

PART 2: POETRY

[INSERT TWO EPIGRAPHS]

CHAPTER 1

Luanda in the thirties was a little city in the suburbs of the world, in the desolate outskirts of time. There was the hill, its solid, solemn fortress, the light rows of houses* in the lower town, the upper town skirting the slopes of red earth. Everywhere the air felt charged with torpor and tiredness. On the island, linked to the continent by a decrepit bridge of wooden planks on cement pillars, a fresh casuarina breeze blew in the evenings, and this was the loveliest time of the day.

Jacinto do Carmo Ferreira lived in Ingombotas, in a white mansion* with an ogival entrance [gate?] framed by large palm trees. It was the biggest house in Ingombotas. Lídia, at least, always believed this, and for years would always imagine it like this, the most beautiful and largest of any in Ingombotas, until 1974 when she returned to Luanda after twenty-one years in exile and was unable to identify it among the proud dwellings of the new colonial bourgeoisie. It had an enormous back yard, closed in by broad adobe walls. Mango trees, guava trees, medlar-fruit trees, papaya trees, pomegranate trees, SAPE-SAPEIROS and Surinam cherry trees grew there, and bougainvillea, rose bushes, sweetpeas and snapdragons.

Old Fina kept chickens, the [their?] world was good and simple, and Lídia was happy with their happiness: “The chickens made nests in the sand and a luminous dust floated around them. Peace for me today is a chicken in the sun.” Lídia wrote this, or something like this, in one of the many notes we exchanged in the São Paulo Prison.

In the Ingombotas mansion the girl found herself once more among women: old Fina, a.k.a. Dona Josephine, an ancient slave brought from the Congo by a German FUNANTE, later the *mucama*¹ of a rich mulatto businessman, and finally the legitimate wife of Carmo Ferreira. Carlota, César Augusto’s sister, a widow, always dressed in black mourning-cloth, and two of her as yet unmarried daughters, Angelica and Maria do Carmo, who received Lídia as though welcoming a younger sister. On Sundays Carlota’s three other children would appear too, three sons with their wives and respective offspring, and then the house would fill with a tumult of voices. Grandmother Fina would prepare a dried-meat *funge*, sometimes a *mufete* with beans in palm oil and a lot of *gindungo* chilli, German beer for the grown-ups and fizzy drinks for the younger ones, and lunch would stretch right through the afternoon. At the head of the table old Carmo Ferreira would recount anecdotes, laugh thunderously, recall old stories of memorable hunting trips or parties and REBITAS [ie. the dance?] COMO NUNCA MAIS.

One of Carlota’s sons, Tito, who was studying law in Coimbra and was married to a Portuguese woman, used to bring along a guitar and would sing in Spanish the popular boleros of the day, *maxixes* [Brazilian?? *maxixe* dances?] and rumbas. Changing language and accent he would then sing *fados*, shameless little sambas and tunes from the Luanda carnivals.

Lídia showed me a photo from those days. It was taken on a Sunday, without doubt, you could tell that at once.

Perhaps Easter Sunday, as Dona Fina is dressed in lilac fabrics as was traditional. For the New Year *bessangana* women wore white fabrics, for Easter lilac, on August Fifteenth a cloth called BARRA-DE-MANTEIGA, white with pink or blue stripes.

¹ Concubine.

At the centre of the photograph, sitting in a wicker chair, is Jacinto do Carmo Ferreira. He is a little fatter than I'd imagined, but nonetheless he is impressive. He has a colonial helmet on his lap, thick white hair that mixes into his beard. On the floor, sitting on a mat, is Lúdia, a fragile girl with little pointed* plaits. In one of her hands she is holding a cat, with the other she is gripping the arm of a boy a little older than her, with light skin and blonde-tufted hair. Artur, Tito's son. He died in 1967. He was an EPLA² commander who fell into an FNLA ambush and was tortured for three weeks. They pulled out his hair and his beard, burned his chest with cigarettes and finally impaled him with a red-hot poker.

Standing to Carmo Ferreira's right is Dona Funa, with a tall perfumed *quindumba*³. Although she didn't need to, since Carmo Ferreira was still a rich man who owned NEGOCIOS in the slums and a coffee plantation in Porto Amboim, Dona Fina still ran a successful sweet shop. Her sweet-sellers crossed the whole town with a board slung over their shoulders crying the virtues of their wares: candies made from coconut, and guava, and papaya, caramels, *micondos*⁴, sweetmeats wrapped in silk paper, each taste with its own colour.

In the photograph Carlota is at her father's left hand, in her heavy mourning. Her three sons are so alike you would think them triplets, all of them FUSCOS [dark, here?], small and solid, their curly hair plastered with pomade and parted in the centre. One of them is wearing dark glasses and carrying a VIOLA [small guitar, rather than viola?]. That is Tito. In the left-hand corner of the photograph are Angelina and Maria do Carmo. Angelina is very beautiful, with very ALTAS breasts standing out under a white lace blouse, a long gazelle neck. She studied at the English College in Moçâmedes where she learned the language of Shakespeare, and to embroider and play the piano. On the day she turned 34 she ran away with a Dutch adventurer and was never heard from again. Maria do Carmo has transparent eyes, a sidelong, enigmatic smile.

CHAPTER 2 [add footnote]

Did you have many friends as a child?

Lúdia – Artur was my first friend. I also had a dog, a gigantic pointer, who was a bit crazy, who my grandfather named after the Portuguese governor of the day, Eduardo Ferreira Viana. We had another dog [cachorro], but he was old and avoided children. He was called Salazar.

When was the first time you left Luanda?

Lúdia – The first trip I remember taking was to Canhoca, a stop on the Malange railroad. My grandfather went to visit a friend and took me with him. The train scared me. It seemed very large, tumultuous*, smoky. We occupied a compartment in the first class carriage, and I sat at the window. It was early in the morning, the air was wet and smelled of ripe fruit. I looked out and saw the *quitadeiras* [greengrocer women – or always quitadeiras?] selling large green oranges. A blue-uniformed man unrolled a little flag and went past us, trotting towards the locomotive. He was shouting: ALLL-ABOOOOOOAARD.

² Popular Army for the Liberation of Angola, the main* armed wing of the MPLA.

³ Hair-do.

⁴ A very rich sweet in the shape of a ring.

(Interview with Lída do Carmo Ferreira, Luanda, May 23rd 1990.)

CHAPTER 3

The train shuddered and began to move. Lída squeezed her grandfather's hand tight. At Canhoca everyone got out. Beside the station was a small restaurant and the train remained stopped a few minutes for the passengers who were headed for Malange to have their lunch. They paid up-front and only then got their food. They used to say that the owner of the restaurant would serve up soup that was very hot so that no one would have time to finish their meal.

Carmo Ferreira's friend was waiting for them at the station: a thin, tiny old man, lame in one leg. Even in this heat he wore a dark suit and felt hat. His beard and curly hair were completely white, his eyes large and gentle. Lída thought he looked like Father Christmas. They went to his house and the whole afternoon the two friends didn't exchange a word, sitting there playing chess.

The girl got bored and went out to the back yard to bother the locusts. In Luanda she and little Artur organised locust fights, between them or against a praying-mantis – in this latter case the praying-mantis always won. They were like little treacherous gods. They would attack the locusts' backs [ie. attack them from behind?] and eat out their eyes. Lída would watch them do this mute with horror (with fascination). Then Artur would go and find a stone and kill the praying-mantis.

When Lída returned, at the end of the evening, the two old men were still sitting opposite one another, in absolute silence. A little later a lady dressed in black fabrics came in; she put an embroidered tablecloth on the table, brought a saucepan with rice and meat in from the kitchen. Lída had trouble eating. The meat was opaline [Engl], sweet and soft, like she'd never tasted before, and it occurred to her that perhaps it might be a giant praying-mantis. She wanted to ask her grandfather about this but he was chewing in silence, his eyes on his plate and yet seeming to be somehow apart from the meal. The girl kept quiet.

That night they put her to sleep on her own in an enormous room, in a bed in which she felt lost, and Lída had difficulty falling asleep [rpt 'sleep' OK?]. She could hear life beating out there, in a dense web made of whispers, sudden barks, the repeating RECO-RECO [percussion instrument – samba scraper – the rhythmic percussive scraping of, the rhythmic scraped percussion of...??] of the cicadas. Noises of night-time in the bush. A distant dragging of bodies, a soft approach of footsteps. The moonlight, straining through the chinks in the window, awoke [shook?] shadows on the bedroom walls. And again the sound of footsteps. Laughter. Very far away, as though underwater*, and almost weary, the rhythmic resounding of the drums. Lída thought of the stories of ghosts and *cazumbis*⁵ that old Fina used to tell her. One in particular used to startle her: the one about the witches whose tongues came free from their bodies, went creeping though the night, went into homes and attacked sleeping children, strangling them. Old Fina told how many years earlier one of her friends, still young, had woken up in the night, seen one of these tongues at the foot of her bed and killed it with blows from a machete. The next morning she discovered that her mother was mute.

Lída awoke with a start. Her grandfather was beside her and he smiled at her. Father-Christmas accompanied them to the station and when they arrived he put a little bag of caramels

⁵ Spirits.

in her hand. He and her grandfather embraced at length. At last Carmo Ferreira drew apart, held the old man's head in his rough hands and said to him, "Courage, this country will be ours yet."

CHAPTER 4

Lídia liked telling stories about her childhood. There was one that struck me particularly, because it was not possible. Later I was amazed to discover various references to the case in the newspapers of the day. It all began on the island, one Saturday afternoon*, at Ermelinda's bar. Lídia and her grandfather were eating lupine seeds LENTOS when Eduardo Ferreira Viana appeared panting with excitement. He was a powerful, restless creature, who seemed permanently on the edge of a nervous breakdown. He stopped beside Carmo Ferreira and dropped onto the floor a woman's hand. The old man was startled:

"*Sundu ya mamaena!*"⁶

A circle of astonishment formed around the table. Fat Ermelinda, an angel-faced mulatta, allowed herself to faint with a gentle cry into the convenient arms of the poet Vieira da Cruz. The dog ran off, did a lap of the house and immediately returned carrying a whole arm in its teeth. He barked, ran to the door, and barked again. The men looked at one another, and then followed him. Some hundred metres away, beside a little forest of acacia trees, the sand had been turned up and you could see – partly eaten away and half-buried – a human cadaver.

They found the bodies of seven women in that place, some of them already badly come-apart, transformed into LIMAS and mud and boiling with a necrophagic life – tiny, pale and nervous. All were "horribly mutilated", as the reporter from the *Província de Angola* would write the next day. To be more precise, the bodies were cut through right across the belly.

The mystery fed the conversations of Luandans over the weeks that followed. Luanda was a city of calm and mild crimes, and even these were unusual, almost always anonymous. A week later the editor of *A Glória de Angola*, Vitorino Espírito Santo, was celebrating the discovery, writing that it was "the proof that, counter to some people's incorrect arguments, Angola is finally entering the great club of civilised nations." It's a good example of the acidic Luandan sense of humour: *A Glória de Angola* was then what remained of a once powerful nativist press, which the growing colonial offensive was practically suffocating.

Almost everyone agreed that what they were dealing with was a sexual crime. However, the suspects varied and the theories for explaining the case varied even more. Some colonials, particularly those lately arrived, recalled the "cannibalistic practices, the savage orgies of the bushland blacks", many of whom had reached the capital and were seen wandering aimlessly through the dust of the streets, "offending the eyes of our virgins with their shameless outfits". I took these curious statements from a small article in the *Província de Angola*. Its author, one A.D. Ventura – possibly a pseudonym – suggested the creation of European neighbourhoods that were kept rigorously separate from the African neighbourhoods and watched over by a special police corps: "only in this way," the writer of the article concluded, "will it be possible to guarantee the security of our wives and daughters. Yesterday they were just blacks [black women? Check], but tomorrow, who knows, perhaps the tragedy will come knocking on our own doors."

Vitorino Espírito Santo, in a later article, wrote that "a crime that is so refined, so imaginative, so filled with mystery and seduction, cannot honestly be imputed to the common

⁶ An obscene expression in *quimbumdu*.

herd. The people, the barbarous black man, kills simple beasts simply: ELE DESFERE A PANCADA, ELE CRAVA A NAVALHA and flees. The sorcery* does recall some cases, but none with the inspiration to carry out something of this kind and on this scale. A crime of this nature requires the learning of an educated man and the sensibility of an English Lord. I know the name of the guilty man and can reveal it to you now: Jack, the Ripper.” The article must have caused considerable scandal, because the issue in which it appears would be the last published in the series.

The other newspapers I consulted didn’t solve the mystery. But Lídia claimed to remember the sudden outcome very clearly. According to her, a few months after the discovery of the body, the killer handed himself over to the police to escape the people’s fury. He was a fisherman from the Algarve, an insignificant sort of man, with sharp protruding bones, and a hare lip. “A real genetic disaster,” in Lídia’s words. He had been deported to Angola for the crime of murder and having bought himself a little boat had spent the latter years of his life settled among the *axiluandas*⁷. Without much luck at sea, one day he nevertheless began to appear with his barge laden with a new kind of fish. The people found it odd, especially the fact that the man from the Algarve only ever brought the scaly things’ tails to land, quite big tails judging by accounts, on the grounds that they were the tastiest part of that new* species. Shortly after the bodies were discovered, the man confessed: they were mermaids! The wretch had been killing them and then cutting their human appearance away, burying these pieces in big common ditches. The tails, rejected by the people of Luanda, would be salted and sold to *fubeiros*⁸ from the interior, who would then sell them on as though they were salt-cod.

The man was released after a few weeks. Lídia heard that he’d fled from Luanda hidden in the hold of a trawler and that he had later set himself up in Moçâmedes, where he’d opened a funeral parlour.

CHAPTER 5

It was in the July of 1994, in Porto Alexandre (Tombwa), in the extreme south of Angola. By chance I’d gone into an old ironmongers’ shop. At first I thought it was empty. Then I saw him, sitting in the gloom. All I could make out were his thin hands. The tired gestures with which he shooed away the flies.

The shop didn’t seem to have anything to sell. Just a few objects eaten away by rust. Nails, nuts, little things DE USO REMOTO. The man spoke slowly:

“You should have seen this place in other times,” he said to me. “These houses, the ones out there, they were like palaces. And then there were the casuarinas too, tall trees that the government had planted to stop the advancing of the dunes.”

I had seen the houses. They looked like boats submerged in the sand. As for the trees, I hadn’t seen a single one. The man raised his hands in a gesture of discouragement:

“What do you expect? They cut them down for firewood.”

Night was falling fast over the desert. Looking towards the door, out there, you could see the shadows growing. A dog went past growling, head down (could it be fear?). “I’ve had plenty of money in the past,” the man continued. “I was a fisherman.”

He laughed: “I used to fish for mermaids.”

⁷ Fishing people from Luanda island.

⁸ Bushland traders.

He fell silent. Silent and hidden in the shadows, it was as though he wasn't there. I sat down alone on the doorstep. I thought of Lídia. I had gone there, to this place at the end of the earth, in search of her. Oh Lord, where could she be?

The red ants ran, forming strange pictures in the sand.

CHAPTER 6

“He was an odd guy,” Lídia said to me about Canon Froto, her godfather. His voice changed with the seasons, shining like a just-polished metal in the raw, dusty months. Hoarse in the rusty early mornings, before the great rains: they said that he'd had his throat operated and his vocal cords reconstructed in metal. Firm and definite on matters of custom, he could not abide ladies participating in religious rites with their faces uncovered, just as he would not allow gentlemen in shirtsleeves into the church. On one occasion he publicly reprimanded the Governor General himself because he had tried to tell a crude* story at the inauguration of the festival of August Fifteenth⁹. And yet his best friends were Carmo Ferreira and Canon Manuel das Neves, the first a committed* republican, anti-clerical and with libertarian tendencies, and the other a fierce nationalist who plotted secretly against Portuguese rule and seemed much more interested in hearing the words of the people than in conveying to them the sacred word of the Lord.

There was another famous man from São Tomé in Luanda who also frequented the house of Carmo Ferreira: Dr Aires de Menezes, one of the first black doctors to develop a practice on Angolan soil. Tall and of athletic bearing, dressed like the hero of an American movie, a sober monocle in his right eye, with French perfume and a silver walking-stick. The *candungos*¹⁰ watched him with distrust. They looked at his haughty monocle, disconcerted at his incredible FIGURA and when he passed them they muddled [no – ENROLAVAM] their words, greeting him, “And how is Your Excellency's health?” But no sooner seen the back of him than they would spit out to one side “ORA QUEREM LA VER, O RAI DO PRETO!” The story goes, that one of them, wanting to humiliate the doctor, turned up at his surgery asking to have one of his feet operated on – he had chigoe fleas [confirm species]¹¹. Aires de Menezes wasn't troubled: he stretched the man out on the operating table, prepared his tweezers, his needles and scalpels, gave a local anaesthetic and carried on in every way as though this were a real operation he was performing. The *candungo* laughed to himself, thinking about the good story he would have to tell to entertain his friends. He stopped laughing when Aires de Menezes presented him with the bill: “You think it's expensive?” asked the doctor, surprised, “you should know that when you're talking about treating parasites, it's cheap at any price.”

In spite of his proverbial rudeness, Canon Froto cultivated an old man's gentle tenderness for Lídia. He took her out in a *maxila*¹², offered her sweets and little rag dolls and as soon as the girl had shown herself capable of holding a pencil he taught her to read and to write and spoke to her of the world. At D. João II School, where she had finished year four, Lídia stunned everyone with her precocious learning: she didn't merely read and write, she had already mastered the

⁹ Celebrations to commemorate the reconquest of Angola from the Dutch by Salvador Correia de Sá e Benevides.

¹⁰ Coare* whites.

¹¹ *Pulex penetrans*, a parasite that penetrates the skin and installs itself there, normally in the toes, laying eggs and provoking severe itching.

¹² A kind of sling.

basics of arithmetic and geometry, recited whole poems by St Francis of Assisi, knew the secrets of the Bible and could conjugate the most obtuse Latin verbs.

D. João II School occupied the whole first floor of the Palace of Dona Ana Joaquina, a building with three centuries of memories, whose wide walls contained* dramas of blood and love, of slaves and masters. Named a piece of national heritage, it was occupied in 1977 and debased and destroyed down to the bones of its stone [=> to its stone skeleton / carcass?]. Nowadays Angolans back from Zaire light bonfires in its huge halls, raise chickens in its old confessionals of valuable woods, and pigs where Luanda's Creole aristocracy used to waltz. With the innocence of those who know nothing they stretch out fabrics with the ESFIGIE [likeness?] of the President on the elegant iron-embroidered* [ie wrought?] verandas, and many-coloured underpants on the proud flagpole.

But all this came later. At the time, the Palace of Dona Ana Joaquina was still calm and heavy, and maintained an atmosphere of ancient nobility that fascinated young Lída:

“The ancient light intact,
preserved in each CANTO, RECANTO
ESQUINA [Aaargh!!!]
Stuck to the high hall ceilings
The dead dumbly murmur
In stealth.”¹³

CHAPTER 7

—*You studied, Lída, at the D. João II School, in the old Palace of Dona Ana Joaquina. What was your day to day life like in those days?*

Lída – It was almost always the same. I would get up at half past five in the morning. Angelina would give me a cold bath, combed my hair and dressed me. At six o'clock it was breakfast, my grandfather JA SAIRA to take care of his business. At six forty-five Angelina, Maria do Carmo or one of the servants would take me to school. I remember the teacher clearly, a serious man, always dressed in black. He would take attendance, ask to see homework and punished those who didn't deliver with half a dozen strokes of a ruler on each hand. Repeat offenders would get theirs on the backs of their hands. They said that if you rubbed chicken droppings* on your hands the ruler would slip and it would hurt less. But I tried it and it didn't work. There was a break at ten o'clock, and we would go out to the playground*, where the domestic servants were already waiting for us with the snacks our mothers had prepared for us. The poorer of my schoolmates brought from home a roll wrapped in brown paper.

—*And did you also have someone bringing you your snack?*

Lída – I was one of the few black children who had someone waiting for me, but it wasn't until much later that I noticed this. I remember another boy, also black, for whom a very white lady, dressed in a kind of cream-coloured tunic like a priest's, a colonial helmet on her head, used to come to bring his snack. She'd arrive pedalling an old blue bicycle, the lunch-box in a basket fixed to the handlebars. And the dogs ran along behind her in silence.

¹³ Lída Ferreira, in *Ancient Stones*, Casa dos Estudantes do Império edition, Lisbon, 1961.

—*What?!*

Lídia – That’s exactly how it was. I remember seeing her pedalling. And the dogs behind her, running in silence.

(Interview with Lídia do Carmo Ferreira, Luanda, May 23rd 1990)

CHAPTER 8

—*You wrote in one of your poems that when you were a child you used to hide to smoke. Is that true?*

—I’ve always written about things that have happened. I remember smoking my first cigarettes, in the shade of the cashew trees, behind the high school – Caricocos. A pack of 300 cost 19 *escudos*. There were even ads on the radio. (She sings): “If you don’t smoke caricocos / You just don’t know how good they are... / Caricoco hey-la / Caricoco hey-la-la [*]”. Then there were the French ‘Number Ones’ with blue and white stripes, which looked like they were wearing pyjamas. And Reys, Fidalgo* tobacco, but with a revolting taste. Then Cuanhamas appeared, black and dangerous, no sooner had you lit one than it would come apart into little sparks. One day I arrived home with little holes all over my dress. Vavó Fina smelled my mouth, smacked her lips, made a rotten expression, went to fetch my grandfather. The old man laughed a lot and imitating the voice of the TELEFONIA started singing “If you don’t smoke caricocos you just don’t know how good they are.” He opened his cigarette case and offered me a cigarette. I think I was furious. That day I stopped smoking.

(Interview with Lídia do Carmo Ferreira, Luanda, May 25th 1990.)

CHAPTER 9

Lídia would write poems in the silence of her bedroom. As soon as it got dark she would go out into the back yard to gather RAMOS of roses. The cicadas screamed. Then she would close herself in her room and pull the petals* off the roses and chew them anxiously, feeling confusingly like a female praying-mantis devouring a male. Out there the cicadas were burning, mad with amazement and CIO [ie. on heat]. Lídia devoured the roses and scratched through [*] leaf after leaf of paper with long incoherent poems.

She was afraid of snakes, and of the dark. She was above all afraid of her own body. She counted the days waiting for her period with horror. And while it was happening she would avoid going out, agonised by the idea that her scent preceded her, She felt herself persecuted by the restless gaze of the men, the mocking gaze of the girls, the sympathetic gaze of the old greengrocer women. She closed herself in alone in her bathroom and wept in silence, as she washed the cloths stained with blood.

Her best friend, Antónia Buriti, was in love with a classmate. She spent her days sighing, RESPIROSA, her little hand on her heart and her eyes moist. Lídia found her ridiculous and hated seeing her like that: “You look stupid,” she would tell her. But in reality she was jealous of her. The cause of such sentimental exaltation was a dark mulatto known to be arrogant and argumentative. But he did have an incredible gift for satire* and published a few sarcastic poems in the school* paper, *The Student*. The teachers said – in a whisper – that he showed great promise. His name was Viriato. Viriato Francisco Clemente da Cruz.

There were few girls in the high school and they had little to do with the boys. These [the boys] formed their own groups. They organised big football tournaments, went swimming at Samba Pequena beach, they roamed through the city in a band, explored the slums, looked for cuckoos in the BARROCAS, waged war against rival gangs, raided the old courtyards to steal fruit, or hunted birds. Basically, as old Fina used to say, they laddered about. Viriato was the leader of one of these groups.

Lídia had noticed him, as everyone had, but what captivated her was something quite new*; something she could not explain. Antónia Buriti did know [chk]. She spoke slowly, languidly of his “mysterious oriental eyes”, glorified the boy’s DETERMINADO [determined/decisive or bold?] personality. With great excitement she would recount the stories circulating about him. None of this mattered to Lídia; it was something else. One day she wrote in her diary, VI-RI-ATO. A VITORI. RIOT, VIA. She didn’t know what that meant. Sometimes she dreamed about him. They were walking down a long road together and she gave him her hand. And suddenly she realised that the boy beside her was not Viriato. It wasn’t even a man. She had this dream again, many years later, by which time Viriato was dying in China and she was beginning to get to the heart of mysteries [ENIGMAS].

CHAPTER 10

The boys were cruel. Once they put birdlime on a small wall where birds usually landed. It was a habit in those days to catch birds with birdlime. Poor children constructed wicker or wire cages, caught the little birds and then went to sell them from door to door. The boys from the high school didn’t want to catch the little birds to sell them, however. When there were already seven or eight struggling on the wall they started discussing what they should do. Some wanted to stone them, Viriato wanted to eat them. At this point a thin lad appeared:

“Killing little birds is a crime,” he said. “Better let them go right away.”

His name was Rui Tavares Marques and he had recently arrived from Huambo. He was an outgoing little kid who entertained everyone with his impressions of the teachers’ voices. I will be talking about him again later on, as he was the man who judged the mercenaries in 1976, and subsequently took part in the interrogations of the fractionists*. Those who survived said that he was the worst of all: “He was Macchiavellian.” Other adjectives: hateful, hypocritical, repellent, paranoid. He obtained his confessions by torture. They say that once in an attack of rage he put his hand into the mouth of a prisoner and tore out her tongue. And yet he still has many friends: “He’s absolutely delightful,” a Portuguese woman writer assured me, “a cultured, fun, intelligent man, and excellent cook and poet DE GRANDES RECURSOS.” Other adjectives: brilliant, friendly, DELICADO, welcoming. I told her that he had once torn out the tongue of a woman who was tied up. The Portuguese woman raised her hands to her lips:

“How horrible! That’s not true...”

Not true? Very well. Let us return to the birds. Rui Tavares Marques – whom we would later have to call Tovaritch Marx – confronted the boys:

“Killing little birds is a crime,” he repeated. “If you don’t free them at once I’m calling the police.”

A boy with an effeminate manner, Rosa-da-Ana – also known as Porcelain Rose – appeared with a pair of pruning scissors [shears?]:

“You want to free the birds? Then we’ll free the birds.”

And while the others were holding Rio Tavares, he cut the birds’ legs off.

CHAPTER 11

—“*Childhood is the season of malice [evil? MALDADE].*” *It’s your line. What does it mean?*

Lídia – Just that, that childhood is the season of malice*. Of course, it is also the age of innocence. I think a certain innocence is necessary for malice* to manifest itself in its most exuberant forms. Did I tell you the story about the birds? It was me who gave Porcelain Rose the scissors [shears?].

News stories about children who kill or torture other children don’t surprise me. What does amaze me is that the phenomenon isn’t more widespread. The great torturers – and I’ve known some – well, we’ve known some, haven’t we? – the great torturers are almost always men who haven’t had a childhood and so EXERCISE it later on.

Perhaps malice* in men, deep down, is an expression of their innocence. That’s why I always say that only the innocent are guilty.

(Interview with Lídia do Carmo Ferreira, Luanda. 23rd May 1990.)

CHAPTER 12

The Second World War had come to an end, and fragments of news were reaching Luanda of a world being restored. The defeat of Nazism struck at the very essence of the racist theories that had been embedded in Angola since the end of the previous century. Social Darwinism was treated as a joke in AS ACADEMIAS [The Academy?], and the arrogant Germanophiles – who just a few months earlier had advocated for the separation of races and for keeping the blacks and mulattos from all public posts – had fallen silent. Students organised marches to throw stones at the windows of the German consulate, while at the same time irritating the English consul with repeated demonstrations of support and gratitude. Salazar, meanwhile, continued to squeeze [tighten?] the MALHAS [net?] of Empire, and the Angolans found themselves each day less in control of their own destiny. The older ones spoke of a time when it was the children of the land who dominated Angola’s economic, cultural and even political life, but the young laughed at them. Some of these old people dreamed of a restoration of the old parties from the days of the monarchy: they spoke a lot of the Pro-Angola Party.

Some small number of tireless idealists, like old Carmo Ferreira, grew old at café tables, trying to connect the confused, rotting threads of revolution* to one another.

In this atmosphere poetry burst from the young as the most obvious means of cultural affirmation: “they took everything from us, our dignity, our land, our men. And finally even our face [chk],” Lídia said to me; “they took our whole past away from us and we looked around us and couldn’t understand the world. Then we began to write poetry. Poetry was a IRREPARAVEL destiny for an Angolan student in those days.”

It was a poetry that was poor but generous, alert to the distortions of society and above all obsessed with the sacred space of childhood, this final and deepest stronghold of memory – general, not particular – which explained the world. The infancy of distant customs still preserved [vb?]: *makèzu*¹⁴, cola and ginger¹⁵, the mixed-race *quimbundo* of the greengrocer women, the legends their grandmothers told, always inhabited by talking beasts and strange prodigious beings.

The young poets were aware of the messianic role they had to play. “We were writing for History,” Lídia said to me. She told me that once she met Viriato da Cruz walking in the Largo da Mutamba. He was alone, but seemed to be concentrating on something. Lídia asked him what he was doing and Viriato replied that he was waiting for the echo. She thought this strange:

“ESSA AGORA, the echo of what?!” Viriato explained that that day he’d published a short poem in some newspaper from the city:

“You didn’t read it? No matter, your grandchildren will certainly read it.”

That was definitely in the late forties. Viriato was recovering from TB. The illness and the lack of financial resources had forced him to abandon his studies. He spent his days reading. He received from Brazil books that had been banned by the revolution and he read like a man possessed. He read some literature too: Jorge Amado, Erico Veríssimo, Manuel Bandeira, Graciliano Romas, the Russian classics, the first Portuguese neo-realists. He had a curious, EXCITADO spirit. He had difficulty taking criticism, but was always the first to criticise. He spoke of the need for Angolans to rediscover Angola, he defended the study of *quimbundo* – our real language – and dreamed of a AMPLA revolt of the countryfolk and the oppressed masses from the slums. At the same time he criticised with ferocious sarcasm [IRONIA] the “little bourgeois values” of the old Luandan aristocracy, got irritated with the intellectual limitations of his circle of friends and was known by many people as a pretentious and arrogant kind of guy. The truth was that he felt embarrassed when people spoke *quimbundo* in his presence, and whenever he visited his family in Porto Amboim where he’d been born he avoided the countryfolk because he didn’t know what to say to them. He secretly envied those who left to study in Portugal.

On the day Lídia went away he appeared on the quay at the last minute, as the passengers we preparing to climb the stairs [ladder?]. He had brought a bunch of roses and was racked* with fever. He didn’t say goodbye to her. He said to her, “Sis, don’t forget us!”

It was raining. Lídia put her arms around his neck, pulled him towards her and felt his trembling body. It burned. And the anxiety, the scent of roses. [Chk last two sentences – link.]

¹⁴ Old Angolan aperitif based on cola leaves.

¹⁵ It used to be the custom to offer cola and ginger to a young woman whom one meant to court.