

Decapitation – Monique Malcher

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*For our oldest ancestors:
the children we once were.*

PART I

Waves of flesh raise planks of future

1.

I wish I could keep the skin of the faces of those I loved. I would put that mask on before sleeping. It would be the best way to rock myself to sleep. With this simple gesture, I would attack my restless sleep, a consequence of what I have not been able to forget. The face is a territory of ancient constructions, which shelter eternal people. There was no other face to place over mine. I was a *cunhatã**, naked of my own imaginations and beneath my own face.

In the distance, the sound of the siren.

It was Holy Saturday, but God was not with us. Joana and I inside the police car, the entire land occupation watching us and me looking through the window, seeing the shacks for the last time. They never take the real culprits.

It took me a long time to remember when I learned that our dream was more than just having a house. Joana always said that once you have a piece of land you can, besides living, dream and plant more than tears. I looked at her face and could see a great part of her thoughts, even her history. I did that with anyone from that place. I don't know if all the *curumins** had that thing, but I understood that our faces are territories occupied by memories. This part of the body, a community of beaten earth, sees water spring from the cavity that faces other territories. The tear always breaks through.

And the houses that were built are dismantled as if made of paper. Aren't we all? In this soil masked with ointments and progress, protrusions sprout, diseases, rips, miasmas that map.

No land is given to us in the North, even though it is all ours. And that land we occupied with our house, our small grocery store, our raising of chickens, we would never see again after that Saturday.

Today's houses, with numbers and deeds, shelter families who may not know about the others who passed through there and built a history beyond themselves, who hardened their heads in faith to endure the beating of days. The land keeps the remains of protection baths and the mortal remains of the disembodied. In it still lives every corner of the shacks where our children were born. We keep much of what happened to us, even if loss is a distracted animal. Happiness and torment flow from the same spout; those born in occupations know this very well.

I didn't want the police officers to see me cry; I never liked crying in front of anyone. Every person and every animal guards the gate to their own hell. The dogs, in an uproar, running after the police

van through the mud, on the nameless streets of that place that hid itself inside me and in the layers of our flip-flops. While I tried to understand everything that was happening in that sliver of time, I didn't know how to feel what was coming.

The siren louder than my thoughts. I would never return.

Now I am an adult and face this part of myself that I cannot decide whether it is good or bad. Pain did not crown me with lessons, it only made me take longer to like being alive in the world the adults presented to me, and now I need to be at peace with it while I remember. I speak of what I know. How could I dare to pull happiness from between my teeth? There are places I couldn't remember—until the scab formed—how I arrived, nor how I said goodbye. The occupation was one of them.

There is no memory that invents what my eyes witnessed; for the first time I knew what the end was, and it accompanies me every time that, even in thought, I return to that piece of Manaus. We went looking for death in the promised land; that was our new testament.

* *Cunhatã* and *curumim* are Indigenous Brazilian words meaning *girl* and *boy*, respectively.

2.

Daddy used to teach me, even when I didn't want to learn, about changing guitar chords on barbecue nights in the backyard. We ate prime cuts of meat whenever something very sad happened to us; it was my parents' effort to believe that everything would be fine. His fingers were so firm and patient, staring at the wood as if thinking far away. Singing old songs from the radio before I hated listening to music.

Children are always the last to know about the tidal bores. At nine years old, an old voice inside me mixed with the sound of the guitar and knew it before Daddy told us with his cruel courage: those were our last days in that house in Pará. The Manauara* dream was being announced. It was time to take what had always been ours.

I don't want us to go!, I said, almost diving into my tears.

You'll like it, Sol. You'll have a nice room with your CDs and books. In Manaus we can set up a little grocery store again, maybe we can have our own house? One day you'll understand what a house is.

But Daddy, this is our house, you're the one who doesn't understand! Every time Daddy came with a conversation that bothered me, I started to focus on something else. While he talked, I observed the pieces of roasted meat on the aluminum tray. Some were cold, attracting flies, becoming greasy-looking, darkening with hardened blood, curling up. I imagined that with those cylindrical pieces of meat I could simulate a telescope. And what do we see through a tube of meat? Stones that dogs can tear apart like they tore my brother's leg when he was running in the street? In the water, his scar shone like the stars I count to get through the sob stuck behind the bones of the face.

It was almost without noticing that I began to harden in order to see other things in the world on the crumpled aluminum tray in the backyard of the house where Yan was born and died.

Joana had an obsession with control, but she always wanted Daddy's participation in decisions. Can I? Ask your father. If he allows it, I allow it.

You can't, my daughter, but if your mother allows it, I allow it.

And she smiled secretly while washing the dishes, because she knew I wouldn't throw the boomerang of confronting her once again. She was happy to give him the idea of control, but she was the one who decided and liked to see him fool himself about his own power. Someone needed to be the man of the house, and she said, I don't step over your father, here we do everything by agreement.

There was never any agreement.

Daddy Alfredo told us that we were a week or less away from moving. At that time he had a little grocery store in the Mapiri neighborhood, it was a rented spot. A tiny door falling apart. Every day it became more dangerous and Daddy was only not robbed because he was well liked in the neighborhood. There were only a few goods and a borrowed freezer; we sold popsicles and frozen juice bags. In Santarém was our whole life and everything I knew about the world. But this time the new home was Manaus, a change of state in all its definitions. My father set his mind on setting up the grocery store there, and maybe in the future we could buy a house. At that moment we had nothing, like a large part of the families we knew.

There are lots of people from Pará going to Amazonas, the Zona Franca is the future, my buddy, with the big companies everyone has a job, enough of this misery. That was what my father talked about with the regulars at the bar; I listened when I went to tell him that Joana had sent word that dinner was ready. He wasn't much of a drinker, but he was a talker. Every week we heard about someone we knew who had gone to Manaus to try their luck.

That same night, Joana whispered in his ear: let's leave this land.

He thought it was a joint decision. We're going to grow, it'll be pure progress, he said, while Joana smiled secretly, proud of controlling her man. Today I know that progress is a word I hate.

Yan had worms. Of all people, him, the incredible son. Do worms eat quickly everything that is incredible?

Sometimes I dreamed of Yan diving to the bottom of the pool and coming back to the surface with the yellow cap from the little bottle, the treasure-hunting game from summer games. I was sitting on the edge.

Open your hand, sis. Open it. And he gave me the inheritance.

Every time I return from the repeated nightmare to the surface of reality, I feel water in my trachea, I open my hand and only the mark of the cut I made with Daddy's pocketknife on the day we buried Yan in that child's coffin remains. I didn't even know they made coffins like that; to me, children carried eternity's record inside their bodies.

I believed I could sew the cap inside my hand, like those piercings that go under the skin, on the forehead. That's how I altered the lines of my hand in the backyard, under the banana tree, which drowned in blood. Nothing else grew in that piece of land. My brother's death made me head toward another life line; I never knew what I would have been if he hadn't drowned. Maybe even today I think more about that than about him, of whom I remember almost nothing anymore. I try to

see his face, but that territory was kept by armadillos. Yan was taken to a place I don't know and never wanted to try to imagine.

For the first time we were going to live in a city he had never set foot in. It was the death of another thing I didn't understand, but tried to see in Joana's eyes. As if she wanted to leave me behind and take my brother's still-fresh corpse. Yan died at seven years old and took with him the affection I once had from the woman my mother.

* Adjective relative to what is natural from Manaus.

3.

I take care of other people's animals, soothe diseases in cats, horses, birds. Veterinary medicine was my path so I wouldn't go insane. I try to stop the advance of death. Sometimes these creatures die in my hands. Sometimes I slip away from the cold or practical person I became and cry on the way home—I could have saved that animal, I could have done more. Only they talk to me; I moved away from people because what appears in their eyes is not the same as what comes out of their mouths.

This distancing is not a bad thing. It helps me conduct situations as they are, deal with what is possible. Losing control would make me fail. Sometimes you do everything within reach and death still happens. It is a certainty that comforts me. I don't chase it, but we are old companions. I was accused of being a murderer at nine years old; from time to time I accuse myself so as not to lose the habit. I play Joana's role in my mind; she is always with me, like a ghost, watching me critically. There is still a part of my body that is imprisoned. I don't understand that a piece of me stayed in the occupation, but I am not made only of it. The calendar moved forward; today I am an adult, a veterinarian, I live alone, I don't lack food. And these facts don't always sound so real. Deep down I feel like I'm acting, because I still believe myself to be the child Sol, in the dust. I ask myself if all adults are acting and in truth never left childhood in their gestures and voids.

I encounter who I could be every time I swim.

A figure emerges from the pool and throws itself at my body, I fall, turning the color of the water red, with the speed only a nightmare can manage. I manage to swim until I touch the edges; I realize there is no one but me inside and outside the pool. I wake up sweaty, feel my legs warm, my blood visits me in the night as fears visit me. I realize I got my period. I get up to shower, think about the chickens, my family, and the people from the occupation for the first time in these last years, while blood pools at my feet. I don't think about Joana's face; I forbid myself to think of her.

Every face is quicksand that remakes a statue that dies each year. Until we forget them all forever. Over time I ended up living with people at the university a bit off the curve, who talked about how important memory is so that some things don't repeat themselves. But I think I'm more like the majority, whose dream is to forget. Even when the brain no longer works as before, other parts of the body pulse and create spasms, and this is how memory takes shape. Everything that happened to me yesterday feels like it happened today.

The cramps increase while the herbal bath speaks with my skin. For a brief moment I come to think I carry a child inside the glass of water lodged in my womb. I am like the woman from the occupation who spent days bleeding. She by losing a child, I by losing hope. I don't let anyone

touch me; still, the same thought won't let go of me: thinking I carry an impossible child with the face of many corpses. The loneliness that happens in the head corrupts the love that deserves to stay inside, in the deepest place pain has touched.

4.

Joana enrolled both of us in the community swimming program because she said that at some point in life anyone born in the North has to face the water and understand that it doesn't kill us because it wants to, but because we never truly tried to know that we are its *curumins*. I think pool water isn't spiritual and doesn't care about our existence, but she never considered that.

Our grandfather had a brutality in the way he dealt with his children; Joana always remembered that for some reason. It wasn't necessarily a violence she had endured during other moments of life with other existences that loved her.

While washing the dishes, she would say:

Your grandfather used to stay alone with the horse Adamias in the corral, making sounds and gestures that were indecipherable to me, but the animal understood him and respected him. Maybe he loved him, I'll never know. They weren't harsh gestures, but simple ones. In those moments, through the cracks in the wooden walls, we watched the spectacle of delicacies no one dared to attribute to him. I loved him in solitude, from afar, where only man and horse sang the song of taming, which later allowed your grandmother and me to ride an animal that had understood our importance, even though Daddy was not a man of words, but of enchantments capable of dissolving any fear and distrust that lived in the core of Adamias.

Was he a wild horse?, Yan asked.

My son, *wild* is a word we put in our pocket and forget. The horse spoke a dialect few people cared to learn. My father's greatness made a home there, in knowing how to ask nature to be irrevocably with us.

And Grandma?, I asked.

I remember my hands, very tiny, gripping her waist. In those first hours of the day, I tasted what it was like not to hear the footsteps of ghosts, only the impact of the horse running on the orange road, almost golden like Daddy's teeth. I enjoyed the ride by holding tight to your grandmother. My small arms couldn't hold her properly, but I trusted her completely.

She dried the dishes while telling everything in such a beautiful way...

She mounted first and I would say, Daddy, help me get up? Hold on tight, girl!, she said. He gave two light pats on the horse, which started to run. How I loved hearing my mother's scream that blended into laughter! I think the animal liked it too, because there was a freedom that made him tremble and run very fast. Our hair tied up... funny, because we call that hairstyle a ponytail. Even so, the strands flew high. I could stop envying the little birds, I learned what it was like to fly with my feet. I imagined a sea in place of that clay, which missed the kisses of water that one day return; it was in childhood that I came to know mud. We also returned when the sun cooled and the horse was rested.

She put the dish towel over her shoulder and sat down on the chair to continue the story.

The baskets were empty of our cheeses, but full of vegetables, bread, and sewing materials. The currency was exchanging things. I rested my head on your grandmother's back while calmly observing the landscape, closed my eyes and imagined her hands, which at that moment held the reins of the horse, passing a white, shining thread through the impossible eye of the needle on the days she sewed. How delicate she was in everything she did! Nothing was impossible for your grandmother. To this day, she is like that.

Of all the repetitions, she told only once the part in which our grandfather and Adamias, years later, drowned.

5.

Our street survived on that smell of blood dripping from the animals. The fish screaming in silence inside the plastic bag next to the beach chairs. The time of the knee with a wound always open, scar over scar. Here occupying my role, pushing a child and tomorrow being the child pushed by the one who tripped for no reason. Event on top of event. The law of our street was a contract of wounds, laughter, and slaps on the head. Trading stickers and *tazos* taken out of bags of *militos*. Marbles, dodgeball, and cops and robbers. The smell of clay mistreating the air. The sun striking the soles of the feet. Kilos of dead skin that cracked in this walking so early in life.

It was fun to live on the wide street, almost infinite, to know everything about each shack, to learn what each one wanted and why they ended up there. To know the route, to write the same fights and fairs again. To dream of having a patio, a backyard, window bars, a gate, a padlock, electricity, water coming out of the faucet. I didn't know that everything was of gigantic importance, my child's world with an old stray dog licking my face. I didn't imagine that a house could disappear into the muteness of all the happiness that doesn't stay under our fingernails when one is poor. I still didn't know what poverty was, even though I already lived in it.

I didn't have dreams, only desires. I remembered Pará and our old house in which the windows closed and, above all, existed. I never imagined that windows were built, I thought they were like babies in someone's arms, they seemed ready since always. One day all windows will disappear. I grew up knowing what a bedroom and a toilet are. A spout in the patio just to wash asphalt off the feet from playing. The voice of the street said that food would never be lacking. Until one day it started dwindling. Hunger is a truth that removes the strength to believe.

They started removing the window bars, days later they took the bed, the wardrobe, cups, cutlery, tore out the doors, took Raimundinho, who barked sadly. They sold what had no equal price. I even scratched the back of the girl who took Raimundinho, saying that he was her baby. They took the fucking trust I had that things would always be the same.

Everything will be fine, Sol, Joana held my shoulder while inventing stories. I want to go to Grandma's house! My eyes, pure water of hatred. You're not going anywhere without us, your place is where I say it is. She held my arm tightly.

Raimundinho barking from far away.

Joana no longer knew how to love me. I felt like a limb that had been torn from the body and would never come back, something you only feel in some way, but that no longer exists.

Raimundinho barking from far away.

Sadness hurts more when crying becomes tiring and stops into silence, never again to say goodbye to the chest inside us.

Phlegm is the exhausted water of hatred.

Raimundinho barking from far away.

6.

I saw a report about a woman who had more plants than furniture inside her house; what caught my attention was that she took television carcasses and turned them into pots. I spent many years without having a television at home, at first it seemed like something that was missing, then the lack turned into habit, then habit turned into forgetting. Once I had a colleague from university over at my place and she asked if she could put a music video on the television. Until she realized there wasn't one. How can the lack of this device cause embarrassment? Refrigerator, stove, and television, every house needs to have them.

Joana got a job at Sharp in Manaus months after Yan's drowning, I don't know if that motivated us to go or if she looked for that opportunity because she wanted to get the hell out of there. She couldn't stand living in Santarém anymore or running into the mothers at the market, who talked behind her back about the temporary closure of the community pool. No one wanted to let their child swim in the pool where a boy died. No one cared about the mother who lost a child, people pretended. Everything was Yan before and everything was Yan after, even if for different reasons.

At the time of the move Joana was thirty-six years old, the same age I am now remembering my nine years.

The year was 1996. One of her close friends had gone a year earlier to live in Manaus to work in the Zona Franca, which for Joana was pure madness. She even spoke badly about the woman a few times, but since adversity makes us chew our own tongue, the woman had become the great symbol of revolution for her. This friend of mine already set up her house, has everything, a stereo system that plays five CDs and a huge television in the living room. Joana spoke excitedly to Daddy Alfredo. They gave her a television? Daddy asked with wide eyes. Gave it, I don't think so, but she was able to buy it for a bargain.

Daddy Alfredo, since he liked television, loved the idea. Not only because of the television, but because that episode represented in his head a hint that many new things could be achieved more easily. He ended up having a somewhat romanticized view of the possibilities of achievement that Manaus would give us, even though he had never set foot in the city. There was a Manaus ready-made in his thoughts, in which everything was less painful. He got a considerable amount of money from a loan shark for our trip. He did not intend to pay it back, for that reason our whole move happened at dawn. We sold what we could, we didn't really have much anyway. His attachment was to adventure, he liked radicality. He liked following Joana's ideas, because he saw in her that impulsiveness that excited him so much.

At first we went to the Mundo Novo neighborhood, he rented an already set-up point that had a little room in the back. Living in an occupation was the goal for the future, but for now we were going to start like that. Privacy did not exist, the place was tiny and the electricity was on an illegal hookup. As Joana spent a large part of the day in the district working, the control she managed to exercise over the grocery store's matters started to fade.

Alysson was a fifteen-year-old boy, son of our new neighbor. Daddy hired the boy for peanuts to be an assistant, it wasn't even enough to buy half a basic food basket with what the boy earned per month. Alysson was the assistant and also the clerk, besides being the only person responsible for the grocery store all the time. Daddy Alfredo didn't pay the guy who supplied the products to him, it was the famous today, tomorrow. He kept stalling. So he was always holed up so he wouldn't have to explain himself. It didn't take long and the small grocery store went bankrupt. He was the guy who made any business prosper at the beginning and then the main person responsible for the ruin of the same business. From that type of people who go crazy with any minimal financial success and put everything to waste. Knowing how to create is not the same as knowing how to maintain.

With the small amount of money Joana managed to save at the new job, we paid the new debts, the previous ones my father treated as nonexistent, once he crossed state lines the loan shark no longer existed. Joana always forgave Daddy, because she always believed in love as forgiveness. Two things I definitely don't believe in.

Alysson, on his last day of work, told Daddy that there was an invasion emerging nearby, they were calling it the Mundo Novo invasion, same as the neighborhood. No one called it an occupation at that time, at least not the common people. We didn't know anything about it. I learned this after I no longer lived in Mundo Novo. No property is absolute. Every place needs to have life. An empty space is a cost to the city and the city is also ours, of those who even if they worked their whole lives without spending a cent would never have a house.

Even using another nomenclature, today I am aware that we were going to a place that was ours because that place, on paper, belonged to rich people who built nothing, didn't even remember they had that land. Joana worked like a motherfucker in that factory, the job as an assembler was never easy. My parents, contrary to what I heard my whole life, were not criminals for having gotten involved in an occupation. They didn't want to invade anyone's house. But when I was nine years old, I didn't understand any of this.

But I don't want to go.

Fuck, you never want to go, Sol. You never want to go.

Today I know that she needed to be firm, but she was always firm looking at me. I lacked mental, emotional resources. I was nine years old. At that age we think we know everything, but there is a version unknown to us. I thought Joana was mean, but she was just a fucked-up mother. Later she changed her mind about this move, like all the others.

Alfredo asked Alysson what else he knew. Ah, boss, there's this big guy there who already invaded a piece of land and asked me to tell you that he accepts a television, makes a deal with that plot over there in the invasion. But here's the thing, once you go in you can't leave the land alone, because the guys go in and settle, they walk around with machetes at their waist.

And that's how our Sharp tube television, part of Joana's severance pay, turned into a plot of land in Mundo Novo.

PART II

Blowing desire into the

mouth of the hen

1.

To be a child and arrive at the gymnasium full of them, knowing in the brushing of eyes that they do not understand or accept her. The inappropriate clothes, tacky, she prefers to be naked, but that would be the worst choice. She hates the smiling face of the mother kneeling, looking into her eyes at the house gate saying: you look beautiful, everything will be fine. Swimming was the sport Yan and I practiced on Thursdays, at the time when there was a community pool in Santarém. I skipped all the classes and he went to all of them.

I never tried to learn how to swim, until now... at thirty-six years old.

I take a sip of water from the bottle with the slogan “everything will be fine.” I have to be at the swimming class at 10:20, which is ten minutes from my house. I woke up at six. I am ready, I had my coffee and did everything I could do in this first-day preparation. I took objects out of the bag many times, until I was satisfied with an organization that from now on will be the one I will use on the days I go swimming.

Many swimmers use small waterproof backpacks that look like suitcases or those that people use to carry soccer items or sports in general. I was decided that it would be one of those that I would use, but in the end I bought a little perforated bag, which makes it seem more like I am going to the beach or to do groceries. I hate the beach, I never want to put my feet in the sand again, but I needed the water, I needed something that still challenged me and made sense. I want to be wrong about the imaginary laughter of imaginary people of the first days of learning. I am ashamed of the things I don’t know.

I chose a professional black swimsuit, romper style. Anti-fog goggles, so as not to disturb vision underwater. All-black silicone cap as well. The sandals unfortunately were not all black, I bought lilac ones. The little bottle was also lilac, I took advantage of having already escaped the monochromatic idea. The waist pouch to carry keys, phone, and migraine pills: everything in the same tone. I asked the doctor if there was a way to change the pills, because they are orange. It’s fine, at least they are complementary colors. Lilac towel. I bought gray-mélange shirts and shorts, after all in a neutral base I could restart all of that if I felt bad with that arrangement of objects. The veterinarian who dreamed of being a *tambaqui*. Arranging the objects again on the bed, I remembered the colors of priests’ cassocks and coffins and matchboxes and vampires and gothic songs, and old cotton boxes, then the nostrils of the dead. Lilac, like lavenders that are beautiful near the end. I threw my body over all the objects, groped to find the swimming goggles, put them on my face, tried to cry until the two lenses turned into two mini aquariums. I put everything any which way into the bag, I needed to run. At some point in life I would be present after all my absences.

2.

I embroidered star by star on the tulle, all with different sizes. I discovered that I liked to embroider after becoming an adult and with the advance of depression, that slime that takes over the skin and spreads trash through the house. I never knew if my personality with words inside my head and with my mouth empty of syllables was something of mine or of the pain that entwined me like the mud of the street of my non-house in childhood.

An elderly woman on a morning program calmly showed how embroidery was an underestimated art. After all, finally having bought a TV was not so bad. She embroidered faces of children who had died in the first years or months of life, the parents brought a photo and she embroidered a poetic portrait. I remembered that my great-grandmother said that photos were taken of the dead sitting in their favorite chair and the family kept that image with great love in a memory album.

When those we cherish die, we forget laughter and screams of an entire land. Even so, I feel that death does not exist before the word we shout. Obituaries were made for the materialization of death into written words. The cross stakes in the land tell us about those who fought to plant the future and are now forgotten, silent roots.

On other days the dead were arranged in a chair, someone took the photo. Photos have always been attempts to say that something was, and not that it is no more. I know because I carry in my bag some photos of the animals I killed before eating and of the animals I couldn't keep alive, I see how they struggle. To record the body after it is just body, to remember the end as someone who hopes to live again. To remember the body lying down was to invalidate the movement of endings. A photo is also made with the gaze, especially with it, without a camera. I don't just look, I photograph.

Dealing with death was my constant and in wanting to move toward the side of life, to keep myself somewhat okay, I began to embroider on various dresses. I became a specialist in making embroidered wedding dresses. I like the feeling of embroidering dresses I pretend are mine. There were many weddings I had in that place of creating. The bride told me her story and I internalized every detail of what I was learning was love, even though it wasn't, and love is that thing that never is. It was at that time that I wanted to abandon veterinary medicine, and I did, for six months.

I never wanted to have children, but this weaving of forming a family always danced in what they call the heart. The last time I felt that I had a family was when Yan and my chickens existed on Earth. Death for me is the end, there is nothing after, there is no god, there is no heaven or hell, there are no messages from the dead, there are no figures with sheet bodies, there is only the ghost of absence and that is capable of destroying any body with life. The true dead are those who stay with longing, and even with it take buses, clock in, put food on the table.

I did not embroider dead children on the tulle, I embroidered six months of dreams for desperate couples without knowing that they will inevitably die, but they are beautiful in that belief of forever. My first embroidery was the memory of my purple brother in the pool, I embroidered it inside myself. And with each star on the bride's dress I tried to flee from the image that never abandoned me, that of being guilty for someone's death.

I kill people with my thoughts, therefore, at the same time that desire exists, I think it's better not to have company. Everything that cuddles close to me and with me... dies. I worked exhaustively on a certain dress before resuming my first profession. I stopped for a while, I wanted to distance myself

from the idea of caring for animals. I only left the house to swim. I missed feeding myself better, I didn't feel like preparing anything elaborate.

Daddy Alfredo had a very good game to make me eat when I was a child, he took my plate and said close your eyes and I'll put the powder of solares. According to him, it was a magic powder that gave a special flavor for me to be more Sol than I already was. I loved the play with my name, I felt important in the world, that kept me smiling strongly. My father was a good man on the good days of a man.

Put more powder of solares, Daddy!

Daddy had a lot of magic inside himself, sometimes Yan and I lay with him in the red hammock, still in our house in Santarém, before the occupation. He put on a Gloria Estefan record, who sang in three languages a single song. Daddy, is it very hard to learn Spanish and English? Everything is possible if you really want it and make an effort, my daughter. Today I know that Daddy didn't understand much about how the world worked. He liked listening to those romantic songs and planted in our hearts this idea that one is only happy if you get married and form a family, a fake one.

To this day I know Gloria's lyrics, as if it were Daddy's face drinking a taperebá juice lying in the hammock rocking and calling Joana to lie down with him. I'm busy, I don't have time for this mushiness, Alfredo.

The men in our house were owners of dreams and we were never allowed to dream. I was always in the world to be something else, but I believed for a long time that I was the deposit of another body's pain. I cry watching videos of mothers preparing lunchboxes and of children cooking free of judgments.

I stopped being a child to be a failure.

As strange as I may seem, I can calmly say that the adult I became would be the security person that my child version needed to have nearby when my brother died. I had no one by my side, no one to talk about what it was to see a little boy dead. I had no adult voice kneeling and looking into my eyes to announce that the blame was not mine. Today a happiness sprouts in my chest when in rare moments I am proud of myself if no one is looking.

I never felt that it was important to have Yan nearby, until I no longer had him.

Swimming classes were important to him. He was a boy with a body full of dreams, and one of them was to be a great swimmer with medals in the future. He believed in the future and I wanted in the depths of my ignorances and crossed answers to be of the same matter as my brother. I always found a way to skip swimming classes, I went to some friend's house to drink cachaça in secret, today I know it was not something for a little girl. Running away has always been a way to get through the days. I didn't understand this emptiness that already lived inside my mouth in this passage of time.

For an unknown reason, which I refuse to attribute as divine, I knew that my parents were adults incapable of helping me have minimal happiness. I ask myself today if in some way I felt that Yan would leave to remain forever in Joana's aggressive gaze surrounded by the mud of a place I would be forced to accept as home. We went to the occupation as penance, life without Yan was the hell of Joana's god.

I was the demon who stole the beloved son of a courageous mother.

In the month of my brother's death, there were neighborhood Olympics and the swimming group would compete in a game called treasure hunt. They spread various colored bottle caps through the pool and the winner would be the one who picked up the largest number of caps. I watched from the bleachers. The children all ready to jump. Yan was so small, he didn't always master swimming. The recommendation was that the smaller ones not go to the deeper parts. He began to throw his chest forward, lift his head with determination and advance toward the forbidden. It was very fast, he dove, dove, dove. The teacher was chatting and didn't see it.

Drowning is a kind of dance, you struggle while trying to return to the surface. Breathing becomes a painful effort and the water understands that your body is a house too, it invades your fear. The larynx closes, it is necessary to contain the floods. Completely submerged, the body gives in. The relaxed larynx lets the water in. Part of the water goes toward the stomach and the rest strolls through the body. The body that breathes now ceases. The Portuguese language stops calling you person-body, your name is body-corpse and maybe your memory swells too. Everything is inevitably deep.

There were many children, many. I started screaming when it was already too late, I didn't have the courage to jump into the pool, a terrible fear reached me of leaving with him. I had lied all that time to mom, who would become just Joana to me, about swimming. There was no way to save someone who knew more than I did. The teacher jumped into the water while shouting call the ambulance, call the ambulance. And on that day I learned that guilt is something adults like to attribute to others, but when they lie in their hammocks and beds they always feel that it is theirs, even if they reject that image.

The endless cardiac massage.

I, a statue,
only with the eyes in motion.
Death is dryness.
A ready, it's over.

3.

We did not go straight to live on the occupation land. The guinea pig was my father. In the first days he, with Alysson's help, put up a kind of shed. The floor was just packed earth, like other shacks, but that was a forbidden word. Alfredo even hit my mouth with the back of his hand when I said it.

I said that word.

SHACK.

Alfredo felt a kind of repulsion when he realized that he was the same as the other people who occupied those lands. He cared about them truly, but he wanted to be someone different, he always wanted to be a savior, a prophet. He didn't want to be seen as a boss, but as a messiah. To this day I wonder if he really wanted to form a family or if this configuration was a way not to feel so alone. To constantly be able to err knowing that we have unconditional support. How nice.

Some men want more than purchasing power, they want to be adored like saints. Alfredo built a relationship of power with people without them realizing they were being used for his dream. He

was careless with the outcome of his actions, but I can't see intentional malice in those actions. There was a purity in his acting, and when I say this it is not crowning him as a saint, others did that. At least for a while. He really was good for that occupation.

There has always lived in me a restlessness before the figure of the saint. You ask something of the saint and offer a favor if the request is fulfilled. Joana said that this was benevolence. I call it a commercial transaction. It's not the saint's fault, it's society's that erects the saint. You scratch my back, bro. Whoever rules is money, this thing of time being the fabric of life only exists in the mouth of a poet, and I really wanted to believe in poetry. Poetry is not paying rent in Brazil.

Daddy Alfredo was a working-class guy who thought that by building a giant shack and starting to help all those people, he would be a community leader. Seeing people happy fed a part of him that said I matter, I have worth, I am not just anyone. When Altair raised his arm and said into the megaphone: here speaks the governor. this land belongs to the people. Manauaras, people of the north! who is the leader here?

He would be ready to say smiling: It's me! I'm the leader!

What is your name, my son? Alfredo Sousa, your servant.

Daddy said that when we introduce ourselves to an authority we should always say after our own name: your servant. That was how his father taught him how to show respect. On my first day of class at the new school, the teacher asked my name, and I: Sol, your servant.

No, don't say that, my dear!

It's because I respect you, teacher. Never say that to anyone again, understand? I pretended I understood.

When I think about this fantasy of my father, two certainties coexist:

What an idiot (laughter).

Good man, my beloved father (a tear running down my chin).

He didn't know that bourgeois people we never see, nor would we ever be. Only we knew that each plank of our shack had a different smell because it was found, stolen, rescued, from various places. All the tones that wood could have, the sinister of the palette, the scream of shacks that have already gone and took the faces of others. Of those that no one told the children that existed, those who took a bullet in the face, the beheaded, those who left in a rush, by bus, those who disappeared without saying tomorrow we're leaving, those who believed in subdivisions, deeded land. The shuffled planks, after the machine runs over a house, record the stories of all the people who dreamed of the future of housing, but not only that. I look for the fingerprints that the trees made on our migrant bodies. Not everyone manages to have a house, even though we are shelter for one another.

It was a Tuesday. Smell of squash and bay leaf, beans boiling in the pot. Rice with a lot of garlic. Pirarucu taking over everything scallion on it. Every day Joana went to take his packed lunch, watched Alfredo chewing, loved to observe his big teeth.

He needs me, I love that he is only when I am for him.

She wiped the sweat from Alfredo's forehead while he ate from the lunch box as if it were the last of his life, with the container touching his chin. They never said I love you to each other. She

always said it in thought. Alfredo, you are so important to me... I love you. I imagine Joana's feeling at that time because it seemed easy to read her desires if we stopped to face her eyes; something there had a language different from words. Maybe it wasn't that, but I liked to believe it was. She looked at me and I knew that something was irreparably broken between us. Everything was there, always, in the apple of the eyes.