



excerpt from: RAFAEL

translated from the Portuguese by Kenneth Krabbenhoft

I lost my suitcase again. I'm in the white airport of a white city. I look for a cab, but all the cabs are gone. I have no idea where I am. I discover there aren't any buses left (or there aren't any yet). Maybe I'm dreaming. Maybe not. Maybe I'm awake in my dream. Exile, they call it, banishment. This is what it's like. A white airport in a white city. A need, and there's no one there.

I.

Later they will say there was going to be another attempt, that there was a brigade prepared to kidnap them in Madrid, it was by chance that it didn't happen, a mix up about the time and the place. But how can we know for sure, if it was this way or that – how could they determine that's what happened, especially after the scandal of the General's death? But maybe it could have been that way, anything could have happened later on, who knows? Maybe two hours earlier the brigade had been in the café across the street from the restaurant where Rafael, Jorge Fontes, and Manuel Maria were gathered. It was a long time after Angola and prison, a long time, too, after the day Leocádia, the housekeeper who did some work at the Police Chief's house, rushed in out of breath. "Run, child, run, they're going to arrest you again! The Police Chief's daughter told me to warn you!" Yes, it was a long time before that day when she passed me a note when no one could see, I didn't bother to read it, just stuck it in my pocket, my mother Isabel went to fetch the suitcase that was still plastered with stickers from the great hotels of Europe, she was nervous but determined, she knew there was probably nothing anybody could do but she didn't cry, she only broke down when my grandmother Filipa handed me fifty bills: "Take them," she said, "you're going to need them for sure, and I'll never see you again".

It was long after this leave-taking, they will say that one of the regime's top people was there, everything must have been carefully set up: the false deserter who had infiltrated Algeria, the meetings he arranged in Paris, this time there was even the knowledge and complicity of the Spanish secret police. Later on they will say many things, the truth will be distorted a thou-



sand times and reality turned into fiction. But on that day, at that moment, in that restaurant – the same one an ETA commando would blow up at a later date, in that place only Rafael, Jorge Fontes, and Manuel Maria are sitting when the two men assigned to the job arrive in Madrid from out of town, I can almost swear I know who they are, but if I were to identify them they would still accuse me of mixing fact and fiction, apples and pears, truth and make-believe, as if life itself weren't the same way, and what we write.

2.

It's hard to know what they'll say. What is told and what is lived are not the same thing. Nothing may be said about Pedro Lobo, who liked to ride motorcycles, wore a leather coat, wrote novels, used to pull a notebook out of his pocket and jot things down. Or framed camera angles with his fingers as if he were shooting a film of his private imaginings.

These things get on Rafael's nerves. Take notes? Why? You can't experience something and take notes about it at the same time. Or to paraphrase the famous saying: "It's better to live than to write about life". Make sure you write that one down, too.

And the other one does write it down. He's always writing things down. For example the time Rafael says: "We have a country that no longer exists and we belong to a country that hasn't come into existence".

Pedro Lobo smiles, takes out his notebook, writes.

Rafael is irritated.

– Screw your notes, he says.

They are walking up the Boulevard des Batignolles, cars pass them going the opposite direction. They're on their way to the house of a Gaullist coronel, formerly of the Resistance, he's teaching them how to work with explosives, he arranges passports for them, has a network to help Spaniards and is now giving a hand to the Portuguese. They call him by his first name, Julien, it might be an alias, he meets them in the living room, he's brought plastic explosives, there are timers and detonators on the table and the chairs. His grandchildren come and go from the room, sometimes one of them takes a detonator with him, he doesn't say anything, you can tell the family has been properly instructed.

It's late afternoon on that day they went to his house, the two of them going in one direction, crowds and cars going the opposite way.

– Somebody is going against the current here, Pedro Lobo says. The question is: is it us or them?

3.

But who knows what direction they're going, in the end, if it's this way or that?

(It's two p.m. on a day in February 1964. You're out of prison and yet you're not. Exiled inside yourself. A prison within a prison. Your war inside another war.)

Rafael is crossing the Praça da República, he looks behind him and sees: shadows.

(They follow you like vultures, they hover over you, sit next to your table in the café, eavesdrop on your conversations, telephone in the middle of the night.)

Shadows. Everywhere, all the time. Shadows.



4.

The invisible city inside the visible city. I look for it in the stones and in the shadows. Sometimes in the Tower, at certain times of the day it seems to glide on the river.¹ Sometimes at Santa Cruz, the one built of dark stones. I often pay my respects to Grandfather Afonso, occasionally wander through the cloisters, search for time compressed into an ogive, an angle, or a rose window, a little fragment of eternity, a patch of reflected light, a triangle, a zero, a symbol, a sign.² This is why I like the Monastery of Santa Clara, the underwater tombs, the baptismal fonts, floating leaves, roses from past eras, echoes, remnants, traces.³ Every once in a while I go to the Church of Santiago on the Praça Velha, it's the eve of battle, I am Álvaro Vaz de Almada kneeling at the side of the Infante D. Pedro, Duke of Coimbra, *Désir* is my device, the flags are waving, *Lealdade, Justiça, Vingança* (Loyalty, Justice, Revenge), I would rather people be ashamed of my death than that I should be ashamed of living.

Now I'm sitting on the steps of the Old Cathedral, on stone shaped by João de Ruão, I hear a disembodied guitar, the square is empty but I hear a guitar, a voice, voices. This serenade is for me and for nobody, D minor, A minor, or a fado in a major key. Then I go by the New Cathedral, I sit on the steps, my name is Eça, I say out loud: "This charmed and whimsical Coimbra". I see Antero, he's giving a speech, gesticulating, challenging God, he has yet to discover the new language of his sonnets.⁴

I know these street corners: some nights, after reading André Breton, they suddenly bend toward the sunset where Nadja is waiting for me.⁵ Looking out over the river I enter Duino Castle to read the *Elegies*,⁶ I walk through the garden with Rilke, he is talking about the death that each one of us carries inside us like a fruit, there are long arched galleries of solitude, and then I see: the tranquil waters of the Mondego, beneath the passing hours.

(...)

¹ A reference to the Tower of Coimbra University and the Mondego River – translator's note.

² The Monastery of Santa Cruz is located in Coimbra. D. Afonso Henriques, the first king of Portugal, is buried there – translator's note.

³ The lower level of the church of the Monastery of Santa Clara has been flooded by water from the nearby Mondego River – translator's note.

⁴ Eça de Queiroz and Antero de Quental, nineteenth-century Portuguese writers, a novelist and a poet, respectively – translator's note.

⁵ Breton, a French surrealist, published his novel *Nadja* in 1928 – translator's note.

⁶ The German poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote the *Duino Elegies* (1922) while living in the castle of the same name – translator's note.

