

Rubem Fonseca

Rubem Fonseca was born in 1925, in the city of Juiz de Fora, in Minas Gerais, but has made Rio de Janeiro the background for his short stories and novels. His preferred narrative form is the detective novel, which he combines with metafictional and philosophical considerations. Much of his fiction is characterized by violence, as it reflects the reality of contemporary society. In "The Art of Walking in the Streets of Rio de Janeiro," from *Romance negro e outras histórias* (1992), the reader finds not the graphic violence of some of Fonseca's previous works, but an insidious and more disturbing one that originates in poverty, hunger, indifference and social exclusion. Fonseca's books also include: *O caso Morel* (1973), *Feliz ano novo* (1975), *Vastas emoções e pensamentos imperfeitos* (1988) and *Agosto* (1990). His work has appeared in German, Italian, Spanish and English, including: *High Art* (Harper & Row, 1986), *Buffo & Spallanzani* (Dutton, 1990), and *Vast Emotions and Imperfect Thoughts* (Ecco, 1998).

of an asthmatic child, his mentally defective mother-in-law lived with them, and even so he met his obligations to literature. Augusto would go home and find he was unable to rid himself of the problems of the water and sewerage department; a large city uses a lot of water and produces a lot of excrement. João said there was a price to pay for the artistic ideal, poverty, drunkenness, insanity, the scorn of fools, affronts from the envious, lack of understanding from friends, loneliness, failure. And he proved he was right by dying from a sickness caused by fatigue and sadness, before completing his six-hundred-page novel. Which his widow threw in the trash along with other old papers. João's failure did not dishearten Epifânio. When he won a prize in one of the city's many lotteries, he resigned from the water and sewerage department to dedicate himself to the task of writing, and adopted the name Augusto.

Now he is a writer and a walker. Thus, when he isn't writing—or teaching whores to read—he walks the streets. Day and night he walks the streets of Rio de Janeiro.

At exactly three a.m., when Haydn's *Mit dem Paukenschlag* sounds on his Casio Melody, Augusto returns from his walks to the empty upstairs apartment where he lives, and sits down, after feeding the rats, in front of the small table occupied almost entirely by the enormous notebook with lined pages where he writes his book, under the large skylight through which a ray of light enters from the street, mixed with moonlight on nights when there is a full moon.

In his walks through the city's downtown, since he began writing the book, Augusto looks attentively at all there is to be seen—facades, roofs, doors, windows, posters stuck on walls, commercial signs, whether luminous or not, holes in the sidewalk, garbage cans, sewer drains, the ground he steps on, bird drinking water from puddles, vehicles, and especially people.

Another day he went into the theater-temple of Pastor Raimundo. He found the theater-temple by chance; the doctor at the Institute had told him that a problem in the macula of his retina demanded treatment with vitamin E in combination with selenium and had sent him imprecisely to a pharmacy that prepared the substance, on Senador Dantas Street, somewhere near the intersection with Alcindo Guanabara. Upon leaving the pharmacy, and after walking a little, he passed the door of the movie theater, read the small poster that said CHURCH OF JESUS SAVIOR OF SOULS FROM 8 TO 11 DAILY and went in without knowing why.

The Art of Walking in the Streets of Rio de Janeiro



*In a word, the state of immorality was general. Clergy,
nobility and the common people were all perverted.*

Joaquim Manuel de Macedo,
A Walk Through the Streets of Rio de Janeiro (1862—63)

Augusto, the walker, whose real name is Epifânio, lives in a space above a women's hat shop on Sete de Setembro, downtown, and he walks the streets all day and part of the night. He believes that by walking he thinks better, finds solutions to his problems; *solvitur ambulando*, he tells himself.

In the days when he worked for the water and sewerage department he thought of giving up everything to live off writing. But João, a friend who had published a book of poetry and another of short stories and was writing a six-hundred-page novel, told him that a true writer shouldn't live off what he wrote, it was obscene, you couldn't serve art and Mammon at the same time, therefore it was better for Epifânio to earn his daily bread at the water and sewerage department and write at night. His friend was married to a woman who suffered from bad kidneys, was the father

Every morning, from eight to eleven, every day of the week, the theater is occupied by the Church of Jesus Savior of Souls. Starting at two in the afternoon it shows pornographic films. At night, after the last show, the manager puts the posters with naked women and indecorous publicity slogans away in a storeroom next to the bathroom. To the church's pastor, Raimundo, as well as the faithful—some forty people, most of them elderly women and young people with health problems—the theater's normal program is unimportant; all films are in some way sinful, and all the church's believers never go to the movies, because of an express prohibition from the bishop, not even to see the life of Christ at Eastertide.

From the moment that Pastor Raimundo places a candle, actually an electric light bulb on a pedestal that imitates a lily, in front of the screen, the locale becomes a temple consecrated to Jesus. The pastor hopes the bishop will buy the theater, as he has done in certain districts in the city, and install a permanent church there, twenty-four hours a day, but he knows that the bishop's decision depends on the results of his, Raimundo's, work with the faithful.

Augusto is going to the theater-temple that morning, for the third time in a week, with the idea of learning the songs the women sing, *Flee from me, flee from me, O Satan, my body is not thine, my soul is not thine, Jesus has defeated thee*, a mixture of rock and samba. Satan is a word that attracts him. It has been a long time since he went into a place where people pray or do anything like it. He remembers as a child having gone for years on end to a large church full of images and sad people, on Good Friday, taken by his mother, who forced him to kiss the feet of Our Lord Jesus Christ lying with a crown of thorns on his head. Jesus is purple, religion is linked to purple, his mother is purple, or was it the purple satin lining her coffin? But there is nothing purple in that theater-temple with bouncers who watch him from a distance, two young men, one white and one mulatto, small, short-sleeved dress shirt and dark tie, circulating among the faithful and never coming near the chair in the rear where he is sitting, motionless, wearing dark glasses.

When they sing *Flee from me, O Satan, Jesus has defeated thee*, the women raise their arms, throwing their hands backwards above their heads, as if they were pushing the demon away; the bouncers in short sleeves do the same; Pastor Raimundo, however, holding the microphone, directs the chorus by raising only one arm.

Today, the pastor focuses his attention on the man in dark glasses, missing an ear, in the back of the theater as he says, "Brethren, everyone who is with Jesus raise your hands." All the faithful raise their hands, except Augusto. The pastor, very disturbed, sees that Augusto remains immobile, like a statue, his eyes hidden by the dark lenses. "Raise your hands," he repeats with emotion, and some of the faithful respond by standing on tiptoe and extending their arms even higher. But the man without an ear does not move.

Pastor Raimundo came from the state of Ceará to Rio de Janeiro when he was seven years old, along with his family, which was fleeing drought and hunger. At twenty he was a sidewalk peddler on Geremário Dantas Street, in the Madureira district; at twenty-six, pastor of the Church of Jesus Savior of Souls. Every night, he gave thanks to Jesus for this immense gift. He had been a good peddler, he didn't cheat his customers, and one day a pastor, hearing him selling his merchandise in a persuasive way, as he knew how to speak one word after another at the correct speed, invited him to enter the Church. In a short time Raimundo became a pastor; he was now thirty, almost lost his Northeastern accent, acquired the neutral speech of certain Rio natives, for it was like that, impartial and universal, that the word of Jesus must be. He is a good pastor, just as he was a good peddler and a good son, since he took care of his mother when she became paralyzed and dirtied her bed, until the day of her death. He cannot forget the senile, failing, and moribund body of his mother, especially the genital and excretory areas that he was obliged to clean every day; sometimes he has disgusting dreams about his mother and regrets that she didn't die of a heart attack at fifty, not that he remembers what she was like at fifty; he only remembers his mother as old and repellent. Because he knew how to say words rapidly one after the other, and with correct meanings, he was transferred from the outlying Baixada district to downtown, as the Church of Jesus Savior of Souls wanted to bring the word of God to the most impenetrable districts, like the center of the city. The center of the city is a mystery. The South Zone is also difficult; the wealthy disdain the evangelical churches, the religion of the poor, and in the South Zone the church is frequented during weekdays by old women and sickly young people, who are the most faithful of the faithful, and on Sundays by maids, doormen, cleaning workers, dark-skinned and poorly dressed folk. But the rich are worse sinners and need salvation even more than the poor. One of Raimundo's dreams is to be transferred from downtown to the South Zone and find a way into the heart of the rich.

But the number of faithful going to the theater-temple hasn't increased, and Raimundo may have to go to preach in another temple; perhaps he will be forced to return to the Baixada, for he has failed, he has not been able to take the word of Jesus convincingly where the Church of Jesus Savior of Souls most needs to be heard, especially these days, when the Catholics, with their churches nearly empty, have abandoned their intellectual posture and are counterattacking with the so-called charismatic movement, reinventing the miracle, resorting to faith healing and exorcism. They, the Catholics, had already gone back to admitting that the miracle exists only if the devil exists, good dominating evil; but it was still necessary for them to perceive that the devil is not metaphysical. You can touch the devil; on certain occasions he appears as flesh and blood, but he always has a small difference in his body, some unusual characteristic; and you can smell the devil, who stinks when he is distracted.

But his, Raimundo's, problem is not with the lofty politics of the relations of his Church with the Catholic Church; that's a problem for the bishop. Raimundo's problem is the faithful of his parish, the dwindling collection of tithes. And he is also disturbed by that man in dark glasses, missing one ear, who didn't raise his hand in support of Jesus. Since that man appeared, Raimundo has begun suffering from insomnia, having headaches, and emitting gases with a fetid odor from his intestines that burn his ass as they are expelled.

Tonight, while Raimundo doesn't sleep, Augusto, sitting in front of his enormous notebook with lined pages, jots down what he has seen as he walked through the city and writes his book *The Art of Walking in the Streets of Rio de Janeiro*.

He moved upstairs over the hat shop to facilitate writing the first chapter, which comprises only the art of walking in the downtown area of the city. He doesn't know which chapter will be the most important, when it is done. Rio is a very large city, protected by hills from whose top you can take in the whole of it, in stages, with a look, but the downtown is more diversified and dark and old, the downtown has no true hill; as occurs with the center of things in general, which is flat or shallow, the downtown has only a single hillock, unduly called Saúde Hill,¹ and to see the city from above, and even then only poorly and incompletely,

you must go to Santa Teresa Hill, but that hill isn't above the city, it's somewhat to the side, and from it you don't get the slightest idea of what the downtown is like. You don't see the streets' sidewalks; at best, on certain days you see the polluted air hovering over the city.

In his wanderings Augusto has yet to leave the downtown, nor will he do so any time soon. The rest of the city, the immense remainder that only the Satan of the Church of Jesus Savior of Souls knows in its entirety, will be traversed in due time.

The first owner of the hat shop lived there with his family many years before. His descendants were some of the merchants who continued to live downtown after the great flight to the districts, especially to the South Zone. Since the 1940s, almost no one lived in the two-story houses on the major streets of the downtown area, in the city's commercial core, which could be contained in a kind of quadrilateral with one of its sides Avenida Rio Branco, another a meandering line beginning at Visconde de Inhaúma and continuing along Marechal Floriano to Tomé de Souza Street, which would be the third side, and finally, the fourth side, a rather twisted course born at Visconde do Rio Branco, passing through Tiradentes Square and Carioca Street to Rio Branco, enclosing the space. The two-story houses in this area have become warehouses. As the hat shop's business dwindled year by year, for women stopped wearing hats, even at weddings, and there was no further need for a storage space, as the small stock of merchandise could all fit in the store, the upstairs, which was of interest to no one, became empty. One day Augusto passed by the door of the hat shop and stopped to look at the wrought iron balconies on its facade, and the owner, an old man who had sold just one hat in the last six months, came out of the store to talk with him. The old man said that the house of the Count of Estrela had been located there, in the time when the street was called Cano Street because the water pipes for the fountain of Palace Square ran through it, a square that later would be called Dom Pedro II Square and then Quinze Square. "The habit people have of changing the names of streets. Come see something." The old man climbed to the second floor with Augusto and showed him a skylight whose glass was from the time the house was built, over ninety years old. Augusto was enchanted by the skylight, the enormous empty room, the bedrooms, the bathroom with English porcelain, and

by the rats that hid when they walked past. He liked rats; as a child he had raised a rat that he had become attached to, but the friendship between the two had ended the day the rat bit him on the finger. But he continued to like rats. They say that the waste, the ticks and the fleas from rats transmit horrible diseases, but he had always gotten along well with them, with the exception of that small problem of the bite. Cats also transmit horrible diseases, they say, and dogs transmit horrible diseases, they say, and human beings transmit horrible diseases, that much he knew. "Rats never vomit," Augusto told the old man. The old man asked what they did when they ate food that was bad for them, and Augusto replied that rats never ate food that was bad for them, for they were very cautious and selective. The old man, who had a sharp mind, then asked why lots of rats died of poisoning, and Augusto explained that to kill a rat it was necessary to use a very potent poison that killed with a small, single bite from the rodent, and in any case not many rats died from poisoning, considering their total population. The old man, who also liked rats and for the first time had met someone who had the same affection for the rodents and liked old skylights, invited him to live in the space, despite having inferred from the conversation that Augusto was a "nihilist."

Augusto is in the enormous room, under the large skylight, writing his book, the part referring to the center of the immense city. From time to time he stops and contemplates, with a small loupe used to examine weaves, the bulb hanging from the ceiling.

When he was eight years old, he got hold of a loupe used to examine textile fibers in his father's shop, the same loupe he is using at this moment. Lying down, in the distant year, he looked through the loupe at the bulb in the ceiling of the house where he lived, which was also an upstairs floor in the center of the city and whose facade was destroyed to make room for the immense glowing acrylic sign of a small-appliances store; on the ground floor his father had a shop and talked with the women as he smoked his thin cigarette, and laughed, and the women laughed. His father was a different man in the shop, more interesting, laughing with those women. Augusto remembers the night when he was looking through the loupe at the bulb in the ceiling and saw beings full of claws, paws, menacing horns, and imagined in his fright what could

happen if one of those things came down from the ceiling; the beasts appeared and disappeared, leaving him terrified and fascinated. He finally discovered, at daybreak, that the beasts were his eyelashes; when he blinked, the monster would appear in the loupe, and when he opened his eyes, it would vanish.

After observing, in the skylight, the bulb monsters of the large room—he now has long eyelashes and still has the loupe for looking at textile—Augusto returns to writing about the art of walking in the streets of Rio de Janeiro. Because he is on foot, he sees things differently from those who travel in cars, buses, launches, helicopters or any other vehicle. He plans to avoid making his book into some kind of tourist guide for travelers in search of the exotic, of pleasure, the mystical, horror, crime, and poverty, such as interests many people of means, especially foreigners; nor will his book be one of those ridiculous manuals that associate walking with health, physical well-being, or notions of hygiene. He also takes precautions so that his book does not become a pretext, à la Macedo, for listing historical descriptions about potentates and institutions, although, like that creator of novels for damsels, he sometimes yields to prolix digressions. Neither will it be an architectural guide to old Rio or a compendium of urban architecture; Augusto hopes to find a peripatetic art and philosophy that will help him establish a greater communion with the city. *Solvitur ambulando*.

It is eleven pm and he is on Treze de Maio Street. Besides walking, he teaches prostitutes to read and to speak correctly. Television and pop music had corrupted people's vocabulary, especially the prostitutes'. It is a problem that has to be resolved. He is aware that teaching prostitutes to read and to speak correctly in his rooms over the hat shop can be a form of torture for them. So he offers them money to listen to his lessons, little money, much less than the usual amount a customer pays. From Treze de Maio he goes to Avenida Rio Branco, which is deserted. The Municipal Theater advertises an opera recital for the following day; opera has gone in and out of fashion in the city since the beginning of the century. With spray paint, two youths are writing on the theater walls, which have just been painted and show few signs of the work of graffiti artists, WE THE SADISTS OF CACHAMBI GOT THE MUNI'S CHERRIE GRAFFITI ARTISTS UNITE; under the phrase, the logo-

signature of the Sadists, a penis, which had at first caused some consternation among the students of graffitiology but is now known to be that of a pig with a human glans. "Hey," Augusto tells one of the youths, "cherry is with a y, not ie, graffiti is with two f's and one t, and you need punctuation between the two sentences." The youth replies, "Old man, you understood what we mean, didn't you? So fuck you and your shitass rules."

Augusto sees a figure trying to hide on Manoel de Carvalho, the street behind the theater, and recognizes a guy named Hermenegildo who does nothing in life but hand out an ecological manifesto against the automobile. Hermenegildo is carrying a can of glue, a brush, and eighteen rolled-up manifestoes. The manifesto is stuck with a special high-adhesive glue onto the windshields of cars parked on the street. Hermenegildo motions Augusto toward the place where he's hiding. It's common for them to bump into each other late at night, on the street. "I need your help," Hermenegildo says.

The pair walks to Almirante Barroso Street, turn to the right and continue to Avenida Presidente Antônio Carlos. Augusto opens the can of glue. Hermenegildo's objective tonight is to get inside the Menezes Cortes public parking garage without being seen by the guards. He has already made the attempt twice, unsuccessfully. But he thinks he'll have better luck tonight. They walk up the ramp to the first level, closed to traffic, where the cars with long-term parking contracts are, many of them parked overnight. Usually one or two guards are there, but tonight there's no one. The guards are probably all upstairs, talking to pass the time. In a little more than twenty minutes, Hermenegildo and Augusto stick the seventeen manifestoes on the windshields of the newest cars. Then they leave by the same route, turn onto Assembleia Street and go their separate ways at the corner of Quitanda. Augusto goes back to Avenida Rio Branco. At the avenue he turns to the right, again passes by the Municipal Theater where he stops for a time to look at the drawing of the eclectic penis. He goes to the Cinelândia area, to urinate in McDonald's. The McDonald's are clean places to urinate, even more so when compared to the bathrooms in luncheonettes, whose access is complicated; in luncheonettes or bars it's necessary to ask for the key to the bathroom, which comes attached to a huge piece of wood so it won't get lost, and the bathroom is always in some airless place, smelly and filthy, but in McDonald's they're always odorless, even if they have no windows, and they are well situated for someone walking downtown.

This one is on Senador Dantas almost across from the theater, has an exit onto Álvaro Alvim Street and the bathroom is close to that exit. There's another McDonald's on São José, near Quitanda Street, another on Avenida Rio Branco near Alfândega. Augusto opens the bathroom door with his elbow, a trick he invented; the doorknobs of bathrooms are full of germs of sexually transmitted diseases. In one of the closed stalls some guy has just defecated and is whistling with satisfaction. Augusto urinates in one of the stainless steel urinals, washes his hands using the soap he takes by pressing the metal tab on the transparent glass holder on the wall next to the mirror, a green, odorless liquid that makes no suds no matter how much he rubs his hands; then he dries his hand on a paper towel and leaves, again opening the door with his elbow, onto Álvaro Alvim.

Near the Odeon Cinema a woman smiles at him. Augusto approaches her. "Are you a female impersonator?" he asks. "Why don't you find out for yourself?" says the woman. Further on, he goes into the Casa Angrense, next to the Cinema Palácio, and orders mineral water. He opens the plastic cup slowly and, as he drinks in small sips, like a rat, he observes the women around him. A woman drinking coffee is the one he chooses, because she's missing a front tooth. Augusto goes up to her. "Do you know how to read?" The woman looks at him with the seduction and lack of respect that whores know how to show men. "Of course I do," she says. "I don't, and I wanted you to tell me what's written there," says Augusto. BUSINESS LUNCH. "No credit," she says. "Are you free?" She tells him the price and mentions a hotel on Marrecas Street, which used to be called Boas Noites Street, and where the Foundlings House of the Santa Casa stood more than a hundred years ago; and the street was also called Barão de Ladário and was called André Rebouças before it was Marrecas; and later its name was changed to Juan Pablo Duarte Street, but the name didn't catch on and it went back to being Marrecas Street. Augusto says he lives nearby and suggests they go to his place.

They walk together, awkwardly. He buys a newspaper at the newsstand across from Álvaro Alvim Street. They head toward the upstairs room above the hat shop by following Senador Dantas Street to Carioca Square, empty and sinister at that hour. The woman stops in front of the bronze lamppost with a clock at its top, decorated with four women, also bronze, with their breasts exposed. She says she wants to see if the clock is working, but as always the clock is stopped. Augusto tells the woman to

keep walking so they won't get mugged; on deserted streets it's necessary to walk very fast. No mugger runs after his victim; he has to come close, ask for a cigarette, ask the time. He has to announce the robbery so the robbery can take place. The short stretch of Uruguaiana Street to Sete de Setembro is silent and motionless. The homeless sleeping under marquees have to wake up early and are sleeping peacefully in the doors of shops, wrapped in blankets or newspapers, their heads covered.

Augusto enters the building, stamps his feet, walks with a different step; he always does that when he brings a woman, so the rats will know a stranger is arriving and hide. He doesn't want her to be frightened; women, for some reason, don't like rats. He knows that, and rats, for some even more mysterious reason, hate women.

Augusto takes the notebook where he writes *The Art of Walking in the Streets of Rio de Janeiro* from the table under the skylight, replacing it with the newspaper he bought. He always uses a just-published newspaper for the first lessons.

"Sit here," he tells the woman.

"Where's the bed?" she says.

"Go on, sit down," he says, sitting in the other chair. "I know how to read; forgive me for lying to you. Do you know what was written on that sign in the bar? Business lunch. They don't sell on credit, that's true, but that wasn't written on the wall. I want to teach you how to read. I'll pay the sum we agreed on."

"Can't you get it up?"

"That's of no concern. What you're going to do here is learn to read."

"It won't work. I've tried already and couldn't do it."

"But I have an infallible method. All you need is a newspaper."

"I can't even spell."

"You're not going to spell. That's the secret of my method. Spot doesn't run. My method is based on a simple premise: no spelling."

"What's that thing up there?"

"A skylight. Let me show you something."

Augusto turns out the light. Gradually a bluish light penetrates the skylight.

"What's that light?"

"The moon. There's a full moon tonight."

"Damn! I haven't seen the moon for years. Where's the bed?"

"We're going to work." Augusto turns on the lamp.

The girl's name is Kelly, and she will be the twenty-eighth whore whom Augusto has taught to read and write in two weeks by his infallible method.

In the morning, leaving Kelly to sleep in his bed—she asked to spend the night in his room and he slept on a mat on the floor—Augusto goes to Ramalho Ortigão Street, passes beside the Church of São Francisco, and enters Teatro Street, where there is now a new post for the illegal lottery,² a guy sitting in a school desk writing on a pad the bets of the poor who never lose hope, and there must be many, the poverty-stricken who don't lose faith, for there is an ever-growing number of such posts throughout the city. Augusto has a destination today, as he does every day when he leaves his place; though he appears to wander he never walks totally aimlessly. He stops on Teatro Street and looks at the two-story house where his grandmother lived, the upstairs of which is now occupied by a store selling incense, candles, necklaces, cigars and other macumba materials but which just the other day was a store that sold remnants of cheap fabric. Whenever he passes by there he remembers a relative—his grandmother, his grandfather, the husband of an aunt, a cousin. Today he dedicates to the memory of his grandfather, a gray man with a large nose from which he used to pick snot, and who used to make small mechanical toys, birds that sang on perches in cages, a small monkey that opened its mouth and roared like a lion. He tries to remember his grandfather's death and can't, which makes him very nervous. Not that he loved his grandfather; the old man always gave to understand that the toys he built were more important than his grandchildren, but he understood that, thought it reasonable that the old man would prefer the toys and admired his grandfather for tending to his mechanisms day and night. Maybe he didn't even sleep in order to dedicate himself to the task, which was why he was so gray. His grandfather was the person who came closest to the notion of a flesh-and-blood sorcerer and both frightened and attracted him; how could he have forgotten the circumstances of his death? Had he died suddenly? Had he been killed by his grandmother? Had he been buried? Cremated? Or had he simply disappeared?

Augusto looks at the top floor of the building where his grandfather lived, and a bunch of idiots gather around him and look upward too—

voodoo followers, buyers of fabric remnants, idlers, messenger boys, beggars, street peddlers, pedestrians in general, some asking "What happened?", "Did he already jump?"; lately lots of people in downtown have been jumping out of windows from high-rise offices and squashing themselves on the sidewalk.

Augusto, after thinking about his grandfather, continues in the direction of his objective for today, but not in a straight line; in a straight line he should go to Tiradentes Square and along Constitution, which leads almost to the large gate of the place he's going, or along Visconde do Rio Branco, which he usually chooses because of the Fire Department. But he is in no hurry to arrive where he wants to go, and from Teatro Street he goes to Luiz de Camões to make a quick stop at the Portuguese Royal Academy reading room; he insists that this library have his book once it is finished and published. He feels the cozy presence of that vast quantity of books. He leaves immediately for Avenida Passos, not to be confused with Senhor dos Passos Street, arrives at the Tesouro alleyway and heads toward Visconde do Rio Branco by way of Gonçalves Ledo, in the middle of Jewish and Arab merchants, bumping into their poorly dressed customers, and when he gets to Visconde do Rio Branco leaves behind the commerce of clothing for that of second-hand items, but what interests him on Visconde do Rio Branco is the barracks of the Fire Department; not that this was his destination, but he likes to see the Fire Department building. Augusto stops in front of it; the courtyard inside is full of large red vehicles. The sentry at the door watches him suspiciously. It would be nice if one of those enormous red trucks with its Magirus ladder came out with its siren on. But the large red vehicles don't come out, and Augusto walks a bit further to Vinte de Abril Street and arrives at the gate of the Campo de Santana, across from Caco Square and the Souza Aguiar Hospital.

The Campo de Santana has in its vicinity places that Augusto is in the habit of visiting: the mint where the government used to print money, the archives, the new library, the old college, the former army general headquarters, the railroad. But today he just wants to see the trees, and he enters through one of the gates, passing the one-armed man sitting beneath on a stool behind a tray, and selling cigarettes by the unit, the pack sliced in half by a razor, which the one-armed man keeps hidden in a sock held by a rubber band.

As soon as he enters, Augusto goes to the lake; the French sculptures are nearby. The Campo has a long history: Dom Pedro³ was acclaimed

emperor in the Campo de Santana, rebellious troops camped there while they awaited orders to attack, but Augusto thinks only of the trees, the same ones from that far-off time, and strolls among the baobabs, the fig trees, the jackfruit trees displaying their enormous fruit; as always, he feels the urge to kneel before the oldest trees, but getting down on his knees reminds him of the Catholic religion and he now hates all religions that make people get down on their knees, and he also hates Jesus Christ, from so often hearing priests, pastors, ecclesiastics, businessmen talk about him. The ecumenical movement in the church is the cartelization of the business of superstition, a political non-aggression pact among mafiosi: let's not fight among ourselves because the pie is big enough for everybody.

Augusto is sitting on a bench, beside a man who is wearing a Japanese digital watch on one wrist and a therapeutic metal bracelet on the other. At the man's feet lies a large dog, to which the man directs his words, with measured gestures, looking like a philosophy professor talking to his students in a classroom, or a tutor giving explanations to an inattentive disciple, for the dog appears not to pay great attention to what the man says and merely growls, looking around him with his tongue hanging out. If he were crazy the man wouldn't be wearing a wristwatch, but a guy who hears answers from a dog that growls with its tongue hanging out, and replies to them, has to be crazy, but a crazy man doesn't wear a watch; the first thing he, Augusto, would do if he went crazy would be to get rid of his Casio Melody, and he's sure that he's not crazy yet because, besides the watch he carries around on his wrist, he also has a fountain pen in his pocket, and crazy people hate fountain pens. That man sitting beside Augusto, thin, hair combed, clean-shaven, but with groups of pointed hairs showing under his ear and others coming out of his nose, wearing sandals, jeans too big for his legs, with the cuffs rolled up to different lengths, that crazy man is perhaps only half crazy because he appears to have discovered that a dog can be a good psychoanalyst, besides being cheaper and prettier. The dog is tall, with strong jaws, a muscular chest, a melancholic gaze. It is evident that, besides the dog—the conversations are, cumulatively, a sign of madness and of intelligence—sanity, or man's mental eclecticism, can also be proved by the watch.

"What time is it?" Augusto asks.

"Look at your watch," says the man with the dog, the two of them, man and dog, observing Augusto with curiosity.

"My watch isn't working very well," claims Augusto.

"Ten hours thirty-five minutes and two, three, four, five—"

"Thank you."

"—seconds," the man concludes, consulting the Seiko on his wrist. "I have to go," Augusto says.

"Don't go yet," says the dog. It wasn't the dog; the man is a ventriloquist, he wants to make me look like a fool, thinks Augusto; it's better for the man to be a ventriloquist, dogs don't talk, and if that one talks, or if he heard the dog talk, it could become a cause for concern, like seeing a flying saucer, for example, and Augusto doesn't want to waste time with matters of that sort.

Augusto pats the dog's head. "I have to go."

He doesn't have to go anywhere. His plan that day is to remain among the trees until closing time and when the guard starts blowing his whistle he'll hide in the grotto; it irritates him to be able to stay with the trees only from seven in the morning till six in the afternoon. What are the guards afraid will happen at night at the Campo de Santana? Some nocturnal banquet of agoutis, or the use of the grotto as a brothel, or cutting down the trees for lumber or some such thing? Maybe the guards were right and starving criminals go around eating agoutis and fucking among the bats and rats in the grotto, and cutting down trees to build shacks.

When he hears the beep of his Casio Melody alerting him, Augusto goes into the farthest point of the grotto, where he remains as motionless as a stone, or rather, a subterranean tree. The grotto is artificial; it was built by another Frenchman, but it has been there so long that it appears real. A loud whistle echoes through the stone walls, making the bats flap their wings and squeal; the guards are ordering people to leave, but no guard comes into the grotto. He remains immobile in the total darkness, and now that the bats have quieted down he hears the delicate little sound of the rats, already used to his harmless presence. His watch plays a rapid jingle, which means an hour has passed. Outside, it is surely nighttime and the guards must have gone, to watch television, eat; some of them may even have families.

He leaves the grotto along with the bats and rats. He turns off the sound on his Casio Melody. He has never spent an entire night inside the Campo de Santana; he has walked around the campo at night, looking at the trees longingly through the bars, now painted gray with gold at the top. In the darkness the trees are even more disturbing than in the light, and they allow Augusto, walking slowly under their nocturnal shadows,

to commune with them as if he were a bat. He embraces and kisses the trees, something he is embarrassed to do in the light of day in front of other people; some are so large that he can't get his fingers around them. Among the trees Augusto feels no irritation, nor hunger, nor headache. Unmoving, stuck in the earth, living in silence, indulging the wind and the birds, indifferent even to their enemies, there they are, the trees, around Augusto, and they fill his head with a perfumed, invisible gas that he senses and that transmits such lightness to his body that if he had the aspiration, and the arrogance of will, he could even try to fly.

When day breaks, Augusto presses one of the buttons on his watch, bringing back the drawing of a small bell on the dial. He hears a beep. Hidden behind a tree, he sees guards opening one of the gates. He looks lovingly at the trees one last time, running his hand along the trunks of some of them in farewell.

At the exit is the one-armed man selling one or two cigarettes to guys who don't have the money to buy an entire pack.

He walks down Presidente Vargas cursing the urban planners who took decades to understand that a street as wide as this needed shade and only in recent years planted trees, the same insensitivity that made them plant imperial palms along the Mangue canal when it was built, as if the palm were a tree worthy of the name, with a long trunk that neither gives shade nor houses birds and looks like a column of cement. He goes along Andradas as far as Teatro Street and stands once more in front of his grandfather's house. He hopes that someday he'll appear in the doorway, absent-mindedly picking his nose.

When he enters his walk-up on Sete de Setembro, he finds Kelly pacing back and forth under the skylight.

"I looked for coffee and couldn't find any. Don't you have coffee?"

"Why don't you leave and come back tonight, for the lesson?"

"There was a rat and I threw a book at it but didn't hit it."

"Why did you do that?"

"To kill the rat."

"We start out by killing a rat, then we kill a thief, then a Jew, then a neighborhood child with a large head, then a child in our family with a large head."

"A rat? What's the harm in killing a rat?"

“What about a child with a large head?”

“The world is full of disgusting people. And the more people, the more disgusting ones. Like it was a world of snakes. Are you gonna tell me that snakes aren’t disgusting?” Kelly says.

“Snakes aren’t disgusting. Why don’t you go home and come back tonight for the lesson?”

“Let me stay here till I learn how to read.”

“Just for two weeks.”

“All right. Will you help me bring my clothes from home?”

“You have all that many clothes?”

“Know what it is? I’m afraid of Rezende. He said he’d slash my face with a razor. I stopped working for him.”

“Who’s this Rezende?”

“He’s the guy who— He’s my protector. He’s gonna get me the money to put in a tooth and work in the South Zone.”

“I didn’t think there were any pimps these days.”

“A girl can’t live by herself.”

“Where’s your place?”

“Gomes Freire near the corner of Mem de Sá. Know where the supermarket is?”

“Show me.”

They walk along Evaristo da Veiga, go underneath the Arches, turn into Mem de Sá and immediately find themselves at the building where Kelly lives with Rezende.

Kelly tries to open the door to the apartment, but it’s locked from inside. She rings the bell.

A guy in a green mesh shirt opens the door saying “Where’ve you been, you whore?” but draws back when he sees Augusto, gestures with his hand and says politely, “Please come in.”

“Is this Rezende?” Augusto asks.

“I came to get my clothes,” says Kelly shyly.

“Go get your clothes while I chat with Rezende,” Augusto says. Kelly steps inside.

“Do I know you?” Rezende asks uncertainly.

“What do you think?” Augusto says.

“I’ve got a rotten memory,” Rezende says.

“That’s dangerous,” Augusto says.

Neither says anything further. Rezende takes a pack of Continentals from his pocket and offers Augusto a cigarette. Augusto says he doesn’t

smoke. Rezende lights the cigarette, sees Augusto’s mutilated ear and quickly averts his gaze to the interior of the apartment.

Kelly returns with her suitcase.

“Do you have a sharpened razor?” Augusto asks.

“What do I need a sharpened razor for?” Rezende says, laughing like an idiot, avoiding looking at the remains of Augusto’s ear.

Augusto and Kelly wait for the elevator to arrive, while Rezende smokes, leaning against the apartment door, looking at the floor.

They are in the street. Kelly, seeing the bookie sitting in his school desk, says she’s going to place a small bet. “Should I bet on the lamb or the stag?” she asks, laughing. “He didn’t do anything because you were with me. He pulled in his horns because he was afraid of you.”

“I thought you women were organized and there weren’t any more pimps,” Augusto says.

“My friend Cleuza invited me to join the Association, but— Five on the stag,” she tells the bookie.

“The Whores’ Association?”

“The Prostitutes’ Association. But then I found out there are three different prostitutes’ associations and I don’t know which one to join. My friend Slackmouth told me that organizing criminals is the most complicated thing there is; even crooks who live together in jail have that problem.”

They take the same route back, passing under the Arches again, over which a trolley is crossing at that moment.

“Poor man, I was the only thing he had in the world,” Kelly says. She’s already feeling sorry for the pimp. “He’ll have to go back to selling coke and marijuana in the red light district.”

On Carioca Street, Kelly repeats that in Augusto’s place there’s no coffee and that she wants coffee.

“We’ll stop for some coffee,” he says.

They stop at a juice bar. They don’t have coffee. Kelly wants a coffee with cream and bread and butter. “I know it’s hard to find a place that serves coffee with cream and bread and butter, especially toasted,” Kelly says.

“There used to be luncheonettes all over the city, where you’d sit down and order: ‘Waiter, please bring me right away a nice cup of coffee that hasn’t been redone, some bread straight from the oven and butter by the ton’—do you know the song by Noel?”

“Noel? Before my time. Sorry,” says Kelly.

"I just meant that there was an endless number of luncheonettes all over downtown. And you used to sit down, not eat standing up like us here, and there was a marble-top table where you could doodle while you waited for someone and when the person arrived you could look at her face while you talked."

"Aren't we talking? Aren't you looking at me? Doodle on this napkin."

"I'm looking at you. But I have to turn my head. We aren't sitting in chairs. This paper napkin blots when you write on it. You don't understand."

They have a hamburger with orange juice.

"I'm going to take you to Avenida Rio Branco."

"I'm already familiar with Avenida Rio Branco."

"I'm going to show you three buildings that haven't been demolished.

Did I show you the photo of how the avenue used to be?"

"I'm not interested in old stuff. Cut it out."

Kelly refuses to go see the old buildings, but since she likes children she agrees to visit little Marcela, eight months old, daughter of Marcelo and Ana Paula.

They're on Sete de Setembro and they walk to the corner of Carmo, where, on the sidewalk under the marquee, in cardboard shacks, the Gonçalves family lives. Ana Paula is white, as Marcelo is white, and they are just satellites of the family of blacks who control that corner. Ana Paula is nursing little Marcela. As it is Saturday, Ana Paula was able to set up the small cardboard shack in which she lives with her husband and their daughter under the marquee of the Banco Mercantil do Brasil. The board that serves as wall, some five feet in height, the highest side of the shack, was taken from an abandoned subway construction site. On weekdays the shack is dismantled, the large sheets of cardboard and the board from the subway excavation are leaned against the wall during work hours, and only at night is Marcelo's shack, and the Gonçalves family's cardboard shacks, reassembled so that Marcelo, Ana Paula, and little Marcela and the twelve members of the family can go inside them to sleep. But today is Saturday; on Saturdays and Sundays the Banco Mercantil do Brasil doesn't open, and Marcelo and Ana Paula's shack, a cardboard box used to house a large refrigerator, has not been disassembled and Ana Paula luxuriates in that comfort.

It is ten in the morning and the sun casts luminous rays between the black, opaque monolith of the Cândido Mendes skyscraper and the turret of the church with the image of Our Lady of Carmona, she standing up

as Our Ladies usually do, a circle of iron, or copper, over her head pretending to be a halo. Ana Paula is giving the naked girl a sunbath; she has already changed her diaper, washed the dirty one in a bucket of water she got from a chicken restaurant, hung it on a wire clothesline that she puts up only on weekends by attaching one end to an iron post with a metal sign that reads *TurisRio* — 9 parking places and another to an iron post with an advertising sign. Besides the diapers, Augusto sees bermudas, T-shirts, jeans, and pieces of clothing that he can't identify, out of consideration, so as not to appear curious.

Kelly remains on the corner, unwilling to approach the small shack where Ana Paula is taking care of Marcela. Ana Paula has gentle eyes, has a narrow, calm face, delicate gestures, slim arms, a very pretty mouth, despite the cavities in her front teeth.

"Kelly, come see what a pretty baby Marcelinha is," Augusto says.

At that instant, Benevides, the head of the clan, a black man who's always drunk, comes out from one of the cardboard boxes, followed by the two adolescents Zé Ricardo and Alexandre, the latter the most likable of them all, and also Dona Tina, the matriarch, accompanied by some eight children. There used to be twelve minors in the family, but four had left and no one knew of their whereabouts; they were known to be part of a juvenile gang that operated in the city's South Zone, acting in large bands to rob the elegant stores, well dressed people, tourists, and on Sundays the patsies tanning on the beach.

One of the children asks Augusto for money and gets a cuff from Benevides.

"We're not beggars, you brat."

"It wasn't charity," says Augusto.

"The other day some guy came by saying he was organizing beggars in a group called Beggars United. I told him to shove it. We're no beggars."

"Who is the guy? Where does he hang out?"

"On Jogo da Bola Street."

"How do you get to that street?"

"From here? You go in a straight line to Candelária church, once you're there you take Rio Branco, from there you go to Visconde de Inhaúma Street, picking it up on the left side, go to Santa Rita Square where it ends and Marechal Floriano starts, Larga Street, and you go down Larga until you come to Andradas, on the right-hand side, cross Leandro Martins, get onto Júlia Lopes de Almeida, go left to Conceição

Street, follow it till Senador Pompeu, take a right onto Coronel something-or-other, and stay to the right till you get to Jogo da Bola Street. Ask for him, his name's Chicken Zé. A black guy with green eyes, all the time surrounded by suck-ups. He's gonna end up on the city council."

"Thanks, Benevides. How's business?"

"We've hauled in twenty tons of paper this month," says Alexandre.

"Shut up," says Benevides.

A truck comes by periodically to pick up the paper that's been collected. Today it came early and took away everything.

Dona Tina says something that Augusto doesn't understand.

"Shit, ma, keep your mouth shut. Shit," shouts Benevides, furious.

His mother moves away and goes to put some pans over a dismountable stove of bricks, in the Banco Mercantil's doorway. Ricardo combs his thick hair using a comb with long steel teeth.

"Who's the babe?" Benevides points to Kelly, in the distance, at the street corner. Kelly looks like a princess of Monaco, in the midst of the Gonçalves family.

"A friend of mine."

"Why doesn't she come any closer?"

"She must be afraid of you, of your shouts."

"I have to shout. I'm the only one here with a head on his shoulders. . . ."

Sometimes I'm even suspicious of you. . . ."

"That's silly."

"At first I thought you were from the police. Then from the Leo XIII,⁴ then somebody from the bank, but the manager's a good guy and knows we're workers and wouldn't send some spy to rat on us. We've been here for two years and I plan to die here, which may not be that long. 'cause I've got this pain in the side of my belly. . . . You know this bank's never been robbed? Only one in the whole area."

"Your presence keeps robbers away."

"I'm suspicious of you."

"Don't waste your time on that."

"What do you want here? Last Saturday you didn't want to have some soup with us."

"I told you. I want to talk. And you only have to tell me what you want to. And I only like green-colored soups, and your soups are yellow."

"It's the squash," says Dona Tina, who is listening to the conversation.

"Shut up, ma. Look here, man, the city's not the same anymore. There's too many people, too many beggars in the city, picking up paper, fighting with us over territory, a whole lot of people living under

overhangs; we're all the time throwing out bums from outside, and there's even fake beggars fighting us for our paper. All the paper thrown away on this part of Cândido Mendes is mine, but there's guys trying to grab it."

Benevides says that the man on the truck pays more for white paper than for newsprint or scrap paper, dirty paper, colored paper, torn paper. The paper he collects on Cândido Mendes is white. "There's a lot of continuous computer forms, reports, things like that."

"What about glass? It can also be recycled. Have you thought about selling bottles?"

"Bottle men have to be Portuguese. We're black. And bottles are giving out, everything's plastic. The only bottle man who works these parts is Mané da Boia, and he came by the other day to have some soup with us. He eats yellow soup. He's in deep shit."

Kelly spreads her arms, shows an impatient expression, at the corner across the street. Benevides pulls Augusto to his naked torso, bringing his alcoholic mouth close to the other man's, and looks at him closely, curiously, shrewdly. "They're saying there's going to be a big convention of foreigners and that they're going to try to hide us from the gringos. I don't want to leave here," he murmurs menacingly. "I live beside a bank, there's safety, no crazy man's going to try to set us on fire like they did with Maílson, behind the museum. And I've been here for two years, which means nobody's going to try and mess with our home; it's part of the atmosphere, you understand?" Augusto, who was born and raised in the downtown area, although in a more lustrous era when the stores' facades sported their names in glowing twisted glass tubes filled with red, blue, and green gases, understands completely what Benevides is saying to him with his endless embrace; he too wouldn't leave downtown for anything, and he nods, involuntarily brushing his face against the face of the black man. When they finally separate, Augusto manages to slip the clever little black boy a bill, without Benevides seeing it. He goes to Ana Paula and says goodbye to her, to Marcelo and to little Marcela, who is now wearing a pair of overalls decorated with small flowers.

"Let's go," says Augusto, taking Kelly by the arm. Kelly pulls her arm away. "Don't touch me; those beggars probably have the mange. You'll have to take a bath before going to bed with me."

They walk to the used-book store behind the Carmo church, while Kelly spins her theory that beggars, in hot places like Rio, where they walk around half-naked, are even poorer; a shirtless beggar, wearing

old, dirty, torn pants that show a piece of his butt is more of a beggar than a beggar in a cold place dressed in rags. She saw beggars when she went to São Paulo one winter, and they were wearing wool overcoats and caps; they had a decent look to them.

"In cold places beggars freeze to death on the streets," Augusto says.

"Too bad that heat doesn't kill them too," Kelly says.

Whores don't like beggars, Augusto knows.

"The difference between a beggar and others," Kelly continues, "is that when he's naked a beggar doesn't stop looking like a beggar, and when others are naked they stop looking like what they are."

They arrive at the used-book shop. Kelly looks at it from the street, suspicious. The shelves inside are crammed with books. "Are there enough people in the world to read all these books?"

Augusto wants to buy a book for Kelly, but she refuses to go into the bookstore. They go to São José Street, from there to Graça Aranha Street, Avenida Beira Mar, Obelisco, the Public Promenade.

"I used to work the streets here and I've never been inside this place," Kelly says.

Augusto points out the trees to Kelly, says that they're over two hundred years old, speaks of Master Valentim,⁵ but she's not interested and only comes out of her boredom when Augusto, from the small bridge over the pond, at the opposite side from the entrance on Passeio Street, at the other end where the terrace with the statue of the boy, now made of bronze, is, when Augusto, from the small bridge, spits in the water for the small fishes to eat his spittle. Kelly finds it funny and spits too, but she quickly gets bored because the fish seem to prefer Augusto's spit.

"I'm hungry," Kelly says.

"I promised to have lunch with the Old Man," Augusto says.

"Then let's go get him."

They go up Senador Dantas, where Kelly also worked the streets, and come to Carioca Square. There the portable tables of the street vendors are in greater number. The main commercial streets are clogged with tables filled with merchandise, some of it contraband and some of it pseudocontraband, famous brands crudely counterfeited on small clandestine factories. Kelly stops before one of the tables, examines everything, asks the price of the transistor radios, the battery-driven toys, the pocket calculators, the cosmetics, a set of plastic dominoes that imitate ivory,

the colored pencils, the pens, the blank videotapes and cassettes, the coffee strainer, the penknives, the decks of cards, the watches and other trinkets.

"Let's go, the Old Man is waiting," Augusto says.

"Cheap crap," Kelly says.

At his walk-up, Augusto convinces the Old Man to comb his hair and to replace his slipper with a one-piece high-face boot with a raised heel, elastic on the sides and a strap at the back for pulling it on, an old model but still in good condition. The Old Man is going out with them because Augusto promised they'd have lunch at the Timpanas, on São José, and the Old Man once courted an unforgettable girl who lived in a building next to the restaurant, built in the early nineteen hundreds, and which still has, intact, wrought-iron balconies, tympanums, and cymas decorated with stucco.

The Old Man takes the lead with a firm step.

"I don't want to walk too fast. They say it causes varicose veins," protests Kelly, who in reality wants to walk slowly to examine the street vendors' tables.

When they arrive in front of the Timpanas, the Old Man contemplates the ancient buildings lined up to the corner of Rodrigo Silva Street. "It's all going to be torn down," he says. "You two go on in, I'll be along shortly; order rice and peas for me."

Kelly and Augusto sit at a table covered with a white tablecloth. They order a fish stew for two and rice with peas for the Old Man. The Timpanas is a restaurant that prepares dishes to the customer's specifications.

"Why don't you hug me the way you did that dirty black guy?" Kelly asks.

Augusto doesn't want to argue. He gets up to look for the Old Man. The Old Man is looking at the buildings, quite absorbed, leaning against an iron fence that surrounds the old *Buraco do Lume*, which after it was closed off became a patch of grass with a few trees, where a few beggars live.

"Your rice is ready," Augusto says.

"You see that balcony there, in that blue two-story building? The three windows on the second floor? It was in that window to our right that I saw her for the first time, leaning on the balcony, her elbows resting on a pillow with red embroidery."

"Your rice is on the table. It has to be eaten as soon as it comes from the stove."

Augusto takes the Old Man by the arm and they go into the restaurant. "She was very pretty. I never again saw such a pretty girl."
 "Eat your rice, it's getting cold," Augusto says.
 "She limped on one leg. That wasn't important to me. But it was important to her."

"It's always like that," Kelly says.

"You're right," the Old Man says.

"Eat your rice, it's getting cold."

"The women of the oldest profession possess a sinuous wisdom. You gave me momentary comfort by mentioning the inexorability of things," the Old Man says.

"Thanks," Kelly says.

"Eat your rice, it's getting cold."

"It's all going to be torn down," the Old Man says.

"Did it used to be better?" Augusto asks.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"In the old days there were fewer people and almost no automobiles."

"The horses, filling the streets with manure, must have been considered a curse equal to today's cars," Augusto says.

"And people in the old days were less stupid, the Old Man continues, "and not in such a hurry."

"People in those days were more innocent," Kelly says.

"And more hopeful. Hope is a kind of liberation," the Old Man says.

Meanwhile, Raimundo, the pastor, called by his bishop to the world headquarters of the Church of Jesus Savior of Souls, on Avenida Suburbana, listens contritely to the words of the supreme head of his Church.

"Each pastor is responsible for the temple in which he works. Your collection has been very small. Do you know how much Pastor Marcos, in Nova Iguaçu, collected last month? Over ten thousand dollars. Nova Iguaçu needs money. Jesus needs money; he always has. Did you know that Jesus had a treasurer, Judas Iscariot?"

Pastor Marcos, of Nova Iguaçu, was the inventor of the Offerings Envelope. The envelopes have the name of the Church of Jesus Savior of Souls printed on them, the phrase *I request prayers for these people*,

followed by five lines for the petitioner to write the people's names, a square with R\$ in large letters, and the category of the offering. The SPECIAL prayers, with larger quantities, are light green; the REGULAR are brown, and in them only two prayers can be requested. Other churches copied the Envelope, which greatly annoyed the bishop.

"The devil has been coming to my church," Raimundo says, "and since he started going to my church the faithful aren't making their offerings, or even paying the tithe."

"Lucifer?" The bishop looks at him, a look that Raimundo would like to be one of admiration; probably the bishop has never seen the devil personally. But the bishop is inscrutable. "What disguise is he using?"

"He wears dark glasses, he's missing one ear, and he sits in the pews at the back, and one day, the second time he appeared at the temple, there was a yellow aura around him." The bishop must know that the devil can take any appearance he wants, like a black dog or a man in dark glasses and with one ear.

"Did anyone else see this yellow light?"

"No, sir."

The bishop meditates for some time.

"And after he appeared the faithful stopped tithing? You're sure it was—"

"Yes, it was after he showed up. The faithful say they don't have any money, that they lost their job, or they're sick, or they were robbed."

"And you believe them. What about jewels? Doesn't any of them have jewels? A gold wedding ring?"

"They're telling the truth. Can we ask for jewels?"

"Why not? They're for Jesus."

The bishop's face is unreadable.

"The devil hasn't been there lately. I've been looking for him. I'm not afraid; he's walking around the city and I'm going to find him," Raimundo says.

"And when you find him, what do you plan to do?"

"If the bishop could enlighten me with his counsel. . ."

"You have to discover for yourself, in the sacred books, what you must do. Sylvester II made a pact with the devil, to achieve the Papacy and Wisdom. Whenever the devil appears, it's always to make a pact. Lucifer appeared to you, not to me. But remember, if the devil outsmarts you, it means you're not a good pastor."

"All good comes from God and all evil from the Devil," Raimundo says.

"Yes, yes," the bishop says with a bored sigh.
 "But good can overcome evil."
 "Yes," another sigh.

The lunch at the Timpanas continues. The Old Man speaks of the Ideal Cinema, on Carioca Street.

"The Ideal was on one side of the street, the Iris Cinema on the other. The Iris is still there. Now it shows pornographic films."

"Maybe it'll become a church," Augusto says.

"At the night showings the Iris's ceiling would open and let in the evening cool. You could see the stars in the sky," the Old Man says.

"Only crazy people go to the movies to see stars," Kelly says.

"How did the ceiling open?"

"A very advanced engineering system for the time. Pulleys, pulleys. . . Rui Barbosa always used to go there, and sometimes I sat near him."
 "You sat near him?"

The Old Man notes a certain incredulity in Augusto's voice. "What do you think? Rui Barbosa died just the other day, in 1923."

"My mother was born in 1950," Kelly says. "She's an old woman who's falling apart."

"For a long time, after Rui died, and until the theater became a shoe store, his seat was separated by a velvet rope and there was a plaque saying *This seat was occupied by Senator Rui Barbosa*. I voted for him for president, twice, but Brazilians always elect the wrong presidents."

"The theater became a shoe store?"

"If Rui were alive, he wouldn't let them do that. The two facades, one of stone and the other of marble, and the glass marquee, a glass just like that in my skylight, are still there, but inside there's nothing but piles of cheap shoes; it's enough to break your heart," says the Old Man.

"Shall we go there?" Augusto suggests to Kelly.

"I'm not going anywhere with you to see fountains, buildings falling to pieces and disgusting trees until you stop and listen to my life story. He doesn't want to listen to the story of my life. But he listens to the story of everybody else's life."

"Why don't you want to hear the story of her life?" the Old Man asks.

"Because I've already heard the life stories of twenty-seven whores and they're all the same."

"That's not the way to treat a girlfriend," the Old Man says.

"She's not my girlfriend. She's someone I'm teaching to read and speak."

"If she'd put in a front tooth she might even be pretty," says the Old Man.

"Why put in a tooth? I'm not going to be a whore anymore. I've given it up."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm still thinking about it."

On Monday, regretting having treated Kelly badly, even more so in light of the fact that she is learning to read with great rapidity, Augusto leaves his lodgings to go to Tiradentes Square to buy a semiprecious stone in the rough to give her as a gift. He has a friend, who goes by the false name Mojica, who buys and sells these stones and lives in the Hotel Rio, on Silva Jardim, and can give him a good price. Mojica, before establishing himself as a seller of stones, earned his living as a bagger of fat women, a specialty of lazy gigolos.

On Uruguaiana, hundreds of street vendors, prohibited by City Hall from setting up their stalls and assisted by unemployed youths and other passersby, plunder and sack the stores. Some security guards hired by the stores shoot into the air. The noise of broken store windows and of steel doors being battered in mixes with the screams of women running through the street. Augusto turns onto Ramalho Ortigão and takes Carioca in the direction of Tiradentes Square. The weather is overcast and it's threatening to rain. He is almost at Silva Jardim when Pastor Raimundo appears unexpectedly in front of him.

"You've disappeared," says Pastor Raimundo, his voice tremulous.

"I've been very busy. Writing a book," Augusto says.

"Writing a book. . . You're writing a book. . . Can I ask about the subject?"

"No. Sorry," says Augusto.

"I don't know your name. May I ask your name?"

"Augusto. Epifânio."

At that moment it starts to thunder and a heavy rain begins to fall.

"What do you want from me? A pact?"

"I went into your theater by chance, because of some selenium capsules."

"Selenium capsules," says the pastor, paling even more. Wasn't selenium one of the elements used by the devil? He can't remember.

"Goodbye," says Augusto. Standing in the rain doesn't bother him, but the ex-bagger of fat women is waiting for him.

The pastor holds Augusto by the arm, in a flight of courage. "Is it a pact? Is it a pact?" He staggers as if about to faint, opens his arms, and doesn't fall to the ground only because Augusto holds him up. Recovering his strength, the pastor frees himself from Augusto's arms, yelling "Let me go, let me go, this is too much."

Augusto disappears, entering the Hotel Rio. Raimundo shakes convulsively and falls in a faint. He lies for some time with his face in the gutter, wetted by the heavy rain, white foam coming out of the corner of his mouth, without attracting the attention of charitable souls, the police, or passersby in general. Finally, the water running in the gutter rises over his face and brings him back to consciousness; Raimundo gathers the strength to stand and walk unsteadily in search of the devil; he crosses the square, then Visconde do Rio Branco, proceeds staggering between the jobless musicians who meet at the corner of Avenida Passos under the marquee of the Café Capital, across from the João Caetano Theater; he passes the door of the church of Our Lady of Lampadosa, smells the odor of candles being burned inside there and crosses the street to the side where the theater is, running to avoid the automobiles; all over the city automobiles hit one another in the search for space to move in, and they run over slower or careless pedestrians. Dizzy, Raimundo leans against the base of a bronze statue of a short, fat man covered with pigeon crap, wearing a Greek skirt and Greek sandals and holding a sword, in front of the theater; beside it, a vendor selling undershorts and rulers pretends not to see his suffering. Raimundo turns left onto Alexandre Herculano, a small street with only one door, the back door of the Faculty of Philosophy that appears never to be used, and finally enters a luncheonette on Conceição where he has a glass of guava juice and mulls over his unspeakable encounter. He has discovered the name behind which Satan is hiding, Augusto Epifânio. Augusto: magnificent, majestic; Epifânio: originating in a divine manifestation. Ha! He could expect nothing less from Beelzebub than pride and mockery. And if the one who calls himself Augusto Epifânio is not the Evil One himself, he is at least a partner in his iniquity. He remembers Exodus 22:18: "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live."

The thunder and lightning begins again.

Mojica, the ex-bagger of fat women, tells Augusto that business isn't very good; the crisis has hit him too, and he's even thinking of going back to his old business; for reasons he can't explain, there's been an increase in the city in the number of middle-aged women with money wanting to marry a thin, muscular man with a big prick like him. Fat women are gullible, have good temperament, are almost always cast aside, and they're easy to deceive. "One a year is enough for yours truly to lead a comfortable life; and it's a big city."

From Tiradentes Square, ignoring part of Benevides's instructions, Augusto goes to Jogo da Bola Street, taking Avenida Passos to Presidente Vargas. Crossing Presidente Vargas, even at the traffic light, is always dangerous; people are constantly getting killed crossing that street, and Augusto waits for the right moment and crosses it by running between the automobiles speeding past in both directions and makes it to the other side panting but with the euphoric sensation of one who has achieved a feat; he rests for a few minutes before proceeding to his right to Andradas and from there to Julia Lopes de Almeida Street, from which he sees Conceição Hill and quickly comes to Tenente Coronel Julião, then walks a few yards and finally finds Jogo da Bola.

"Where can I find Chicken Zé?" he asks a man in bermudas, flip-flops and a mesh shirt with a three-strand gold chain wrapped around his neck, but the man looks at Augusto with an ugly expression, doesn't answer, and walks away. Further ahead, Augusto sees a boy. "Where can I find the boss of the beggars?" he asks, and the boy replies, "You got any change for me?" Augusto gives the boy some money. "I don't know who you mean. Go to the corner of Major Valô Square, there's people there who can tell you."

At the corner of Major Vaiô Square are a few men, and Augusto heads toward them. As he approaches, he notices that the man in bermudas with the three-strand gold chain is in the group. "Hello," Augusto says, and no one answers. A large black man without a shirt asks, "Who was it said my name is Chicken Zé?"

Augusto senses that he is unwelcome. One of the men has a club in his hand.

"It was Benevides, who lives on Carmo, corner of Sete de Setembro."

"That lush is a sell-out, happy to be living in a cardboard box, grateful to be picking up paper in the street and sell it to the sharks. People like that don't support our movement."

"Somebody needs to teach the fucker a lesson," says the man with the club, and Augusto is uncertain whether he or Benevides is the fucker.

"He said you're president of the Beggars Union."

"And who're you?"

"I'm writing a book called *The Art of Walking in the Streets of Rio de Janeiro*."

"Show me the book," says the guy with the gold chain.

"It's not with me; it's not ready."

"What's your name?"

"Aug— Epifânio."

"What the shit kind of name is that?"

"Search him," says Chicken Zé.

Augusto allows himself to be searched by the man with the club. The latter gives Chicken Zé Augusto's pen, his ID card, his money, the small pad of paper and the semiprecious stone in a small cloth sack that Augusto received from the bagger of fat women.

"This guy's nuts," says an old black man observing the goings on.

Chicken Zé takes Augusto by the arm. He says: "I'm going to have a talk with him."

The two walk to the Escada da Conceição alleyway.

"Look here, Mr. Fancy, first of all my name isn't Chicken Zé, it's Zumbi from Jogo da Bola, you understand? And second, I'm not president of any fucking Beggars' Union; that's crap put out by the opposition. Our name is the Union of the Homeless and Shirtless, the UHS. We don't ask for handouts, we don't want handouts, we demand what they took from us. We don't hide under bridges or inside cardboard boxes like that fucker Benevides, and we don't sell gum and lemons at intersections."

"Correct," says Augusto.

"We want to be seen, we want them to look at our ugliness, our dirtiness, want them to smell our bodies everywhere; want them to watch us making our food, sleeping, fucking, shitting in the pretty places where the well-off stroll and live. I gave orders for the men not to shave, for the men and women and children not to bathe in the fountains; the fountains are for pissing and shitting in. We have to stink and turn people's stomachs like a pile of garbage in the middle of the street. And nobody asks for money. It's better to rob than to panhandle."

"Aren't you afraid of the police?"

"The police don't have anyplace to put us; the jails are full and there are lots of us. They arrest us and have to let us go. And we stink too bad for them to want to beat up on us. They take us off the streets and we come back. And if they kill one of us, and I think that's going to happen any time now, and it's even a good thing if it does happen, we'll get the body and parade the carcass through the streets like Lampião's head."

"Do you know how to read?"

"If I didn't know how to read I'd be living happily in a cardboard box picking up other people's leavings."

"Where do you get the resources for that association of yours?"

"The talk's over, Epifânio. Remember my name, Zumbi from Jogo da Bola, sooner or later you're going to hear about me, and it won't be from that shitass Benevides. Get your things and get out of here."

Augusto returns to his walkup on Sete de Setembro by going down Escada da Conceição to Major Valô Square. He takes João Homem to Liceu, where there's a place called the Tourist House, from there to Acre Street, then to Uruguaiana. Uruguaiana is occupied by police shock troops carrying shields, helmets with visors, batons, machine guns, tear gas. The stores are closed.

Kelly is reading the part of the newspaper marked by Augusto as homework.

"This is for you," Augusto says.

"No, thank you. You think I'm some kind of performing dog? I'm learning to read because I want to. I don't need little presents."

"Take it, it's an amethyst."

Kelly takes the stone and throws it over her head with all her strength. The stone hits against the skylight and falls to the floor. Kelly kicks the chair, wads the newspaper into a ball, which she throws at Augusto. Other whores had done things even worse; they have attacks of nerves when they spend a lot of time alone with a guy and he doesn't want to go to bed with them. One of them tried to take Augusto by force and bit off his entire ear, which she spat into the toilet and flushed it.

"Are you crazy? You could break the skylight. It's over a hundred years old. It'd kill the Old Man."

"You think I've got the clap, or AIDS, is that it?"

"No."

"You want to go to the doctor with me for him to examine me? You'll see I don't have any kind of disease."

Kelly is almost crying, and her grimace reveals her missing tooth, which gives her an unprotected, suffering air, which reminds him of the teeth he, Augusto, doesn't have and awakens in him a fraternal and uncomfortable pity, for her and for himself.

"You don't want to go to bed with me, you don't want to hear the story of my life, I do everything for you, I've learned to read, I treat your rats well, I even hugged a tree in the Public Promenade and you don't even have one ear and I never mentioned that you don't have one ear so as not to annoy you."

"I was the one who hugged the tree."

"Don't you feel like doing it?" she yells.

"I don't have desire, or hope, or faith, or fear. That's why no one can harm me. To the contrary of what the Old Man said, the lack of hope has liberated me."

"I hate you!"

"Don't yell, you're going to wake the Old Man."

The Old Man lives in the rear of the store, downstairs.

"How am I going to wake him up if he doesn't sleep?"

"I don't like to see you yelling."

"I'm yelling! I'm yelling!"

Augusto embraces Kelly and she sobs, her face against his chest. Kelly's tears wet Augusto's shirt.

"Why don't you take me to the Santo Antônio Convent? Please, take me to the Santo Antônio Convent."

Saint Anthony is considered a saint for those seeking marriage. On Tuesdays the convent is filled with single women of all ages making vows to the saint. It's a very good day for panhandlers, as the women, after praying to the saint, always give alms to the poor beggars, and the saint may notice that act of charity and decide in favor of their petition.

Augusto doesn't know what to do with Kelly. He says he's going to the store to talk with the Old Man.

The Old Man is sitting on the bed. He motions for Augusto to sit beside him.

"Why do people want to go on living?"

"You want to know why I want to go on living, as old as I am?"

"No, all people."

"Why do you want to go on living?" the Old Man asks.

"I like trees. I want to finish writing my book. But sometimes I think about killing myself. Tonight Kelly hugged me, crying, and I felt the urge to die."

"You want to die so as to put an end to other people's suffering? Not even Christ managed that."

"Don't talk to me of Christ," Augusto says.

"I stay alive because I don't have a lot of pains in my body and I enjoy eating. And I have good memories. I'd also stay alive if I didn't have any memories at all," says the Old Man.

"What about hope?"

"In reality hope only liberates the young."

"But at the Timpanas you said—"

"That hope is a kind of liberation. . . . But you have to be young to take advantage of it."

Augusto climbs the stairs back to his walkup.

"I gave the rats some cheese," Kelly says.

"Do you have some good memory of your life?" Augusto asks.

"No, my memories are all horrible."

"I'm going out," Augusto says.

"Will you be back?" Kelly asks.

Augusto says he's going to walk in the streets. *Solvitur ambulando*.

On Rosário Street, empty, since it's nighttime, near the flower market, he sees a guy destroying a public telephone; it's not the first time he's run into that individual. Augusto doesn't like to interfere in other people's lives, which is the only way to walk in the streets in the late hours, but Augusto doesn't like the destroyer of public phones. Not because he cares about the phones—since he left the water and sewerage department he has never once spoken on a telephone—but because he doesn't like the guy's face; he shouts "Cut that shit out," and the vandal runs off in the direction of Monte Castelo Square.

Now Augusto is on Ouvidor, heading toward Mercado Street, where there's no more market at all; there used to be one, a monumental iron structure painted green, but it was torn down and they left only a tower. Ouvidor, which by day is so crammed with people that one can't walk without bumping into others, is deserted. Augusto walks along the odd-numbered side of the street and two guys come toward him from the opposite direction, on the same side of the street, some two hundreds yards away. Augusto quickens his pace. At night it's not enough to walk

fast in the street, it's also necessary to avoid having the path blocked, and so he crosses over to the even-numbered side. The two guys cross to the even-numbered side and Augusto returns to the odd-numbered side. Some of the stores have security guards, but the guards aren't stupid enough to get involved in someone else's mugging. Now the guys separate and one comes down the even-numbered side and the other down the odd-numbered side. Augusto continues walking, faster, toward the guy on the even side, who hasn't increased the speed of his steps and seems even to have slowed his pace a little, a thin guy, unshaven, T-shirt with a designer logo and dirty sneakers, who exchanges a look with his partner on the other side, somewhat surprised at the speed of Augusto's march. When Augusto is about five yards from the man on the even-numbered side, the guy on the odd-numbered side crosses the street and joins his accomplice. They both stop. Augusto comes closer and, when he is slightly more than a yard from the man, crosses to the even-numbered side and continues ahead at the same speed. "Hey!" one of the guys says. But Augusto continues his march without turning his head, his good ear attuned to the sound of footsteps behind him; by the sound he can tell if his pursuers are walking or running after him. When he gets to the Pharoux pier, he looks back and sees no one.

His Casio Melody plays Haydn's three a.m. music; it's time to write his book, but he doesn't want to go home and face Kelly. *Solvitur ambulando*. He goes to the Mineiros pier, walks to the boat moorings at Quinze Square, listening to the sea beat against the stone wall.

He waits for day to break, standing at dockside. The ocean waters reek. The tide rises and falls as it meets the sea wall, causing a sound that seems like a sigh, or a moan. It's Sunday; the day comes forth gray. On Sunday the majority of restaurants downtown don't open, like all Sundays, today will be a bad day for the poor who live on the remains of discarded food.

Translated by Clifford E. Landers

Notes

1. The name Saúde Hill means Hill of Good Health.
2. The *Jogo do Bicho* or Zoo Lottery (see note 1 in "Great Neighbors," this volume).
3. Dom Pedro I (1798-1834), Portuguese prince who proclaimed the political independence of Brazil from Portugal in 1822, and thus became the first Brazilian emperor.
4. Leo XIII (*Leão XIII*) is a social service institution that assists the homeless in Rio de Janeiro.
5. Valentim da Fonseca e Silva (c. 1750-1813), or Master Valentim, a sculptor, engraver and craftsman famous for his sacred pieces and ornate furniture, was responsible for many of the statues, fountains, lampposts and ornaments that were added to the streets and public places of Rio de Janeiro at the end of the eighteenth century. Some of his sacred statues can be found at the National Historical Museum in Rio de Janeiro.