



MARIA CRISTINA DAMIANOVIC

Carolina primavera



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Fone: (0xx81) 2126.8397 | Fax: (0xx81) 2126.8395

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To my beloved husband, Paulo.
To my Godfather my Godmother.
To my uncles and aunts.
To my beloved nieces and nephews.
It is very important to have you in my heart.



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The secret path



- Luiz Augusto?

- Yes, Madrinha.

- Aren't you coming?

- I am.

- And why aren't you here yet?

- I *am* here. *You* are the one who hasn't seen me yet. I can see you in your room. Nice flowery blouse. Your hair looks wild as usual. I love when you hide your pencil in your curls.

- Luiz Augusto, you're doing it again!

And Madrinha goes out looking for me in the forest in her back yard. I am twelve. She gave me a cell phone for my birthday. My parents thought this was an absurd, but I loved the idea.

- Luiz Augusto, how did you come in today? – She found me in a hollow tree trunk which Madrinha refused to cut down. Instead, she made a steel structure to support the branches – a whole new structure to keep the tree alive. And alive it is. Packed with bird nests on its branches. And we simply adore the hollow trunk.

- I'm not telling you.

- Come on, tell me.

- No.

- I'll just have to read your mind then – she said, placing a massage device on my head, which, according to her, was a mind reading machine.

After making some rather rhapsodic sounds, she tells me:

- You took the secret path on the wall, didn't you?

- Yes.

- Did your dad see you?

- Of course not.

- Good! And you climbed up the secret steps?

- Yes. And you know, Madrinha, I think you should put some more dry leaves there, or other people may notice the steps. Oh! Yes, and the ladder you placed there for us to climb down, it is kind of broken. I need to fix a step there before someone falls flat on the ground.

- Could you do that?

- Right away.

And there I go to Madrinha's wood workshop. It used to belong to her grand-father, my great-grand-father.

"Luiz Augusto seems to take after his Pop. He has got a hand for wood. And in no time, he fixes the ladder. His hands are large and firm. He handles carpentry tools like nobody else, or perhaps, just like his great-grand-father. He is very fond of the saw and the hammer..." Madrinha thinks to herself, monitoring what I do from her room by checking out one the many security cameras that she has in the yard. She likes to pretend we are by ourselves. But I always know she is close by.

Madrinha allows us, her many nieces and nephews to do certain things when she is sure that they can do them without putting our safety at risk. And we gain confidence in what we do because she trusts us.

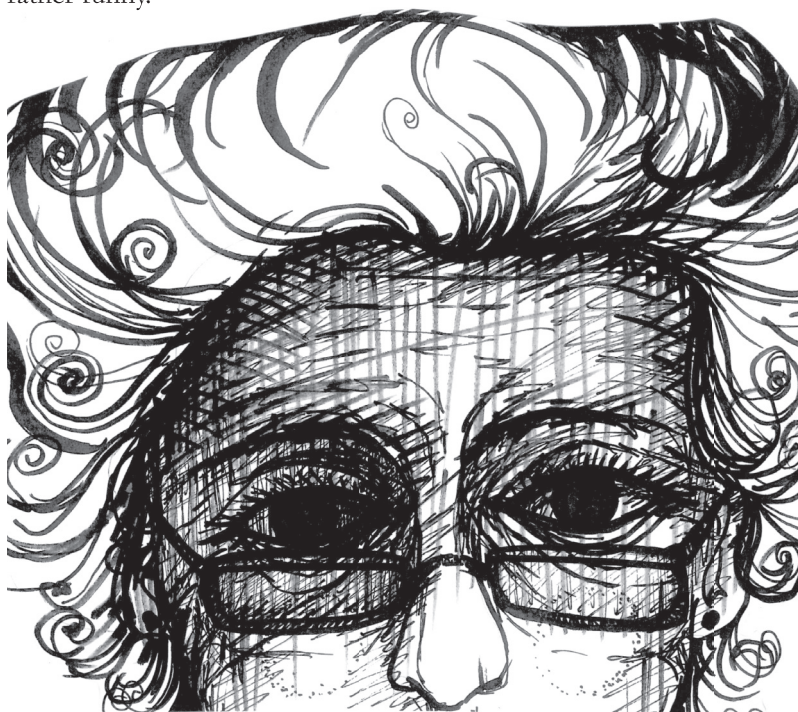
This godmother cannot be looked at from common definitions and standards. To begin with her house. Enormous! Ten thousand square meters that take up an entire block on a busy avenue in a metropolitan huge capital in Brazil!

She inherited it from her grandfather, my great-grandfather, Rodolfo. She was the only grandchild – out of six – who wanted that

old house surrounded by bushes. This is how the others see what my godmother feels to be a palace surrounded by a forest. She has sixteen fruit trees, some of which are almost one hundred years old.

To my Godmother, every niece and nephew is her godchild. So, altogether, we are nine godchildren. Actually, I am the only godchild: Luiz Augusto! My father insisted that she should be my godmother. Lucky me!

My cousins all call her Madrinha¹. She says that she Christened all of us. And it is true. Some say that after the real godparents had finished the Christening ritual, she repeated it. Father Antônio, who has known the family for a long time, always says jokingly: the godparents X and Z and the heart godmother, Carolina Primavera. Even her name is rather funny.



1 Madrinha means godmother. Because it is how her nieces and nephews call her, this term is going to be kept as in Portuguese.

Back to the house, there is a small carp lake whose water comes from an artificial waterfall that Madrinha had built. The water comes from a water mine in the plot of land. There is a well too. Everything is wonderful and everything in the forest is alive because of the blessed water.

There are many large rocks around the land. They are all magic. There is even a park with a see-saw, a merry-go-round, climbing and sliding toys and many swings spread through the many tree branches. Some swings are mystical. One of them goes higher than the structure of the swing. And there is one that goes around three hundred and sixty degrees without dropping us! The most extraordinary thing is that this only happens when Madrinha pushes us on the swing and says:

- Very low, almost grazing our feet on the ground... very slowly... - things that only our Madrinha does!!!

Madrinha is smart and knows us better than anyone. She also reads our minds. She always knows what I am thinking.

My cousins and I love her. We adore the doorbell-less front door. There is however a real bell and funny enough no-one rings the bell unnecessarily. She is respected in her neighborhood. Or, perhaps, people are a little afraid of her. She says that the house is haunted so nobody wants to walk on her sidewalk.

The only people that walk in front of her house are construction engineers, who often knock on her door. She replies:

- Wait till I die and you can buy the land, ok?

- Carolina, the house will be protected by national heritage and we will build a library for children and youngsters. I promise not to cut down any of your primroses from the porch. And part of your forest will become a public garden. Don't wait till you're dead to see all this.

- And the rest of the land?

- A multiple-storey building. But bear in mind that you will get three full stores in each of the five buildings that we will build.

- Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! No way. When I die, we will talk about it.- that is what she says.

- All done, Madrinha!

- Leave the ladder there because a cousin of yours may remember the secret path and try to come in through it.

- I'll take it there.

- And while you are at it, please put some dry leaves as well. There are many piled up under the Yellow Ipê.

After carrying out my chores, I enter Madrinha's kitchen, and she was just getting a tray of kibbeh from the oven.

- Hum, Yummy! Did you use the mint that Nicole planted?

- Of course! It has such a perfume!

- Madrinha, what are these bullets on the bookshelf for?

- They're old. Very, very old. It's just because today is Friday thirteenth.

- I don't understand.

- Well, I'll tell you a story so that you'll understand the reason for the bullets. This story is called: Blond or red-headed?

- Is it one of your stories with Uncle Justino?

- Yes, it is. This one took place in a short vacation we took to Serra da Canastra.

- Where is that?

- Get the Brazilian Road Guide and see if you can find it.

- And did it really happen what you are going to tell me?

- Oh, Yes. It really did. And, of course, I always add some literary magic. You know me.

- So tell me.



Blond or Red-headed?



The road ends right ahead, where the dam begins. This is a huge dam that provides water for a number of small cities around this hilly region – whose format is of an enormous trunk.

While waiting for the little ferry that would take them to the other side, where the village in which they will spend their holidays lies, Fiorella and Elisson admire the full moon. In the darkness, the moon, in full size, seemed to fill the entire sky. It was so big that the naked eye could see the craters and the silver tones of the surface of the moon – always enigmatic. When a dark cloud covers the moon, a deep voice screams out:

- All aboard! Let's go!

They boarded; the only car going to the other side at that time was theirs.

- Wow! Are we the only ones travelling? – Fiorella asks with a little weary of the solitude at that place. “The guide said that it was an isolated place, but I didn't think it was all that,” revealed the wife feeling a little anxious about the 7 km that they would have to cover to get to the village where they would be staying.

- Here is your receipt – says the ticket collector, who is also taking the ferry, handing them the piece of paper.

To break the silence and the ice, the wife asks the boat captain:

- Why are there so few people? I thought that the last ferry would have many more people on board.

- Oh! Yes, but today is Friday.

- So I assumed there should be even more people going to the other side to make the most of the weekend.

- That is usually true, but it's not just any ordinary Friday... And I myself am only here because I have to. But look at the amount of crosses that I am carrying to protect myself.

- And why do you need all that? – incredulous, and having no idea of what to expect, she heard:

- Today is Friday, the thirteenth, and there's a full moon, have you paid any attention to that?

- Good Lord, I didn't even remember this. I only left home thinking of having a good time.

- Oh, you city folks never remember these things, do you?

- This didn't even cross my mind. What now?

- Now? Now, nothing. Hurry up and you will soon be at the B & B. We will be arriving at the docks soon. That's it. We are here. See you on Sunday.

-Will we? – The shivering woman asks with doubtful eyes.

- If *he* wants, Yes – in an ironic frightened tone, the grim man said goodbye from his ferry.

Elisson looks at the plate which stated that they had seven kilometers ahead of them. Without saying a word, Fiorella discreetly took a little rosary from her bag – it had been there forever. She also leaves pepper spray handy – she always keeps one to protect herself from muggers in the city.

- What is all this? How stressful can this be, Fiorella? Who are you arming yourself against? – the dejected husband asked.

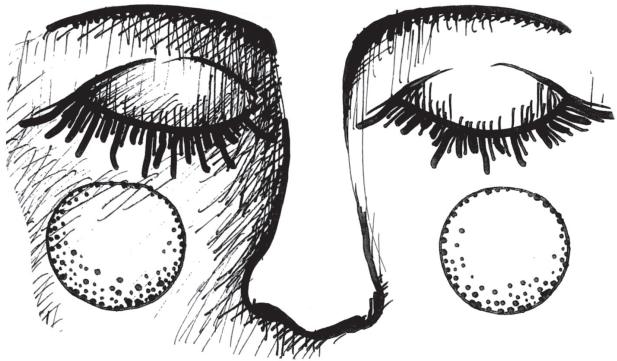
- Elisson, the man on the ferry said that tonight is werewolf night.

- What? Here you come with all vein for folklore literature.

- It's not superstition at all. Today is a Friday, and it is the thirteenth; tonight we have a full moon, you see?

- Oh! Just look at this view and your fear will vanish. Look at this corn field. Wonderful! Look how this corn comes and goes with the breeze! And that silo in the middle of the plantation field. Do you see it? – trying to distract his lover, the driver speeds up a little in order to arrive earlier.

- Did you hear that, Elisson?- his wife asks, already goose-bumpy in fear.



- I heard it. Where could it have come from? It is probably an animal wallowing around.

- Careful! Look at the crossroads. The plate says left-turn only!

- It is so hot! The windows are down and it's so hot!

Suddenly, Fiorella notices a difference in her husband's facial expression. He had his eyes fixed on the rear outside left mirror.

- What is it, Elisson?

- There is something coming after the car – he says, already feeling a nauseous breath entering through the window.

Fiorella feels she is in terror and gets the urge to go to the toilet – classic sign of when she is in visceral panic. Also frightened, Elisson accelerates a bit further. They are now at 70 km per hour.

When Fiorella looks back, she sees two shooting fiery eyes chasing the car. The couple can hear the thing's breath coming out of its nostrils.

Without any apparent reason, Elisson cannot see anything but a hairy and dribbling mouth, from which two sharp canines are projected

outwards. The dribble covers the rear mirror outside. It is now all blurred, and the man couldn't see clearly anymore.

In that frightening situation, a fearless Elisson puts his arm outside shaking a cleaning cloth in an attempt to scare away the abominable and fetid creature.

- Put your arm inside! How foolish can you be? Do you want to be bitten by this spook? – reasons Fiorella, feeling her wits leave her. And throw this cloth out, please. This is absurd!

Seeing the thick eyebrows entering the car, Fiorella tries to close the window. – He will eat you! Watch out!! – she alerts her husband, pressing the key to raise the window. When it is almost sealed, the nail from the beast's middle finger tries to stop the window from closing.

Fiorella gives the pepper spray to Elisson; and he sticks his finger on it, spraying a good amount. There is pepper all over the mythical being.

- I managed to push his head outside. What mane! Look, there is a little bit on my hand! – He throws it on the floor. Far away, the clock strikes twenty-four. It was midnight.

With the windows closed, the husband finally seems to have the car under control again. Running at one hundred per hour, they leave that sudden spook behind, and it disappears in thin air under the lunar light.

Silencing their deep relief after being chased by something of primitive nature, the couple arrives at the B&B. As they approach, the gate opens automatically.

- Won't there be anyone to greet us, Elisson?

- Good evening! – says a beautiful young woman whose blonde hair under the moon light seemed like golden coins in a trunk.

- Are you alright? You look a little pale. You seem scared – she inquires apprehensive.

- Would you like to have something to drink? Come around to the kitchen.

When they entered the room, they noticed a shelf covered in bullets used in rifles, carbines and other fire arms. These bullets were covered in something white.

- What are these bullets for? – Fiorella asks in fear.

- Some say that they are for us to protect ourselves from the werewolf; they say we need to be ready to strike them. And these bullets are covered with wax from the candles of three Sunday masses. That gun over there is carefully loaded with nine bullets covered in a lot of wax. I also have outside, in the garden the herb the poisons wolves. It is a deadly poison that frightens away any type of werewolf.

- What happened to your hand, Dear? – the B&B owner asked, already using a napkin to dry a trickle of blood running from Elisson's left hand.

- I don't know how to explain what happened. I was bitten by a yellow creature, with bristling fur, which ran after our car for many seconds, at 70 km/h. It had fire coming out of its nostrils. Some of its fur is on the floor of the car.

In a minute of surprise, the B&B owner gets the wad of fur and analyzes it.

- You are lucky that it was the yellow-furred werewolf. This is a good one and only chases us to make us run away from something worse that is going to happen. Now, if you had been caught by the red-furred werewolf, then you would have arrived armless. The red-furred werewolf has malefic and scavenger potential. The yellow one only fulfills its punishment and lives his curse on every Friday, thirteenth, when there's a full moon. They have tried to catch it away here, but nothing happened. They have even searched for his protective circle – where it leaves its werewolf clothes, but nothing was found. It is difficult because it urinates in the circle and everything in it is petrified. Being bitten by the yellow one is nothing to be worried about. Besides, it is just a small cut. Now, if the red-furred werewolf bites us, we become werewolf too.

- Geez! And how can we be sure if it is the good one or the bad one? – Fiorella asks with concern.

- Well, they say that if the red one bites, we see a pentagram on the palm of the bitten person.

“Damned if you do, damned if you don't” - thought the husband.
– Do you have any hydrogen peroxide or anything else to disinfect this

with, please? - the husband asked, wanting the young woman to leave them for a few minutes.

- It may be better if we go to our room and leave early tomorrow morning. We make something up and get out of here, Fiorella. We can't stay here at all, and besides, I want to see a doctor.

- Let's go home now.

- There's no ferry, remember? We have to hold on tight.

- Good evening! - greets the young girl's husband with a huge glass of water in his hand. - I'm just so thirsty! When there's a full moon, I am thirstier than ever.

- Hi there! Jesus, what happened to your eyes?

- Some sort of allergy. I don't know what happened. All of a sudden, I opened my eyes and they were really stinging. But it's getting better already.

- Oh! - sighed the wife wanting to run away and looking sideways at Elisson.

- Here is the peroxide and some antiseptics. Tomorrow, I think you should go to the medical Center - she suggested affectionately.

- Yes, of course. Early in the morning. Well, actually, very soon, right? The sun will soon rise.

- Here are the keys. I will take you to your room - offered the man, with a smile that showed a bit of yellow fur in between his front teeth.

- Don't worry. We are alright. We can find our way. Thank you and good night - in a diligent refusal, the couple quickly make their way to the room.

They lock themselves up and don't even unpack. Neither could they sleep. With fixed eyes on the wound, they analyzed the palm every minute to see if the pentagram would crop up. They didn't notice when they fell asleep. Far away, under the moonlight, something howled. The curse is carried on...



Can I sleep with you?



- Luiz Augusto!!! – yelled Madrinha. – Why are you panting? It looks like you have been hypnotized.

- And what these bullets are for? Are they also covered in wax?

- They sure are! From three masses at the church around the corner. You don't think I'm going to mess with the werewolf, do you?

- No.

- Did you like the kibbeh?

- Umhum.

- What is the matter, Luiz Augusto?

- Can I sleep with you?

- We'll just wash the dishes and go straight upstairs. But no snoring, ok? Do you want the sofa-bed or the mattress?

- The sofa-bed is actually closer to your bed, isn't it?

- It's next to it.

- And did you also plant the herb in the yard, Madrinha?

- A whole bunch of them. I'll show you tomorrow.

- I feel better now.

- Me too.

- Madrinha, why doesn't Uncle Justino sleep here?

- He does, sometimes.

- Why don't you marry him?
- I will, one day.
- You have been saying that for a long time. This house is too big for you to sleep all alone here, every day.
- One of you is always here with me.
- But it's not the same as a husband.
- I'll think about it.
- Uncle Justino is great!
- Sweet dreams.
- And with no werewolf, I hope.
- So do I.
- Madrinha? Did you notice that in your werewolf story, the clock strikes twenty-four times? Didn't you mean twelve? I've never heard a normal clock or the church bell strike twenty-four times.
- Neither have I, but I said twenty-four to make it more scary. Weren't you all goose-bumpy when you heard the twenty-four strikes?

- Good Night, Madrinha.

The following day...

- Ciao, Madrinha! Nicole will be here later.
- At what time?
- I'm going to the party at 8 p.m., so I think that my parents will leave her here around that time.
- Didn't you want to see the herb that frightens werewolves?
- You can show it to me when I come back.
- The werewolf didn't come around did it?
- I didn't see it. Did you?
- No, I didn't either.

Madrinha says hello to my parents, and to me she raises her aegis, which is always by the front door and has a golden butterfly on a blue background. She doesn't like saying goodbye.



Nicole and the *spirit de corps*



The car takes off and Madrinha returns to her home and professional chores. She is a journalist, a writer and a professor. Most of the time, she works from home. A luxury! When she finishes her articles and books, she sends them by e-mail. At university, she teaches twice a week, morning and afternoon. On the other days, she receives her supervisees at home, in her study, where she has her computer and a private library. It is one of our favorite little places. There are sofas, puffs, mattresses, a number of chairs in a variety of styles, and Madrinha's little corner, where no one goes. It is fully decorated with plants and many glass, crystal, mirror, and all sorts of shiny hanging thingamabobs. She really likes everything that can be hung and has the format of birds and flowers.

I am really so proud of Madrinha! She writes for a big newspaper here in the city. In her *blog*, she talks to her newspaper and book readers. She loves to enter *chats* with her students from all around Brazil. On such occasions, no-one can go to her house because she needs silence in the room, and this is hard when we are around. Since she does not like to say that we cannot go there, she keeps a board in her study with a gigantic calendar where she writes down her to-do list, her *chats*, her trips and other commitments. We always look at it and so we can organize our visits.

As time goes by...

Suddenly, a gust of wind invades her study, and she had been sweating, so hot it is. She hears the trees rustling the mobiles jingle.

- What a fright, Nicole! How did you come in at this time of night?

- I came with the wind and parked my broom over there.

- Well, that's the way to travel, isn't it? And not even the dogs barked.

- I can talk with them, Madrinha, and I asked them to be silent. I am learning your powers and besides, for fifteen years I have been trying to give you a little fright. Today I did it.

- A little fright?

- Madrinha, what are you writing?

- An article. I have a deadline on Monday.

- What is it about?

- Werewolves.

- Madrinha.

- Yes?

- Is what my brother told me true? My mother was very nervous about it. My father asked her to relax because it is probably just one more of your supernatural short stories.

- What did Luiz Augusto tell you?

- That you have a gun with nine bullets covered in wax to kill werewolves.

- That's true.

- Mum said we can't come here anymore unless you get rid of that gun.

- Not going to happen.

- Then, we can't come to your house anymore. This is silly.

- I'll find a way.

- What way?

- My way.

- OK!

- Why didn't you go to the party with Luiz Augusto?

- I wasn't invited.

- And why not?

- I'll use a new word that you taught me.
- Go on.
- Well, I superseded a classmate in a game of volleyball at the club.
- And why did you do that?
- She was too full of herself, making fun of me in court. And I knew she was weak to defend a quick hit so I sent all my quick hits in her direction. I really humiliated her.
- How crafty of you! Since when have you become wicked?
- Where's the dictionary?
- There.
Some minutes later...
- Have you found it?
- Yes.
- And what are you going to do to diminish this?
- Hold on, I have to use the dictionary again.
Some further minutes later...
- Apologize.
- And what else?
- I'll have *spirit de corps* as well.
- I like this.
- Madrinha, I think you should stop with this superstition business.
Luiz Augusto was really shaken. He's only twelve.
- And you?
- You always forget.
- There are too many nephews and nieces and my time is different from yours.
- Fifteen, Madrinha. Don't you remember the super party?
- It was great. You were dazzling. Well listen to this story and then you let me know if you believe in superstition or not. The story is called "the hopping rock".



The hopping rock



Teacher Gilberta was returning home in her four-wheel drive SUV. It was already dark, even though it was only five thirty in the afternoon. Driving through the woods, she is alert to any news that is always seen along this path, carved in the middle of five volcanoes that surround it.

After a very sharp turn, just before a footbridge, Gilberta bluntly breaks.

- What kind of huge rock is this? She was used to getting out of the car to push big rocks that come tumbling downhill. So, Gilberta got out of her car ready to push that shapeless thing.

- Hmmmm, what is this? – She asks herself a little louder, looking for her lantern inside the car.

The place where Gilberta lives is not quite common, and there are no lights on the streets. So, having lanterns and hand lamps in the car is rather essential. Besides other things such as hammers to break the window in case the car is caught in a flood caused by tropical rains, or falls into a river and gets caught in a torrent of rain. Gilberta has lived in so many places...

So, with her lantern at hand, Gilberta places the beam on the rock. “Now, I’ll be spooked! The rock is breathing and sweating!!! It has two eyes and a twisted mouth”.

In total panic, Gilberta gets in the car, blows the horn, flashes her high beams, her low beams, and nothing. The rock does not move.

- Jackson! That huge frog from the local superstitions is in front of the car! It is the rock frog! It is enormous! It is probably fifty centimeters in height and about forty centimeters wide – Gilberta says on the phone, screaming her story to her husband.

- Gilberta, where are you?

- At that turn close to our house, just before the footbridge.

- Kick the frog. Who knows it may roll down the bridge.

- Are you crazy? What if it spits its venomous dribble on me? It looks bloated. I think it will explode.

- Have you tried to make it hop with a piece of bamboo or something long? There is a broomstick in the trunk of the car. You know that, here, every broomstick may come in handy. Do you remember when a snake curled up on the bumper of the car? I used the broom to get it out. And ever since that time, I decided to keep a broomstick in the car.

- I'm afraid of touching the animal.

- Then, what you can do is slowly go over it. The car is higher than the animal. Don't worry.

- I don't want to run over the frog.

- Go slowly and I'll be listening on the line. Leave the phone on the speaker.

- I'll try.

- Go on, Honey.

- I'm going over it.

- Go on, Honey.

-I made it.

- Did you look back?

- No way. What is done, is done. I'll wait for you at home. Bye!



Nicole and superstition



- Where did you hear that story, Madrinha?

- I didn't hear it. I experienced it when I lived in Central America. I was returning from work.

- Didn't you exaggerate on the size of the frog a little?

- Perhaps a little, but it surely was big.

- Madrinha, are you superstitious?

- I breathe superstition, Honey. What about you?

- Only when I am here.

- Let's watch a movie?

- Is there popcorn?

- Have you had dinner?

- Yes.

- But I haven't. I'll get something to eat. You know where the popcorn is. So, you just have to turn the microwave on.

- Which film are we watching?

- I got three from the rental store. Pick one.

- I'll wait for you on the sofa.

- I'll be there in a minute.

Next day, Sunday...



The Argentinean *parrillada* and Marquinho's gecko



Nicole and Madrinha hurry to have the fire, the coal ready when everyone arrives. It was roast day, and it was not a barbecue. After Madrinha went to Argentina, she began to cook Argentinean roast. The brazier she assembles is worthy of description. She evenly spreads the coal under the grid and when she is ready to serve, she brings the meat in a coal *réchaud*. She is trendy! And she also makes a salad and some *farofa*. Just a simple lettuce salad, in her house, is called *salat vert*.

The *parrillada* is mouth watering, and is really nice because the meat, with its unique cuts, is tastier, softer, and overall more savory. Madrinha cooks *parrillada* with meat that she buys from an Argentinean butcher: *short rib, strip loin steak, flank and parrillera sausage*.

My parents, uncles and aunts help with the lunch expenses – which are rather high. But Madrinha cooks everything, and at dessert time,

she brings us Argentinean *dulce de leche*. She says that even the milk produced by the Argentinean cow is sweeter. I wouldn't know because I have never drunk any, but the *dulce de leche* is wonderful, I'll say that. And to have with coffee, Argentinean *alfajores*. It is really all too good. Thank Goodness she has a literary project for the *Porteña* land. This way, she will keep bringing these scrumptious things over to us.

Lunch is a bustle. There is no church silence. But who wants silence at Madrinha's place? Even the music is loud. It's Brazilian country music. Madrinha likes this kind of music and no one dares change the station in her good old radio. I really don't know how that radio still works.

- Madrinha, look! A gecko on the table!

- Leave it alone, Marquinho, and I'll tell you a story...

Everyone looks at each other. Here comes another story! My uncle Jovinaldo, one of Madrinha's brothers and Marquinho's father closes his eyes to doze off. Madrinha notices it and starts her story in a higher tone of voice. It was only the title so far. Madrinha reads her titles as if they were an announcement for the entrance of some king or Queen. The title is "the Sparrow and the alligator".

- Is it the story of a sparrow talking to an alligator? Marquinhos – who, by the way, is seven – asks.

- Well, it is not just a sparrow, the bird. It is a Sparrow, with a capital S, and this a completely different cup of tea.

- So it's a person Sparrow.

- That's it. Listen to the story.



The Sparrow and the alligator



- Sparrow, it's Wesley here.

- Back from *Pantana*?

- Yes, I'm back and I'm on the road again. It's full blast.

- And how did the fishing expedition go?

- Some really big ones! Sparrow, I need a favor from you. Actually, I have a mission for you.

- Well, since you are calling me at this time of night, I imagined that something was going on.

- Sparrow, I need you to go to my place to help Alfazema get rid of an alligator that is in the bathroom.

- Me? What is this? An alligator? This is something for the Fire Brigade. God forbid me try this! What is Alfazema doing with an alligator in the bathroom?

- So you see, Sparrow, she doesn't even want to stay at home. And you're the only one I can ask for this favor.

- Did you bring it from *Pantana*?

- No, it came from somewhere else. I'll tell you later.

- How big is it, Wesley?

- Small. Very small. I'm sure you can handle it.

- Why don't you call the Fire Brigade?

- It won't work.

- Alright then, I'll go there immediately. Being your neighbor is not an easy task, Wesley. I just want to see what you have prepared for me now.

- I'll be on the computer, on that program that we use to talk and see each other. I'll be on the computer screen when you get to my place. Alfazema is expecting you. And she has some dessert for you to eat after you handle the alligator. Chocolate *éclair*. Your favorite.

- Alright. This is horrible, but here I go. Thank Goodness there'll be chocolate *éclair* for afterwards. How many are there? I want at least two.

Sparrow is one of those sweet people. Trying to minimally get equipped for the job, he put some thick leather gloves on; got a harpoon ready – one which he used for fishing. Then he got his large hunting knife, his ally. “Good grief! Why would Wesley bring an alligator to São Paulo? The guy is crazy. This new job of his is messing with his head. What if someone accuses me of killing an alligator? Where will I put an alligator? With a hundred thoughts that would make anyone shiver, Sparrow, all equipped for war and a raffia bag in his hand, he got the elevator, swearing against God and the world, and he went to the ninth floor.

When the elevator door was open, Alfazema was already waiting with three chocolate *éclairs* on a plate. Seeing Sparrow all dressed and armed to kill, she couldn't hold back.

- Sparrow, is all this just to save me?

- I'm only doing this because you are my good friends. Such things you put me through, really! Where is the alligator, Alfazema? I'll eat the *éclairs* later.

- In my room's bathroom – Alfazema said, with a flea in her ear. “What on earth did Wesley say to Sparrow?”

- Alfazema, where is the alligator?

- It's in the bathroom, Sparrow – Wesley said from the computer screen, with a look of someone who could barely hold his laugh outburst after seeing his friend with all those tools ready to catch an alligator.

- It is there, look! – pointing to the wall, Alfazema located the reptile.

- But is this the alligator? Where is Wesley? That ☐ ξᵒ:·☹ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ !!!!
I feel like a fool! Alfazema! I'm disheartened with all this. Is this some kind of funny TV show?

- Calm down, Sparrow. Talk to Wesley on the computer.

After talking for a while, Sparrow calmed down and understood the way by which his friend Wesley, that ☐ ξᵒ:·☹ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ , persuaded him to leave his house at 11:20 p. m. to get rid of a gecko that was in Alfazema's bathroom – bearing in mind that she is terrified by this little animal. There was no way she would sleep in the same house with a gecko!

In the end, Sparrow left all his gear aside and, with a simple piece of paper and a dustpan, he got the gecko, and opened the bathroom window to throw it outside.

- What? Sparrow, are you going to throw the gecko outside, from the ninth floor? - Asked Alfazema, in fear.

- Well, come on, Alfazema! What do you want me to do with this white gecko looking at me? I'm already grossed out. I think I would rather see an alligator.

- I don't know what you will do, but you can't throw it from the ninth floor. I will feel remorse.

- The things we won't do for a friend – Muttered Sparrow, who was on the verge of losing his decorum.

- Ask your husband on the computer screen.

Following Wesley's recommendation, Sparrow went downstairs, to the garden of the building with the so-called alligator in an envelope. Off to the flowers and grass runs the alligator. Relieved after having saved his friend from an alleged reptile with big teeth, Sparrow sits down on the wall of the garden – where the alligator has already disappeared -, opens the paper bag and devours the three chocolate *éclairs* that Alfazema had given him. With a happy smile after eating his favorite sweet, Sparrow looked up to catch his friend waving goodbye from her balcony. "Well... our friends have such *alligators* for us to handle..."



Enough!!!



-Madrinha, who are these crazy people from your story?

- Well, Marquinho, Alfazema is a friend of mine from school and Sparrow is a neighbor of hers. And Wesley is her husband. I changed the names of course.

- I've seen Alfazema, haven't I Madrinha?

- Yes, that was her. We work together.

- And she tells a lot of stories too. She says I am seven, but I look ten.

- There is another story...

- That's enough! – shouts Uncle Oswaldo, another of Madrinha's brothers; he knows that this could go forever... Madrinha's brothers' names are funny. The first is called Inaldo, the second, Oswaldo, the third, my father, is Everaldo, the fourth, Jovinaldo and the fifth and last, Rinaldo. Madrinha is the only woman, and the youngest. My grand-mother was going to call her Esmeralda, but my father insisted that her name should be Carolina and Primavera.

- It's not enough! Shouted my sister, and Madrinha's protector. – Tell us another one! – Pleaded Nathália, who is thirteen.

- This story happened with grandma, and she is here to confirm. The story is called the "shoe lace with two eyes". As you know, I have also added some details to this story to make it more interesting.

- And, since when do shoe laces have eyes? – Marquinhos asked in doubt.

- That's where the fun is, Marquinho. Silence! I'm going to tell the story – Madrinha began, taking her tennis shoe lace off. She always tells stories holding object in her hands. They come to life in ways we cannot imagine.



The shoe lace with two eyes



Like a racing car, Mikaela is one of those people who do a bunch of things at the same time and is able to conclude them all in little time. In that frantic rhythm, she goes into the laundry room and starts placing the clothes in the washing machine. As usually, she shakes the pieces of clothing before placing them in the washing machine. And she also turns them inside out. She says this is to clean the insides of the clothing – which are dirtier.

Because Mikaela is always on the go, and does many things at the same time, including the newspaper that she reads, she often misplaces her reading glasses along the way. Then, she desperately looks for her spectacles with no spectacles on – which makes it harder for her to see. I think she had new spectacles made. They are pink, green and orange. Beautiful! And easier to find. But when this story happened, her glasses were still the basic-color type.

While shaking clothes to place them in the machine, a sheet gets stuck on the laundry lamp. She pulls the sheet and forces it to get loose. The light bulb turns off and on. It may have been the beginning of a short-circuit.

After everything is in the washing machine, Mikaela adds the soap, a little bit of disinfectant – she likes it that way – and the softener. She

adjusts the timer to ring in thirty six minutes and disappears inside the house. There were many chores to be completed.

When the timer rings, she rushes out to hang the clothes. It is a beautiful sunny day!

Her clothes line is sensational, and very practical, besides being very close to the washing machine. She gets each piece of clothing out, shakes it again and hangs it with a peg. Hers are fashion pegs, colorful, painted and very charming. Even her clothes line has to be glamorous.

First she hangs the large pieces, then the smaller ones; and, when she finishes, there are only two long white pieces in the machine. She thinks they are shoe laces from her husband's sneakers or something like that. Her glasses were not there, as usual.

Without paying too much attention, she holds the lace with one hand and a peg with another. When she is hanging the shoe lace, she notices that it has two eyes and a long, flat tongue hanging out.

Reflexively, as people who are holding a strange animal in their hands, Mikaela throws the whatever-it-was far away.

She rushes out to look for her glasses and returns to the scene. – Uhum! Poor Darling! It is a gecko! How weird! It's lost its tail. It may have dropped it thinking that it was being attacked. Surely, it thought that this would confuse its predator. Poor thing!

Well, you see, the tail was still in the washing machine. It was the other alleged shoe lace. How sad! Always an animal lover, Mikaela tried to resurrect the gecko. But it didn't work. There was too much soap, disinfectant and softener in the machine for that reptile that loves climbing up walls which, now, had been washed, rinsed and spun.



Caíque and fiction-reality



- Why did grandma become Mikaela if that is not her name, Madrinha?
- asked Caíque, Marquinho's eight-year old brother.

- Caíque, I changed the name because, although I based my story on grandma's real life, I always change a few things when I write a story. In fiction, the characters can have any name. It's fiction, Caíque. Not a true report. It is half true and is told as a story.

- Is this what happened, Grandma?

- Not exactly, but sort of, Caíque. I was very disgusted. I threw the gecko far away. But I guarantee that the fiction is better told than the real story, Caíque.

- And there's another story about an alligator, or was it a crocodile – added Madrinha, wishing to continue with the story-telling business.

- Now, that's enough – said Uncle Jovinaldo, Caíque and Marquinho's father. Leave the other story for the next *parrillada*.

- I'll tell it to the first one who sleeps over. Is that a deal?

And off they all went, after cleaning everything up. It was something she always asked for: That everything is in place and clean before the crow goes home.



Do you copy that, Madrinha? I copy, Arthur.



On Tuesday evening, Arthur, who is also twelve, arrives. Before entering, he calls Madrinha on the *walkie-talkie* that he got for his birthday.

- Madrinha, do you copy?
- Go 'round the corner, copied.
- It's dark, do you copy?
- There is hidden light, copied.
- Where?, copy.
- When you come in, to your right, at your nose level. Copy?
- Will you be on the other side? Copy.
- I'm already here. Copy?
- I'm on my way, copy.

Arthur, a little frightened, goes around the corner. Turns on the secret light and enters a gap on the wall that, for Cartesian eyes, was an access to the light meter reading. For those who look carefully, it was a secret passage because there was a door under the meter where, in the old days, the milk man used to put milk and bread. Madrinha keeps the door today and we are the only ones who have the key to go that way. Each of us has a key-keeper with special keys to Madrinha's house.

- Carolina, why can't the children just take the front door? – yells my other uncle, Oswaldo, from the other side of the street.

- See you tomorrow, Darling. Arthur is in already.

- Ciao, Dad! See you tomorrow, after school.

Only my uncles come by Madrinha's house to leave the kids, my cousins. My aunts don't quite understand all that jazz. They get nervous, insecure and a bit startled. Madrinha's brothers are used to their sister. They think she is a little weird, but since we, the kids, love the way she is, they end up accepting the magic that surrounds the big old house. Deep inside, the only reason stopping them from taking part in all that magic is the fact that they can't go through the secret passages anymore. When they were small, they used to do the same things, but, in those days, it was grandpa's house.

- What's the matter, Madrinha?

- My water bill, Arthur. It's too high.

- But you live alone, how can it be high?

- That's my point; there must be something wrong. I need to call Seu Gusmão.

- Who is he?

- Listen up and I'll tell you a story about him.

- But, weren't you going to tell a story about an alligator? I thought I was the first one to come over this week, isn't that right?

- Well, actually, the story is about a crocodile. But I need to tell the story about Gusmão first.

- But I want the story about the alligator.

- Gusmão's story has a cat. Afterwards, I'll tell you the story about the crocodile. It's not an alligator. Look up the difference in that book after. The crocodile and the alligator are similar, but quite different.

- How come they are similar if they are quite different, Madrinha? Ok, then, tell me the story about Gusmão. But, Madrinha, how is Gusmão related to the water bill?

- He is the one who will find out what the problem is, and in the story, you will find out how he works.

- Ok. Tell me the story, then, but afterwards, you will tell the crocodile story, won't you?

- It's a deal! The name of the story is "Siamese water bill".

- What's the meaning of Siamese, Madrinha?
 - There's the dictionary.
 - I don't want to look it up. I'm tired.
 - Hey, Kiddo!
 - Alright, I'm looking it up. But only because I know that if I don't, there's no story.
 - You've got that part right.
- A few minutes later...
- I know it now. It's related to a cat isn't it?
 - Yes.
 - Madrinha, are there any sandwich cookies and juice? I'm hungry.
 - What a question, Arthur!
 - Why don't you have child food around?
 - All the food I have is for children: fruit, home-made rye bread, oat and sesame cookies which I baked this afternoon. Jam that grandma made in the farm – so you can make your own sandwich cookies with jam, honey or milk caramel. And there's also guava jam and cheese from the farm. Everything is in the fridge, and this is real food for children. As for juice, we just put some fruit in the blender.
 - I'll get the guava jam with cheese, and a peach. Is the peach from the farm as well?
 - Yes, this is the peach season. Can you get me some of whatever you are eating too, please, Arthur? And meanwhile, I'll tell you the story.



The Siamese water bill



Economy is a word this couple knows well. They have a number of candles around the house, not only to have a romantic atmosphere, but also to leave the lights off. – It is romantic-economic. – says the husband to friends that visit.

- Darling, come here, please – the husband calls his wife with irony in his voice. She comes wearily expecting to be told off for some reason. “I know when he makes this tone of voice”, she thinks. “What would he want to save now?”

- Hi, Dear! What is it?

- Irene, we will have to have quicker showers – he informs her with harsh voice. – And we will also have to change our clothes-washing habits; only when the washing machine is full will we turn it on! Dishwasher! Only when we are too tired to wash the dishes manually. The garden does not need water on a daily basis and...

- What rubbish are you saying, Urias? Are you crazy? Who told you that plants do not need water every day? My flowers, the shrubs, the grass... No way!!! You can drop the idea because it's not going to happen, Urias. I can save on the other items, but not on my garden!

- Irene, look at our water bill! We are using too much water! It's an exaggeration! It's unintelligent to do so! – says the savings fanatic, discouraged, handing the water bill to his wife.

- Hold your cat so I can look at this bill. – Interested in investigating the reason for such exorbitant expenditure, the wife hands Urias his pet cat, Tigre – all white and black with crystal blue eyes.

After resorting to her calculator, and doing many operations on it, the wife says:

- It is impossible, dear. We must have a leak in the house somewhere. We couldn't use that much water even if we wanted to. It's certainly a leak. Call the Water Authority.

And that is precisely what they do. However, when they arrive, the technicians who were supposed to locate the leak, say:

- From where we stand, there is no leak. You had better call a plumber that you trust to look at the rest of the place.

That's where Seu Gusmão comes in. He is a funny fellow who walks around with a huge glass used to locate leaks. Seu Gusmão places the leak on the walls and on the floor and listens and... nothing. He then concludes:

- There's no leak. Someone must be using your water. – That was Seu Gusmão's verdict.

- Darling, I will find out what is happening. Tomorrow I won't go to work and I will begin my investigation to see if any neighbor is using our water. Don't worry. I'll get the water thief!! – Urias promises nervously as someone who has just snapped an idea.

The next day begins, and when his wife gets up, Urias is already at the window with his binoculars. Knowing her husband for years, Irene simply wishes him luck before she leaves to go to work:

- Good luck, Honey, and please avoid violence. Call me if you find out anything. I'll talk to the neighbor.

-Why you? Don't worry, I'm ready. I have the camera here to record the flagrant act! I'll get the sun of a gun. Today! – says Urias petting Tigre.

Time goes by and Urias ends up sleeping. Suddenly, he wakes up with the toilette flushing which, of course, means water going down the drain.

-My Goodness! The thief is inside my house! This is horrible! How could it be? – Armed with a broom, Urias gets ready to face the burglar on the second floor of the house.

He goes up the stairs trying to avoid making noise, and hears the toilette being flushed two more times. Very angry, taken by a choleric feeling Urias wants to climb the stairs quicker, but is afraid of making noise and scaring the bleak thief away. He continues up the stairs in sepulchral silence.

On the last steps of the stairs, three more flushes. Enraged, Urias goes forward, the camera in one hand and the broomstick on the other. He invades the bathroom and can't believe his eyes, as he screams:

- Tiiiiiiiiiiiigre!!! What are you doing here, playing with the toilette flush lever? He calls him all sorts of names, and swears a whole number more. Tiiiiiiiiigre! I don't believe that you are the one responsible for the inflated outflow of water in this house!!! What do you think you are doing? Who taught you to do that? Is this even human?

Not believing his eyes, and wishing he could drown his own cat in the toilette bowl, Urias films Tigre admiring the water going down the drain when the flush is activated.

- Who said that cats don't like water? – asked Urias, red with anger, purple in the face in fury.

- And now, what will I do with you, Tigre? Irene won't believe this. Thank goodness I caught it on video. I'll call her.

- Irene, you can come home now. I know who the thief is. Who is it? I can only tell you when you get home because you have to see it to believe it.



Arthur is not a fool



- Madrinha.

- Yes, Arthur.

- I am a child, but I'm not a fool. Where on earth have you seen a cat flushing the toilette? You went a bit overboard. No one would believe you.

- Who won't believe me? My readers know my style. Those who read me see reality with fantasy in their eyes. I saw a cat do that on a TV Sunday show. It was a program that showed animals doing human things. So I decided to make a story of it.

- Did you really see that?

- I did. And actually, it was last Sunday, after our *parrillada*. And since I got the bill today, I'm telling you the story that I'll publish in the newspaper after tomorrow. Let's go upstairs and I'll write it down.

- And the crocodile story?

- I'll tell you the story, but let me write the cat story first. What do you think of listening to the crocodile story tomorrow at breakfast? I promise to make you a delicious ham sandwich and tell you the crocodile story. Is that ok? But if you want to imagine the story, I'll tell you this: do you remember the scar on Uncle Justino's arm? Well, the crocodile did that.

- Why don't you marry Uncle Justino, Madrinha? He is really nice.
- He is my boy-hubby-friend, Arthur.
- What do you mean by boy-hubby-friend, Madrinha? He is either a boyfriend or a husband. And you are too old to have a boy-hubby-friend.
- Too old? My Dear boy! You'll hurt Madrinha's feelings like that...
- Why don't you get married?
- One day, perhaps, Arthur. Have you been speaking to Uncle Justino?
- He called me yesterday.
- And what for might I ask?
- To call me to go to a football match at Pacaembu, on the last Saturday of the month – three weeks from now.
- And are you going?
- I am.
- He never told me anything.
- He said he was going to surprise you because you love football.
- Um! So don't tell him that you told me.
- Done.
- And now, go to bed that I have work to do. I have to write the story and send it to the newspaper.
- This job of yours is really good, isn't it, Madrinha?
- I like it.

Next morning...

- Madrinha? I'm late. Did you sleep here, on top of the computer? Where's my sandwich?
- What time is it?
- I've missed the first class already.
- Oh! Dear! Let's go.
- Without breakfast?
- I'll prepare breakfast in the cab.

And quickly, with a bag in her hand, Madrinha grabs some things in the fridge while Arthur calls a cab. On the way to school, the sandwich gets ready.

- I'm sorry, Honey, it was the cat story. When I finished writing it, I recalled another story, about the stressed-out spider, which I also experienced with Uncle Justino. I'll tell you the story afterwards. I'm really sorry, Honey! Here is some money for your morning snack.

- Thanks, Madrinha! You can tell me the two stories after. Finally you left you natural eating routine. I loved the idea of receiving money to buy something to eat at school.

- It was a mistake, but make the most of it because it is very rare. Next time, your snack will be a double ricotta and spring onion sandwich. My Love! Bye!



Nathália



Saddened because of her mistake, Madrinha returns home. To her surprise, Nathália, who is thirteen, is at her door with her father, my uncle Everaldo.

- It's an emergency, My Sister.

- What happened? Come in, Nathália.

- I'll tell you later. I have to go. Can Nathália stay there until later this evening? Can you take her to school? She enters at 1.15 p.m. and leaves at 6.45p.m.

- What time will you pick her up, Everaldo?

- I'll call.

- What about Luiz Augusto and Nicole?

- All under control.

- Good luck!

- Thanks.

- What happened to your dad, Nathália?

- I don't know, but someone from work called and he rushed out and brought me here. It must be some emergency investigation.

- You would never guess what happened: I slept in the Office and forgot about Arthur.

- Another story?

- Two stories.
 - Can you tell me one?
 - I'll tell you the one of the stressed-out spider, but then you'll tell it to Arthur. He will ask you to tell it. By the way, Nathália, do you have any homework?
 - Yes, but I'll do it after the story.
 - Have you had breakfast?
 - Yes, but I can have another one.
- While preparing breakfast, Madrinha begins the story.
- What is the title again, Madrinha?
 - "The stressed-out spider". Nowadays, everyone is stressed: the trees, the people, the animals and the spider in this story.
 - Where did it take place?
 - See if you can guess while I go through the story details.
 - Was it in any of your trips with Uncle Justino?
 - I'll begin the story.



The stressed-out spider



Alberto and Albertina are always plunging somewhere where no one goes, somewhere out of the ordinary. When they tell others where they are going to spend their vacations, people usually ask:

- But where the heck is that?

In our case, in order to get to the house where this story is set, the two walked for three days amidst a lot of plants in a subtropical Brazilian forest. They followed a river and, suddenly, this blue and white hut popped up in front of them. A gift for those who were already tired and hungry.

They had a long shower in extremely freezing water.

- It is refreshing – said the guide soothingly.

- The one who screams less in the shower, will get two desserts – he added jokingly, but actually meaning what he said. Alberto received two pieces of apple pie baked in a hearth.

- Here is your bed – the guide showed a grass mattress with white hand-embroidered linen.

- Such smooth cotton – praises Albertina.

- And here is the mosquito net. Don't forget to use it – recommended the guide.

Alberto and Albertina got ready to sleep and Albertina, as usual, was sound asleep as soon as she closed her eyes.

All of a sudden...

- What is the reason for this stress, Alberto? What is this horrible noise? You're going to wake everyone up. What are you doing? Why are you so nervous? Why are you slamming the door so fiercely? We are on holidays! – said Albertina, still a little sleepy and without her glasses to see what her husband was doing with that door made of three pieces of wood and several gaps in between.

- Quiet! Put your glasses on and come help me! – requested Alberto.

“He is not joking”, thought Albertina. By placing her glasses fixed with a head lantern, Albertina gets up and gets out of the mosquito net going in Alberto's direction.

- Killed them.

- What?

- Two Brown spiders. Very dangerous!! Can you imagine being bitten here, in the middle of nowhere!? By the time we get to Instituto Butantã we are doomed.

- Where were the spiders?

- I got up to go to the loo and saw twelve eyes on the door knob. They were glowing in the reflex of the lantern light.

- Geez! What an eye stricken spider! I always thought spiders had six eyes.

- That's right, Albertina! There were two brown spiders! We would get two bites. Can you imagine if I held the knob? I would crush the two, and in this compression, they would surely attack my hand. They almost went unnoticed.

- Is everything alright there? – called the guide that was in a room a little far from theirs.

- Yes, all is well. It was just two stressed-out spiders, but they are calmer now.



One more vote for Uncle Justino



- That story happened in that vacation that you went to Chapada with Uncle Justino, didn't it?

- Yes it did. And there is another story from that vacation.

- Why don't you marry Uncle Justino, Madrinha? You've practically been living together for eighteen years. He really loves you, and I think you love him too.

- That is true. There is a lot of love.

- So?

- So what, Nathália?

- Marry him. He wants to marry you.

- Did he call you too?

- Yes.

- What for?

- There's going to be a show with songs from Bahia, and he invited me to go.

- He never mentioned anything to me.

- He said he didn't need to because it was a surprise. He will invite you.

- Another surprise?

- What do you mean? What's the other one?

- It's a surprise.

- For me?

- I don't know. Well, back to the story.

- Which one?

- I'm lost now. What is this smell coming from the toaster?

- It's a cockroach, Madrinha!

- My Goodness, Nathália! Let me kill it! How ghastly! Get away from my toaster, you evil thing!

And with one blow from the thong, the roach was history.

- How horrible! A cockroach on the toaster!

- But you see, Madrinha, this can be a good story.

- Yes, it can. I'll write it right away and the title will be: "The winged bread". Keep going with your breakfast. I'm going to work.

"Madrinha is always writing stories."

Some minutes later...

- Is it ready, Madrinha?

- I've finished it. Have look and see how a real story becomes fiction.

- Madrinha?

- Yes, Nathália?

- How do you invent a story like that?

- Did you like it?

- It's funny. Did you think of the beach house?

- Well, there are always cockroaches there, and I thought it would be funnier. And I invented the couple. It is more of a thrill; there's more dialogue and I can explore other themes as well. Here, for example, the couple's life together is the background for the cockroach story. Then, there's the idea of cleanliness, and so on so forth. And I also get ideas for my articles. I'll look into cockroaches and then I'll publish something about them.

- It is good. Well, you can finish your breakfast, Madrinha. I've got to do my homework.

- Go on, Dear. I'll be working over here. I think I better put my alarm clock on so that I know when we have to leave.

- Aren't we going to have lunch?

- How about you think of something for us both to eat? Have a look in the fridge. I went to the supermarket yesterday.





- Leave it up to me then.

The two ate spaghetti *a la roaches*.

- What is this invention, Nathália?

- I was inspired by the cockroaches, Madrinha. I saw these dates in the fridge and decided to use them in the spaghetti. Don't they look like cockroaches?

- Yes, they do, and the taste is divine!

After lunch, the two go to school on foot. It's just 'round the corner. – I'll pick you up. Send me a message on your last class to remind me, ok?

- I'll write the usual: Leave immediately.

- Thank you, Dear! Love you!!!

Some hours later...

- Carolina, I've finished everything. I'll pick Nathália up at school. Thanks, Sis! – it was my father, Everaldo sending a text message.

- I'm always here if you need me, she says.

Sleepy, Madrinha surrenders to an early bedtime. She goes to bed, tucks the covers in, and just before turning off the lights, who does she see on the ceiling? Three bats!!!

- Hm! This lining! Bats adore the linings of old houses. Hmmm... this is a good story... I'll go back to the computer... title, title... bat... what might be the benefits of a bat? I have to look into this...

And in a flash, the drowsiness is gone. Madrinha is on full blast creating a new text. The title was "the blood-thinning medication upside down". She has a grin on her face and reads the story out loud. "It's a pity that no niece or nephew of mine is around".



Blood-thinning medication upside down



- Dawaney, wake up!

- What is the matter, Daísa? - Dawaney turns around and goes back to sleep.

- Come on, get up! There's someone making noise on the window. It must be a burglar.

- What burglar! We are in Europe, My Darling. In a hotel. Go back to sleep, Honey.

- Dawaney! – Daísa screams taking her husband's ear protectors off.

Jumpy, Dawaney sits up and turns on the light. – Where are my spectacles?

- Here! The noise comes from that window over there.

- Oh! Honey, it's a bat trying to get out. Poor thing. Its echolocation system is probably not working. And it can't see that there is a curtain on the window.

- Hurry up, Dawaney, open the window and frighten this bleeder out of here.

- It doesn't drink blood. Blood drinking bats are natural of America only.

- Who told you that?

- I saw it on a TV program. This one must be a frugivorous. With so many fruit trees in this castle-hotel, the bat is probably frugivorous.

- Come on, Dawaney, enough with the bla, bla, bla. Just open the window.

Slowly as ever, Dawaney gets up, brushes his hand over his hair, opens the curtain and the window.

- There you go! – Back in bed and tucked in, Dawaney puts his ear plugs back on again. – Turn off the light and it will leave, Daísa. – He turns on one side, and immediately falls asleep.

“What does he mean ‘there you go’? What do I do with this bat inside the room? Turn off the light? Not in a million years!!!” – She is restless; Daísa can’t accept this. She keeps looking at that furry body hanging upside down, holding on to the lamp right above their bed. She tries to cover her head, but keeps peeking to see if the flying mammal has left.

Daísa looks at her husband, who snores so deep is his sleep. “If this animal is going to leave the room, I’ll have to be the one to frighten it”.

Armed with her flowery hat, Daísa shakes it at the tip of her toes to see if the intruder – whose habitat was probably the lining in the ceiling – would fly away.

“It doesn’t even move an inch. How horrible can this be?” Daísa sighs and carries on with her assignment.

- Dawaney!!! – She calls loudly and clearly, and adding to this, a good shake of her husband’s body.

- What is it woman! Let me sleep! We’ve got a full day of sightseeing tours ahead of us tomorrow.

- Dawaney, the bat has not left.

- Of course not, the light is still on! I told you to turn it off.

- Please make this animal leave, Honey. Do this for me, please.

Muttering, who knows what, to himself, Dawaney gets a hand towel, climbs on the bed, and tries to set the bat loose from the lamp.

- Daísa, I can’t do that. It’s a female and there’s a baby bat with it. Look over there. I’m not going to mess with it. It’s probably lactating.

- It’s not possible. How can a bat be lactating, Dawaney?

- It’s a mammal, remember? And that one over there is a female, and I also saw on TV that the female bat lactates. And that’s enough,

Daísa. Besides, you should remember that you take blood-thinning medication, don't you, my Darling?

- What's that got to do with anything, Dawaney? This is no particular time to speak about medicine. You and your bright ideas.

- Oh, Yes, but I bet you that this medication of yours has something to do with the bats because I also saw on television that the blood-thinning drugs are made from the bat's saliva. It seems that it leaves the wound open, but without bleeding. This way, it can return on the next day and suck a little bit more blood.

- This is a little below the belt of you, Mister. This is no time to remember these things. When are you watching programs like these, Dawaney?

- In the gym, when I am on the treadmill. It's a program just about animals, and it's really interesting. I learn a lot of things. Now, sleep, Daísa. The female bat does not want to have any business with you. Sleep, Honey, because I am going to sleep, and that's what you should do too. Let's turn off the light and sleep – orders Dawaney, who is sound asleep again in a blink.

“ Well, what can I do? I can't hit the female bat with a broomstick – besides, there isn't a broomstick in this room. There's a coat hanger, but I can't reach the bat with it. My only choice is to turn off the light, thank the bat for the blood-thinning medication and go to sleep.”





Names for the characters



- Dawaney and Daísa, these are very different names. I'm glad I have all these chats with school children. I have so many characters that only a number of students' names to be able to help me baptize all the people in the fictional world – says Madrinha aloud, but to herself. She often thinks aloud.

Happy to have written the story and sent it to the newspaper, Madrinha says good-night to the bats and has a very good-night sleep.

When she wakes up, Madrinha begins to make a new list of names for her characters – that have to be named when they go on paper. She revises the names of her students and makes a list of those that she considers interesting for the fictional world.

Deep in this fiction, she receives a phone call.

- Hi, Daddy. Long time no hear from you. I miss you.

- I saw you on Sunday, Honey. Have you been writing a lot? When you lose track of time, it's usually because of a lot of writing.

- Oh, Yes, I have, Dad. I have begun new book. It's about my life, my godchildren's lives, some animals and my trips.

- What a coincidence!

- Why is it a coincidence? Is everything alright in the farm?

- Not alright at all, Dear.

- What happened?
- Two of your horses.
- It can't be!!!
- Listen carefully, and write one of your stories, my child.

As she listens to the beginning of the story, Madrinha reacts:

- How gloomy, how somber! How mournful! What a bad omen! How sad! – and in tears, Madrinha listens to the story and jots down some notes. The paper is wet with all the tears that drop.

- Carolina, are you listening to me, and are you writing your story?
– This is the magic word to transport Madrinha from the real to the imaginary world. With this sentence, she can put aside the pain. Literary composition is her feisty way to overcome her self-sacrifice and record her happiest and saddest moments. This is a moment in which, consciously serene, Madrinha listens to every word her father says and writes “the mare that hugged the lamppost”.



The mare that hugged the lamppost



- Another one, Seu José Marcos.

- That's not possible! Which one?

- Dourado.

- Have you called the vet?

- He is on his way.

Seu José Marcos was deeply concerned with his horses. One by one, they started to drop dead out of the blue.

First, it was Selvagem. A Mangalarga stallion with short coat fur, and an astonishing noble character. Happy, bright, brave, Selvagem was, nonetheless, the first to enter the deadly list.

- I don't know what is happening, Seu José Marcos. It is something really strong that attacks the animal's nervous system and leaves it paralyzed, with twisted muscles. It's not snake bite. Nor is it poisoning. I'll take its insides for analysis. – said Dr. Anderson, a six generation vet in a family of many veterinaries, intrigued. Few people have as much knowledge as this young lad that accumulated years of knowledge on the breeding of Mangalarga – a breed that goes back to the period in which Dom João VI brought a new lineage elite of equines to Brazil.

Now it was Dourado's turn to drop dead. "Giovanna is die of grief when she finds out that her horse has died," thought Seu José Marcos.

- Giovanna?

- What's the matter, Daddy? You sound sad.

- It's Dourado, my child. It died.

- How, Daddy?

- We don't know yet, but it went just like Selvagem. First it got all twisted up. Then, it raised its mane in a way that we thought it was going to bend over backwards, and then it neighed of deep, deep pain. And dropped dead. It was terrible, Honey.

- What are you going to do? It must be some sort of virus, Dad. You should separate the others straight away.

- That's what I'm going to do, Giovanna.

Without any delay, Seu José Marcos sees to it that twelve of the best breed of Mangalarga mares are separated. Ever since his great-great-grand-father, the family has had Mangalarga horses.

- May they be protected from everything possible. He closes the pasture fence of a special corral in the farm, and sets off to separate his breeders.

- Tadeu, there's horse missing. We only have seven here. Where's Alteza?

- With that unmistakable character, it's probably hiding somewhere. It doesn't like staying in this pasture. I'll go look for it.

- I'll go too. – No sooner had they finished saying this, Seu José Marcos and Tadeu hear a long neigh caused by pain.

- It's him, Tadeu. Let's go. Call Dr. Anderson.

- He is opening Dourado.

- Call him all the same. I'll find Alteza.

And there goes Seu José Marcos, mounting his favorite mare, Caprichosa. Eye-catching, roundish in body format, Caprichosa's galloping felt comfortable and safe. When they arrived at the scene where the pain call had come from, Caprichosa, sensitive as she is, started to twine her hooves in a sign of despair. Her strong thighs seem to weaken. She wants to flee in dismay. Her pointy ears moves in all directions. Her nostrils are more open than ever. She smells death in her mate that is now lying on the grass.

- My Goodness, what is this disease? - Still mounting Caprichosa, Seu José Marcos goes back to the headquarters of the farm. On his way there, he meets Tadeu and Dr. Anderson.

- I'm getting the tractor. I think I have to take the horse to São Paulo to be studied or I'll lose the whole livestock. Tadeu, go back home and get some samples of the pasture, the corn, the bran that the horses are eating. Also check with Jailson if there is any new agrototoxic substance being used. Get all the data we need about whatever is new in the horses' treatment here at the farm.

- Dr. Anderson, please take care of the ones that are still alive. Analyze them one by one. I'll bring more people from São Paulo to join our research. This can't continue. Call other colleagues of yours from other towns. We need all the help we can get.

Seu José Marcos drags Dourado across the pasture. "I never thought I'd see the day when something like this happens. What is this disease that destroys a strong animal like the ones of this breed?"

- Adrielli, where are the boys? I need them. I almost forgot the pregnant mares that are in the orchard pasture! – with trembling voice Seu José Marcos asks his wife that had been waiting for Dourado. – My Hail Mary! We have to try to save the pregnant mares. What do I do first?

- The boys are on their way to get the mares from the orchard. They remembered that, and are now probably on their way back with them already. Hurry up and put Dourado in the truck to take it to the biological institute in the city. They'll find out what is wrong. - Adrielli suggests trying to guide her husband.

- Alright, then. – And up they take that wonderful black horse with grey mane and tail. - Dourado, tell me that you are going to get up. You were my first stallion to win a prize. Get up! - In a lot of pain, Seu José Marcos hoists Dourado up to the truck.

- I'm on my way, Adrielli.

- Seu José Marcos, I think you better take Bella as well. She does not look good, and is nine-months pregnant. She has only two months to go, and at this stage, anything could happen. She is very unsteady. Look

at her eyes. They are no longer wide-open and lively, but squinting and fading. There is something wrong. I'll take her in my truck and follow you. I've already called some friends from three neighboring towns and they will soon be here to analyze Selvagem, and to help Tadeu in the analysis of the changes that have taken place in the farm. Let's go.

- And how are Constelação and Galácia doing?

- They are happy and lively. They seem to be well.

- What a relief. When are the colts due again?

- Thor, Constelação's colt is due next month, and Titã, Galácia's colt, in two months.

- May God protect them. Adrielli, please call the institute and tell them what we have experienced here. Try to talk to Dr. Bruno that helped us when we had that other cattle disease. Please ask him to wait for us with anything that may be helpful.

- I will do. Have a safe trip. I'll call them straight away.

On the Road, the red dust is raised by the trucks, creating a cloud in which the two vehicles disappear. It was dry so the dust is easily raised. In the middle of all that mist, Seu José Marcos and Dr. Anderson recall the latest occurrences with the horses in order to try to discover what could be causing their sudden and painful deaths.

Seu José Marcos' cell phone rings.

- Seu José Marcos, it's Dr. Matheus. I've just opened Dourado and I thought you should know that its liver and spleen are totally deformed. It must be something to do with that. I'll continue the exams, and I'll probably have more news by the time you arrive in the city.

- Please speak to Dr. Bruno of the Institute, Dr. Matheus, and tell him about this finding, and keep me informed.

Suddenly, Seu José Marcos sees the beamer of Dr. Anderson's truck flick. It was a sign that there was an emergency in the other truck, which had pulled over.

- Oh, God, it's Bella. She is having trouble to go on through the road with that big belly. – He pulled his truck over immediately.

When he sees, Dr. Anderson is unloading Bella looking like the world is coming to an end, Seu José Marcos tries to signal for the other

cars to keep a distance so as to avoid accidents. He knows that they will have to stop for a long period of time, and this a two-way section of the road with thin roadside.

The two try to hold Bella, which walks in zigzag and bend forward constantly. They try to tie the mare to a lamppost that was near the entrance of another farm. Bella is all twisted and Dr. Anderson notices that the colt is coming out.

- Seu José Marcos, it's coming out before its time. Please get me briefcase in the truck. The colt is coming into the world right here.

Trying to calm Bella down, Dr. Anderson takes care of that birth on the roadside. The colt is born half an hour later. With its staggering legs, it gets up and seeks comfort of its mother, which is going wild and continues to twitch and turn. Her usually very tall neck, loses direction. Her delicate legs hesitate. Her broad rib case seem to close down. That well arched mare of tough trunk stands up on its hind legs like it had never done before. Its neigh is painful for Seu José Marcos and to Dr. Anderson to hear. The two men watch as Bella falls, and, in an attempt to stay up in order feed its colt, it hugs the lamppost to which it was tied up.

It is a dramatic scene. A mare hugging a lamppost. The colt trying to feed. The two men helplessly looking, without knowing what to do. Nothing could make the mare let go of the post.

Some minutes later and it was done. Fatality is there to catch up with that mare that used to love to play in the barrel racing test in times of games in the farm.

- Seu José Marcos, get up, man. The mare is dead. We need to get to the Institute quickly to save the colt.

Silence. Seu José Marcos was almost in birth position, lying down on the ground, biting his lips in tremendous pain.

- Let's go, there are horses to save.

- I can't leave Bella lying there like that.

- We can and we will. I'll call the Rescue on the way and I'll tell them what happened. They all know us there, and later, someone from the farm can come over and pick Bella up to take it to São Paulo as well.

The important thing is to get to the institute in time to save the colt.

- You're right. – Feeling his strength had began to fail him, Seu José Marcos gets into the truck leaving Bella behind, hugging a lamppost.

When they arrive at the Institute, a team is expecting them. The colt is taken to postnatal care and is fine. Dourado's entrails are being analyzed. Seu José Marcos and Dr. Anderson keep in contact with the farm. There no more dead animal there.

- May our Mother of Mercy strengthen the ones that remain alive.

Seu José Marcos and Dr. Anderson check into a hotel in the city. Next day, they call the Institute.

- It's a bacteria! We have de medication now. All you have to do is drop by to pick it up.

And off they went happily, both Dr. Anderson and Seu José Marcos, to get the drug for that disease that got the nickname of “neighing to one's death”



Geraldo Marcelo



- Madrinha?

- Who is this?

- Geraldo Marcelo.

- There's no one with that name here. Sorry, you've got the wrong number.

Madrinha, still mourning the loss of her horses, didn't even notice who was calling.

- Madrinha?

- Not here.

- What do you mean she's not there?? Madrinha! Wake up! It's your nephew calling here from the farm. It's Geraldo Marcelo. Your brother Inaldo's son. The only nephew that has your hair and eyes, remember? The one who is twenty-eight years of age and hasn't seen you for a year. Remember me?

- Did any other horse die?

- No. They are all fine. The vaccination was successful and your other horses are trotting around the grass. I'm coming to São Paulo.

- No, you're not.

- I'm on my way and your father invited me to stay at your place. He is worried with how sad you are. And so am I. You seem to be going weak in the head.

- What?
 - See you in a few hours.
 - What for?
 - Bye, and try to sleep a little, or better still, write me a story.
 - Which one?
 - Listen to what I have just read in the papers. It's so absurd, it could well be a story. It happened to a flamboyant woman in São Paulo. Are you listening?
 - I am.
 - Do you have pencil and paper?
 - The pencil is tied to the phone.
- And Geraldo Marcelo reads the story that is indeed illogical.
- 'This woman is crazy, isn't she?
 - I think so too. Don't you think it could be a story?
 - I'll write it down and this will be the last one of the week. Wow! I'm one week ahead with the newspaper. I can also write an article about dogs. I liked it.
 - This is really good news! What's will be the title? – Geraldo Marcelo, who knows Madrinha well. He was one of the first to begin to stay with her in the big old house. If she had a title, she would write it all down.
 - Title? Hmmm... "the female dog tells the time".
 - I'll read it as soon as I arrive. Will you bake a cake?
 - What kind of cake do you want?
 - Could you bake that banana pie?
 - Perfect. I have a bunch of bananas that are too ripe. Cheers!





Geraldo Marcelo and Arthur want the crocodile



- Geraldo Marcelo? How are you doing, Man?

- Arthur! You're taller than Uncle Oswaldo! You are really tall! Why didn't you go down to the farm anymore?

- I can only go there with Madrinha. My parents don't like it there, and Madrinha hasn't been there in a while, so...

- That's right. I came to São Paulo to pick her up for a wedding.

- Whose wedding?

- Hers.

- With whom?

- Uncle Justino.

- Does she know that?

- She has no idea, and we better keep it that way. It's all a secret.

- Will this work?

- We've thought up a plan.

- But you know that Madrinha is a bit crazy... Isn't it better to have the surprise wedding here, in her house? Too many out of the ordinary novelty leaves her a little lost. It might be better to have something here.

- Perhaps. Yes, it really may be better. We can have a barbecue since I'm here. It could be something along those lines.

- I think it may be better.
- I'll talk to her dad. It's simple. And what are you doing here, at her house today?
- I came looking for a crocodile. But tell me, how did you come in, Geraldo Marcelo? I didn't see you come in, and I arrived earlier.
- No, you didn't. I saw you come in through the wall. And what is this about a crocodile? I have heard Madrinha tell a story of crocoelephant once, but never one about a crocodile.
- How did you come in, Geraldo Marcelo? Tell me. I know Madrinha is full of secrets. She tells them little by little.
- I'll show you a secret tunnel.
- A tunnel? Where?
- It's something your great-grandfather did. Some say that when there were too many people in the house and he wanted to sneak out, he used a tunnel that he had built.
- Show me.
- It's this way – Walking through a part of the forest in the back yard there they went, the boyish man and the mannish boy. – Do you see this rose bed here? See that grill on the ground? Can you see that the grill is above the ground a little, even though it doesn't seem to be?
- This is genius! It's almost a meter high, but with all these plants around, we can barely notice it.
- All you have to do is pull the grill and enter. I have a lantern here.
- It's such a well-built tunnel! And high enough! There is even air current! This is ingenious! My dad will love to know about this.
- You know that parents cannot hear about these things.
- Yes, I do. These are Madrinha's rules: only nephews and nieces.
- That's right. Do you see how clean it is. She takes care of all the secret passages.
- Are there others?
- Oh, yes. Little by little she will show you each one of them. Just hang on there.
- Where does this one go to?
- You'll see in a minute, Arthur.

- Here we are.
- A gate?
- It opens inwards, and when we are outside, there is a hidden lock.
- Can I open it?
- What are you waiting for.
- It's bizarre! We are at the wall. How is this possible?

- Let's have a look from the outside. It's an illusion, you see. This creeping plant on the wall, plus these prickly flowers on the ground and this strategically planted tree, a weeping willow with its branches pointing to the ground, this combination doesn't allow the passerby to go past this part of the sidewalk. Naturally, he looks at the street, since the sidewalk is rather narrow. Besides, the passerby would normally try to get away from the willow's leaves. So, only those who really know this passage would come this way. So you see, it's a secret passage.

- And the lock?
- Put your hand in this hole.
- It looks dangerous – Arthur places a rather shaky hand inside.
- Nothing is going to happen. Go on. Pull the lever.
- Fantastic!!!! – With his feelings in a turmoil, Arthur invites Geraldo

Marcelo to go through the tunnel again.

- Let's go! – And they do.

When they get back to the yard, Madrinha is waiting for them outside the grill.

- Did you like the passage? Don't show it to your cousins yet. Deal?
- You can trust me, Madrinha.
- And what about this so-called crocodile, Madrinha?
- You too, Geraldo Marcelo? Geez, you look more like me by the day.
- That's what everyone says. I like that.
- Let's come in and eat something. And then I'll tell you the story.

The banana pie is ready.

The boys go in with Madrinha and greedily eat the banana pie with a cup of white coffee. The coffee came from the farm and is ground in Madrinha's kitchen when she wants to drink some. Everything tastes divine.

- Have you ever seen the scar on Uncle Justino's arm?
- Yes. He never told us where it came from.
- It's just so that you don't get worried with our trips.
- Was he attacked by a crocodile?
- Sort of... that's the story.
- What's the story title, Madrinha?
- "The crocodile tear faints".



The crocodile tear fairs



Agostinho and Beatriz were on holidays at an archipelago in the Pacific Ocean. They say that *Jurassic Park* was created around those areas. Certainly, the writer thought of the book after going for a sightseeing tour in that area. So many pre-historical things happen in those lands...

Pioneering the tracks and getting to know the planet in its intimacy, Beatriz and Agostinho swim in blue rivers, bathe in ever-so-beautiful waterfalls, make the most of thermal waters that come off the ground, and climb volcano mountains to see the craters where people do not fall simply because they are protected by God. One should say that every now and then someone does fall inside. However, Beatriz and Agostinho have claws on their nails. When Beatriz is afraid, she clings to something or someone, like you wouldn't imagine, so she doesn't fall.

And speaking about claws, Agostinho and Beatriz and a rather dense guide walk through the track that would take them to the other side of the island. Unknowingly, the two were actually lab rats for that comical guide, that was testing the track for the first time. This sordid and gruesome detail they only learnt later, at the end of the trip, after several experiencing adventures. For Beatriz, a writer by profession, this is a perfect situation because it meant having many stories to write for a long time.

After walking for quite some time in that tropical forest and in unbelievable heat, feeling her sugar level was dropping quickly, Beatriz searches her pockets for something to eat. Her pocket stock was empty. The walk was longer than she had envisaged, and her snack supply had finished. She needed to open her backpack.

The wry tour guide ignored her need despite his knowing that when Beatriz needs to eat something, she really has to eat something, or else, she falls apart – she starts shaking and ends up fainting.

They kept going, walking on rocks, across a river that, part of an estuary, flows into the coastal area of the island. Perfect habitat for a well known pre-historical animal.

Agostinho, who was right behind them, keeps his eye on his wife that is quite clearly losing her strengths.

- I think we should stop. She needs to eat something.

It was too late. Beatriz's legs weakened and Agostinho held her just before she fell to the ground, in this case, into the water.

Because she fell a little awkwardly, Agostinho nearly fell in the water with Beatriz on his lap.

When he looks into the river, about a meter from her head and his arm, Agostinho sees these enormous jaws with something like sixty or seventy very sharp teeth, and it was wide open, ready to snap at, drown, shake its victim, tearing it down to pieces.

- Crocodile!!! - Agostinho screamed to the guide that turning around, could not believe the nearly seven-meter reptile that he was seeing.

In a twinkling of an eye, the monster, apparently slow with its short legs, seems to be trying to move with open jaws.

Instinctively protective, and having very few things to use as protection, the guide grabs the staff that had, until that time, served as walking stick, and places it in the crocodile's jaws. The animal starts to thrash its tail about in despair, trying to get rid of that thing that didn't allow it to close its enormous mouth.

Seeing a small track in the middle of nowhere, Agostinho climbs a small hill of about 30 steep meters with Beatriz on his lap. The guide,

and all his misleading ideas, follows right behind, just in case someone rolled down.

When they get to the top, they do not see that starving teathy animal, with its long, narrow, pointy muzzle that was probably tired of eating crabs, insects, frogs, turtles and fish. That carnivore animal with its prominent eye ridges wanted to eat fresh human flesh.

- Beatriz! Beatriz! Wake up! – He calls, pouring a bit of saline solution in his wife's mouth, and reviving her.

- What is that scratch on your arm, Agostinho? You are so pale!

- I'll tell you what happened afterwards, Beatriz.

- But it's better to do something about that cut now. There is a lot of blood dripping off it. Getting a first aid kit from his bag, the reckless guide makes a dressing on the wound, and sheds a tear: a crocodile tear.



Uncle Justino



- Madrinha!!! How long will you still wait before getting married to Uncle Justino? He has even said that he doesn't mind sleeping in a separate bedroom, as long as he can sleep in your bedroom every now and then. Uncle Justino said he doesn't mind the window open when he sleeps with you, though he is scared to death. And he also said that he will have a room just for his technological gear, which is quite abundant. - Uncle Justino is very sophisticated and has everything he needs to have a cinema theater at home. His sound stereo rack is wonderful!

- Madrinha - Geraldo Marcelo continues -, How many further scars do you want him to get? Don't you see that this hero that faces crocodiles and other animals wants you? Uncle Justino wants to marry you, Madrinha!!! How many times has he proposed to you?

- You know, proposing, as we know what proposing is, like in the stories, none.

- What do you mean, like what story, Madrinha?

- Well, I wanted him to come to my house and....

- Just a minute, Madrinha, I need to go to the loo.

This was not true. What Geraldo Marcelo really wanted was to turn on his cell phone in conference call to that Uncle Justino and

Madrinha's father. Then, they could hear her describe what she dreamt with for her wedding. Everything was getting in place now.

Arthur and Geraldo Marcelo sleep over at Madrinha's house and build a whole scheme for the wedding – that would take place in the next weekend. Many phone calls are made. Geraldo Marcelo is the leader. With an aptitude to make Madrinha happy, he gets everything ready in style.



The wedding in the tree house



The weekend has arrived, and with it, all the joy of cousins, uncles and aunts, grandparents and, of course, Uncle Justino that was embedded in Madrinha's fantasy desires.

- Is everything ready? – Uncle Justino asks for confirmation.

- Yes! We will hide in the orchid nursery.

Madrinha comes back from the street market. Every Saturday, early in the morning, she leaves with her street market trolley. And returns with a lot of fruit, greens, vegetables and something to plant - always.

As if part of a ritual, she washes the fruit so that they are ready to be eaten by her or by us, her nieces and nephews. The greenery that will be used on the weekend is also washed. The fridge is very colorful and that is how Madrinha keeps healthy. And she eats a lot.

The wireless telephone makes a noise.

- Already someone here? – She asks at the phone.

- Carolina.

- Justino? What are you doing in the tree house? And how did you come in?

- I came in through the front door and decided to wait for you here.

- You never go up there.



- It was about time I did. And I brought you a surprise from the Bixiga bakery.

- Don't tell me: the Italian sausage Bread!

- Yes. And there's grappa for you to drink as well.

- I'll be there in a minute. – She hangs the wireless phone on a hook next to the sink; gets some flowery napkins two plastic orange cups, a table cloth with humming bird design, and places all these things in a small straw that she uses for her personal picnics. She has a collection of straw bags for several different occasions.

Madrinha quickly goes up to the tree house. Because of the time of year, the jacaranda where the house is set is particularly exuberant; most of its flowers are open. The birds and the humming birds delight in the flowers' nectar.

- Hi there.

- I loved the surprise, Justino.

- So sit down so we can eat.

The two delight themselves with the quick picnic. Madrinha keeps to a diet, but if someone offers her anything with a few more calories, she eats it straight away because she doesn't like to be rude.

The two eat a lot and laugh too, and, as usual, Madrinha begins one of her stories. But it's better not to tell or the wedding will be delayed.

- I brought you a new orchid, Carolina. It's in the nursery. Do you want to go there to see it?

- Shall we take the zip-line?

- Right away. – Zip-lining down, there goes Uncle Justino, followed by Madrinha, with her vaporous hair. She is wearing one of her typical dresses: white, made of cotton and embroidered with glowing beads.

When she enters the orchid nursery, Uncle Justino waits for her at the end of the corridor – about five meters long. Madrinha starts to walk down the aisle and she listens *Trenzinho Caipira* starts to play in the background. It's Yasmim playing her flute. Yasmim is a niece that Madrinha hadn't seen for a while. She is eighteen, and is Uncle Oswaldo's daughter, my cousin Arthur's sister. She is gorgeous.

- Come, Carolina. – Uncle Justino calls her.

Madrinha walks with short steps and, little by little, finds a well known head here and there, amongst the orchids.

- This is beautiful! – she says.

- You could write a story about it, couldn't you? – My grandfather holds her arm to continue through the path and make sure that Madrinha will get to the improvised altar.

- Dad, I don't have a veil.

- Your mother was expecting that. There it is. – A few more steps and grandma puts a fully embroidered veil, with butterflies and a lot of shiny stuff, on Madrinha.

- Where's the priest?

- All in due time, Carolina.

Madrinha arrives at the altar and Uncle Justino feels a little silly and is stuck to the ground. Grandpa pats him on the back to see if he notices that all that is actually happening. Father Antônio does a quick ceremony to make sure that everything works as planned.

Our uncle Rinaldo's three-year old daughter, Camila, hands Uncle Justino a little box. The rings were in a little music box that played *Wave*.

Finally, the Kiss. Uncle Justino holds Madrinha firmly. He tilts her a little, and she sighs. Everyone is anxious.

Nicole raises the veil to help Uncle Justino, and he touches her lips with his very slowly.

- This is so romantic! - Nathália and Yasmim whisper.

- I now pronounce you husband and wife!

- How did you find out that this was how I dreamt it would happen, Justino?

- I have learnt to read your thought, Carolina – he answers, looking at all of us with the looks of a mischievous child.

- Hurray!!! – everyone screams leaving the orchid nursery to the sound of carnival in Bahia.

Everyone dance and Geraldo Marcelo plays the bell.

- The food is ready everyone! I cooked what I know better. The dessert is my dad's.

The menu is rice, beans and steak. Everything came from the farm. Portuguese cabbage, manioc flour and a lot of salad from Madrinha's street market. Dessert was made by Uncle Inaldo that can also cook very well. It is blanchmange, nut brittle and caramel pudding. And, as usual, freshly ground short black coffee for everyone to wind up the eating feast.

- Madrinha, What is that yellow wood on the wall? - Arthur asks.

- You know, once your father and four of his cousins went to the farm, and the story is called "the English horse that didn't go 'round curve"

- Why not? Was it used to the different side that the English drive on, Madrinha? – I asked jokingly.

- That's a good joke, Luiz Augusto. I think I'll include it in the story, that goes like this...

- Enough!!! Leave some of the stories for another book! Put an end to this one, begs Uncle Oswaldo.

- Put an end to the book? But if I don't have a book to write, I am not happy.

- Finish the book and begin a new one, Madrinha. Something that begins after your wedding. After all, our lives go on and there is a lot to tell. What do you think of that? – I suggested hoping that there would be more stories from Madrinha.

- Great idea, Luiz Augusto. So, in order to finish this book, I would probably use this space to say... And everyone lived happily ever after!! – with her typical and very funny laughter, Madrinha closes the book saying:

- C'est fini.







<i>Title</i>	Carolina Primavera
<i>Author</i>	Maria Cristina Damianovic
<i>Graphic Design</i>	Tamyres Siqueira
<i>Cover</i>	Diogo Cesar Fernandes
<i>Illustrations</i>	Ana Paula Lima
<i>Translator</i>	Sueli Fidalgo
<i>Revisor</i>	Maria Cristina Damianovic
<i>types</i>	Garamond
	KG Somebody That I Used To Know