



MEMORIES OF A WOMAN

ELTÂNIA ANDRÉ

TRANSLATED BY LÚCIA COLLISCHONN DE ABREU

Even though this recollection comes to me in gaps, it unleashes within me this strange sensation; astonishment, outrage or fear. I remember my aunt hanging the sheets on the barbed wire clothing line to bleach under the blazing sun, the smell of the washing powder, the soft laundry blue of the white clothes; she applied care and dedication to that repeated task, part of the household's routine. The small dirt yard, in those times, looked immense to me, the old and functional concrete sink awaiting her reddened, tired toes; weeds grew in buckets and tires' carcasses, the lime tree at one end and the malnourished papaya tree at the other – a peaceful scene. I imagine her (I need to fill in the empty spaces) with a beautiful smile once she sees me. She went to get the bamboo stick to prop up the clothesline so it was stretched out and the clean clothes could get the most out of the summer sunlight. I don't know where my uncle came from, but he was possessed by the greedy soul of the Devil. He didn't see me, so small, crouched against the roughcast wall with my little yellow summer dress, which almost offered a glance of my panties – clothes born from the old Singer belonging to my stylish seamstress mother.

Before she had a chance to escape, or I to understand that what was going to happen would be a watershed moment in my life, he dragged her by the arms, stumbling up the small staircase leading to the kitchen door in ferocious agitation. He hollered, using words I did not understand; in fact, everything was new to me in those childhood days. *You're useless, you're no good at watching your daughter, the wretch was kissing that ochre mulatto at the end of Bento's Alley* – the living sentence resounds back from that past. My entire body trembled, but I managed to follow the screams, he cornered both mother and daughter in the bathroom, against the wall of grimy tiles and slapped them amidst death threats. Furious and unsubmitive, his daughter tried spitting in his face, but she was so nervous that the drool was dripping from her chin and neck. Horrified, I spied with only one eye, covering the other, scared of that man.

Fear and outrage resurfaced from other times. My little cousin arrived at the scene, running and crying, asking his father to stop, and he soon obeyed his fellow man, even at that age, when he still played with marbles and homemade go-carts. I stood there like a little shell of a person, shrinking as much as I could, wrapping myself up like an oyster, then I recognized the snore of his beaten-up Lambretta and I felt someone carrying me in their arms, without knowing to whom that neck belonged, I clung to it, as I calmed down. The sheets were on the ground and dirty again, they had fallen when my aunt fought to escape the beatings, she leaned on the bamboo stick that propped up the clothesline as if it were possible to fix herself on it or free herself from those oppressive tentacles.



My cousin, Sandra, as charming as always, with her doll freckles and her irreverent attitude, didn't bow her head, she felt victorious with an object in her trembling hands and the calming glass of sugar-water waiting on the table... *wretch, that'll teach him, he broke the watch that he wanted so much, I'm not giving up on Tunim, do you hear me, Mother?* With the meat tenderizer, laughing between her tears, she ruined the Mondaine he had bought in installments at Meia-Pataca Jewellery Store.

Months later, the four of them were driving back from a barbecue at a friend's ranch, and probably because of the driver's excessive drinking, the blue VW Beetle flipped over at the entrance of the city. Father and daughter died on the spot. We used to live at the top of a hill in a neighborhood near the entrance to the town, and at the end of the day, when my mother had finished sweeping the yard with her rosemary broom as she usually did, we would stop to look at the road that zigzagged between the hills on a horseshoe-shaped slope. The rickety afternoon sun would say goodbye, spreading melancholy in the air. It was a strange time, every afternoon we looked around, as if we were imagining scenarios and dreaming of what was to come. *Mother, why did Uncle Tuíca do that? I don't know, my daughter, he's nervous, and he thinks women have tough skin. One of the brutes.* I was beginning to understand both that I was a woman and what it was like to be a woman in the world inhabited by men like Uncle. We spotted the hurried ambulance, which appeared at the slope of the road, and she told me that a stream of chills went through her body. I thought that deep down a voice had whispered premonitions to her, after all we had old, sick relatives, but existence brings other surprises that – we hardly imagine – are on the way. Well, the moon had not yet taken the place of the sun on Miguel's Heights, and reality came with its weight and contention: we received the news that that white van from the hospital was taking our relatives. His wife and son suffered slight injuries to their bodies. Everyone was saddened by the tragedy. However, I could not mourn the death of my uncle. For months I did not shut the doors, I had the strange sensation that he was still present, and I was afraid that he had gained the power to haunt women even in the afterlife.