



of foreign things

I'm a lamb's age when it happens, and he's a budding butterfly, or an inverted one – one that instead turns into the caterpillar, rebelliously, and I merely find it beautiful as the world gasps on. I have a lamb's look in my eyes: the one that seeks something to adore.

Whole family's at the beach that week. We're getting away from Campinas, they're getting away from Chicago, looking maybe for redemption for *living the American life* (meanwhile, we're living this), and maybe I'm looking for redemption for being so Brazilian, so clingy, so out of style I want them here forever. The beach is stunning, but the house is dirty. There's rotten beef in the oven, rotting over the weekend, and we're sorry to have brought them here, but we're family. So, they don't mind, or so they gracefully tell us. I'm not old enough to know the difference, but old enough to feel the shame, so I keep my quiet.

In my innocent shame, I draw on the corners of my notebook. I draw on the walls. I like drawing, what can I say? My pen tries subtle frames that aren't enough to disturb them or ogle their superior nature – they must, after all, have drawing lessons in their American schools, they must have acting classes and tap dancing and soap operas in school theaters and pens that draw by themselves while they clap and sing and magically exist, as all American things do. So, I draw, in the corners, in the shadows, so no one sees, and say I'm listening to Kelly Key songs on my MP3, alone but watching, like a coward little dirty mouse would do.

We go to the beach and I play on the sand, and I self-consciously tap on the salted water and taste its salted flowers in my mouth when they splash. For a second, it's magic. I'm an awkward critter, my bikini's too tight around the tummy for American gracefulness, yet it's just so much fun and tenderness I can't help but love it! I run to my uncle, to my grandma, and hug them fiercely and chat endlessly and look at the scarce clouds and cherish my life for a second more before it fades, and it's summer in Brazil with its summertime elegance. All the while there they are: blazing power underneath the sun, even though their skin looks stupidly red and burnt, even though they can't laugh at our jokes and don't want to buy our cheap candies... They smell so good, I just sweat (reeking of sun, poverty and single-mindedness).

I fade on the bed, looking to the ceiling, they laugh with my auntie. She loves them more than me, my cousins. She loves them, she loves them, she loves them. They talk in their language, this sacred language, and I, in my perceived inferiority, I can't seem to manage a foreign babble.

I draw on the floor with white chalk. He takes my picture.

What?

He takes my picture. The big one. The long one. The one with hair falling over his blue eyes, with sunburnt skin, with sea-soaked sneakers, with smelly armpits and gentle eyes. He does it, he looks at me! Me. It's brief, but I can feel it for a minute, his like-minded... dolefulness? Huh. I sketch him, on the corner of the page and keep it (secret).

The days pass, and we're all leaving – this wrecked paradise of a Brazilian beach house. We didn't use the pool because it was green, but we had our fun, right? Everyone laughs. I cover. I hug them briefly before anyone notices how out-of-place I feel... But he's right there on the corner table, trying to be an artist (just like me). Not gone yet, not leaving. Scarcely, piously, timidly I get closer. One step at a time, now. I pull the chair and sit there looking at our aunt's laptop. He's meddling with the photoshop. I stare longingly, and we sit, simply, side by side, longly. The silence perpetuates itself, because it's peaceful, sacred, in its self-sustenance. There's something there, something that feels meaningful and is absolute in its immateriality: company. The minutes aren't sullied by any words... because he doesn't know how profoundly I perceive him, and neither do I the opposite. Through it all I stay by his side, like a loyal pup. When it's time, we stand. It's awkward, of course, but there's something... when he hugs me.

It's not shameful or conceited, nor is it detached, because it's as genuine for him as it is for me, the reverence. It's reverence over a shared bond that maybe none of us knew existed. He hugs me, hugs me, hugs me, for a moment we're together in the blissful reality of the sensible heart – and then he says, kindly: "Tchau." And he's the lamb with the abashed look, with the Brazilian clumsiness, contained in the foreign mirror of my youthful soul.

They're gone. I'm gone.

He stays.