

After the bombing, Robert didn't want to sleep anymore. He appointed himself to be the group's sentinel and wanted to be in position in case more misfortune fell from the skies. In fact, there was another one just a few nights later. Before he felt scared, Robert felt satisfaction for having stayed awake. The second bomb hit the neighbor's house full-on and swept it off this earth so efficiently that no one would have guessed that hole had once been a home. They hoped the three little girls next door had escaped. So Robert started sleeping in short segments. He took a nap mid-morning, another after what they used to call lunch, and slept a bit more in the early evening. The night was sleepless. To this day, his afternoon nap is sacred. He would lie on the floor, on the grass, and I remember once having seen him on top of a table for a good fifty minutes. I always thought it was funny.

The best time to spy on my neighbors was at night, when the windows across the street were lit up. I saw them on the sofa, comatose in front of the television's blue light with their food-stained pajamas. But I never even glimpsed Robert. He wouldn't switch on a lightbulb after the sunset. For me, nights were always the worst. I saw the neighbors turning off their melancholic lights one after the other, until there was only me, alone by the window.

The night brought with it a racing heart, shaking, breathlessness. I spent weeks thinking I was contaminated before I realized I had the wrong diagnosis. The lady on the emergency line explained that if I had the same symptoms for so many days without getting worse, I must have a different illness. She gave me some phone numbers so I could talk to someone. I lost them. At least my son never saw me on the mend. He woke up really early, only a few minutes after I had fallen asleep on the couch and found me miraculously cured. "Mommy, mommy, let's play zoo!" There it was again, the miniature lion.

Seventy-five years before the day the ambulance arrived, Robert's family finally left the basement. They hadn't heard bombings for days and started noticing conversations on the street. "Good morning" here, "good

morning” there. There were no shots being fired, no running, nothing. The father went out to investigate but got contradictory information. The guy had blasted his brains out in the bunker, said some. Not true, hang tight, he’s going to launch his secret weapon to save us all, said others. Indecision had them paralyzed. It was May 8th and they hadn’t eaten in two days or heard blasts in five when they decided to take the risk. One by one, they left the basement, admiring what world there was left. They touched the grass, looked at the immense sky. They didn’t know, but on that day, the last officials would sign the surrender. Peace, peace! Today, the holiday.

Robert looked at the street as if for the first time. In a way, it was. Those trees looked implausible to him. They had stayed in the same spot for all these years, witnessing history, and still, they bloomed. Neighbors turned to dust, mowed down friends, an insatiable hunger. He wished he were a maple tree. Standing there, he was sure he would never be happy again. But he was wrong.

The other day, the chancellor went on TV to say that the normalcy from before would never come back, but a new normal would have to be created. “We have reason to be cautiously optimistic.” Parks were opened. Stores placed their trinkets outside their shop windows. Restaurants had their tables spread over the sidewalk. I finally went outside. Six hundred thousand dead. Bodies dumped on the streets of Guayaquil. All those old people suffocated at home in Lombardy. Graves opened by bulldozers in Manaus. Trees were indeed implausible.

I walked the streets admiring the crowd and took my son to a near-by park. We made timid contact with another mother close by, and the children started playing. From time to time, I called him to disinfect his dirty little fingers. I threw 70% rubbing alcohol in his cracked hands and started to console him before the tears came. From afar, I kept repeating “take your hands out of your mouth!,” “no, don’t hug your friend,” “let go, that’s not yours.”

The sun was so warm, so different from the rays that came in through the window. The children’s laughter reminded me of an ad for

laundry detergent. Even the birds were singing. I started shaking. My heart raced. I opened my mouth to breathe, but the air didn't come. I called my son and took him home under protest. We didn't go out anymore.

Finally, something inside the ambulance moved. Two young men opened the back doors and pulled out a gurney. One was the driver, because he kept going to the front and coming back. They rang the buzzer and went into the building with a kind of ease that made no sense. This is it. Poor guy. If he'd just opened the curtains a little, I might know what was going on.

Peace looked strangely similar to war. After they left the basement, the family still didn't have food. They couldn't even find bread anymore, or potatoes, or salt, anything. They stood for hours in line, waiting for some watery soup that didn't nourish or comfort. They walked through a decimated Berlin looking for familiar faces. They went to old addresses and found only the skeletons of buildings, vertical walls cut by horizontal pavement and filled with debris. Furniture was still neatly arranged in rooms, clothes strewn across the street, shoes with no one to lead them. They waited for things to normalize. A new normal.

On a late summer day a few weeks later, Robert's father invited him for a walk. They climbed a hill on the edge of the city. They watched the horizon for a few minutes, before the father started speaking. "Listen carefully to what I'm going to say, son. We didn't want to tell you before. Your mother is Jewish." Robert didn't understand. He literally couldn't extract meaning from the words. His vision became blurred and he had to sit on the floor. How was that possible? How could that person he loved so much be... a Jew? How could she be alive? Wait. "Doesn't that make me Jewish also?"

He remembered how his father had disappeared during the war and came back with his body full of scars. He discovered that they'd tortured him, trying to force him to separate from his wife so they could eliminate her and her half-bred children. The man refused. He was whipped, made sick with cold water in the winter. Still, he resisted. They couldn't

kill an Aryan's family. Ten days, six feet, a great love. When Robert was able to face his father again, he was crying. "Come. Let's pack our bags. There's nothing for us here."

They took a train South and crossed the Alps. The plane that took them to America shook so much that Robert couldn't help but think how ironic it would be if they were to die like this. But they made it to Brazil. He reached adulthood, met a nice girl, put children in the world. He really was happy. I know because I remember. I remember him sleeping on the table, I remember him picking mushrooms out of the salad, I remember the insatiable hunger of my grandfather. He is now in isolation, at home, in Brazil. He doesn't recognize his family anymore. He doesn't know about the virus. I don't know if he knows he was happy.

Finally, the paramedics came back. They had trouble keeping the building door open while they pushed the gurney out. One of them held a bag valve that needed to be held every few seconds over the patient's head. The other one was focused on steering the gurney. He pushed it carefully so the curb wouldn't become an obstacle. They opened the ambulance door and, slowly, lifted the body inside. The person was covered up, but I could see they weren't tall. During the manual ventilator, some tufts of very long blond hair fell over the sweatshirt. Then, a woman came out of the building and begged to get in the ambulance with her daughter. They didn't let her. My neighbor's window stayed shut.

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Silva, by São Paulo's Daniel Sabino and *Autobahn*, by Peter Wiegel,
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Silva is a robust serif typeface superfamily, is designed for editorial use.
It was created and developed in São Paulo.

Autobahn is based on the original lettering design for *Deutsche Reichsbahn*,
the former German national railway. Some of the original placards
can still be found in train stations in Berlin.



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