THE SET OF THE SUN

novel-as-memoir
by
J.L. HERRERA

1998 Michele Turner Award

The central characters and happenings
of this novel are fictitious.

Some of the minor characters are based on real-life people, others are composites or inspired by real people. I have taken a number of small liberties, such as giving people family or friends, lengthening their period of 'duty', and putting words in their mouths.

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**To the Memory of
my Father**

By the same author:
The Vigil (Alan Marshall Award)
Keeping Sheep & Other Poems
S*eashores*
The Pickelhaube Mouse

Foreword

Books get written under a variety of difficult circumstances. This book is doubly precious to me because I can still picture Tom saving scraps of paper to write it out by the light of a lantern and because he took to heart my constant pleas that he write about his childhood and schooldays. It cannot have been easy for him to write of things he felt had been safely left behind.

I have tidied up his spelling and grammar a little and corrected several misquotes in his verses but I have tried to keep his words, his style, and his punctuation, except for changing his use of *aspas* to the quotation marks more familiar to English readers.

As well, I have added a couple of verses I like to think he would've enjoyed if I'd thought to share them before our time ran out. (No doubt you will be able to decide which ones I chose.) And sometimes when I come upon words such as Robert Louis Stevenson's—

We travelled in the print of olden wars;
  Yet all the land was green;
  And love we found, and peace,
  Where fire and sword had been.
They pass and smile, the children of the sword—
  No more the sword they wield;
  And O, how deep the corn
  Along the battlefield!

—something of that strange sense of poignancy that was always an unspoken part of our friendship resurfaces.

My son in a moment of post-modern enthusiasm suggested I slice the story up. This did not appeal to me. I am old-fashioned enough to prefer a beginning, a middle and an end—and if 'end' is inappropriate in this context then a moment of conclusion. As well, my struggle to put all the pieces together in as chronological an order as possible did not endear me to the idea of cutting it apart again.

Perhaps I am making excuses, now that I have admitted to my own amateur editing, but I pondered long over expressions such as 'the natives' and 'house boy' before deciding to leave them. Tom learned his English in Mr. Beveridge's establishment which even with the mellowness of hindsight cannot be described as a *progressive* school. It closed, I think, in 1942.

And the world has moved on; to my grandchildren the period, 1946-47, when Tom wrote down these words now seems like ancient history. Tom, himself, saw nothing odd about sending photographs and writing on the back 'a Timor native' and then in brackets 'do you think you would recognise me if we met again?'

Memoirs are moments in time and place. So I hope you will share some of the pleasure I have found in preparing this manuscript for a wider readership.

P. McNab
Edinburgh 1996

THE SET OF THE SUN

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This our
refined melancholy
arising from I know not what
a letter perhaps
from the solitary hours
wafting over the island
or from the music
of the opposing sea.

Jorge Barbosa

*****

Might it not be the mark of an unacknowledged boastfulness which leads me to put these words on paper. Are not the great men of our time busy with their memoirs? But perhaps it is only possible to understand, to explain that which seems inexplicable, by trying to write down what came before, those things, so small and unimportant, that led to decisions, to fates. Is that a sufficient reason? Sometimes, when I sit down to write, I am happy and sometimes I am sad but mostly I can be happy—and my mind protests, why must I take it back to the dark places, why not let it frolic in the sun.

But I must be honest in what I write. And my family might say that I, of all people, need the cold calculation of writing things down because of my inability to engage, as others engage, with life, to understand the ways of the human race which, to them, seem absurdly obvious. If so, I humbly concur.

I was born in 1917. Once, I heard my mother call this a time of melancholy but I know she did not mean my being born because they were happy to have another son, happy in the constrained way that was the habit in our particular household. My brother Henrique was about six-years-old then, after him had come two still-born children.

So you will understand that the melancholy referred to things beyond our village; the terrible war that was being fought in the trenches and ditches and even up in the air of France, and which had already taken the lives of two young men from this most remote of regions where many people did not truly know where France or Germany was. They had gone away in the army of *Geral* Tamagnini de Abreu and not returned.

An isolated place too, left alone by the main thoroughfares of travellers and the commercial to and fro, where the gnarled wind-bent firs and pines struggled to put down their roots in the great granite hills, and heather crept low over the rough moor grass where sheep with splendid out-curving horns grazed. The roads were simple tracks which became small rivers when it rained and were sometimes heaped with snow in mid-winter.

Our house was the largest there. A square stone house placed apart without apology, without friendliness, upon the rising land to the east, looking down with tight windows in deep embrasures upon a neglected stone terrace with urns and a tangled garden. A house with four high chimneys rising up from its slate roof. Henrique was very proud of those four large chimneys. They meant *something*.

Yet, for all its solidness, our lives there had an impermanence; my parents referred to it as ‘the house’ rather than ‘our house’ and they would talk when they thought we did not hear of ‘soon’, ‘leaving’, ‘moving’, ‘packing’; large wooden trunks stood in the entrance hall, pictures invisible under centuries of grime and spiders’ spinnings leaned against bare cupboards in the room my father designated, importantly, *a biblioteca*.

The house had passed to my mother from her father and Henrique told me when I was old enough to ask questions that it would be a discourtesy if they were to sell the house before a time had lapsed.

Then, a little while later, he acquired a new story which included momentous phrases like 'clauses of the will'. I do not think he understood it himself and I certainly did not: for a long time afterward I believed Clauses to be a person who, for some mysterious reason, wished to keep us in this house despite my parents nearly packed and ready to leave for places else.

My grandfather was an equally mysterious person. There were no portraits of him in the house, not even a photograph to be handed round like the photographs my mother had especially taken of us by a man with a fierce black machine in Bragança; we sat on chairs with our legs dangling and were dressed, strangely, in sailors' clothes for the occasion. My grandfather and his life were never mentioned even though we ate at his table and our cook had been his cook and cooked the things he liked to eat.

Maria Godinho was a slow-moving woman with great thick legs and grey hair and a big mole on her jaw, a big brown beetle which jiggled up and down when she ate her food with firm slow bites. She was taciturn but not unkind and her magic lived in her finger-tips because she could turn ordinary things into meals that would please even my father with his delicate health: "Ah, Maria," he would say and it was like a benediction.

Despite the size of the house there was not much money, not money to be held in the hand or counted out to the butcher. There was Maria and a woman called 'Old Mother Lamúria' who came once a week to wash the floors and scrub the clothes; I do not know why she was given this name: other children said she was a witch and put bad things in her big iron pot; my mother said it was strange for a *cigana* to be so full of self-pity; one evening I passed by her small house and she was wailing "Aaaahhhh", on and on she went, crying for something. I walked faster.

Some of the rooms in our house were closed up and dust was allowed to collect and all the rooms of the lower floor smelled of age and sunkenness, a smell that no amount of scrubbing and blue-mottled soap and cedar-oil can banish. The smell seemed to rise from deep under the house, an invisible vapour, which crept through the cracks in the kitchen flagstones and the gaps between the creaking boards of the corridor. It was a cold house.

My little sister Emília was born about two years after me and lived just one week. We were allowed a short glimpse of her before she was dressed in a little white gown and placed in a tiny wood casket, so tiny it was no bigger than the sandalwood box in which my mother kept several necklaces and brooches. The baby's tiny face was a marbled blue, her hands with finger-nails so small yet so perfect, were ice-cold when I put out a finger to touch.

Henrique and I were left at home, watching from an upstairs window, as the small group of men and women wound their way up the hill to the cemetery behind the church. Snow banks crept on to the track so they walked through a narrow white cleft, chilling their feet, and snowflakes settled on their heavy dark coats and a wind blew from the eastern plateaux, cold and biting: for, as we say, Spain gives us nothing but bad winds and worse marriages. I do not believe we cried—she had been part of our lives for so fleeting a time—but for many years to come I associated cold with sorrow—until life turned sorrow upside-down.

Two tenants came with our house and my father was very good to them, perhaps because he felt they would always be here, needing things, and we might not, so he did to their houses things he never did to ours. He studied pictures of the most modern of indoor plumbing and baths of various designs, he sent to english firms in Porto for ideas on floor coverings and comfortable chairs (because England was so much colder he thought their products might be better for people living high in the mountains), he drew plans for what he believed would be the ideal home for the widow and the perfect home for a family with ten children and an improvident father, he drew barns for the animals, and machines which would provide food and water for them without human hands. (Most of the houses here kept the animals downstairs while the people lived upstairs, the heat from the animals keeps the house warm,

but he had read that this was not hygienic.)

It was as if his mind burned with ideas which the nature of his life and the importunities of 'clauses of the will' prevented him using in other ways. The idea, the *world*, my parents shared was very similar; they never argued, or squabbled, or called each other names; they never shouted or threw their arms in the air. They might have been great birds hovering over a pond, stilt-legs, so patient, so serene, watching; perhaps it was the house which had stood against the storms for centuries which gave them this quiet endurance.

They were kind, they were tolerant (oh yes, I know *that*, when I see now what a disappointment I was to them), they never said bad things about other people. For a long time their world had stood, a tripod on three stalwart legs. God in Heaven was one leg; the Holy Father in Roma was another leg; but, by the time they had a family, the third leg had broken. The shooting of young King Carlos and the Crown Prince suddenly left their secure world lop-low.

Yet, in their manner of speaking, it was hard to believe that Portugal was now a republic. The Braganças would sit again on the throne and the third leg would then be, simply, the King in Queluz. They took no apparent interest in the *minutiae* of royalty, they made no attempt to follow the life of the exiled King Manuel, if they had ever seen any of the royal family they never spoke of it. This was simply the way their world was ordered.

You will think them very conventional and this would be true—and yet they were not quite like other people. When the wind blew it was as though they heard different voices, voices of a wider world which they could hark to but which was in some way barred to them. My mother did not treat Maria as a servant though my father must have paid her wages, and they would chat in the kitchen, my mother asking Maria's opinion (for she thought Maria was a wise old woman, wise with years and experience not with education because Maria could not read or write) and sometimes she would say 'Don't do that, it is too heavy for you' while other women of my mother's class would assume that poor women had always strength and stoicism to be placed at the beck of their needs and whims. Maria would grumble, then relinquish whatever it was, for us to carry.

But all this world washed over me those first few years. I find it very hard to say what I was doing and what I remember from that time. Sometimes I have the suspicion I was not precisely doing anything. My father gave us some lessons in preparation for the moment when he would decide to send us to the village school, though it was not till much later that I understood his reluctance to place us in the care of the school-master.

He was still a young man, though his hair was grey, and he had suffered what was called *nevrose de guerra*. He could not keep order, sometimes he would cower behind his heavy wooden desk and not come out for an hour or more, and when he came out he would ask in a high-pitched voice 'is it safe now?' On his calm days he was intelligent, warm-hearted, even funny when he pretended our physical exercises had to do with animals and birds.

But we never seemed to learn very much or perhaps it was that he did not know how to teach children with whom he had little in common and who had no ambition other than to be a shepherd and have their own big half-mastiff, the bigger the better—I, too, thought I would like to be a shepherd but I never said so, intuiting even then that my father had ambitions for his sons—or to leave the village for the grape harvest on the other side of the mountains.

Why did we *need* arithmetic, why did we *need* to know the mountains and rivers of Portugal. He came from the city—I do not know which city but a city I am sure because he was frightened of the dogs.

And so it was left to the priest, *Padre* Diogo, to give some of the lessons. He was white-haired with a thrusting red face and a bulbous nose beneath his wide-brimmed black hat, and he was ignorant and dirty with egg-stains on his *sotaina* and mud caked on his boots, he smelled of wet feathers and much sweat, and yet he had a *presence*. His word was law and his words, so my father said, were founded in superstition and bigotry.

Years afterward, Henrique told me that *Padre* Diogo had lectured him and the other big

boys on the evil of kissing. The old man would shout at them, spittle collecting round his mouth, that they would grow weak and sick, that they would turn black and putrid, that women were like contaminated wells. Who would be foolish enough to dip his bucket in such water! As I remember his words and place them on my paper I think I begin to understand something about Henrique ... and I know, now, I am grateful for the old priest's neglect of my being, my soul ...

Other lives, I am guided by those I have read, present moments of dramatic change. They say "It was at this moment I realised—". Perhaps it is *de rigueur* that they should do so. Therefore I will choose the moment when I was in bed with the measles. My mother had heard somewhere, certainly there was no doctor for her to consult, that children with measles should be kept in a dark room. She moved me from the room I shared with my brother to the great dim expanse of the bedroom at the end of the upstairs corridor.

Mouldering crimson curtains hung round an ancient bed, so old I think Afonso Henriques might have slept in it, more dark curtains were pulled across the windows to close out the day. It was a frightening room for a small boy, alone, and one who lived in the outside by choice. My mother saw me safely in to the bed then she tip-toed out and closed the door softly.

I slithered down from the high bed, as her footsteps faded, and hurried to tug back the curtains. A pear-tree grew outside and in its spring-branches two small brown birds were busy building a nest. A marvellous nest! They came and went, came and went; small slips of twigs, reeds, grass-stalks, each was woven into a bowl which grew under their industrience. Then they lined it with soft down, tiny shreds of wool left behind by the sheep. It was so very beautiful and their sureness fascinated me. How did they *know* what to do next?

There was just one thing which troubled me. Already, I knew all manner of things, I knew that 8 and 5 and 3 would add up to 16; I knew that Vasco da Gama sailed for India with four ships; I knew that the Amazon was the largest river in the world; I knew the capitals of all our colonies and their principal products. But I did not have a name for these small birds. And without a name they seemed to have no official place in the world given me.

I am not sure that I thought this all out in one flash. It might have lived underground, burrowing, spreading, until it could leap upward, as a fountain does. My life was showered with little pieces of information but they always seemed to be the wrong pieces ... When I found the courage to ask *Pe*. Diogo why the snail left a silver trail behind him and what was it made of he simply told me to go back to my lessons. Even Henrique just laughed. "That's the way it is—birds lay eggs and snails leave trails."

But who could be content with such an explanation?

All those hours I spent watching and wondering while Henrique was instead filled with a restless energy. He must be doing things. He found the hours bent over his books tiresome even though he 'had ambition'; he liked to be with people, with other boys. He acquired a football and began a new career. Off his head, his knees, bouncing, dribbling, hitting the stone wall at the back of the house, scoring imaginary goals.

How could I simply sit, he demanded. I did not know this was an unnatural thing to do until that moment. I could sit, trance-like, without feeling anything was wrong, unaware of my self, my body, that I must move. All around me was a world of movement: bees, butterflies, the wind in the grass, the mysterious ways plants twined their tendrils but I could never catch the moment when they moved, the squirrels in the trees, the small paw marks in damp ground that said a fox had passed, the domestic animals which wandered in the rutty tracks between the houses. They acquired characters, personalities, but there was something more I did not understand then. It was the desire to know what was in their heads which constantly perplexed me. Did a sheep say to itself 'I will eat this blade of grass, then that dandelion—then perhaps it will be time for *sesta* and I will fold my legs and rest a little while'?

Henrique would stand over me. "What are you doing, Tomasinho?"

"Listen, can you hear the bees, the whirr of their wings, and the sound they make as the flowers bend under their weight?"

"I don't hear anything. Come and play."

It is hard to know when people started to 'notice' me, that I was unlike Henrique. I was small but not so small that people need worry and want to examine me. I was not clever but neither was I so slow that they would need chastise me. I do not think mischief often entered my head so if I was with the others when they did something naughty, like sneaking trinkets from the saddle-bags of Old Zé, the pedlar, they would know I was not the chief culprit—and never the ring-leader.

The chorus began so slowly—'that boy is not quite right in the head' ... 'he is not like other boys' ... 'it does not seem right' ... it was never said directly to me but rather I caught the meaning as the words flew past, autumn leaves.

One evening, the schoolmaster, 'Senhor Doutor' Costa Lopes, came to see my father. They sat in the library and the row of old books in the glass-fronted case gave a new sternness to my father as he sat beneath them and took in the complaint the master had come, with circumlocutions, to make. My work, he said, ahem, was not as good as it might be.

My father listened and nodded gravely as the master condemned me and I stood silent by the unlit fireplace. My work was not finished. I stared out the school-room window. And if I was moved from the window I studied the mouse-hole in the corner beneath the globe. I had no answers to simple questions. Surely I could try harder. Henrique was his best student.

What did I have to say for myself, my father asked.

I could not say the words that might absolve me from deliberate intent: the charges were undeniably true. But some letters seemed to stick in my mouth. I fumbled, especially, with d's and m's. Now, with their sorrowful eyes on me—and I knew even then they both wanted me to succeed and felt my failures as their failures—I could not make my words form: "*P-p-papá—d-d-desculpe-m-me—m-mas—*"

My father brought this terrible moment to an end by telling me to go to my room. He rose. He and Sr. Costa Lopes walked, heads bowed, to the door.

I drew in, a little snail which keeps everything inside its shell; only with Henrique was I able to talk easily enough and I think this somehow made things worse. It meant there was nothing the matter with my tongue; rather it was something deep inside me, something I did not understand but which was always waiting to embarrass me.

Pe. Diogo liked to talk of the men who had devils inside them, in the times of the Bible and I wondered if I might have a devil living inside me; not a really bad one, just a little one who liked making trouble and then cackled to himself when I grew hot and red. *Pe.* Diogo usually ignored me. If he had a question, even a simple question, he passed over me as if I did not exist and hurled it at someone else.

But the schoolmaster understood, I think, because his own affliction reminded him every day that people can look much like other people and yet be locked away in their own private purgatory. My mother thought I would grow out of it in the same way that I had grown new teeth but her kindness did not make it any easier. I felt I was shaming her. How could she want a son who could not say something so simple as *bom dia* to a neighbour; wherever I went, on the simplest errand, to church, to the cottages to bring back a bucket of goat's milk, I thought a great wave of derision followed me.

More and more I went to the high moors or walked by the trees on the slope beyond the village. It is hard to see yourself as a child, to see yourself as others might see you. An odd boy, small, lonely, always on the edge of others' games? But I do not see myself like that—because, as the houses dropped from my sight, I was king-of-the-mountains, all of a grandness, a happy king ...

*****

Learn well your grammar,
And never stammer,

Write well and neatly,
And sing most sweetly,
Be enterprising
Love early rising,
Go walk of six miles,
Have ready quick smiles,
With lightsome laughter,
Soft flowing after.
Drink tea, not coffee;
Never eat toffy.
Eat bread with butter.
Once more, don't stutter.

Lewis Carroll

*****

The second mysterious thing which changed my life (I do not think 'change' is too strong a word), happened at about this time. My father had a dog, not a sheep-dog but a peculiar-looking dog with brindle and yellow patches, white patches, black patches, grey patches. He got it from the *ciganos*. Possibly they were not real gypsies; they had no gold rings, they told no fortunes, they played no music; they were grey and glum and came occasionally across the border from Galiza with horses and sometimes black cattle to sell. I think they must all have belonged to the one family or clan. There was a silent sameness to them. As I grew older they seemed to come less and less but perhaps that is my memory: perhaps the first times I saw them the excitement of their coming was so much the greater.

On one passage (they stayed only a day in our village; we would never make them rich) along the tracks and byways of Trás-os-Montes, my father bought this strange dog from them. They told him it was a pyrenean mountain dog and he believed this until the day I found an engraving of such a dog standing in shaggy splendour in one of the ancient books which lived behind the glass doors. Here were all manner of strange dogs but none like ours. My father called him Jacob because he said he had created, all by himself but perhaps with a little help from God, a coat of many colours.

Jacob often had sore ears. My father tried all manner of 'quack' medicines, herb poultices, extra cleaning with a warm cloth, but nothing seemed to help Jacob very much. He would sit in patient misery, his head held at an awkward angle, not moving. I cannot say why I touched his ears one day because I must have known a touch would pain him when they were always tender.

But I took them in both my hands, those long brindle ears, and began to run them through my fingers. Instead of yelping and pulling away Jacob simply sat there and let me do what I wanted; over and over, I said 'Poor Jacob, poor ears,' as I felt them between my small palms. (I think I was about eight at the time.) After I do not know how many minutes Jacob gave a long satisfied sigh and lay down at my feet.

I did not know what to think about this, just the simple fact that Jacob seemed to feel better after I had fondled his ears.

*****

At about this time I had two large ambitions. One was to see a real live wolf. I had seen a dead one, we all had, but it was such a disappointment. It was small and thin, its ribs poked through its rough fur, its tongue hung from its dead mouth and left a little pool of saliva. Yet we had all watched the blacksmith making the special collars with spikes for the sheep-dogs, some shepherds also cropped their dogs' ears, and this gave a terror and mystery to wolves.

A wolf, I felt sure, was a huge dark animal with burning eyes and a slavering crimson mouth; when they came down in winter we could hear their howling as though they were just

beyond the fence and this gave me a wonderful *frisson* which ran up my spine and then down again to settle somewhere in my bowels ... I had to see one for myself ... But the only way was to climb out of bed in the cold night, go out into the forest and wait.

You will think I was very brave but of course I was not: I was possessed by the need to *see*. Were wolves huge fierce creatures of the night or were they thin sad pitiful things, skulking and empty-bellied?

Night after night I slipped quietly out, wrapped in my coat and with a blanket from my bed thrown around me like a *bruxo's* cloak; night after night I returned home, wolf-less. Once I saw an owl. Another night a large creature leaped away in the shadows but it was not a wolf. I like to think it was a chamois because I had never seen one. But never a wolf.

And then, after I had let weeks by, staying warm and sloth-ly in my bed, I came one afternoon upon a wolf in a trap. Sometimes I would walk in the woods, my heavy laced boots making tracks in the snow, liking the way the snow heaped the branches in slim lines, looking for the first shoots of spring to come thrusting through. I had never seen a trap before. If anyone trapped they were meant to trap a distance from the houses.

But there was a wolf growling and biting at his caught leg. I stood a long time watching him, until dusk fell, and I still did not know what to do. Of course I knew I *should* go down and call people and they would come and club him to death.

But, at last, I sat down and began to talk to him. I do not remember exactly what I said ... '*lobo-lobo-pobre-pobre-lobre-lobre*' ... a litany of nonsense, but softly. I could not let him chew through his leg and go away with three legs because the other wolves would smell the blood and kill him and I could not tamely hand him to be killed by the village, but I did not know what I *could* do. This is not quite clear to me, now, but I took off my long woollen scarf and put it round his snout then looped it round his neck. You might ask why he did not bite off my ears while I was doing this and the truth is I do not know the answer: perhaps he was exhausted with pain.

Then, with clumsy fingers, I opened the jaws of the trap and led him a little way to where a tumble-down hut existed among the trees. It had been deserted for many years but Henrique and I and some other boys sometimes played there; the roof was half-fallen and snow had crept in but I pushed open the wooden door and it was dry along one wall.

I gave the wolf the bread and ewe's milk cheese that was in my pocket and he snapped it up in an apologetic manner; I squatted down and put both hands round his leg. Unlike with Jacob I stayed still with both hands circling the leg. I was like that for some time then I stood up, very cold by now, and told him I must go home. My mother asked where I had been and I said I had been walking.

"In the snow? Yes, so you have! Take off those wet boots immediately and put them by the fire."

She did not think to ask me anything else and I went normally to bed but could not sleep for thinking that a large wolf, and this *was* a large wolf, would need more than the little morsel I had given him; I thought and thought for a long time, until Henrique was asleep, then I wrapped myself well and crept down to Maria's kitchen and searched.

There was a mutton bone, we had had stew, and Maria had cut the meat away and left the bone white and gleaming. It was a fine big bone and there was meat and gristle round the nuckle. I added more bread to my pocket and went out into the cold. The wolf snatched the bone with his long jaws and worried it for several minutes. Then he placed it carefully on the rubble-strewn-floor and held out his sore leg to me.

Again I took it gently in both hands and we both stayed still, perhaps a few minutes, perhaps longer. Then he drew away and took up the bone again and I walked home with only the gleam of the snow to guide me. When next I went back he was gone, so was the bone. I thought someone had found him but, although I crept in wherever men were gathered and listened, no one said anything about finding him; the smith said those traps were not strong enough for a full-grown wolf; Maria said her soup-bone disappeared without trace and my

father said, without taking her complaint seriously, that the *lobishomens* had taken it; Maria crossed herself and twice checked the bolts on the kitchen door.

But that was all that happened and I believed it was my secret, for years I clasped it to me, certain no one else in the whole world knew that I, Tomás Ernesto Mendes de Vasconcelos, had gone out in a winter's night and talked to a large dog-wolf. As with other things in my life I was mistaken in thinking that.

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Come, dear children, let us away;
Down and away below!
Now my brothers call from the bay,
Now the great winds shoreward blow,
Now the salt tides seaward flow;
Now the wild white horses play,
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray.
Children dear, let us away!
This way! this way!

Matthew Arnold

*****

My other desire was to see the cod boats setting out; or, perhaps, it was a simpler desire: to see the sea. The sea, the great voyages, the sardine fleet, but most of all, the cod-fisher-men—remembered in the great slabs of dried cod hanging in the store-house which Maria took down when other foods were scarce, to soak and turn into cod-cakes or cod-stew or serve with potatoes and turnip-tops—they all seemed to taunt me: a boy who had never seen the sea! That most of the village had not seen it either did not reconcile me. But my hints and questions and suggestions fell, it seemed, on unlistening ears.

"Have you ever seen a real live cod?" I asked Maria.

"Of course not," she said in her brusque way. "No one has."

"Someone has," I said. "Because someone caught them all."

"Oh that!" She gave a gruff laugh. "But nobody here."

"Maria, d-did you always live here—when my grandfather was alive—and before that?" I did not know if my grandfather had been older than Maria; I knew Maria had to be very old; she always said she was older than her teeth and nearly as old as the mountains. "Did you ever see the sea?"

She gave me a long suspicious look. "I have lived in other places," she said cautiously. "Long ago, I have seen the sea. I was with another family once." She closed her mouth tightly. It might be said of us that we, as a people, talk too much—the saying is '*As palavras são como as cerejas*'—but no one would ever accuse Maria or me of talking too much. "Your father will take you some day. Ask him. Now run away, I am too busy to be talking."

Three things came together, a conjunction of planets, to make it happen; three things which did not seem at first glance to have anything to do with each other.

My mother and father began to think of sending Henrique to live in Porto and stay with my father's sister, *Tia* Leonor, there to attend school. Henrique was very intelligent, everyone said so, and a one-room school without books or desks or even a teacher who knew how to teach—what good was that to a boy who might become anything, a great engineer, an army general, with the best lessons?

One night, Sr. Costa Lopes disappeared from the village and was found dead, two days later, out on the wind-swept hillside. I do not know how he died; no one thought to tell his students what they most wanted to know. But people had very little sympathy; it was left to

my mother to gather woody branches with their pink-and-white apple blossom from behind our house; she carried them to the pauper's grave he was given beneath the fir trees. "The poor man," she said softly, "the terrible pain in his head when the wind blew and, all the time, a ringing—or perhaps a drumming like guns—in his ears. But now he is at peace."

My father did not like *Pe.* Diogo, I am not sure that anyone exactly *liked* him even though they did as he told them, but my father said one night: "Do you not hear it in his voice?"

"Hear what, Papá?"

"The sound of Espanha."

So close to Galiza, whose people slur their words much as we do, I had never thought of Spain as being a different sound even if it might be an unknown world. Now, I began to listen more carefully to the old priest: the faint lisp, ignoring his nose.

"He studied at a seminary in Madrid," my father went on. "So he carries a way of believing with him. It is not the way I want for my sons." The anti-clericalism that weaves in and out through our history is never so great as the deep-down fear of Spain, the fear of the small and vulnerable for the large, the bigger brother, but I do not think this is what my father meant. He feared the bigotries of the past which he believed, perhaps with good reason, were nurtured in Spain and exported, a gaudy promise to seduce us with dreams of usurpation, simple believers that we are. He saw in the old man something, I do not know how much, of this rigidity, this bias, this belief he knew who was destined for where ...

Gradually, I came to see what my father meant, an insidious bias: the way he taught 'the Captivity' to us, for instance: Philip was a bulwark, a rock of faith, jew and moor and protestant had alike to be swept away, society cleaned; it was right that we welcomed him—it was not from the *Padre* that I learned that Philip had thirty thousand soldiers—but he presented the unfortunate Dom António as an ingrate, a scoundrel, a fool (I forget, now, the words he used) ... And it was not until many years later that my father explained to me in his calm clear way why Philip's claim was illegitimate ... As he put it "Those who defy the law always want something for themselves, even though they say it is 'for the nation'—" ...

But it was also true that I did not give my undivided attention to *Pe.* Diogo. The apples were forming in the orchard by the inn; there was a horse and cart resting by the fence, the horse was old and gaunt with a grey muzzle ... Old Mother Lamúria whose house was beyond the church came stumbling along the track, a basket of things from the mountains (mushrooms, nettles, wild herbs), her lips moving in what might be silent complaint or invective or an incantation for a 'spell'; I knew, we all knew, she was a witch, because of the leaves and roots she boiled to sell to those who came to her with coughs and phlegm, stomach ailments, stiff knees, bent fingers—even, it was rumoured, those who wanted things to happen which would not happen naturally ... I watched her pass, wondering if I dare go to her cottage one day and ask to see what she put in her big iron pot ...

There was a gigantic bellow behind me, then I was sent flying by a fierce cuff to the head. I lay there, stunned, my ears ringing. The priest bent down and grabbed me by both ears and dragged me to my feet. I stood in front of him, head down and shaking. Then he struck another loud blow and sent me reeling against the end of a bench. Again he picked me up and I felt the strength in his black-clad arms—and again a swift and furious blow sent me stumbling backward. Then he simply turned and walked away. Through the rest of my attendance he never spoke to me but each time he caught me inattentive he would beat me about the head. I began to have head-aches and I do not know how long this misery would have continued had a new teacher not arrived.

He was old and stooped and vague; yet the word whirled about: he had lived and taught in the university city of Coimbra. Why, people asked, would he have chosen to come to such a poor and backward place? New words were found to answer this intriguing question. Scandal. Sindicalist. Money. Women. We watched him carefully, where he went, what he said, his little mannerisms; when would he say or do something which would explain his exile in the mountains.

Nothing!

He lodged with a family in the village and walked slowly to the school-house each morning, in old rusty black, his high old-fashioned collar turned yellow, and each evening he walked slowly back again. He lived a life of such perfect rectitude no one ever learned anything more than that one intriguing tippet of knowledge: that he had a steamer trunk labelled '*Coimbra — Porto*'.

He was not a good teacher, he became lost in vague long-winding explanations which explained nothing, he forgot what he had asked us to do, he became sunk in mournful reveries. It seems to me, now, that life, somewhere, somehow, had beaten him. His days were simply tasks to be got through until the final task when death would creep up, kindly, stealthily, and he would be found to have left his belongings tidy with a little letter to accompany them.

But death came very slowly and unkindly; he acquired a kind of dropsy which made his belly grow out sideways like a terrible expectation. Yet he continued to come every day, walking more and more tiredly, his belly held up in a little kind of harness; he would sit in near silence, occasionally pointing to a boy and wearily dredging up a question while his mind turned inward to his fear of what was happening to him. I think we all felt pity for him but, from my position, it was very terrible because *Padre* Diogo continued to come and the old *professor* could no more take command than had Sr. Costa Lopes ...

My mother—I do not now remember if this information was told to us or we simply guessed—was expecting another child. I do not know why but this galvanised my father into doing something about the school for Henrique.

A car! My father wanted a motor car. He dreamed of travelling round in a motor car. He would take Henrique to Porto to our *Tia* Leonor's; he would look at automobiles; he would—"What would you like, Tomás?" he asked kindly; thinking perhaps of a little gift from one of Porto's glittering emporiums which Henrique and I imagined on every street and corner ... "I would like to see the cod boats, Papá."

"The cod boats!" He looked at me in astonishment. "But why?"

"I want to see the sea."

He sat in thought for some time. "I do not think we can arrange that. They will not return till late in the autumn." Did he see my disappointment? "But we will certainly see the sea—and the reed boats—yes, I will take you to see the reed boats." He looked at my mother. "But we will need a car."

My mother was fiercely opposed to the idea of a car. We had an old horse and an old buggy. Not fast and certainly not smart, perhaps a little smarter than an ox-cart, but then we rarely went anywhere. But, as my mother pointed out, people here understood horses. If something went wrong with the horse then someone would be sure to know what was the matter. It might be colic or a girth-gall, it might be a spavin or a cracked hoof, but who would understand the ailments of a car? Who would be able to look into its depths, amid pounding pistons and whirring parts, and say "This is the matter"?

But she gave in, not only because it was expected of her but, I think, because she wanted my father to be happy. If a roaring metal monster which gulped down tins of smelly *gasolina* would make him happy then, with fatalistic calm, she would accept the car and the changes it might make to our lives.

So it was settled and then I heard my father say—"we have done our best for your father, now he must do something for us." My father was standing in the doorway at the time and my mother was over by the window, looking out to the whirling clouds of late summer.

"I know he will pay for it, if you ask," she said quietly.

My father turned and saw me slipping past, Jacob at my heels. "You know you are not to bring Jacob upstairs," he said without visible annoyance.

"I found him waiting here—but, *Papá*, I thought *Vovô* was—I thought he d-died?"

"No ... no, he is," he looked at my mother for inspiration, "indisposed."

"B-but—what about—clauses of the will? Henrique told me."

"When you are older—I will explain."

Jacob galloped downstairs and stood waiting for me, his tongue lolling. I came down much more slowly. It was strange and confusing. Could my grandfather have been ill for ten years? And what could be wrong with him? I thought of our teacher from Coimbra. Was my grandfather like that? I hoped, fervently, he was not. But speculating was no use and the thought of going to see the sea and the boats on the lagoon banished thoughts about my grandfather. For what could be speculated about someone who had ceased to be Clauses and was now merely Indisposed?

The house was full of packing and discussion on what Henrique would need and what subjects he should study. Already, he knew he wanted to study the law. How could anyone know, I wondered, when the world seemed to drift by in such unknowable immensities. What made the clouds and why were sunsets red. Who told the swallows the way to África and why did sheep have two or three lambs when cows and horses had only one. Why did the spanish broom and the tiny wild iris flower in the spring and the heather at the beginning of autumn. Who told them?

My mother cried as she folded and packed Henrique's clothes into a small tin trunk; my baby, she said over and over again, even though Henrique was now taller than she was. But he seemed happy about going away and talked of all the things he might do, things he might see, people he might meet—not in a precise manner but with an excitement that was confident. Life—at last!—was beginning. The convent of São Francisco in Porto was a mere stepping-stone. A stepping-stone to what was less clear but he dismissed the question with a laugh.

The Carmona government was not to my father's liking—yes, even here in the land beyond the mountains, he kept his interest in politics—and he feared a particular kind of politics would infiltrate the world Henrique wanted and that the right political affections would be more important than a brilliant grasp of jurisprudence. I think he was right. But Henrique just smiled tolerantly and said someday he would be a judge. I envied his confidence and his knowledge of himself.

So it was nearly a decade before I discovered Henrique had understood himself no better than I, perhaps less well—and I, he would someday say, had the excuse of being 'different'.

As the clothes and small personal things filled the trunk, as Maria cooked Henrique's favourite meals, and as the day of our departure came closer, cars and schools were spoken of with hushed excitement; almost as though, in superstitious fear, we believed something must intervene. Each time a car was seen anywhere in the district, which was so rarely, we discussed it endlessly.

My father had sent to someone in Porto for information—american cars, french cars, english cars, german cars—but in a world in which we had not yet acquired the words to discuss their merits and de-merits our discussion excluded such terms as 'horsepower' and 'cylinders'; instead we wondered if we would all be able to sit inside and how fast the different models would travel and whether it would be better to buy a red car or a green one. We pictured ourselves rushing along the roads, the wind in our hair, hooting at slow ox-carts and flocks of sheep, frightening donkeys and palpitating pigs. When I came, years later, to the english story *The Wind in the Willows* I understood exactly how Toad had been seduced by a car.

At that time, we knew nothing of english books. My parents spoke some french and had books by Anatole France and Maupassant on the small shelf where they kept their personal books separate from the ancient tomes behind the glass-front. But my parents also had a copy of *Uma Familia Ingleza* by Julio Diniz which my father later gave to me because, he said, it was about life in Porto. It was like no life I could imagine at that time and strange words like *lunch*, *pudding*, *spleen* and, most puzzling of all—*cheer*, *boys*, *cheer!*—leaped off the pages at me.

But I liked it that he described Trás-os-Montes not as mere hills or even mountains; no, we

became an ‘Alpine countryside’. I used to say to myself that I was walking in an Alpine place, all that was lacking was my mountain boots and mountain horn.

We went by carter over the rough roads to Bragança and by train down into the smiling valley of the Douro; my father, never a man to miss an opportunity for careful instruction, lectured us on the growing of grapes, the nature of rivers and sediments, and, close to our destination, the history of Porto, the city of his birth. It was an exciting arrival. Mist hung loosely round the old grey town, cobbles not dirt rung under our country feet, the buildings seemed to loom austerely above us. We felt the damp air in our nostrils as wood smoke and close living—and, yes, the smell of motor cars.

But first we had to find our way to *Tia* Leonor’s in a narrow apartment block not far from the river and up three flights of dark panelled stairs where the smell of olive-oil and cooking fish, fresh bread and damp clothes, was a ghostly presence coming up with us.

But my aunt, who, like my father, was slender and severe-looking with small wire-framed glasses, was full of welcome. Tea brewed in a small brass kettle with a strange curlicued spout. A profusion of small cakes sat waiting for us to arrive.

A large yellow cat sat up and gazed at us inscrutably out of shoot-green eyes; then he stretched and came across to me as I sat down on the plain chair my aunt had pointed me toward. He leaned forward and touched my shin with his black nose then climbed with great calm and dignity into my lap. My aunt opened her mouth as though to tell him to get down but changed her mind and turned to my father and began to pour tea for him.

She had set out a glass of milk for me but, instead of simply handing it to me, she said “*o chá*, Tomás?” and poured a cup for me. It was as though, at that precise moment, everyone recognised I had taken a step out of childhood. I might still be small and slight and of no consequence except to a yellow cat with a booming purr, but at that moment I felt important. My aunt said to my father before we left Porto that Girrasol was a cat of great discrimination and taste.

We bought, no, my father bought his longed-for car: a 1923 Berliet VM which had only travelled, so we were told, six hundred kilometres in its entire life. My father ran his hand lovingly over its brass-fittings, tested the horn, cranked it up, was shown how to drive it. Then he leaned toward the salesman and said “Can it climb mountains?” The man stared at him a moment then he seemed to summon all his desire to see this car leave with my father: “Senhor, this car,” he laid a knowledgeable hand on the bright metal, “is next best to a mountain goat!”

He came with us the first part of our journey southward; I do not know if this was his suggestion or my father’s request but it was as well; my father had not quite established his mastery over all the different levers and buttons and handles though he looked his part, in a jaunty cap and neat brown jacket. His very image cried ‘motor!’ to anyone who should happen to look at him. But we proceeded south in leaping bounds and grinding gears; sometimes he hit the accelerator instead of the brake and we found ourselves missing angry geese by an hair’s-breadth; once we ran right off the narrow road into a reedy ditch and had to be rescued by a passing wagon pulled by two splendid bay horses. The man, as he unhitched his horses from his load of barrels, derided our automobile in words which pained my father deeply, but he could say nothing.

The wind along the coast road was sharp, the *nortada* bringing the tang of salt to our unfamiliar noses.

And the sea!

The sea, the sea, now I knew why so many songs were about the sea. Twisted pines grew where the land met the dunes; then there was the singing expanse of sand, then the waves curled in great arcs to come crashing down in smothering foam. I could have sat to watch them all day but my father and Henrique were eager to reach Aveiro and find an hotel or guest-house for us.

The town was set low and flat upon the lagoon which reached the great Atlantic by

channels in the marshes. But it was late and growing dark when we arrived and my father said simply "*amanhã*" and hastened us upstairs to wash and make ourselves ready for dinner. We ate eel stew and he allowed us each sips of his wine, so we would sleep more soundly.

There were little humped-over bridges in the town so the boats could pass beneath, the boats which dragged up the seaweed, beautiful boats with painted necks which carried proverbs about life and living, though some of them seemed strange to be chosen: *Quem bem faz, bem achará* and *Asno de muitos, lôbos o comem** ... And then there were the wild birds which filled the lagoon and swam among the reeds and flew over the town: what were they? Again, I had that sense that I *must* know. "Ducks," said my father doubtfully, "and seagulls and ... " He gave me a long considering look then changed the subject.

In the market-place were women selling all kinds of fish—and now he was on 'safe ground'. If he did not know the names he need only ask: mullet, lampreys, eels, sardines, flounder—the women's hands darted across their shining wares, poking and prodding, extolling their taste and freshness, turning them as though they were the jewels of Índia rather than dead fish with dull staring eyes.

We walked to and fro all day long (I do not think my father had the courage to take his car out in the busy day-time streets, not yet) seeing the harbour and the sea-going boats, scooping up sand in our hands, letting it run between our fingers, watching the gulls dive and scream; even taking off our shoes and rolling up our trousers to feel the ocean leap and swirl against our puny legs.

And always there—something, the sea calling, a sense of mystery, of grandeur. For the first time it came to me, a powerful urge to see what lay beyond the horizon ...

The journey back to Porto was accomplished, my father was a little more confident, he cranked up our vehicle with *panache*, he drove with a certain flourish, he dared to take his hand off the wheel to wave to the people who stared at us.

Then there was the convent and walking with Henrique in to its solemn grey grasp; talking to the men in brown habits who would take Henrique and turn him into someone, neither brother nor stranger; seeing the small plain bed where he would sleep; the chapel, the class-rooms, the places where he would bathe and eat and play. A kind of awe overcame us. It was so large, there were so many boys, so much noise: talk and bells and footsteps.

We said good-bye. Henrique stood there, calm and tall, and waved energetically. And then he was gone forever, the Henrique of my future was a different person and I could never enter his thoughts ... and he wasn't *there* when I needed him.

* 'Safe bind, safe find' and 'What's everyone's business is nobody's business'.

*****

Though it was planned that Henrique would spend part of every Sunday with *Tia* Leonor and cousin Josefa, my mother cried for him, seeing him small and lonely and under-fed. Until the baby came, a little girl they named Brites. She was born at home, like all babies of that time, and I remember hearing her cries, so strange and weak and puling like a new-born kitten.

I was told to stay downstairs in the library with Jacob and my father, and we busied ourselves with dusting off the old pictures that were piled against the walls.

"This one must be dutch." My father held a canvas in gilt up for me to see. It was a picture of a wedding-feast. People with large red faces and fat arms caroused with wine-jugs and great platters of animal-joints and pigs-heads, more meat than I had ever seen in my life. The bride and groom sat at one end of the long table and their heads were bowed down by strange head-dresses, a mysterious Order perhaps. There was something in the way he said "this one must be dutch" which implied a criticism. But when he lifted off the backing to clear away the spider-webs and took out the canvas we found painted on it a name which looked like 'Joachim von Herter'.

“Your grandfather married a german woman,” he said as though mentioning the weather. “A very beautiful woman ... ” For a while he seemed lost in thought. “Perhaps this painter—” his thin fingers traced the name on the canvas, “lived in the Netherlands.”

“Are they not nice people, *Papá*?”

He seemed to come out of his reverie. “I remember, it was just before the War, that they took a piece more of Timor from us. They went to the World Court in The Hague which is a city in the Netherlands. Already, they had signed a treaty with us for the border but they wanted more ... they had taken Malacca, Ceilão, Flores ... it is understandable that the Court might have ruled that way, being in their city ... and don’t you think it is in their faces?”

We looked at the painting again, my father’s thoughts seemed to roam away, upward I thought, then he said, “Germany and Britain had a secret agreement, that same time ... ” I knew what came next, I had heard him speak of this before, “always looking to divide our colonies between them, first Moçambique, then Angola ... ”

He placed the painting back in its heavy frame and stood it against the book-case and it was true: the faces of the wedding guests did look bloated and smug and greedy. “But—you must never hate people, *filho* ... ”

“Not even—”

“Not even.” He smiled down at me. “You were not made for hating. Now, what is this next picture.”

And a little later, there was a tapping on the door and Maria told my father he could come upstairs; the *parteira* had cleaned and wrapped the baby.

About a week later, my father said he would take me walking in the hills. We would go out on the one day and sleep there for the night and come back the next evening. We would discover things! This was immensely exciting. I had never gone beyond a day’s walking before, and never with my father, and although it was autumn the days were still mild. Maria packed food into an ancient haversack, my mother rolled up blankets for us. But no one explained the reason for our excursion. Perhaps a reason was not necessary.

My mother said as we went out: “Like Abraham and Isaac.”

I looked up at my father as he shook his head. “No.”

Then I did not understand the allusion nor, I think, did my father understand that in avoiding one kind of sacrifice it is possible to make another, unintended. We walked, no, we strode. We were men of the hills, men of the ‘Alpine countryside’. We ate when we felt hungry. We drank from the mountain streams. We saw a great golden eagle soaring high in the air (I did not know then of things called thermals). We walked through silent pine woods and sat out on the massif granite, to look down upon a world in miniature.

“What do you see, Tomás?” My father swept his arm in a grand gesture from horizon to horizon.

So many things!

I showed him the tracks of deer and where a wild boar had lain down; where I thought the eagle had a nest and a moth settled, almost invisible, against a crevice in a rock.

“What would you like to do—when you are older?”

“I do not know.” I felt I should know but I could not think of a profession of any kind.

“You have two uncles who are diplomatics, your mother’s brothers, and I have a cousin in the chandlering business and another who manages a small estate ... olives ... ” He presented these as passing thoughts, and a little later he said, “I have heard of a good school in Porto, not The British School but a crammer run by an englishman.” He said ‘crammer’ as though it was an entrance to a mysterious world of opportunity.

“W-what is a crammer?”

“A school where you learn faster.”

He said no more on the subject until we were nearly home, then he mentioned it again, adding, “Next year perhaps.”

Gradually I came to understand it this way: although he wanted the best for me, he did not

want to send me somewhere in which I would be judged unflatteringly in comparison with my brother—and this was the solution he was musing upon. But he spoke no more about school and a little while later I heard him say to my mother: "I hear that Wall Street has crashed."

He turned to me and explained, "Wall Street is in the *Estados Unidos*."

"But—how can a street crash?" I pictured it as an image of french towns, all rubble and broken churches and horses pulling sad carts.

"They keep all their banks and money-lenders there. They have lost all their money."

"Will it affect us, do you think?" my mother said.

My father gave her a kind of sorry smile. "They tell us we are bankrupt anyway—so there does not appear to be any value to worrying ourselves."

"But this new man?"

"Yes. Perhaps."

And some time later, I do not remember just when, my mother saw a picture of Dr. Salazar and said, "he has rather nice ears" and my father said, "he appears to be what we need—for the moment." I think that is how Dr. Salazar entered our lives. People liked the way he spoke, very calmly and slowly and with great dignity, and they liked the absence of rhetoric, the lack of grand promises without capital.

At a time when financiers in other countries leaped from windows and put pistols to their heads there was a sudden new mood of hope in Portugal: people forgave him his coldness, his austerity, his ruthlessness, for the sake of that spring-time; perhaps I might liken it to a woman who forgives her husband, many times, for his beatings, his unfaithfulness, because of that moment when he looked across a crowded room and chose *her*, no one else.

My mother, of course, could not vote and it was not until years passed that I learned that my father, briefly as a young man, had had political ambitions, that he dreamed of entering the Chamber of Deputies, and that his family, by which I mean *Tia* Leonor, dissuaded him, believing his health was not strong enough.

People ceased speaking of politics; they took what I might describe as an *ano sabatico*.

And the following autumn my father and I came to Porto so I could be enrolled in Mr. Beveridge's Young Men's College.

*****

Pass off with speed, thou prowler pale,
Holding along o'er hill and dale,
Spilling a noxious spittle round,
Spoiling the fairies' sporting ground!
Move off to hell, mysterious haze;
Wherein deceitful meteors blaze;
Thou wild of vapour, vast, o'ergrown,
Huge as the ocean of unknown.

Ap Gwilym

*****

Mr. Peter Beveridge was balding, just a fringe of ginger hair, and he had a small moustache which he frequently fingered as though afraid he might have mislaid it. His voice was large and his portuguese was bad, really very bad. "Well, well, well," he boomed at my father. "So this is the lad!" He turned to me. "Sit over there, boy," and he pointed to a plain chair near the window. I did as I was told and gazed out the high narrow window with its drapes the colour of ripe plums, into a small garden surrounded by a high stone wall.

On the wall sat a black cat with two white paws—and the cat was fully occupied watching the sparrows that cavorted on the tiled roof of the building beyond the wall. I forgot about

listening to what Mr. Beveridge might be saying to my father—until a large ginger hand suddenly landed on my shoulder and a voice thundered in my ear: "Now, come with me and I'll get a boy to take you up!"

He let go my shoulder and walked to his study-door and shouted into the dark front hall—"Oates!"

There was a long silence, broken only by the sound of a clock ticking and the street sounds filtering in. "Oh, it's you, is it, Aldergate! Here, come and show the new boy where to put his things!"

A boy in a blue shirt and striped tie and grey flannel baggy-trousers appeared beside the head-master.

"Well, go on, boy. Aldergate will show you your bed and cupboard!"

But my father, I think a little overawed by the sheer volume of sound Mr. Beveridge produced each time he opened his mouth, intervened.

"I'll say good-bye now, *filho*." He put out his hand and shook mine gravely. Then he bent down and said so that only I could hear him: "Henrique is not far away." He straightened up again but his eyes glistened—I understood, even if he had never been able to talk to me with the ease he felt with my clever brother—that he was reluctant to leave me here alone. Mr. Beveridge bustled him out, rubbing his hands together, and assuring him loudly that he had many years experience with boys of all types.

The front door closed with a thud and Mr. Beveridge turned back to me and said in english, "Off you go then! See that he knows his way around—and that tardiness is punished here!" More than a door shut ... My little trunk was set down by my bed in a big dormitory which ran the length of the attic. Ten boys slept here.

Downstairs were the class-rooms. On the ground floor was the dining-room, the kitchen, Mr. Beveridge's office, rooms for the other masters, and a small room full of books about England. In the back garden stood a barn-like building containing a laboratory with benches and a sink and things called Bunsen burners, also a small room with easels, and a room for our ablutions.

"What have you got there, Snoggsy!"

"New boy," said the student called Aldergate.

The boy who had been lounging on a bed and eating sweets from a coloured tin got up, yawned, and came over. He was tall and heavily-made with hot protruding blue eyes and thick brown hair.

"Leave him alone, Simpson."

"You know what's wrong with this place, Snoggsy? No fags. I need a fag. Someone to run up and down stairs for me. So bags I this little runt."

"I said leave him alone."

(You will understand this is not verbatim; I had almost no english then, but it was a frequent kind of conversation.)

Simpson loomed over me. "What's your name, runt?"

Aldergate translated.

"T-t-tomás Vasconcelos."

Another boy came up, a thin boy with round glasses and an air of being superior; his voice, too, was thin and sharp, and it was strange to see the others defer to him in some indefinable way. He took this, my name I mean, played with it—"Tom, Tom, Tommy—" and then he seemed to run through words so fast, shuffling cards, and then—"So!" he said, "we'll call him Piggy."

It was as a pronouncement handed down from a pulpit: not to be argued with.

"But I still want him for a fag," Simpson said petulantly.

"No fags, you know the rules." And then this unknown boy, whose name proved to be Sadler, winked.

I did not understand any of this and I felt so miserable, homesick and exposed.

"Got any tuck in there, boy?" Aldergate pointed to my trunk.

I had no idea what he was asking but he mimed putting things in his mouth and chewing. "Tuck—*mantimentos*." I wondered why he should expect me to have food in with my clean clothes in my trunk. My mother had sent a basket of food with us for the journey—bread with slices of *presunto,* apples, pears, cheese—but we had finished it even before we arrived.

"Never mind. Bung your things in here and get ready to come down for dinner."

I placed my shirts and under-clothing in the little cupboard by the bed. But when I turned around, my protector (for that is the way I had begun to think of him) was gone and the room was empty. I did not know what to do so I simply sat down on my bed and tried not to think about home. In a little while a bell rang in the distance but, not knowing what it signified, I simply went on sitting. There was a muffled rush of footsteps somewhere below but it was not till about ten minutes had passed that anything happened.

A boy with brilliant red hair and jutting ears came up. "Sir sent me to get you." He beckoned. I got up and followed him down the stairs; everyone else was already seated at the tables and they all turned to stare at me, so it seemed; I felt that thousands of eyes followed me as I stumbled to a chair.

"Punctuality, boy!" Mr. Beveridge boomed from the far end of the room. I sat down, my ears on fire and a lump in my throat. The boy next to me pushed a plate of food toward me.

"No napkin, I see," said the long lanky man at the head of this table. "Typical. See that he has one for tomorrow, Taylor."

I ate as best I could but it wasn't nice; or perhaps I did not like it because it wasn't Maria's food and I was not accustomed to eating anyone else's. I got through the evening somehow. Time is inexorable but there isn't much comfort in it, sometimes. I tried to do as everyone else did but I was not experienced in looking after myself, folding my clothes, organising what I would need on the morrow; always, there had been my mother and Maria.

I climbed into bed—and found that my feet had nowhere to go. This was very strange and I wondered what to do and why english people should want to sleep all crammed up in the top half of their bed. But I was so tired I really did go to sleep like that. It was only in the morning when I saw the others making their beds that I realised it was only my bed which had been made in such a way—and even then I did not understand that someone had played a trick on me.

"Sleep well, Piggy?" Simpson lounged over and grabbed me by the ear. "Now, go over there and make my bed. Go on, hurry up!"

A bell rang and there was a stampede down the staircase. I had not finished making my own bed. Perhaps I could do it later. I followed the others.

With the eyes of one experience I now saw that the dining-room was not filled with thousands of large mocking people as I had felt it to be; only about twelve boys and six masters were spread round the big room with its unused fireplace at one end and a door in to the kitchen at the other. A bank of windows gave light from the enclosed garden and a luminous grey autumn day.

But a new trial lay waiting. At the end of each table was a large pot like a tureen and the masters began spooning some gluey grey stuff into bowls and passing it to the boys. A steam rose from my bowl and brought an unpleasant smell with it. Where were the hot rolls, the milky coffee, even perhaps a bowl of polenta? A small jug of milk went round the table, then the boys began to eat. I tasted it, tried to swallow it. But it seemed to fill my mouth with a thick scratchy feeling and I was terrified I was going to choke on it. "Eat your porridge, boy," said the same long master, and I swallowed it down, somehow. It was followed by small mounds of pale scrambled eggs on wet strips of toast, and weak black tea with sugar.

*****

E a tal folha exotica,

Delicias da China,
Por nossa má sina
Trazida de lá,
Servida em familia,
N'um môrno hydro-infuso?...
Anathema ao uso
Das folhas do chá!
Julio Diniz

*****

It is quite true that what had begun as a delight from China had turned into a 'tepid infusion' but at least it washed everything down my throat. My first day was begun and I wish I could say things became better, day by day, but I often went to bed and felt the tears well up in the darkness and slide down to my pillow. Every day Simpson was waiting with things I must do for him, every day there was more porridge, every day there was my struggle to speak this strange hard language.

Altogether there were about thirty boys, but some of them came merely for the lessons. Besides Mr. Beveridge, who taught 'History' and 'Latin', there were six masters: Mr. Burnley was round and soft with a bald spot in his thick wavy grey hair and taught us 'English' and 'Literature', Mr. Giffard-Jones was the long man with rubber limbs who sat at the head of my table and exhorted me to eat my porridge and taught 'Natural History' and 'Mathematics', Mr. Hartley was short with an old-fashioned watch-chain in his waistcoat and over-full lips and taught 'Geography' and a subject called 'Business Principles', Mr. Pedley looked like a large version of Simpson and trained us in 'Physical Education', and Mr. Crawley taught 'the Sciences'. Mr. Bayley was a cousin of the head-master and acted as a kind of overseer; 'house master', I should say. There was also an elderly french man whose name, unfortunately, was M. Briand, and he had to teach us 'French Language and Literature'.

He was poor and vague, he peered at us but walked and talked with a certain frail dignity. He had a habit of placing his hat and stick down in various places and then not being able to find them; some boys took advantage of this and put them in strange and hard-to-reach places. He would murmur as he got them down from the tall cupboard in the library 'I can not think why I put them there' and he would pass his hand across his forehead as though afraid his memory was creeping out of his head.

This was my world and I was a very small personage in it.

Every Sunday we had to sit down and write a letter to our parents and give them to Mr. Bayley to read before posting. Did he read mine? I was afraid to say anything about the food and other things in case he could. I had never written a letter before and was uncertain what to put on the page. I asked a lot of questions about Jacob—to which my father responded that Jacob was as well as could be expected but they wished to know how I was progressing with my lessons.

Every third Sunday, Henrique was allowed to come and take me out for a walk for two hours. How I looked forward to the first time! I do not know if Henrique felt the same but he never made me feel that I was a nuisance even though he was nearly grown up. Yet his world was not my world. He had friends, he liked his classes, he played in the football team.

I did not know how to express my loneliness, my homesickness, my sense of being the outside person, the one with the face at the window. When I tried to tell him how difficult it was to be taught everything in a foreign language (only in french did I feel I managed as well as the others) he simply laughed and said I might be glad of it some day. But it was more than the language: each day I sat down to lessons about english history, the hills and rivers and products of The British Empire, the lines of Tennyson and Wordsworth and, as Mr. Burnley was fond of him, Swinburne.

"What do you want to do, Tomás?"

"Go to the river." Henrique sighed, but took me. My interest in the great grey Douro never flagged; the flat-bottomed square-sailed barges, the pleasure boats, the occasional *traineira*; Eiffel's great iron bridge, the birds which flocked to the mud flats when the river was at its lowest; the stalls along the Cais da Ribeira ...

We had no money, either of us. Our father had handed us each fifteen *escudos* but we knew there'd be no more money forthcoming once it was spent. So we walked past the smells of the *casas de café*; we turned our backs on the rattling trams; we looked longingly at circus posters and film advertisements—and turned away.

The black cat which chased sparrows, wisely, never came into our garden. But one day I found some of the boys, led by Simpson, playing with a little half-grown grey kitten. They were dropping it from different heights to see if it could always land on its feet. The cat tried again and again to run away and each time a boy managed to catch it by its tail, before dropping it again.

But at last the game palled and Simpson said, "Here, watch this!" He grabbed the cat more firmly by the tail and began whirling it round and round; its shrieks cut the air—then he let it go and it spun across the yard and hit the brick wall with a thump. "Did you see *that*!" Then the boys seemed to lose interest.

I hurried across to where the cat lay at the foot of the wall. Blood dribbled from its nose and I put a hand out and placed it over the animal's face, it gave out a long sound, somewhere between a mew and a sigh, and died. Behind me I heard an adult voice, then Simpson saying, "The Peasant's killed a cat, Sir."

"Typical." Mr. Giffard-Jones stood a moment. "Well, get a spade from the shed, boy, and bury it." The others went inside while I toiled at the cold ground until the hole was big enough to fit the cat. Mr. Giffard-Jones came back and watched while I finished covering it up and put the spade away. The night had become dank and unpleasant with river mist but he smoked calmly as he stood there. Then he said in his cold manner, "And if I ever catch you behaving like this again—you'll be up before the Head."

This, I had learned, was an euphemism for being struck six or twelve times on the hand by the thin pointer Mr. Beveridge kept in a cupboard in his room.

I wanted to cry out at the injustice of it—but the words, in the face of the master's contempt, refused to come up my throat.

Then he said, "Why do they call you The Peasant?"

"I-I think b-b-because I c-come from Trás-os-Montes, Sir."

"I see. Well, no doubt you find it a change from Piggy."

There did not seem to be anything I could say. He tossed his cigarette away, turned, and went inside.

*****

There were two other portuguese boys in the school but they came only for lessons; I would watch them leave with great envy and longing. They were years older and rarely said more than a few words in passing. Aldergate, too, lived out but seemed to spend very much of his time, not of class-hours, at the school. I wondered why he was never in a hurry to go home.

The boy with the red hair, Paul McNab, was almost a friend but, unfortunately, he had a friend already: a fat boy called David Taylor who fiercely resented any sign of friendship Paul might make toward another boy. So there was no chance the three of us might do anything together.

Gradually I understood that the boys who came here, rather than to The British School, came because they were not very bright or because they had been expelled or because their fathers, for some reason, were not treated as part of the british 'colony' in Porto; Simpson, thus he boasted, had already been expelled from three schools.

But Paul was here because his father, who worked for the Scottish Tract Society and travelled widely, disapproved of british public schools and felt that Mr. Beveridge's school

was more concerned with education than a boy's pedigree. I hoped that the unknown Mr. McNab was right; it was hard to see what I was learning but I hoped, for my father's sake, I was learning something.

Each Sunday morning there was brief respite because Mr. Hartley would take me to the cathedral and wait until I was inside, I think to make sure I went to Mass rather than to play truant; it was daunting to be alone among the swirl of strangers in the huge building but after a while I came to like this time.

I suppose I was bad in that I spent all my time looking round, at things, at people ... *hostiam puram, hostiam sanctum, hostiam immaculatam* ... I knew school-masters objected to inattention but I didn't think, then, that God would mind. I thought that Mr. Hartley must dash on to the english church of St. James arriving after everyone else—and leave before them to collect me—and it was only much later I learned that he did not go to church at all and probably did not mind if I went to Mass or not ...

When I came to school, my mother had carefully packed my rosary and missal, saying, "You will find many people in Porto with a much greater understanding of the Faith than *Padre* Diogo—but never forget your personal devotions, my darling, they are what matter most, more than all the great learning, the beautiful churches ... " and now I had the terrible feeling I was letting her down because I was too shy to want to be seen saying the decade by these boys with their casual irreverence; they called the tail of the hen, in the rare times we ate poultry, the 'Pope's nose'; I wondered that they would dare—

I can see that I knew, even then, my God was not the one whom people sought in old-smelling churches and pious words and incense, in man-made *things*, but the one I found in the glory of the eagle soaring, waves curling and crashing, the dying summer bright in the heather, the bracken, the perfect purpose of nest-building ... And it came to me that this was heresy because it took God out of the hands of men ...

The year finished. Some way, muddling along, often miserable, I had come to its end—and now Henrique and I were on the train for Bragança and I felt as though a great burden rolled off my shoulders and smashed on the carriage floor.

But, when we arrived, there was no sign of our father and the Berliet. We could walk, why not, I said to my brother, it was not so far. He said not to be silly. Now he was very conscious of his new status as a man with a bear-growl in his throat, dark and deep, (I hoped I would have a voice much the same) and whiskers trying to grow on his chin—but I could not see that walking was silly.

"Or—" in the distance was 'Old Zé' passing down the road with his train of mules "we could ask Old Zé to take our trunks for us"; he went where the roads did not go, his panniers crammed with useful small things. I do not know if it was his real name. I do not know if he was old. His round brown face, infinitely weathered, was always cheerful and I saw an adventure, a freedom, in his life which had nothing to do with Mr. Beveridge's Young Men's College; perhaps in winter it was a lonely arduous life but better than being bullied by Simpson ...

Henrique dismissed Old Zé and said we must ask the station-master, our father might have sent a message, so we 'bearded' this official in his office and he removed a slip of paper from an iron spike and said solemnly but not unkindly that we must go to Sra. Barreno's lodging-house and stay there till transport came for us. So! We wondered if the car had ceased to climb like a mountain goat.

But there was nothing to do but leave our luggage at the small *pensão* and go out to explore; compared to Porto the town now appeared small and shabby. I remember we passed the newly-built synagogue, we peered in the shop windows, we walked up toward the castle.

"Did you ever see the pig?" Now, I could say pig and feel free.

"Yes. It's nothing, just a lump of rock." Henrique was disparaging but he agreed to walk up that far. Truly it was not a very grand pig, this ancient worn-down-by-time celtic pig, but for some reason I reached out both hands and touched it. Something, a kind of current,

seemed to flow up my arm.

"It's alive!"

"Don't be stupid, Tomás!" Henrique also reached out and touched it. "It's just a stone."

"Don't you feel it?"

"I don't feel anything … well, it has a little warmth—but it is a warm day."

Henrique dragged me away from the pig and we walked a little further before returning to the supper provided by Sra. Barreno, then up the narrow stairs to a room on the first floor, a cramped room but one with a window over the street. We had just begun to get ready for bed when we heard a car outside. The Berliet, very scratched and muddy, was at the front door.

We rushed downstairs. Our father caught us in his arms even though he looked very tired and pale. He settled with our *senhoria* for our supper and the unused beds and packed us in to the vehicle.

I think now he should not have driven the long rough road home that day but it never occurred to me to think about his health, to see him thinner and failing. But home was home. Next morning, I rushed out and rolled around in the sweet-smelling grass and heard the birds and gazed up to the incredible blue of the mountain sky—no damp people-smelling mists, no sounds except the sheep on the high moors, the pigs crunching the old year's acorns, no rattle of trams, no bells, nothing to do ... I did somersaults and handstands …

"Mad as ever," said Henrique.

Yes, I was like a horse set free after a long season in the shafts of a dray—intoxicated with my freedom.

My mother asked me about school. Here, now, was the moment to say I hated it, I *dreaded* it, I was so lonely and miserable, could not I go to São Francisco with Henrique—and I mumbled something, constricted by filial duty and the sense of their sacrifice, which my mother interpreted as "you know I have never liked school."

She said kindly, "Poor Tomás. I know. But someday you will follow in the footsteps of your uncles and you will be glad of it all."

So they did hope for a diplomatic career for me! Did they understand me so little—or did I live in my own illusive world and, when Mr. Beveridge had done what he was being paid to do and pushed outward the frontiers in prosaic periods and pompous rhetoric and the tingling slap of the pointer, I would see that they had understood me all along? In one of Sadler's sarcastic moments, taunting me for what he liked to call my peasant origins, peasant ways, peasant manners, I had tried to salvage something by saying I had consular uncles—

"Consular—consticar—constipate ... Did you hear that, chaps? Piggy's got constipated uncles!" And he rolled around the dormitory, with Simpson, bellowing with laughter.

Maria made an especial luncheon of roast pork, pork with great rich rinds, and as I ate I saw my mother with new eyes—the grace, the kindness with which she wanted everyone to enter into that warmth, that happiness, which came with the moment in her company, the way she looked at my father, the delicacy with which she ate ... just because we do things differently does not make the english ways *better* ... and for a little while Simpson and Sadler lost their power to hurt ... but I could not find the words to tell her what it was like, being at Mr. Beveridge's.

Before we left to return to Porto they told us they would be coming, 'soon' they thought, to look for a house near the coast.

*****

Throughout my first year, Mr. Burnley had virtually ignored me. He had his favourites, he had those he constantly picked on and found fault with; I had seen but not really understood his ways. But now, when I no longer sat blankly or struggled with the intricacies of english pronunciation, he began to take some notice of me.

Unlike Mr. Giffard-Jones and the other masters he did his own caning. He would call the offending boy out, tell him to drop his trousers, bend over the desk, and "take what was coming" on his bare backside. I am not sure how I came to the knowledge that Mr. Burnley

enjoyed his physical contact with the boys. Frequently, he would stand with his hand on a boy's shoulder or he might lean over and pat a boy, even stroke his hair back as he said "more water on your comb, boy"—and there was always a smile on his florid rather petulant face when he gave the dread command "Drop your trousers, boy"—and, this came to me slowly, he would then stand, what seemed an inordinately long time, simply gazing at the red welts or he might put out a hand and touch the buttocks of the victim and say, "No, the skin's not broken but you'll remember *that* when you sit down."

I had suffered physical punishment often enough at the hands of *Padre* Diogo but it was somehow impersonal; I dreaded it, yes, but I had never felt degraded by it; today I was being cuffed about the ears, tomorrow it would be someone else.

The damage the priest did, I think now, was the damage that was embedded in the church: the aura of sin that was woven around anything to do with our animal natures, to do with women, and a pervasive sense that the church by the authority vested in its human 'hands', its priests and bishops, was not required to be fair ... And by conditioning its members from childhood to unfairness it made us silent, passive, afraid of our intuitions and insights ... If they could not come from God through the medium of the church then they must come from the Devil. I could not tell Henrique my thoughts; I knew he would refute them with the argument of centuries.

That new year I worked at my english with a conscience, a ferocity, which had nothing to do with wanting to succeed, to master the language, and everything to do with Mr. Burnley's ire. Christmas came and went with wet winter days and a little parcel from home, the new year with a squalling atlantic gale.

Henrique continued his life-passage with incomparable composure and brotherly criticisms; he told me he'd been accepted by a law firm as a clerk at the end of the school year. This, he said, was to see if he liked the life before committing himself to the course at the university. But we both knew our father had said, with many apologies, he could not afford to pay the university fees, at this moment. The money paid to Mr. Beveridge loomed, unspoken—Henrique knew I was unhappy here—but it stayed unspoken for ever. Time passed—and still Mr. Burnley left me to myself.

And then the blow fell.

Each time he came to check my work he would lean over, the smell of his pipe tobacco heavy in his smart tweed jacket and something else, bay rum perhaps and perspiration, redolent in my nose of his manner, do-as-I-want-boy-I-am-God-here ... His hand would rest on my head, my arm, my shoulder, a great weight, and I would feel unable to move a muscle. And then, one day, I could not help it: I had to wriggle out from under the burden of his touch.

"You have a problem, boy?" he said sharply.

"N-n-no, Sir."

"Speak properly. Boy of your age stuttering along like an asthmatic tram."

There was a faint round of amusement. Mr. Burnley straightened up. "We'll soon fix you, boy. Take out your Swinburne—come on out here—" He jabbed a finger at the chosen piece and said "Read".

'When the hounds of spring are on winter's traces,
The mother of months in meadow or plain
Fills the shadows and windy places
With lisp of leaves and ripple of rain;
And the brown bright nightingale amorous—'

Could you, if you were in my place, read "the brown bright nightingale"?

"I don't expect much," said Mr. Burnley. "I like all my boys and want only the best for them—but one thing I will not stand for is boys who do not try—and I do not think you are trying, Vasconcelos."

I knew I was lost. The awful command. I fumbled with my buttons. I was filled with the fear I was going to cry even before the first stroke came whistling through the air. I heard Mr. Burnley slapping the thin cane against his palm. "Bend over." The pain stunned me. I forgot all about the boys watching. There was nothing except this searing hurt which seemed to go on, stroke by stroke, for ever.

I don't really remember getting myself done up, getting back to my seat, getting through the rest of the lesson. When I undressed that evening, I found my trousers encrusted with dried blood. Paul came over as I got ready for bed and said, "How do you feel, Tom?"

"I-I don't know how I am going to manage till laundry-day." Women came in once a week and carried our laundry away on their heads and brought it back clean and ironed, ready to collect the next load.

"I'll lend you a pair of trousers if you're stuck. Still, that was pretty rotten of Burnley to hit you like that."

Simpson lounged over. "Got a pain in the little piggy arse, have we?"

Paul stood up to him. "Go away, Simpson. It's none of your business." And, after making a few more comments, he *did* go away.

Who told Mr. Beveridge I wasn't trying—or did he decide this for himself? One evening, between classes and tea, he called me in to his study. "I understand," he began, "that you're still stuttering." There was a movement behind me and Mr. Burnley came quietly in. "Stuttering," the head-master went on, "shows a lack of discipline and a failure to enunciate your words properly. I have therefore asked Mr. Burnley to take you in hand for a short period each evening—and if you put your mind to it you will be speaking clearly within the week. It is very kind of Mr. Burnley to do this for you and I expect you to show your gratitude by doing your best to improve quickly."

With that I was dismissed in to the company of Mr. Burnley who took me along the hall to his small sitting-room. It had a couple of armchairs, a small fire burning in the grate, a table with crystal decanters on it—and over everything that heavy rich rather unpleasant smell which followed the english master through life. For five minutes I had to stand there saying the alphabet very slowly, then we moved on to simple rhymes—'see-saw, Margery daw', 'Jack and Jill went up the hill'—and each time I became caught he pulled me up. "Again." And so it went on. After about twenty minutes he said, "Good, good. I knew you could do it." And he put his hand heavily on my shoulder.

"Now, how are those cuts coming along? Drop your trousers and I'll have a look." I didn't want to but I had no choice. "Bend over a bit." I felt his cool hand running over me. "Nasty infection there. I'd better put some ointment on." He rummaged in a cupboard and a moment later I felt something wet move over the suppurating cuts.

His hand stroked me down, first one side, then the other, and as he stroked he talked mundanely, "this will heal it up ... but I'd better keep an eye on you," and as he talked he moved his stroking hand down, he reached between my legs, still stroking. I didn't know what to do. I felt sure he should not be touching me there but I didn't know how to tell him so. Finally he straightened up, rested his hands briefly on my hips, then said in a businesslike way, "Do yourself up now—" he looked at his watch, "five o'clock tomorrow."

I got myself out of the room. Over tea, then through what was called 'prep', I gradually managed to convince myself, almost convince myself, that I had imagined it all. My next session with Mr. Burnley was the same except that after stroking me for several minutes the master told me to turn around. I reached to pull up my trousers but he said sharply, "Leave them."

I stood there, nervously, wondering what came next. He ran his hands down my ribs. "not much meat on you, is there? If the world was not in such a parlous state I could insist that you get second helpings ... ah well ... "

Again, his manner suggested that his mind was divorced from the hands he moved down over my hips. Something seemed to interrupt his line of thought and he put out the tip of a fat

pink tongue and ran it round his full lips. He stepped back, an abrupt movement, and said, "Well, off you go."

Did I improve? "Crisp and sharp," he got in the way of saying. "Enunciate clearly. Bite the words off." And as he spoke he showed his pointed teeth, stained by years of tobacco. Would the end of the week ever come and would he say, "Very good. I don't think you need to come again"? The end of the week did come, but he said nothing. The other boys all were lined up for an afternoon excursion, me too, when he came out of his room and said, "Aren't you forgetting something, boy?"

"N-no, Sir. B-because it's Saturday and ... "

"Has anyone given you permission to skip your lesson with me?"

"No, Sir. B-but—"

The 'crocodile', smart in blazers and boaters, moved forward, the front door closed with a dull thud, and I meekly followed Mr. Burnley into his room. "We'll run through your exercises then I've got some chelsea buns for tea." He stoked up the fire, then sat down in one armchair and said to begin. Every few minutes he would nod and say "Good" but it seemed to me I was no better than yesterday. I felt a vague sense of disappointment and something else: an apprehension that, there being only the two of us and nothing to be done till the excursion returned, he would keep me there working and working all afternoon. We went through the alphabet, through nursery rhymes, then simple poems, then he took down his Swinburne and told me to read the poem which had brought me down before.

"Excellent! I knew you could do it. Now, come here and sit down."

He poured me a small glass of something from one of his decanters.

"A little glass of sherry won't hurt a boy your age."

It was very sweet and strong and seemed to rush straight to my head. He handed me a slice of bun and began to eat himself with quick bites which made his smooth jowls wobble. His grey hair was discreetly pomaded and I noticed the ring of sweat where his collar met his pink neck. He refilled my glass. In the warm room I was beginning to feel light-in-the-head but I did not dare tell him I didn't want any more, that I wanted to go outside. If I could not go on the outing then perhaps I could walk in the back garden and the black and white cat might consent to come down from its safe perch on the wall.

But Mr. Burnley rose, poked the fire briefly, then said, "I'd better take a final look at those cuts." He took down his tube of ointment and told me to bend over his rosewood desk. He began to stroke me down slowly, beginning in the small of my back, working right down—then he stopped suddenly and said, "A little music. I don't think you've had the honour of hearing my new gramophone."

He wound it up and set it to playing a record of piano music.

"Chopin." He came back quickly and took up his rhythmic stroking. It was very uncomfortable to remain bent over. "Pillow your head on your hands, boy." I did as he said, hoping he was nearly finished. But his hands continued to move over me, becoming more intimate ... he took one hand away and seemed to be fumbling at his own trousers—then I felt him pressing up against me. The edge of his writing desk cut into me, I felt imprisoned and smothered by his strong-smelling closeness, then he pressed into me. I do not know, even now, how to express that terrible moment of pain and outrage. He began to breathe faster. I felt the hot puffs of air on my neck. It seemed to happen forever then he drew out and said, in quick pants: "Good boy. Do yourself up."

I was trembling. I could not make my fingers obey and he came over and tidied me up. Then he drew me into his plump lap and said something like, "There, that wasn't too bad, was it now, a big sensible boy like you." He kissed me on the top of my head and handed me another slice of bun.

But I couldn't eat. All I wanted was to get out of his room. I'm not sure how I escaped; perhaps he grew tired of me because he let me out with the admonition to "keep our little secret". I *had* to get away, from Mr. Burnley, from the school, from that claustrophobic smell

of his which seemed to clog my nose: I knew that what he'd done to me was wrong even if I could not have explained it in how and why ... And so I ran away to the only person I had to run to: Henrique. I ran and stumbled and cried. It seemed to take me for ever to get to the convent of São Francisco.

By then it was beginning to get late and the boys were just arriving back from an away game. They had won. They cheered and yelled and carried each other around and were happy. I pushed into the crowd, desperate to find my brother. He caught sight of me first. "Tomás! What are you doing here?" Someone grabbed him from behind and bore him along the path. They were all wet and muddy, buoyed up by the exuberance of victory. Henrique disentangled himself and came back to me. "I was not expecting to see you until next week, *irmão*! But come along!" He caught my arm and took me with him. Then a bell started ringing and he abruptly let go, saying he must go up and change. "Do you want to stay? I can ask Brother Xavier for permission." One of his friends slapped him on the back and told him to hurry.

"*N-não* ... not today. C-can I tell you—"

The centre courtyard had emptied, only Henrique and I stood there in the rain which had begun to fall softly.

"Tomorrow. I'll come tomorrow and see you. I must go now." Henrique gave me a quick hug and turned away.

I couldn't go back to Mr. Beveridge's, couldn't *couldn't* ... but I had nowhere else to go. *Tia* Leonor was dead, Josefa gone to Sintra, home was far far away ... yet I seriously thought of walking all the way home, that night.

I wandered through the streets, getting cold and wet, not knowing where to go or what to do, and sometimes I cried and sometimes I tried not to; and now I look back on that small self with infinite pity. Night came closer. I did not know where I was but I thought I might be able to find somewhere along the river where bushes grew thick and there I could curl up and go to sleep.

I stumbled down a small dirt path and found myself in a clearing with small wooden houses on stilts. At first it seemed such a strange place, hidden in the trees, that I thought I had fallen into an Alice-world and nothing would ever be safe and normal and predictable again; then I saw them flying in all around me.

Pigeons!

They seemed so utterly comforting with their fat bodies and whirring wings and pigeon noises. I held my arms out to them.

"*Pombo-pa-pombo ... vinde aqui ...* "

And they came to me, they landed on my arms, my shoulders, they cooed and turned their little heads this way and that and stared at me with their bright inquisitive eyes ... and there was a voice exclaiming "*Meu Deus!*"

An old woman in a long shapeless frock and a fisherman's jersey and a dirty shawl came out of the gloom. All the pigeons rose lazily into the air again and flapped away toward their roosts. She stared at me, then she said in a voice that was almost awe: "It is a miracle."

"I'm sorry. I-I did not mean to bother you."

She came up close and put out a hand. I drew back involuntarily.

"I won't hurt you," she said humbly.

I didn't understand why she should look at me in that astonished way and I thought she might be mad; she might live down in this secret clearing because she was mad.

"They loved you. My birds ... "

Then she peered at me, more closely. "*Menino*, you are all wet and cold. Come into my house." It was true that I had begun to shiver. Her little house, hardly a house, a falling-down-shed, was where she kept a few things and food for her pigeons and the stone trough and bench where she cleaned and plucked the birds for a restaurant in the city. She handed me a slice of bread and cheese and folded several old bags for me to sleep on and gave me a very

ancient coat to put around me. I stayed with Rosa Barbosa for three days. She let me feed her birds. She asked no questions. She gave me food and made up a little fire and dried my clothes. And sometimes she would look at me and say, "It is a miracle, the way they came to you."

And then, at last, she said, "Do you have a home, Tomás?" She said it very kindly, this uncouth slovenly old woman, this woman who had saved me from doing something wild and desperate, who had helped expunge the thought and feel and smell of Mr. Burnley from the front of my mind; all still there, oh yes, but in the cloak-room, not waiting on the platform—

"I-I have been at an english school here—I ran away. My parents don't know I ran away."

She put out her gnarled fingers and stroked my cheek. "*Filhinho*, an education is a good thing. I have none, but I can see it is a good thing for a boy like you."

I had believed, with adamance, that I could never go back and now I found that I could. Rosa Barbosa asked me if I would like her to come with me, to find the way back, to speak to the head-master with an excuse. "I," she laughed, "do not mind to say anything to the english." I wondered then what she meant. "But you might not wish to be seen with me, Tomás Vasconcelos?"

She owned no shoes, her feet were much cracked, her arms red and chafed by the weather and preparing her birds, her clothes smelled of wet feathers and garlic ... I thought of Sadler and Simpson and I thought of Mr. Burnley and then of my secret knowledge: that Rosa Barbosa's pigeons were not afraid of me, even loved me a little ... we walked through Porto's streets to the front door of Mr. Beveridge's Young Men's College—and how grim and shut it looked, how superior its glowing knocker, its discreet brass plate saying 'Principal: Peter Beveridge B.A.' ... and my heart quailed.

Rosa Barbosa stepped between us and said pugnaciously, "You have not been looking after this boy!" Mr. Beveridge affected not to understand her and merely said to me "Run along now and get started on your prep!" Dona Rosa put a large hand on his arm and told him to treat me well, then she turned to me and said in her gruff manner, but a little choked: "*Filhinho*, come back and see me one day."

It is strange, looking back now, how little I know of that old woman; how little curiosity I felt about her, her life, about how she came to be living there with her pigeons, all alone ... I can only excuse myself as being too young to want to know about adult lives, and I was taken up with a kind of terror of what would happen to me back at school. She pressed a loud kiss to my forehead and walked away.

I waited. What would be said, done, what punishment ... I grew sick with waiting. But my time away was never referred to by any of the masters; it was as though I had ceased to exist for those days and so there was no point asking questions about me. But I believe, *now*, that Mr. Beveridge knew, or suspected; by saying nothing, he could avoid decisions, and scandal, in that small inward-facing english community ... It was not that his compatriots would have cared about his few portuguese pupils (did they not call us, derisively, pee-gees?) ... And I am perhaps quite wrong and do not understand now, any more than I understood as a small boy thrown to the lions, what I might call the 'english temperament'. Mr. Burnley himself returned to his earlier attitude of treating me as though I wasn't there ('I met a man who wasn't there'; I do not think England can be a comfortable place), and good or bad, and I think mainly bad, he never commented on my work, never called me out to read, never asked me a question. My work suffered because I took into each class a deep dread, always waiting for something I could not prepare myself for to happen ...

But strangest of all was Henrique: he came his regular Sunday and said nothing about my visit, about whether he'd come the day after as he'd promised he would ... I felt disorientated, that I had run to him in my mind but walked to Rosa Barbosa in reality. Immediately he came, he said enthusiastically: "Come and I can show you the office where I'll be working soon". I gazed up at its narrow grey front, its narrow inhospitable windows, at the plate by the street door. It chilled me. Would he walk there each day, sharp and grey with a stiff collar, and say

‘I belong’, with the law at his finger-tips and humble petitioners, confusedly wronged, not allowed, with their bare feet and dirty necks, up the stairs.

I looked at it for as long as he wished—then he took me to a Charlie Chaplin film *O Circo*, then back to school—and he had asked me nothing except: “Do you know what you want to do in life, Tomás?” and I said “No” because it was the truth. Then I said I would like to be able to keep pigeons and he laughed at that and went away.

*****

O, wert thou in the cauld blast
On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
My plaidie to the angry airt,
I’d shelter thee, I’d shelter thee.
Or did Misfortune’s bitter storms
Around thee blaw, around thee blaw,
Thy bield should be my bosom,
To share it a’, to share it a’.

Robert Burns

*****

My last term was a torment of tangled feelings. I knew I had to find the words to ask my parents to take me away. I must beg them to let me go to Henrique’s school or perhaps no school at all. Many children didn’t. I saw them in the streets selling papers, shining shoes, in the markets, little beasts of burden, but to my mind they lived great lives of freedom, unburdened by shoes and ties, by porridge, by ‘prep’.

Some nights I would wake in panic, sure that I was being suffocated, that my head was being pressed into the pillow; other terrible dreams saw me standing naked in front of a great crowd of jeering people or asked to bend over in public when I desperately needed to run to what some of the boys called the ‘lou’ (I never called it this because we sometimes refer to a girl called Lourdes as ‘Lou’ or ‘Loulou’; maybe that is why they chose it); I felt mystery pains in my stomach, sometimes I could not keep my food down, and sometimes I became so constipated Mr. Bayley forced me to have spoons-full of a thick white medicine. Mr. Giffard-Jones seemed to become more and more sarcastic at table. Mr. Beveridge gave me fierce looks which seemed to say it was only by the Grace of God he wasn’t finding fault at this moment ...

And then things changed, changed enough to help me through the term: one Saturday evening Paul McNab asked if I’d like to come and stay a week with him when the holidays began. His father, he said, had returned from Brasil and taken a house in Vila do Conde for three months and would I like to come there, with him. But what about David, I asked, would not he expect to be invited? Paul said, no, David did not like his father; then he made his voice quieter and said, “anyway, I’d rather have you.”

I had never been inside what I called an ‘english house’; it might be very strange in its ways of doing things, even stranger than school (we neatly cross our knife and fork when we finish eating but the english, strangely, do that to show they *haven’t* finished eating; Mr. Giffard-Jones was always rapping my nuckles for forgetting—which was unfair: this is *my* country, not his). I felt very nervous but I wrote and asked my parents and they said, yes, I could go with Paul and they would come for me at the end of the week.

They had taken the lease of a house near Espinho and they thought it would be our new home. I did not, immediately, see the significance in their use of the word ‘home’.

The term crept onward, the summer beckoned. I was excited but I also felt guilty because I had not told my parents that Paul’s father was some kind of protestant minister. Would they

be angry when they found out? But, when he came, Mr. McNab was only dressed in an ordinary suit. His car was a Wolseley, large and battered, and after he said, "How do you do, Master Vasconcelos?" and shook my hand he told me to climb in beside Paul. He spoke to me in portuguese, good portuguese, and to Paul in a language I had never heard before and which Paul later told me was called gaelic.

He was not exactly a minister but a translator of religious books into other languages. Did this still mean he might want to convert me? I was not sure how, in the twentieth century, people went about converting other people. I worried much about this, when would he begin, what should I say to him ... but after the first anxious day in his company I began to relax.

We were very happy there: Paul and myself, his father and old Carolina who looked after our meals in the grimy old house he had rented near the water-front. Paul did handstands on the beach and his father took photographs of us with a square black camera and we made a gigantic sand-castle, the most magnificent sand-castle of all time with high turrets and a deep moat and a manner of draw-bridge. Paul said "I christen thee, Castle of Otranto, and may thou be steadfast and true in the face of storm and battle!" While we were working on it, a skinny little dog came up to me and I put out a hand to him.

"I shouldn't touch him if I were you," Paul's father said. "He looks as though he's suffering from ring-worm."

I did not like to disobey Mr. McNab when he'd been so kind to me but I took the dog's neck between my hands then ran them slowly down his body, along his jutting ribs to his spindle haunches. The dog put his little black nose up to my chin and gave it a quick lick, then he lay down beside me and stayed quietly there while I went on working on the north wall; until the wind came up strongly from the sea and we decided to go home and see if our creation could survive the night. Paul's father came over to me as the dog also clambered to his feet and gazed up at me.

"Show me your hands, Tom."

I felt embarrassed, they were so dirty and scraped; he looked at them, then down at the dog, then he gave his grave smile and said, "I think we have just acquired you, Master Dog, so I hope your appetite is moderate ... but don't forget to wash your hands well, Tom. You too, Paul."

He asked Carolina to prepare a little bowl of bread and milk for the dog which she did with much grumbling. The dog gobbled it up, then wanted to come inside with me. I did not know if I should try and chase him away—Mr. McNab would not want a diseased dog in his parlour—but he came out and said, "Och, Master Dog, I can see you don't want to be parted from Master Tom here, so come along in."

It was a very quiet house. You could hear the clock ticking and the wind in the chimney. Carolina did what needed to be done. Mr. McNab spent much time working, surrounded by books, in his study. Every day, Paul and I went down to the beach or walked around the town. He never had any money to spend, nor did I, but on the last day of my visit his father took us both to a little travelling fair which had a fire-eater and a little brown dwarf—'See the Smallest Man in the World from the Faraway Jungles of Brasil'—and stalls with food.

There was something very intense about the way Paul's father looked at him, spoke to him, watched him when Paul was busy with something and not noticing. I asked him what it was like to just have a father, no mother, and he ducked his head with a kind of embarrassment. "He is always afraid of loving me too much."

This was a very strange idea: could people be loved too much or too little—and how would you know when you were loving exactly the right amount.

"Why would he be afraid?"

"Flesh and blood, I suppose, earthly things ... not—not thinking enough about—not loving God enough ... I can't really explain ... and it's different for catholics, isn't it?"

"I'm not a very good catholic."

"But you have confession, don't you? I mean you would have to think what sins you were

going to tell the priest, wouldn't you?"

This touched a painful part of me; I knew I should confess to what had happened with Mr. Burnley, about running away, about not being able to eat the food my parents paid to go on my plate ... Somehow, I knew these must be sins but I didn't know how to express them to anyone, not even the anonymous voice behind the grille ... I didn't know the word 'rape' then ... And I felt obscurely it was all my fault because I hadn't tried hard enough to overcome my stutter ... Confused words like 'temptation' and 'lust' and 'uncleanliness', handed down from the pulpit, obscured my innocence ... I did not know where the boundaries should be drawn ...

Mr. McNab came from the highlands of Scotland and his english was quite unlike that of any of the masters, it had a soft dancing quality, as if the *corridinha* was being danced in a mist. I think he was a sad man; afraid of the love which consumed him for the son he could see so seldom, afraid of never reaching people's hearts with the tracts he translated so carefully and painstakingly, afraid of his own impossibly high standards.

That last night when we sat together in the parlour with Master Dog basking in our company, Paul and I playing chinese checkers, he simply sat there, watching us. Then Carolina came in with a tray of coffee cups and cake and he looked up and thanked her in the way he had, as if she had walked to the end of the world and back with her tray, and she poured out, giving, as she did so, Master Dog a fierce look which said 'dirty creature in my clean room!' Master Dog beat his tail softly and crept closer to me.

"Have you ever thought about religion much, Tom?"

I had let my guard drop; I had decided Mr. McNab was much too busy to take time to convert me.

"N-not really, Mr. McNab."

"How do you think of Jesus—I don't mean how do you feel you *should* think about him, but what things about him would you normally think of?"

"I-I know he liked riding on a donkey—and he would go and get it out of a pit if it fell in. I would too. Do you think there are many pits in Palestine? I know, one time, a sheep fell down a cliff at home and fell right to the bottom of a ravine—do you think that is what he meant?"

"It could be."

"Except the sheep was dead."

"That's a pity." But he gave me an encouraging 'go on' smile.

"And when they saw the white dove ... I like pigeons ... "

Normally, I had great difficulty talking to adults. But that evening I surprised myself. We talked about Noah's ark and Daniel and the lions and ravens and bears and wolves and sheep; he gently led me on though it seemed strange to me that a religious man should be so interested in animals; perhaps it was different in Scotland and I thought I'd like to see his country and the animals they have there ...

It grew late and Mr. McNab looked at the clock. Then he said in a different voice, "I think you will both grow up to be fine young men—but, I think, too, that life will be difficult for you both." Did I imagine the little chill those words gave me? Though, being honest, I don't think I had ever thought of life as *easy*, there were snares and trip-wires ... perhaps he meant more difficult than being at Mr. Beveridge's ...

"It doesn't matter what tribulations might come to you both if—" (I was not sure what 'tribulations' meant then) "you have faith and courage ... and no matter what happens I always come back to that wonderful promise ... " He handed me a small book and said, "Perhaps you would read it aloud for us, Tom."

Me, the person who dreaded the command to read aloud? I held it as I might hold a poisonous spider—"*Porque Deus amou o mundo de tal maneira que deu o seu Filho unigénito, para que todo aquele que nele crê não pereça, mas tenha a vida eterna*." For God so loved the world ... and I read it without stumbling once ...

"I think, Tom, that He gave you a special gift—even though I don't pretend to understand quite how ... " He looked from me to Master Dog and back, then across to Paul. "The gift of

healing." There was a long silence and we could hear Carolina singing to herself in a croak-croak voice at the end of the house. Then Mr. McNab said, more normal, "What are you going to do when you are older, Tom?"

I said I didn't know. Paul said, "I'm going to be a doctor."

"Mmm ... " His father nodded. "And you, Tom, something to do with animals perhaps?"

Apart from being a shepherd or a muleteer, which Henrique would deride, such an idea had not occurred to me.

"A farmer, do you mean?"

He shrugged. "A veterinarian. A zoo-keeper. A big-game hunter—no, not that ... a naturalist ... "

"What does a naturalist do?"

"Well, he studies animals in their natural condition to understand them better, to understand what they eat, how they live together with other animals ... he might study their migration patterns—you've seen the birds that come from northern Europe and fly all the way to Africa and then, come spring, they fly all the way home again ... how do they find their way when we must ask questions and consult maps when we start on a journey?"

Next day, my mother and father and Brites came in the Berliet and packed me in—and I have not seen Paul or his father since that day.

*****

Summer splendid Summer, feeding the Poet with the milk of your light
I grew like corn in the Springtime, I was drunk with verdure of water,
with green rustling in the gold of Time
Ah! no longer! I cannot bear your light, the light of your lamps,
your atomic light breaking up all my being
I cannot bear the light of midnight. The splendour of honours is like a
Sahara
An immense void, without erg or hamada without grass, without the flicker
of an eyelash, or the flicker of a heart.
So twenty-four hours out of twenty-four, eyes wide open like Father
Cloarec
Crucified on the stone by the Heathens of Joal, worshippers of Serpents.
In my eyes the Portuguese lighthouse turned, yes twenty-four hours
out of twenty-four
A machine precise and unrelenting until the end of time.

Léopold Senghor

*****

Our new house was south of Porto, inland from Espinho with its beaches and pine-trees, buffetted to strange sharp angles in the sandy soil; we were told the house was the manager's residence at an anthrax research station, set up with the help of the League of Nations as part of their plan to eradicate the disease ... but, as happens, the money had finished and the house could be rented. The barns and pens were empty and the weeds grew briskly. The house was surrounded by a high prickly hedge and several large chestnut trees grew in the *quintal*. Sunny windows looked south down a shallow slope to a winding pond full of reeds.

I would go to school in Espinho; it would mean walking ten kilometres each day but I did not mind. I liked walking and there were always things to see. Besides, I was full of enthusiasm for what was to be my first study: a study of life in the pond. I had no idea how to set about this—I was sorry I had not thought to ask Mr. McNab—so the first day I went down, all portentous, with a clean notebook and two especially sharpened pencils.

At first, I stirred the bottom mud to see what lived there and annoyed everything but, slowly, slowly, I learned how to 'remove' myself from what I wanted to study; and I learned that there was no point in filling up my notebook until my mind was clear about what I was observing rather than what I thought I was observing. In haphazard ways, you might say I taught myself.

My mother said I should take Brites when I went "out for a walk". By then Brites was a little elf-creature with big brown eyes in a small face, very frail and often prostrated after exertion. She liked to come with me and she, too, had the capacity to sit absolutely still; but, soon or late, she would want to talk, to ask questions, or she would sing to herself in a high treble, funny little 'songs' whose words she made up as she went along. If she got tired of the pond, or grew hungry, she would simply get to her feet and go home, squeezing through the gap in the south hedge and entering the back garden.

But one day she didn't do this: I did not notice her going, just that it grew in my thoughts that she was very quiet today ... Instead she walked up the slope behind the house where a flock of brown and white goats sometimes grazed. There was an old male there, a very decrepit old male, and I cannot say if Brites ran down the hill to get away from him—and he ran after her ... or if he saw her coming and chased her ... but when my mother found Brites in the yard she was blue-faced and gasping for each breath.

My mother tucked her up in bed, 'You're quite safe now, *Mamá's* here, quite quite safe' ... and a warm drink and many kisses. But Brites died in the night. Heart-strain, the doctor said, when he heard the story of the goat and the hill ... Henrique came immediately but he was no comfort. Over and over again, he asked why had not I taken better care of my little sister. Why had I ignored her. Why had I forgotten her. Why had I been so self-absorbed, so careless ... it was nothing but a muddy little pond ...

I do not mean to say he was untouched by her death but he was untouched by the guilt which we each carried and could not speak of, not then ... My father, suffering from what he had been told was congenital heart disease, blamed himself for passing his weakness to his daughter ... My mother said in great anguish "If only ... " (surely those are the saddest words in any language; if only there was a language where you are what you are and you did what you did and regret and guilt are cloud shadows) ... if only she had kept Brites in the garden, if only she had remembered how apt I was to become absorbed by little things, if only she had taken time to watch from the window or even to walk down to fetch her back when she'd had sufficient fresh air ...

My father and mother, I think, crept closer to each other; I know now she was more than the girl who survived baby-hood, she was their last possible baby ... now they had only each other ...

I had school and much catching up to do and, outward at least, I became very pious, very devout. I think I was looking for some kind of comfort, some kind of certainty, in the forms, the rituals, the close observance, the sense of obedience—and there *was* comfort—but deep down inside me was the unspoken fear: I could not quite believe that anything lived in the Host, that little piece of dry cardboard-tasting wafer; I could not make the ultimate leap of faith and I felt I did not belong ... I would come out in to the sunshine and there, suddenly, I could feel that faith, God, was all around me. I longed to be able to express my doubts to someone—and yet to admit it, to give it words and shapes, to breathe life into it, seemed a fearful step to take.

Paul went home to Scotland—his father had to take his translations to the printing press—and we wrote to one another. I had never written to anyone other than my parents and, to begin, I wrote long journals crowding into them all the things I saw and did: the trees, the birds, what I had learned about frogs, about Jacob—and Paul wrote back to tell me about his new school.

But gradually, without noticing, our letters changed. We began to discuss Questions—not exactly Questions of Faith—*that* was a dangerous subject—no, it was more an exploration of

what questions intrigued us, what questions we asked ourselves when we lay in bed with nothing to do but think; the letters grew, changed their nature, I spent hours writing them; I waited impatiently for Paul's letters ...

Jacob was growing old and stiff; he preferred the rug at my father's feet than to walk with me. I was sorry I could not have brought Master Dog with me but Mr. McNab had found him a home in Vila do Conde. And then Jacob died. One day he simply gave a long sigh, his hind legs kicked out in a sudden spasm and he grew still. My father missed his company very much. Of course he never spoke of him as a companion, as his 'best friend', that is a very english idea, but good companions they had always been.

And my father himself was not well: he was much too thin, his slight nagging cough refused to go away. But, that next summer's holiday, I was absorbed in a new and exciting plan and didn't think about my father, much.

*****

Though the beaches at Estoril were fashionable enough then, I expect they still are, this was not so further north. Except for fishing ports, the beaches were often unfrequented. I began a study of the herring gulls along the coast. My place of study must not be close enough to people for the bird lives to be influenced by fish offal or refuse ... but determining this meant I must walk at least fifteen kilometres to my chosen place each day—and I soon learned that I must not take food with me because then the gulls would simply collect around me and wait. My mother, seeing me set off in the rain, would say, "Do you *need* to go today?"

"Yes. I must observe them every day."

At first I did not believe I could ever come to recognise each different bird in that colony—though I remembered Rosa Barbosa who had known each of her dozens of pigeons: which ones were male and which were female, which were the oldest, how many eggs, first brood or second ... and slowly I began to determine gull characters, gull hierarchies, gull relations; it was a new world being opened to me yet, in a strange way, seeing a human world mirrored in feathers and beaks ... And now I had a camera to help me remember it.

Paul had sent copies of the photographs his father had taken of the two of us on the beach at Vila do Conde and I looked often at us; at Paul with what he called his 'jug-handle' ears and his wide grin and freckled face; at myself with the long sad-in-repose Vasconcelos face, the secret eyes with their slight downward droop, the blackly arched brows, that little quiff of black hair which insisted on standing tall in the centre of my high forehead, despite comb and water—and it seemed to me, then, that the camera captured a 'truth' that the mirror could not. To stand in front of a mirror was to turn your best angle unconsciously, to compose a particular expression.

I longed for a camera—and for my saint's day Henrique looked in Porto pawn-shops and my father sent the money. Of course, often I could not afford to buy new films to thread through its mysterious insides and I had to think carefully about each picture I took.

My mother said a bicycle would be more useful but I treasured my little black box and my father said my legs were young and strong but he arranged for me to go, now and then, to work for a photographer in Espinho.

David Pinheiro had a big room above a shop, with black curtains and glass dishes and fancy chairs for his customers, brides and grooms, First Communions, first sons ... He did not pay me anything but he showed me how to develop the films he took and, when business was slow in coming which was often, he showed me how to fool people with cards but I was never quick enough with my hands to fool anyone ...

Every day I wrote up my observations with great care. I chose out my best photographs and took them to Sr. Pinheiro for his final decision and, upon my father's advice, I sent my article which I called 'A Day in the Life of a Herring Gull' to a magazine. Months went by. I felt sure it was lost, unretrievably. It was not that we had great faith in the post and, as time passed, I gave up my last lingering belief that they would not be careless of such a precious packet.

Então!—when six silent months were gone—a letter came. They liked my article! They were going to publish it in their forthcoming issue. And they sent the wonderful sum of twenty-five *escudos*! Not much you might say, as my father did, for months of careful observation in all manner of weather; not much for the hundreds of kilometres I had walked—but, oh, life was sweet! I spent some of it on buying a copy to send to Paul and, unbeknownst to me then, my father also purchased several copies to send to family members.

So I began the planning of a grander idea for when the next holidays came: Mr. McNab's passing talk of birds which find their way without a map had remained with me; I would begin a study of the birds of northern Europe who choose to come this way on their long journeys to África. At first I thought of it as a small observation of the reed warblers, the lapwings, the cranes, which occasionally were to be seen this far west.

Then, in my mind, the idea blossomed and grew, a great beanstalk reaching to the clouds: I would observe the whole region of Beira Litoral, I would observe the north of Portugal, why not all the country—if common sense had not intervened, in the shape of examinations and my father's caution, I might eventually have aspired to the whole of the peninsula, western Europe, the world, the history of bird migration ...

Mr. Beveridge had provided my parents with a final report. It suggested in dashing loops, that Tomás Vasconcelos was not over-burdened with intelligence or potential (I wonder why intelligence and potential should be seen as a burden?); it said what many people thought, what I thought myself ... but why did this report, unlike his previous report, not mention 'application', not say I must 'try harder'?

I think, now, that he avoided them because a parent might naturally ask "why have not you been trying? Why did not you apply yourself to your studies?" and then I just might blurt out, I might try to put the blame on Mr. Burnley ... this way it was an inherent fault, a little disappointing, but not to be helped. I accepted it as such. Henrique was clever. I was not.

And in countless hours I was brooding on what had become a shared sin, a secret brooding which grew to massif dimensions, a black lake from here to the horizon, a manner of despicable dirtiness which lived always just beyond the reach of my thoughts but which, in some mysterious way, made me feel disgusted with my body; I felt vaguely ashamed each time I had to hold myself up to be lathered and dried, I didn't want to think I had a thing the same as Mr. Burnley, that I might grow to be like him, hot and fierce and smelling of sherry-sweat and bay-rum ... I was afraid that my little thing might grow and grow and get out of my control ... I felt embarrassed when I saw animals and birds mating, when I saw dogs sniffing and cocking ... I tried to pretend it was only because they were animals and no people did such as that, it was only a sin in my imagination ...

That Christmas my grandfather, my mother's father, came, so portentous, so exciting, bringing with him his german wife Kristen. He was old, of course, but energetic and his white hair stood up furiously, straight up like mine. Kristen was a strange beautiful woman with large blue eyes framed in dark lashes. She wore her silver hair parted in the middle and coiled at the neck. She wore long dark dresses which suggested someone sleek and silent, like a panther, and she smoked cigarettes in a long ivory holder. She fascinated me.

My grandfather brought with him two pieces of the 'treasure' from the garden of the house in Trás-os-Montes. The treasure! The house! His life-long quest; my grandfather who had entered my life as Clauses of the Will, and turned into Indisposed—and now he was here, holding a strange thing he called a '*lunula*', intricately made in copper, and which he said the ancient ibero-celts wore around their necks, that it represented the crescent moon and that when the moon lay upon its back, like this, it would bring rain—and a pig, a little stone pig, carved and pitted by great age and about ten centimetres high.

He said they loved pork better than anything else ... "better than *bacalhau*?" ... my father laughed and said they knew nothing of cod-fish ... I took the little pig in my hands but he gave out nothing, no electric impulse, he was truly dead. But he was part of the 'treasure' for which my *Vovô* had pondered and studied and translated and travelled to archives and museums for

more than twenty years; the ‘treasure’ deep beneath the old pear trees of my childhood; I had run on treasure, sat on treasure, turned somersaults on treasure—how strange!—and now, if there was more, it would all be stored for ever, for people to see, in Bragança, and Kristen said it should be called the *Coleção* Luís da Cunha Mendes.

“And is there nothing for you?” my mother asked in concern; she did not like to think he had worked for so long and suffered so much criticism and now other people would benefit.

“*Talvez*, Lília, *talvez*.”

“Vindication,” Kristen said quietly. “When so many people mocked.”

It was true that important scholars had told him, no, that was not what the maps, the inscriptions, were suggesting. But he believed in himself; he never lost his faith in his own interpretation.

It was only much later that I understood the scandal, why some of his own family avoided him, not because they thought his ideas wild and foolish, as Bartolomeu Dias believing in the cresting of the Cape—but because he had taken his wife, my grandmother, to the south when they found she had tuberculosis. They acquired an apartment, just above the sunny sea, in Faro. And there he met Kristen. But my grandmother was not yet dead. That was the scandal.

My grandfather was as fascinated with Kristen as I was, no, more so ... naturally more so. He fell desperately in love—with her ‘northern beauty’, her mind, her smile, the way she walked, the way she held her long beautiful hands. But it appeared to the family that he had betrayed his dying wife who had always been good to him, who had given him four sons and two daughters, who had brought him a dowry large enough to allow him to follow his curious quest to the exclusion of all else; she died alone, they said furiously, because he was with Kristen.

My mother loved them both, father and mother, (now I can better understand her dilemma) but only Kristen believed in his ideas. He embarrassed his family—my uncle Arco who died of fever in Guiné never failed to decry what he saw as eccentricity, even a wild whim; uncle Ari who was too kind to criticise, uncle Ata, far away in Japan, said nothing; *Tia* Rosa never forgave him, nor Kristen either; her door was closed to them both.

As my father once said, “We are not an eccentric people.”

*****

He hears the wild geese gabble o’er his head;
Then, pleased with fancies in his musings bred,
He marks the figured forms in which they fly,
And pausing, follows with a wondering eye,
Likening their curious march, in curves or rows,
To every letter which his memory knows;

While, far above, the solitary crane
Swings lonely to unfrozen dykes again ...

John Clare

*****

Finally, I accepted my father’s suggestion and called my research ‘Vagrants in the *Distrito* of Aveiro’. It required me, I required me I mean, to visit farms, fishing villages, gypsies, and ask them if they had seen any unusual birds during the last spring and autumn. Being shy about my fascination, about talking to people, it was hard to approach them to ask: “Have you seen any strange birds?” They laughed, they frowned, they had no idea what I might mean, they said in apology, yes, and very tasty they had been, roasted. I was learning a lot about people: some were observant, some were not; some professed an interest out of politeness, but

many did not (life is not so good on one or two hectares); some were suspicious, many were open-hearted and hospitable.

I prepared pictures of the birds I thought they were most likely to have seen (I remember I had redshanks and barn swallows, buntings and fieldfares, wheatears, water pipits, the common crane) and coloured them as true to life as I could—and this was of much help in the first few minutes of meeting people.

And now I had a bicycle! The Berliet sat unused. Its tyres perished. My father could not bring himself to admit he did not have the strength to crank it up, to lift the cans of petroleum, to hold the wheel as it bucked over rocks and ruts in the country lanes. It was my mother who said, gently, even a little wistfully, that as we had a telephone, though it did not always work, and as there was now a bus which came within walking distance might we not manage without the car ... and so the car was sold. It was hard times for selling a car, for selling anything, and my father received very much less than he had paid—but out of this he took the money for a well-used bicycle and a basket to fit over the handle-bars. The rest of the money, I think, went to pay Henrique's university expense.

I cycled up and down the roads, man-handled it up primitive tracks; I came to know the hidden valleys, the ponds and groves and hamlets where people lived insensible to the claims of the world. That I was no longer a student, and could be expected to be looking for work barely concerned me. I *was* working, I believed.

The article was finished and my mother talked my grandfather into buying a typewriter—"It would be such a useful thing for my husband"—she mentioned his poor health—"and for Tomás too". Slowly I typed my research, learning as I went the vagaries of the machine, a big black Olivetti, and learning the vagaries of ten fingers.

I should mention that my father was working on a book—he had been working on it for years—which he called '*A Lição dos Miguelitas*'. It mixed nineteenth-century history, political opinion, social comment; he had drafted out perhaps twenty pages and the chapter headings but he had many more pages of research. It may seem strange, and as I write this narrative I find many unasked questions fighting their way up to bother me in sharp ways, but I had no interest in my family's financial affairs; sometimes there was money and sometimes there was not and even now I do not know where the money came from, exactly.

My father, I know, had a small share in an olive orchard owned by a cousin and another small share in the ships-chandlery in the capital and my grandfather had paid him a small allowance for caring for the house in the mountains and its tenants ... was it what we lived on or were there other sources ...

Then Henrique came one day, bringing with him the young woman he had asked to marry him when he should be finished his studies. Her brother came too. It was a louring day with no sun to lighten the solid brick house and autumnal chestnuts and dark laurels, the pond shivered under a curt wind. Henrique seemed ill-at-ease and my father was uncharacteristically glum. The young woman, Antónia, simpered and gave Henrique *looks* from under her wing of dark hair. Her brother Fernão smoked cigarettes too close to my father.

I suppose many things were spoken of but I only remember them talking a lot about Spain; this seemed almost an obsession with Fernão. He and Henrique, I learned later, had become members of a catholic student group in which political and religious thoughts mixed; patriotic, full of zeal, they were early disciples of *salazarismo*, but at this time most concerned with Spain. And everyone in Spain it seemed was unhappy:—the anarchists were unhappy, the land-lords were unhappy, the basques were unhappy, the catalans were unhappy, the peasants were unhappy, the carlists were unhappy, the workers were unhappy, such unhappiness ... I decided I would never go to Spain. Perhaps I am exaggerating when I try to put this down, time changes thoughts—and I always felt ill-at-ease with my brother's clever decisive friends.

Not that day but another, Henrique told us his marriage would come as soon as he

completed his studies. I did not especially want her as my *cunhada*, she laughed when Henrique said I was studying birds, but it was not my place to complain. My mother said to my father: "Perhaps we will come to love her when we know her better."

My second article, too, was taken, again for twenty-five *escudos*, and again I felt a great excitement at the fact of my author-ship. My future, I thought, was now assured. But my father said in his quiet way, "It is not a large income for six months of work, *filho*."

"No ... no, I suppose it isn't—but—do not you think it is a good beginning?"

"*Por certo*. But you must give more thought to earning an income, you know. Some day, you too will wish to marry—and a wife can not live on moonshine and hope."

I think I blushed. I had no interest in girls, no wish to marry; it even seemed, that day, a good reason for *not* earning an income, a protection from such a suggestion. He did not press the thought, saying instead: "Perhaps you might like to think of a more solid piece of research?"

I had not thought beyond my vagrant birds and said so. This did not seem to surprise him. "If you could write about anyone, anything, what would you choose? It might be that I can guide you."

I thought about this for weeks—in between thoughts on widening my 'research' and gaining permission, from whom I do not know, to sail with the cod boats to study Arctic birds—and knowing his 'anything' did not mean birds I finally and diffidently said I thought Garcia de Orta was interesting. Instantly, he became enamoured of this idea; and if it gave him pleasure in the last years of his life I do not regret it. Besides, it was not precisely an untruth. I *did* find Garcia de Orta interesting. It was only that I did not want to write about people; even long dead people asked questions I could not answer.

*****

Olhai que, em vossos anos,
uma Orta insigne produze várias ervas
nos campos lusitanos,
as quais aquelas doutas e protervas
Medeia e Circe nunca conheceram,
posto que as leis da Mágica excederam.
Luís de Camões

*****

Yet, looking back, I think I gained something, how much I do not know, from the reading my father steered me toward. Garcia de Orta went to Índia and wrote its first book for european readers about the plants he found there: *Colóquio dos Simples e Drogas da Índia*; he was, so my father said, a man of integrity and courage, this kind of austere integrity which is neither foreign nor home but a difficult gift from God ... and now I began taking more notice of plants, seeds, the cures the old *bruxas* used, even the science of botany.

Orta lived in the time of inquisition, the Santo Ofício, before Pombal, and his dead bones were dug up and burned ... which was a madness, what harm could old bones do when his soul was not in Purgatory but resting in the blossom of the *neem* trees awaiting the Day of Judgement. I would laugh if they went to so much work for my soul and forgot their own ...

But then I knew nothing of Magic, of herbs and potions, and it was hard to stand outside myself and ask about the character, the nature, of Tomás Vasconcelos: I was not clever enough. But I wrote of all this to Paul and he wrote about John Knox and the burning of the witches in Edinburgh. He was about to enter Medical School there, the great school, he said, of Mr. Simpson (no relation to the bane Simpson) and Mr. Lister ...

And I? I was little more than a part-educated gypsy, bicycle-be-holdern, mostly happy in

my travels, tough I like to think and self-reliant but a sad disappointment to my parents and my brother. I was going everywhere and nowhere.

*****

I stole a plump and bonny fowl,
But ere I well had din'd,
The master came with scowl and growl,
And me would captive bind.

My hat and mantle off I threw
And scour'd across the lea,
Then cried the beng with loud halloo,
Where does the Gypsy flee?

Anon.

*****

Henrique graduated. The very act seemed to change him. He grew pompous; he carefully cultivated a thin moustache (how I hated that discreet line of hair and yet I cannot say precisely why) and wore high collars. His way of thinning his mouth I found disconcerting. And he was critical. Oh yes! When would I cease to play with 'my' birds, he asked, and settle to being a normal young man?

He had no strong feelings, he and Fernão, for or against Franco at the time of the *coup*. That was to come. I said if the spanish people were all miserable, not a carefully-clasped melancholia, but true unhappiness then I could not see how killing one another could make them happier. Henrique told me I did not understand a thing about the world I lived in; *realpolitick*, not fairy people with spells and *conjuros* ...

"If you mean," my father interposed gently, "he does not understand this increasingly deterministic and authoritarian world we live in—then he is not alone. What is the point of Man enjoying a degree of God-given Free Will if other men will not permit him to exercise it? You surely would not wish to see him as no more than one of his seagulls, at the mercy of instinct and hierarchy, would you? I am tired of being told that other men know what is best for me."

"I think, *Papá*," Henrique hid his cutting words under a gentle deference, "you do not understand the level of influence communism has gained and what this may mean for the church ... living so remote from the world as you are here ... "

"I may not be at the centre of events—but I do retain the services of my eyes, my ears—and something you have not yet had time to acquire—what I might call an historical perspective."

The next time Henrique came, he came alone, and he was very sober, chastened almost, because he had decided he did not want to marry Antónia but she was insisting on their engagement, talking of his breach of promise ...

"Is it that you have lost your regard for her?" my mother said.

"No ... not exactly. I feel increasingly drawn toward the Church. I am not quite clear yet but you do see, don't you, that marriage is impossible while I feel this way?"

"But—surely—Antónia must understand this sense of vocation which is troubling you?"

"She-she has already done some sewing, some embroidery—and her family, her relations, have all been told ... they expect ... " Henrique sounded glum.

"*Casar, casar; sôa bem, mas sabe mal*—" I said it under my breath; not that it was quite exact, they were not married, but I knew Henrique had become engaged to Antónia partly because her father had his own law firm ... no, I should say I *think* I knew ... but it came to me then that if I should ever happen to get married (I could not imagine doing so) I would want to

play with my wife, that we would laugh and run on the sand and throw seaweed at each other (you can see my youth in this; married people do not do those things, much) ... and there was something about Henrique's engagement which reminded me of a particular kind of letter which begins '*Respondendo a sua prezada de 20 do p.p. do ...* ' My parents counselled patience; everything would become clear soon.

Then they talked a little about events in Spain and passed on to grandfather's latest discovery: an urn, a jug, both broken; my father mentioned the possibility of their going to the Algarve for a few months to see if his health would improve—but an air of unhappiness prevailed and I left them to go to work in my vegetable garden where I could think about the new world I was uncovering and beginning to understand: a secret world of earth-worms, beetles, millipedes ...

I had not known until the thought came to me: I might help by growing cabbages and onions for the *caldo verde* we had almost every day—that this world lived and went silently about its life beneath the grass of what we merely called the *quintal* when we should have called it the 'zoo' ...

We did not hear from Henrique for some weeks—though my father said something to my mother about Henrique enticed by 'Canon Law' and I asked, one evening, if this was what interested him. My father was urging me to improve my very bad latin because "even birds and insects have latin names—to classify them—you would find it useful".

"Poor boy," my father said without inflexion, "but who am I to fight Mother Church—if that is truly where his future lies ... but Canon Law, necessary as it may be, is something I associate with cloistered old men, their kindness withered from lack of use, pronouncing upon the lives and marriages of other people, without any true understanding ... "

"Without understanding what, *Papá*?"

He became diffident. He said, "Can a seagull understand about life before it has established what you naturalists call a 'pair bond', before it has brooded its first eggs, raised its first chicks, felt the burden of constant feeding, day after day, seen them grow, made them fly—"

('you naturalists'—it had a lovely sound to it!)

"Do you think Henrique will *really* become a priest?"

"Not yet ... but I am afraid of the influence of other young men like Fernão ... men who find—" he seemed to fumble for words, "the most attractive aspects of their faith in matters of hierarchy, of enforcing rules, of a degree of power ... yes, I think that is what worries me ... that search for power ... "

But I let all this drift out of my mind. I could not influence Henrique; even if I could I do not think I would have tried to. And my father had begun to worry on a quite different matter. The *Legião Portuguesa*.

*****

I remember, still, my father saying: "Salazar and Franco might be brothers—except that Salazar is intelligent and Franco is not." And a little while later the two men met and clasped each other to their bosoms and Franco was full of envy and Salazar promised to send young men to Spain to assist the Nationalists; not the regular army, oh no, he did not trust Franco *that* much—but he promised to raise twenty thousand 'volunteers'. They were called Viriatos after an ancient hero of our history but, really, they were much in the manner of conscripts.

As my father put it, it would train young men without cost to our poverty-stricken treasury—and if they did not come home as many did not, in our Prime Minister's view, it would not matter very much because the best young men were already in the colonies, the Church, the Army ... only the weaklings, the lazy, the decadent, cluttered up the countryside, sedited in the cafés in the towns. My father worried over this idea of harvesting the 'superfluous' and he was implacably opposed to our involvement with Spain in any way; my mother thought the whole problem would be solved if only Alfonso were to sit on the spanish throne again; but Henrique disagreed with them both.

He wrote to me that the priests were encouraging young men in the villages and farms to

see it as the fight to halt the spread, the '*contágio*' of 'God-less communism'; he and Fernão were travelling, speaking each week-end, encouraging young men to see it as a catholic mission. He spoke warmly of redemption through discipline, through sacrifice—and he asked if I would think of going, as an example it might be thought. I was upset by his letter. Why should I leave my blood on a spanish hill-side. I do not know why I saw it in those terms—some confused memory of *Padre* Diogo perhaps, and he had given me head-aches.

I showed the letter to my father—which made him angry with Henrique and Henrique angry with me. "Is communism God-less?" I was then more interested in a new beetle, gloriously spotted, found in the hedge—but I needed to understand this political matter before I responded to Henrique.

"In theory yes, in practice no. Karl Marx may have needed the church in the way that Cervantes needed windmills to demonstrate his hero's folly—but the Being who created Heaven and Earth does not need Karl Marx. It is only our pride, *filho,* which leads us on to say that God may lodge in this heart but not that heart ... "

"B-but we have to say Prayers of Intercession—is not that because ... the priests say we will go to Hell if we do not believe in God ... and if the communists do not believe in God ... "

"Do you remember that place where Jesus says 'Judge not'?"

"*Sim* ... "

"Well, there you have your answer to Henrique. It is not for him to say how you should live your life ... but, that being so, still I would like you to make a choice and if you cannot choose something for yourself—then I will have to make a choice for you."

"What is the choice?" Suddenly, my mouth was dry as sand. I knew, I had known for weeks, he lived in fear of 'conscription' for me.

"The choice of other fathers perhaps—the army, the church, the Colonial Service—I would like you to choose one—unless you can find a way, soon, to put the knowledge you have acquired to some use."

The regular army would stay safely at home—it seems strange that I did not think of other things for it to do; colonial insurrections happened, one hundred thousand men went to the *Guerra Mundial*, to África, to France ...

The church was even safer. And if he could not see me drilling with rifle and bayonet—Yeahhh!! Uggghhh! Poww! I was too silent a boy—then he could see me polishing a general's shoes, minding a general's horse ... and he could certainly see me in the monastery garden, keeping bees, milking the cow for the refectory table ...

And the Colonial Service ... I tried to imagine myself like the men in the books in Mr. Beveridge's school. Men with topee-helmets and brown bearers, one putteed-boot casually resting on the flanks of the dead tiger ... And the birds I had seen—the cranes and storks, the redshanks and bee eaters and warblers—were on their way to África.

I told him I would apply for the Colonial Service. I was running away from 'volunteering'; in my brother's eyes I was a coward. But my father said it was a sensible choice and that I would be good for the colonies and the colonies would be good for me. Immediately, he set about 'pulling strings' by writing to his cousin in the capital and then writing a very respectful letter to the man *Tio* José suggested. It took weeks for the reply to come.

But I was to go Tuesday the twenty-third for an interview with a Sr. Martinho Rosário de Magalhães. I was both terrified and excited. I went by train. *Tio* José (he was not actually my uncle) met me, took me home with him, introduced me to all his large family, and then to the water-front to see the family business. How I loved it! Here were gulls in their thousands, and ships large and small—and his warehouse crammed with everything a ship could possibly need: from ropes and canvas to barrels of salt and ships' biscuits—and over it all the wonderful smell of creosote and warm leather, tobacco, canvas, salt-sea-air.

I stopped thinking about my 'mission' and asked if I could stay and work here. He was apologetic as he pointed out that he already had four sons in the business—and business was by no means brisk. So! There was nothing for it but to set out for the office where Sr.

Magalhães was waiting.

I thought he might be an old sea captain—with a name like Magalhães!—but he was small and dry with a pince-nez which bothered him and needed to be removed often so that he could feel the bridge of his nose, cautiously. His handshake too was small and dry. Then he told me to sit down. I had thought the building would be crowded with brisk exciting people, engaged on their great mission, and instead there were deserted dark corridors and little dry men in little dark offices, surrounded by great piles of musty paper, and at work under dim yellow lights.

But his questions were brisk. First my school record. He showed no sign of being impressed, but he said, "english might be an advantage, young man. Can you speak it with some fluence?" He took down a heavy black book with a broken spine and said, "Perhaps you would read a few lines."

It proved to be a report on developments in the sugar industry in Índia and I read it without difficulty. He nodded several times. Then the bombardment began.

"Can you drive?"

"No. I have a bicycle."

"Can you type?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ledgers—Shorthand—Reports—Dealing with Native Peoples—Experience with Plantation Agriculture—" On and on, I had to keep saying no and I imagined his hopes, if he'd had hopes (after my father's letter), descending.

"Describe what you regard as your talents, young man."

I took out my two articles and passed them to him—and, to my surprise, he read both right through. He took off his glasses for the tenth time and said, "Where do you wish to be sent?"

"I am happy to go wherever my country needs me." All my way here, I had silently rehearsed this reply, believing it would be what he would want to hear. Now, with so much practice, it came out stiff and pompous. He managed a small smile. "Well, *that* is a change from most of the young pups I see." I didn't like to ask in what way it was a change.

After a few more questions about my status, family commitments, church attendance (he said he would require a letter from *Padre* Mateus in Espinho) he dismissed me, saying I would hear in a month or two whether he had recommended me for acceptance and, if so, where I would be sent. I thanked him for seeing me and left. Outside the sun shone, and I walked in the streets of Lisboa for nearly two hours before spending the little money my father had given me on a cup of coffee and a small gift for my 'uncle' and 'aunt'.

It sounded hopeful, my father decided, and he and my mother chose to take advantage and go to Faro for two months to stay in my grandfather's apartment there; they hoped the sun and the drier air might halt the course of my father's illness even if a cure was not possible—and he did seem much better when he came back, his cheeks less sunken, his cough less frequent.

While they were away, my 'aunt' Josefa came to stay, along with a girl from the neighbourhood. Her name was Gadarina Freitão. I had never met anyone called Gadarina and I wondered if it had anything to do with the Gadarene swine but I did not like to offend her by asking. (Secretly, I do not believe the pigs all drowned. How could they? Pigs can swim.) It should have been difficult, because my aunt was considerably deaf and Gadarina could not speak clearly because she had an hare-lip, but we were happy together; I think because we asked nothing of each other.

I spent my days outside, working on what might be my last article: on the nesting habits of swifts. I had been observing a pair which had chosen one of the deserted barns as home. To get enough light I had removed several tiles from the roof (no one knew about this act of destruction of League of Nations' property; the tiles broke) and I was mainly worried that I would incense them by my presence and they would abandon their nest.

Tia Josefa gave me some high quality paper to type on and Gadarina asked me an hundred questions and told me she had a duck and drake of her own and the duck had hatched out

nineteen ducklings last time ... she was saving to buy more ducks ... did not I think ducks would be a good business as it wasn't likely anyone would want to marry her. She said this with much frankness.

*****

A letter of acceptance came. A clerk in the Colonial Service! My mother cried. My father said he was proud of me. My tin trunk was brought out to be packed with 'tropical clothes'. A list of things I would need to do and take had been sent with the letter—and I added my camera and my typewriter. It wasn't really my typewriter but my father said "take it; it is your future"; I am not sure if he meant I would be a clerk for ever, that I would be small and old and dry and still typing, like Sr. Magalhães.

Henrique had not forgiven me for spurning *his* ideas for *my* life—and now, with the recent encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* to reinforce his belief blood must be spilled to defeat the spanish 'left', along with his greater skill in oratory, in convincing the unconvinced, he made my life a difficult life.

And where was I going that would lead to promotion and success?

"I am going to Timor."

"Timor! You must be mad! Why did you not put in for Angola—if you insist on going?"

It hurt me that we should part on a sour note. But I was packed. I had read *everything* I could find, in Espinho, in Aveiro, and I would have a week in Lisboa to study further while I had my injections for yellow fever and small-pox. "Did you know a Pygmy Stegadon fossil has been found in Timor?"

"A Stegodon!"

"Yes ... it is like a small mastodon."

"You must not be critical," my mother said to Henrique. "This is the choice that Tomás has made and he has always been a good son." She said this with tears in her eyes.

"Oh yes, Tomás is good. Too good. And that is his terrible burden."

"I do not see how being good can be a burden to anyone," my mother responded.

"Can't you? When he goes through life without any understanding of the great moral dilemmas of normal human beings, the important questions of our age, the philosophical and ideological debates which are everywhere in Europe—when all he wants to know is whether a bird has laid two eggs or three!—how can he enter into real—*relations* with other people when he is separated from them by this kind of goodness ... do not you ever wonder that he has no friends, no interest in the family, no attractions to women except that idiot girl you had here ... can't you see that there's something odd about what you see as his goodness ... "

(I did not like him calling Gadarina 'that idiot girl'.)

"You forget, my dear, that Tomás is six years younger than you."

"It won't make any difference. You will see. And sending him to a back-water of the empire is the last thing you should have allowed. What will he learn there?"

"Do not you think," my mother sounded sad, "that the great moral dilemmas and philosophical questions, as you say, are to be found wherever there are people, whether they live near or far away from us?"

But Henrique remained unconvinced.

*****

My mind pulsed with facts. My arms were stiff and red and filled with attenuated germ plasms. I had read countless copies of the *Boletim da Agência Geral das Colônias,* looking for Timor. My knees had been tapped and my eyes tested. (I had keen eyes, they said.) New recruits were mere nothings, to be lectured, ordered about, mere chess pawns—and yet, when I talked to my fellow-recruits on board, I was asked, "How much did you pay to be accepted?"; they seemed to resent the apparent ease with which I had been accepted in to the service. *Had* my father paid for me to go? And if he had—how much did it cost to despatch a son? This troubled me. I tried to put it out of my mind. Though nobody minded much—because none of them wanted Timor.

We were rigidly divided, not by barriers and decks but by an invisible gulf; the men to garrison the colonies were apart from the higher colonial officials who were apart from the middle-ranking men; wives and daughters were separate, unreachable; we, the lowliest of clerks, were set at the bottom of the ladder-steps; only the seamen received less in the way of food and comfort. But I loved the actual sense of sailing; the coast disappearing, the birds following us until the Atlantic was everywhere around us, foaming at our bow, leaving a twin-road upon the ocean surface astern, the changing sky, the flying-fish which hurtled through the air, the occasional fin, a grand fluke ...

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And the coming wind did roar more loud,
And the sails did sigh like sedge;
The rain pour'd down from one black cloud;
The Moon was at its edge

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

*****

We came into Mindelo in Cabo Verde, a mid-morning, and docked for taking on fuel then, during the night, sailed on to the capital, Praia. On the decks, a fine grey grit collected; the hills were sharp and brown, the red-tiled town shabby. We could go ashore. We could walk around, shop even, not that there was very much to buy—food which we did not need—but everywhere was a vibrance in the air, people moved in an intricate dance, people of all colours that people can be, women, tall and wound in bright cloth, their feet bare in the dust, children everywhere, and animals, skurvy skinny animals which had never seen green Minho grass; such dryness I had never experienced before. All day the wind blew from África, carrying África in its mouth as a million tiny pelting grains.

Toward sun-down I had gone back on board with Rogério and Artur, also clerks but bound for Lourenço Marques. The sun was sinking in a red haze toward the waiting world. There was a slight commotion below us, then a line of men marched out, well-guarded, and were soon out of sight along the quayside.

"Who are they?" I had not known they were on board with us. Rogério watched them go and remained silent. Artur chewed the end of his cigarette, then he looked quickly over his shoulder, then back at us.

"Don't you know?"

"No. Where are they going? Do you know?"

He pointed with a quick gesture away to the north-west then put his hand firmly back in his pocket, before having another try at lighting his damp cigarette. All the cigarettes available on board were damp, smelling slightly of mould; perhaps not those available to the higher officials: the majors, the colonels ... "We had better go in," Rogério said without turning his head. "It will be our sitting in a few minutes."

We went down and a while later we heard the sounds of departure; men unwound ropes, people were hustled along the docks, a last-minute-cart unloaded dozens of trussed hens and hurried them on board—and still the grit fell gently over everything. I was not so sorry to go. The open sea filled our nostrils again.

The lectures on tropical hygiene, sanitation, *primeiros socorros*, and less tangible knowledge began again; lectures, warnings against miscegenation, the upholding of true portuguese values throughout the Empire on which the sun never set, and political talks: the evils of communism, the values of the *Ditadura*, the continuing desire of Germany and Britain to steal Angola (eternal vigilance; the nature of 'fifth column talk'), even a lecture on new techniques in air warfare—did they think we might find means to apply this—and every

day Physical Culture when we stood out in trousers and bare chests under the tropical sun and leaped and bent and twirled—and the wives and daughters peeped and snickered and the sweat ran off us in great glistening rivers ... and the garrison did arms drill and thrust at burlap dummies with their bayonets ... the wives and daughters did not like that so much ...

Then there was São Tomé. So green! How I'd missed the green of home. My eyes seemed to feast on the lush hills, the heaving white-bearded sea, the fields of sugar-cane, black people walking, cycling, little listing thatched stalls selling cane juice which looked to me like dirty water. (Years later someone told me that to put cane juice in your eyes can cure blindness; I do not know if this is true.) We walked around the curve of the bay, then Rogério sighed and said there was not anything more to see and he thought he would sit down.

"Nothing to see!" I did not know where to begin, so much to see and so little time.

"You, Tomás, are a make-shame. Go away and let us enjoy our *ennui* with all the facility that the young man of today should be able to bring to the passing-of-time."

I went away. I walked as far as a road which ran inland toward the green mountains and said it was going to Trinidade. I longed to follow it but our shore leave was a taste rather than a meal ...

When I came back the two of them were still seated under a palm tree. Artur opened a lazy eye. "See anything?"

I opened my mouth to burst into speech—butterflies, birds, cascades of flowers, a kaleidoscope of things—and he said, "On second thought—don't."

It took Luanda to spur them into energy, enthusiasm, once more. All day the black *estivadores* sweated in the sun. All manner of things came up from the bowels of our ship—things we had not even imagined it to be carrying: rolling-stock for the Malange railway, two beautiful grey horses, a gleaming Hispano-Suiza motor-car, crates of crockery, a pedigree black bull. For a while we simply watched. The horses sweated and shivered in the bustle and I walked over to where they stood, nostrils flaring, nerves making them twitch. Their handler, an old bow-leggèd man, told me to stay away.

I said politely that I was just admiring them.

"For the Governor they are." He turned and spat a sizzle on the hot ground. The horses put out curious noses and smelled me, smelled the sweat that trickled inside my collar and the smell of the sea and the weeks of rice and fish and coffee. And they liked me. They nibbled my shirt sleeve and pushed me gently in the chest and I hoped the Governor would treat them well. The old man raised his eyebrows but said nothing and, a few minutes later, a truck came to take them away. I had not known till then how much I missed animals, birds,—but there was no time for thinking. Rogério and Artur had hired a cab, a strange falling-to-bits motor-car tied up with wire, to take them around the town.

A little while later we found ourselves in a small bar, drinking very bad wine, cloudy with sediment, in company with three other men. (I forget if they approached us; I know it was not my decision to join them.) They talked loudly about Alves Reis taking his train across the bridge that everyone said was too light to carry the train; they boasted of horses they had tamed, money they had made in secret mines, they decried the town ... and then someone said, not one of us, that the three of them would race the three of us. "Race? On what?" The familiar look of boredom came over Rogério's face though I was now convinced it was a mask he put on and took off and he might be feeling something different.

"Horses! Mules! Goats! Antelopes! You say!"

I felt sure they were teasing us but, next minute, we were bundled back into the mad taxi and rattling over dirt roads out into the country.

"What will you wager? We'll give you good odds. Eight to one?"

"Done!" said Artur, which was trusting of him, but we were quite innocent of such men. About ten minutes later we stopped near what seemed to be a mixture of farm and zoo, a drear place with small fields containing dispirited animals.

"What is it? A zoo?" Rogério put my thoughts into words.

"It's a place where they keep captured animals until they can send them to Europe—but they also keep animals for themselves—" We tumbled out to march across the parched ground to a tin house. Two little black girls peered around the door, then ran away to hide. A minute later a lanky white man came across to us, dangling an halter from his arm. He spoke to us in portuguese but he had a strange accent, one I could not identify. He did not seem to care what we wanted to do so long as we did not lame an animal.

To me, they all looked so sad and scruffed I could not imagine us being able to race them. In the open field beyond his house was a kind of rough track weaving round the clumps of trees. The others snatched at the horses. There were two warthogs in a pen. A zebra stood alone under a tree. A small antelope of some kind was hobbled by a rope tied from its front feet to its back feet. Two hump-backed bulls dozed in the shade.

I could not see how we could race three against three. Rogério said the bet was off. We had been offered a choice and there was no choice.

Very well, the men said: one each, one of us, one of you—and you can have a horse. So we discussed this. Who could ride best? Which horse? Finally, they pushed me up on to a thin brown horse with harness sores. I leaned forward and placed both hands firmly down his shoulders and sat still while the others argued over who would ride. Then we took the rough rope reins and steered our horses out on to the 'course'.

A black woman with tight-plaited hair came out to watch. Her belly was huge in front of her and the two little girls clung to her faded cotton dress. The man turned and yelled at her and she turned and walked wearily back toward the hut. I was not sure but I thought it might be german he used, and I wondered what he was doing here; all those lectures.

His wife, if that was what she was, looked bruised and beaten, the children afraid of him. I wondered about her life but I'd never had to look into any life but my own and I did not know how to begin to think about the life of a stranger—besides, we were lined up, ready to go. The man brought down a stick with a thud on the ground and shouted "Go!"

For the first time round I was content to get to know my little brown horse (not being an experienced rider) and let him run at his own pace. He seemed to enjoy himself; he pricked his ears and ran close behind the bigger black horse. As we passed the others at the gate I could hear my friends yelling and I urged more effort but the black horse drew steadily ahead of us. We pounded in his dust, not despairing, and as we turned again toward the gate I knew the black horse was tiring.

I leaned forward more. "We can do it so—*ca-ca-ca-cavalo*—we can, we can—" Slowly we reached the pounding black haunches, drew equal. At the line we were just in front! Rogério and Artur leaped in the air. Yelled. Counted their winnings before they ever saw them. The zoo-man asked for money. His fierce pale eyes in his leather face went from one of us to the next as though assessing how much we each might be worth.

The others gave him something, all except me—I had brought only sufficient to pay for my drink; I had still much time to fill before I would begin work. He looked angry. I suddenly said, desperate under his dangerous stare, that I would cure his animals of their sores. Everyone looked at me. It was a wild and stupid thing to say and I felt myself hot and beginning to stammer. But the man said, "Very well. I have no money for medicines. Tell me what is the matter with them all." I think he thought I was a veterinarian and would give him free advice.

Artur came close to me and whispered, "What is your plan, Tomás?"

"*Não*. No plan." He looked worried. Was it some kind of trick then? "Be careful, *amigo*, he is not a nice man. They say he killed men with his bare hands in Windhoek. He might kill you." As if I was not nervous!

We walked slowly, my friends trailing worriedly behind, first to the warthogs which scrambled up and ran, squealing, away from us. This was a disconcertion. I turned to the man from Windhoek and said politely, "D-do you think you could all stand back." He looked even more suspicious but did as I asked; they all returned to the shade near the house and waited. I

climbed into the pen and simply stood there, and spoke, silly things, the first words to come into my head. The animals in their ungainly way turned and came to me, snuffling round and smelling me. I had never seen a warthog before, only in books, and they fascinated me with their gait, their peculiar heads ... Their eyes were sore and I was not sure what to do ... But just as the wolf and Jacob had shown me the way years ago so these odd little animals showed me: they put their heads to one side and I stared down into their eyes, then I took my handkerchief and carefully wiped away the grit and mucus, then I placed a hand on each forehead for a minute or two ... They seemed much happier when they turned and walked away, holding their tails out like short banners.

It took me an hour to walk carefully round to the other animals. The woman and the little girls brought out a calabash of water for the others but I was left alone, to do my promise. Only the zebra disdained me; gazing with contemptuous gaze, then trotting away. I took this as a sign he felt himself to be healthy; certainly his hide glistened, his steps were quick and even.

I felt immensely tired when I came back to the others. Rogério put an arm round my shoulders and I was glad of his support. "São Francisco," he said lightly, "when do you remove your clothes and go and live in your cave?"

"*Não sei*. I am only an ordinary person—but animals have always seemed to like me, I do not know why."

"But you know it will not last. Tomorrow he will be shouting and beating them again. Can you change people?"

I said I couldn't and we all went back to town and drank beer and more beer and I was light-headed and drop-leggèd when we returned on board. There are other things I might say about Angola—the tall beautiful women with hair tied up or plaited tightly, in every step their strange mixture of submission and pride—but the other things are not so clear as that first day. It is an illusion perhaps that the things which leap out of my mind when I try to write are the important things; that the things deeper buried are not of greater significance—is not that the new way of understanding human nature—but I am not trying to convince anyone. I do not even need to convince myself that one thing is more important than another thing.

*****

Snore in the foam; the night is vast and blind;
The blanket of the mist about your shoulders,
Sleep your old sleep of rock, snore in the wind,
Snore in the spray! the storm your slumber lulls,
His wings are folded on your nest of boulders
As on their eggs the grey wings of your gulls

Roy Campbell

*****

In Lourenço Marques, the capital of Moçambique, I was to say goodbye to my friends. It was more than goodbye. We might never meet again and a great wave of sadness caught us. "You are not like anyone else, Tomás," Rogério said, smoking fitfully, as we inched into the dock and the town lay before us, rust-red and white and azulejo-ed in the african sun, "but we shall miss you."

"One last night?" Artur said. "We don't work before tomorrow." (He was to work with the Railway, Rogério with Customs.) "We have drunk together, swum together, we have seen you talk to the animals—" He leaned toward us and whispered his plan. Rogério laughed. Then he, too, lowered his voice and said, "The Three Wise Virgins, eh *pá*?" Secretly, I did not want to go—but how could I say so? All the day I had been feeling queasy and hot; now I was sure

I was sick. But they might not understand: did I not have red blood, was I not curious?

They were open and frank about their lack of experience while I felt the unresolved past, burdensome and clinging, on my shoulders—and something else, not formulated: a fear ... the natural austerity of my brother, mind and body ... the sort of love and respect my parents had (I did not know then of its rareness), the way my grandfather looked at Kristen ... might I not catch something, a loathsome thing which would crawl over my skin turning me black and leprous ... in this quick exchange between strangers, a handing over of a few damp coins, I did not know what a whore would charge ...

But the words stuttered and died in my mouth and I went with them; to tavern after tavern where we drank the cheapest wine and ate fried squid—I felt worse and worse as the evening passed; my head ached, my palms sweated—then again down back alleys, at the mercy of our cab-driver, a man with a twirling scar on his neck and yellow eyes—I felt sure he would not choose wisely, if there can be wisdom in this, and my companions ceased their joshing and grew quiet.

What can I say about that terrible place? I did not know such places existed, such squalor, such hopelessness. The women were long past youth, *mulatos* in dirty cotton frocks, with heavy breasts and an air of shattering weariness. I was more befuddled by my fever and the wine than I knew, and the others took charge, haggling over money, pushing me into the care of a silent woman with her hair bound up in coloured rags.

She took me by the hand and led me away into the noisome interior, divided up into tiny cubicles by *cânhamo* strips. I think in her own way she was considerate, but life had beaten her with frequent blows and she did not care ... and I felt no pleasure, only a sense of fleeting release ... and I did not know what to say to her, if anything. I slept badly that night and was sicker next day; sweating and burning. It stayed a week, that fever, and other people had it too. It was whispered to be cholera but we knew it could not be.

We lay in our sweat and I felt a great homesickness as the ship sailed on across the indian sea. Home, beautiful home, was gone and I knew I could never recapture it; not in reality, not in my dreams—from now onward I would only have the yearning of it, the *saudade* for which there is no cure. We, the last, the more minor of functionaries, sat out on deck and felt our weakness in our bones and drank boiled water.

*****

Ichasoa urac aundi,
Estu ondoric aqueri—
Pasaco ninsaqueni andic
Maitea icustea gatic.

The waters of the sea are vast,
And their bottom cannot be seen;
But over them I will pass,
That I may behold my love.

Basque Song

*****

Timor! A ragged line of green hills, lightly sketched with trees. We had cargo and people for Oé-Cussi. I knew this had been the ancient capital, Lifau, for all Timor, but I did not go ashore; my sadness wrapped me round like a cloak and I struggled to re-discover the bubbling enthusiasm with which I had embarked on my voyage.

And then Díli, lying in a crescent of hills, a curve of clean sand backed by trees and shrubs and palms with the twin towers of the cathedral peering over, and the town asleep behind ancient cannon and the rim of puny surf; and in its centre a small wharf. No, not asleep. I must not begin with an artistic falsehood. It is the fashion with my countrymen, this little

community who have forgotten the *sesta* of their motherland, to say Díli sleeps; but it is not true. We crept in through the reef, dropped anchor, went on shore; we stood there waiting, feeling our newness in the set of our hats, the starch of our trousers, the ignorance of our minds.

Then someone came and we were bustled away to the single-men's quarters and allotted rooms and told our luggage would be delivered later—but not before we had been seen for the curiosities we were.

Our rooms were very small, hot, faintly foetid, not very clean; the mattresses were thin and hard, and a chorus of complaints could be heard except that there was no one to listen until an older man came later and told us we could rent a house between us if we wished; he knew of a house. There was something about him—he would always know where the things which could be exchanged for money were to be found—an eagerness to take us in, bind us to him, before we had time to learn things for ourselves. We thanked him and he said "don't forget" and told us where to find him.

My secret worry was not the rooms but that I seemed to be on no one's list. José Mineiro was to work with Customs, Manuel Vaz da Cruz with Public Works, João Namora was a teacher; "Vasconcelos?" they said, "no, no one of that name put down here." And then they reassured me. "A mistake at home, a name left off, we will find work for you," and they yawned.

"I can type," I said. So, next morning, I was sent for, given a chair in front of a typewriter, a huge ancient black monster with an elaborate silver name worn away, and crooked keys. Above us turned a large fan, waxing and waning with the temperament of the town's generator, creaking into greater action, winding down till the air barely stirred and I left sweating finger-marks on my work. They found reports everywhere for me, written in fading ink, and I typed as neatly as I could: figures for rubber production, the export of cotton, projected figures for the small manganese mine near Vemasse; my hands grew tired on the heavy machine and I wondered if anyone would read my work (the rubber report was already five years old) ...

At the end of my first day I was interviewed by a Sr. Artur do Canto Resende. The purport of his questions was not clear to me. He wanted to know about my childhood, where I had lived, did I belong to the Sintra Vasconcelos's who were related to the Gamas or the main branch who were ... I was the last person to know the answers; all I could tell him was that my mother was Lília Mendes de Vasconcelos, her mother was Noémia da Costa Mendes, and my father's mother had been Carlota Ribeira de São Tomás (from this I derived my name, I thought; I did not like to say I had never asked); my father and his father were both portuenses and it was true that he had some relatives in Sintra. Then was I any relation to the well-known geographer, *Professor* José Leite de Vasconcelos? Again, I had to say I did not know but probably not.

He sighed and said he thought he might be able to use me in the *Missão Geográfica e Geológica* but all his teams were already set up and he was not sure if I would be tough enough to work with Sr. Cardoso. I thought he meant physically tough and assured him earnestly that I was stronger than my appearance might suggest. He did not respond to this, merely saying he would tell me soon.

In the evening I walked down to the harbour with José and he told me what it was like working with Sr. Barbosa who was not only harbourmaster but also had many public and private commercial interests. "Did you see," he asked me, "any exports going to Nanyo Kohatsu in Tokyo?" I said cautiously that I had. "This colony, Sr. Barbosa says, is going to grow really well now that Japan is buying—and the british are looking at our rubber ... I know they are not like us," he pulled his eyes into slits, "but, still, I like Sr. Inokuchi. He came in today and I met him ... he is very polite, very—precise."

"I have an uncle who is a consul in Japan."

"Do you?" José was full of his first enthusiasms. "Does he like being there?"

"I-I don't know."

He looked surprised. But I was saved from his questions by an older man approaching us. The evening saw many people promenade to enjoy the sea-breeze, to exchange gossip, even to do business. Sr. Duarte asked us how we were managing our duties, did we like our work, were we comfortable. We were very polite. He was director of the bank, director of this and that, he owned a car; he had three daughters.

He asked us would we like to come to dinner with his family one evening. I said I might be going to work somewhere out in the countryside with a Sr. Cardoso, soon. He laughed and said, *então* I must come tomorrow and José could come on Saturday.

After he had gone, José whistled to the sunset sky. "Three daughters, three beautiful daughters—and you have first choice, Tomás!"

"What do you mean?"

"Is your pedigree good enough, Tomás Vasconcelos? Does your father have money, Tomás Vasconcelos? Do you have style and charm, Tomás Vasconcelos?" And he laughed at his own questions.

"No ... but how do you know all that?"

"Ah, *tanto pior*!" And he laughed some more.

*****

I confess I did not really want to go to dinner with the Duarte family. I was apprehensive of Sr. Duarte and his three daughters—even one would make me nervous!—but I went, neat and pressed and apologetic that I had brought nothing for my hostess because I was still ignorant of the shops. Sr. Duarte smiled and said it was of no consequence. It was like that all evening: he spoke, kindly yet firmly; he led the way, he responded even in the times when I found the courage to direct a question to the three girls, Joana, Marília, Maria, sitting silent and prim in white frocks.

I might say "Díli is rather hot, is it always hot?" and he would answer for them. He wanted to find personable husbands for his daughters but, unwittingly perhaps, he condemned them to an unexciting existence in his neat white villa, bowered in massy purple flowers, and frightened off potential suitors by the vigour with which he spoke of money and morals. "Deplorable," he said again and again—the modern way, a "deplorable way"—he had visited London in 1924. Ah! He rolled his eyes to the ceiling and his wife nodded in a tight-faced tut-tutting way. The laxity, the deplorable moral laxity of the english! And the spread of it, the contagion, young women wishing to wear bathing-suits, to cut their hair short as boys ... he darted his chin forward. And the new methods of accounting: borrow, borrow, borrow ... Money and morals, the cornerstone of decent catholic society ... Did I attend Mass regularly? I said I did.

Sra. Duarte relaxed a little. "*Monsignor* Goulart," she ventured in, "*such* a cultured man, an *açoriano*, not yet thirty years old and already we notice the difference. But Timor is a place, you will soon see, sadly deficient in culture. But we are so fortunate to have him."

"Tone," said her husband. "I have noticed," he grew disapproving again, "that the younger men they send out are deplorably lax in their religious duties. I make it my business to watch over their morals in so far as I am able. I am a busy man, you realise."

"Yes, sir."

"Now—what do you think about Events in Europe?"

"Well, I-I h-h-hardly ... " (I was often to hear it spoken like that: as though it came in capital letters—and I never knew what to say.) One of the girls put a hand over her mouth; Sra. Duarte frowned at her. But Sr. Duarte did not really want my opinion anyway. He launched into praise for our prime minister. His was the praise of the banker, the man concerned always with balance sheets, with black and red. Dr. Salazar, he claimed, was a man in a million and there was not a day when he failed to thank God for giving him to us.

But, he lowered his voice, this was heresy and walls have ears: "I do not think he quite understands that Timor has special needs. Our allocation is too small, I fear." The evening

seemed to go on forever. When I said I might be working with Sr. Cardoso all three girls raised their hands to their mouths and their father said, "Never mind. You must come and see us when you return."

It was late when I stepped out their front door to walk back to my room; I tripped on the doorstep and nearly fell because Sr. Duarte was still holding my attention with his energetic words, and this time the three girls threw decorum to the four winds and giggled into their hands.

*****

On Friday afternoon I received a message to be prepared to leave at six on Monday morning, to be prepared for at least a month away. Oh, my heart sang! Yet everyone, when they knew I was to be Sr. Cardoso's new assistant, said "poor you" and "he is crazy, mad, *louco*—he is touched by the sun, you be careful, Tomás" and even, with mock sorrow, "it has been nice knowing you, Tomás Vasconcelos." But no one could, or would, tell me exactly what to expect. I was packed and ready waiting on Monday morning; I was arrayed in my best clothes: crisp white shirt, pressed trousers. In my ear, my mother said "You look very nice, *filho*." The birds sang in the dawn.

Then a very ancient truck, so ancient I could not even be sure what colour to call it, drove up and a huge hairy man sprang down. He had a great black beard, he stood at least a head taller than me, he wore a strange assortment of native and european clothing. He stared at me then he boomed: "Is it a game of tennis you're dressed for!" His words beat strokes on a great iron bell, all around Díli, waking people to the new day. I blushed.

"Well, if you don't mind getting them dirty—this your box?" and he hurled it in to the back of the lorry where a confused assortment of things were captive in a kind of wire cage.

"Get in."

The wire springs poked through the seat, unwelcoming, as I went to climb in. "Wait!" He folded a shabby greatcoat and placed it for me to sit on, then he revved the engine and we leaped forward in to the sunrise. So began my life with Rui Conceição Cardoso.

*****

But I have seen,
Pointing her shapely shadows from the dawn
And image tumbled on a rose-swept bay,
A drowsy ship of some yet older day;
And, wonder's breath indrawn,
Thought I—who knows—who knows—but in that same
(Fished up beyond Aeaea, patched up new
—Stern painted brighter blue—)
That talkative, bald-headed seaman came
(Twelve patient comrades sweating at the oar)
From Troy's doom-crimson shore,
And with great lies about his wooden horse
Set the crew laughing, and forgot his course.
It was so old a ship—who knows, who knows?
—And yet so beautiful, I watched in vain
To see the mast burst open with a rose,
And the whole deck put on its leaves again.

James Elroy Flecker

*****

Where to begin to tell you what it was like to work with him? Day-long, we rattled up and

down steep hills, the truck scrambling and pounding, up dry water-courses, down rock-faces. We could not converse over the engine noise so I was free to see the countryside. In mid-morning we stopped and he told me to make a fire and boil the kettle and when I managed, clumsily, to do this he sat down and asked me about myself.

"W-what would you like to know?"

"Do you have a girlfriend?"

No, no *namorada*.

"Wise! Wise! And take it from me—stay away from native girls unless your intentions are honourable, church and name! You would not wish a spear right through your private parts—and their fathers have inflated ideas about family honour—not so different from ours, now that I think. The men talk about honour, the women endure. Ahhh." He spat comfortably in to the earth. "But perhaps you prefer a white woman, eh?"

"I—h-have not thought about it."

"No? Not had a dear *Mamá* or two looking you over yet, dissecting your parentage and your prospects. What are they coming to?" He laughed his great fog-horn laugh. "The most ingrown incestuous society in the world, Vasconcelos, take my word for it. That is why I stay away from Díli."

Our conversations were always like that: he would set the subject, would choose the moment to close off all talk. If I stuttered, he laughed. If I did not know how to do something he would smite his forehead and roar "Not another fool! *Meu Deus*—when will You take pity on a poor old man?" His world was full of fools. The *deportados* were wild men and poor fools; the natives were shrewd with "a fair number of fools"; the chinese were "greedy fools" but with a good eye for new commercial prospects; the bureaucracy which required our reports at regular intervals were fools when he wasn't calling them *sanguessugas*, leeches ...

It was of course true that I did not have a girl; but, just before I left Díli, José and I and the others had gone to the market in Díli out of curiosity; not only did the traders sell all kinds of food—maize, sweet potatoes, chillies, bananas, *mamões*—but woven cloth, betel nut, chickens, woven hats, bags of all manner of shapes and sizes ... and it was our chance to look at the people, the girls especially. Instead of wearing shawls and aprons, as at home, they mostly had long lengths of bright cloth wound around them and blouses done up with silver pins, a few wore cotton frocks, and everywhere were old women with black teeth and sharp eyes watching over them, over the money that changed hands.

There was a slight gap in the stream of people coming and going and I saw them, a woman and a girl of about eleven or twelve; they carried baskets of eggs on their heads and walked with a kind of pride and reserve which set them apart. The woman was tall, very dark, much darker than anyone around her, and in her very tight-curled hair was a single red flower. An hibiscus, I think. There was something about the length of her neck, the way she walked, glided almost, her head still, her hips swaying slightly, which was so beautiful, so graceful, it left me weak. The young girl was equally beautiful but much lighter in colour.

Who were they, I wanted to know, as they were lost in the bustle of native commerce. But perhaps she felt my gaze burning the back of her neck because the woman turned slightly, looked back, for the briefest of moments, we looked at each other, then someone passed in front of her with a little black pig, trussed to a pole, and she was gone. No, of course I had no interest in girls! The woman was too old, surely, and the girl too young.

My *chefe* called me, for mysterious reasons of his own, O Vasco, which means 'the basque' and, at times, he would speak as though I were somewhere else. "The Vasco will dig this trench when he's finished barking that pole"; things like that. It was work, work, work, without surcease. He threw derision on the claim that white people can not work hard in tropical countries: "dignity of labour?" he would deride, "our dignity, their labour!"

In the beginning I thought that was why people said he was mad: because he criticised them for wanting natives to dig and build, to chop and labour in the sun. I had thought I was fit—but now I discovered I was a weakling in his eyes.

And what were we doing that was so important? It was hard to tell. *Coronel* Jorge Castilho's Timor Survey was mapping and surveying the entire colony and land ownership; in the *Missão* we were more limited but we were meant to measure water flows, take rock samples, study vegetation, things like that. Mostly, we did none of these things. But we did many other things, oh yes, the sweat of my brow told me that!

Cardoso wanted to make not one big dam, which was the government's idea, on each of the main north-flowing rivers but to make thousands of small earth dams in the hills. It is not by the sea that people need the water, he would say, it is in the mountains. And so every small gully, every infant ravine, would be banded by dams. By the time one gully reached the valley it would be crossed by a dozen, twenty, fifty, of what he called *escombros* dams, dams made up of earth, branches, rocks, then grassed and planted with tough shrubs. But before he could do this he needed to know where to build his experimental dams. "Do you know what a soil profile is, *pá*?" I thought I might and made a cautious explanation.

"Aiiee! They have sent me an intelligent man at last!" And he smote me between the shoulder blades. He was always hitting me, not exactly painfully, but once he caught me as I stood on the edge of a river-bank and I lost my balance and fell in to about a metre of muddy water.

He laughed till he cried, he thumped himself on his tree-trunk thighs, while I dragged myself up the bank, squelching-wet. Only once—he thumped me on the back of the head. Oh, shades of *Padre* Diogo and his head-aches! ... I moved away, angry, but, to my surprise, he immediately said "Sorry!" and I had to forgive him. Yet something changed. Assistants were nothing, chattels handed out by Sr. Resende, even if he at times called us '*pá*'. Though I cannot define the outward change I felt he began to give me a scrap of respect from then.

It was true we did hundreds of soil profiles (which I wrote up in hand; my typewriter being back in Díli) but we were always being diverted on to other things: Cardoso studied grasses, for example; he showed me a tiny neglected plot of cinchona trees; he lectured me on how to grow castor-oil beans; he advised people about irrigation; he took samples of tree bark and sent them off to a company in Índia for testing for fevers; he showed me the brasil way of curing tobacco with molasses (people here sometimes used honey but mostly the tobacco was only smoked and dried, not properly cured); he tested different materials—rice stalks, corn husks, rags, kapok—for their usefulness in making paper; he knew how to make tannin to tan leather ... and things for which I could see no use, no connection with the land ...

He knew each rice, of the many varieties, by looking at its seed-head, by taste, by harvest-time, whether it might be an early variety such as *ceilão* or a late one as *mahertala* ... I longed for his knowledge but not the years it might take to acquire. He had the idea of a truck such as ours to carry a small grain mill, to thresh and husk, going from village to village; and trucks which would carry travelling libraries, travelling class-rooms, travelling *circos*, movie-films ... but he did nothing with any of his ideas: perhaps, long ago, he had been told there was no money ...

Padre António was a very old priest who had a church toward the south coast; a dozy drab old man who lived only for his collection of books and manuscripts he had brought here from Macau thirty years ago. (The Church in Timor was still administered from Macau, as the government had once been; they said that was why the macaenese began to gamble: to pay for the timor government, to send officials and write reports.) Largely, he ignored the people who came to his church; if they 'bearded him in his den' and demanded baptism or marriage he would grudgingly agree but mostly they were too timid to do that and he was left unmolested through the hours.

But he had a problem with mice: mice ran wild in his papers, they made little mice nests and raised mice broods, they fought mice battles and played mice 'hide-and-seek', they held mice *conferências* and jamborees for mice clans from near and far. The old man was close to tears as he showed us what they had done to his papers.

"The basque will solve the problem for you," said Rui Cardoso and went out in to the sun

to sit and smoke his pipe. The old man looked puzzled but waited patiently to see what I might do or say. I could not think what to do: I thought of traps and poisons and sweet music. Then I had an idea. Did *Padre* António have a pencil and a piece of paper? He gave me the back of an envelope. It was post-marked 1921. I drew an *espigueiro*, the little store-houses people build in the Minho to keep their grain safe from mice, like a pigeon-house set up on mushroom-topped legs. It was a very beautiful little house. It had cabinet doors to open out on each side and a thatched roof with wide eaves. The old man watched it grow, mystified, then light broke across his face. "Thirty years I have lived here, thirty years! and now you take me home." He cried copious tears and kissed me on the cheek. Then he became practical. He would begin to build his own *espigueiro* that same blessèd day and he wiped his face with the sleeve of his *sotaina*.

Before I climbed into the truck to leave he whispered in my ear, "come in the Paschal season, I do the Stations of the Cross". I thought I understood—little by little, he had let his religious duties slip and fade but that, at least, he had kept. There were priests who did things with vigour and humanity, started schools and gardens and hygiene-lessons; there were priests with their secret native mistresses; there were priests who gathered little boys around them, training them they said as they touched and fondled; there were priests whose bodies and duties lay here while their spirits roamed far else. The colony was divided into six *circunscrições* or provinces, and the enclave in Timor Holandês, and we spent most of our time working within São Domingos and the neighbouring province of Manatuto.

But, occasionally, by some mysterious process of telepathy or mere whim, Rui Cardoso would drive for days over the mountain roads and we would find ourselves in the southern swamps or up by the dutch border.

It was in this latter region that a Dominican priest, *Padre* Mário da Cruz, had his church and like a certain king of olden-time he was called the Farmer Priest. Great nodding heads of sun-flowers pressed up against the spiny bowers with the purple bracts of *bougainvilleae*; pale pink roses were circled by massed bands of daisies; big green fruit sprouted unnaturally from *mamão* trees and he said proudly he had eleven varieties of banana; pomelos and limes and oranges lent their tart sweetness to the warm air. But the *padre* longed to grow grapes, to see the glistening brown bodies of native men treading *his* vintage in wooden vats. He had even designed the labels that would be placed on *his* bottles to lie in fermenting darkness beneath his church.

I loved to walk in his garden: parrots with brilliant red and green and blue feathers, or white ones with yellow crests, came and screeched, butterflies hovered over the *carnaval* scene, little toqué lizards played in the trees. But, as always, it was Rui Cardoso who said to him—"You want to grow grapes, the basque will get vines for you."

"Only the best, mind there, young man. Álvarinho vines." And his eyes grew dreamy as though he tasted his wine in his mouth already.

"I-I ... " Rui Cardoso laughed at me; he smote me between the shoulders with a you-can-do-it-smite—so hard I lurched forward and tripped over *Padre* Mário's *prie-dieu*; the priest hurried forward to help me up; my *chefe* merely went on laughing.

I wrote to Henrique asking if he could get cuttings for me and they arrived on the boat six months later. After that, *Padre* Mário neglected his people more and more (I did not tell Henrique so, not now that he was gone to the seminary) but the vines flourished; for three years they flourished—*então*, the Great God Mars fell upon that little church and garden and despoiled it for ever. Now there are no vines there but the young men who were to tread the vintage put up a little cross to remember the Farmer Priest.

*****

Your Excellency must arrange matters in such a way that the ownership
of the cultivated lands, the sacred ministries of the parishes and the missions,

the exercise of public offices, and even the military posts, should be confided
for the most part to the natives, or to their sons and grandsons,
irrespective of whether they be lighter or darker in the colour of their skins.
For apart from the fact that they are all equally the vassals of His Majesty,
it is likewise conformable with Divine, natural, and Human Laws,
which should under no circumstances allow that outsiders should exclude
the natives from the fruits of the soil where they were born,
and from the offices and Benefices thereof.
And the contrary procedure gives rise to an implacable hatred and injustice
which cry out to Heaven for condign satisfaction.
Marquîs de Pombal 1774

*****

It was not true that I would return to Díli at the end of one month. It never was. Four months might go by, or five. My life was now lived at the pleasure, the whim, of *Chefe* Cardoso. He would telephone to the post office in Díli and say "send the basque's letters to Baucau"—or Venilale or Manatuto or whatever place he might think of—and sometimes the *chefe de posto* (in most places there were no post offices), when we finally came, would have letters for me and I would place my reports for Sr. Resende in a bag and send them to Díli.

In the beginning, the imprecision of my life bothered me; what, after all, were we doing? We rarely finished a project. We would build a half-dozen small dams, then we would go away and study our plots of grass or take samples of mangrove bark or plant kapok trees or send messages demanding that the Administrator build a bridge over the Cuha because, and Rui Cardoso would underline this with fierce stabs of his nib, his vehicle could neither swim nor fly. He showed me how to turn lamp-black in to ink, he taught me how to catch eels with hooks made from a length of wire, he showed me how to purge a child, and dye feathers.

His relations with the villagers were ambivalent: he both frightened and fascinated them. He did not subscribe to the belief they would not give him respect if they saw him work with his hands; neither would he ever sleep in or near a native hut, saying, "People will not respect you when they hear the noises you make" ... (I think, too, he did not like fleas; houses with earthen floors, not houses on posts.)

My own feelings about him were equally ambivalent but I could not hold grudges for long even though he gave me fresh cause each day. And although I slept the sleep of the exhausted every night he was always prodding my mind, my assumptions, forcing me to see things upside-down and inside-out.

One day, I told him about my father writing a book (he asked me what was my father's profession)—and what *is* the lesson of the Miguelitas he demanded. "It is a book about history," I said; being pompous because I needed it to be self-evident. "Fool!" and the mountains echoed back his thunder. "Idiot! You do not write about history unless you have a lesson to draw from history! Do you think history is an inert substance like—well, like argon gas—do you?"

"N-n-no—b-but—"

"Is your father a fool or a brave man?"

"I—don't understand."

"The struggle between liberalism and conservatism, between a sharing of power and the desire for all-power—is not that a subversive lesson for our time—who will dare publish that, fool of a boy!"

"I-I don't think he is writing a subversive book—"

"Don't think! Of course you don't think! Don't you have a brain in your head, Tomás? How can he write such a book and not subvert! If they ever send a rocket-ship to Mars," here he stabbed the night-sky, "and if they find men on it, they will be just like you."

I didn't understand what he meant so I said nothing.

Sometimes he talked about the people we met. He was not there, he asserted, to advise, to teach. No! He was there to arouse curiosity and he also, though I did not see this straight-way, served as a manner of repository: people would never go to their *chefe de posto* with complaints because they saw such men firstly there to collect taxes—and there were long and intricate 'battles', marked by cunning and silence on the native side and close observation and threats on the other; the need to increase the head-tax or, in *lieu*, to take more men to labour on the roads and public-works—and the need to decrease the head-tax and keep the men at the harvest or out hunting at the end of the dry season. But Rui Cardoso was safe. They would lay burdens on him, deeply deferential, yes, but with scorpion-stings in their words.

In the beginning, the deference paid me, a lowly clerk, went to my head. Secretly, I was smug and puffed up. Then I came to understand it as the deference expected from them as subject-people—and I felt a kind of embarrassment. That a *liurai* owning hundreds of buffalo, ponies, pigs, and goats (worth many hundreds of thousands of *patacas*) should defer to me ... and then, slowly, I saw it as a secret freedom. A servant—ah, yes, this is Pedro, he is my 'house-boy' ... and there would be a relationship ... but the sense of masses—one native man, head bowed, was like another native man, head bowed, was like another native man and his name, his identity, his place in his society remained inviolate, untouched by the hands and curiosity of europeans ...

Rui Cardoso kept a wireless in the back of his truck and, sometimes, when we were high up in the hills he would fix the wire aerial to a tree and, safe in the thick tropic night, we would listen to the world. English bulletins would crackle from Darwin in Austrália, the BBC relayed from Singapura would fizzle between staccato chinese voices, gruff gutteral dutch words would burst in as unwanted guests; the set would whine and howl and far-away voices would hint at a world beyond—french, american, even japanese ... and Rui Cardoso would lean back and talk.

His world, though, was the one he created for himself; if people squeezed through the gate into his compound he beat them back into the outer darkness ... He had no friends, no family, his relations to his country, to the exile community, the Church, were detached, often rude. I never saw him read a book yet he could quote, long pieces, from the classics; though always to show us in the worst way. Camões, he said, called us uncouth, austere, unpolished and remiss in things of the mind; and who dares to argue with Camões?

"But—that was then—"

"Was—*was*? Knight in Shining White—open your eyes! Look about you—uncouthness everywhere! I am uncouth. You are uncouth. Be humble, O Vasco, and admit the truth. Civilising mission! Pah! What does that mean—except to hide our failings. Civilisation, Tomás—a word meaning no more than to live in cities. Who wants to live in cities? Do *you* want to live in a city?"

"No. Not really."

"Then why do you want it for some poor fool of a native?"

"B-but we could do things, like macadam roads—do not you think—"

"What for? So they can get to market more quickly—spend more time fighting and gambling—ruin their horses' hooves—and Tomás Vasconcelos will call that progress?"

"No-o ... but I think the world would call it progress." I thought back to Old Zé and my childhood dreams: I saw his seamed and cheerful face, roughened by the wind, and I heard the rattle of his chest before his giant expectorations, or thought I did; and I saw the cars and faces rushing in the capital, unsmiling, but I also saw the warehouse on the water-front and *Tio* José, not unhappy, but telling me business was slow.

He puffed his pipe and said nothing because nothing is ever clean and straight-cut ... And he did not care if we brought progress or merely existed, our dreams curling in the rising smoke.

"People here," he said, another time, "resist the church—and why should not they? God is

in goodness if he is not in faith ... they see themselves like an empty pitcher to be filled with sweet water or mud ... like a musical instrument on which both good spirits and evil spirits will play their harmonies—their lives are a struggle to balance good and evil—not a struggle in which good must defeat evil, in which we can never pay for enough Masses for the Repose of the Soul ... ”

It was strange to hear him speak of God; I felt certain his God must have a very different conception from Henrique’s God, or mine. “But they do believe in heaven, in the immortal soul?”

“Without our help—ours as in pontification ... the soul leaves at death, but it stays close by a-while, it sees the body’s death, it watches over the funeral, the grief, the new arrangements ... sometimes it longs to return, to its place in the house, the clan—it makes mischief, it keens its sorrow at the loss of its earthly body—you can hear it in the wind ... and then month-by-month it prepares to depart, to become memory and veneration, maybe a year passes, and it accepts, it goes to heaven which is in the stars, not real stars, but stars of green fields, God’s fields with gentle white buffalo and sweet white corn ... ” And he laughed: “Tell that to your priests!”

“But many people come to church.” I was not precisely objecting.

“Our magic! Incense and candles and mumbo-jumbo—and they climb down on to their knees, neat and nice, and they say ‘*O Deus Português*—will *you* kill the chief in the next valley for me, his land is more fertile than mine—Oh, hear my humble prayer’ and they go away and wait—and the chief is struck down with pneumonia—and they say to themselves ‘this is powerful magic’ and they bring the priest the fattest chickens in the village so he will make more powerful magic for them—and he, fool of a man, thinks it is his sermons, his piety, his magnificent voice ... in his dreams he becomes a monsignor, a cardinal ... ”

Did he mean me to believe every word?

Now I looked more carefully at the *lulic* symbols around the villages as we visited, maybe the horns of a great buffalo or a goat, maybe some dried herbs of mystical property, or woven leaves from a sacred tree, or a cairn of stones; in the east the objects attached to the high and beautiful thatch roofs; and anywhere the sacred places where people go to pray: a cave or a spring-pool or rocks, sometimes a small special ‘house’ ...

And I felt their peace in the belief that through their care for the ways handed down by their ancestors harmony between good and evil had been restored.

*****

Fair are Timora’s dales with groves array’d:
Each rivulet murmurs in the fragrant shade,
And in its crystal breast displays the bowers
Of sanders, bless’d with health-restoring powers.
Luís de Camões

*****

How strange it was to return to Díli after months of undiluted Cardoso. José would look at me and say “Tomás!” as though he had never expected to see me again. And I would say “Which of the Duarte daughters is it to be?” and he would roll his eyes and say with an heart-felt exhale, “Never!” or “I have a thousand excuses for not going there—pray God they will all be married before I reach the thousandth!”

But, then, he found himself the company of a young woman whose name was Cecília da Costa Gomes. It is true there was some gossip: that she had been engaged to a sergeant of the garrison and he had ‘jilted’ her. But José said I must come with him, not listen to gossip. They would be happy if I would dine with them next time he was to visit.

They had a quiet bungalow on the west side of the town, with two almond trees in the compound and bamboo blinds. Cecília was not pretty, her pale skin had red blotches in the heat and her hair was pale-brown and she wore thick steel-framed glasses, but I liked her immediately for the sweetness of her smile and the way she made me feel 'at home' there. Her mother had been dead many years, she was an only child, and her father worked directly under *Major* António Magro in the Public Works Department. I thought, even without José to tell me, that her engagement, if it existed, if it had been broken, would have been broken by her father. Though he spoke as a kind-hearted, progressive man, I saw, as the evening passed, that he would do anything to keep his daughter as his companion and house-keeper.

The only acceptable son-in-law would be the one who could be sub-sumed in to the household; Cecília would never leave him, not until he was carried out in his coffin. But this did not seem to worry José; he said he was not wanting to be married yet and her father was always interesting to listen with ... and she was a very good cook ... (Cecília was good at many things) ...

As we walked home I asked José if he had ever seen a woman at the market who was black and tall and had a daughter of perhaps twelve, might he know who she was.

"A secret love?" he teased.

"No. I am curious." Truly, no more than curious.

"I think you must mean Dona Déolinda. Her father, I have heard, came from Angola."

"And the little girl?"

He shook his head. "But you can go to see them if you want. They work for the old man who has the New China restaurant. In fact, we can take a meal there ... it is not so clean ... but you might see the little girl ... "

We went there the next evening. It was small, of unpainted wood, in a back street, dark with hissing lanterns and a dog asleep under our table. We had rice fried up with little things including a twig and a long black hair. The dog put a sad nose on my knee and I gave him rice balled in my hand. He turned round and round, then lay down again. Two other tables were occupied; people talked loudly in their language which is called hakka which makes me think of water in a weir, an aqueduct. José said one of the men there ran the chinese school.

But there was no sign of the pretty little girl. The evening wore away. We drank glasses of china-tea and José asked me many questions about the 'mad old man' and I found it very hard to explain what it was like working for Rui Cardoso.

José said he thought he might emigrate to Brasil when he had finished his time here; he had, and his eyes kindled, always felt a great ardence to live in Brasil, that immense land of opportunity. He saw himself with a big american car and a *latifúndio* which went to the horizon and beyond, and a beautiful stallion, black perhaps, for his excursions through his land. "Dream on," he said and laughed at himself, because his family was poor and he had ten brothers and sisters and he sent half his month-pay home to them, which was little enough. (At the beginning I received about the equivalent of £2 a month and I expect José received the same.)

Então—a child-face peered round the door at the patrons; it smiled a very sweet smile—and disappeared again. José put on a big grin. "You will have to wait a few years, Tomás, she cannot be more than twelve." But I think I saw in this child of grace and gaiety something of my own lost little sister. I could no more think of marrying her than I could contemplate behaving wrongly with my sister ... But sometimes the pureness of love is an illusion and sometimes it is not enough to protect it from bitter winds ...

My chronology is confused, I know, because months over-lapped, weeks concertina-ed; if only I could go back and read my notes on my work, the reports I wrote under duress by campfire or fuming lamp, bitten by mosquitoes, harried by sand-flies, criticised by Rui Cardoso—but all our files, my years of work, went up in smoke when the americans bombed Díli in October 1943; being the dry season, fires burned for days afterward. That the mysterious nation where streets crashed and marvellous films were made should one day wish

to drop bombs on this small capital town of ours would have seemed unbelievable, inexplicable, in that year of our Lord ... yet so it was ...

I remember the day I turned twenty-one because Rui Cardoso woke me in the dawn, *before* the dawn, to boom in my ear "Twenty-one today! A man among men!"; then he kissed me resoundingly on both cheeks and gave me a small gift wrapped in a yellowed scrap of newspaper: it was a tinted sepia picture of São Tomás, a picture so glaring with the saint's beard poked forward, gnome-like, a huge smooth forehead over round brown eyes, long flowing tresses of an unnatural chestnut colour; on the back it had a label to say it came from the firm of Haneesh and Sen, 'Purveyors of Holy Pictures', in the city of Bombay. So ugly! Yet I was deeply touched that he should wish to give me something.

And of course I remember 1939 because that was the year of the Great Cyclone and it was the year that war began in Europe and Paul had to decide whether to stay and complete his time as an intern in Edinburgh or abandon his studies to join a scottish regiment.

The timorese call a rising wind *anin mouris*; when it grows furious it becomes *anin aat*. I like this. Naturally, different peoples have different words but I like to think it is always the whi-i-i-i-nd, the typho-o-o-o-o-n, they catch in their mouths. I had not known that Nature could destroy so quickly; at least, I knew only in that part of me which knows all manner of untested things ...

The winds, that May, came in from the south-east ... They whirled across the island, toppling mighty trees, sending rain, not just in buckets but in battleships-full, the mountains turned to mud and threw themselves into the valleys, taking hamlets with them, animals were swept away in the raging brown waters, bridges turned to spars, roads ceased to be ... Poor Sr. Gomes put his head in his hands and cried. A life-time of work, of planning, of prising money out of an always miser-ly budget ... all swept away in hours to the northern seas, which broke muddy waves on to muddy beaches for weeks afterward; and carrion-birds came to pick over the carcasses, bloating; they grew fat and impudent. Even the sweetest springs were turned to mud and for months afterward the water came brown in the taps and wells. *Major* Magro probably cried too—when he saw his new-built barracks in Aileu and Maubisse near to their roofs in mud; everything, the furniture, all, ruined!

Rui Cardoso only said "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away" and demanded to know why the boys he had trained to measure water-flow in the rivers had failed him. But one thing made him smile: the dams we had built on one tiny tributary of the Seiçal all held. He had proved something. But there was no money and no labour available to do it as he wished, right across the land, every tiny gully ... except the ones which dropped vertically from the heights of the Cablaque and other fierce mountains, not even Rui Cardoso claimed he could tame *them*. But he liked to say "the *indígenas* have been changing the landscape for a thousand years with fire, with animals, with dykes and ditches—let me make my mark too."

But he did not seem to care, much, that no one listened, that Sr. Castilho and Sr. Resende merely filed our reports and toyed, on paper, with bigger and bigger dams, dams that could be named in honour of Salazar, of Carmona, of *Almirante* Tomás, even, perhaps, of Franco and Pétain ...

*****

Spider, are you
crying — or
the autumn wind?
Matsuo Kinsaku: Basho

*****

I carried my bathing costume in my small tin trunk and one evening, after some months in

Timor, we found ourselves on a deserted beach. The sun was red and choked with haze, waiting for the monsoon, and the air was full of suspended dust. We will swim, said Rui Cardoso. At last! I unpacked my beautiful, nearly new, costume; it was red and black in stripes. In those days, the beach inspectors in Portugal were very strict. Just as the army would not permit a moustache unless its points were waxed, so the guardians of our public decency would not permit men to show their nipples in public, and there were some who believed women should not be permitted on beaches at all.

I changed in the lea of the truck and ran down to the beach, the sand warm and strong between my toes. A great guffaw split the dying day. "Is it a man—or is it a spider!!" And there was my *chefe*, his clothes thrown in an untidy heap, standing huge and tall and hairy, wearing nothing at all. His body was so brown and hard with massif muscles standing out of his grizzled hair—I felt puny, embarrassed, and ran in to the sea. He too leaped in, this quiet sea that hardly bothers to break on the sand, merely caressing it with foam, *Tasi-Feto*, the women's sea, people call it—but now it shook and boiled as though a leviathan of the deep had come too close in-shore.

I swam out quite far, imagining a shark gliding beneath me, watching me, smelling my warm blood, but I knew no shark would dare come near us while the water fountained and Rui Cardoso crashed to and fro. He stood up, a Neptune, the water cascading off him, caught in the last of the sun—and there was something magnificent and disturbing about him. Not mad. But a terrible old man, touched by something that passed ordinary people by. A man with God and devil and he scorned them both. And I felt an uneasy excitement somewhere deep inside me which had nothing to do with his nature and all with his body; it frightened me.

In the years since Mr. Burnley I had created an inner world in which he could not exist (I did this by banishing all thought of school); no crevice, no forgotten *niche*, no place from which he could creep forth and hurt me again. I hated Rui Cardoso at that moment, hated with a burning bile hate, because he had called my surety into question, he had resurrected my past.

I swam till my arms could barely move—not that I really knew how to swim, this awkward flailing, touching the sand below to thrust myself forward ... He stood on the beach, rubbing himself vigorously with a dirty sack. His hair stood out round his head in spikes like a crown-of-thorns, water dripped from his member, he belted his chest and stomach and thighs with his make-shift towel in a way scandinavian people are said to beat themselves with birch branches. I hurried to change, to hang my wet costume on a convenient tree, to set a small fire going with dry grass coiled and twigs, to boil our evening rice. He pulled on his trousers, sat down nearby; he lit his pipe and smoked in silence.

Then he said: "I was in Hong-Kong once." He often started conversations like this—"I was in Manila once, I was in Darwin once, I was in Calcutta once"—but it did not mean he would tell me why he'd gone there, or for how long or when. I knew he'd been to Darwin to try and buy a theodolite (but they had none for sale) and he had been in German East Africa to manage a sisal plantation when the League of Nations took it away from Germany and gave it to Britain—"Ah, Mr. Bismarck!" he had added to that and done a great sizzling spit into the fire.

"D-did you like—was it—" my mind was still in a secret turmoil. What did Hong-Kong matter tonight. "Garrisons and guns. And snobbery. They would not let the chinese live on top of the hill until one chinese was so rich they could no longer tell him where to live ... a man named ... Ho-tung, yes, Robert Ho-tung ... and they walk around saying, ah, the japanese can not fly planes—they all have such bad eyes and they have no balance because their mothers carried them on their backs when they were children—and do you know who is training the japanese pilots?"

"No."

"The british! After the *Guerra Mundial* all those british pilots with no work—what can you do? I can fly a plane, sir—no use, next! what can *you* do? I can fly a plane, sir ... so all their

good pilots went to Japan! And I'll tell you something, Vasco," and he leaned over and poked me in the knee with a large finger, "the british will take two weeks to lose Hong-Kong to the japanese and three weeks to lose Singapura. Fools! They think big guns are the answer and they sit there, smug and red, having their hair cut and their chins shaved by japanese barbers and talking all the while—"

"Perhaps they do not know—that the barber is japanese, I mean?"

"Of course they don't know the barber is japanese, you fool! Is not that what I am saying? They can not tell a chinese man from a japanese man—they think anything that isn't english is 'gibberish'—and they pride themselves on how well they deal with the 'native races'—" (he said 'native races' in english) ... "and then they'll turn round and tell us how to defend Timor," he let a handful of dust run through his fingers, "from the japanese—"

"D-do you think the japanese want to take Timor from us?"

"Of course not! So long as we sell them manganese and copra at cheap prices—what idiot would want my job, your job, the Governor's job?"

"Well, I suppose *someone* might."

He did not argue, only told me he was going to Díli on the morrow—I would stay to work on water-flows—and did I want him to send any mail. I tried to write a letter to Paul but having Rui Cardoso sit there, so close, with the electric heat he seemed to emanate ... I could not write, that night, the things I really wanted to write about; I appeased my conscience by saying I would write again soon. Then I put out the campfire and rolled up in my blanket and I thought of a story I had read which, I think, goes like this:

'Will you walk a little faster?' said a whiting to a snail,

'There's a porpoise close behind us, and he's treading on my tail.'

I do not know why I thought of it; thinking of Hong-Kong which was to surrender in two weeks and Paul in a far-away hospital, rushing up and down corridors in the cold scottish night, because interns are worked very hard ... and I felt strangely lonely.

I could love Rui Cardoso in an uneasy way—even now I can not find the words to explain it exactly—but it was neither father-love (I loved the father I had) nor the forbidden love of one man to another (I knew I did not like him touching me)—but he constantly provoked strong feelings in me which I could neither interpret nor banish. Perhaps there simply are men like that. Men who live in history. Except that Rui Cardoso did not care and the men of history did, about themselves, about their people, about grandeur and fame and gold braid and other things totally alien to an old man dozing beside a rusting truck. But I think his regard for what he saw as the truth made him fascinating, dangerous even.

Later—forgive my confusion; I jump forward some years—he heard that the Administrator of São Domingos had entered into a secret agreement with an australian, a Mr. David Ross, to build an aerodrome on the Salazar Plateau just south of Baucau. *Tenente* Pires would find enough men to provide the required labour; they would not know what they were clearing it for, perhaps to plant maize; Mr. Ross told him the natives were too primitive to understand 'aerodrome'. Rui Cardoso was furious. He went to Sr. Pires and demanded that it go no further.

How did he know such things when he spent days, weeks, in silence except to talk to me. He was like an animal which can snuff the wind and know things. He did not approve of Sr. Pires anyway, because the administrator was said to have six native mistresses—"the vanity of the man!"—and he said to me: "Never sow your seed except where you will reap the rewards". I blushed at this but he asked no questions. It did seem greedy but I could not help liking *Tenente* Pires, perhaps because he reminded me a little of my father, not that I can imagine my father with his cough, his deep rectitude, having six mistresses! Pires was a tall man, nearly as tall as Rui Cardoso, with a grave and courteous manner. He wore small round glasses and had a deep affection, I think, for Timor.

He also thought the british were excellent people (though he was the british consul, Mr. Ross was an australian and was also tall and narrow and tough-looking with an autocratic

manner) and this aerodrome was to be his way of showing what he felt.

But Rui Cardoso told him not to be a fool: if that was what he wanted then he had two obligations: to make known that he did not wish to keep our neutrality and to tell the natives living on the plateau what an aerodrome was. "If a *bomba* is to miss the aerodrome and fall upon their huts—will you tell them they are too primitive to understand death and dying. If you wish to put their lives in danger then you must tell them what might happen."

The aerodrome was not built, not then, but Rui Cardoso made enemies in those years, more enemies than I think he understood. But he retained one crucial support: the new Governor, His Excellency *Capitão* Manuel D'Abreu Ferreira de Carvalho. I think, I can not pretend to *know*, that the Governor divined that desire for truth, that desire for the natives to be protected, to be given information. There were many wild rumours and many untruths circulated, were deliberately fostered even ... My friend José later became the victim of such a rumour.

He had become acquainted with the Inokuchi family who wanted to send some animals to a zoo in Japan—but their animals always seemed to die before they could send them. Sra. Inokuchi looked after the health of the small japanese community in Díli. There were thirteen people, including herself and her two children, at that time and she and her husband were educated people, cultured. They were not popular because they were seen as 'the wedge' by which the japanese community would gain control of timorese land under the guise of growing fields of cotton.

Still, I could see why José liked them, liked to visit their house. Kazuo Inokuchi was interested in the history of our early missionaries, the Dominicans, who came to Japan in the sixteenth century (he had visited Macau) and thought to write a book. He was not catholic but belonged to a faith called Shingon Buddha, so he hoped that José would help him with the idiom and style of the church ...

One evening José took me to see the animals in the compound where this family lived. Never before had I seen a woman wearing the clothes called *kimono* and *obi* and she seemed very beautiful and gracious as she escorted us, saying, "I can not see why they should die when we feed them well and they have fresh water and shade in the heat of the day."

This was true. They had three mouse deer and three grey monkeys; they had also had a small crocodile but it died. The wire cages were small but allowed enough room for the animals to move around and the floors were covered with straw. At first, I thought the sickness was pining ... people and animals pine, break their hearts ... but I sat down and tried to listen to them.

I am not sure that I am very adept at listening to people, at understanding the language of the tilted head, the expansive arms ... so how can I 'hear' animals 'speak' to me? It is a mystery. I do not know how long I sat there, just sat. The Inokuchi children grew tired of watching and went away. But, as I sat, gradually it came to me: they were seeking mother-warmth. They had been captured too young. I stood up and went over and undid each of the cages containing the tiny spotty fawns. Then I waited, talking quietly, until slowly, one by one, they crept nervously through the doors and came up to me. I held my fingers out to them and they sniffed and nibbled and sucked. Sra. Inokuchi watched, then she went quietly away and came back with a big basin containing tinned milk with water and sugar added. One by one I lowered the sucking fingers into the bowl and the tiny creatures drank and when it was empty and they had licked it out, they turned to each other: to sniff and then to cavort with timid bounds and funny legs.

"Will you let the monkeys out?" Sr. Inokuchi was nervous. I tried to explain what was needed: something to replace a mother. They rolled up a robe, stuffed it full of leaves and grass and broken-up fronds, and I tied this in the tree.

Then I asked Sra. Inokuchi if she had an old comb she could spare. She brought me a nice tortoise-shell one. The two smallest monkeys came to me and I snuggled them in to the 'dummy' and asked the children to comb them very gently but not to touch them with their

hands; the monkeys were covered in fleas which came on me but I tried to ignore them.

The other monkey was older, recalcitrant, the distance between his mother and this moment too great. He scrambled clumsily on to his cage and looked away, then he leaped to the top of the fence. Sr. Inokuchi cried: "Catch!" But he would run away if they chased him. "No! Please—stand back. Don't speak." They stepped back with reluctance and I said softly: '*Macaco-maca-macaco-coco-colinho* ... " Something like that, over and over; he came back, suspicious and angry, but bewildered too. He stared at me from the top of his cage.

Then I held out my arms and he suddenly hurtled into my chest and clung to my shoulder, making funny noises. I went on talking quietly; the Inokuchis and José looked astonished. I was astonished too: the wonder of it, the miracle, and I felt tears in my eyes.

Sr. Inokuchi insisted that I take the biggest monkey. I said if I took him it would be to let him go, would he mind? He bowed. The monkey was mine to do as I wished. As José and I went away, the monkey still holding tight to me, José said, "You are not really going to let him go, are you? You could sell him. There are always people who will pay a good price for a monkey." I shook my head. Then could I not make money, taming animals, training them to do tricks ... We could start a circus, he saw our name in lights, the deep dread *ennui* of the capital had not yet permeated his bones. I said I could not do that but I did not know how to explain the things I could and could not do ...

He sighed, "*Não faz mal* ... I will think of something else."

*****

And out on the green tide towards the sea
Drift the rinds of orient fruits
Strange to the lips, bitter and sweet.

John Dos Passos

*****

I pretended to myself the track I took was merely 'suitable', now that I was to take my monkey to the wild, nothing more. 'My' monkey and I walked in the evening where the native huts straggled in the dull place where the hills met the *pântano* behind the town, the scrub trees met the chinese and native gardens; I told him stories and he talked back, I told him I had never seen so many fleas, my friends would shun me, and he nipped my ears and tried to comb my hair, and I said we must find some untended banana plants if such things existed ...

And, of a sudden, I came face to face with Dona Déolinda! By then my thoughts were far away and I simply stared at her. She was wearing a kind of yellow tunic over a red and green *lau*, held at the waist by a green girdle; above one ear she wore a white flower. Her presence, her magnificence! I felt weak in my knees. But she dropped her gaze and went to pass in silence.

"W-would you l-l-like a monkey?" I blurted it out. She shook her head and the flower slipped; without thinking, I raised a hand to catch it—then withdrew it, burning with embarrassment. "Are you—then—D-dona D-d-déolinda—" She was surprised, then grave. "I am Déolinda Coelho. Why do you ask?" Her voice was unexpectedly deep, no, not unexpected ... "I-I saw you at the market once." She waited, obviously suspicious: when would my real reason appear. "M-my name is Tomás Vasconcelos." I would have held my hand out to her but I was afraid of its fleas. Still she waited.

What was I doing, this was a back-wood track, leading nowhere in particular, and I did not know what to say. "Please—don't go—" The distance between us was more than man and woman, black and white ... it included all my confusions and her suspicions ... "Are you sure you would not like a monkey to live in your trees—for your daughter, do you not have a

daughter?"

"Yes." She offered nothing. Was it her daughter I wanted then? I knew nothing of her history but if my thoughts had been in order I must have guessed the father of her daughter was white—sweet promises, abandonment—but it was not till much later that I learned the story of her daughter's father. That I might wish to seduce with a monkey instead, that I might be touched by the sun, did not remove the power that walked by my side ...

"If you wish," she spoke with cool courtesy, "I will ask her if she would like to have a monkey—but I do not have much money."

"Oh, but I do not want money!" I blushed: oh, the innuendo sitting in the words, a spider in its web! "I was going to let him go, let him be a wild monkey again—and then I saw you—and I remembered you had a daughter—and I thought ... I would ask you, nothing more, you might not want a monkey, you might not like monkeys, some people don't—and he might scratch you and you will blame me—and I hoped we might be—friends—"

She listened to this wild speech, unsmiling. "I am going to collect my daughter. She has lessons with Sra. Costa Gomes. It will not take me many minutes ... " She did not know what to do with me.

"If you would not mind—I could walk with you ... " She looked at 'my' monkey (and he stared back) and her doubt was in her large expressive eyes. "I think he has decided he likes me." I felt I must explain him.

"I was not thinking of—the monkey."

"Oh, but it does not matter! I work with Sr. Cardoso but he will be fighting with Sr. Oliveira right now." I did not mean fighting as in punches and blows; Rui Cardoso was convinced Sr. Oliveira could make the colony self-supplying with petroleum if he would only put his mind to ways and means. I was glad I was not Sr. Oliveira.

I see now I was obtuse and we walked along-side one another in silence. Dona Cecília had the use of a public-room for her lessons: she was really very clever and talented: here she taught crochet and embroidery, also dancing, and, at home, singing and music. It is true the girls here were not the same as the girls who came to her house—mostly they were white—but, also, there were *mestiça* girls in all her classes. Timorese girls do not need to learn our dances because they have many beautiful dances of their own to learn from their mothers and grandmothers but they came to learn embroidery because it was spinning and weaving they learned at home ...

She saw me standing there and smiled and began to walk over; then she noticed Sra. Coelho, then the monkey, and her face was a study in many things, mainly bewilderment. The little girl, Dona Déolinda's daughter, ran up to her mother and took her hand. It was a confused moment. Dona Cecília came over; I smelled a faint sweet perfume overlain by the heat of the room; she put out her hand to touch, gingerly, the monkey's fur; I did not like to say, out loud, "he has a lot of fleas." But the monkey ignored her and Dona Déolinda distracted her by handing over the couple of coins for the lesson.

"But what are you doing here?" The other girls (some younger, some older, some with mothers or maids) went away. Dona Cecília turned back to me.

"I think I am giving a monkey away—and I thought that ... " I held my hand out vaguely, as an archbishop blesses, over the young girl whose name I still did not know.

"For Rosentina?" Dona Cecília frowned a little. "Does she want a monkey?"

I was beginning to wish the monkey would leap from my shoulder, disappear from our lives. Rosentina looked as surprised as Dona Cecília: she had come to do her sewing, never dreaming of a monkey. Her mother continued to look at me and I felt the fierce protective mantle with which she encircled her daughter, it was an almost tangible rebuff ... When I look back on this episode my cheeks burn, yet I did return with Dona Déolinda and Rosentina to their hut, I did manage to persuade the monkey to leave my shoulder, and I gave them the two *patacas* in my pocket and my comb to comb him with. He solemnly peeled and ate the banana they proffered—then, seeing me prepare to leave, he sat and sulked a minute before leaping

away into the evening trees.

I was very tired that night: I do not know why being with animals should always make me so tired, and there were other feelings inside me that had to do with women. Dona Déolinda held me at arm's length; she would make very certain her daughter knew white men could not be trusted. White Men Can Not Be Trusted. I saw it in my dreams that night, circus lights blinking, whiskery monkey faces deriding. The next day Rui Cardoso and I went to Manatuto.

"Stop yawning, Vasco. Take my word for it—wine, women and song will give you a bad liver, the pox, and a sore throat ... " Then, for some reason, he sang in his great booming baritone "Yo-ho-heave-ho" and this Volga Boatman song made me feel even more tired.

"So—what is she like?" He leaned over and poked me in the shoulder.

"Who?"

"This woman who gives you dead eyes."

"No. It was animals ... " I did not want to explain.

"Some women are animals—they screech and claw and bite—"

"None that I have ever met."

His jocular mood seemed to drop suddenly from him. "Stay away from the Inokuchis. And that is an order!" He thrust his big beard in my face. "Do you hear me? A babe in arms like you—"

"I hear you." It was impossible not to. I closed my dead eyes.

The old man, furious, swung his hand and hit me right across the mouth. My lip bled. I sprang up! "Stay away from me, you monster! All you know is how to push people around! Bully them!" I did not care that I was his subordinate.

"Don't you see, fool of a boy ... " then he seemed to fold up, lose something, some life-force, "I love you so much—and you—"

"Then I do not want your kind of love!"

He sat down and spat in the dust. "No, but you have it anyway." He bowed his head and sat there in hot silence. I pulled out my filthy handkerchief (I think I had wiped my boots) and tried to stem the blood on my chin; my beard, shaved off for Díli, was already dark and dangerous a day later ...

I wanted to get away, to be free of him. I would ask to be transferred. Sr. Resende would understand. Surely. I had served my apprenticeship. Rui Cardoso got up slowly, his age seemed to creak in his joints, his hair was now all grey; his face when he turned to me seemed to have a greyness about it too. He climbed stiffly in to the cabin and I had no choice but to follow.

He turned to me: "*Desculpe-me*, Tomás, forgive a bad-tempered old man ... but do as I say, you and that friend of yours, José, and if you want to run wild with african women—then who am I to deny you that pleasure?"

I said nothing. I did not know how to run wild, and I was not going to forgive him, not in words.

*****

We began a new project: it required us to collect fresh-water snails for research (in between other duties; I should perhaps put duties in *aspas*). Did the snails carry disease-causing plasms, could they be used as a food-source, how many varieties were there? We had to keep them separate, make notes on where we found them, what vegetation did they appear to prefer, were they near fast-flowing or stagnant water?

And I began a new project of my own: in my mind, you see the growing habit to think in titles, I called it 'The Secret Life of Scorpions'. Scorpions were easy to find, almost everywhere we went, and they both fascinated me and gave me a secret *frisson* as they raised their sting and darted forward. The most interesting ones were the females carrying their tiny pale soft babies on their backs. It also, foolishly, I expect, involved getting stung so that I could note the exact sensation, how long the pain lasted, how the creature pierced the skin, whether anything rubbed or poulticed on the skin made a difference.

Rui Cardoso said, “And they call me mad!”

And, one day, he asked, “What do you think about when you look at animals, *pá*?”

“I think ... ” What did I think? “I wonder ... why it is animals have no malice, not as we would see human malice ... perhaps a desire to tease that might turn cruel, I suppose what is not quite a desire for revenge, they neglect the runt of a litter ... but no evil ... ”

“They contain no devil. Only human beings contain God and Devil.”

“And you have more Devil than I have.” I still wanted to hurt him in some way; this new relationship not yet taken from its pins on the easel ...

“Yes, Tomás Vasconcelos, I have more Devil than you ... and do not you ever think you are lucky that the dice fell that way.”

“No, sir.”

“And another thing,” he sounded peevish, “stop filling your speech with other people’s words—” (this was merely because I thought the local word *babuuk* was more interesting than *caracol* for snail); “you can do them the courtesy of learning their languages properly—or you can leave them alone.”

“I don’t see how you expect me to learn anything properly—when we—”

“You wouldn’t.” He was determined to be unpleasant; I think he had begun to see it as a war of attrition whenever I stood firm to him. “*Então*, you can start in to learn market-tétum—then you had best learn mambai—that is, if you are going to remain with me.” He sounded the same as a head-master who drops scorn upon parents’ aspirations for their boy then sees that he, accordingly, suffers for them. But as our travels were so haphazard, sometimes chosen it might be to *avoid* people, I said nothing more.

Three days later, we were stopped briefly at Laleia and Rui Cardoso disappeared for half-an-hour and returned, shepherding a boy of about thirteen. He said curtly: “Here is your teacher, Vasconcelos. In return you will teach him to read and write. Is that understood?” If he had had a panther’s tail he would have lashed it. It was an unpropitious beginning.

Yet the time Manuel dos Santos spent with us was a happy time. He took the grinding edges away. He laughed with unaffected pleasure at the things Rui Cardoso said, even when they were not in the least funny. The old man never showed irritation with him. He certainly never *hit* him. The boy grew shrewd and capable, but always good-natured, and even if he thought his new *chefe* was mad he still gave him a respect which was close to adulation.

Cardoso said Manuel was an orphan which was not true (except in the sense that he was given no time to spend with his parents); orphans were almost unknown in this society: children might be looked after by childless relatives or grandparents, aunts or cousins, if their own parents had many other children or were in ill-health, sometimes as a way to thank relatives for a kindness. Children were a blessing.

So I will call Manuel an apprentice, not because he learned in a carefully-planned manner or was rewarded with a certificate, but he learned the countryside in new ways. Too, he learned a cheerful cheeky repartee which the old man seemed to enjoy. (I envied this.)

That it might not be good for Manuel ... who can say ...

The war in Europe seemed far far away, though we tried to listen to its news on the old wireless, mounted on the truck. Its first intimations for our family came about in a strange way: my uncle, my mother’s second brother, *Tio* Ari, had been portuguese consul in different french cities—Marseille and, I think, Bordeaux; places with a live passage of sailors—but suddenly he was removed from his position and sent home in disgrace. My mother wrote, in caution, that he had been sending ‘unstamped parcels’. I could not imagine what she meant and asked Rui Cardoso if it might have some special war-time significance, I had not thought consuls sent anything other than their ‘diplomatic bags’ ...

He said, “So! At least there is one member of the Vasconcelos family who is not a fool.”

I said, stiffly, none of my family were fools and he had no right to assume they might be.

“Of all the bare-nosed nonsense I have ever heard—” he walked over to the door (we were in Díli when I had that letter) then he looked over his shoulder and said, “How many parcels

did he send?"

"At least two thousand."

"Good Lord!" The old man whistled to the air, then went out without deigning any explanation. So I might as well have asked Manuel if he could explain this mystery.

Each time I came to Díli I went to see Dona Déolinda and Rosentina, ostensibly to see if they had their monkey, if he was well and bigger and behaving; they always treated me with formality, giving a report on his life and health—in so far as you can do this for a monkey which treated them with a certain disdain, coming to pick through the scraps from the restaurant then to ignore his benefactresses. I tried to insist he was their monkey now but, each time he saw me, he would hurl himself in to my arms as if I was his monkey-mother even while I said, over his head, "But he is your monkey, not mine."

They called him Chiar-Chiar, which means a little chirping noise, but gradually he became Chi-Chi; he waxed fat and cheeky with that snide impudence monkeys seem to acquire in captivity. Not that he was captive, they never chained him to a perch as many people did, he could always come and go and, finally, early in 1942, when the bombs fell, he decided Díli was *not* a safe place and he disappeared, we thought to the hills.

I loved 'my' monkey but I loved Dona Déolinda and Rosentina much much more, yet they were convinced I came for his sake when, truly, it was for them.

Rui Cardoso said offensively:

Manu mutin ain modok, rani ro inur,

Ro uale ua'en modi mutin ain modok—which is a tétum saying to warn village girls when white men come scouting: do not trust. But I objected to being called a 'yellow-leggèd white cockerel'—and, despite his jibes, it was never like that. I loved them both so much it made me feel strange inside but I wanted to possess them almost as you might wish to possess something rare and beautiful, for them to belong to me and yet not to belong ... My wanting confused me and because I did not behave like other men they had known they never let down their guard. From somewhere Dona Déolinda acquired an elegant cup and saucer and so, when I visited, I would have to sit, 'honoured guest', balancing it on my knee, dowager-ly, while they kept re-filling it with china-tea ... It symbolised my confusion: I longed to break it, lose it, throw it away ...

They looked after the large flock of hens belonging to 'Mr. Wang'; he actually introduced himself that way the first time we met. He had spent a number of years in Austrália and also in Singapura and he had a brother with a restaurant in, I think, Sidney. Though there were members of the chinese community considerably richer he secretly regarded them as 'coolie-chinese', especially the 'black sheep' from Macau; at first I thought this was pretension: his restaurant was unpainted, not clean, often enough I saw a *carocha* expansively cleaning her feelers, or it might be an him; but as I came to know him a little, he always insisted on speaking english with me and seemed to enjoy the opportunity, I found him to be cultured and well-read. In a place where few people owned so much as one book he had one whole shelf with books in four languages. He would talk of his compatriots with furtive disparagement: "All *they* think of is money—money money money." And he would roll his stubby fingers round phantom banknotes.

But I think I liked him because he was generous to the two women: any chickens or eggs not needed for the restaurant they were free to sell in the market. He carefully separated scraps from unserved food, gave them the use of the hut and the fruit trees in the compound, and paid Dona Déolinda a very small wage which provided the sewing lessons with Dona Cecília and the cloth to make their clothes which were always clean and bright and beautifully embroidered in an unique way. But, most of all, I liked him because he always treated them with respect ...

I tried to write of this to Paul and we discussed the love of Plato, agape, amore, illusion, delusion ... pretensions to the sensitivities of the great lover ... and then—Paul was sent to Egypt as an army doctor (of course the army-censor would not permit him to say *that*; no, he

quoted from a Shakespeare play—an asp as opposed to *aspas* for a quote; we were very clever, *n'est-ce-pas*?) and there he fell in love with an armenian nurse named Rose-Marie Kechichian; fell in love the proper way, not my peculiar way.

I envied him, not for Rose-Marie though I am sure she was very nice, but for his *certainty*. To wake up each morning and say 'I *know* I love' ... José too, at the end of 1940, announced that he would marry Cecília da Costa Gomes in the cathedral. I must be there to support him.

Rui Cardoso grumbled when he heard this news. "All this sentimental nonsense, fools, the whole flock of you, and now a wife to be held hostage."

"Held hostage?"

"Ah, what is the use of trying to tell you things that should be plain as the nose on your face!" He became more and more irritated with me—*então*, one night, he complained of pains in his head. He vomited suddenly, then crashed to the ground. I rushed to help him up and clean the mess on him, and he seemed to recover, just a bit dozy and slow. Then he said he was sleepy and he lay down where he was and was immediately asleep. Next morning he seemed much as usual except for a kind of small *tic* in one cheek.

He refused even to consider seeing a doctor saying he would rather die in the hills, not foolish and soft in pyjamas; not that he owned any pyjamas but the hospital might put him in such garments. Then he turned to me and said: "When I die you can have my truck and everything in it." I was not yet twenty-three; I did not want to be speaking of death and bequests. "Death," he said suddenly, "where is thy sting." He seemed surprised by the quotation and frowned: "Who said that?"

"You just did. But I think maybe Guilherme Shakespeare said it before you."

"Shake-'is-spear?" And he laughed at himself. "No. God said it."

I was thankful to see him back to normal; and it meant I could forget yesterday. But it was the beginning, I think, of his decline. He became a little forgetful, he made odd statements which seemed to have no connection with anything he, or anyone, might have been saying. It is strange to think that while my father was dying (my mother kept this from me; thinking I could do nothing but worry) I was worrying about Rui Conceição Cardoso. He grew increasingly despondent as the year wore on; he began to see spies everywhere; he berated the Governor's liberality in allowing both the japanese and the australians to come and go though the japanese had to have written permission to leave Díli.

He would sometimes sit for hours staring into nothing and then say something that I could not interpret, one I remember: "Missy Longlan' thought no one knew and the whole colony was laying bets ... " and then he would tail away and return to an almost catatonic state. I did more of the work now, wrote the reports, but we retained the position, sometimes fact, sometimes fiction, that he was 'in charge'.

Yet there were days, frequent enough, when nothing seemed changed, when the air around him seemed to fizz with his energy, when he roared and bellowed and thumped and had us running round in circles doing his bidding. He still called people 'fools' at every chance but the uneasy word *obrigação* crept more and more frequently into his mouth.

José, too, saw spies around him; that the metropolis might be an hot-bed of spying seemed to infect everyone in it: the passing of a cigarette, the lowering of a voice, a hurried step, a failure to call was no longer a social slight but a matter of grave and sinister concern, to walk along the beach at night and glance over your shoulder ... I think I must be extraordinarily obtuse but I could not see why anyone should want to spy on anyone else ... Did we not all know that the secret police, the PVDE*, did that anyway, and everyone knew each other, everyone knew who they were. In such a small society secrets are hard to keep ...

* PVDE = Polícia da Vigilância e de Defesa do Estado.

*****

Não sei se é sonho, se realidade,
Se uma mistura de sonho e vida,
Aquela terra de suavidade
Que na ilha extrema do sul se olvida.
E a que ansiamos. Ali, ali
A vida é jovem e o amor sorri.

Talvez palmares inexistentes,
Aleas longínquas sem poder ser,
Sombra ou sossego dêem aos crentes
De que essa terra se pode ter.
Felizes, nós? Ah, talvez, talvez,
Naquela terra, daquela vez.

Mas já sonhada se desvirtua,
Só de pensá-la cansou pensar;
Sob os palmares, à luz da lua,
Sente-se o frio de haver luar.
Ah, nessa terra também, também
O mal não cessa, não dura o bem.

Não é com ilhas do fim do mundo,
Nam com palmares de sonho ou não,
Que cura a alma seu mal profundo,
Que o bem nos entra no coração.
E em nos que é tudo. E ali, ali,
Que a vida é jovem e o amor sorri.

Fernando Pessoa

*****

I do not know if the poet was thinking of Timor as his 'southern isle' his place of palm-trees, his 'islands at the world's end'; it is an island which exists in the mind but 'it is in ourselves that everything exists—it is there, there, that life is young and love smiles'.

One morning we went to visit Sr. Pedro Pereira, who has the same name as our esteemed Foreign Minister, who worked in the Agriculture department; he ran a little farm where he was breeding a special kind of pig. Some day, these pigs would exist in sufficient numbers that they could go to all the villages, so he hoped. These pigs, a boar and three sows, had come from South África via Moçambique and were white with black spots, bigger than the black village pigs and with long straight backs but, as he liked to tell everyone, equally good at foraging and looking after themselves once they became accustomed to their new circumstances. He watched over them with great conscience and all his pigs were happy and healthy and he minded them as a mother minds a little baby.

Sr. Carvalho, who was his *chefe,* was a man of ideas: he had also imported several dairy cows to Timor so that, someday, all the children would drink milk like european children. Of course there were lots of goats but the cows would give a bucket of milk each day while the goats only give a beaker.

He also went occasionally to see the programme to breed mules for the army which were very fine and handsome: though he had no certificate to say it he was very skilled in the treatment of animal disease.

We could not know then, with Rui Cardoso telling me to 'use my eyes' which I always do, while he rested beneath a shade tree and Dom Pedro showed me everything—that all this

would be destroyed: all the pigs, all the dairy cows, nearly all the mules would be killed and eaten by australian and japanese and dutch soldiers ... I am glad, that day, I could not see into the future ...

Dom Pedro said, as we walked, "I have heard that you have a good manner with animals so I will show you my new litter; she does not like to be disturbed." They were very lively, more than a dozen piglets but "this little one always misses out, you see how thin and weak he is". He took his malacca cane and indicated one piglet which could not find room at the sow's udder.

"A pity." He looked at me. "I could feed him with a bottle but I have not found that very successful—and if I try to remove one and push him in, instead, the sow becomes annoyed and restless. I think I must accept the loss of one."

I had been standing there, with no ideas of my own, but then I remembered something I had once seen a man use in Trás-os-Montes when his pigs were disobedient in the forest. I climbed carefully into the pen, talking softly to the sow, she opened a small eye, then closed it again. I lifted up the little runt and held him gently for several minutes and he looked a little brighter. I tried several noises—a bee, a mosquito, an hyena, a dog, Dom Pedro smiled indulgently, but I could not seem to find exactly the noise that pigs do not like; it is a kind of high whine, I seemed to remember, but hard to do; then, suddenly, they all stopped feeding, began to move around, look anxious, look upward and around. In a flash, I rushed the little pig in against his mother's warm udder. By the time the others seemed to feel safe and reassured again it was too late: the little pig was filling his belly with great industrience.

Sr. Pereira laughed. "That is very clever! I would never have thought of that. Where did you learn it?" I explained and he said "You are not morose enough to be a *transmontano*!" and then he said "But, still, he is surplus to my requirements ... "

"Then—may I buy him from you?"

He thought a minute. "*Por bem*. When he grows a little more."

I was delighted! To be the owner of a pedigree pig, even such a small one. Of course I had nowhere to keep him—except in the good benefices of Dona Déolinda. As we stood there Sr. Pereira said more quietly, "You are just the young man I need." He sounded enthusiastic. "Have you thought of a transfer from the *Missão*? I could ask Sr. Carvalho to second you to my work here. I would be happy to give him a good report about you."

I did not see or hear Rui Cardoso behind us; already I was thinking of what it would be like to work here. A dilemma, yes, but Dom Pedro kept neat records and had plans and ideas which were set out in easy-to-understand ways—I would enjoy animals more than soil profiles or grasses—but to leave Rui Cardoso and that special kind of freedom and provocation of my mind—

"Stealing my staff!" Cardoso boomed. "Shame, Dom Pedro!"

Sr. Pereira started violently but then he shook his head. "My esteemed senhor, of course he is yours—but I am sure a mutually beneficial transfer could be arranged. The shame would be in not using the talent and good sense of this young man to the greatest advantage."

"I have trained him for four years. I am too tired to begin to train another assistant. He understands my work and must take over from me in the near future ... "

Sr. Pereira was dubious about what Rui Cardoso called 'my work'; like many other people he believed my *chefe* was irrelevant to the colony but he was too polite to say so. For me it was a terrible dilemma, I was torn in two pieces, while Rui Cardoso looked into my mind and saw dreams and ingratitude there. Whatever I did I did not wish to leave the shadow of bad feeling ...

Then Sr. Pereira rescued me, stepping back and saying with formal grace: "I am being quite unfair, I see, I should not have asked for him when you need him." All the fire-brandishing went out of Rui Cardoso. He stood there and gazed round the farm, at the pigs in their little fields, at everything bright and clean, and he sighed. "You are quite correct. Tomás has a special way with animals. I should not deny him the opportunity to work with them."

They both looked at me. “C-could I think about it?”

“No. I have a solution,” said Rui Cardoso. “Once each month you will come here for some days and work.”

So! I was to live between Demeter and Hades! I said immediately, yes, but of course Rui Cardoso never let me go without great grumbling—and Dom Pedro returned me with reluctance. And to expect my *chefe* to keep to something so precise as ‘once a month’ was to dream. Still, I was very happy most of the time.

Rosentina called the little pig Pinta which means ‘spot’.

*****

Did José persuade Sr. Costa Gomes to become his father-in-law; did Sr. Costa Gomes persuade José? The wedding was to be in the cathedral and I and Manuel (Manuel Vaz da Cruz, I mean) were meant to see that José arrived on time, had combed his hair, and brushed his clothes, he was not a *tidy* man ... While D. Cecília would come with her father as he was her only relative and she would arrange a girl from her lessons to take her flowers for her—but which girl? hundreds of little girls had learned from D. Cecília: the youngest, the oldest, the prettiest, the one who was most skilled with her needle or had the sweetest voice? She simply told José she had solved this dilemma and all would be well.

We stood there waiting for her to arrive, wondering. Then she came up the aisle, suddenly pretty, with yellow and white roses, daisies, frangipani, and behind came her pupils, hundreds of them! ... They followed her in two rows, all the way down the aisle and out the church door! So beautiful! Every lovely colour, little cotton frocks of pink and yellow and blue and green and serious faces with dancing eyes ... They were silent but longed to look around and whisper and smile ... Rosentina was about half way down, my side ...

When it came time that D. Cecília should pass her flowers to one side the girl immediately behind her took the bouquet and passed it to the next girl, and the next, and so it went from girl to girl all the way down the long aisle, out the door so that the people who could not fit inside the church could see it, then in through the door and all the way back to the bride. Some of the little girls raised it to their noses to smell the sweet fragrance. Everyone smiled.

Afterward, they put up long tables outside the church and there were cakes and syrup for everyone. Rui Cardoso was outside with Manuel; Dona Déolinda stood alone, watching, waiting for her daughter to appear; people clapped and sang happy songs; Rui Cardoso bowed to D. Déolinda ... There was such a crowd of people! And the sun was so hot and the day so close with the air sitting like heavy cloths upon our skin ...

Then we, the ‘official’ people, went on to the house where D. Cecília’s father had invited *Tenente* Ramalho dos Santos and other people from Public Works, other departments, and wives, even His Excellency came with his wife Dona Cora and their eldest daughter; there was a mountain of food.

Então the musicians came, three men to play *fados* and music to dance to ... I hoped they would ask D. Cecília to sing, even though it was *her* wedding, because I loved to listen to her sing—but only the men sang as they do in Porto; I learned later that José would not let D. Cecília sing because of the tradition that a *fadista* should wear a black *mantilha* in memory of a famous *fadista* who died—not the white *mantilha* of a bride—and he thought this was a mark of sorrow, an omen ...

I asked D. Cecília if she would dance with me, if she would not mind that I was clumsy on the floor; she laughed and took my arm, “For you, Dom Tomás ... ” and she let me kiss her too. (I had as little experience kissing as dancing.) It grew hotter and hotter; sweat ran down us in raging rivers. And her father, Dom Clemente, became very drunk and sentimental. He said he must read us poetry of love—

*****

No silêncio da noite a virgem vinha

Soltas as tranças junto a mim dormir;
E era bela, meu Deus, assim sozinha
No seu sono d'infante inda a sorrir! ...
Casimiro de Abreu

*****

But I think he was reading, not for his daughter but for his dead wife Dorotéia. When finally José and his new wife were gone, they had hired a car to drive to some of the places José had not yet seen, and everyone had drunk and talked and smiled enough, he pressed Manuel and me to stay a little longer in the rooms filled with spilled wine and crushed flowers and the smell of food and hot people. He insisted on reading more to us in his deep grave voice but only the saddest things he could find from the brasilian poet ... *Horas Tristes, Saudades, Canção do Exílio ...*

Rui Cardoso said rudely, did we maudle? I said, yes. Then he laughed and said he was being Cupid while I was being 'official'. What did he mean? "O Vasco, open your eyes!" He refused to say any more and I did not really believe him—Rui Cardoso playing with *love*—and when I finally thought I understood it was much too late.

That next month a ship came from Macau; on board, Rui Cardoso said, was an envoy from the Governor of Macau, Governor Gabriel Teixeira, come to discuss certain matters with our Governor: what did they discuss? With the japanese in China, with the terrible things done to chinese people in Nanking and other cities there was the fear that they might do these same things in Macau. It is impossible to defend Macau, it is only about sixteen kilometres square, a small flat town at the mouth of a river; its defence is its neutrality, (though His Excellency had already sent one company of men from the Timor garrison, the september before), so they discussed how both colonies might strengthen the understanding of how neutral people must behave when there is great provocation ...

Afterward, it was said there was a japanese plot to take over Timor and that was why the ship had come. My *chefe* said that was nonsense, it was only the australians saying so in the hope that His Excellency would expel the small japanese community, but he refused to do that, it was better to know every foreigner in the country, to know if he had military rank, to know where he went and who his friends were, not to force people to resort to secrets and subterfuges ... The australians also said an elderly german man who had come here for many years, Dom Max, was a spy but I am sure this was never so because he was *judaico*, and he played billiards better than the australians, better than anyone, and everyone knew that Adolfo Hitler wanted every *judeu* to leave Germany so he could steal their homes and their money.

There was also a rumour that several of the arab traders in Díli were to help two prisoners to escape from the jail (there is only the one jail in Timor); they had been sent here from Macau for killing a man; I do not know where this rumour began but, sometimes, there was jealousy between the chinese and arab shop-keepers ... Later there were other rumours: that the australianos would buy everything we, in Timor, produced if we would allow them to make a military base ... Then the dutch commander said to His Excellency that the japanese were gone to the hills and intended to poison Díli's water supply but he said this was nonsense, now, when they, the dutch soldiers, had every japanese, even the children, imprisoned in their commercial premises ...

But mainly the ship came because of the celebrations for the independence of the Diocese of Díli. This was a proud moment! At last we were independent, no longer to be ruled by the Bishop of Macau, now Monsignor Goulart had almost as much power as the Governor.

*****

I completed articles on fresh-water snails, also on scorpions, and sent them to my father in the hope he might be able to get them published for me; then I began to think I would like to study cattle egrets: these are fine big white birds which like to nest untidily all together and,

sometimes, you can see them riding round on the backs of the cattle and buffaloes, just swaying a little at each step or standing in great calm, up there, observing, or bending to pick the insects from the animal's skin with a delicate beak ...

And I had another plan—of course Rui Cardoso complained, what did he not complain of during that year—but I did not take his criticisms and grumbles so much to mind now.

The ponies that every *cnua* owns are very beautiful, every colour, brown, black, grey, chestnut, dun-brown, brown-and-white, but not always cared for; I think because people do not have the knowledge to make good saddles and bridles or harness for those that pull little carts. These things were made of wood or rough rope or stiff hard strips of leather, cut straight from the hide. At first I thought I might be able to work out a way in which I could get soft leather to make a simple small saddle. If the indian women in the *Estados Unidos* could chew the leather to make it soft perhaps I could too—but *how* did they chew it?

I tried this in various ways, it was vile to do so, I really do not know how the women could manage; I gave up. Rui Cardoso said "If the basque eats any more leather Sr. Resende can have him back for the typewriter, my patience is limited" ... And so, I began to think I could make a padded cloth and people could put saddles or packs on top, and the stuffing (I tried wild cotton, kapok, chopped grass, rags) would protect the pony from sores.

Villagers, when they found I could heal these sores often asked; sometimes Rui Cardoso got angry: "Sr. Vasconcelos has more useful things to do than make up for your carelessness", he would chide them and they would apologise and, then, when he was not watching, they would whisper to me, "Please, your excellency, could you touch my horse with your hands". But they did not like me to come close by the cock-fights, when they brought their fighting-cocks to the circle at the *feiras*, to see which ones would fight each other, then money would change hands and the two hostile birds would be set down in the ring ... There were strict rules but they said the birds did not seem to want to fight when I came to stand close ... It is strange that this should be so ...

D. Déolinda said she would sew my horse-cloths for me, I paid her for this, and then I would test them. We were away near Soibada when two *coroneis*, one dutch, one australian, came to Díli and said to His Excellency (they tried hard not to put their demand on paper; you will understand why): if you do not allow us to land our soldiers we will shoot your men. The government far away in Lisboa naturally did not wish these foreign soldiers to land—but His Excellency had less than two hundred men and there were at least four hundred men on the ship, with modern rifles. He knew that if our neutrality was over-turned by these foreigners then the *japoneses* might invade Macau but, finally, very sad, he said they could land because he did not want the men of his garrison shot.

*****

What beauties doth Lisboa first unfold!
Her image floating on that noble tide,
Which poets vainly pave with sands of gold,
But now whereon a thousand keels did ride,
Of mighty strength, since Albion was allied,
And to the Lusians did her aid afford:
A nation swoln with ignorance and pride
Who lick yet loathe the hand that waves the sword
To save them from the wrath of Gaul's unsparing lord.

Lord Byron

*****

This poem is about Napoleon and Wellington. The poet does not mention that Britain sent

ships so they and their french prisoners could take away all the lovely things they had stolen from our homes and churches; I had to go to school in Espinho to learn that. Now, Britain sent correspondence and cables to and fro to say Timor should not be neutral, Austrália and Holanda would force us to give up our neutrality; they, too, sent such documents: of course all suggesting that our safety and our people's safety was their prime concern. The dutch wrote in french, the british and australian messages came in english—but *I* think that the people who are more like to care about you are the people who come with that first courtesy: *your language*.

Our Governor tried to say we did not wish outside people here, I was even sworn to secrecy so that I could see the contents of some of these messages because they knew I had been to an english school and might understand english and english people better than they did ... The Governor's secretary, *Tenente* Alves, discussed this matter with me, after the cables had been deciphered; that the dutch were using the australians to camouflage their desire to enter, that the english said it was the australians and the australians, an english plan, and the dutch were asking London to say ... *Papá*, did you know by sending me to Mr. Beveridge's school I would some day have to witness the deceit of nations? ...

And as you know His Excellency failed in his attempt to keep foreign soldiers out. Rui Cardoso was angry with him, angry with these supposed democracies; it might be that they listened to their own people, they certainly did not listen to our government.

He said, "Now, the japanese will come, the australians and the *neerlandês* have seen to that, and what will happen to our people ... " He waved his hand outward, over the valley below us, over the goats grazing, the children by the stream, the thatched huts. And for a long time he was silent. Then he said "God forgive them for what they will do to the innocent. I can not."

I do not know why the *japoneses* treated the chinese people so badly in China and, later, here; did not their culture and language and ancestors come from China? should there not be a filial duty? It was very hard for the chinese here because the australians also treated them as spies, always convinced they were japanese pretending to be chinese: I do not see how they could make this mistake ...

It was hard for Mr. Wang: in about june of 1942 the japanese came to his restaurant and told him to leave at bayonet-point, just that, "Go! Go!" and he had to go into the mountains with some other men and work for them in the garrison, first cleaning for them, and then for a while on the roads, then cooking, and he was treated very badly, beaten, and all the time orders, do this, do that, which was very hard for him because he was at least sixty years old.

He told me, years later, that there was one old chinese man took bananas to sell to the japanese in Díli and brought back secret information to give to the australians, but the australians shot another chinese man as a 'spy'. He told me he comforted himself, when he felt very weary and forlorn, with the knowledge D. Déolinda would care for his possessions as best she could.

The japanese wanted women all the time, they wanted them to have only pale-brown skins, not dark, so that although they did not rape any white women, I have heard of two women who killed themselves out of fear of what might happen, but they always wanted the girls that had portuguese fathers or grandfathers and families tried to protect their daughters. The japanese did not like 'dirty girls' so all the girls began to chew betel nut, Rosentina too, they would not comb their hair, they would smell of smoke and buffalo dung, they would use rancid coconut-oil on their hair—it was very hard for girls, once so beautiful, to have to give up all pride in how they looked but, often, it was a successful ploy; not always, still there were village girls forced to be prostitutes in the barracks, or raped ...

The soldiers came to D. Déolinda and demanded that she let them take all the hens for eating and one by one they began to disappear; she asked me what she should do: I asked Dom Clemente for his advice—he went to the japanese corporal who had demanded the hens and said would it not be better if she cared for the hens and you have the eggs so there will be eggs and chickens all the way into the future and the man agreed. But I told her always to take

enough eggs for herself and Rosentina before she took any eggs to the restaurant—now it had a sign on cardboard in japanese letters which I believe said 'New Japan'—but it meant she received no wage and had nothing to sell at the market. Instead she tried to get work washing clothes.

Dom Clemente learned to speak a little japanese. Even though he did not like people to be frivolous or laugh a lot in his presence he was a very kind man and would make conversations with the japanese soldiers: he was very strict in his neutrality but he said, these are young men who have been far away from their homes and families for five and six years and they can not go home until their Emperor says they may, and so he would talk politely: did they have wives, children, parents, was it true that *Japão* was a very beautiful country, very green always, with snow on the sacred mountains and cherry blossom petals falling on the graves of their ancestors.

Japanese people do not like to be buried in foreign countries for the sake of their spirits. José understood this, how Dom Clemente gently diminished the will of the men to fight, made them *sabishii*; this was both good and bad, nothing in an occupied country is neither, more a pendulum; I thank Sr. Costa Gomes for the good, he was already dead by the time I understood the bad ...

The japanese sent him and Sr. Duarte (Dom João), Dom Pedro and Dom Artur and José Santa and *Tenente* Liberato to an island north-west of Timor, called Alor, where they starved to death, all but Oliveiro Liberato and Sr. Santa—and Sr. Machado was given the bank to care for, except that the walls were broken down by then and the last money stolen, and Public Works had become Public Wrecks ...

*****

If you wake at midnight, and hear a horse's feet,
Don't go drawing back the blind, or looking in the street,
Them that asks no questions isn't told a lie.
Watch the wall, my darling, while the Gentlemen go by!
Five and twenty ponies
Trotting through the dark—
Brandy for the Parson,
'Baccy for the Clerk;
Laces for a lady, letters for a spy,

And watch the wall, my darling, while the Gentlemen go by!
Rudyard Kipling

*****

Nearly a month passed between my last view of a cable demanding of us and when I saw these strangers that had come here to small small Timor Leste to prevent the Imperial Japanese Army reaching their very large country. The men of the nederlandes infantry were all round Díli, strutting to and fro and not wanting to pay for their food. Some of them were white men, some of them were pale brown with straight black hair and it was said they came from the island of Java but they all acted the same toward us: as if they now owned the town. (They put all the japanese in prison, took all their papers, messed with their belongings; later the japanese reprised for this by treating the dutch consul, Sr. Brower, very badly.) Only between themselves were there differences, the brown men deferred to the white.

One of the dutch officers met Rui Cardoso in the street—Manuel and I were still near Manatuto so I did not see this myself—and expected him to step aside but, of course, he did not, not Rui Cardoso! and when the dutchman did not make way for my *chefe* he just

suddenly swung his arm and struck him across the side of the head and the dutchman fell down in the street! "*Porcaria*!" said Rui Cardoso when he told us the story. Manuel opened his eyes very wide.

"You see it, do you not?" "See what?" "Their plan." "No. What plan do they have?" "Sometimes I despair of you, O Vasco, but you will learn. Why do they come to Díli to protect *their* colony?" "I do not know. It seems a very strange thing to do." "But, *naturalmente*, they do not come for any such reason. They want all of Timor. That is all. Make a nice big war here between the japanese and the *australianos* and our administration will fail under the pressure of such belligerence—and they will say, 'Never mind, we will make a new administration, a dutch administration.' Pah!" He spat the nasty taste out of his mouth.

Since then I have wondered about this: *Coronel* Castilho also believed the dutch wanted to take over, that they had persuaded the australians to be the frontline, as it might be said, the obvious soldiers. On that day, the 17th of december, the british consul, Mr. Ross, told His Excellency he needed a meeting and His Excellency simply asked Dona Cora could they have lunch for four people.

Imagine then his surprise when two military commanders, dutch and australian, came without warning and wrote him a letter to say they would be landing soldiers "to assist the defence" of our country. In vain, His Excellency protested our neutrality. But what *Coronel* Castilho said, and His Excellency asked him to come to his house to consult, along with Sr. Barbosa and the two garrison commanders, Vieira and Costa, was that the demand came from the "Governor General of The Netherlands East Indies" and the Australian Government "concurred"; from this he deducted that Batávia was foremost in the desire to create trouble for us ...

The australian soldiers were mainly out around the aerodrome to the west of the town. Each week, then, there was a flight between Díli and Koepang in a small aeroplane with two engines called a Dragon Rapide; our government leased it from a dutch company. 1940 was the busy year for planes: His Excellency said Japan could make six 'experimental' flights over six months so the dutch said we must have more, one flight a week and you must improve the aerodrome for us, so the australian government said 'us too' and we will land in Díli Bay and you must put buoys (it was the same one-up-man-ship with oil concessions); and everyone waited: what would all these planes *bring?* Waited and waited. Only a few letters and some drums of fuel for aeroplanes.

So then people understood: all these planes were an excuse to fly over and become familiar with Timor from the aerial view! But now the soldiers dug ditches across the run-way of the aerodrome and filled them with explosives.

We were so intensely curious, Manuel and I, that we found an excuse to borrow two of the ponies that pull small carts along the streets, to test the cloths D. Déolinda had made. We walked them out the road past the airfield; of course we did not tell Rui Cardoso this, it was as much as our lives would be worth.

It was evening, the men had sentries and were cooking something which had a rich smell; they were big men, much taller than either of us, but seemed friendly—"How y'goin', mate? Speakee English?" one of them said. I said, just like Mr. Giffard-Jones, "I regret to say that yes, I do. Is it true that you come from Austrália?" (This man made me remember Simpson, I do not know exactly why; abrading perhaps.) "Hey! How about that! A real pommy accent!" (I did not know what a pommy accent was.) "Come on over and meet m'mates"; they did not say their names and they did not let us come too close to what they were cooking ... Next day, I learned they had stolen a pedigree dairy cow, perhaps it was what they were cooking ...

Then they asked me a few questions about the natives in the mountains: was it true that they eat human flesh, was it true that they had 'witch-doctors', were they likely to be friendly ... Poor Manuel, but he did not understand most of what they said ... Then they asked me what languages the mountain-people speak, did they speak portuguese or malay?

I said: “Here they speak tétum, then to the east they speak mambai, then galoli, then makassae, then fatalucu and then you come to Jaco island and they only speak mouse deer there ... ”

“Cripes!” said one man. Then someone asked me what my father did. I wondered why he wanted to know. But I did not feel able to explain about the War of the Two Brothers and what lessons might be learned from it; instead I told a half-lie and said he grew olive trees. One man seemed interested and asked me how hard they were to grow, how did we harvest them—I said we pick the green olives in october, the black ones just before Christmas—but another man said “Can’t abide all that greasy stuff you lot go for, everything dripping in oil.” “B-b-but—do you not fry your food in anything?” “Mutton fat—or a nice spot of bacon fat,” he licked his lips. “And is fat not greasy?” “Nothing like the same, mate.”

In a little while, we left to return to where we had tethered the ponies, we were very trusting then, but when we had stepped behind the trees I whispered to Manuel to go back to the horses making much noise, as though it was two people walking, and I remained where I was, very quietly, and listened ... It is strange, no one took much care that we left or that they would speak about us—they talked about eating, but then someone said “I didn’t know there’s a language called mouse deer” and someone else said “Don’t be a bloody nong! He was only taking the mickey.” All australian conversations were like this, hard to understand, and I wondered if His Excellency understood exactly what they wanted to do when they disembarked from their ship.

And another man said, more senior perhaps, “Ye-ah, and mind what you say in front of that little dago runt ... ” I slipped away in silence; “little dago runt” is not a polite thing to say about anybody, nor especially when you are a guest in their country and stealing their cows.

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Awa to miru
Awaji no shima no
aware sae
Nokoru kumanaku
sumeru yo no tsuki
Murasaki Shikibu

******

This poem is about exile in a far island, which by its beauties can at last heal that sorrow. Each year the *nipônicos* celebrated their Emperor’s birthday on the 29th of april and they would always have fireworks, food, music, and they would invite people to their party and there people would learn to drink rice-wine called *sake* and there would be little gifts; then there was the english King’s birthday and the dutch Queen’s birthday but their community did not make much, certainly no party, then there were all our festivals for the saints, *Páscoa*, *Natal*, *Pentecostes* ... *festas* and *férias* ... the day of the republic ... In 1941 I received an invitation to the japanese party but I was away in the hills so it was easy to say, politely, I could not come; but I admit my cowardice, I did not know how to acquit myself in japanese protocol, and there was Rui Cardoso.

Next year, I received an invitation again, but with japanese soldiers now in our country against our wishes I knew I could not attend: I said simply I was neutral but that it was kind of them to remember me; in the hardest way I had to learn diplomacy. (It did not matter; the party was not held because the consul was called home.)

But, several months after my declination, I received a message from a japanese *coronel* in Díli, he must see me with some urgence. Rui Cardoso shrugged. “Go, Tomasinho, let it not be said that I stood between you and your curiosity. And do not complain if you get hurt.” (At that time, I lived in the belief my uncle was in Japan; I did not know he was already in Canada

... I do not know if I would have done anything, differently, if I had known this.)

This japanese *coronel* whose name I think was Hikidiji, I am not sure, sat at a desk, I will not say 'his' desk because it was really Sr. Rosário's desk, and he said he heard I spoke english and would I look at some words in english. The piece of paper he showed me had a surrender note on it, the consul would give it to Mr. Ross who would take it up to the mountains to give to the australian soldiers. I do not remember all the words but I asked this man, who was very narrow and mean about the head, 'weaselly' in english, what would happen to the men when they surrendered. (The letter said they would have "bread meat and fresh vegetable"—but there was very little of these in Díli and the japanese only brought rice and dried-fish with them.)

He simply sat there and looked at me in silence. I did not know then this is what japanese people do when they do not wish to answer a question and I did not know what else to do, except wait. The silence went on and on. He expected me to apologise for my impertinent question, to speak, but I did not know it was my turn to speak—that his silence was his answer—so I sat there and did not speak. Suddenly, he leaped up, pulled out his sword and held it at my neck. Only now, I understand why—that I had caused him a dishonour, that I had shamed him into doing something.

But I was terrified! I thought he was going to cut my head off!—*Mamá*, forgive me for not writing more often, *Papá*, *desculpe-me* that I did not listen when you wished to talk about your book—I tried to say his letter was excellent, of course it was not ... very good, very good, your excellency ... at last, he withdrew his sword and sat down, he seemed to lose interest in me, let me leave, after a deep bow ...

And he sent Mr. Ross with this note but the australian commander said no, I do not know about the dutch if they saw it; the next month he was sent out again and again they said no but this time he did not return; the japanese respected their enemies for saying no, they will never surrender, but, for his non-return, they killed his two little 'house-boys', I think they were about twelve, then the emperor's men prepared to go to the mountains to fight.

They bombed all the towns where they thought there were soldiers camped and where they believed the natives had been influenced to hate all japanese people or that the priests or *chefes de posto* were now convinced that the japanese were cowards ... They bombed Maubisse, Aileu, Ermera, Bobonaro, Balibó, Mape, Same, Beco, Hatudo ...

That day I went to D. Déolinda; the english drink tea so as to keep 'a stiff upper lip', I thought her tea might help me to stop shaking. But when she saw me she said immediately "Dom Tomás, what has happened!" I thought I must look ghost-white, a spectre, a very shaming thing, all the english boys in the books at Mr. Beveridge's showed no fear, they would say "Come on now, chaps, after me. We'll teach those dirty chinks a lesson they'll never forget!" (they never explained why they were dirty: it is true that Mr. Wang's restaurant was not so clean but he, himself, was most fastidious, with a clean white shirt every day, and english boys only have a bath once a week and do not mind if their socks smell ...) "I h-had a bit of a fright" ... She looked surprised at my explanation. "But your neck—it is all over blood!"

It was my wish that D. Déolinda and Rosentina should be safe somewhere and I asked Sra. Duarte if they might go with her and her three daughters to Viqueque; the Governor also had sent his three daughters first to Manatuto, then there. It was embarrassing for me to ask her anything, not when I had avoided her, and she too was embarrassed but by my request. And D. Déolinda, if she had known of it, would have been angry with me, and embarrassed equally.

I see now what a fool I was. Sra. Duarte did not know what to say to me, only "I really can not do as you ask, Sr. Vasconcelos. With our baggage and ourselves and our maid, our car will be crowded. Why do you not ask Sr. Cardoso?"

"But he is in Lautém. I am very worried."

"We are all worried," she said sharply. "To have my daughters here—and these—*animals*

in our town—"

"Could not the car return to take more people?"

"No. We need the car."

I must confess—God forgive me—I became angry with her and said, "Then I hope the japanese will come to Viqueque—"

"Oh no, please do not say that! I am so sorry—but, really, we can not take—this lady—with us." I did not press the matter any further; I know, now, I should have pressed it, persuaded D. Déolinda to take Rosentina to Viqueque because the women there *were* left unmolested and later when they returned safe to Liquiçá—but Sra. Duarte and I had embarrassed each other too much.

Instead, I began another plan: I would ask for them to go on a boat to Austrália. But in the mean-time I had to return to Rui Cardoso and work and I asked him if he thought it might be safer if she were to return to her village in the western mountains; I was surprised that I had not thought of this idea before now. He told me simply not to be a fool, did I want her killed? "Of course not! But why would that be more dangerous than living in Díli when there are thousands of japanese soldiers everywhere here?"

I thought he was not going to answer. Then he said slowly: "Do you not know what the *neerlandês* were busy doing all through—these last decades?" "No." "Do you know why the australians go round saying 'these dutch are very efficient—these portos are hopeless'?" "No. Do they say that?"

He spat, sat considering follies. "If you have a little village here, a little village there, another one over the hill ... that is natural, that is human ... but what if you say: that is not *efficient*? So! You move the people from this little village, that little village, put them all together in one large village right beside the road. You come, in your car, you stop, do what your duties are—you move on, another large village with everyone pushed together like pigs on a farm. You drive on—"

"I think I understand."

"Do people thank you for driving by with such efficiency—when their ancestors are outraged, when they are forced to live side by side with those they do not wish to live beside, old warriors, old enemies, old feuds."

"You would be angry, unhappy ... but I do not see what this has to do with Sra. Coelho's village."

Rui Cardoso turned his eyes up to heaven. "Give me patience, Lord." Then he turned back to me. "What happens if the dutch surrender in their colonies," (they did this only days after this conversation) "and their *indígenas* know they have gone over the border and the japanese, not understanding history, but quick to see resentment in their faces, say, *now* you may kill your white masters—"

"They might come across the border?"

"The Great Vasco astonishes his audience with the grasp of his mind." He clapped. Manuel smiled and did not try to understand.

The atoni people are great warriors, every timorese tribe knows that, and would like them to stay peaceably in their villages; for the dutch colonial officials to make them secretly angry is as foolish as a little boy poking a stick in a wasp-nest. But I was not convinced, even so, because they did not have any guns. We did not know that the japanese would give them dutch rifles left behind; and worse, permission to use a more terrible weapon. Fire.

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Digamos aos nossos vizinhos que o território português não é distinto da Espanha, e com isto, longe de menosprezarmos o nosso patriotismo, tê-lo-emos exaltado, mostrando que o vínculo nacional é tão forte que não tivemos necessidade de encontrar um território

à parte, para vivermos uma vida independente.

Amorim Girão 1915

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This is to suggest that we must share a land always with Spain but this does not take away the fact we are distinct from Spain; just as Timor is two different peoples on one piece of land for always; distinct in some ways and similar in others.

Once, we did go back to the border. Rui Cardoso said he had the wish to see *Padre* Mário one more time. On the way, when we were stopped to draw water from a stream, two australian soldiers came out of the bushes at the road-edge and demanded that Rui Cardoso let them use his truck. They had guns. But my *chefe* expanded his chest, strode toward them. "The only way," he boomed, "that you will take my truck is to shoot me! *Ora*! Go on then, shoot me!" While they were trying to decide what to do he simply walked back to his truck, stood upon the running-board and said to me "Drive!".

By then, the australian soldiers were everywhere in the western hills; they had platoon-headquarters at Bobonaro and Atsabe and Maliana and Cailaco and Bazartete and other places ... Their plan, at first, was to link with their comrades in dutch Timor but then, the dutch and the australians in Koepang all surrendered, so they changed their plans and gradually began to move southward, to Maubisse, Ainaro, Suai ... And still the japanese hesitated to come after them.

The japanese repaired the aerodrome in Díli first. Many of their soldiers only had long sticks, no rifles, and they did such work like shovelling and grading. It was very strange to see them because some of them had different shoes which had a special compartment for their big toe; we thought it might mean japanese people had different toes to other people—but then, when I saw them with no shoes, their toes looked much the same as my own. Still, they walked in a different way, not lifting their feet but just sort of dragging them across the surface of the ground.

José said this was to conserve energy because some of these men had been fighting already for five or six years and they were very tired—and also they had diseases like malaria and a fever that we had not seen which makes the blood drip out of people's skin, and another fever which they called *sodoku* which I am not sure how to translate into english but which was said to have been because the soldiers got bitten by rats: and many rats came with their ships and came on shore in Díli and Baucau.

Yet, it was strange, these soldiers seemed to be afraid of the mountains, I am not sure why, they liked to go from city to city or the jungles where they were hard to find—but Timor was different, here there were open lands with scattered trees and as the wet season finished and the grass started to turn brown they were suspicious of the mountains; they had never experienced a land quite like this; it was unlike Japan, Manchuria, China, Hong-Kong ...

They spread themselves along the coast a little but only made small forays into the mountains. But all the time the fear grew, that the australians were coming and going, freely, in the mountains and teaching the villagers to hate them.

When we went to see *Pe*. Mário he asked me if I would walk in the village as the *regulo* or chief had a goat with a broken leg. This was worrying, I did not believe I could cure broken bones, just touching. But I went. The small brown and white goat was tethered to a tree; she put her hoof to the ground and took a few steps, which was hopeful. While I was there, kneeling down by the little animal, an australian suddenly came from the trees and stood near-by. "How you goin', mate." He was very cheerful and wanted to talk but I asked him to be quiet for a while.

Then the little goat said she was cured and skipped to the end of her tether. I said I should walk up and tell the chief, I could see him making his slow way down the hill, and I told him that she seemed well now. We turned around—and the australian and the goat were gone!

The japanese brought in an important man to inspire their soldiers to go in to the hills; this man they said had been in Singapura when the british surrendered but there were new arrivals nearly every month through 1942 so the soldiers had come here from different countries; this man was full of 'swagger' and led some troops into the hills just out of Díli. Instead of no confidence he had too much and was immediately shot by the australians; this inhibited his men about going away from Díli and it was not until august that most began to leave Díli in columns. This was the beginning of the real misery for the timorese tribes, the farmers and herders and women.

They brought this man back to the capital and got his bones ready, by boiling him in a drum, before taking each joint apart and drying the bones before wrapping them in silk to return to Japan. All the soldiers did not mind to die for their emperor, it was the most glorious thing they could do in life, but they wished to be returned to their ancestral land should they die so their bodies were burned and a little container of ash was sent back to their families or, if this was not possible, a photo might be sent or a little scroll.

Their bodies were burned on a pyre near the aerodrome, sometimes the smoke rolled across the town, black and greasy and filled with the smell of roasting meat. But this man could not be left un-avenged and so they took a *deportado*, Dom Fernando Martins, and tied him behind a horse and beat the horse until it galloped wildly across the hills. Dom Fernando was all smashed to pieces and the horse was no more good for riding, it was so terrified of everything.

It was known another *deportado* suffered in this way very much, the japanese saying he had helped the australian soldiers: Dom Ramos Graça had his chest cut open so they could pull out his heart, his hands and his feet cut off, and he was left to bleed to death ... Other people said his head was also cut off but I think that was *Cabo* Baptista at Fatu-Lulic who was tortured and killed like that, and his wife and children taken away across the border to Atambua ...

(Some of the *deportados* were sent to Timor after the army mutiny in 1931, some were criminals because there is no hanging—but many, most, were anarchists; they did not believe in any government. Mostly they married timorese women because the government believed that the life of the clans was so immersed in tradition not even an anarchist could change it. They joined the australians, not because they believed in whatever kind of government was in Austrália, but for adventure, because they were bored ... Rui Cardoso believed in orderly government but he criticised all governments because they were afraid of ideas and he said a people without imagination and ideas might as well be cows ...)

Now, when I think about all this, I realise we do not feel that same way about our deaths, our bones, we do not mind to leave our bodies in far places, very careless I suppose, but it is the soul that matters. I think japanese people do not believe, in the same way, that they have a soul and that heaven is waiting ... Sometimes, when I have nothing else to do, I try to think what it would be like to live with different beliefs: most japanese people have a religion called Shinto which has two million, or it might be, ten million, gods, I forget; so many that no one can know all their names and so it is very hard to worship them, only to remember that they are all around Japan keeping it safe. Every time, they say, that someone wants to take their country from them the ten million gods come to their rescue and keep them safe. But this is not the same as having a soul and needing to worry about purgatory and hell.

But I must go back and tell you about my encounter with an australian *coronel*; I regret that I can not make this story perfectly neat and chronological, each time I sit down I intend to do so and then, other thoughts intervene and I hop here and there as a *canguru* is said to hop about.

It may seem strange when I say we continued with our work but that is the case. Rui Cardoso said simply "Who pays you?" "The government." "Then you must work for the government." We continued to listen to broadcasts on the wireless but it grew harder to obtain fuel for the truck so we did few long journeys, not because Rui Cardoso was afraid of anyone

but because there was not always petroleum ...

Some of the *gasolina* is imported in drums, some of it comes from the oil well at Aliambata where the oil bubbles to the surface and is scooped out by a big ladle into drums. In some places the villagers use, in their lamps, what they call *mina-rai* which is earth so saturated with oil that it will burn a-while. In other places they skim the oil where it simply floats upon the surface of streams, and they use pig-fat or buffalo-fat, but they sell the bees-wax in the market when they find it because it brings a good price. Richer people use paraffin oil. (There is one place where gas burns under the ground, sending flames and smoke up through the crevices ...)

I heard that the australians had their 'hospital' and headquarters in the south now. When we were near there, I asked Rui Cardoso for permission to go and ask for help for D. Déolinda. He was unhappy about this. I went into the thatched hut where the villagers said was the 'big man'—I think his name was *Coronel* Spence or Spencer—and he was startled to find me there while he was typing letters. He recovered his composure. "How did you get in?" "Through the door." I think, really, he meant how did I get past the sentry but I had not seen a sentry.

Then he said, "Have you come to help us?"

Now, when I was at the most crucial point, I began to stutter. If only my tongue would behave itself! But I managed to tell him I had come to ask a favour, not for me, but for two women and I took a photo of D. Déolinda and Rosentina from my pocket. Would he help me to get them safely to Austrália? What did *I* know about boats? He looked at me with very sharp critical eyes. Only that they came by night to the south coast, I said.

It was a very beautiful photo of them, though a little creased from my pocket, they always look beautiful in photos, and I was sure he would be sympathetic as soon as he saw them. He looked at it some moments then he said, "No chance of getting the dame in to Australia—the girl, hmmm ... your daughter?" He looked up.

"N-n-no—they are friends." Did he think I might have become a father when I was only eight years old? or did I, it was many days since I had looked in a mirror, now look much older than my true years?

"If you could arrange with a porto woman—don't know, say her maid or something—might be a small chance. But I can't offer better than that. Where did you learn English? Been to London?"

"I learned it in Portugal."

I did not particularly like his manner. Why no chance for D. Déolinda? Why did he wish to separate them? I know now that I was very ignorant and had never even heard of what they call the 'white australia policy' which does not allow black people to come to Austrália.

But just then there was a commotion outside, voices were raised. Shouts. "What the dickens!" He stood up and went to look out. I leaned briefly over his letter, my eyes are sharp, and looked to see what he was writing. His letter was saying that some of the men were of such 'bad character' that they were 'useless' as soldiers but because he had no means of punishment they must be sent back to their homes; those might not be the exact words but I wondered what they had done: and to be safe at home. Merely a goat had run through where some ponies were tethered and created a 'disturbance'. He turned back to me and said, "Well, if you change your mind—let me know. I could do with a likely lad like yourself ... " He seemed to have forgotten all about D. Déolinda.

So I began to walk back to where Manuel and my *chefe* had been working some distance away to the north-east. But Manuel met me on the path, he was 'in a state', all dishevelled and crying. He grabbed me by the hand and we went running over the rough ground because he could not speak with any coherence and sense.

We ran nearly two kilometres like that—to where Rui Cardoso was lying in the dust, covered with blood. I kneeled down, touched him. He was dead.

*****

An australian soldier came upon us, as he came down the track.

"Dead?" He looked closer. "Boongs must've got him."

"B-but he has been shot with—with a machine-gun."

He came closer. "So he has. Japs then."

We looked around with our blurred eyes. The man was laconic: "Haven't seen any japs around and I think I would've. Noisy little buggers. Must've been your lot got him by accident."

'Must've been your lot got him by accident'. Oh no, people might wish that Rui Cardoso would retire, go away and die in sloth in Figueira de Foz, he was a grit on the skin—but kill him? No! Never! I did not say this out loud yet the thought seemed to come to him too. But he looked sufficiently perplexed by it all that I can not believe he was in any way responsible.

He said suddenly: "The dutch! That's who shot him. Don't trust 'em an inch. Couldn't hit a bull's-eye at two yards—not that you'd know it to hear 'em skiting!"

But there was nothing he could do for us. Manuel took Rui Cardoso's legs, I lifted him from under his arms, and we carried him across the hills. He was very hard to carry. We could not speak a word and the tears ran down our faces all the way. We reached the truck, exhausted, and I saw immediately someone had tried to prise off the lock he now kept on the wire cage. "Look!" All the way back I had asked myself: why? why would anyone shoot Rui Cardoso?

He had shown some of the australian soldiers a poem he had collected in Darwin, it was not a very polite one—I found his copy on a scrubbing-sheet still in his pocket: the verses are like this—

The bloody town's a bloody cuss,
No bloody trams, no bloody bus,
Nobody cares for bloody us,
So bloody, bloody, bloody.

The bloody roads are bloody bad,
The bloody folks are bloody mad,
They even say "You bloody cad!"
So bloody, bloody, bloody.

(I have learned that bloody is a swear-word, otherwise I would think it a place full of murders ...) But now I wondered if he had tried to stop someone breaking in to his truck and they had shot him—but, if so, why had they carried him all that distance across the hills; Rui Cardoso had spoken of leaving the truck, working only on dams within São Domingos but, somehow, he could not find the means to restrict himself ... now I wished he had ...

I removed his shirt carefully, I thought it might be 'evidence', and packed it in a paper. We lifted him in to the front seat and we drove away but we could not drive far because someone had drained the *gasolina*. So what should we do? We decided to bury him there. We spent hours digging in the hard earth, yet in the sweat and tiredness was a manner of dispensation. We laid twigs and branches below him, round him, above him so that he was not touching the soil, then a piece of canvas, then soil, then we lashed two pieces of branch together and put it in the earth.

Should we say a prayer for him? It seems such a simple question—yet we could not decide. This might be our state of mind but, even with Rui Cardoso dead and buried, we still, in some strange way, deferred to him: it was as though we waited for him to shout at us and when the world stayed silent, only the whisper of a little wind in the trees around us, we were helpless, without bearings.

For months after that terrible day I still woke each morning, half-expecting to hear my *chefe's* great voice waking the birds ...

I know that if he could choose he might rather die like that; not slow and soft and foolish, but I can not accept him as dead, not like that, not when I was not there.

Within a few days I managed to find enough petroleum to move the truck and we used it for one more task: it seemed in those days, I know now this is naive, that if we could put distance between the two groups of soldiers then the village people would be safe. Manuel and I, when we had seen the australians move on southward, we took the last of the dynamite from the wire cage and we set it in a massif hill-side and we blew it to make it seem a giant land-slide had come down, completely blocking the road so the japanese column could not pass through, with trucks, that day ...

The only thing we managed was to create an enduring story of an awful monster within the mountain: land-slides are frequent in the rains but not now, not in the *bailoro*, the dry season, so that people nearby had to seek in their stories for a different explanation ...

Then I took Manuel back to his family, to see that they were safe, that they would know he was safe; I wanted him to remain there, with them all, while I walked to Díli to see Sr. Resende; already I had sent him a message about Rui Cardoso but he might not have received it, things were chaos, and I needed to ask him how should I organise my work now.

And while I was away Manuel went to the priest in Manatuto, *Pe*. Duarte, because he felt deep guilt that he had not kept his *chefe* safe ... and the priest said he should go and help the australian soldiers, perhaps now he was in the manner of a 'likely lad', and he did not like to disobey what the church said.

Disaster is like that: it comes when you are not prepared in your mind. It might be that Manuel could not explain the doubts and confusions in our minds over Rui Cardoso's death, that Manuel needed time, in peace, with his family, not to forget but to forgive himself; but the *padre* wished to do everything to fight against japanese fascism, later he went to Austrália on a secret ship, and he did not approve of Rui Cardoso whom he felt was an heretic. It was true he did not approve of many priests, only those like *Pe*. Mário who spent his time in his garden and *Pe*. António who spent his time with his ancient manuscripts; I might say the feeling was mutual—except that now Rui Cardoso was dead and *Padre* Duarte was not.

But I still believe he should not have sent Manuel when he was so unsettled in his mind. Manuel went obediently and he found the australians wanted more ponies so he found ponies in the different villages for them and at night he slipped in and took the ponies away and re-sold them and he did this over and over, to prove to himself that he truly belonged to the tradition of secret warriors and just in case it was the *australianos* who had shot his *chefe*, and at last they caught him at his subterfuge and they shot him for making fools of them.

*****

Nove casas,
duas ruas,
ao meio das ruas
um largo,
ao meio do largo
um poço de água fria.

Tudo isto tão parado
e o céu tão baixo
que quando alguém grita para longe
um nome familiar
se assustam pombos bravos
e acordam ecos no descampado.

Manuel da Fonseca

*****

D. Déolinda's village did not have nine houses and two streets—I think six houses and

some paths; nor was there anyone to shout a familiar name, anyone to frighten the pigeons, anyone to awake echoes in the countryside; long before I reached there I felt nervous and apprehensive, so much silence, so many burned places; the coffee plantations were already showing signs of neglect and fires had burned away in to their heart; the most valuable *arábica* trees, the less valuable *robusta*, the new liberian trees, all scorched; tea bushes, rubber, cacao; houses were mere blackened poles or walls without roofs.

Her village was on a slope, all around were great mountains, Mt. Maúlo, Mt. Ramelau, the Cordilheiro, swimming in dust and smoke—I *think* Mt. Ramelau is the highest mountain I have ever seen, perhaps Mt. Cano in Cabo Verde, but I had only a glimpse ... I did not like the way the crows circled, and even before I came to the end of the path the smell was on the wind ...

Everywhere people lay dead, sometimes they had been be-headed or stabbed or burned, dead for weeks and torn away with beaks and teeth and claws ... I walked all around, very slowly and carefully, I counted, I tried to memorise: so many men, so many women, children, babies ... I knew D. Déolinda had neither parents nor grand-parents but certainly she had aunts, uncles, cousins, cousin-brothers, cousin-sisters ... And now they were all dead unless some of them had managed to escape away into the thickets of bamboo and tamarinds in the mountains ...

Was it the people who had crossed the border from dutch Timor, fired to wildness by the desire for revenge, as Rui Cardoso had implied? But the dutch, I thought, were now down near Suai and the south coast, waiting to be evacuated—so was that the reason? They could not wreak whatever they wished on the dutch officials so they had run *amok* in the villages near the border ...

Now I sat down wearily and cried for Dona Déolinda that she should be alone in the world, only her daughter.

But what could I do? Not bury them, yet I did not like them left like that, bloated and dishevelled and carrion. I could not move them, the bodies would come apart, even if I could nerve myself to touch them. I merely covered them with branches, leaves, thatch. Were they christians in this hamlet? It seems strange but I did not know. There was no church here but then it was a small place. But I knew the good God would take care of their souls. If he did not wish to care for their bodies that was the littlest he could do for them ...

When they wore out, I discarded my boots; now I walked barefooted and my feet were getting tough; even so, I cut myself on a stake, between my toes, on my long walk back. To try to take my mind off the horror behind me, the paining of my foot, I began a plan that someday I would buy this land, in her name: I would make a garden.

At the highest part I would plant cherries, almonds, apples, pears; further down I would grow olives, cork trees, figs, pomegranates; down in the humid valley I would grow bananas, pineapples, *mamões*, passion-fruits, brasil nut-trees, and winding through the trees, vines *enforcado* ... and there would be monkeys playing, spotted pigs, hens with fine chickens, ducks, deer ... geese ...

You can not know how much comfort my ‘garden’ has given me in the years since. On days of utter misery I try to picture myself among the trees planting something new, a persimmon tree, a carob tree, a quanabana; how carefully I will dig the places for them, how fragrant the blossom of my oranges and limes ... Then there would be *toronjas*, *goiabas*, *abacates* ... Was it my hunger or my sorrow I was feeding ...

Dona Déolinda accepted my news in her calm reserved way and did not wish to talk on it (I know now she had known already, she too could hear the whispers of the winds, but did not fully comprehend: not all, *not all!*)—instead she took pity on my infected foot and insisted on making a poultice of sticky rice and tying it carefully around; I was almost glad of my pain, that it brought a tender touch, so brief, yes, but she did not like to touch men at all. My foot took several weeks to heal.

*****

I see how much I have left aside so I will return from near the end of 1942 to near the beginning. I thought I knew who was Rosentina's father, even though I could never ask D. Déolinda, I did not have the right to ask such personal questions. But then, in that february, I heard he had a monkey which he teased, perhaps more than teased and I thought I would ask him if I could buy the monkey or he might even give it to me if he had tired of being an owner of a monkey.

He rented a house with two other men. (I will, as they all still live in Díli, call them X, Y and Z); one of them had previously been married but his wife had returned to Portugal, for some reason; the other man was a widower, but X had never married (I know to call him X makes him sound dramatic when he was not; or, perhaps?, all lives are dramatic). He said to me when I came that night, the clouds had cleared after rain, "Ah, the servant of Mad Cardoso ... and what can I do for you?"

"I wondered if you would like to sell—or give—me your monkey?"

"Ah, you have plans to enter the monkey business?" He had a cynical manner of speech which was disconcerting.

"I might," I said.

"Very well. Come and see the beast." The other men were inside the house but he took me through to a small court-yard where the big male monkey was chained to a perch. He had a leather strap tied round his lower abdomen from which a light chain attached him to the post. The leather was tight and had removed the fur. The look he gave us was not pleasant; 'you!' it said.

"Would you mind to stand here ... I will see him." I approached and stood about a metre from him and spoke softly. The monkey listened then he bared his front to me and touched the leather with one paw.

"Can I unbuckle it?"

"Don't let him go or I'll charge you double price." He laughed at that.

The leather was stiff and hard to remove but the monkey stayed still, then he climbed on to my shoulder and I stroked him a little while, before walking back with him to the doorway.

"What do you mean, he is uncomfortable?" X called out to the others: "Come and tell Vasconcelos this is a perfectly healthy monkey and we will not let him depart for a *centavo* less than ... what would you say is a good price?" He waggled his eyebrows at the other men and Y said, "An hundred *patacas* then." The others laughed. This was much more than I earned in a month.

"Well, well, come inside and we will bargain. Coffee?" He called the 'house-boy' who was about eleven. "Carlos, four cups and cake. Be quick now."

"So Vasconcelos," X sat back, relaxed in a cane chair. "We hear you have taken our *africana*, our leaving as you might say; a bit haggish now, would not you say—or do you prefer old women?"

"I do not understand what you are talking about ... "

"They say Cardoso only gets the dolts—but of course you do know what I'm talking about—the black—*prostituta* is too strong, shall we say, available but unwise ... Come now, you know all about her and the child, pretty girl would not you say, nicely ripe in another year or two—"

"You should not speak like that about women."

"Come now, sit down." He poured four small brandies and handed me one as we waited for the coffee. "We are all men of the world. We all enjoyed your good Déolinda when she was fresh and young, how long ago now," he turned to the others, "only a child herself then—like all the *camponesas*, wishing for a white husband—oh, I do not object to dreams, Vasconcelos, but she was always going to be disappointed—hair like a bush, complexion like a mud-wallow ... We said Come! and she was here with her eyes all lit up. She went away with her legs in a bother but there—first time, hard work." He drained his glass. "We didn't see her again for—" He appealed to the others. "A month, two months ... and then she came with

some story, a baby, the tragedy in her eyes and Sra. Pinto putting her out of the house ... so sad ... but once they start ... ”

“How old was she?” I had wanted to know what happened to her; now I felt a deep repugnance within myself for listening, or was it that I did not want them to know what was inside me?

“Fourteen? Thirteen? *Talvez.* Sweet meat ... ”

I stood up. I did not wish to stay any longer. “Stay,” said Z calmly. “The coffee is coming. Kick that boy later.” I stood there with the monkey still perched on my shoulder, what should I do about him.

There was a faint sound in the air, growing stronger. The others turned and listened too. The sky was black but clear, the stars in points. The aircrafts came in from the sea, the north-east, a long sweep, then a whine and a tremendous Boom! I will never forget the first time I heard a bomb explode—and then, as the planes swept away the bombs decreased in sound till they became a pug! pug! a buffalo lifting its feet in a wet field, then the next line of planes dropped their *bombas* but mostly in the sea; my first thought was not *who* was bombing us but the sheer astonishment that we were being bombed at all! Were we not a neutral country? and such a little country?

The other men had thrown themselves down on the floor while I continued to stand there not knowing what to do, whether to leave the house, go into the yard ... How strange—the other men crossed themselves, began to mumble prayers to the Blessèd Virgin, and I stood there, not because I was brave but because I did not know what to do ... I think I can not be a good person because I did not even think of praying myself. All I thought was that they had lost their monkey. I do not know where he went.

There were other sounds, a screaming, a yelling, the sound of branches falling, the sharp roar of a car going east. I simply walked back to my quarters, my mind full of things.

Before dawn, japanese soldiers began to come ashore and they walked straight into the australian soldiers round the aerodrome. His Excellency tried to say “We are a neutral country” and the japanese commander said—whatever the words are in japanese—“that is a lie, you have all these foreign soldiers here.”

And then they ran wild through Díli, looting houses and shops, even taking the food off people’s plates and dishes, for nearly three days they behaved like that. His Excellency sent message after message through the japanese consul, and went himself, but it was not until nearly a week went by that the soldiers began to behave better.

(Yet, if they wished Timor itself, as territory, would they not have come secretly to unnoticed shores, not garrisoned, not watched, and entrenched themselves in darkness? Rui Cardoso thought so.)

Before that dawn he came pounding on the door. He had me hawled out and in to the truck and was shouting for Manuel to wake up before my eyes were open. And then driving furiously. Why? After some kilometres he stopped the truck, got down, told us to get down, then—he hit us both on the head! I was angry. Manuel was astonished. What had he done wrong? And Rui Cardoso said, no, he shouted it so loud: “Ai! Sá de Bandeira! Dom Boaventura! Do not you dare! You clowns! You idiots! I want you alive! *It is not your war! Do you understand!*” He quieted a little but his face stayed a thunder-cloud as we then drove on toward Baucau.

But we came to Laleia and there were several cars there, luggage piled on the running-boards and women and children crowded inside—and below them ran the Laleia River, not deep, but running fast with logs and branches carried on its brown bosom. People were tying ropes to the cars so they could all cross safely together. But Rui Cardoso watched and then he shrugged, not today, and we turned south and made our way towards Cairui; near there he had some olive trees growing and he said he would look at them. The rains had cut away the river bank and several trees had toppled down but most of them were growing well, their silver-grey leaves washed clean ... The war had begun.

*****

I should start by saying, I think, not least because I must write mainly with a sour and angry pen, that soon after the japanese arrived they passed over gifts of medicines, mainly quinine, also bandages, even sugar for syrups and medicines for animals; each time new troops arrived throughout that year they brought gifts—and sometimes apologies—but they said, the *australianos* and the hollanders were here and they had declared war on Japan so Japan had no choice but to come here and fight them ... Yes, I understand that excuse—but it does not absolve them from blame for stealing from people's houses, their precious possessions, nor can I forgive the way they treated many of the simple people in the mountains who asked for nothing more than to be left alone.

(When they gave Dr. Carvalho the medicines for the hospital he could not read the labels and had to ask the vice-consul, Sr. Suzuki, to translate them for him; Sr. Suzuki had been to Brasil where he found his wife so he understood better; but he did not like to be 'the man in the middle', yet that was his fate as consuls came and went home again or like Sr. Hosokawa, died.)

The japanese said "Ásia for the asians" but this meant nothing to the mountain-people; they did not know what Ásia was, even that they might live in it, that it might be a place where yellow people rather than white people ruled brown people. They were suspicious, even hostile. So the japanese changed this to "Throw out all the white people" but this did not solve their problems. When people have been marrying each other for four hundred years—how can you throw out your white ancestors?—only when the japanese inadvertently discovered the old tribal feuds, resurrected them, were they successful in stirring people to fight for them.

The arriving soldiers did not really listen to the japanese who had lived here for years and acquired some knowledge of the people, such as Yoshitaro Suzuki, only to finish the war swiftly and return home, that was their aim. (It is true that almost all the japanese who came here had military rank, we expected that, even when they worked as shipping-clerks; the australians were the same: Mr. Ross and Mr. Whittaker were intelligence officers in the Royal Australian Navy, I know, even though they were here to run the flying-boat service for the brief time it passed, and to be the british consulate. Only Mr. Brower and the swiss surveyor, Mr. Keller, that worked with the dutch to make the aerial maps and left on a dutch boat late that year, were more interested in money and adventure; when Mr. Brower and his wife left for Austrália people said he had not paid his debts.)

The old men who could remember back to the frequent tribal wars of the nineteenth century—and the campaigns waged by governors like Sr. José da Silva—feel a deep regret that they can no longer prove they are great warriors, brave men, leaders whose hearts beat at the great *Tam-Tam!* of the war-drums, the harsh gathering-call of the *hohole*, whose feet can move with the stealth of the immemorial past. Fearless! With the hearts of soaring eagles! What is life for a man merely tending buffalo, watching the harvest sprout, trotting to market with baskets or water-pots? A man might as well be dead!

But then there were the old women who remembered the fear, the mourning, they were glad such days were gone for ever—and they were angry that these new warriors, white and yellow, had stirred these smouldering passions—that their sons and grand-sons would drop everything, their duties, their minding of the animals, to follow the soldiers; their young and innocent eyes glistening with the anticipation that they might be able to cradle a great and powerful gun in their arms—a Bren-gun, an Akahasi, a Vickers ... that the power of the weapon would enter their bodies, give them secret strength, the hearts of lions ...

The australians said to the villagers "we have come to make you free"; they began to say that even before anyone had seen a japanese soldier and so people misunderstood. So! These great tall men, six feet tall and more, some of them, had come to chase away the portuguese and rule in their place—they must be able to rule well—so large and strong-looking: they would make the people of the villages equally large and strong—and rich, yes, they must be rich to have such powerful new-looking weapons—and when they began passing out silver

shillings later, people imagined Austrália as a land full of silver shillings to be spread so easily. There would be no more taxes! At last they would live in paradise! People, always resisting to pay the head-tax, now grew even more obstinate.

They had given their sons to help these strangers, they had given them meals, allowed them to borrow ponies and eat their chickens and goats—and now, how dare we come along and ask them for money! And then came the japanese asking for food, asking for boys to go with them to guide them through the mysterious mountains—saying, they had no silver, they would burn down the houses, the crops, if people did not stop feeding and hiding the "foreign devils"—and still we demanded tax as always, to repair the roads and bridges and telephone-lines that these foreign soldiers destroyed faster than we could fix ... And the natives from dutch Timor and the dutch troops with their java orderlies and privates demanding too.

The confusion that people had in their minds! At last some people rose in revolt—but such a confused revolt with old tribal enmities! Greeds! Fears! The never-buried hope that they might be able to extend their tribal boundaries while everyone else was preoccupied with different wars.

In the 1930s the Timor Survey began work to survey and set up the *Organização do Cadastro* which would register all land ownership in the country; there would be both individual and collective titles to land, depending on whether they were owned by a person or a company or a tribe ... It would be registered with the office in Díli but people did not necessarily want a written title themselves, they distrusted things written on pieces of paper if they could not read them; instead they wanted an announcement made in front of all the people and maybe their *liurai* or *chefe de suco*, then it was a true title. Some places were clear, in others where people-numbers had increased or there had always been confusion or dispute, then there were problems ... and there was not enough money and now, a war, so that some remained un-resolved, still ...

And then there was something more, more complex, which I will try to explain: in the old days the island was a kingdom named Ue-hale which sometimes had one great king who ruled over vassal kings and sometimes two kings when there were disputes over the succession of kings and when this happened people rather than take clear sides used a secret unspoken way of seeing themselves because knowledge is dissipated if spoken out loud, lost in the wind, whereas it grows more powerful if known in secret ... They were the people of the sun-set and the people of the sun-rise and the kingdom was sometimes seen as being divided by an unmentioned line that ran south from about Manatuto.

But gradually the power of the kings was challenged by two new families, the Hornais and the Costas, who had acquired their power by trading with our other settlements in the islands of Flores and Celebes and further a-field, Malacca, Macau, Goa ... and the unspoken boundary secretly began to move westward until it might be said to run south from Díli toward Maubisse, with their power divided between Lifau and Díli ...

I am sorry to sound so confusing with this, though it is not half so confusing as european dynast-histories.

And where people live on either side of this mysterious line they are more likely to feud and misunderstand each other.

So—there was nothing for it but *Capitão* Câmara and *Capitão* António da Costa and the men of the garrison to march south and west and kill the *indígenas* who had begun a little war of their own against their neighbours; even to follow them in to the dangerous mysterious mountain caves of the Pedras de Russi-Lau; this brought His Excellency great pain, he could not allow the fighting to go unchecked but he also saw it was not really the fault of the bunaq and mambai and atoni people ... They had been caught up in the passions which were not truly their own.

*****

Sr. Resende kept my work under review and made some suggestions, saying people needed to know that we believed in the future and the better life that would come, despite all the

sorrow and chaos and fear of the moment. The australian and nederland soldiers were taken away in several ships from the south coast, one ship ran on to the shore and the japanese bombed it but another ship was sent straight-way. The men left behind the many small boys, their *criados*, who had carried their rifles, led their ponies, found food, taken messages; they stayed behind on the beach.

At first they compared whatever their 'masters' had given them as parting-gifts, they were full of bravado and boasting, they gambled, they 'swaggered' ... And then, it grew dark in the next evening, the japanese were between them and their homes and families. Some of the boys were ten years old, even eight, some were older, some had moved outside their tribal *distritos* and were not even sure how to get home, they had moved to and fro so much.

The older boys offered comfort and help and many of them reached their homes again. But that was only the beginning of their troubles. The japanese did not believe the australians and dutch had all embarked and sailed away; they persisted in beliefs they were hidden somewhere and that people would tell them if they asked—and asked ... then threats ...

There is a tradition, perhaps for a thousand years and more, that if someone likes something you own you will find a discreet way to give it to them; knowing this, you will make sure that you never admire something which has been handed down from the ancestors or that is filled with *lulic* power; but if, as an example, you were to see a beautiful silver bracelet that someone had made and you admire it—later you will find it slipped in your pocket or your basket or if they have been visiting at your village it will be there when they have departed.

So it was with the things the soldiers left behind: a belt, a pouch, a small book, a pen, even a watch, and these things would pass from hand to hand, briefly treasured and admired; within a month they might exist many kilometres away in a village where the soldiers had never come ... and the japanese might see them and recognise them for what they were. So they would say: "Where are the *australianos*, tell us, or we will burn down your houses." Of course people, no matter how much they wished, could not say. How could *they* know where the soldiers had gone?

*****

The last time I saw the cathedral pristine white and shining and with its interior full of beautiful blue and red shadows from its great windows, modern windows, above the altar, I think was the day when I went with José and Cecília so their baby daughter could be baptised. They called her Mafalda because they said, even though war and sorrow and pestilence has come, they needed to believe that history goes onward, people live, in body or in soul or in memory, the future is inexorable; even if individual people lose hope, history always carries hope with it ...

I do not remember if it was that day or another that I saw a very unusual insect in church. It was green, with big eyes, and impossibly thin legs. I think your name for it is prayer-insect because of the way it holds up its two front legs. It is a very appropriate insect to find in a church. And he appeared to listen gravely—*Deus qui omnipotentiam tuam miserando maxime et parcendo manifestas*—he put his head on one side, he nodded it up and down, he looked around the building, he turned and walked with finicking steps through a crack in the wall ... someday I think I will write about the life of such an insect.

The next year they had a little son, Estevão, and they were beautiful babies, I wish that I could have taken photographs of them ...

José continued his work, in some manner despite Sr. Barbosa going to Baucau for some time and, it was rumoured, drinking too much; as did Dom Clemente and Dom Artur and Dom Pedro (though when all the animals were gone, stolen, eaten, he could only manage by growing some vegetables; his wife's people helped; he had married a *mestiça* widow of about forty years old, a very kind woman, and they had one little baby). Life was very distressing for Dom Clemente as he was always getting messages of things destroyed and he did arithmetic to decide on the cost of repairs, where he could get materials ...

The australians blew up two bridges Public Works had just finished building, fine concrete

bridges, the japanese repaired them enough to pass across—but they themselves dropped bombs on the barracks and other public buildings in Aileu and Maubisse and other places and did not repair them; then the australians began coming at regular times too to drop bombs on nearly every town—Viqueque is the only town I can think of which was not destroyed over the next several years—and particularly the airfields the japanese made the natives build, as well as the ones we had built; often they missed and hit other things. A school in Aileu, the cathedral, the splendid big market in Baucau.

As fast as things were bombed that the japanese needed, the natives had to set to work to re-build them. They could not go home to plant and harvest, to care that their wives and elderly parents and little children had enough food. In 1942, the planting was disrupted in the three western provinces, and also a little in the provinces of Manatuto and São Domingos, only Lautém was spared for the moment.

Without buffaloes and ponies it was hard to prepare the fields for planting ... And all the soldiers helped themselves, to fruit ripening on the trees, to hens found wandering, to goats that were away from the ears of their village ... In a country where people, usually, can only grow enough to take them from harvest to harvest you will understand how serious this situation was.

Sometimes the australians paid with silver shillings, sometimes with papers to say they would pay after the war, the dutch sometimes gave silver florins, the japanese had not made any money especially for Timor Oriental, perhaps we were too small and unimportant, perhaps they had not planned to invade, so they used notes they had printed to use elsewhere in their new ‘empire’; I saw some notes they had printed for Hong-Kong. (Later they set up a small press in Díli to print notes.) Some of their officials said all notes must be honoured, many others did not care that people were being cheated—and the villagers were too shrewd not to understand immediately, this worthless paper, and so they used it instead to roll their tobacco ...

But in one respect it did not matter if they were paid or not paid: there was almost no food to be bought before the next harvest. And the less food, the more it cost. People no longer could trust any money; mostly they held the coins in their hands—our coins, australian coins, dutch coins, the mexican *pesos* from the treasury used for chinese-trade that Sr. Duarte agreed could be used—and weighed them. The heavier the coin, the more it could be trusted.

In 1943 things were much worse, by the end of 1944 people were dying of hunger. The people in the mountains had to eat their ponies, their pigs, their buffalo (which were especially valuable, not only because of their use in the fields but as *barlaque* or the traditional exchange before a wedding and for the feasts that would send the dead prestigiously on their way) ... Nor was there any way to bring food from other countries, only the small amounts the japanese brought in for the Díli garrison in the first two years—and even they expected their soldiers to forage for their food in the villages, with guns ...

*****

Rowing go the rowers
In a ship of great delight.
The captain at the helm
The Son of God is Light.
Angels at the oars
Rowed with all their might.
The flag of hope was flying
Lovely to the sight.
The mast was of endurance
Like crystal shining bright.
The sails were stitched with faith

And filled the world with light.
The seashore was serene
With not a wind in flight.
Gil Vicente

*****

When I stand beside the Sea, I feel a great sadness. And yet, I was too busy to pity myself. It may seem strange but between the end of 1942 and early in 1944 I built no less than ten *escombros* dams. I lived in the mountains and built dams. That was my life.

The japanese wanted us all to be kept in the area of Liquiçá which they called a neutral *zona*. There we would be safe from bombs, they said, and no harm would come to us. Of course they did not expect us all to be there—Dom Artur and others continued with their work, Dom Clemente, Sr. Duarte, His Excellency and his staff, the doctors—and they left some of the administrators and *chefes de posto* to continue with the work of running the country, as best they could; Sr. Oliveira remained in Viqueque and after *Administrador* Pires went secretly to Austrália he was replaced by Sr. António do Amaral in Baucau. But this did not mean they would not wish to have me put 'in their field', so my life was circumspect.

From a distance they might assume me for a native—but in close proximity I knew I could not fool them; though I was very brown, equally I had too much hair on my body to be timorese. When they asked Dom Artur about his staff, he shrugged and threw his hands in the air "Alas!"—but he said to me, "Do not come to Díli or if you do, you are nothing to do with me." (One time Dom Artur asked me if I was related to Alberto de São Tomás who wrote *Explorações Botânicos de Timor* in the 18th century; I liked the thought of this but, again, I had to say I did not know.) Dom Pedro said the same thing.

But still I came to see D. Déolinda and Rosentina, José and Cecília. They told me about the bombs dropping, new troops, damage, gossip, rumours, and I told them of the mountains and what I knew of the war.

Then Cecília would sit down at the piano and play in her beautiful way that moved us to tears, Bach and Mozart and Debussy and others, I forget. The new japanese consul, Sr. Saita, liked to play the piano too, and listen, and he came there to their house—he could speak spanish so he could speak and understand them in a reasonable manner—and he would listen to Cecília play and he was quite emotional; might she come to Japan some day, give concerts, when the war was finished, when he might be able to arrange ... and José and Dom Clemente, might they not like to see that Japan was a country of culture, not merely wild warriors and *samurai* courage ...

People said José was pandering to the consul, that this was not neutrality, but Dom Clemente who had come to love him like a son said: we welcome the british consul when he was here, the dutch consul, any consul ... wars are not resolved in death but in life, in the hearts of the living ...

But life was difficult for José because of other reasons too. When the japanese soldiers arrived, for several days they looted houses and shops; over and over again the Governor sent firm notes telling them to desist but they did not immediately obey. The things they took, they put in the warehouses used by Nanyo Kohatsu, thinking to send them back to Japan but José did a clever 'sleight-of-hand': he removed the most valuable things at night to another secret location, then he started a fire in the warehouse and said some of the things, furniture and pictures and carpets, had been burned, *infelizmente!* But then the gods played him a mean trick. The other place was hit when a bomb fell. Everything was destroyed! People said, maybe he had taken them for himself, and he could not justify himself because he had asked a japanese clerk from the company to help him. He could not say or do anything that might make his accomplice known.

*****

Dona Déolinda's father was a mystery to her. He was a Mbunda man from Angola, from the plateaux, and he came to the capital and found work on the wharves, then he took passage in a ship, ships being mysterious things to the Mbunda, and had to shovel the coal in to the great furnaces. On that ship he sailed to Beira and Lourenço Marques. Then on another ship that was coming to Timor to bring soldiers to fight with the rebellious Dom Boaventura.

Here he married a bunaq woman and went to her village; a proper marriage in a church with a piece of paper to say he was married. Her mother, Dona Ermelinda, died when her baby daughter was born—and her father disappeared. Her grandparents looked after her but they both died when she was a child. Her aunt arranged for her to come to Díli with the wife of their *chefe de posto* when he was transferred to the capital; she would help look after their children and clean. So she was only twelve when she came to Díli.

José looked in old shipping registers, customs declarations, police information ... nothing, there was no mention of her father whom she called Dom Joaquim Eduardo d'Arcos Coelho, that was the name on the marriage, though perhaps he had a Mbunda name also ... "This is very strange, *pá*," said José, "this man does not exist. He did not come, he did not go." I thought of myself, not on their lists, and did not think it so strange.

Então—what happened to Dom Joaquim? "I will tell you, Tomás, what I think—and you will not like it. I think the relatives of his wife killed him. I think they did not like that these black men came here to fight them, they said, they should fight *with* us not *against* us. Do you see? Because they were so big and black ... so they were not so happy about the marriage—and when the mother died, they said it is his fault, he brings us bad luck, he makes the baby too big for the mother ... " He looked at me carefully. "I think he is dead and buried in the mountains."

I thought about this. I could say "*Que história!*" and laugh but ... "*Talvez* ... and *talvez* he sailed away on another ship and you lazy people in the port did not bother to put his name on your list—and now he is back, safe, in Angola and everyone sits around the fire and listens to him tell of his adventures. That is what *I* think." José laughed at this. "That is just as bad, that he abandoned his baby daughter, so I think you will tell her nothing."

Quite true. What to say?

Dona Déolinda worked very hard at the laundering, and she and Rosentina did sewing too, but the money the japanese paid them was of little use, so they asked to be paid in rice. If Rosentina's mother was always watching over her, now she was twice as fierce in her watching. It was bad that portuguese men might look at her daughter with greedy grasping eyes, it was worse that japanese soldiers should look that way ... I see now that I could have taken more risks to help them and yet, Dona Déolinda did not invite such actions; she lived as though she needed nobody, only Rosentina, and to suggest anything was to cause embarrassment.

I remember one little happening that I puzzled upon then, oh! I understand it now, when she was preparing to take a basket of clothes, first placing the towel to encircle her head in a flat pad—I said to her that at home we sometimes call that a *sogra*, a mother-in-law, and did people call it the same here. She gave me a strange look and did not answer. Then she spoke on something quite different and went out, telling me to be careful, there were so many thousands of soldiers here now and all bored.

(Another time I came there, in this I did not like simply to *arrive*, not courtesy, but they did not have a telephone and, not expecting letters, they never went to the post office, and I heard Dona Déolinda speaking very slowly, stumbling on words, then Rosentina saying a word—and the knowledge came to me: Rosentina was teaching her mother to read. I did not, then, like to go to their door so went away again.)

It is strange that the *nipônicos* should be bored: did they not say 'this is our new empire'—how can you be bored with a new empire; though they were always careful to refer to this as 'Portugal Timor'. One day I saw one man on sentry duty, the sky was hot and the dust was over everything, and he was by himself. He opened his trousers and began to rub himself with

a far-away look in his eyes until he spurted into the grass. I was astonished that he should dare defy the priests and drop his seed so casually; perhaps he was dreaming of a woman back home ...

Another time I watched a young soldier sitting at the edge of a rice field, near Baucau, I was hidden in the *tecoma* bushes with their bright yellow flowers and rank growth as camouflage; he lifted the rich brown mud ready for planting, he formed it into a ball, then into other shapes, and there were tears glistening on his face. Did he have a *quinta* in Japan and it was time for planting and he did not know what state it was in, whether there were people left to plant the rice seeds, were the harvests good with so many men gone and only the old people and the women ... did he see the japanese stars rising over the rich fields and the haunts of night-birds and thus he was *saudoso* ...

*****

The brains of nightingales,
With unctuous dew of snails,
Between two nutshells stewed,
Is meat that's easily chewed:
And the hearts of little mice
Do make a feast of wondrous price.

Anon.

*****

Now I understood Rui Cardoso much better. I always wondered why he did not finish things, why we moved from one thing to another thing to another. But it was not the finishing that was important. Anyone could finish what he had begun. No. If an official came into a village and said, you must do things this way, it is much better, your way is inefficient, my way is better ... then people would, discreetly, do everything in their power *not* to do things the new way, because the old way came from the ancestors, it was not simply a way, it was a link, binding present and past, it was tradition, it was the way that belonged to them ...

So Rui Cardoso never said, do this because ... he simply did things, or made Manuel and me to do them ... and people were curious, they came to see, when he was not looking—what is this, why, what will happen next—and then he was gone and, sometimes, they were curious enough to go on with his activity ... just to *see* ... they did not feel him a threat to their ways because he had gone away.

Of course everything was different now, with the war and the occupation, but I tried to do things in the same way. At first I did not fully comprehend the care with which he prepared and sited each dam; I thought his soil profiles were merely work to keep me busy; now I understood, when some of my dams failed, how important it was to know where was limestone, coral outcrops, sticky clays, marl-earths, where the soil was full of stones ... My freedom and power went to my head, I was a troubadour taking my songs to the countryside, a pilgrim with long paths to the sacred cities, a knight to joust with the errant airs, the baron of *pendão e caldeira* with the largesse of freedom.

Now I understood his habit of eating as he went—the sweet sap grass-stem, a leaf, the petals of a flower, berries, piths, where fruit grew wild, I had noticed and yet not noticed, but now I began to do the same. I do not know if he did it from curiosity, because he liked doing it, he liked the tastes. Soon I found if I was always chewing on something I did not get so hungry—because food was more and more scarce and, anyway, I had no money to buy from the villages even if they had food to spare. So I learned never to let my hunger become acute.

Small boys often wanted to come and help me; I could not pay them but I could try and make the work interesting and amusing and instructional—so that they took for ever some

new knowledge. I know there are officials who keep their distance, who would never let themselves be seen by their people as laughing, as having fun, even as sometimes getting things wrong; running a colony is a very serious business, yes sir. But I had had Rui Cardoso for my *chefe* and I had seen for myself that Manuel and the other boys were interested, eager, hard-working, that they loved him even when he criticised and grumbled.

It was not that I wanted to be like him—I knew I was at the other end of the world when it came to our characters—but I saw and I remembered. Yet the most important thing really, for them, was that he did not care about change. He did not put in reports saying he had done this and done that. He did not need change to hold his position, for promotion, for his own worthiness, his own pride. He could always walk away, many of the officials could not. But I think he cared about his dams. He really wanted to see what would happen when the rain was held in the mountains for longer, instead of running away—poom!—to the sea. I think that is why I chose to build more dams.

In the mountains I had much time for thinking, for listening to people, for observing the animals and birds. My idea was to write a book about monkeys, what I had observed of their habits, but then I thought of the book Paul had sent me called *Tarka the Otter* and although it was written better than I could ever hope to write, its sentences more like poetry and running water, sometimes I under-lined things I liked—'the law of life was also the law of water—everlasting change' and 'some still bore the bells of old summer, that made a fine sibilance in the wry wind-music of the moor'; of course there were words I could not translate but I liked the idea of making my book more than just the habits, it might deal with the life of a particular monkey, an imaginary monkey but real in his ways and habits ... but not so sad.

In the same way that scots-people call themselves highland-people and lowland-people the timorese sometimes call themselves *ema foho* and *ema tasi*. The mountains are extremely interesting but, still, I like the shore best though it is less healthy.

The japanese made people extend the road from Ossu to the south coast, down through the high *soco* grass which could hide a thousand australian *guerrilheiros*; yet, strangely, they did most of their building of aerodromes and fortifications along the north coast. I do not understand this when they expected, always, invasion from the south; that it was easier and the ground flatter ... and because Timor, and naturally the japanese, faces the north, an unbreakable habit ... (Before the war they had done much travelling in the south: their excuse was that their two technicians were studying the land to see if it was suitable for growing large *quintas* of cotton.)

The planes came over more and more often. José could recognise the different planes—australian, american, japanese—by their engine noises, the shape of their wings, their size: but I could only say that if they came from the south they were australian or american, if they came from the north they were japanese. I know a latin saying which I think is like this: *nam leuius lædit quicquid prævidimus ante*—for whatever we have fore-seen hurts us less. *Talvez*. But how *can* you prepare people for things which they can not imagine? How can you explain a bomber-plane to people who had not even seen an aeroplane before that moment? How can you explain a bomb, its sound, its destruction?

Mostly I stayed away from the coast, only a few times there to catch fish. Yet the coral reefs are so interesting I could explore them for ever, and the little creatures. There are many kinds of starfish with nondescript colours, but there is also one of a rich dark blue. If you turn the starfish upside-down it will slowly right itself again but so slowly you can never see it turning; your mind wanders away, inevitably. And, suddenly, there it is, right-way!

Then there are the small crabs that do not grow hard shells but instead borrow shells from the beach to climb inside; some choose wisely and their shell exactly protects them, some choose a shell that is too small and scurry round not realising almost all of their body is poking out, so pale and frail, and others are the same as mothers who buy trousers for their sons—'he will grow to fit them'—wobbling along in over-large houses, only the tips of their pincers and legs showing ...

Sometimes I seek shells, especially the shells called cowries. They are beautifully smooth and gleaming like porcelain but with the most marvellous colours, rich brown spots shading to speckles, the gloss of chestnuts, the perfection of their underlip, each groove touched with its own spot, and all this from a tiny creature like a lump of gristle and jelly. I think I would rather look at one of these shells than all the diamonds and rubies in the world.

*****

Sometimes I had the chance to walk in the cloud forests where mosses drape themselves from the branches of the trees or grow in clumps on the ground, also orchids and beautiful ferns, the teak-trees grow here too with their panicles of purple flowers, also banyans and kapok-trees with their large trunks, large enough to live inside, but the sandalwood-trees grow lower down where they are slim nobody trees that you would walk past without noticing, unless you *knew* ... And then there are the mangrove trees which people say are a beautiful strong wood but no one cuts them because of their hardness; they grow in the swamps behind the low dunes of the south coast. And walking there deep in the forests, where even the fiercest storm-rain comes softly through the many layers of leaves, I thought about my garden, about my family who had no news of me nor I of them, about people in Díli, about the weather, about history ...

Someone told me the story of *Sargento* Baptista who was the *chefe de posto* in Tutuala in 1914. A massif german warship, called *Emden*, came and anchored near Jaco island and another ship, and he rowed out in a little boat, just himself, and he said to the captain "You are in portuguese water, you must move your ship" so, instead of just dropping something on him to sink him and his little row-boat, the captain took up the anchor and sailed away. I wish I had his kind of courage.

I will tell you just one story that I have sometimes pondered on: it happened, I think, about a month before Rui Cardoso died. The australian *soldados* said we must be a very cruel people because the *administradores* and *chefes* could punish people for crimes by beating them with a stick with a flat end, called a *palmatória*; it is not that I think this is *good*, but, still, I think I would rather have it than prison. It is very painful for a week or two, yes, but prison goes on for months and months, far away from your family, your fields, your animals, your *festas* ... and I think it did not take away a man's dignity.

But—how to explain this? I asked the australian men what happened to aborigine-australians when they did something wrong. One man laughed, "Got rid o' the lot of 'em—best thing we ever did." And another man said "That's only down your way, Tez. Still plenty up north."

An older man said, "Well, they go to prison."

I nodded. "Yes, I have seen a picture of them with heavy iron chains around their necks. And on their faces such an hopeless sad look."

Several of the men looked uncomfortable but the man called 'Tez', or it might be something like that, just laughed. "Nothing wrong with prison! Probably think they're in clover. Decent food. Bit o' discipline."

"And is the prison near their village?"

"Heck no! Anyway they don't have villages. Just wander round like lost souls, living on grubs and snakes. Prison might be three or four hundred miles away. Depends."

"And can their families come and see them there—and their wives?"

"Wouldn't think so."

"Breed 'em out, that's the way to go."

Several of the men nodded.

"What do you mean—breed 'em out? Out of what?"

"Strewth, mate, don't you understand english? If you take the kids away and try to stop the full-bloods breedin'—hundred year's time the problem's gone."

Later, Rui Cardoso said to me: "Learned anything, O Vasco?"

"I-I do not know."

He said nothing more but the thought has come back to trouble me since then: why should these men, who were all decent men, I think, because it was not their choice to come here and make trouble but the choice of their government and their *gerais*, seem to despise their *indígenas* in that way?

*****

Lone, lone, and lone I stand,
With none to hear my cry,
As the black feet of the night
Go walking down the sky.

The stars they seem but dust
Under those passing feet,
As they, for an instant's space,
Flicker and flame, and fleet.

So, on my heart, my grief
Hangs with the weight of doom,
And the black feet of its night
Go walking through my room.

Dame Mary Gilmore

*****

Perhaps I grew careless. When I was leaving after talking about my work with Dom Artur, he was now in charge of the municipal council of Díli, though he was still fairly young and handsome his face was very clouded and weary, I did not go carefully enough and two japanese soldiers told me to stop, they looked to see if I had weapons, they marched me away to their compound for questions. Then they sent me on a truck to Liquiçá. I know I only have myself to blame for being imprisoned.

At first the neutral *zona* was not a camp—but the japanese were nervous all the time, so they made two camps, one at Liquiçá and one at Maubara and put them in charge of their secret police, called *Kempei Tai*, which was in charge of a *Tenente-Coronel* Yutani. They took over all the shops and dwellings there, they sent the chinese away to work on the roads and bridges, to clean their barracks and wash their clothes, and took their belongings, especially food, and they made rules by which people lived here.

Later they sent José to the camp at Maubara but it was Cecília who suffered, and the children. She was with them in the hospital in Díli with fevers. When they were better they were all sent on a truck, along with several other women, and the truck-driver panicked when planes came over, he thought he was going to be bombed or strafed and he drove very wildly so the pilots' aim would be bad. But he drove too wildly and he drove off the cliff, there is only one place along that road with high cliffs, and all the women and children were drowned.

Cecília was such a beautiful person, always kind and thoughtful, and she could do so many wonderful things; her voice gave me lovely trickles up and down my spine. And now there was only Dom Clemente and José left.

In the camp there were both men and women and I soon saw it would not be hard to escape—except that, if anyone escaped, the sentries guarding might kill people in reprisement. So I had to think of something that would avoid this. It was very difficult for me. It is true some people did not mind the camp, but I felt my loss of freedom, of the mountains, of my work, as a kind of pain. Now I think I know what it is like for a wild creature, caged, there is nothing to do but pace, pace and pace, till at last life ends.

There was a young man there who had also worked with the *Missão* and we became friends; his name was Gastão de Sena. He told me all about life there and we talked of our work, I was fortunate in that way, he came from the *norte* too and knew the same stories and habits, and so we spoke of home.

He said there were some wives and children from Díli and other towns, also several dutch women Sra. van Galen, Sra. Mollema, their children, and a number of minor *funcionários* like us. (Sr. Brower was replaced by Dr. Bloemsma for a short time but I think they and their families had all gone to Austrália by then.) The problem was: each day was the same, the same little bit of rice, the same call for names, the same orders about nothing, the same routine. "How I long for a *book*" he said an hundred times.

It was true there was a school for the children and also lessons in nursing for older people, but also long hours to sit and watch the shadows contract and grow again. It was true, too, that it wasn't always quiet: bombs dropped even here, killing several people in the camps, also several timorese foraging along the seashore. There was a doctor there but not with the medicines and bandages he needed and his wife, Dona Aida, was also hurt by one such *bomba* and he was so sad because he could not save her eyes.

But often Gastão sat with a stick, drawing pictures on the ground. These were lovely pictures and when he had finished one and sat back, people would crowd around to look. I said, why did we not make a plan to escape, we could pretend to be sick, then to die, but he said no, if we escaped we would starve, there was hardly any food left anywhere in the colony, and the japanese went through the villages taking all that was left. This was true and yet not quite true.

I knew of villages which had made very ingenious hiding-places for food, for their *lulic* objects that they not be desecrated, for their beautiful *orbs de ouro* and other golden adornments, bracelets, head-dresses, *mustisalas* ... but, yes, life was very hard, very spartan, out in the mountains now. Perhaps it was better to stay here, to have that small helping of food delivered, to sit in the sun and talk, nothing more ... Still I longed for my mountains, my work ...

*****

Chora porquê? Ora, chora.
Uma crise de nervos coisa passageira.
E talvez pela mulher que o adora?
(A ele, à carteira?)
Seis horas. Foi-se o pessoal.
O homem que venceu está sozinho.
Mas reage: que diabo. Afinal ...
E olha para o cofre cheinho.

Mário Cesariny de Vasconcelos

*****

Why to cry? Oh, so many reasons. It is strange that the rumour that Dom Mano Loi, the chief of the nearby village of Fatu Besse, should give me this idea, because, after the war, we learned he had merely pretended to be dead to remove japanese suspicions—and his people continued to smuggle food into the camp for us, sometimes vegetables or bananas; so there were no punishments against his people.

(In 1945, people began to die in Liquiçá; so little food anywhere ... and no medicines. His Excellency persuaded the japanese to let some people go to Lebomeu to grow food; Dom Manuel Carrascalão, now that the government plantations and research had neither people nor money nor equipment, came to help ... Even then, most people had *béri-béri*.)

My idea was to fake my grave by gathering up as many bad-smelling things as possible, so even if there was suspicion, no one would insist on opening it up: it might be a death from leprosy or gangrene, something infectious. In secret, I even manufactured a small cross to tell people it was the grave of T.E.V. Of course, I could simply escape, it would not be difficult, and I was accustomed to being over-looked—except, when they called our names or counted our numbers, they would become suspicious—and other people might suffer. Other inmates discussed this too but they were afraid of being caught, afraid of starving.

Gastão said he would take people's attention away from me—I could sit there, miserable, looking sick—and he would make a whole path of pictures. It was like tiles, some plain for stepping on, some pictures to see as you walked ... very interesting, people came just to watch, even the guards came to see ...

He said I was sick and the guards did not care. One less to feed. And then, when I was nearly ready to 'die' a message came for me, smuggled in, a simple message pricked into a leaf. It said 'Rosentina is dying'.

Should I travel, then, along the road, along the shore, or inland? In the end I took the simple way, the road, always ready to hide if I heard a vehicle or marching men.

It was terribly true that Rosentina was dying; she was in the hut with her mother; a bed was made up for her where she could see the trees; Dona Déolinda had stuffed a soft mattress with kapok, cotton and chopped corn husks (people do not normally use mattresses) and she lay there restless, and mumbling things even when she slept; her stomach was terribly swollen up, my poor Rosentina, my little sister, they had stabbed her with bayonets; it was not the first time the soldiers had done this to women ...

They were so long away from Japan and its warrior tradition they lost interest in fighting so their commanders, to make them war-like again, would set them to strike a dummy, a bolster-person, but that was not enough, that did not stir their blood—so they would find women, girls. I think this was because women could not fight them back and also because japanese men are raised with the teaching that women are nothing, slaves, beasts, it does not matter if they shriek and cry. A man's heart is as ice; unmoved as when the wind cries.

Her wounds were so terrible and they were infected; the smell was all through the hut but D. Déolinda said nothing, only, "Can you heal her?" I do not understand why it should be that I can heal the pains of animals (there are things I can not heal, even so) but my hands do not heal people. Why should that be? If it is faith why not with Rosentina who had faith, who loved life, who knew how much she meant to her mother?

Dona Déolinda made poultices of leaves, she walked to the hospital but it had japanese guards who told her there were no medicines there (it also acted as a prison; you could go in if you were sick but you could not come out again); I said I had an idea. When it was well dark I went quietly to see Sr. Inokuchi. I know it was dangerous for him but it was far more dangerous for me. If I was found on the streets they would not say 'Back to Liquiçá!' No. And it was dangerous because, since his wife and children were back in Japan, other men shared the house with him. Because I knew which was his bed-room I tapped quietly ... and now I used my code to tap ... help ... friend ... after doing this three times over there was a sound; his face pressed against the window, then when he recognised me he pointed and beckoned and I went round to the back of the house (the wall was broken and the trees in the compound, but the house was only a quarter-broken). He opened the door quietly and I followed him in.

"Tomás-san," he sounded surprised and I held a finger to my lips. "No, there is no one here."

He put a chair for me but did not light the lamp: "help—how may I help you."

"I need medicines, bandages, something to kill infection."

"But I have none, there are no medicines in all the country, only quinine, only the herbs and potions the women understand, but I will tell you one thing I saw once ... the web of a spider in a wound, it healed it up, very strange ... and sea-water, that is a good cure, the water to

wash often, the salt to kill the poison ... and good food, people heal."

"But can you not heal people with those silver needles you told José about, I forget their name."

"Alas, I do not have that knowledge." He sighed. "I wish that I could help."

He gave me *o-mochi*, which are cakes made from rice, to take to Rosentina, and he found two rolls of clean bandages.

This is not much—but I know too he need not have given me anything, only called the police compound, "There is a man here, escaped ... " but he never did that. Dona Déolinda went in the very early morning before sunrise to bring back a pot of sea-water and bathed Rosentina well, then I laid the bandage over her but soon it was soaked in a foul-smelling liquid and her pain was so bad it broke my heart to sit watching, stroking her hand, saying the things I had said to horses and pigs and monkeys; this time nothing happened.

But in the evening I had another idea: if she could sleep more comfortably it might help her body and I had read a story that lived in the library at Mr. Beveridge's school about two boys, you will understand they were english boys, perhaps you even remember the story, where they hypnotise the native chief so he will let them go and will not put their father, the courageous missionary, in a cooking-pot.

All I needed was something shiny that I could wave slowly back and forth (that is the way they did it, I assume it is the general way) and Dona Déolinda found a brass button and pulled a thread from a cloth and suspended it for me and I said, sleep, sleep, my little Rosa, a deep deep sleep, in which you will get better, close your eyes, sleep, sleep, and in a little while she did close her eyes.

How strange!

Her mother said nothing, merely went and made a little soup for us and Rosentina when she should wake again. I knew that to wake people you had to click your fingers in front of their face but I did not think even rest could ever heal those terrible bayonet wounds deep inside her entrails. And yet, the idea that Rosentina should die was absurd! She was meant for life, for happiness, for joy. Every step she took radiated happiness ...

That she would never get up again and walk, my mind refused to believe. At night I slept in the bushes beyond the house and during the day I sat beside her, yet always listening for someone coming.

"You must go back and try to get something more," her mother said, "this magic with the button is not strong enough." I put Rosentina to sleep again, it was harder this time, perhaps because the pain was greater, perhaps her mind understood my trickery better ...

"Yes, I will try."

Sr. Inokuchi said he had expected me to return but he had nothing for me, only a jar of *sake*, the strong japanese drink, and some more clean bandages: he thought the drink might dull the pain.

Again he gave me the chair but sat cross-leggèd on the floor as he told me he would be returning home. He did not know if he would reach home, it was a long way to go and there were many hostile war-planes; there was so little food here and he was too old now to be of much use. I had not thought him old, so perhaps he did not mean precisely old in years. He said he was sorry that he would never see me or José again ... José was still in the prison-camp at Maubara ... but if the fates were kind he might be able to send a letter when peace came ...

He poured me a tiny glass of port and gave me more *o-mochi*, and we talked a while (because we would not talk again) about the war, about Japan. He was full of sadness. Sometimes he spoke like a father, sometimes like a teacher, sometimes like the greek man who went down in to the Underworld to find his love that was lost and dead. I do not remember his exact words ...

"We were never a people who were meant to wander the earth. We feel," he touched his breast, "in our hearts, the pain of separation from the earth from which we grew. We must do

what our Emperor wishes but we never cease to feel the longing to return, to our home, our sacred places, our shrines."

I was reluctant to offend him, but there was a question to which I wanted an answer: "Yes, but if you long to return, why do the japanese soldiers treat the people here so badly when they have done nothing to you, they have not harmed your people, they did not ask you to come here—"

He looked very sombre but I think his tone had a little irony, a mocking, when he spoke: "And they asked your fore-fathers to come? Just as the chinese asked the british to come with their gunboats and the sickness of opium? And did the people of Cochin-China send an invitation to the Emperor of France to come and take their country? ... Oh, Tomás-san, do you not understand human nature? What other people have taken we will come to want too."

"But ... you are right to ask ... we must give filial duty to the Emperor, obedience to those who rule us ... but I know now that they do not understand the world they are trying to make japanese ... " he thought for a long time and we breathed the thick air and tasted it on our tongues. "The generals," he said at last, "wished to wipe out foreign influences, to purify japanese society, they wished to show the nations like Britain, like America, that we will not be humiliated simply because we do not have white skins, we will not be told how many ships we can build and where we can trade, we will not be called 'yellow peril' like wild beasts ... But, you see this, how we become less and less japanese ... I speak to you in portuguese, I learn to like port instead of *sake*, my children know the story of your Prince Henrique and Dom Humberto ... If we become colonisers then we become less japanese, and we begin to understand that that is to pay in much loneliness, the loss of *nihon-seku*."

"But—I do not think we are less portuguese b-because of Timor?"

"Forgive me, Tomás-san, you do not understand yourself, I think. To be portuguese is to wander the oceans, it is part of what you mean when you say "I am portuguese", to take in other people's ways, it is the mark of a trading society. The chinese keep their nature because they trade with chinese communities; they do not wish to colonise because that would make them less chinese ... We are learning that it is easier to kill people than to find out how to make them japanese ... When I came here to learn about Timor, when others came to other countries, we were ordered to learn of your weaknesses ... When you say 'Timor' your eyes shine with love, you do not need to return home to be what you are. That is a strength, not a weakness, and we do not know how to emulate you. I—we—all my country-men living far away, we all need to return to the well that contains our 'soul' so that we may exist as ourselves."

"You understand *saudade* but you see it as a longing for the glories of the past. We yearn—*akogara*—but it is for the chance to touch the eternal Now, and that we may be reborn within Japan ... to die here is to die forever, the men who die in the jungles, in Borneo, the Philippine islands, they believe if they die with the Emperor's name on their lips, they will be rescued for the next life, but the longer they stay away from their 'well' the harder it becomes to truly believe that in their hearts. Little by little they lose, become careless, become less ... and the thread frays, grows thinner, some day it will break altogether ... "

"If you conquer then you must stay and rule ... I think, sometimes, the men are cruel because this terrible fear grows in their hearts, which pushes out all peace, generosity, harmony ... They are not permitted to blame the Emperor, the generals are too far away, so they vend their fury and their despair on the people they see every day in the villages ... It is a terrible fear, Tomás-san, this fear of Nothing, of the Eternal Separation."

"More terrible than our fear of Purgatory and Hell?"

"More terrible."

*****

Listen more to things

Than to words that are said.
The water's voice sings
And the flame cries
And the wind that brings
The woods to sighs
Is the breathing of the dead.

And repeats each day
The Covenant where it is said
That our fate is bound to the law,
And the fate of the dead who are not dead
To the spirits of breath who are stronger than they.
We are bound to life by this harsh law
And by this Covenant we are bound
To the deeds of the breathings that die
Along the bed and the banks of the river,
To the deeds of the breaths that quiver
In the rock that whines and the grasses that cry
To the deeds of the breathings that lie
In the shadow that lightens and grows deep
In the tree that shudders, in the woods that weep,
In the waters that flow and the waters that sleep,
To the spirits of breath which are stronger than they
That have taken the breath of the deathless dead
Of the dead who have never gone away
Of the dead who are not now under the ground.

Birago Diop

*****

All the next day, Rosentina seemed to grow more and more distended with the gas the infection made, we did not know whether we should try and let it out or whether this would spread the infection, but our helplessness did not make much difference; Dona Déolinda prayed constantly, a despairing prayer, Holy Father, spare my daughter, she is all I have in this world, without her there is nothing. Take me instead, I am old, she is young ... Ah, Maria, Maria, *Mãe de Deus* ...

About six o'clock in the evening Rosentina died. I do not think we realised this immediately, simply because to watch someone die is to die little by little yourself, and your own dying takes your attention away. Her mother was startled in to a terrible cry by the end of her breathing, the most terrible cry in the world, all its loss and despair, and then she threw herself over her, kissed her as though she would kiss life back into her sunken cheeks, cried the most passionate tears, she rocked to and fro on her heels, to keen, to drag her hair between her fingers, to bury her face in the still breast of her daughter.

Oh, a mother's grief!

She thought she would see the face of happiness in her daughter, that Rosentina would live and marry, that there would be beautiful children, that nothing else mattered.

*****

Should I stay? I could not decide; her grief was her own, it had no place for me ... When I tried to comfort her she shook me off. In a little while I went outside. The sun was setting, the sky was full of dust and the sun was a sinister red ball; better to die then than in cheerful sparkling rollicking sun, in sweet clouds, or silvery moon, or soft rain with the flowers unfurling ... but no, not best to die ...

What to do with myself? I could not stay in Díli. That would put both of us in danger. I thought of places I might go. But what would I do there? In theory I was still an employee in the *Missão Geografia* but there was almost no work going on. Perhaps, again, I should *make* work, tell people my work was their future ... I did not see this clearly then not with my mind protesting, a harsh craw, *Não, Não, Não* ...

And then, slowly, an idea came to me; perhaps it had been maturing there like wine in the grand cellars of Nova da Gaia ... I tidied myself as best I could and went to the tin in the hole in the bank beyond the house: I had several things stored there as had Déolinda. No one would find them. A few photos. A piece of paper. (My camera was hid somewhere else since I could no longer buy film for it.) I took the paper and began the long walk up through the grass and trees, so quiet past the japanese officers at Lahane, higher; there was only one soldier outside the Governor's residence.

I showed him the paper and said "I have come to check documents with people here." He understood no portuguese. Better, he did not understand my paper. I had learned long ago many of the japanese soldiers could not read their language; a paper like this covered in their writing and shown with a manner of authority was sometimes enough to deflect suspicion.

I went quietly, past the old guard-house, through the grounds. It was dark now and the moon had not risen and I felt myself to be in another world. A world of eery shapes, each one a soldier coming to relieve the sentry or share his duty but each time it was merely a branch moving in the wind sprung up from the sea. I knocked quietly at the side door. A voice demanded that I state my name. I complied. My business: "*uma mensagem*", not exactly a message, but the door opened and I stepped in; it was lit with a candle. "Ah." It was a man from the garrison, behind him, in the shadows, was the Governor's timorese cook. She faded back to a room beyond when she saw I was not her business. He was careful, thrusting a hand in my pocket, feeling round my *lipa* and shirt for a weapon. He said to proceed and pushed me into the dining-room.

There were at least six men there; some of the wives, I believe, were gone away but Dona Cora remained ... and they had many questions for me. Yet they were very well informed, many other people must pass that sentry, I thought, (they could listen to the radio but not transmit; even when the japanese came and demanded they hand their radios over they found hiding-places, excuses) and they knew many of the things that were happening around the country. But I did not know then, that I was one of their *Camisas Negra*s, those clothed in the black of night: to bring news, carry orders, take hope.

They were all very thin; His Excellency had deep grooves in his face where the plumpness had gone; his teeth and gums were very bad from the lack of good food. But when their dinner came they all insisted I have a plate, even though there was hardly enough for them, and they took from their plates and put extra on my plate—and they gave me a glass of port.

I had not eaten so well since *Capitão* Silva e Costa had come, the dangerous journey, from Macau earlier in the year and told the japanese he would have to report badly if there was not more food in the camps—it was very brave of him to stand firm to the japanese secret police, *Kempei-tai*, who controlled us; for nearly two weeks the food was a little more plentiful then it became scarce and awful again.

His Excellency listened carefully when I told him of my dilemma—what should I do now? where should I go?—and said we must think what was best. They spoke of other things too, he and his secretary *Tenente* Alves who is also his brother-in-law and the others, of the terrible mistake made by letting the australian and dutch soldiers land in 1941, of not trying to intern them, of all the tragedy which had stemmed from that decision ... And he said "I thought I was protecting my people and instead I was destroying them ... when *Coronel* Leggatt and *Coronel* Dettiger" (these were the australian and dutch commanders) "threatened to shoot at my soldiers I should have seen that they bluffed, they could not afford to shoot down the garrison and officials of a neutral country ... I should have said 'you have a choice—to be interned or to sail back the way you came'—I think they would have returned

to Koepang." (Later, as I went out, *Tenente* Alves said quietly to me "he often talks on that—he is quite right, of course, and Dr. Salazar will have his head for it ... ")

Then His Excellency said he would write a message for the people and would I take it out in to the mountains and tell everyone to have hope and faith, their misery would soon be at an end. He paid me a great compliment then—"There is no one else who could do this as well as you, Tomás Vasconcelos, but then you had Dom Rui as your mentor" and, for a few minutes, they talked of Rui Cardoso, asked me what I thought about the manner of his death, before the Governor took up his pen and wrote and signed a few lines.

When my elation at being chosen for what seemed a vital mission wore off and I saw the dangers in it, the hiding, the hunger, I still said I would do my best. What else can you say to a Governor? At least I had a full stomach to take out in to the night.

I still had to pass the sentry. I stepped into the shadows, there was a sudden russssstling and fffffrumppping—then something hurtled at me. You can not imagine my fright! The grey shape landed on me. A monkey! And then I saw it was Chi-Chi! How amazing—that he should still be alive, that he should be living all this time in the Governor's garden. Who can say that monkeys are not intelligent?

The sentry was asleep. At first I thought of taking Chi-Chi back to Dona Déolinda now, then I thought it was late, I would go in the morning. We slept there in the grass and thick bushes and walked down before the dawn. She did not welcome me, nor Chi-Chi, instead she looked exhausted and uncaring. When I said I wanted to help her, with the funeral, with everything, she simply turned away: "It is done. I do not need you. Go away. Díli is not safe for you. Me, I do not care. Just go away." She would not listen to remonstrance, sympathy; she would not agree to come with me. Nothing. I left Díli that same morning.

I had not walked for more than three hours when I found I had lost my paper. To have failed almost before I had begun! I felt very ashamed but it seemed best to go on, to tell people what was the message. I was many months walking. But I will just tell you three stories from my travelling; the first one from a village near Remexio, south of Díli.

*****

'On the other side of the island are the dwellings of four kings,
and their districts are named Oibich, Lichsana, Suai, and Cabanaza.
Oibich is the largest place.
We were told that in a mountain near Cabanaza, very much gold is found, and its inhabitants buy whatever they want with small pieces of gold'

António Pigafetta 1522

*****

The old timorese man there said "I will tell you a story about Portugal": I thought he meant that he would like to tell me about his experiences there, he might have visited. But he began, "Long ago, soon after the Great Flood, there was a beautiful maiden, so beautiful that even the gods looked upon her. There were not enough young men in her village to climb the coconut trees to cut down the nuts so the maiden said she was young and agile and she would climb to the sky and cut down all they needed. The old women said "Take care, child, that Father Sky does not touch you" but she only laughed, she was so young and innocent.

She climbed and climbed, first up the tallest palm in the village, and began to slice the nuts from the tree with the *catana* she carried. The nuts thudded to the ground, far below, and everyone in the village became busy collecting them and no longer looking up to the maiden. Father Sky came low like the great blue wings of an eagle spreading over her but she was so busy with her task that she took no care to look upward to the sun, and he covered her over, touching her everywhere, her warm brown eyes, her soft child's mouth, her gleaming black

hair that curled around her coronet of flowers, and she felt him as the faint brush of bird-wings, the tickle of the palm fronds moving in the breeze, the warm frolic of the sun ... but when she had cut the nuts and went to climb down again to the waiting people it seemed that she could not move, that her mind had gone to sleep and she had forgotten that she had family down below.

She slept there in the tree, with the birds nourishing her, the sunshine keeping her limbs clean and sweet and content, her mind only on the sky, forgetful of Mother Earth and everyone upon it. And after many weeks she gave birth. Out flew a cockerel with bright bronze feathers, and all the people down below said: What a magnificent bird! I must have it as my fighting bird, and I will become famous and rich, the richest man in our *cnua*. And then, out flew a huge eagle with great gleaming eyes and everyone said: We must have that eagle! We must catch it and put it in a bamboo cage and it will bring us all good fortune! And so they forgot about the cockerel and began chasing after the eagle. They left their village behind and ran down the valleys and up the mountains.

And then out flew a third bird, a small brown and grey bird and no one noticed it and it flew here and there, and it laid eggs in every nest it came to; soon it had pushed all the other kinds of birds in to caring for its chicks, but the people were too busy to notice."

He sat back. I ventured to say I did not think it was a story about Portugal but a story about the habits of birds. "No, your excellency, it is a story about the habits of men. It was a portuguese eagle, and a portuguese fighting cock, and a portuguese cuckoo-bird." He bowed his head gravely. "So it is a story about Portugal."

*****

A palavra é de prata, o silêncio é de ouro.
Provérbio

*****

I do not believe this: that silence is golden: silence is death. Death is not golden. How I longed for the sound of voices and instead ... so quiet, so quiet, the quell of Death ...

One village where I came appeared to be completely deserted: I walked, softly, to and fro. There were no animals at pasture near-by, no black pigs to snuffle and grunt in the leaves, rooting, giving their sharp sideways glances, little surly busy-bodies; no *galinhas*, no dogs ...

This does not bode well, I said to myself. It was growing dark. So I made up a little fire from my flints, pressed leaves and twigs upon it, placed an earthern pot with water to heat, while I began to collect up grass, a few dry corn kernels, ants, worms, a pinch of salt from within one hut ... oh Maria! I never savoured your food in true sufficience; now I am punished for my ingratitude ...

Then I sat by the fire listening for birds, the scuttle of small legs; I brushed mosquitoes into my pottage. I wonder if that is why I have not been troubled by malaria—because I have eaten so many mosquitoes? But where was everyone? The huts were almost bare, only the sleeping platforms, some ropes, water-pots, old blackened stones where cooking fires had been: I was hungry and yet not hungry, the place made me feel an unhappiness, a sense of *saudade*, yet I could not understand this strange sense of nostalgia for something which did not belong to me, never had ...

The steam began to rise from the pot. I went into the nearest hut hoping to find a spoon or something so as to strain my *sopa* ...

At the corner of my eye I saw something move: a young man was in the hut with me. Naturally, I said *Olá* and asked him where was everyone—he merely inclined his head slightly, spread his arms which were so incredibly thin; it seemed that I could almost see the wall through them; his whole body was mere bones, only his bright-coloured *lipa* giving

shape to his self; his hair, too, was very long and matted and outlined his thin pale face in which his teeth seemed to gleam with an uncanny whiteness in the after-glow of the sun.

I asked him, would he share my cauldron—I had found two large stirring spoons—and he immediately seated himself without sound opposite my fire and dipped his spoon in to the pot after slowly crossing himself and looking around; he dipped and raised his spoon, dipped and raised, not seeming to mind how hot it was; I blew gently on each spoon-full. It did not taste of anything much, a little acrid perhaps, but I drank and drank till my belly felt full, only leaving the residue at the bottom of the pot. Then I said I was very tired from walking and would he be offended if I went to sleep. In the morning, we could talk.

A little dew came and settled over me, the fire died down to embers, only the slightest drift of smoke through my hair. He, too, wrapped himself more closely and seemed to settle to sleep ... Morning came, with birds, and the sun over the curve of the hills, the thatch-roofs rose through a faint curtain of mist. I sat up and rubbed my eyes and looked around. There was no sign of my companion, only the dead pot over the ash.

Another day. I stood up slowly. I must find the young man, see if he needed help; tell him, ask him ... I went all around the houses, calling out, sorry I had not even asked his name: softly, "senhor, are you there? can we speak?" No answer. I came back to the fire, thinking to boil up more *sopa* to start me on my journey ... I looked to where he had sat last night. There was a faintly-damp patch on the ground.

Then I thought: that is very strange, no sign of his footsteps to and fro, no sign of his bare feet in the dust, or where he laid himself to sleep ... how could he move so lightly that nothing disturbed the ground ... It was shivery in the mist ... I touched the stone where he had sat and I knew again that terrible sense of sorrow I had felt—for something past—but stronger now.

*****

Cats, no less liquid than their shadows,
Offer no angles to the wind.
They slip, diminished, neat, through loopholes
Less than themselves; will not be pinned

To rules or routes for journeys; counter
Attack with non-resistance; twist
Enticing through the curving fingers
And leave an angered, empty fist.

A.S.J. Tessimond

*****

In another *póvoa*, now that I was turned toward the Loro Sa'e, the space of the sunrise, I came upon two elderly women and a younger woman who was trying to give birth. She had been trying for three days, they said, and the baby was dead. The mother was exhausted, too tired even for despair ...

The women had known I was coming (or that *someone* was coming, an official, not *I* as in me); I did not ask how they knew; clearly they were *bruxas*, not *curandeiras*, and their magic was weak because they were weak. They told me all the village was 'away', they had gone south to the swamps to catch crocodiles for food. And the baby, they said, must be cut in half, would I cut it in half—and they handed me a sharp small knife—*Mamá*, you were quite wrong to wish me as a diplomat: picture me now with this knife, my hand trembling, seeing those parts of a woman with which I am not supposed to be familiar ...

The two tiny pale legs sprouting, unmoving when I touch their soles with my nails, and when I try to slice between them the sweat runs in my palm and the blood is thick as

chocolate. I do not know how I did it, how long I took; the old women took away the pieces, speaking, muttering, as they did so ... then they gave the young woman something strong-smelling to drink.

When I lay down to sleep I dreamed of sharp knives cutting me and my legs and parts handed to strangers. Early, the women brought me food which tasted of nothing, only *piri-piri* and smoke, and it did not make me sick, and I know I was eating a japanese baby. There were many japanese babies born from rape or the girls taken to the brothel in Díli but the babies mostly died from starvation.

People had so little food, naturally they fed their own babies first, not these babies born to shame and sorrow—because each baby, in the manner of true tradition, has his place in the clan genealogy, perhaps he has a special totem figure from his father, he is part of the histories repeated on important occasions and which trace back centuries into the mysterious past before we came ... A baby born without a father's name was a baby without a father, he belonged nowhere ... It was rumoured, too, that at least one australian baby was born like this, out of rape. I do not know if this is true but it might be.

For a little while, I spoke with the old women; saw them treat the young woman who was hot and feverish with their words of comfort and I gave her a cold wet cloth to put on her forehead.

Então! I must go on ... *obrigação*, to walk, to walk, on and on ...

*****

Padre António remained in his church—I do not think the idea of leaving even came to him—but a big bomber flying south had jettisoned a bomb; perhaps the bomb-toggle had stuck then come loose again and just the one bomb fell—but right on top of his little manuscript house and all his priceless papers disappeared in a puff of smoke! There was nothing left, just a crater right beside the church! Poor old man. He was very old now, seventy, eighty, his hair sparse and white, his *sotaina* mere rags, and I felt so sorry for him—yet he seemed to understand immediately, before I had spoken, that I needed his comfort; all I had seen, all the unspoken things inside my head ... It was my duty to give comfort, to tell people to have hope, and instead he knew immediately I needed something.

He simply suggested that we sit down and I tell him about things, not as confessor to whom I came in *penitência* ... We did not look at each other and I tried to tell him: of sin, yes, but also things seen and done and felt; he tried to keep straight all the words that suddenly came pouring out of me, I did not know I had so many words inside me, and then, instead of telling me the kind of things priests normally tell people to do, he said calmly, "God sees into your heart. He forgives. Now you must forgive yourself. It is war. Not *your* war. Not *my* war. Not *my people's* war. Just war. If you know it, say it with me" ... and we said, in the tétum-words spoken here, the *Pai-Nosso* ... *Ami Aman, iha lalehan, tulun ema atu hahi'i Ita Naran; halo Ita—Nia reinu to'o mai ami;* ... and then he embraced me as a father, let me cry for death and sorrow and the smell of bodies ...

His people brought him food every day, placing it humbly on the church-step, and the old priest took it inside and cooked things simply in the one pot, because his digestion and his teeth were now so poor he could only eat soft things, but before he cooked for me he said, "I must ask you to keep my secret, I have two men here, it is better that no one knows." He tapped softly on the vestry door. In a minute it opened—and two japanese men came out! I stared at them. What were they doing here?

The old man smiled a little: "They are my people too. Catholic men. They do not wish to kill my catholic people—so they stay here ... with me. The Church is much persecuted in *Japão* so they must have great courage to worship as they should." He told me they came from a town in Japan called Naga-saki which has the most christians in the entire country; for centuries they had been persecuted, since the Toku-gawa dynasty had thrown the missionaries from the country and forced their people to worship in secret. It is very hard, they said to me, each day we must say our prayers in secret—

"*Orasshos*—do you not mean—*orações*?"

"In japanese—*orasshos*."

"How strange."

"Ah! Brothers in Christ," the old man said. "But come now, my sons, you must be hungry." He told them that I love animals; they were confused, I think, then smiled and said, "Sei Furanshisuko" which is their name for São Francisco ...

And never once did the old man refer to the loss of his life-long study. Instead he tried hard to be cheerful and comforting and his people forgave him for his decades of neglect of their souls and gave him more food than he could possibly eat. He told me he had sent messages to Monsignor Goulart in Díli and to his 'friend' *Padre* Januário in Soibada—to ask what he should do with his 'guests'—and had received no answer.

I was astonished. Did he not know? Monsignor Goulart had moved from Díli leaving *Pe*. Carlos Pereira in charge, first to Ossu, then to Soibada, then he and *Pe*. Januário and some other priests and the italian nuns had sailed secretly to Australia, *this was nearly two years ago*, leaving *Pe*. Abílio there to look after everything—but he had been killed by the japanese ... Suddenly the old man was no longer one of many, he was alone. He sat down and ate his pumpkin mash and his hand trembled on his spoon.

Might his letters have fallen into the wrong hands? I felt nervous. But no, he had asked them only to visit that he might ask their advice on a 'pastoral matter'. I tried to give comfort, the war would soon be over, even the japanese in Díli thought that, I said, and all would be well, and the young men could say they had been prisoners here or, perhaps (they did not like to tell untruths) people might allow them to stay here and begin new lives ... "yes, my people are good people," the old man said, "such kindness and generosity of heart, they deserve a better shepherd."

Later, he asked me to tell him the time. I have no watch but I have learned in my years here how to read the sun. "It is about half-past-two," I said. "You are sure of that, quite sure?" "Nearly sure, perhaps a little more, a little less. Why?" "I will sound the *Trindades* on the hour—" "But—you have no bell!" He smiled as he stood on his step. "Listen now—*Tlão-Tlão! Tlão-Tlão!*" I was startled by his great rich voice suddenly booming down the valley to the southern sea ... and nervous ...

Sometimes, I lie on the ground, I am so tired, and look up at the passage of the sun across the heavens, and I close my eyes and see the sun dance the *chula*, the fandango, in orange and gold upon my eyelids, and sometimes I say the words of that *salmo*: My God, My God, why have you forsaken your people? So simple, so innocent, why have you asked them to bear this terrible burden? Why? and he never answers—so it is true that I am not a true believer.

I went away that night before the moon rose, walking quickly.

*****

I will tell thee, Gilgamesh,
Of a mournful mystery of the Gods:
How once, having met together,
They resolved to flood the land of Shuruppak.
Clear-eyed Ea, saying nothing to his father, Anu,
Nor to the Lord, the great Enlil,
Nor to the preacher of happiness, Nemaru,
Nor even to the underworld prince, Enua,
Called to him his son Ubara-Tut;
Said to him: 'Build thyself a ship;
Take with thee thy near ones,
And what birds and beasts thou wilt;
Irrevocably have the Gods resolved

To flood the land of Shuruppak.

Gilgamesh

*****

Manuel Vaz da Cruz was given the work of a *chefe de posto* after its incumbent had gone to Austrália and he stayed on, even after the japanese ordered people into the 'neutral zone'; he had no wish to be alone in a village, unprepared, with no one to drink with but he did his best. By the time I came there, he had been living in that place for eighteen months or more; he had ceased to think of Life. He had two names of days, BE and AE, 'before exile' and 'after exile'; he avoided speaking of the present.

Yet, the very fact that he spoke, unconcerned, about returning to Díli, as it might be next week, gave people a particular kind of hope, there would be change of course, it would be the change to times of peace ... But there was too much hunger, he had sent nearly everyone from the dry hills south of the town of Manatuto to somewhere along the sea-coast, a long march done in one night; only several old women remained behind, and an old man mad with a kind of disease of the ears, and the old women washed and cooked for him. I can not say if this was out of concern for him, or because they felt they were too old for the long hurried walk, or it might be that they stayed to look after the graves and places of the clan spirits ...

He never spoke about them, only of the time the japanese came, looking for australian spies and people who had succoured them, and when he said there was no one here, that they had all died or run away into the trees or been taken to labour on the Díli-Baucau road, they did not believe him and began to shoot with their rifles into the ground around him; some of the bullets went into the earth but some of them rebounded from stones and caught him in the legs.

Although he managed to dig out a couple of these bullets some were too deep for him to reach and they festered and grew putrid and made the flesh swell and his leg grew foul and black until, in desperation, he drank two bottles of *aguardente* and sawed his leg off at the knee; after that he got better but it was very awkward with only one leg, and he grew morbid about his other leg, always saying he could feel his toes yet, when he looked down, they were not there and sometimes he thought he might be going mad, out here, like the old man.

He took to sitting for hours on end, holding this one thigh between both hands; then there was no chance of it fooling him with the belief it could walk, why was he sitting down? He would squeeze the flesh, pummel it, waggle it to and fro, up and down; it was disconcerting to sit near him.

"Tomás! *Pá*! Where have you come from?"

I told him the Governor had sent me, to give hope. "Hope!" He laughed and laughed. "That is crazy! What hope is there for me!" He hit his leg so fiercely that his fist left red marks. "Then make me some crutches. Or a wooden leg."

"I'll try."

"No!" He threw himself back in his chair. The room was very bare except for several bottles lying about and papers on another chair.

"When you go home you will be able to have an artificial leg and walk again ... "

"And who will look at me—pog, pog, pog! I know I am unlucky, I was born with a *cometa* passing in the sky, my mother knew I would be the unlucky child of the family."

"But—"

"*Mas* this, *mas* that, Tomasinho," his voice was full of scorn.

"—you will find a woman who loves you and she will see that you have only one leg because you were brave and did not run away."

He laughed some more. "And you, Tomás, you have a woman?"

"Not exactly."

"Who is she?"

I hesitated. “Dona Déolinda.”

He looked astonished. “Still the black woman! You must be mad! What will your mother say?”

“I do not know. She is far away and busy with other things.”

“And she is ... ” He tried to find the words to say to my face, “everyone in Díli knows her. She is not good enough for you ... ”

“Who told you about her?”

“No one, I just hear talk, you know what it is like, people saying this woman, that woman, I do not know what is true ... ”

“That talk—about Déolinda—is not true. I know that.”

“The only man allowed?” His misery made him offensive.

“You know nothing about women, Manuel. Wait till you go on the boat.”

“The joy of it, sitting, good food, cards, music,” he began to caress his leg, a far away look in his eyes. “Shall we eat?”

“I am always hungry.”

“So am I.” Then he put his arm along-side mine; “but you are more thin than me. When I cut off the leg, I cut off the bad meat and cooked the good meat, I liked the flavour, tender goat ... ”

“So what do you eat now?”

“Corn cakes. Green bananas. *Sopa de pedras*.” And as he spoke one of the old women came to the door, deferential, with a bowl of boiled bananas. “Your Excellencies.” She put it down and backed out.

“Old, old,” he pursed his lips, “but obedient.”

I was glad to leave there next day, with the noisy blessing of one last poor *kokorék*. Manuel said I could not reach ‘his’ refugees; he had found a secret cove once when he had sailed on the barge along the coast from Díli to Baucau: it had stayed a-while because men had come on it to fish for sharks; it was a good place, he said, and I would not be able to find it.

That was my dilemma: of course I could find it, did he think Rui Cardoso had allowed me to travel with my eyes closed—but *should* I go? Were they safer without intrusion ...

*****

Agua densa do sonho, quem navega?
Contra as auroras, contra as baías:
barca imóvel, estrela cega.

Bate o vento na vela e não a arqueia.
—Não foi por mim!
Partiram-se as cordas, rodaram os mastros,
os remos entraram por dentro da areia ...

Os remos torceram-se, e trançaram raízes.
—Inútil forçá-los—alastram-se, fogem
na sombra secreta de eternos países ...

Mudo-se a vela em nuvem clara!
Choraram meus olhos, minhas mãos correram ...
—Alto e longe!—Não foi por mim ...

E apenas pára
um corpo na barca vazia,
à mercê das metamorfoses,

olhos vertendo melancolia ...

O vento sopra no coração.

Adeus a todos os meridianos!
Deito-me como num caixão.

Ah! Sobrevive o mar no meu ouvido ...
"Marinheiro! Marinheiro!"

(Ilhas ... Pássaros ... Portos ...—nesse ruído.
—O mar! ... O mar! ... O mar inteiro! ...)

Mas é tempo perdido!

Cecília Miereles

*****

Because of walking I have much time for thinking: as I walked I thought it is a strange foible that men build their cities right on their coasts, flaunting their beautiful cities, full of treasures, as if they would say 'Look at me! Am I not rich, am I not clever, am I not civilised!' and the ships of foes need only sail in and throw missiles ... because we are not peaceful, by nature ... So would it not be better if we were humble in our ways and built our homes, deeply, secretly, modestly, within the mountains, like the *ciganos* in Spain who live in simple caves, and have our small fields and our animals in small herds ... our coasts would be sand … the trees lashed only by the sea-winds ...

The road from Díli to Baucau winds around steep cliffs until it comes close to Manatuto where the land becomes flatter with salt-pans and small trees, so that, hidden at the base of these cliffs are a number of small coves which can not be seen from the road above. Here they had made small shelters for themselves with grass and branches and angled away from the wind that comes in from the sea every evening; here, too, they had a small canoe, burned out from the trunk of a tree so they could catch the small sharks that abound in these waters, even close to the shore, perhaps a metre long, and which are easy to catch and tasty to eat; here, too, they could catch crabs and shellfish, *bicho do mar* which they grind up and season and use as a paste, and spiny urchins and starfish which they boil to make soup, seaweed too.

I gave them my message and news of their women left behind and their *chefe de posto* ... they told me two children had been born safely here, but that a body had washed up on the beach of a native man; they did not know who he could be ...

I turned east, with great reluctance, because I would prefer to sneak back into Díli, to see D. Déolinda, but I knew I must go to as many places as possible; naturally, I would rather go to the places where the japanese were not—if they caught me I did not think they would merely and kindly return me to Liquiçá—but it was the people labouring for them who most needed His Excellency's message. I would go through Baucau, along the coast to Laga and Lautém ...

The japanese had thousands of men enforced to work on their airfields at Baucau and Lautém and Fuiloro and men working on the road between Díli and Lautém, and, now, the road south from Baucau to Venilale. This was because they had brought more than fifty tanks on their ships and they could not use them because the roads were not wide enough or strong enough to carry them.

Around Lautém they were digging holes wherever there were any cliffs so they could hide their barges and all around these they put up barbèd wire—the timorese had never seen this kind of wire before and said they did not believe it would stop the animals—and they made the men dig similar caves near Venilale to hide their trucks from the australian and american

planes which came over every week and bombed the towns and airfields. As fast as the natives repaired them, they had to begin repairing them again, so they could never go home to plant and harvest in their villages, and thousands of them died from starvation and the japanese, when they had no supplies of food, ate some of the bodies.

The aerodrome at Fuiloro had been bombed many times but when I went there, the rainy season was begun, I was amazed to find that some of the aeroplanes there were not real planes, they were only painted wood sitting on platforms, and the ground itself was mud, so the real planes were not able to take off. But the *bombas* had also landed on the near houses and gardens: the palm trees and fruit trees were all shattered and broken and there were deep craters in the ground, full of dark water, and some *bombas* had not exploded then but later when children stepped on them, hiding in the good earth. The people had lost their livelihood, their hope ...

But I could only give my message, furtively, in the night, a spirit tapping at their doors, "soon there will be peace, plant new trees; soon the planes will cease to fly over", and travel on through the up-and-down countryside to Loré and Iliomár ... It was easier to find food along the south coast and I knew how to fish along the reefs here and boil the lagoon creatures for soup, where to find bird's eggs, but, every day, I longed to sleep, to sleep and sleep and never wake up. Whenever I could I made a smoky fire and immersed myself in the smell of the palm leaves and wet grass burning but still the whine of the mosquitoes was like a million tiny whining planes ...

*****

Asleep there are dreams, awake there are thoughts. I do not know which is worse. You will have seen so much death, I do not need to tell you how it looks and smells; but the misery of the death here, in the eastern *circunscrições* of São Domingos and Lautém, is that it need not have been.

The japanese were convinced that every person in the western *circunscrições* of Fronteira, Suro and Díli, was infected with beliefs left behind about Austrália and the Nederlandes: that Austrália would again come and 'save' the people; they patrolled, always watching, always suspicious, always ready to shoot at the smallest commotion and burn down houses, but they had mostly left the east alone except along the north coast—and then the australians did a very terrible thing to the people, they began sending in 'spies', men who could be left on the coast, secretly, by night, or dropped from planes.

They did this because they thought the japanese would not know they had come back but the japanese soon heard: heard the planes, sighted the secret ships, heard rumours, picked up radio messages; so now the east was patrolled too. Everywhere there was suspicion; people were grabbed, questioned, tortured for the little knowledge they might have: Where are the *australianos*? tell us? we must know how many? when they will be invading? where?—sometimes people knew and sometimes they did not, sometimes they told and sometimes they did not: even some of the japanese who had treated people well before became like wild men, knowing there would be an invasion, and they did not have enough men or war-material, and the Emperor Hiro-Hito would demand their disgrace ...

They tried to make people so terrified with torture that they would not help the new australian *soldados* when they arrived in the future, they would not give them food or information ... They did terrible things to the women, not only rape, but burning and hanging, dragging behind a horse, and the men could do nothing but watch ...

The *australianos* said they had come to 'gather intelligence' on the numbers of japanese, to find out about their numbers of planes and ships ... but because they came, the japanese changed their plans ...

They had been moving men from Díli, from Timor, back to the northern and north-eastern islands, slowly, slowly, and if they had continued to do that there might have been enough food for everyone, even with the bombing, but the embarkations stopped, there were even some new arrivals at Lautém.

The australians told the villagers they must fight the japanese with anything they had, when and where, because the japanese were the most evil people in the world and wanted to take over every country, even Austrália. But it is true that the japanese only treated people very badly after the australians had come to their villages.

I know, too, that the australians did not come to collect intelligence because all their secret ciphers and codes were captured by the japanese, but the people in Australia did not notice and kept sending messages. I know, from Rui Cardoso, that each person using the Morse code is different, just as each person using a typewriter has his own style—an expert, it seems, can tell my typing and my typewriter—so why did the experts in Austrália not notice, if this was important intelligence they were trying to collect?

But generals do not care about the lives of their men ... And the men, I know now, were sent into our country so that the japanese would stay, would not be moved elsewhere to fight the australians and the americans; for the death of only twenty or thirty men they could keep thousands of japanese soldiers here (they did not count the death of the village people) and the people in the villages were 'only boongs'; they said it like that between themselves, 'only'.

(When I tried to learn the *código Morse*—a—dot dash, ã—dot dash dot dash, b—dash dot dot dot, c—dash dot dash dot—Rui Cardoso told me not to be a fool and took the paper away from me and tore it in small pieces, but I remember most of it ...)

Tenente Pires, who had been the administrator of São Domingos, went to Austrália then came back with these secret agents, and the japanese caught him and now, because he was not neutral but an australian spy, they treated him very badly, with torture, first in the prison they made out of the barracks in Baucau, then, later, in Díli, where he died of fever.

One *chefe de suco*, called Dom Olímpio, said he and his village had a plan to attack Baucau and rescue all the men there. It was a very simple plan and I thought it might succeed. The timorese are very brave warriors but they prefer to rush up on their 'enemies' with fierce yells and the illusion that thousands of feather-be-decked warriors come behind them with spears and swords. This is why Dom Boaventura lost his war in 1912; he had not learned how to be subtle; I think, too, this is why millions of men died in the *Primeira Guerra Mundial*—because their generals could think nothing better than to send them yelling at each other with their bayonets ...

But I said to Dom Olímpio that he was not required to help spies; this was not part of the law, only if he felt this was what his conscience said he should do, and he must think of the safety of his whole village; that his freedom was in his land, in his people, in his little children (he had three wives), not in promises made by strangers ... but still he thought he and his men might go, so I told him exactly where everything he needed to know was in Baucau ...

Later I heard that he was sick with a broncho-pneumonia, as was all the village, and several children died of this because they were not so well-nourished by this time. In the mountains, the mist is thick and cold and does not want to disperse with the sun rising, and people can only be safe from it with good food and blankets.

*****

The big bombers often dropped pieces of paper; by the time the paper floated down to the ground, the planes had disappeared and people were often puzzled and superstitious and afraid. People, too, could not read what the messages said. There was an old priest—he was no longer a priest; the Church had taken away his authority to say the *missa* because he had a makassae wife, but people still came to him for advice and comfort—and he had a number of these pamphlets. He said, quite frankly, he had no intention of translating these papers or reading them to the people who brought them; certainly he told them hopeful things but it was not what was on the paper.

His reason was quite simple: the papers mostly began with the salutation 'Timorenses!' or 'Filhos de Timor!' or 'Homens de Timor!' or 'Povos de Timor!' or 'Timores!' and he believed that to encourage people to think of themselves as timorese would create trouble, that people were happy to say 'I belong to the Guterres clan' or 'the tribe Mambai', and if they

began to think of themselves as a nation it would bring back the problems Dom Boaventura created.

Of course he, Dom Boaventura, had different reasons: his people complained when they were no longer allowed to cut as many sandalwood trees as they wished; this was easy wealth and the law which said they could only cut it with permission made the people, and especially the *liurais*, angry. Other people said it was because of the new republic flag in 1911; the monarchical flag was taken down but people had come to treat it not as a flag, belonging to us, but as a *lulic* object which had especial magical powers; they were afraid that the new flag would drain the magic from the old flag ... I have heard, too, from a retired administrator, that the dutch were responsible for the uprising, that they wanted this last little bit of the Indies to belong to them ...

This man said he had seen natives with dutch *guilders* and *florins* in their possession in the next years; they said they had got them in trade with people along the border but he did not believe this, why suddenly was there *more* such money circulating, and he had much experience ...

'*Padre*' Jesus de Nascimento kept all these papers in a hole in the ground; he knew, if the japanese found them, it would be as much as his life was worth, but, sometimes, he liked to bring them out, mock them, put them away again. Why, he said, do they ask the *indígenas* to stay away from the japanese when it is their actions which bring the japanese to the people? (There were leaflets saying 'Timorese! Stay away from the Japanese or we will be forced to attack you!') How did they think villagers gathered together at gun-point to work on the roads and bridges were to obey this? Then he said, "but it is as the good God requires ... You believe in God, Tomás?" "Yes." "But yours is the God of the creatures, is it not, a Pan-God?" "I d-d-don't know, only what the priests taught me."

"The priests, pah! What do they know! Where is it in the words of Jesus that I may not cleave unto a wife, to love and to cherish? Do not you think that I am a better priest for understanding the love of women and children? Answer me that?"

"Yes, I think what you say is true."

He was very critical of the priests who left, saying that people were going back to their pagan ways—and why not—"It does not do for them the miracles they believe it does, but it gives them comfort—and why should they not believe in the power of the *lulic*—it did not embark upon a ship and sail away, leaving them without comfort in their travail ... and if we are to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, does that not mean we must take it to the japanese soldiers as well, even if they do not listen, even if they take out their bayonets and spit me as I would spit a roasting fowl?"

And, later, he said—"'They give drink to every beast of the field: the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of the heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chamber: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of their works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth' ... I am an old man, Tomás Vasconcelos, a very tired old man. I tell people, have hope, but I have very little hope myself. Give me hope. Where is the food He gives ... Where are the animals to eat the grass, don't you see it happening, people with no beasts to plough ... People use any creature, lame, stunted, misshapen, to try to breed new generations, what will the future be with animals like that ... Come with me and see what I mean."

We walked some distance in the moon-light, the world silent around us except for a little bird that goes 'shiss'ckshiss'ck' in the night, and then we dropped down into a kind of cleft where he had a few animals penned, mostly goats. All of them seemed a little odd. One of them seemed to have two heads but I am sure this must have been the poor light—I did not know what to think.

"Can you cure these," he said quietly.

"No. I do not think so—"

“And the children, can you cure the children.”

“No.”

“For that ... ” he crossed himself slowly, “there will be children stunted, sick, weak ... You can not raise healthy generations from stunted children. Go back and tell His Excellency that.”

“You do not think—that the australians might send us food.”

“Cause and effect?” I do not know if he was listening to me and it was eery to stand there and watch the small animals and I wondered if he had bought these animals over the years so the villagers would only breed from the better animals ... Yet they seemed not unhappy, the way they would lie down, bleat softly at him ... He turned back to me: “But no, my son, I do not believe the australians will send our children food.”

And they didn’t.

*****

I must return a little way upon my journey to tell another story: Near dark, I came one night to a tiny hamlet which appeared deserted. Yet I could smell that people lived here, cooked here. First I tried calling out, then I walked to the trees, hoping to hear people; all was silence. But I was very tired so, eventually, I settled myself and went to sleep; the old fear, of being caught sleeping by japanese soldiers, was always there and yet there was plenty of time—every night, in fact—to learn to live with it.

Very early in the morning, before dawn, I was awaked by a dog, a very fat cream-coloured puppy. Many villages once had dogs, brown dogs, yellow dogs, even dogs that were nearly pure-white, but most of them had been eaten. This little dog licked my face and climbed into my lap when I sat up. I rubbed my eyes. Where there was a fat dog there *must* be people.

In a few more minutes faces came at the door and spoke to me in a loud whisper. “Your Excellency! We did not hear you arrive!” They explained they mostly lived in the forest, only coming down to their huts along the shore to fish and collect *bicho do mar* and other things. But they said, fishing this season was not good; they did not understand why but felt it was because they had not carried out the sacrifices to the spirits of the sea and the coral reefs ... Then I understood why the puppy was so fat ...

They spoke neither portuguese nor tétum nor any language I knew at all, only a few words they had acquired. Mostly they lived here, almost sufficient in their lives and with their own customs and beliefs which admitted almost nothing from the outside world, only the teachings of their ancestors who had come long ago from islands to the east-north-east; because of this they recited their stories and histories facing to that way and sacrificed chickens when the fishing was poor ...

But, now, they had no chickens. I asked why was that. They said a boat had come close to the coast a little to the west and many strange things had washed up along the shore including tins which, when they had opened one with the point of a sword, a brown stuff had oozed out, so they left it—but the japanese heard rumours and came to search the coast. They spread their soldiers all along the coast here, sometimes digging in the sand, sometimes hiding in the trees, waiting ... and demanding food.

Later a boat did reach the shore—and the men on it were captured and taken away somewhere. By then the village had lost all its animals, its pigs and chickens and goats and dogs ... only this puppy was left because he was a timid animal and had been hiding.

After our long slow conversation I told them His Excellency who, to them, was a mysterious never-seen figure, wished them well and told them the war would soon be over and all the soldiers would leave. They thanked me, not quite convinced such a skinny ragged figure as myself could be the bearer of such important news. The little dog at last climbed down from my lap and waddled toward the door. Suddenly, one of the men shouted something and caught the dog in his arms and they all crowded round him; I wondered why they were so excited. It seemed that the little dog had caught himself on a sharp branch and had a big infected wound on his flank—and now, they said, the wound was healed.

They wanted me to take him as a gift; surely, now, their good fortune must return to their fishing nets and spears; now that I, who could heal, merely by looking, had come to visit their humble village (I do not pretend this is exactly what they said) but I said I could not as he was too young to walk all the way and I did not have the strength to carry him, could I therefore leave him with them as a special mark of respect and a link between my world and their world ... and if they would take him every day to the sand they would have better catches of fish.

Of course this was a foolish thing to promise. But I thought it might simply be their fears about going out every day on to the reefs which had reduced their hawl of fishes; they gave me three coconuts and the special mixture they make by grinding up the sea-slugs with *piri-piri* and other things, then I continued on my way; sometimes, I think too, it was the *tabus* that made life harder for people, the rules of what food they could eat, and how, and when ... Sometimes I could see the reason, as the rule not to eat things caught near a reef damaged in a storm; I do not know why it is but such food causes sickness ... If they broke a *tabu* because of hunger they sometimes vomited the food back straight-way, such was the power of the *tabu*.

Nearly a year later I received a letter from a priest, *Pe*. João Saldanha, who said the people there every day buried their dog in the sand while they fished and they had good fishing and he was the largest dog he had ever seen in Timor; but the reason he had taken up his pen to write to me was that he had always found these people particularly stubborn about relinquishing their pagan beliefs—and he asked me, as the people there refused to see the error of their ways, to use my good offices to ask them to embrace the True Faith.

This might seem such a simple thing to ask me, for me to do, but I could not decide. Would these people be happier under *Padre* João's munificent eye? If they chose to become catholics it would mean they must be catholics for ever—because he would allow no slipping of duties, no half-and-half ... Was it for me to decide what was best for them? Had not my father said that other people do not necessarily know what was best for him, best for anyone, and if the good God should wish these people to become baptised, would he not quicken their hearts and un-stop their ears to the siren call of the Church?

And I had another worry which is more alusive. When the japanese came many of the priests helped the australian soldiers and told their *paroquianos* to do like-wise—now I think this is understandable because most of the priests were white and the *australianos* were white ... But did they make this decision with all true care for their people who were not white, and with all true care for the words of Jesus the *Cristo* ... Who told us we must love our enemies ... Now, many of the priests did not do this; I do not mean that they were not brave, men like *Padre* António and *Padre* Norberto were very brave ... But, the australians had made the japanese very angry and suspicious so they buzzed with the aimless fury of wasps and scorpions, then the soldiers and priests went away on ships and left the people without protection against this fury and it was the people themselves who must try to be the true christians, to say they felt love and kindness and good-will to all men, even japanese men ...

I can not look into the hearts of the priests who went away to Austrália but I still wonder if they would have made different choices if the australian generals had sent only black aborigine-australians to fight in our country ...

But this was only one half of my dilemma. The japanese. If there is no one God beyond the emperor, beyond the prime minister, beyond the generals ... what then? Is it not our God who reminds us every day, as our conscience, of our failures to be kind, to be honest, to understand hope, charity, love; to live what we know is the ideal. Some of the japanese were very cruel to innocent farmers and shepherds, to wives and children, to elderly grandmothers and grandfathers, because they did not believe that their lives would be Judged. Was it not better for people to believe in a God who both felt great love and pity for his people as they crawled as little ants across his world, and who held the Book of Righteousness in his hands and entered names?

I lost sleep over this, walking the floor, and I purposely mislaid the *Padre's* letter. God

forgive me. No, perhaps it is Henrique ...

*****

Over and over again Díli was bombed before peace came; I lived in the hills but came back twice to see D. Déolinda; she did not welcome me and she was very thin, her skin seemed without lustre, her hair had a strange red tinge; her hut was dilapidated where a fire had burned the end thatch ... I had to be very careful to come quietly so as not to be seen ... And Rosentina lived between us there, if I could speak of her—but I did not know what to say and D. Déolinda seemed not to want to hear her name, not to talk; she was the spirit there, never laughing, but always saying, so I like to think, "the future, there is a future" ...

D. Déolinda was so sad, so far removed from me, I suddenly pressed her hands, the right, the left, to my lips. She pulled them away and put them behind her as though she had been stung ... I felt entirely useless and miserable ... But when I had walked up to the track and turned to look back I saw her with her hands pressed to her face ...

Mr. Wang was allowed to come back from his 'exile' in the garrison at Aileu and he tried to re-establish his restaurant but it was hard: it was so dirty, everything was dirty, broken, everywhere there was rubble, part of the roof had fallen in. And elsewhere—the beautiful cathedral had no roof any more, its windows broken, its towers tumbled (the japanese had blown off the top of the towers because they said the enemy planes used them to guide where to bomb). Many of the chinese and arab shops were empty, the water did not run in the taps, the harbour's edge was littered with bombed ships, there were burned aeroplanes on the aerodrome.

Mr. Wang said, "See me, I am no better than a rat, scavenging."

"But a day will come when you can open your door and people will come to eat here again. I will."

"Yes. But they say I helped the japanese."

"B-b-but that is not true."

"No, but I do not have friends who will say 'that is not true'."

"I will."

"No. You won't." He patted my arm with his thin hand. "If men were like you, Mr. Thomas ... but they are not."

"Will you ask Dona Déolinda to care for some hens again?"

"Yes. If I can find hens."

"Will that be very difficult?"

"Oh yes, but perhaps I will send to my brother in Sidney."

It was more than a year before the hens came, but they were fine big hens, black and speckled. They were a gift. Unfortunately Mr. 'Sidney' Wang did not think to send a cockerel; generation to generation they became small again.

Mr. Wang, later, was the first person to tell me that the australians would be returning to the countryside to gather 'evidence'. They were going to put the japanese on trial: people were pleased to hear this. They thought the men who had raped and tortured people should be punished suitably; the cruellest men would go to prison in Austrália, women would be safe, children could go out in to the village gardens again ... But then it was said that the men writing down the stories only wanted to know about the australian soldiers who had suffered, not what was done to civilians, to neutral people ... they were not important in this case ...

First some of the men were taken to Koepang and then to Austrália for the trial, including the worst man of all, *Capitão* Saiki, and then we heard that he had received three months in a prison there. How strange! Only three months. And two other men, called Mori and Abe, each received one month. People here thought they had suffered far more, they were hungry, they had lost everything they owned ...

Mr. Wang said to me, "I would rather have three months in an australian prison, my food brought, big plates of food, three times a day, it would be heaven, do you not think so?"

But that first time, we talked of things we would like to eat—Mr. Wang described the soup

he would order, the crisp Peking duck, the vegetables to garnish huge mountains of rice, the choice of sauces, perhaps a sweet and sour fish well basted, the bottles of snake-bile wine to refurbish his liver ... I, too, thought I would begin with soup, rich with all kinds of fish, lampreys and oysters and eels; then I would have roast pork à la Maria with mounds of potatoes to fill all the many empty crevices, then a row of *flans* stretching to the horizon ... there would be fresh coffee and little biscuits made with almonds which would melt in my mouth, or *ovos moles* ... We rubbed our empty bellies ... imaginary food is not very nourishing ...

Then, suddenly, there was the sound of guns being fired. Mr. Wang started up in shock but I told him it was nothing to be worried about. They were only shooting at scorpions. "Scorpions!" He did not believe me. You will think this very childish of me but I had gathered together many scorpions in my travels here and quietly let them go again ... near the barracks ...

*****

Lo! Death has reared himself a throne
In a strange city lying alone
Far down within the dim West,
Where the good and the bad and the worst and the best
Have gone to their eternal rest.
There shrines and palaces and towers
(Time-eaten towers that tremble not!)
Resemble nothing that is ours.
Around, by lifting winds forgot,
Resignedly beneath the sky
The melancholy waters lie.

Edgar Allan Poe

*****

The japanese formally surrendered to His Excellency; the australians had hastened to get a ceremony over before the ship that was coming from Lourenço Marques could arrive. But the japanese commander, *Coronel* Yoshioka, had already made a formal announcement to His Excellency, he said it was right that he should do so in the name of the Emperor because this was our country, but I think people still did not believe, not completely, until the radio was linked once more to Macau two weeks later.

There were no fewer that *six* australian ships in Díli harbour the day of the ceremony, to watch over the laying of wreaths, of everything. *Capitão* Carvalho, even though he was tired and unwell, was as rigid and formal as the world's best governor. It was hard to remember that he had not had a proper meal for three years to see him standing there, never-bending in the hot sun, smart in his crisp white uniform. It was hard to remember that his teeth were loose and his gums fallen in.

There were many australian sailors wandering round. Some of them were astonished that our capital city was all bombed to 'smithereens', they did not know about the bombing, some of them hardly knew we existed. One sailor said to me "Hullo" and "Nice day, eh?" and then "You've sure got a mess here waiting to be cleared up. Gawd Strewth, I never saw such a mess, not even in Darwin."

"We did not bomb our own city, sir."

"Didn't say you did, mate. Well, give your boongs a good kick up the backside and get 'em busy on it, there seems to be enough of 'em around."

I think he thought this because so many people had come to Díli, walking for days to come

here, because they had heard there would be fireworks and, better, some food. “I have seen so many people dead from hunger, from disease, out in the mountains ... ”

He shrugged, and he was a man with fine big shoulders. “A bit scrawny but they always say the wiry ones work better. I heard that in Ceylon.”

“You have many ships. What do you call them?”

For a minute I thought he was not going to tell me, it might be a military secret, then he shrugged again. “That’s the Gympie, nearest us, then the Moresby, the Warnambool, the Gladstone, the Parkes and the Katoomba ... ”

“And have you brought some food supplies in them?”

“We’re the Navy, mate, not a fleet of bloomin’ barges.”

“People are hungry.”

I can see now how I had become obsessed with food. I could not talk with anyone without thinking whether they might have food to spare, whether they might have friends or relatives with food to spare, whether food would arrive ...

“Well, I’ll be seein’ you around, mate.” The sailor tipped his smart cap, turned and strolled away. He had a small camera and was keen to take pictures of the broken buildings, the streets with deep holes, the splintered trees. I wondered what he would do with his pictures. And the ships took away with them much of the japanese war-material left, destroyed much of that remaining (what the japanese themselves did not burn or put about for spite, *minados* especially); they did not want us to have any benefit from our country’s pain.

*****

It was just after this time that I became sick with a fever and I was no good for anything but lying in bed and sweating. This was frustrating but, really, I felt too sick to care, just lying there with my pillow soaked even as I was shivering. I did not know what was happening in the *Missão*, not even if they would still have work for me, and with both Dom Artur and Dom Pedro dead, there was no one there to remember that I still belonged.

Dom Clemente, too, had died on Alor island, so that José was the only one left from the family, with Cecília and the two children drowned (even the piano stolen for firewood); it was so hard for José, he had nothing left to live for, he felt, and I was no comfort there in bed. So he made a terrible decision. (I did not know then that people had said things to him, innuendos, that he was seen taking things from the japanese, that they had given him special treatment in Maubara; what kind of things no one would later say, just ‘things’...) He went up to the fartherest point, Ponta Fatocama, where there is nothing but the spine of the hills running away to the south and the east, and a small look-out built of stones, and there he threw himself from the highest point; if he had landed in deep water he might have lived; if he had landed straight on the rocks he might have been dead straight-way—but he landed on rocks just beneath the water, just enough water to be a cushion beneath him and he broke his back to pieces and took three days to die. He was my best friend in Timor.

Day after day, João Namora would come into my small hot room, even though all the windows were broken it was still hot, and tell me what was happening, who was coming and going, his heavy walk was like a jungle drum in my head, *tam-tam, tam-tam*, but he brought me oranges, I forgive him for his walk but not for other things. I sent a message by the small boy, Adão, who brought the lunch tray with *sopa*, bread, water; it was thought that solid food was not good, that the disease must be sweated out ...

I asked him to go to Dona Déolinda and tell her I was sorry I had not been to see her as I was not well. Of course she had Mr. Wang to help her if she needed help but he was thin and old with his hands swollen and calloused and big pits in his legs where ulcers had come and gone; but I knew he would do everything possible to see that she had food. Adão took my message and she came to see me but João was there and did not want to let her in.

He said it was for my ‘own good’; only letting her when she said she had come because of my message and I might need washing done—but he took the chair away so she had nowhere to sit down (perhaps he took it for another reason) and when I asked her to sit on the bed she

would not. She commisered with me, that I was so red and hot, and I tried to make light of this, "You may call me Chief Hiawatha" but, of course, she had not been forced to read this poem at Mr. Beveridge's school ... I asked if she had any chickens to mind yet and she said, not yet.

Then I asked her if she would marry me. At first she was quite astonished, then she said, quietly, no, she would not. I said, I was feeling tired all ready, might she think differently in a while. She still said no. I asked her if it was because I had annoyed her, I could not bring myself to ask her a deeper question, and she said it was because of Rosentina; then she said she must leave me and she simply went to the door, said "*Adeus*" still so quietly, and went out.

João came in later and said I must be careful; did not I know what people said about her, about her daughter, about the way that she followed and bothered Senhor X ... I said, "why should not he and ... (I named the other men) pay for the care of Rosentina when they had raped Dona Déolinda" and he said, if she had told me that I must know it was only her story, everyone knew the darker the person the less likely they were to tell the truth. I said, no, it was Senhor X and the other men who had told me themselves in 1942 and that Dona Déolinda was only about thirteen at that time.

"How sad." It was only his irony.

"If you do not believe me you can ask him yourself. He is back from Austrália."

"No. But I will go and get that lazy boy—and your chair, Tomás."

Adão came flying into my room with a cuff from João. I do not think I would like to be one of his pupils; also he was one of the teachers who refused to use the *Cartilha Tétum* in his school, he said there was no point as it was a language with no literature and no use, but perhaps he was like the teachers at Mr. Beveridge's who poured scorn on our language rather than admit they could not speak it ...

The boy hurried to set up the chair and my bowls again ...

"I know a proverb about Adão," I said to him, "it goes like this—*Quando Adão cavava e Eva fiava, a fidalguia onde estava*" ... and when I had explained it to him he asked me if he could be a gentleman. I said "Of course. A gentleman comes not from whether you carry trays or mind goats, it is in your heart, a kind of goodness"—I do not think everyone would agree with my explanation but Adão was happy ... Then I asked him if he could try and find for me someone who might be willing to sell me some hens, it did not matter if they cost much (there were some 'black-market' things here and there) as I would like to buy some when I was well enough to get up.

My typewriter had survived everything, the bombs, the war, the looting, and I planned to sell it. He was immediately enthusiastic and three days later he told me he had a relative with a hatching and how many would I be willing to buy ...

*****

Dona Déolinda came again and unfortunately it was when João was there to argue with her but she would not listen to him when he tried to say I was asleep; sometimes, when I think of José, I think it would be nice to sleep and never wake up; sometimes I feel like that when I think about Rosentina and Brites ... Will you marry me, I would very much like to have you as my wife ... No, I do not wish to be married, I do not wish to look after a husband ... to cook his food and sew his trousers ... pah! ... It is strange, when I think about it, that the government insists that women must be obedient to their husbands, the Church insists, and when that fails then we can pick up sticks or take off our shoes to beat her with, we can pull her hair and cuff her ears and shut her in the pig-pen ...

"I think it would be much more fun to have a disobedient wife, do not you?"

"You are who you are and I am who I am," she stretched out her arms, now a little rounder, a faint bloom coming again to her beautiful skin, her hair again tied back in a *carrapicho* and a tiny flower in it so that her graceful neck might entice me again ... Sometimes I wished so much she would reach out her hand and touch me, so I would know she liked to do that, or let

me touch her but she never came close, she was a person who walked surrounded by a little empty space, as if she was afraid people would tread on her shadow. Again she said, "There is Rosentina" and again she said, "Now I must go."

"Then give me your flower, *por favor*."

It was a single bract of the purple bougainvillaea with its tiny white flower at the centre. She shrugged, I *was* sick, and placed it on the pillow beside me.

Afterward, I lay there thinking, and I thought she was like a wild horse with imperity in its hooves and a tempest in its mane and a great fierceness locked away in its heart; a horse which knows bit and bridle, hard saddle and spurs and would like to bite and kick ... But there are all manner of ways: ropes, days without food or water, stealth and cunning.

What did she mean by Rosentina, that she no longer needed to forgive me my failures, if I would say I loved Rosentina, if I would say I wanted to marry her, like her grandfather, with a 'proper marriage' in front of a priest ... She would tell me, would she not, that she had accepted that she must be my *sogra*, nothing more, except I could not have borne *that* ...

And I thought to myself, did I forgive Mr. Burnley for all the misery and guilt and sense of 'uncleanness' he bequeathed me, did Time heal ... Did she forgive those three men ... Did she understand that Manuel, did she *know* that Manuel wanted Rosentina (oh yes, I had come to understand Rui Cardoso's hint, *now*) ... And I knew she had gone to the japanese commander and said, I will do anything you want, if you will leave my daughter alone—and he had mocked in her face, because she was too black for them ...

When I was able to sit up and eat normal things I received a message: as soon as I felt well enough I was to wait upon His Excellency. I thought I should go immediately. João was impressed. He immediately found an arab taxi, lent me his best trousers after Adão had ironed them with his heavy black iron. "He will take pity on you." João was not forgetting the possibility I was being called to hear of the Governor's displeasure. Why else should anyone want someone as unimportant as me?

His Excellency looked in better health, with several of his teeth drawn, and his handshake firmer. "We are ghosts of our former selves, are we not." He smiled a little, *Capitão* Vieira was with him and he also smiled. Then His Excellency put his hand lightly on my shoulder and said, still smiling, "And I understand it was you who took away our monkey. We had rather come to regard him as the british do their monkeys on Gibraltar."

So this was why he had called me to his presence? He wanted Chi-Chi back!

"I beg your pardon, Your Excellency, but originally I gave him to Sra. Coelho and her daughter. I think the bombs frightened him." I hoped he would not be offended to learn the truth.

"A sad business. The child. Other children. Every day," he touched his chest fleetingly, "I feel in here my failure to save them from harm." He looked up and seemed to find *Capitão* Vieira's presence superfluous; he inclined his head slightly toward the door and his *ajudante-de-campo* passed, reluctantly I think, out of the room.

"Sit down, please." I sat cautiously; it could not be Chi-Chi after all.

He began to speak in his careful way, saying he would be returning home, perhaps as soon as November, perhaps early in 1946, and he was deeply concerned that new officials arriving, who had not lived through the misery and destruction—how *could* a man fresh arrived from an office in Lisboa, perhaps, understand what it was to be so hungry, to eat rats, crows, even grass—

So what he wanted me to do was to visit as many villages as possible and list those which were best able to provide men for labouring on roads and public buildings and airfields, there was so much rebuilding needing to be done, but he did not want to burden further those areas which had lost the most strong young men, which had most need to rebuild their own villages, re-establish their own fields, if they were not to suffer more hunger.

My information would go straight to him and he would make sure, this time, I had a pony to ride, in fact two ponies, and he would try to make sure he had his plan for rebuilding in

place before he departed.

Then he said quietly, “And yourself, Tomás Vasconcelos, have you put your name down for leave? I am told everyone will be able to receive it by 1947 at the longest.”

“No, Sir.”

He looked at me in his calm austere way. “I see. Then tell me if there is anything I can do for you.”

Even now, I do not know precisely what he meant by “I see”. What did he see? All my confusions over Dona Déolinda or the much simpler fact that I liked working here; I was not counting the days till promotion, till I could transfer to one of the ‘plum’ and envied places.

“M-m-may I ask you one thing, it is not important, I always meant to ask Rui Cardoso, when he was affable ... ” I told him the story of my consular uncle. I had meant to ask my mother but now, since my father’s death, she had many troubles with *Tia* Rosa and my step-grandmother; I will not burden you with the way she tried to bring them together, to forgive the manner of my grandmother’s death ... It is so hard to forgive when not forgiving has become part of the way you see yourself ...

(My father left me his manuscripts in his will; when he grew too tired to restle with Dom Pedro and Dom Miguel any more, he wrote a little book for children: ‘The Boy who met a Wolf’.)

“You do not understand *realpolitick* then.” He smiled a little.

“Well, no, n-not exactly. Mainly I am interested in plants and animals and mountains and rivers ... ” I did not mean to sound apologetic.

“And you do not understand the kind of pressures that Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, may bring on a small country.” He put an almost fatherly hand on my shoulder. “After all, Portugal is far smaller than France or even Great Britain.”

“But your question,” he escorted me to the door. “There are people of the Old Testament and people of the New Testament—and the Apocrypha, far from being a bridge, is merely the means by which we feel superior to certain protestant sects. Now, rest another day or two, then you have a large task ahead of you.”

*****

Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon,
clear as the sun, and terrible as an army with banners?
I went down into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valley, and
to see whether the vine flourished and the pomegranates budded.
Or ever I was aware, my soul made me like the chariots of Amminadib.
Return, return, O Shulamite ...

Cântico dos Cânticos

*****

Adão brought me four small fluffy chickens and I paid him, I do not know how much he chose to pass on to his relatives; he had decided there was no good reason, in rubble-strewed Díli, to aspire to be a gentleman—but he had heard of a man called Noé who lived in the same place as Adam and Eve ... I said I would explain everything to him when I came back. Now, I must go and visit D. Déolinda—and if she said no, this time, then I thought I might stay single like my brother. Now, my father’s cousin, José, had seven sons so there would always be men with our name, I need not feel guilty, because I could not think of anyone else I would ever wish to marry and soon I would be thirty.

She thanked me for the chickens. She boiled coffee, it was not nice coffee as she did not have enough beans and they were old and dusty, but I did not say that. Instead I said I must ask again in case she had changed her mind. “You looked at Rosentina—” “Because she was

your daughter—and she was always very sweet and easy to love—and happy ... " In that simple untroubled way. Whereas D. Déolinda turned me upside-down and inside-out. "But it was always you I wanted, always. I was happy to think of Rosentina becoming my daughter."

"You say that now. So! I have been thinking, much, about this—and I think that I can be your mistress, that does not matter," her look challenged me in a strange manner; it said, 'I expect nothing from you, from men'—"if you will promise to help me with books."

For a moment I was puzzled, what did she mean. What books? She had none. She reached down to lift her blouse over her head. "I am old and black—but if that is what you want—you may have it ... "

"No! That is not—you don't understand—" she dropped her hands and stood there, waiting, her eyes down in that timorese way that is modest, and waiting. I could not think how to explain myself. And then, something leaped to my shoulder! I felt my hair caught, my ear pulled! Chi-Chi. I had forgotten all about him living here again. I was angry, a little, with him. I wanted to chastise him, to threaten to send him away to a zoo—he sprang to the floor, through the doorway, then sat and sulked on the step.

"My monkey." Déolinda smiled. "My house."

"But my wife, not my mistress ... "

"*Então*." She came close to me, reached to kiss me on the cheek, the ears, the neck, she began to kiss me all over, but she would not let me reciprocate. The strength of her will seemed to keep me frozen, waiting, and yet, inside, I began to boil and surge, a volcano waiting to explode. Her hands went up and down, to undo my clothes. "You do not understand me," she said softly and I could only say in humbleness, "No"; it was true, I did not understand her. "From that first day, when you asked me if I would like a monkey ... and then the little pig, the chickens ... every day, from that day, I think of you ... and wish I could be different, for you ... to be white, to be ... Did you never understand my love ... and I thought if you would love my daughter, be good to her, that was all I would ask of life ... "

Her lips travelled over me, so soft, so soft, *amoroso*,—no, great bells tolling, great geysers springing, great hot bubbles in a *caldeira* ... I could not speak ... She kissed me everywhere, kissed everything, even there—and I exploded into a million tiny pieces and went to live in all the corners of her house, where I am as moths ...

*****

The horsemen sit like fixèd candlesticks,
With torch-staves in their hand; and their poor jades
Lob down their heads, dropping the hides and hips,
The gum down-roping from their pale-dead eyes,
And in their pale dull mouths the gimmaled bit
Lies foul with chawed grass, still and motionless;
And their executors, the knavish crows,
Fly o'er them all, impatient for their hour.

Guilherme Shakespeare

*****

I rode one pony, the other tied to my saddle: and when they hung their heads, because they were all bones, I walked. I was a *campino* on the great plains of the Alentejo, I was a cossack riding, a red indian watching the sky for mysterious signals. Sometimes I thought of sad things, I had a lot of time for thinking, of José and my father, of Rui Cardoso and Dom Artur and Dom Pedro, of Rosentina; much of my little Rosa; there was a song that was very popular then, everyone knew it, 'O Rosa, arredonda a saia', and ever since I have hated it ...

But then my happiness would bubble up. Déolinda! I thought about all the children we

would have, and what names I would give them, one for my mother and one for my father, one for José and one for Paul ... Soon I had named at least fifteen children ... So I thought, instead, of writing about my childhood for Déolinda. I *did* understand her great yearning, for knowledge of the world, and we would read together in our evenings by the lamp (it is strange that I had not given one thought to where, or how, we could live) ... And then I thought I would write something of the last years for my mother, for Paul ... Anything was better than dwelling on my task.

Because I knew people would resent me when they understood the purport of my questions, they would hide away, prevaricate, anything but agree to labour on the roads—had not they done it for the *nipônicos*?—and for what, so that their hard work, their weariness and agony, could be bombed, and the better and the faster they built the more likely it was to be bombed. They would want me to go far away, bother other people, other villages and other tribes.

But the villagers were kind to me. They said I must do what the governor wants. Most often, they blamed the japanese for all their misery. But near the south coast and in the east, I sometimes found people who said if the australians had not come all would have been safe and well; they said the australians came with ships but they never sent enough, it was because they had no more use for the timorese. "Perhaps they had no more ships?" "But I think they did," one old man said to me. "You do not make one water-pot, you make many—and those you do not need in your village you sell in the market. Do you not know about their other ships?"

"You are right." I thought of Díli, the bay, full of war-ships. "They have more ships."

He nodded. I was only confirming what he believed in his heart. "They left my sons on the beach to die. Now I say—

Hodi uluc amico
Ida mos ami
Hodi icus amico
Soe ona ami—"

—which means: we were your friends when you most needed friends; you left us to rot when you found new friends.

Now I understand better why people felt a special kind of betrayal; in this society people in the same clan or tribe are related, if they feel great affection and closeness, they acknowledge it as part of a relationship, even if it is distant relations, so that when people talk of being friends it always carries a manner of reciprocal duties, it is not something which exists outside ... The people, the soldiers, the people who dropped the little pamphlets from the sky saying 'your friends do not forget you', did not understand that friendship is always reciprocation, you can not walk away from friends ... Of course the soldiers were not free to decide what they did, but people accepted their promises of friendship ...

Where the japanese tried to behave toward people in a good way, to be kind, (not all were cruel), it was done as a courtesy, there was no speech 'from mates', no promises about friendship, and it was accepted as courtesy; so people were not left with that same sense of betrayal. That is how I understand it.

The old man looked around the village with its other old men, a few women, one newborn baby. "You may have our life-blood for your roads and bridges and *postos* ... see our arms," he held out a withered bloodless arm, "take what you will."

I put on my list: 'No men of suitable age.'

I took so much care with my list in my little note-book but I think, really, it was wasted. In december *Capitão* Carvalho departed on the *Cuanza* and we had *Major* Vassalo e Silva for several months, before *Capitão* Óscar Freire de Vasconcelos Ruas became our new Governor.

I do not believe he was an unkind man but he became more and more obsessed with the new capital he planned to build, Nova Díli, not on the rubble of the old, but about twelve kilometres back in to the mountains where it would be a little cooler and healthier. It was a

very good idea—Díli is like an enclave, not a capital, there facing the sea and cut off from its country by a half-circle of mountains, it does not *belong* to its people—but not yet, not yet. It was the people in the country who needed the government's help first, his plans could come later. It is true that Dr. Carvalho sent out nurses to all the eighteen 'health districts' (he had just enough nurses for each area; the nurses here are all men) but many of the new officials were either men who had spent the war in Austrália or were new-arrived from home.

I am not sure how best to explain the difficulties in this situation but some of the men claimed they had gone to Austrália to fight the japanese—and their hearts were very pure—whereas we all were *tainted* because of the relations we had had with the japanese. They were sometimes very moral and lacking in understanding and several of them planned to write books about their war.

But it seems to me, even if I do not understand how hard it must have been to live in a strange country, I can still say they had been safe for three years, they had always had sufficient food for three years; even if they were restricted on where they could go and what they could do, it was not the same as living in a tiny little country with thousands of japanese soldiers, where you see japanese every day, where you can hear their yelling—*kiotske! kashira hidari! kashira migi! yasmae!*; and where you must watch your animals disappearing to feed the soldiers, where you must hide your daughters ... where they *take* your daughters and return them dying and dead—what did the men in Austrália know of the accommodations, the manner of hiding things: your wealth, your feelings, can they really understand? ...

When people heard about the japanese *coronel* going to prison for three months they were amazed that he would get three months of a clean bed and good food ... One *liurai* said to me, "It is my people who suffer as prisoners, my children who cry with hunger, my village which is burned, my animals which are gone—I wish they would give *me* three months of food and no worry" and what could I say to him? He had no buffaloes left, no ponies, to prepare the fields, his wives used the digging sticks only meant for the vegetable gardens; now they tried to dig hectares for corn along with his surviving children but only small areas of land were ready when the rains came.

I did not know when I began my journey that, coming on a ship, were hundreds of soldiers from Moçambique, mainly to help to re-build but also to frighten the dutch citizens, living inside our border, back to their land and their villages; they had only to see these big black men and they would hurry back ... I am glad I did not know when I asked Déolinda because I would not have had confidence after they came, knowing the mysterious bind that held her to África, the África that was an illusion in her mind, where she would be loved by her father's people ...

(Later one of these men told me something I had not known—about the Mbunda people: when Dom Joaquim sailed away from Angola, those were the times when the Mbunda people were still an independent kingdom, living under their great chief, *Mwene* Bando ... It was only later, after the first war, that they became a part of Angola ... Did he return home because he preferred to live in his own people's kingdom, not in a small bunaq village ruled by a mere petty official ...)

But I must return to my story. As well as australians in the country, seeking evidence for their 'war crimes trials', the dutch sent java-soldiers to take away the remains of their dead soldiers (I do not think anyone was sad to see them go), and the government in Díli took evidence about some men who had used the war as a means of pay-back, of 'vendetta', in private feuds, or to gain property they were not entitled to; to commit private crimes.

About two hundred and fifty men were sent to Ataúro island, the longest sentence was ten years, and they were put under the governance of a sergeant who was reputed a callous man, he liked to wield power in his little kingdom, yet their lives were not so bad; they had less forced labour than some of the village men who had *not* done anything wrong and they did not have to pay the new higher taxes. They did not need to keep building things on Ataúro,

only to work in the small mine there and build their own huts, because the island-people live on the coast where they live by fishing, so they have little need of roads and bridges ...

But I think people's troubles were deeper, I think so now, as I sit and chew my pen-handle; time makes some things clearer, there were many new officials to replace those who returned home, poor in health, and they did not understand the things people had experienced, yes, but they also had to rule people who were angry, miserable, frustrated with ideas of betrayal (where was the freedom the australians had promised them, where was the prosperity the japanese had promised them) and yet their anger was confused, unpredictable.

New officials thought, and it was the only power they had, that they must be firm, they must be hard. Hard work. Discipline. Re-build. Work in teams. Heavy work on the roads, clean new bridges replacing rubbles and holes, they would begin to look forward to the future, cease looking back. Is that good psychology? Only excuse? Sometimes I do not know what to think.

After the war, people going to the churches in some districts grew less. This is only the observation of my eyes; churches that were once crowded were now far from full. Was it because the biggest catholic families were dead? Sometimes I thought of '*Padre*' Jesus and wondered if he was right, that many of the priests had sailed away when people most needed succour and hope. I do not know if it could be said—that where priests stayed, so did their churches stay full ... but it might be. In some places, I met people who had returned without shame to the beliefs and practices of their ancestors.

*****

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the
words of my roaring?
Salmo 22

*****

When I came into the area where Mata Bia throws its great shadows, I knew it was time to take back Rui Cardoso's truck; the village was lively in the hour before dusk; the great valley of the Seiçal was beginning to fill with purple mists. Dom Alberto came out to meet me with two men and spears, friendly spears, yet he looked anxious. To my surprise, because it was not the custom, he said immediately, "You have returned, sir, for your truck, I can tell it; the stars have been a brighter red." ... "Well, no, not exactly" ... did he relax his face? ... "But you will be wanting to see that we have taken good care?"

"N-n-not exactly ... "

"But come, we will show you."

Together we walked on up the steep hill after they had tethered the ponies for me. The truck was there yet it seemed strange that it should be there, so much had happened since I left it. Was it my imagination or had it aged more than three years, with its rusting body and vines twining through it and all its tyres flat ... Everyone waited, what would I say?

"I thought, perhaps, if I could remove the box there ... " You see, this box contained Rui Cardoso's private things, his books of records and notes, the things he never let anyone see—but he *had* bequeathed everything to me, he must have thought to himself 'Tomás will look inside my box'.

But they were tense again, even alarmed, and I wondered if they had removed things (I did not mind if they had); then Dom Alberto spoke: "It is very powerful *lulic* this truck, it has kept us safe all through the war between Austrália and Japão; when other people died they did not see us, we prayed here and we stayed safe, the japanese did not come, the australians did not come—the *lulic* made us invisible when they came in our direction, do you understand the

power of the *lulic*?"

"Yes, I think so."

(In there, too, was my picture of São Tomás; might he have wrought miracles?)

He did not want me to remove anything from the vehicle because—who could say, in what precise component of the vehicle the power might lie?—if I took one box might I not leave the truck a mere shell, its spirit departed ... But I wanted that box very much, I wanted to know about Rui Cardoso, all the questions I had kept all the years that I worked for him and the years since in which I had so much time for wondering, about him, about his family, about his life before he came to Timor ...

I wondered if it was the power—or had the village stayed safe because it was not visible from the track or because other villagers were afraid to mention ... In the old days of the century before this century, they were famous warriors who would hurl their enemies from the cliffs near the village—the cliffs were hidden under forest and vines so they would taunt the other warriors to charge and when they charged it was easy to know how and when to move and send the other warriors tumbling to their deaths ...

And then, there might have been rumours, the japanese soldiers were superstitious about the natives who have red hair who mainly live in the areas around Queliçai, east of Baucau ... They say that when women before birth are frightened by the small snake we call *cobra verde* and they call *akka* they will have a child with red hair ... But the japanese misunderstood this and believed this place was notorious for its many poisonous snakes which, moreover, have a very disturbing habit of climbing into bed with people and settling on their stomachs, to rest.

But none of these thoughts were of use to me as I stood there with the last of the sun shining upon the mountain-tops and the men of the village waiting for me to speak; perhaps it *was* true and the old truck was imbued with *lulic* power, for Rui Cardoso in death would not take kindly to death and might have remained here, for who was there to pray for his soul except me, and I had been remiss ... And if he had been condemned to purgatory then to see his beloved island fill with death and decay and destruction was a purgatory beyond the commonplace scene my brother presents to his parish-people ... Here in the dusk I thought I felt Rui Cardoso all around me, I thought I heard his voice ... To take his box would be to violate his spirit here ...

I stepped back. "Dom Alberto, I am glad that I have been the means by which you have acquired this powerful *lulic* ... may it forever protect you and your people."

Suddenly, all was relaxing and smiles. Dom Alberto used his scrawny arm to cross himself; I did not like to tell him he had done it back to front; besides who can say if it matters? When God is looking after the creatures of the air and when he is looking after the creatures of the great ocean deeps might he not see it upside-down and back-to-front?

"Do you hear it said," Dom Alberto said in his wheezing voice, "that all the people here are either the people of the sunrise Loro sa'e, or the people of the sunset Loro monu ... "

"And which are you? Because you are here in the centre of the mountains?"

"No, it is the people to the west, beyond Maubisse, beyond Same and Aileu ... but we believe it is safer to be those who bid the sun on its night journey ... "

"Why is that?"

"Because the people who are afraid of the night are more likely to be taken unawares."

They gave me wild rice with *piri-piri* and dark slices of dog-meat, a large amount of food, more than they ate, but I still had to tell them why I had come, what the government wanted ... so I thought it better to eat first ...

There were about thirty-five people gathered in the village and they listened in silence, but nodding slowly, as I explained. The government always takes, was Dom Alberto's response, never gives ... What had they received in four hundred years? ... A foreign god which did not work so well as it was claimed, a man who came to examine the children to see if they had *bichos* in their bellies, a language that was too difficult for the women and girls, and Rui Cardoso ... And now you want us to make roads when we have nothing to travel on your

roads, no cars, no *bicicletas* ... This was true, I had learned some things in my time here; if they built better roads it would be for administrators and *chefes* to drive along them.

I did not know, then, that most of the men would be required to work to improve the aerodrome on the Salazar plateau; aeroplanes were even further from their lives than *bicicletas*.

But then he smiled at me. "You are a good man, Dom Tomás, and later we will show you how your trees are growing" (I had forgotten it was near here that Rui Cardoso had planted cinchona trees or that I had transplanted several of the seedlings nearly six years ago, and when they were short of food they could barter the bark quills because these were stronger than the frangipani quills of tradition; I expressed my pleasure, to know they had survived) "and I will let you have twenty men—but only when the planting is done." I was glad of this, of being able to write down: '20 *homen*s' in my book. Then he said, "But you will return to your home-land soon, I think?"

"No. I am going to live here, I will do the same work that Dom Rui did."

(If they will let me.)

They all liked that. "And a wife," said Dom Alberto, "you must have a wife now that you will be here for the years of your future."

*****

É assim na Serra d'Arga
Quando canta a Deolinda
E vem gente de longe só para a ouvir cantar
Nesses dias
As larvas vêem-se menos
Pois o trabalho que têm é andar por debaixo das peles
A preparam-se para voar (...)
António Pedro

*****

Afterword

I could not resist adding this verse, not because it seemed terribly appropriate (I do not know if Déolinda especially liked singing), but because it was the only thing I could find which mentions her name.

Over the years I tried to persuade Tom to allow me to show his story to a publisher. He replied, first, that no one would wish to read his story, he was a nobody, whereas I was surrounded by heroes, men who had done brave things and won medals. Besides, Dr. Salazar insisted that Timor was neutral so people might not wish to believe that a war had been fought across the country for four years.

(It is true that Timor received no compensation for all the damage done and Portugal was

not invited to any post-war conferences discussing reparations because of this neutrality though, as I understand it, the violation of a country's neutrality in itself can constitute a 'Crime Against Peace'.)

I wrote back to the effect that we all tend to exaggerate our roles—"all heroes and no cowards" as you might say—and admittedly Tom was never a hero in the conventional sense. But I found his story with its honest presentation of his fears and failures very refreshing. Equally, I believe the long treks he made alone through a starving Japanese-occupied country required exceptional courage and mental toughness. But I will leave you to be the judge of that.

There always remained something of the 'innocent abroad' about Tom, a 'Peter Simple' if you like, and his political perceptions were often naive though I see this as a measure of his own essential goodness of heart rather than a lack of intelligence or observation. He was required to sign, as a civil servant, a statement saying he would not entertain communistic or subversive ideas nor join secret societies (Salazar was nearly as obsessed with fear of Masonic infiltration as Franco was; that Norton de Matos, controversial and tough-minded ex-Governor of Angola became Grand Master probably added to Salazar's suspicions); I don't think it would even have occurred to him that any of his ideas might be subversive; it was only his failure to accept orthodox religious beliefs which troubled him.

My father said, "Tom is a rare and beautiful human being—but it is his life not his attempts to render his experiences in English that matter."

Tom wrote back, saying he was grateful to my father for his kind words, but he would try to explain his reasons more clearly. His first reason was that a number of people, and he mentioned Governor Carvalho, a Sr. Brandão, and the head of the colony's medical service, Dr. José Carvalho (whom he mentions in connection with the gift of medicines during the war), were all writing their memoirs.

If his story, with my help, should find a publisher and theirs not it might lead to bad feeling. His Excellency was severely censured by the government in Lisbon for not sufficiently upholding the colony's neutrality when invasion came in 1941 and 1942, a censure Captain Carvalho accepted although I sympathise deeply, knowing something of the appalling dilemmas he faced in those years. Though he was rigidly conservative in his attitudes, and he undoubtedly made bad decisions under pressure of the conflicting demands and threats from the Allies, the Japanese, and his own government and subjects, he comes across as a man of integrity.

Although he continued in his government's service he never received another position of equal responsibility, and his book remained unpublished till long after his death in 1968. Dr. Carvalho wrote a book called *Vida e Morte em Timor durante a Segunda Guerra Mundial*; this too has never been translated into English.

The second reason was the willingness of various people in the immediate post-war period to allege various kinds of collaboration, sometimes to gain benefits such as priority with housing or, possibly, to divert attention from themselves. People were labelled collaborators or *porcas de murcas*, turncoats, without evidence and sometimes without understanding.

Tom, himself, understood very clearly there were no simple lines between the struggle to maintain strict neutrality, to comply with the traditional laws of hospitality towards strangers, a curiosity to understand all these mysterious foreigners coming and going, the possibility of some small benefit accruing to people who lived at subsistence level, the sheer bewilderment and trauma suffered by people living in a predominantly pre-industrial society confronted without preparation (and, as Tom once said, what preparation could there be?) with the power of modern weapons of war, and, most importantly, the question of duress: what you do at the point of a gun or with threats being made against your wife or your daughters is not necessarily what you would wish to do or even what you believed was the right thing to do.

These complex interwoven strands influenced every corner of Timorese society; as Tom once said "We had to face the dilemmas of our world afresh each morning". There was never

one straightforward position which could be taken and held unwaveringly in the way I was able to do.

The problem, as I see it, in part, was the conflict between those in the colonial administration who left for Australia in 1942 and early 1943 and those who stayed. The exiles upon their return could capture what I might term the "high moral ground" by pointing to their unwavering opposition to Japanese fascism. They were helped to do so by the arrival of a new group of colonial officials in the immediate post-war period who had not experienced the war and could not really understand what people had lived through. Some, I suspect, did not try very hard.

By trumpeting their 'clean' struggle against the Japanese their adherence, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, to *Salazarismo* could, in effect, be skirted. People following the increasingly rigid line emanating from Lisbon were never seen clearly for what they were and they tended to move swiftly into senior positions. Tom felt that anything published in those years might inflame feelings rather than allow them to subside quietly. I disagreed with his assessment. I think it *was* naive. But I respected his views.

And then there was Déolinda. He hoped I would understand. He could not remove her from his story because it would then be only half a story but if he left her in it might expose her to more innuendo. Also, he felt his mother and Henrique might not always approve of his conduct. And there was his work with the re-vamped Geographical Mission.

It was not that he hoped for fast promotion—he dreaded the thought of ending up behind a desk—but it was a struggle even to retain his seniority. I suspect the ghost of Rui Cardoso had something to do with this but his marriage to Déolinda Coelho was also an impediment in that narrow, class-conscious, small society.

(It is interesting that it was class rather than race which could be an impediment; if he had married the daughter of a wealthy Timorese *liurai*—*liurai* coming from an old Portuguese word for king—probably no one would have objected to her colour, unlike in a British colony of that era, but Déolinda was the daughter of a stoker on the *Pátria*, though whether he abandoned his baby daughter voluntarily or under duress remains a mystery.)

Tom continued to write 'nature' articles off and on—fireflies, crocodiles, sea-slugs, spiders, 'Palm Trees of Timor' and others—but his 'monkey book' never found a publisher. He began his 'Garden of Eden' in the mountains where Déolinda's village had been massacred in late 1942 but I must confess I don't know if it has survived more recent events.

In 1965 the first tragedy struck the family. His son Paulo was killed when a vehicle went off a mountain road east of Dili. It was my tragedy too. Sixteen-year-old Paulo was my namesake and 'courtesy' godson. And even now, all these years later, his photo sits alongside those of my own sons on my desk.

Tom, with his family, returned to Portugal in 1970 as his mother was very ill; she died soon afterwards. Only a couple of months after that Tom was diagnosed as having cancer and he died just before the *coup* in Portugal. In one respect I am sorry he did not live to see the great changes that have taken place there but, on the other hand, I am profoundly grateful he did not live to see the second 'holocaust' that has engulfed his beloved Timor.

If all the officials sent there had been men of his calibre then perhaps Indonesia would not have been handed such a useful propaganda weapon, one that my government has been only too willing to endorse not least for the sake of continuing large and profitable arms sales to Indonesia—though I fail to see the logic in claiming that a people, because of underdevelopment, should be seen as the ideal candidates for 'blowing away' with our latest military hardware.

I saw Tom just before he died. We sat and remembered little things, our time in Vila do Conde, our children, our lives and how they intertwined, but he soon grew tired and lay and listened and I wondered if he heard voices beyond this middle-aged Scottish doctor prosing on; there were questions I would have liked to ask ... there always are, but in the end we sat in silence and I felt his strange quality of 'stillness' which I think was part of his gift of healing.

I stayed on for the funeral. It was a dour day, a cutting wind, as we all stood in the cemetery to see Tom buried beside his father and mother and little sister. Tom's grave ascetic brother, Henrique, took the service. The two brothers had inhabited worlds, physical worlds, worlds of the mind, aeons apart—and yet, Henrique spoke, movingly, of his brother and his gift of listening to the earth and its creatures ... I do not know how or when he'd come to that understanding. I am simply and deeply grateful that he had.

As we stood there I realised I knew in considerable detail how Tom had felt about his wife—but how had *she* felt about *him*. What would his loss mean to her. Her regal poise, her reserve, the personality which helped to make her an indomitable figure also helped to make her, in a sense, unknowable.

I made some trite and conventional remark on how she would miss Tom, the things you say on such occasions, sincere but time-worn. She turned to me with a kind of wildness about her, a despair in her eyes ... And then she said, in her soft deep voice, her beautiful voice, words I might best translate as "now the sun has set beyond the mountains and I cannot believe it will ever rise again."

I would never presume on our relationship but intuition led me. I opened my arms to her, we held each other tightly there in that biting wind, and I felt her grief like a knife plunged deep in my heart.

*****

How many people died in Portuguese Timor during World War Two? A health survey and census was carried out in 1946. The 1940 census figures were lost when Dili was virtually destroyed—though I feel there may be a copy somewhere in the labrynthine reaches of Portugal's colonial archives; like other post-colonial societies the debate goes on as to who precisely *owns* this priceless resource, who should have responsibility for its care, who should pay to catalogue and preserve it ... Though it is equally possible the data was not yet processed and remitted to Lisbon when the bombs began to fall on Dili; it was not the world's most swift and efficient bureaucracy! ...

But the 1920, 1930 and 1946 figures exist and show that the population dropped from 472,221 in 1930 to 403,232 in 1947. But this loss does not allow for any population growth between 1930 and 1942. Between 1920 and 1930 the population grew by 74,346. So, *at least 143,000 people died in this tiny country*, and probably many more. These figures inform all my re-readings of Tom's story.

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I kept his memoir in my cupboard out of respect for Déolinda. After his death she stayed on in Oporto with her younger daughter, Judite, who is now a well-known landscape painter, but Déolinda, brave, uncomplaining, still beautiful with a timeless dignity, died last year. I had the manuscript typed up and several copies bound, and asked Judite and Tom's older daughter Noémia for their thoughts on publishing the story of their father's early life.

They both said without hesitation, "Paul, you must do what you think is best. Our father gave you his story. It was his gift to you ... "

And my gift to you.

P. McNab.
Edinburgh 1996.

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The End

Notes:
1. *Uma Familia Ingleza (Scenas da Vida do Porto)* by *Julio Diniz (Livraria Lello, L.da.* 1868*)* really did appear in that form.
2. Quote on Page 36 is from John. Chapter 3. Verse 16.
3. The PVDE became PIDE after WWII.
4. Tom's statement that he never saw the McNabs again obviously was only true up to the time of his writing his 'memoir'.
5. Although I have contacted two Dutch embassies, a Dutch consulate, and the Foreign Ministry in The Hague I have been unable to resolve the question of the correct spelling of the Dutch Consul's name so I have retained the version used in Portuguese documents. I have found it as Brower, Brouwwer, Brauwer and other variations. Curiously the Dutch now say they did not have a consul in Portuguese Timor but he was certainly accredited as such by the Portuguese administration there. He seems to be the same man who later became the Honorary Dutch Consul in Brisbane where he is listed as L.E.I. (Emile) Brouwer.