

The Blade Dance

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Since the morning the horses were bothered by the voices at the square. The breath coming out of their nostrils was sharp, their lips were smacking and they jolted until they felt comfortable. The throatlatches forced them to stay on the same spot sometimes lifting their front and some others their back legs. The coachman, who understood their situation, took them by the reins, brought them close to him, spoke to them, stroke one of them, kissed the other. But he did not discriminate one from another. He turned back to help workers finish their job more quickly. They unloaded the barrels with the salted fish, but there were still some merchandise left loaded.

The bees soon smelled the fish and wine and flew in circles like crazy trying to find a crack. The horses *cottoned on to the situation* and were close to break loose of their reins.

Across the warehouse, in the little bistro, the sun was stroking the spring hats from early on, seeking for the green winter faces. The waiter slung from the iron bar with a single leap in order to quickly release the tent and let its shade on the tables. People felt dizzy by the coffee smell, while groups of friends sunk into conversations enjoying the stroll at the square. Young girls were hidden under their umbrellas, in colorful dresses, bodies tightened in corsets, bosoms lifted and flaunted ready to attract men stares. Laughters, small talks, gestures and bows, compliments' exchange; people came and left with slow, rigid steps and rand once more strolled from the one square's side to the other.

Children stormed in the square from the cobbled road leading to the port. A group of gamins, dark-skinned ragged boys – the older almost fourteen and the younger seven – with a dancing chase, swarmed swiftly between people, pushed them, stretched their hands, touched the dresses and soiled them, pushed each other and then after laughing loudly and mockingly, stopped running and regrouped. The older ones showed the new 'task'.

When they pass in front of the bistro, some of the habitués flinch and shoo them, while the older ones respond by making faces and mocking the people. The youngest child stands at the entrance and lights a cigarette. He takes a whiff and

exhales with a blasé look. The waiter shakes his towel towards him as if he drives flies away. The boy throws his cigarette butt at him and runs away. A habitué trips the child. The boy falls, crawls along the road, his face is full of blood and mud. The older ones attack the habitué and a fight begins, while the offender seized with fright calls desperately for help. From the other tables men with Sunday suits start beating the children, chairs are launched in the middle of the road and the horses across the street get nervous. The dizzy boy shakes his face in order to get rid of the blood from his eyes; he cannot easily stand and moans as the sun burns him.

Behind him an enormously built officer, with an impeccable uniform, observe the fight swinging his bat. Then the officer grabs the child from the ear, lifts it to the air and leaves it floundering like a rabbit. He tears up the ear and the blood is ushered like a fountain. The boy's strangled shriek shrouds the havoc. The crowd stands still while watching the boy's body hit once more the ground and lay numb. The officer stares at the scarlet vestige in his hand, laughs, exhibits it triumphantly to the people, pretends talking to the ear, makes fun of the little body laying at his feet and before having much time to complete his show, sees a blade slashing the air in front of his eyes commencing an oriental dance. The glow of the blade floods the fourteen year-old child's eyes who craves for revenge. The officer's bat mimics the same motions. The crowd speechless, unable to even listen to its own breath, huddles up in the bistro. The couple in the middle of the street drags its feet like a crab, slowly in circle, with arms hugging wide open and solid bodies.

In the middle the child's body laid still like a trophy.

The coachman leaves the horses alone, crosses the street and gets between the couple. He leans over to lift the child. He feels the blade on his ribs. That bloody blade's cuts are so sweet. The horses hit one another, brake off the reins and leave for the port, while the barrels are thrown to the ground. The air is filled with smell of raw fish and fresh wine. The officer, stunned, thinks that he still sees the blade dance. He can no longer perceive real time.

The coachman examines his body, the cuts are deep; he tries to focus his look, now there are other things to care for. He lifts the child from the ground, hugs it with one arm and the child lets itself rest over his shoulder with arms wide open, like a little Christ on the cross. He looks for the ear. The waiter picks it up and folds it in a napkin; he puts it in the child's pocket. The coachman pushes him, now he needs no help, himself suffices.

He stands straight towards the sun and takes the road to the port. The gamins are running behind him, like seagulls which follow a ship, a couple of them change course and leave scared. One of them jumps the church's stone fence and hides in the wild flowers. The coachman leans at the wall, cries at the child, asks for help, whether

he knows a doctor where they can take the child. The gamin listens to the pleading, takes courage, jumps again over the stone fence and asks the coachman to follow him. The coachman's blood paints in scarlet two ascents; the other children hidden in the corners watch the struggle for climbing up.

When they arrive at the doctor's house, the nurse jumps out. She takes the child at her arms while the coachman gives her the child's ear and beckons her to hurry up. He leans his head on the stairway, one can see the port from this high up. The Venetian three-masted ship arrived yesterday, loaded with salted fish and wine, his eyelids now are lowering, his breath escapes at the stairway and blurred it until the sun dried it.