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# The Beach: a Narrative thesis

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# THE BEACH:

A narrative thesis

A thesis submitted to  
Regis College  
The Honors Program  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Graduation with Honors

by

Reuben Matthew Closson

May 2013



To the real-life Guadalupe, who will remain unnamed

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## Foreword

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Ben has traveled extensively for one so young. He was a foreign exchange student in Argentina in 2007 and 2008, and studied abroad in Brazil in 2011. As some of you know, the study abroad experience could be dramatic, even life-changing, in both positive and negative ways. And so it was for Ben. In Brazil, he was able to express himself in new ways, intellectually, artistically, and sexually, with results both thrilling and harrowing; indeed while there, he had one of the worst experiences of his life, one that has since haunted him.

The worst thing to do, in such a situation, is to suppress and harbor the experience, keeping up a happy exterior, not wanting to trouble others, unwittingly relegating our sorrow or pain to our unconscious, so that it ends up affecting, unknowingly of course, our sense of self, and negatively impacting our relationships with others. Yet this is what most of us do. One of the better things we can do is to channel our experience into art, in Ben's case writing, so that we can begin to make meaning of our experience, and in the expression of our story, help ourselves to confront, and then to heal, and in the process help others to understand themselves, to better understand the human condition. This is what Ben has done. To do so often involves a sort of trust in our



subconscious. If we've been traumatized, the brain has helpfully shut off our memories or cut short our processing mechanisms, which enables us to cope, to function. To fully access our experience, then, involves not simply remembering and "talking about our feelings," but to dig out, to uncover, our experience—almost blindly. We take stabs at the rendering of it, not knowing what we're going to come up with. This is a brave act (after all, it's easy to write about something when you know what happened and know what it represents), but it's a necessary act in any form of autobiographical art. (And you can certainly make the case that all art is, in some measure at least, autobiographical.)

Ben's novella, then, is a fictionalized version of his experience in Brazil, and in contrast to what most people think, I find fiction to be a better vehicle than non-fiction for getting at the truth. There's something about calling yourself a different name, and being free to change details, that allows the writer more liberty to get at the truth. I can't really explain it, but I know it to be true of my own experience.

I am proud of Ben. I barely knew the guy when we started this, and, as Dr. Bowie can tell you, I was skeptical that he would be able to write a novel in one year. In fact, I was more than skeptical; I was irritated. I was offended. It took me eight years to write my novel. Who did this punk think he was? But he did it. As he would be the first to admit, it still has some rough patches, but it's a considerably more refined work now than when he started. And more importantly, he's put his heart into it. He's made himself vulnerable in it—the most difficult task for any writer.

-David Hicks, PhD.

From a speech made presenting for the defense of this manuscript, 18 March 2013

## Acknowledgements:

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I am endlessly indebted to my advisor, Dr. David Hicks, and my reader, Professor Martin Garnar. Dr. Hicks was hesitant to accompany this project at first, and I appreciate that he took the leap of faith to go along with the project. Everything that is remotely good about my fiction writing comes from what I learned in his Introduction to Creative Writing class in the fall of 2012. Professor Garnar should be applauded for his patience with my inability to get him updates as quickly as he may have liked, and his keen eye at picking up on discrepancies within the text.

I also appreciate the un-official co-sponsorship of my work by Dr. Lara Narcisi, Dr. Steve Doty, and consultation early on in the idea-generating process from Dr. Eve Passerini, Shayna Nixon and others. There were a few days when I just needed somebody to talk to, to process what I was doing orally, and Dr. Narcissi was there to listen with a patient ear and a comforting gaze. I can never help her enough for that.

A special thanks to Michele Andersen-Heroux, for showing me that getting through an Honors thesis is possible, and for warning me of the threat of getting sick and tired of your content.

While I have heard some writers deny the importance of such menial details of the task of writing, like the pen or the place where the writing takes place, I align myself with those who list these minutiae among the most important in getting the work done.

Therefore, I am indebted to the Creative Writing Center at Regis University's Dayton Memorial Library, the Faculty Development Office in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages and History and Politics in Carroll Hall (and the typewriter therein), and to my friend Sam's home for their contributions of a "room of my own," where I may produce writing freely, uninhibited by distractions.

## Preface

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“Men have a tremendous contribution to make to feminist struggle in the area of exposing, confronting, opposing, and transforming the sexism of their male peers.”

-bell hooks, “Men: Comrades in Struggle.”

I believe fiction, specifically contemporary fiction, allows most closely the recreation of the experience of [trauma] and its effects. Since it is impossible to separate one’s writing from one’s experiences, it is highly likely that certain passages bear close resemblance to actual events and real people.

- Terry Rizzuti, *The Second War*

It is incredibly important to present the first-person-narrative experience of some events, outside of the black-and-white, cut-and-dry, boring, dry facts. One needs a *story* to understand what it was *like*, and one needs rich description of landscape and preceding events in order to really *feel* as much of the experience as is possible through empathetic narrative connection.

I wanted to discuss how gender and sex are two separate phenomena, but my research kept hitting snags seeing I cannot speak from the oppressed female experience. I finally opted for the "Creative Portfolio" option in order to create this extended singular narrative in a Creative Writing portfolio that explores some of my past experiences, as well as opening the door to explore other human experiences that illustrate the truth of the human condition that I am trying to illuminate. In the words of Tim O'Brien, while this thesis may not have the "happening truth" of a research-based work, it holds a central "narrative truth" that what differentiates men and women may be smaller than we tend to think, and yet these arbitrary differences in both gender roles and sexual characteristics make a world of a difference in extreme, but unfortunately extremely common, situations. “[A] história é verdadeira embora inventada...” [The story is true, even though it is invented].<sup>1</sup>

In his book *The Spaniards*, celebrated historian Américo Castro discusses the Portuguese identity. He finds that in the early centuries of Portugal's existence, there was not a distinct national character of that country as opposed to a Spanish identity. However, after an epic narrative poem was written in the sixteenth century about the origins of the Portuguese nation in the eleventh century, he finds that eventually a Portuguese identity became reified in its rejection of Spanish heritage. “Historical

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<sup>1</sup> Lispector, Clarice. *A Hora Da Estrela*. Rio De Janeiro: Livraria José Olympio Editora, 1981. Print. Translations mine.

consciousness has transformed that which had no intrinsic value as objective reality into human poetic reality. A great novelist does not work differently.”<sup>2</sup>

John Green, author of the 2012 Time Novel of the Year, would agree. In the Author’s Note prefacing his award-winning book, *The Fault in Our Stars*, he says that “[n]either novels or their readers benefit from attempts to divine whether any facts hide inside a story. Such efforts attack the very idea that made-up stories can matter, which is sort of the foundational assumption of our species.” Here, Green is valuing the truth of emotions and human experience, in preference to dedication to ontological truth. He, like Castro, is saying that something can be true because it speaks to the feelings of the human experience, regardless of its basis in “hard fact,” or empirically evidence-driven research.

The story that takes place on the following pages is entirely true. While not all of it has happened to the author of this piece, everything that happens in the following pages is a true reflection of real, lived human experiences. These events must not be taken lightly, nor should they be seen as exaggerations or extreme circumstances, outside the realm of normal possibility.

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<sup>2</sup> Castro, Américo and Willard F. King. *The Independence of Portugal as the Indirect Result of Santiago. “Santiago, an International Attraction.” The Spaniards: An Introduction to their History.* University of California Press, Berkeley and LA: 1971. p. 439. Web (Google Books).

## Part One

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Taking the taxi from the airport to the hotel, Max realized that it wasn't the Amazon, but he was definitely in a tropical rainforest, incorporated into a city. During the first mile, the driver wound through a tunnel of something that looked like bamboo. Max realized that he wasn't in Asia, so it must have been cane or sugarcane, unless like himself, bamboo had been brought by the ever-increasing effects of globalization. Whatever plant it was, it was so tall that it shaded his eyes from the sun, though yellow shards of light shattered his vision of the passengers of other cars, and of the pedestrians outside. The cane on the left of the bus met the cane on the right of the bus as they leaned in to each other, hugging in the area above the roof of the taxi (where a second story would be, if instead of in South America, he were in a London tour bus).

This was not London, for sure. This was Salvador, Bahia, Brazil. Max could see fat, coffee-skinned women, balancing baskets on their heads like Max had only seen on National Geographic. They carried long rods, seemingly the same material that created the tunnel for the taxi. He wondered what they were up to, but before he could come to

any conclusions, the taxi zoomed out of a tunnel of cane and into a concrete tunnel. From this point on, Max's surroundings were a blend of city and jungle.

Max was a junior in college, on a study abroad program through SAI—Study Abroad International. The name wasn't the only thing that was less-than-creative about the program. They failed to provide any help in organizing his arrival and making it easier to get to the hotel where he would spend his Orientation Weekend. He had to pay for this taxi himself, and had even arrived a whole day early, due to a misprinted acceptance letter that SAI had sent him.

During that day, he paid the extra fee for internet service. He took pictures of the ocean out his window and immediately uploaded them to show to his friends and family back at home. He changed into his shirt with the Brazilian flag and the letters BRASIL printed in bold type on it, and made sure to wear his Ray-Bans in all of the pictures. He captioned them with trite, cliché phrases, and refreshed his browser repeatedly to see what jealous remarks he would receive.

After his three-leg trip he was thirsty. He had been well provided with orange juice on the leg from LAX to São Paulo by the Korean Air stewardesses, but the cheap regional plane that brought him the last leg from São Paulo to Salvador had not provided him with so much as a package of peanuts). He refused to pay for the water in the fridge out of principle, and knew better than to drink from the tap. He got out the Martinelli's Sparkling Apple Juice he had brought for his host family, and set it on the bed-side table. He turned on the television, but kept glancing at the bottle, trying to decide if the jelly beans and chocolates he would still have to give them would be enough.



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All of the SAI students started their semester abroad extremely early, in mid-June. According to the philosophy of the program, since students usually came with a low proficiency in Portuguese, this allowed for them to acclimate to the culture while taking nothing more than a Brazilian culture course (which was more of an excuse to make sure that all SAI students were in the same room at the same time once a week so they could update them about upcoming outings and keep tabs on everyone) and introductory language courses. They took placement tests within the first couple days of arriving, and were divided into different groups, according to proficiency.

The Portuguese professor for Max's group had long hair. She was barely 5 feet tall, and her hair was 4 feet long. It was naturally black, but she had dyed it purple, so it had a dark-purple, two-toned effect. It kind of reminded Max of a button-down Oxford shirt he shared with his dad back in Colorado. It looked like she had a nose-ring usually, but took it out for class. Her skin didn't seem to be naturally dark, but rather spray-tanned or like she went to tanning booths, to make herself stick out less. She was thin, thin, thin. Like as if she ate nothing but the shrimp that her native island caught and sold to the city of Salvador. Her face was vaguely mousy. Her nose moved when she talked, and her mouth moved when she sniffed.

She was bound and determined to lecture for the entirety of their three-hour lecture sessions, even if most of her students were only staying there for a short stint of language-immersion before moving on to bigger and better things in Rio or São Paulo, and therefore paid little to no attention to her. Back home, they would be on summer

break. They would be drinking micro-brew beer in beach shacks in New England, looking at the ocean but not daring to go in. They would be adding to the cacophony of New Orleans, taking advantage of those few months where outside their 20-hour-a-week job that they maintained to live in New Orleans while Tulane was out of session, they had no responsibilities and no studying or compositions to distract them from a constant buzz of alcohol and marijuana. They would be climbing mountains in Oregon and Washington, eating mushrooms and watching the Technicolor stars.

They came to Brazil to be able to do all these things, but in a tropical setting. Most of them spoke very poor Portuguese, only taking it because Spanish was too mainstream (or the few who already spoke Spanish at home). They put up with Sabrina (the professor) because they knew that as soon as class got out, they could head to the beach down the street from campus and sit on their sarongs as they sunbathed and bought ice-cold beer from shirtless afro-Brazilians harboring to meet their every need.

What made their concentration on her lecture slightly more complicated was the lack of air conditioning in the Humanities building of this university, and the constant clanging of the construction all around campus that the study abroad program failed to mention would distract them from their coursework. Sabrina had a heroic ability to lecture without showing any indication that these two things bothered her (for the most part). Though during breaks she would often pull up her hair from capping her back with both hand and hold it above her head, standing with her back to the open window. Occasionally, her students couldn't hear her over the clamor of the construction mallets (which sounded eerily like men hammering in railroad lines, lots of steel-on-steel

massively forceful banging). She was used to repeating herself to less-than-proficient speakers of her cradle tongue, but even when she spoke up the second time she spoke, her small frame and mouse-lungs could only produce so much noise.

“*Senhora, o quê quer dizer ‘gosotosa’?*” Gaetano had asked. [What does “gostosa” mean?]

“*É uma maneira de descrever que alguém seja bonito, lindo, belo,*” she repeated. [It is a way to describe something or someone that is pretty.]

“*A Senhora é gostosa.*” [You are “gostosa”] A clang hid this comment from the referent, but not from the speaker’s classmates. His male classmates giggled; his female classmates ignored him like they ignored the prying eyes and shouted comments from lustful old Latin men. The professor assumed the giggles dealt with her definition, and so tried to explain that it translated to a rather crude remark, conflating the physically attractive attributes of people with the pleasant flavor of food.

Later, during lunch break in the cafeteria with none of the SAI staff nor any professors present, Gaetano continued his elaborated on his objectification of their professor, miraculously without the observation of the person about whom he was talking.

“I’d lay her down, right there on her desk, and bang her there. BAM!” His arm rendered an abusive force on his lunch table, emphasizing the suggestion of bodily contact. Max jumped back in instinctive surprise.

If Max were stuck back in Colorado, he would not have the luxuries that his classmates missed. He would be running around in slip-resistant Crocs for 30 hours a week, keeping up to the pace of wedding receptions and making sure that wedding parties and their guests could have all the beef Wellington and bruschetta they needed to satisfy their big-day excited bellies. Mostly his job was to make sure that the guests' thirst to forget that they were not as happy as the Happy Couple was sufficiently quenched by beer, overpriced wine and mimosas. Overall he knew he should be glad to be here sitting peacefully as others were teaching him what he loved most: learning how to expand his total number of potential conversation partners through new languages. He still felt trapped in the room, somehow. The humidity was oppressive in a way he could only compare to being locked in a sauna or steam room 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Just sitting there exhausted Max so much that at the end of the day, instead of joining his classmates at the beach, he just went to his host father's house, ate dinner, drank a glass of wine, and played *Portal* until his eyes were too heavy to see where he needed to aim his gun anymore. The most adventurous he got during his first six weeks was reading a short novel in Portuguese and playing a *Portal 2* co-op with his friends from back home.

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Before he moved to Brazil, Max's normal Friday-night routine was to go to his friend Drew's house and play video games with his buddies. He met one of them at work right after he graduated from high school, and quickly fell in with the group, given their shared interest in video games. The thing they talked about most was girls, which understandably made Max uncomfortable, since Max was gay. Max fondly remembered

one night when he had gone over and they had acted particularly obnoxious six months earlier.

He had tried to keep the door quiet as he closed both the glass storm door and the heavy metal and wooden front door behind him. Even though the television was on, he knew that his friend Drew's dad was asleep on the couch in front of him. "Shit," he whispered as he hit the spring doorstep with his little right toe. He went down the stairs to his right, hoping nobody had noticed the noise.

"What are you doing, fucktard, trying to wake up my entire house!? My mom has a migraine, and you know my dad is sleeping!" said Drew.

"Your mom always has a migraine," said Cody.

"And your dad is always sleeping on that couch," Max said. It might not seem like it to someone not intimately familiar with this group's dynamics, but Drew's word choice and tone actually meant that Max was not only fine having made the mistake, he was being welcomed as a friend to the crew.

The basement smelled vaguely of stale beer, cigarettes, old pizza and young male sweat, but mostly like Coca-Cola. An entire 40-gallon trash can in the back corner by the window to the fire escape was filled with crushed Coca-Cola cans. There was a 24-pack between the 60" flat screen television and mini-fridge to Max's right as he entered the room, and another 24-pack of Coca-Cola cooling inside the mini-fridge next to Pabst Blue Ribbon and Mike's Hard Lemonade. The only lighting came from the television on which Super Street Fighter was flickering scantily clad female characters and well-built male characters, and a dim orange glow from the streetlight outside the fire escape

window. To Max's left stood a foosball table, so cluttered with fifths and handles of Kahlúa, Malibu, Jack Daniel's and old pizza boxes that it would take more time to clean than anyone could possibly spend actually playing foosball. On a desk on the wall past the foosball table sat a computer monitor nearly as large as the television screen that Cody, Drew and the others were playing PS3. It boasted the most gorgeous resolution Max had ever seen on a computer, desktop or otherwise, and a computer that Drew had constructed and continued to update using top-of-the line PC products.

The walls were all covered in framed posters of Mickey, Minnie, Goofy and the rest of the Disney gang. There was a love seat, a La-Z-Boy and a larger sofa lined against the wall to the far right and directly across from where Max was entering the basement. There were also beanbags on which some of the guys were sit-laying in front of the couches. They were not holding traditional PlayStation controllers, but what looked like the control panels of arcade games removed from the arcades and sitting in their laps.

Tynan was the only one with a girlfriend, and he brought her over every Saturday night for Game Night. And everyone gave him shit about it. But it wasn't entirely jealousy, either. Sometimes, they would say, "Hey, if I beat you, can I make out with your girlfriend?" as if she didn't have any opinion on the matter. And sometimes they would bitch about being "friend zoned" with other girls, completely unaware of the sense of sexual entitlement this implied.

They would play video games for a while, and then drinking games, and then wake up, go home, shower, and repeat the process on Saturday night. Always Super Street Fighter *before* drinking, though, because they were super serious about that game.

Other games might become part of the drinking-game line up (“Whoever gets fourth place in Mario Kart has to shotgun a beer!”), but they played SSF competitively. They could not have any performance-degrading substances in their system when they practiced, lest they not sweep the Colorado-wide tournament that year. Max sucked at most of the video games, but enjoyed playing them because it helped him relax after a long week at school. He was the best at StarFox and Pokémon, but it was a rare day when he would convince the others to play.

On this one day Max was remembering, in addition to Tynan leaving in a huff because Patrick had demanded to make out with his girlfriend, Patrick had also asked Max to suck him off. As if any gay guy wants to just give blow jobs all the time.

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“People don’t even lock their doors at night.” As the three-week vacation between terms approached, Max had asked Sabrina where he could find more peaceful beaches than the one by his host dad’s apartment, from which you could hear the busses’ diesel engines constantly rev and slow. “That’s where I grew up. Nothing ever happens. It’s peaceful. No threat of getting mugged like here in the city. A Ilha dos Frades.

Not to mention the fresh *camarão* that the men caught and brought first to their wives every morning, and then brought the rest to the ports of Salvador to sell. And the ability to fish for fresh catch in a rowboat on the continental side of the island.

Now it’s getting more developed. But there aren’t any Shoppings. Just hostels and restaurants. Resto-bars, really. *Barraquinhas*. In any case, I really like it there. The island Ilha dos Frades is the island of my infancy.”

Her infancy was Max's fantasy. While Gaetano's fantasy dealt solely with their professor's body, Max's fantasy dealt solely with her place of birth.

Finally, Max got a break from the incessant clamor of campus construction because there were a few weeks without classes between the summer session and the fall semester. Over two-thirds of the other students in the SAI program moved away, either back to the US after their 5 credits of lower-division language credits were completed, or on to their business and economics courses in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Max stayed in Salvador with the other Humanities students. They seemed excited to do a bit of "domestic" travelling throughout the region during that break, but Max didn't have any excess funds to support that sort of affair, so he got antsy as he stayed behind in his host dad's apartment. He spent most of his time on his host dad's balcony, watching the *papagaios* and listening to the screeching of car breaks and monkeys (he gathered they were called "white-penciled marmosets" at the zoo).

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While Max did not get along particularly splendidly with his host father (mostly because he enjoyed participating in conversations, not merely being on the receiving end of them), he did quite enjoy the company of the maid that his host dad hired to come twice a week to cook, and once a week to clean the apartment. Her name was Conceição. Once, Max pointed out how the basilica in his city back home in the United States was as beautiful as she was, and had the same name (Immaculate Conception).



On a Saturday when she had finished her cleaning, and was waiting for the stew to boil so she could continue with her dinner preparations, Conceição offered to make Max a cup of tea. She handed him a porcelain teacup with silver trimming of quadrangle-geometric shapes. The vibrant white of the cup stood in contrast to her mahogany skin and rosy palms. He accepted the teacup, now being filled with a sweet chamomile infusion, adding yellow-green to the image of his pink arms with yellow hair holding the colorless cup with silver trimming. Quickly, the porcelain heated to the temperature of the steam coming out of the scratched stainless steel teapot that had but just been removed from blue flame of the gas-fire stove. He yelped and she handed him a silver-trimmed saucer and a tiny spoon, which he quickly accepted so he could hold the saucer and stir the tea, rather than the scalding cup.

Behind her, to Max's left, stood a wire rack, which measured a meter from the floor to the tiny bananas and fruit flies on the top shelf. Below the bananas was an array of papayas, mangoes, passion-fruit, and green coconuts. Between this rack and the door to the right teetered a pile of books, ranging from leaflet-thin manuals to textbook-style tomes. A scribble of ants trailed from the bananas to the floor, crossed in front of the books, and led up the wall to a counter-top fixed to the wall with no legs, to the right of the man. Conceição pulled out a slimy wooden stool and motioned for Max to sit there. He placed his saucer on a mat on the counter, still stirring his beverage. The ants primary concern were the cookie-jars lined up against the wall, but they also formed traffic-lines and pedestrian crossings on the highways between the three neatly-placed mats with floral designs. One or two began to explore the recently-placed saucer, and Max was

unsure whether or not it would be rude to acknowledge their existence by preventing them from diving into his tea.

Conceição opened one of the jars, and oblivious to the army of ants trying to hoist it to their lair beyond the bananas, placed a half-dozen coconut-ginger cookies on a plate slightly larger than Max's saucer and set it next to his rotating wrist.

She smiled and turned to the stove to her right. She announced that her daughters were going to come to visit her at work today, and continued to talk about this, that and the other regarding their school life, their pre-pubescent love affairs, and her ride on the bus that morning. Max was unsure whether he should enjoy his tea and cookies, which would mean turning his back to her as he faced the wall to sit properly in the rectangular stool, or if he should straddle the stool and sit slightly out from the counter in order to both see her and have access to his snack. He opted for the later, occasionally holding the larger-yet-still-doll-sized plate in his lap in order to avoid having a waterfall of crumbs hit the floor and distract the ants from their countertop endeavors. Max was unable to have a full view of the room in this compromise, it turned out. He heard another voice behind him, and turned to see his host's head and bare, caramel-colored torso leaning around the doorjamb. Ernani had been pretty and effeminate, at one time. Now his face was marked by divots caused by years of sunburns and smoking, and his chest and stomach were scarred from the last decade of operations, trying to keep his heart beating and his intestines unclogged.

Max asked Ernani if he knew the best way to get to Ilha dos Frades. It was Conceição that answered, saying she had a sister in Madre de Deus, which was the port

from which he should take a ferry to the island. She politely asked why he was going. “To have peace and quiet from this,” he yelled over the racket of a bus passing in the streets below.

Before Conceição left for the day, her daughters came to Ernani’s house from school, instead of going home. They wanted to greet their mommy, and show her the candy they were given at school for the Festa de Erê. Seeing children with bags of candy reminded him of a Halloween a decade before, when his cousin helped him dress up in what he later admitted was his favorite costume of all time.

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Regina helped Max search through his parents’ newly remodeled bedroom. “What do we need again?”

“A bra, two pairs of panty hose, a denim skirt, a blouse, a wig and an undershirt.”

Max found the panty hose pretty easily, but it was beyond him why he needed two pair. His legs weren’t that hairy yet, and it wasn’t like anyone was going to see his leg hair anyway—he was going to be trick-or-treating at night. The bra he proffered was rejected, and Regina kept digging around in Max’s mother’s lingerie drawer until she found one that Max doubted that his mother could actually fill. The long skirt and blouse he got from the basement toy closet while Regina tinkered in the master bathroom for some makeup. Since she wasn’t exactly old enough to be wearing it yet, she didn’t know what she was doing all that much, either.

The wig they decided they didn't need—Max already had curly chocolate hair that he combed back. It wasn't quite Annie's mop, but it certainly had body that even Princess Di's hair envied.

Regina stuffed the bra with one of the pairs of panty hose, and then decided she needed a couple of pairs of socks as well. She put the bra on Max—upside-down, clasp in front, then she drew back the clasp like a slingshot, and it slapped him once on his ribs before she managed to tug it around to the back. He got rug burn. She then flipped the stuffed cups right-side up, letting some of the sock spill out, reaching for his sternum. Finally, she put the straps over his shoulders, as his arms dangled like ape-appendages. With a white undershirt over his head, you couldn't tell that the bra was stuffed. Except for the fact that Double-Ds looked suspicious on an individual not yet 5 feet tall.

She barked at Max to take off his pants, who obeyed only because he asked for her help in the first place. He didn't like how much power she was taking in the situation, and liked even less the amount of work she was making him put into this silly costume. He was also embarrassed that she, a female relative, was now seeing him in his almost-transparent white briefs.

After clasping the skirt naïvely in the front, Max looked in the mirror. He saw, looking back at himself, exactly the image of a female elementary-school teacher that he imagined himself to be when people asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up," and he answered, "a scientist."

He said he changed his mind about the costume, pulled of the skirt, then the blouse, and rather than wait for the bra to be un-fastened, clawed it over his head, and ran

out of his parents' room to his own. He threw on some clothes that he had asked his mom to get, because he thought they made him look like a rapper: baggy pants, a backward baseball cap with some California sports insignia on it, and a name-brand shirt with metallic print. He declared as he brought his pillowcase out the front door that he was being a teenager for Halloween.

## Part Two

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"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face. You are able to say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.' You must do the thing you think you cannot do."

—Eleanor Roosevelt

When Max finally woke up that Tuesday morning at 7 a.m., he stared for a while at the empty bed next to him. It would have been nice to have the companionship of another American in this Brazilian apartment empty of youth, but he understood why SAI was against this idea: the two Americans would speak English the whole time. They needed to practice their Portuguese. Learning Portuguese was the whole reason he signed up with SAI to go to Brazil in the first place.

He texted Lupe to make sure she was up and getting ready while still in his boxers, and then proceeded to re-pack his two bags that he had so carefully stuffed full of provisions, his camera and notebook the night before. He placed a R\$100 and two R\$50 bills into the flexible protective covering over his camera. He did not think of this so much as “putting all of his eggs in one basket” as he thought of it being a way to keep

track of all of his valuables in one place, without having to keep counting items in his backpack or pockets to make sure he had all of the important stuff there.

Lupe was a colleague from the SAI program. She wasn't so much of a friend as a convenient other body to go with him to the island. He had wanted to go with a group, but it turned out that everyone else was going on another sketchy trip, hitchhiking to some place called Cachoeira or Chapada Diamantina. Lupe had brown hair, hazel eyes and a Spanish or Basque last name. Whenever she spoke Portuguese, she used obvious Spanish-isms, but insisted that she did not speak Spanish. Her family was Mexican-American, so she had learned a *little* Spanish, but she was a Junior in college and had been taking Portuguese since her freshman year. She was a product of The American Dream, with a rich, overprotective daddy back home. She spoke with a Chicana accent when she got drunk, but typically neutralized her English dialect to Midwestern in everyday conversation. She spoke English 75% of the time, and this made her one of the best three SAI students at always trying to speak in Portuguese.

As Max walked from his room to the kitchen, he saw Conceição sweeping and mopping the already dirt-free (but worn) hardwood floors, having already bleached the immaculately white sinks and counters, and having already washed yet again the glass doors to the balcony that the *papagaios* had not been able to see the day before. Each morning, the *papagaios* tried to enter the house to steal the fruit that was so abundant in that 7<sup>th</sup>-story apartment, just like every night, the fruit-bats would enter the bedroom windows for the same purpose (it was impossible to sleep in that hot, humid atmosphere

on the peninsula of the *Baia de Todos os Santos* with the windows closed against these intruders). He tried to ignore his host's laziness (the host didn't have to wake up for several more hours for his doctor's appointment) as he went through the kitchen and started a pot of coffee, careful to not dirty anything that had been so recently cleaned by Conceição.

He slid open the pristine, crystal-paned doors to the balcony awkwardly with his left hand. The silver-lined porcelain teacup was filled with coffee and sugar in his right hand. The first morning he was in this apartment, he had wished he had milk to make *café com leite*, but when he asked, his host dad offered him a powder. *That's not milk*, Max thought to himself.

He watched squirrel monkeys bathe each other in the tree outside his balcony. This apartment was high enough that he saw a bird's-eye-view of the canopy below. The busses and motorcycles were still audible through the leaves and branches, but he could see the *bem-ti-vi* birds stealing the nests of other birds and then gloating with their lemon plumage on the underside of their necks as they screeched their territorial call from above. The monkeys had been busy finding grub elsewhere in the city when the young man had first arrived, but now they consistently could be observed while he enjoyed his morning coffee on the balcony.

When he finished, he closed the sliding glass doors behind him as he re-entered the apartment. He crossed back past the unused, white couch on his right and the sweaty, oily red couch where his host dad shaved, ate and observed international beauty pageants on his left. He washed the coffee pot and teacup, put them in the drying rack, grabbed his



bags, and headed past the chintzy plates with cat paintings that lined the entryway's walls to the door.

To the left of the door stood a liqueur cabinet, with age-old whisky and *cachaça* and other delights that the owner of the apartment always ignored. He claimed to have been recently diagnosed with diabetes, but it also seems like he has been a wet blanket for the several decades since his prime.

The elevator outside the front door was surprisingly modern. It was made out of stainless steel, with a mirror from navel-level to the three-meter-high top of the lift.

Once the young man hit the ground floor, he pocketed his key on its literal chain, greeted the gatekeeper, and walked down the street. A college-aged man on his “winter” vacation was shirtless as he walked his fluffy poodle down the north side of the street. Down the middle of the street ran a lane-divider, out of which sprang the monkey-infested trees that house the *papagaios* and *bem-ti-vis* that the young man had been observing from above. He dodged the landmines of dog and human feces scattered along the sidewalks as he zigzagged down the street, across both lanes of traffic, toward his destination: the grocery store that served as a major bus stop.

He bought some provisions for the next few days (bread, sandwich meat, *maracujá* and other fruits that seem like they will last for a few nights). The bananas he had taken from the fruit-rack ended up smooshed all over his belongings, so he bought another bundle.

Max waited for Lupe, downstairs in a café that looked out toward the busy street and the bus stop. Most of the grocery store was on the second floor. Only the photo-shop,

the pharmacy, this café, and a pizzeria that only opened after dark were located on the ground floor. The young man ordered a *Guaraná Antártida* in order to not be accused of loitering in the café, but when he found out it was three times as much as the same canned soda he purchased upstairs in the grocery store he regretted that decision. *Oh well. I won't be able to drink this once I get back to North America.*

When Lupe showed up, the two took a city bus to the bus terminal. Max could see Lupe's swimsuit underneath her tank top. She was ready for the beach. She had very large breasts, which helped to emphasize how "Brazilian" (read: non-existent) her clothing was. He wanted to say something about what she was wearing, but chastised himself. She was an adult; she could choose what she wore herself. What was it to him if she chose to dress in a way to attract the stares from Brazilian men that he gave to them? (Jealousy was what it was, of course. *He* wanted those stares. He reminded himself that he could get those stares in *São Sebastião*, the local gay nightclub, if he really wanted. And that no gay man with a brain in Latin America would betray such an attraction outside of a gay nightclub or bathhouse.)

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Max remembered the last time he wore a stick-on bra with padded stuffing. He wasn't nearly as voluptuous as Lupe, but nearly so, given that they had to accommodate for his wide shoulders.

Droplets of blood welled up from his areolas and the skin covering his sternum and pectoralis major after Joanne had pulled up. The sticky ribbon of plastic onto which now clung his chest hair was held between two fingers. She had to use both hands to get

it into his dorm room's trash can, since it adhered statically on the non-wax side to her forearm. It had been a *gracious* offer to wax his chest for the purpose of dressing him scantily with fake breasts and a revealing top. Max had not screamed as the hair and its follicles were being removed tortuously from his chest, but a few seconds after the sibilant sound had already left the room pregnantly silent. It did not take any time to process the pain; the pain merely came after the deed was already done.

His cheeks and neck were to remain chafed and razor-burned for a fortnight after he shaved twice in the morning before performances, once in the afternoon, and once right before getting on stage. At least the stage makeup covered the rash. The audience paid more attention to the corn syrup dripping all over his face anyway, as well as the impactful story that they absorbed of Max's character being brutally murdered with a fire extinguisher seconds after being offered the intimate end of a date.

"Freak," Max's acting partner yelled at him. As the other actor wielded a red foam cylinder and pelted him on the head, the crimson corn syrup pack exploded in his wig and dripped down his face, giving the audience the full effect of a burst vein in his head spilling life-blood down his character's visage. *Click, snap, click.* A burst of warm blue-white light.

Max's wig itched like crazy. He felt naked, with so much of his legs exposed under his short tickle-me-pink shorts. He tried to stop re-adjusting his tank-top, since he was supposed to be dying, after all. His chest itched and burned where the cami rubbed against his raw skin. Why did he agree to letting Joanne wax his chest? Appearance is

everything, he supposed. It's worth it because it will help the audience understand the daily struggles, the reality of oppression of a minority group in their population.

Whether it showed their comprehension of the situation, or their approval of the act, the audience applauded.

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Max and Lupe took pictures of each other on the bus, and chattered excitedly about the "weekend" ahead. They hardly paid attention to the city whizzing by. Their six weeks here in Salvador, Brazil had left them *blasé* to the crackheads recovering from last night's high, the extreme poverty, the huge mansions and the apartment buildings high enough to see the bay from the center of the city. They had their eyes set on one destination: *Ilha dos Frades*, an island in the bay.

When they got to the end of the city bus line, they were panic-stricken. There did not seem to be a bus terminal anywhere to be found. So they asked the bus driver, and he answered, annoyed, that they would have to climb the hill. This was the farthest he could go.

The sky was surprisingly cloudless for this coastal metropolis, however, and it wasn't even midday. They made themselves feel as dandy as the sky. While the area did not seem as chic as the university-student part of town, they figured out which side of the road looked safer, and found what was most definitely the inter-city terminal. They were stoked when they got on the bus, and after a few minutes of riding, the fare-collector only asked for 5.5 Brazilian *reais*. What a steal! They were going two cities northwest of their current location for about \$3!

The coastal rainforest was a pleasant cocoon surrounding the bus and its highway, but an acrid stench was marginally unpleasant as they rode toward Madre de Deus, the port-city from which their ferry to the island would launch. It just so happened that this region produced a lot of sugarcane, and in recent years that sugarcane had begun to be processed into bio-fuel. The process of fermenting the cane sugar into ethanol created a smell worse than that of a meat-packing plant, somewhat reminiscent of a pig sty.

Madre de Deus turned out to be a miniscule town, and even getting off at the wrong end of it, the pair was quickly directed a block down the road to the dock. Yet again, they were filled with glee at the low price of the vessel heading toward their destination: Ilha dos Frades, wildlife reserve, Brazil tree reserve, and home to a small fishing reservation (whose homes had been constructed before the environmentalists demanded that local species be preserved).

The sun was nearing its zenith, but the ferryboat travelled just fast enough to provide a refreshing, silky breeze.

Just like a nature documentary, the small ferry rode gracefully from the mainland to the island in the bay, giving a variety of costal scenes: escarpments, beaches, rainforest foliage, rows and rows of coconut-laden palms. The wind rustled the little hair Max had left, and billowed out Lupe's hair like she was an American supermodel heading to a shoot in Cancun. Bright-white toothy smiles plastered their faces. They did it! They found their way to an island in the bay. They didn't need their program directors to hold their hands the entire way. They did it on their own. This meant their Portuguese was decent, and that they knew the geography well enough to get where they needed to go.

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Chickens on this island walked just as ridiculously as pigeons in the city. Their head bobbed front and back with each step, over-compensating for the shift in their center of gravity. Both chickens and pigeons pecked at seemingly nothing, either having better eyesight than humans, and feasting on the bugs that escaped our eyesight, or eating garbage and refuse and debris, unaware of what it was doing to their insides. It has been said that birds must eat a few stones so that their gizzard can do what teeth do for carnivores. The chickens were also as ubiquitous here between single- and double-story houses as the pigeons were between apartment complexes and 500-year-old churches in the city of Salvador.

Max was used to the perfect grid-pattern that his suburb had back in the States. Here on this island, houses were randomly placed in just the same inane lack-of-organization that the hilled city of Salvador was organized. Like dice, cast by the Portuguese Empire, long forgotten in All Saints' Bay.

The same water that filled the sea so that these people could fish their life-source, the same rain that gave their *cocos verdes* a sweet, unobtrusive refreshing flavor, dilapidated and faded the paint on their houses. Max didn't know if paint aged more quickly in coastal cities than it did in arid Denver, or if these houses hadn't been painted for a decade or so (about as long ago as it had been since he had gone to Lake McConaughy with his family).

Lupe and Max walked through the dirt paths, up and down hills through this small docking settlement. It was like a three dimensional maze, confounding the intruder not

only of directions north, south, east and west, but also up and down. The balconies that jutted out from top-story apartments provided a tunneling effect that added to this illusion. Everyone stared, but nobody uttered a word. Max was reminded of a scene he watched with his dad in an old black-and-white Western, when Rock Hudson walked into the saloon of the outlaw he was chasing. After they got through this town, they ended up wandering through a little forested area for a while, not sure when they would arrive at the opposite end of the island.

Even though they had backpacks full of bread, cheese and sandwich meat, one of the first things the pair did was to buy a lunch from a two-story building with peeling blue paint. The word POUSADA (“lodging”) and a phone number was painted in white above the top floor. They got a modest serving of rice and beans each, along with what looked like was fish that had died, washed up on shore, and dried in the sun. Lupe insisted that Max get past his hesitation and trust the protein source: it wasn’t like they would actually sell them bad fish. Max was convinced only when the tall, sturdy lady that had served them handed them a bowl of what looked to him like the *pico de gallo* that his family gathered around at the beginning of festive meals.

Lupe noticed the cat first. Max had always been taught to ignore animals that beg for food, but Lupe’s heart was broken by its saucer-plate large eyes, and she just had to give the cat the fish’s head (even though she was adventurous enough to insist on eating the fish, she couldn’t stomach this fisherman’s delight). Max then remembered something about not giving bones to animals, like why you aren’t supposed to feed chicken bones to dogs, but he wasn’t sure about it, not having owned a dog of his own, so he let it go.

Besides, he told himself, if this stray chokes on a bone and dies, it won't be like the island would be devastated to have one less flea-ridden invasive feline.

The cat told his cat-friends, Max supposed, because by the time they were done eating, and Max pulled his rather large note out of his camera case to pay for the meal, several more cats started meowing for hand-outs. Max enjoyed his end-of-meal beer, but Lupe threw random bones and bits of uneaten scales in varying directions, obtaining mirth from the spectacle of them jumping and pawing after the raining fish carcass.

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When the pair finally saw an opening in the palms ahead of them, Max noticed papaya-colored streaks slicing through the now cerulean and indigo sky. He ran ahead, pulling out his camera case, unzipping it to snatch his camera and snap a picture of the ephemeral beauty painted across the occidental horizon. When trees no longer obstructed his view, he could see the copper sun hovering above chains hanging between thick poles on a dock. To his right stood a blandly painted church, white with blue trim. If he learned *anything* from SAI, it was that every church in this part of Brazil was older than his home country had been a country.

Lupe held up a R\$100 bill and proffered it to Max. He cocked an eyebrow.

“What's this for?”

“You dropped it when you ran ahead like a madman to take a picture of some pretty clouds.”

Max's face faded to match the color of the western sky as he realized his lack of paying attention. He now noticed three men getting on a motorboat tied/moored to the



pier that jutted out to the left/west of the church. It looked like they were loading light construction equipment onto the boat (tool belts and the like). He now noticed that the area where they were looked really well maintained, especially compared to the dilapidated buildings on the side of the island where they had landed / gotten off the ferry.

The pair studied a map of the island that stood between the church and a long, single-story stone building that they later figured out was a museum made out of an abbey or a convent or something. The map was marked with their current location, and the last sliver of Apollo's bronze indicated where west was, so they thought they knew how to orient themselves on the map.

Lupe got out a very wooly New Orleans Saints blanket and started to set up "camp" on the very short, very well maintained grass that surrounded this Heritage Site. Her goal had been to sleep on the beach, but Max pointed out that they had no idea what the tide was like around here. He didn't know about her, but he didn't want to wake up wet from an incoming tide. The sod they decided on indicated that the tide didn't come up this close to the museum, since you wouldn't maintain grass in an area that it would get killed by seawater.

A large tide pond, or maybe a freshwater pond, sat on the other side of the convent. Max had rounded this when he had run forward to digitally capture the sunset. As soon as it got dark, they both heard rather loud ribbits coming from the mud surrounding this miniature body of water.

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It was Lupe that had insisted that they should try sleeping on the beach. Noah and his buddy had done it a couple weekends before. Nothing happened to them, so she figured it was a great idea. She also had a Romantic notion that the sounds of the waves would lull her to sleep and help her sleep soundly.

Begrudgingly, Max agreed. He wanted to curl up inside the monastery building proper. Even better, he would have preferred to stay in the building that had had *POUSADA* written on it on the other side of the island. It would have been uncomfortable bedding inside the museum, but the walls would protect him from the cool lee-side breeze fighting with the sea-breeze to give him hypothermia. It would also mean that their stuff lying next to them would be less prone to be seen by passers-by if they didn't wake up with the sun.

They went to bed soon after the grapefruit-sun dropped into the mango-juice bay, for there was not much to do. While Lupe had brought a blanket, having planned this in advance. Max had hoped he could talk her out of it, and had been banking on the bedding provided by the *pousada*. Even though he had not walked very far that day, Max's muscles had tensed in proximity to unknown Brazilians on the inter-city bus ride and the ferry ride earlier. Sleeping on this sod would only make his muscles knot more, and his spinal column ache for a chiropractor's expertise.

Even as he was grumbling to himself in his head, a flashlight shined on the pair. A security guard asked them gruffly what they were doing there. Lupe tried to whine with her womanly voice in a way to convince the security guard of their innocence of purpose. "We didn't know it was private property. We just realized after the sun went down that it

was too late to try to get a *pousada* on the other side of the island.” She also pointed fearfully at the forest of Brazilwood trees.

The guard hesitated. He knew he shouldn’t help them. But in the end, they came to a compromise. It was technically illegal for anyone to night there, but he allowed them to stay under a pleasantly rustic-looking lashed-together bundle of logs. Max was just glad they didn’t get arrested or something.

Each log of the structure had the girth of a human thigh. Max thought this structure looked vaguely like a lifeguard watchtower. It was lower to the ground than one, but also wider and more sturdy. He thought it was more of a hut than the high-rise seats that the lifeguards in Baywatch sat in. They still were able lay on the very short-cut grass, rather than either the sand *or* the stone. This was better than sand, for it didn’t get into their clothes, but it became very cold around 3 a.m. They were on the premises of the monastery museum heritage site, but far enough away that it wasn’t indoors and it wasn’t protected against wind or rain.

While they waited for sleep to envelop them, they heard the security guard yelling at someone in the distance. They saw that he was talking to a boat. Out came three men who had been sleeping there, docked not on the long pier, but just beached on the sandbank. They mused what each party must be saying to the other as the three men got out (one just jumped into the water and swam to shore). They were given shovels, and shoveled under the boat. Lupe said to Max that it was strange that they should dig under the boat. Why not just tug it off shore and go home to Madre de Deus? Max joked back that there was probably crack cocaine stored under the hull. They needed to access it

before getting the bottom of the boat covered in water, and the guard would get paid off to not report them. Lupe joked back that Max was just trying to get back to Argentina, that he was hoping they would become witnesses to an international drug smuggling venture, and INTERPOL would relocate them wherever they wanted, so he could live on INTERPOL's dollar in Argentina for the multi-year court case. After a while, the four men then sat down. They sat and joked and talked amongst themselves, occasionally with the armed guard, who strolled to his post out between the pier and the forest, and back to them, never coming back to the north where Lupe and Max were. After two hours, the tide rolled in a little bit, and the three from the boat pushed on its hull. It scraped against the rocks, and eventually made it out to sea. Max was genuinely disappointed that he couldn't witness anything more scandalous than squatters getting pushed back out to sea.

When Max got up in the night to relieve himself, he found himself stepping through decaying leaves. It reminded him of camping at Lake McConaughy in Nebraska while growing up.

The yellow sand on the shore of that lake was so visually inviting – visually and metaphorically inviting. Max wanted to lounge on those warm sands like those lifeguards with one-piece swimsuits on Baywatch. Max wanted to walk poetically where the sand was wet, but the water from the lake no longer stood, watching his footprints behind him, excited for the potentiality of footprints in the virgin sands in front of him.

But it was so goddamn hot. His experience walking on it was like the scene from Aladdin where a turban-clad man carefully tiptoes his way along red-hot coals, but when

Aladdin jumps on his shoulders he screams and contorts his face with pain. So much for his Baywatch idea. If he wanted to join his cousins in the berm or the shallow area where the minnows darted about, he would run from the dead and decomposing leaves, to a log or stump that had washed up on shore. He would then wait on the log while his feet cooled, before burning them again as he ran to the freshwater lake, ready to dive in like the fictional television characters would dive into the brinewater, the salty sea—but alas, he was in a landlocked state. It was too far for his da to travel during his short summer vacations from work to go to the ocean, and too expensive to fly. Sure, they could afford vacations in Fiji and the Gold Coast before Max and his siblings were born, but Max—the third child—made exotic trips impossible. Besides, they wanted to spend time with their family, the Jo Anne Kozlowski dynasty—and the other aunts and uncles could surely not afford to go out of state.

So, for most of the day, Max would sit and watch his elder cousins play and splash and get angry and laugh and cry in the water, while he would sit beneath the spruce and the cottonwood and the poplar, in a nest of pines and crunch brown leaves. He found more bugs than he would have liked while sitting in those leaves. The one good thing about being able to find all of these bugs amidst the leaves of the coastal (coast of a lake, at least) underbrush was that it made Max a very valuable person to the economy of toad-trading amongst the cousins.

The toads in and around Lake McConaughy varied in size from dime-sized to the size of the oldest cousin's palm. The cousins all loved holding these minute amphibians in their hands, they're toes just big enough to differentiate like hairs itching your palm,

before sending an impressive force, seemingly too much strength for such a small animal, into the spongy flesh of the young children's hands, trying to leap to freedom. Several times the toads just ended up killing themselves: the fall was too great a distance for their fragile little bodies. Usually the male cousins would have enough sense not to try any pranks with the toads, but on occasion the temptation was too great, and they placed them on a snoozing aunt's chair, and she would wake up with a toad in her face.

This compilation of cousins created sand castles in which they warehoused the toads. They kept them for the duration of the week that they stayed at the lake. They traded the toads like trading cards. Sometimes a more talented catcher would gift a toad to another cousin in exchange for doing his campsite chores. Naturally, this currency of vacation needed to be kept alive and well, so those who could provide the insects that the toads ate proved to be useful. Max's tendency to spend time in the leaves made it more likely for him to be in proximity to the insects. Against his innermost instincts, he collected them at first to help his uncle Brock fish. Eventually, when the oldest cousin realized the necessity of nutrition for their amphibian pets, he bullied some worms from Max, who slowly started collecting them more for the toads than for the fish. At the end of the week, the biggest meal was provided by a collection of large fish caught by Uncle Brock, who secretly started using the toads themselves as bait. The larger the prey, the larger the catch.

Max and his brother seven tried to smuggle some home with them (their father wouldn't let them have a dog, so they hungered for animal companionship) in their aunt's van. Not only did she freak out when it got too hot and they started jumping around,

trying to flee through the transparent but solid windows; they also ended up making the van smell god-awful, and even though only a handful died in the van, the smell lingered long after all the toads were removed from the vehicle. Max still wonders if there are still frog remains in that minivan.

The frog that jumped across his path toward the moonlight tide pool was much bigger than those little toads he had played with so many years ago.

Max thought he had known what farm life was like given his family history, but he did not realize how many times a rooster crowed in the morning. The first time was fine, and he figured it alerted him to get off the Heritage Site with Lupe before the workers came to man the site and got angry at their presence. But after a half-dozen times, he was quite ready to crash right back through the palm-frond forest to get away from the sound.

Before leaving and cutting back through the nature reserve, they breakfasted on a coconut dropped by a curious squirrel monkey, which had quickly lost interest in the complicated task of discovering what was inside. Opening it entertained them for a good 45 minutes, seeing as Max did not carry with me a machete, but only a small, rusty, bull-horn steak knife, and Lupe laughed at him the whole time he tried to pry it, poke it, stab it and crush it. Coconut water does a surprising job of quenching thirst, since its heavy, oily quality lingers in your mouth much longer than mineral-rich tap water does. It satiated them for the time being, but its velvety sensation it left made Max crave carbonation.

Having to share it with Lupe made Max wish he had two coconuts. Try as he might, he couldn't throw the empty shell accurately enough to knock down another.

They broke out of the forested reserve just as the lemon-sun was being volleyed into its citrus-drink realm. He brushed his teeth, examining, across the bay, the peninsular city where he was being hosted. He quickly moved on, missing the smells of fish-and-chips, tomato and cilantro from the day before. This spot only offered the smells of rotting kelp, wood and shellfish. From what they understood from the map the twilight before, they needed to trek south.

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Lupe and Max found the village where we landed at the dock again. "Shall we stop at the POUSADA, make our reservation for tonight? Wait till lunch, and then just play in the water here?"

"No, let's keep going. Let's find that other settlement they talked about. Better food, bigger *pousada*."

When they finally decided they were hungry, they couldn't find anyone who would sell them food. One lady had a very clear sign that her house doubled as a restaurant. She was even sitting with all of her lady friends, chatting over some beer and salty hand snacks. But she insisted that she didn't have any food (hot food to share, Max supposed). It was out of season. There was nothing she could do. So they kept on walking.

At several points they came to narrow passages, where they had to climb up a chair-shaped boulder that hung out over the tide in order to keep walking. According to



the map they had looked at the day before, there was a beach all around the island. The tide is very confusing to one who has not been around it his entire life. You think you can predict where it goes at its highest. You figure it'll open up passages as it goes down. In the end, the landscape changes so much that you can get lost just going east along the coast. You'd think that with a definite seaside border to your path that you couldn't get lost. You'd be wrong. They didn't realize that that beach all around the island got covered in an inch to a meter of water during high tide. Not only did Lupe not know how to swim, they also wanted to keep their digital cameras and changes of clothes dry.

At one part the boulders on the sea-edge made a wall that was impossible to climb. Max found that where the tide had covered the beach was still a pretty shallow area, that they could walk across it and not get much more than their sandaled feet wet. However, there was moss or kelp or something on these rocks that made them very slippery, especially to flip-flops with no traction on the bottom. They slipped a couple of times, but kept their packs out of the water. Max vaguely pondered how well he could make a splint, given his past Boy Scouts training, if one of them broke a bone, but they soon found dry sand again and didn't need to worry about it.

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Walking down the undulating beach, with the bay and the peninsula to his left, and the forest to his right, Max didn't mind that he was alone. He enjoyed the silty sensation of wet beach-sand between his toes as he walked just beneath the low berm. He enjoyed watching the swarms of cockroaches run away from his impending steps as he teased them on the rocks between the berm and the palm-forest. He tried to ignore the

disappointing debris of dried seaweed that littered the backshore after he passed the small settlement. Eventually, the foreshore seemed just a little too wet, and one too many breakers wet his shins with one-too-many showers of salty hydration. The sun was nearing its zenith, so he waltzed over to the shade of a tree to change out of his travel-clothes. Lupe was off taking care of business away from the exposed beach, and they had only seen a few women since they left the port area behind them, so he stripped naked with little fear of exposure.

It was probably already too late, but he smeared SPF 45 over his cacao-white skin. Lupe, who was out of sight in the brush on the other side of the rocks, taking care of feminine needs, had told him the conventional wisdom that the salt in the seawater would help stave away infection. And yet that same conventional wisdom would tell him about the pain caused by “pouring salt in fresh wounds.”

The cinnamon-and-sugar sand was a refreshing new texture underneath Max’s feet after being in wet leather for so long. The water was a sparkling azure. The salt stung the shallow abrasions the canvas of his sandals and pack had left on his feet and shoulder, but the water was 75 degrees, so he was pleasantly distracted from his pain. The warm saline solution cleared his pores and massaged his sore muscles. Max’s cilantro-and-garlic burps were fewer and farther between, which meant he was going to need to eat again before long. For now, though, he would enjoy this remote paradise. It was perfect, save for the kelp dirtying up the white sand between him and the brush that was giving Lupe her privacy.

During summer vacations at Lake McConaughy as a child, Max would watch his older cousins play and splash and get angry and laugh and cry in the water, while he sat beneath the spruce and the cottonwood and the poplar, in a nest of pines and crunchy brown leaves. They weren't the exciting leaves from autumn that were pretty colors that you could pile up and dive into. No, they were old and black and brown, and occasionally he found earwigs or centipedes crawling on him, and he tried to be a brave boy, and he tried not to care, and he tried to brush them off nonchalantly—while inside he was a Chihuahua, running from a Rottweiler.

The first time Max got an erection was sitting on those dead leaves. He was watching his cousin George, who had surprisingly tan skin for a Kozlowski. George also had dark hair and sinewy arms and broad, rounded shoulders. Max watched as George took off his shirt and run splashing into the lake. Maybe his penis was trying to be bigger and stronger like his cousin George, he thought.

Lupe came back out of the brush. Luckily, only Max's head was above the water. He stayed crouched as he moved back to the rock where he had left his backpack and clothes. He put on a white shirt to cover his exposed shoulders and a quick-dry bathing suit.

Rejuvenated and reunited, they started walking again, hoping to find a better beach around the bend. They rounded the corner of an outcropping, the Pride Rock of boulders, jutting out over the slippery rocks under the water. There, spread out below them was a hidden resort like one they had dreamed of finding: on the left, the water was turquoise and aquamarine. In front was a literal church on a literal hill. At the bottom of

the hill was a dock that went out past the shallow turquoise into the violet waves. On the right there was a place to rent surfing equipment, a bar, and a *barraca*, a sort of Brazilian restaurant-bar, only 30 meters from where they stood.

Lupe wanted to take pictures from up at the church. Max looked longingly at a fish that an old wrinkly man was eating at the *barraca*. He looked like what Max imagined Portuguese sailors to look like, complete with a cataract-covered left eye.

To the sailor's right was a much younger man, maybe 30 years old, who had dark ebony skin. He seemed to be dry, but was wearing nothing but a Brazilian Speedo, a *sunga*. He was at least six feet tall and 230 pounds. He had pronounced *trapezii* framing his neck, and bulging *latissimus dorsi* keeping his football-sized biceps from resting at his sides. Gills seemed to form on the sides of his torso when he interwove his fingers and stretched upward.

The younger man invited Max to sit next to him. As Max looked down to be seated, he couldn't help but notice the man's penis clearly outlined through his *sunga*. Max tried his best not to continue to steal glances down as he inquired about ordering food and beer. The man's bloodshot eyes looked gleeful as he responded between the gap in his upper row of teeth that the owner was his uncle, the weathered man now pouring fish bones into the trash can. The ebony-skinned man asked Max if his wife would also be hungry, and Max responded that yes, his *amiga* would probably want some food too.

Lupe got back from taking her pictures and they were served a small plate of rice and beans. The wrinkled old man apologized that there had been no fresh catches, so that

and beer were all he had. Lupe asked if they had any water as well, as she reminded Max that they would get dehydrated if they drank nothing but alcohol.

At the end of their meal, Max fumbled through his camera case, flashing his large bills until he found the R\$20 to pay for their spread. They thanked the old man and collected their things, heading toward the water.

While Lupe made herself at home sunbathing on her blanket next to a retaining wall on the sand, Max went all the way to the waterfront to bath in the brine. The sun was so bright, reflecting off the water and sand, that Max had to squint to look at the city across the bay or up at Lupe, even though he was wearing his Ray-Bans.

Before long the dark-skinned man approached Lupe and Max got out of the water to see what was going on. The man was holding a sea urchin in his hands, the black orb and purple spines sharply outlined against his pink palms. He was offering to lend them his snorkeling gear so they could see these beautiful creatures in their natural habitat under the waves.

Max and Lupe hesitated, but when they asked him how much money he wanted for them to rent his gear, the man only laughed. He just wanted to share the experience with them. But, as he said this specifically to Lupe, he licked his lips.

Max agreed, but Lupe declined on account of the fact that she didn't know how to swim. Max put on the gear, slid into the water, and saw angel fish that were as big as his head and yellow tuna with electric blue stripes. He didn't see any fish that looked like characters in *Finding Nemo*, but he saw just enough sea urchins to be nervous about stepping on any coral without looking first.

It didn't take long for the man who owned the snorkeling equipment to get bored showing these things just to Max, so he told Max that he wanted to try to convince Lupe again. Max muttered something like "good luck with that," but didn't feel like arguing or belaboring the point. If she didn't want to, he would have to take "no" as an answer. She didn't need Max answering for her.

Surprisingly, Lupe acquiesced. He told her that he could hold her in the water; she needn't worry about not being able to swim. Max put his head back in the water, but all he could see was seaweed and some greenish-yellow moss-like substance. He thought Lupe and her human buoy had gone out farther than they needed to, but stopped trying to control everything and ambled back up the beach to their bags. He grabbed a book out of a backpack and read until Lupe came back.

Once they both came back to the coast and the *sunga*-clad guy was out of earshot, Lupe whispered to Max, "He tried to stick my hand down his *sunga* while we were out there. Isn't that funny?"

Max recoiled. He tried to say something stern, but all that came out was, "Well, I guess we shouldn't go snorkeling with him again."

The pair collected their things and got ready to make their way back to the building where they had had their first island meal, the building with POUSADA written on it. They agreed that it was about time, after a full day in saltwater, sand and sweat.

Max approached the only water-taxi he could see to inquire about how much it would cost to get back to the POUSADA. The man with whom they had gone snorkeling

earlier got to the taxi first and talked to the boatman. Max couldn't hear what they said to each other, and before he reached them to find out, the water-taxi sped off.

The guy was still wearing nothing but a *sunga*. He told Max that the taxi driver was going to rip him off. There should be another taxi later in the day, and if Max waited, he and Lupe could get a ride for only R\$15, instead of the normal R\$50.

Lupe and Max insisted that they did not want to wait to get back to the POUSADA, so they asked the best way to go by foot. He suggested that they cut through the brush, but since they would probably get lost, they should go with him. Max didn't want to, but Lupe said she didn't feel like walking very far, and the man had said that way would be quicker, so they should let him guide them.

There was another guard at the only opening between the thick trees and shrubs of the brush. As they approached the guard, Max stepped in a deep sinkhole of mud, falling back. He tried not to think about the possibility of chicken and cat shit being in that puddle, especially since he had those abrasions where his canvas flip-flops had rubbed against his feet. It was cool, so he concentrated on that. Max limped and caught up to Lupe and the big Afro-Brazilian just in time to hear the guard saying that since it was a nature preserve, they were not permitted to enter. If this guy lives here, he should know that it is not permitted to go that way, shouldn't he? Max thought to himself. He also thought that the glare in the guard's eye was trying to tell him something, but he couldn't read it. So it was decided that Lupe and Max were going to re-trace their steps from that morning. Max said they knew the way, "You can stay here," he said to the man. "Relax

with your uncle.” But the man continued trying to help them. He said that the tides might have changed, that it was hard to get back to the POUSADA at this time of day.

Before he led them around Pride Rock, though, he told them to wait for him. He was going to double-check with his uncle about the tide.

He came back with a sleeveless yellow shirt in his hand. He hurried ahead and tucked it into the front of his *sunga*, “just in case.”

Along the way, Max decided to rinse the mud off of his feet. He fell behind, dragging his feet through the cool, shallow water. The Brazilian noticed, and graciously offered a choice area where they could sit down and take a break. Max just wanted to get to the POUSADA, take a nice long shower, rub aloe vera on his burnt skin, and fall asleep naked between the clean sheets of a real bed. Max tried to hustle to keep up, but kept falling behind.

At one point, the tide had indeed come in a ways. The only way forward, since the nature reserve was fenced off at this point, was to swim with their backpacks through the water, or to climb some ten-foot boulders. Their chaperone went ahead and lifted them up, all the way to the top of the boulder he had first scaled. He then knelt and clasped hands with each of them as he let them use his limbs as a support rope to rappel down the other side. Lupe and Max agreed that this part of the walk would have been impossible without his gracious help, and thanked him on the spot. He didn’t say “You’re welcome.” He also told them to stop speaking English; he didn’t like being left out.



They continued walking along in the sand, now at an easy pace, on a flat surface. Since there were no sharp shells or gravel here, Max could take off his canvas sandals and let the water lap at his foot-wounds. He fell back again.

The Brazilian started walking very close to Lupe, about 10 meters ahead of Max. They also were a little to the left, closer to the island flora, since they were not avidly rinsing their feet like Max was. He bent down to rub his extensor muscles on his lower shin, clenching his jaw to the pain on the tops of his feet, when he heard a scream.

Max glanced up, seeing the *sunga*-clad Brazilian hug Lupe from behind.

“*Não, desculpe*. I didn’t mean to scream. It was an accident,” she reassured him.

They turned, and Max saw that the man was holding Lupe tightly around the waist, holding her arms in with one hand and a serrated knife blade to her throat with the other. It wasn’t a hunting knife. It had an orange plastic handle, so it must have just been one of the dinner knives from his uncle’s *barraca* where they had eaten rice and beans a few hours earlier.

Max thought to himself that this could not possibly be happening to him again.

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A few years before, Max had been a foreign exchange student in Argentina. Before the start of his second semester, he took a trip to visit a buddy from the US in Córdoba, several hundred miles away from his host town. On his first night there, his buddy went home without him, and a few hours later, when Max finally decided to leave the party they had been at, he found himself waiting outside his friend’s house, waiting to be let in.

Two men passed by Max as he pressed the button to the left of the gate yet again. “Come on, Nick, come unlock the gate and let me in...” Max nonchalantly waved and muttered a “*Buenas noches*,” and smiled his brilliantly non-Argentine clean teeth. The black padded vest over a yellow t-shirt suggested that the one in front hadn’t been out all night, but was getting ready for sun-up.

They got to the top of the hill to Max’s right, and as he turned around to lean his back against the whitewashed gate, the paint chipping with each subsequent rainfall. They were now approaching from the left yet again, this time with Max pinned against the gate, looking across the street at the similarly darkened houses one street-width closer to City Center.

Max’s heart pounded in the occipital lobe of his skull when he realized they weren’t coming back to ask for his phone number, or say how well he had danced in the night club. His fight-or-flight instinct was leaning toward the latter option, but running would be futile. Anyone was more familiar with Córdoba than Max was: he had only arrived yesterday – no, it was after midnight. Two days ago. Fighting wouldn’t be an option. Max had quit karate when he was in elementary school before he ever even purchased the *gi* and was presented with a white belt. He had only joined because Jacob was going to go with him. Since Jacob’s mom couldn’t afford it, it wasn’t worth it to Max. Max might have gotten in to wrestling later, in middle school and high school. But alas, try as he might, Max’s twin could never convince him to join the wrestling team. What his twin didn’t know was that the fear of getting a boner while in spandex and rolling around with another guy wasn’t an irrational fear: it was a guarantee. So he didn’t

have any background in fighting, not to mention Max's 5'3" dwarf-stature, but elfin body proportions. Not to mention that even a blackbelt could have trouble when outnumbered 2-to-1.

Clearly Nick wasn't going to come to the rescue, if he hadn't come outside during the last half-hour of doorbell ringing. Calling out would only cause more confusion, since these two guys spoke Spanish better than he did, and would be able to convince any neighbor that they were in the right. And pressing the already tried-and-failed call button on Nick's security gate would probably just anger the muggers.

He couldn't decide if it was good or bad that he didn't have his cell phone on him. It was upstairs in this locked house with his luggage. One the one hand: he couldn't use it to call for help. Not like he could remember the emergency number anyway. On the other hand: he wouldn't have his cell phone stolen!

Max concluded that his best option would be to keep calm and accept the loss of the petty cash he had on his person, while keeping himself from bodily harm by managing the situation diplomatically.

When the vested assailant pulled out a handgun, the pounding through Max's nape and occipital plate slowed, rather than increased. He remembered a newscast about Buenos Aires muggings: guns that are used are hardly ever fired. The assailant correctly assumes that everyone will obey him while he brandishes the ultimately fatal weapon. Max sighed in relief that he was destined to be safe. Besides, it would have been stupid to fight back at this point, so at least he didn't have to feel guilty about not having Karate or wrestling training. Even the strongest man in the world is vulnerable to a bullet.

Mr. Puffy Vest confirmed his hesitancy to utilize his weapon by saying, “*Tranquilo, chabón. Si te cooperás, no te vamos a lastimar.*” Apparently, they would not hurt Max as long as he cooperated. As his accomplice put a cheap, dollar-store pocketknife to Max’s wrist, Max could only hope he would keep to his promise.

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Back on the beach on the *Ilha dos Frades* in Bahia, Brazil, the man had a serious look on his face. He had seemed so eager, so nice before. He had smiled a lot. He had graciously shared his snorkels and snorkeling masks with them. He had even helped them across those huge boulders a few minutes ago. They had put their entire weight in his hands.

It was almost comical the way his bloodshot eyes bulged; they bugged out of his face. He directed with his nose that Max go up, into the brush.

Max’s thoughts raced with how he should stop this man. Throw sand? Kick him in the nuts? But all of his vulnerable places were covered by Lupe.

He didn’t even make Max give him his bag. He had Max walk up a mud path in the woods, just far enough to be out of sight of the beach. Still holding on to Lupe’s arms with one hand, the knife with the other, he motioned with his chin for Max to sit among the dead leaves. He ordered him to look away.

And look away Max did. He heard and, in vain, tried not to interpret the fapping sounds behind him. There was some leaf-rustling, but it didn’t sound like they had taken much time to remove any clothes. Max found himself wondering what exactly he was forcing her to do.

The man reiterated his command that they better not scream. Max's throat tasted too much like bile, and was too dry for him to do anything useful with it anyway.

Max heard Lupe implore, "*Posso mudar o meu braço?* Can I move my arm? I swear I'm not trying to fight against you, it's just that my arm is on a branch or something." She justified every action, every movement. She called out to Max several times, telling him that everything was fine, everything was okay.

Max thought to the condoms he had in his bag. Why did he bring those? Was he thinking of possibly experimenting with Lupe sometime this weekend? Did he think he would have a shot sleeping with one of the natives of the island? He should demand that this man wear one, at least. But he kept his mouth shut. It wasn't like the guy was going to negotiate with them.

After an eternity of leaf-rustling, Max finally heard Lupe's voice. "*O quê você quer? Quer dinheiro?* Max, how much money do you have?" And just like that, they handed over R\$150, and were free.

Before letting her go, the man pulled Lupe in and kissed her on the cheek with his lips puckered and parted. "*Tchau, meu amor,*" he said, and turned to walk toward the barraca where they had first met him.

Max looked down at his feet. They were bleeding. The sun slanted down at a steep angle from just above the forest on the north-western coast of the bay. Everything had a dark blood-orange tint to it.

## Part Three

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They checked Lupe's watch, and noticed it was just past 4. Hopefully they could make it back to the port area by 5. They would have ferries running from 9 to 5, just like normal North American business hours, right? They ran back to the harbor, and literally did catch the last ferry back to the mainland. The sun set as they rode the ferry back, not adding much color to the sky, aside from a blood-red line along the horizon, like a gashing fissure between heaven and earth.

It was dark on the entire bus ride from Madre de Deus to the hospital in Salvador.

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On the way, Lupe and Max tried every SAI number they knew. The one English-speaking staff member was away at a conference in the United States, so when they finally got ahold of Bruna (after half a dozen or more calls, even to their professor of Brazilian Studies, leaving a voicemail everywhere), they yelled at her in a Portuguese the whole bus could understand, “ WE GOT ROBBED! WE ARE NOT REALLY OKAY! MEET US AT THE HOSPITAL!”

In the end, it took an extra couple of hours to get Lupe the help she needed. In Brazil, it was the police station, not the hospital, that had rape kits. They had to take taxis from the hospital to the police station. Then they were given a bunch of grief because the crime happened outside of that municipality's jurisdiction. They were supposed to have reported it on the island, ostensibly. *Yeah, to whom?* Max thought to himself. It's not like that was an easy situation to explain in one's third or fourth language, and nobody on that godforsaken island would have spoken English. And they hadn't seen a police station there, just the Environmental and museum guards. And had they been able to find one in Madre de Deus, who knows what would have happened to them when they got lost in *that* crime-ridden city.

They had an amusing circular conversation when it was time to take down Lupe's information. "Lupe" was short for "Guadalupe," but the name on her passport, the legal name they would need for their legal reports was "Coatlaxopeuh."

"It means 'the one who defeated the snake,'" she whispered to Max. "But Mexicans can't even pronounce it, let alone Americans. How would I explain how to properly say it to Brazilians? Besides, I've gone by 'Lupe' all my life."

Max got very defensive when they were interrogated about the crime. He kept feeling like they were accusing *him* of the rape, or not protecting his female comrade enough.

In the end, he was sent home earlier than Lupe. He asked everyone involved several times that she would get all of the care she needed, that there would be no

permanent damage. They re-assured him “Yes,” but they would need to wait on knowing about anyone’s HIV status.

HIV!? Holy hell, this better not give her a life-threatening condition!

He only calmed down when he was able to practice French with one of the female police agents, while Lupe was lauded for not showering immediately, and asked if they could keep her panties. Why in the world could the police here speak French and not English or Spanish? God, if he could just start blabbing in Rioplatense Spanish, Max probably would have felt thousands of times better.

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Max opened his left eye and noticed the sky starting to change from black to navy to gunmetal to lead to dull silver. He sat up, his bed creaking like a stew of rusty springs, even though he was fairly certain it wasn’t much more than a plank of particle board.

He reached his arm out, still lying down, and slid open his closet door, scraping the wood of the door against the wood grove frame. It didn’t have any wheels to facilitate the opening process. He didn’t bother to get off of the bed as he grabbed a shirt from his stack of cleanly washed laundry and slipped one on, now sitting up. He also didn’t bother to re-fold the three that had been stacked on top of it, and now cascaded off the shelf to join his shoes at the bottom of the closet. He put his bare feet on the cool, dusty wooden floor and walked to the kitchen.

He put two eggs in the tea kettle and set it to boil. He made enough coffee for three people, and went back to the bathroom to relieve himself. Seeing as Ernani’s door



was closed (and Ernani was presumably still asleep), Max didn't bother to close the bathroom door as he pulled his penis through the opening in his boxers and his unbuttoned pajama pants. He could see the closed door through the gap in the ajar bathroom door as his bladder emptied a rushing stream of apple juice through his urethra into the toilet bowl. He shook, getting a semi-erection in the process, and glanced sadly down that he must now tuck his glans back under the layers of cotton. He pressed the flushing button in the wall above the toilet and walked past the sink out into the hall, turned left back toward the kitchen, and left again. There were no *papagaios* on the balcony to his right this morning as he walked through the doorjamb, into the room, the ant-trail still where it had been last Saturday. He fought them off for a cookie from one of the red-lidded jars on the counter.

Max dutifully ate the flatulent-smelling papaya that his host father cut up for him each day to breakfast on the following morning. He also microwaved the last two boiled sweet plantains that were left in the fridge, before settling down to his go-to meal of a half of a hard-boiled egg sliced lengthwise on half of a roll, sliced lengthwise.

He ambled back to his room and pulled out a small paperback left by the previous inhabitant. Despite his two cups of coffee, Max fell back asleep while reading this depressing memoir written by the Brazilian father of a kid with Down syndrome.

When he awoke, his host dad's door was open, but the master bedroom was vacant. It was a Wednesday, so Conceição wouldn't be over until four-thirty or later to make dinner. As it was barely 9:30, Max would have the apartment to himself for awhile.

He retrieved his laptop from its waterproofed location in his closet and set it up on the nightstand next to the television so he could plug it in to the one modem cable in the house. In order to do so, he needed to move Ernani's silver monster of a Dell, and almost dropped it as he placed it on the glass surface of the wicker-bamboo coffee table between his seat and the immaculately white leather couch.

When his Toshiba finally booted up he found no new emails on his school nor personal email accounts. He went back to his room and retrieved his digital camera from his blue single-shoulder pack. His bull horn knife and the condoms fell out, which he left on the self and floor where they respectively landed as he unzipped his camera and removed his SD card, leaving the device itself in its case, which he tossed unceremoniously on the unused bed by the window in his room. There were no longer any Brazilian bills to cushion its landing on the particle wood, so it made a rather loud *thunk*. A bird took off from the tree outside his window.

After uploading the pictures from the island, he created another folder of just photos that were representative of the route they took with the man from where they had eaten rice, beans and beer that day, to where he left them and they ran for the docks. All of Max's pictures were of the way going south toward the *barraca*, but he tried to order them to show the way up, north to the docks.

After a little while he didn't want to do this task any more. He could continue it when he met up with Lupe and they prepared these photos and whatever else the police asked for. He figured that since unlike his dad back at home, Ernani knew nothing about

computers, he could look at all the porn he wanted here. The only people that would know would be Ernani's internet provider.

He clicked around a little, but quickly got bored of this expression of freedom, in addition to feeling extremely self-conscious, since he knew of no way to close all of the curtains and draw all of the blinds on the windows behind him. Especially the huge glass doors that led to the balcony.

For a third time that morning, Max found himself in his bed. This time he was naked. His curtains were closed. He began to rub his hands up and down his thighs. On his chest, from his armpit to his nipple, nipple to navel. After scratching his belly button, he traced his other hand up to the shoulder opposite. When his right hand finally started stroking his penis, his penis hardly stirred.

He caught a glimpse of the fallen condoms and thought, *Well, those useless pieces of shit got no use yesterday. I might as well use them now.* After ripping open a package and trying futilely to force it on his stubbornly flaccid penis, (*You didn't need so much coaxing on the beach yesterday, now did you?*), the reality of the previous days' events overcame him and Max gave up his pursuit. Instead, he vomited in the toilet.

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In the weeks that followed, Max often found himself waking up in the morning thinking about the moment when the man had turned around, completely coiled around Lupe, when he first saw the knife. He fantasized about what might have happened had he reached down and grabbed some sand and hurled it at him. Or had he splashed saltwater in his face. Or if he had just run. Occasionally these scenarios played out in his head even

worse than what actually happened, but usually they resulted in an escape, or coming back with an army of villagers with pitchforks to pry him off her body.

The worst was when Max's thoughts went to the worst possible result of fighting back. If he hadn't frozen, if he hadn't become "complicit," if he had fought back instead of acquiescing to whatever the menace wanted, these grim flashbacks resulted in an alternate reality version where he could see blood pouring out of her shredded neck, her exposed jugular sawed into with his serrated luncheon-knife.

He found himself lost in a sea of "What if...?"

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SAI had to go through the process of reporting the incident, since they had informed the program of the incident (ironically, in an attempt to get Peter Pedreiro, the only person who spoke both English and Portuguese well enough to help them that they knew; he was in the United States at an SAI conference at the time).

They begged the program not to let their parents know. They did not tell their parents themselves yet. There was no point in making their parents worry uselessly. Max almost opened up to one of his video game buddies...and then thought better of it. Why make them worry needlessly, as well?

What Max did do was ask his family back at home to send him another jar of peanut butter. They sent him the biggest jars he had ever seen. He didn't share them with anyone, and finished both off by himself.

\*\*\*

Max's spine tingled as Felipe looked over his shoulder.

“Posso ajudar?”

“Não pode. Sou eu que te cozinha, né? Então, faça o que faria si eu não estivesse aqui.”

“Pois... eu estaria *em cuero*...”

“Fique em cuero então!” Max didn’t really want Felipe to take off all his clothes, he was just angry and frustrated that they were discussing what Felipe was to do with his time, and not letting Max concentrate on shredding the chicken and preparing a tomato-basil sauce. What was really irking him was that he couldn’t use his kitchen back at home. He was a good cook like he had promised Felipe, sure. But that was when he had access to ample counter space, a flat-top stove with four viable burners, a plethora of pots and pans of different sizes, sharp knives, cutting boards... Here, he was stuck with a counter, sink and stove which altogether were about the size of his desk back in Colorado. “Me deixa cozinhar em paz, então?”

There was a pause in which Max felt marginally guilty for yelling, but when he looked up from his minced basil, he didn’t see hurt puppy dog eyes, but instead Felipe’s eyes seemed to communicate a ravenous appetite.

“Vou tomar um banho.” And he took off his shirt forcefully and stomped past the stove, through the doorjamb into the bedroom and out of Max’s sight. Max heard the shower water turn on and then the sound of piss pouring into the toilet bowl. The sounds were so loud and close that Max was fairly certain Felipe had left the bathroom door open.

Moments later, Felipe appeared in the doorway again, staring at Max. This time his eyes weren't so much hungry, as begging for scraps at the dinnertable. He was wearing nothing but the towel around his waist.

“Quando vai terminar?”

“Não sei não. Este maldito frango é grosso demais. Não está cozinhando. *Andá a ducharte, y ya será preparado cuando volvés.*”

He stood there, his elbow on the door jamb above his head, leaning against the doorframe, his hand bunched up eight inches below his belly button, holding the towel up. Max's irritation rose, but he sublimated that anger to cutting the tomatoes and yanked some rosemary leaves off of their stem and added them to the pot.

Lunch wasn't great, but it was edible. Felipe insisted that he didn't eat much not because it wasn't good food, but because he wasn't hungry (and he didn't eat much anyway). When Max finished his beer chasing each bite, Felipe gave him the rest of his own. By the end of the meal, the heat of the August day, the full belly and the extra beer made Max drowsy.

He tried to stutter something about needing to get home to sleep, but Felipe said, “Eu tenho uma cama aqui. Quer tomar *una siesta*?”

“Quero sim.”

Max didn't hesitate to take off his shoes and crawl into the king-sized bed, but he stopped at unbuttoning his tight jeans. He felt embarrassed to take them off all the way in someone else's house, someone else's bed.

Felipe said that he couldn't possibly be comfortable sleeping in his jeans and insisted he took them off. He then proceeded to lay down on the bed with Max. Max rolled over from his back to his left side, so Felipe was behind him.

Felipe put his right leg over Max's butt and legs and Max finally understood the hungry look in Felipe's eyes, the leaning on the door frame, the comments about "being naked if he were alone."

Max twisted around and decided to go for the kiss Felipe was obviously asking for, but quickly lost interest, putting his head back on the pillow. They kept their legs intertwined.

Felipe grinded his lower torso against Max's, and started grabbing for Max's navel. He dug his fingers into Max's boxers, and Max pulled away.

"Não quer fazer isto não?"

"Pois...eu achava que I came over for lunch, nothing else..."

"If you want to leave, that's fine..."

Max didn't have words in English to express how he was feeling, let alone in Portuguese. He had wanted to sleep with Felipe before, but he wished he had known the context when he came over. Why did people have to be so indirect about these things? Instead of saying, "Pay me back by coming over and cooking lunch for me," he should have said, "pay me back by sucking my dick," and then Max could have properly judged him as an asshole and paid him back in cash and avoided this whole situation. Or "you don't have to pay me back, it wasn't an expensive lunch, but I would like to sleep with

you,” and then Max could have said, “How sweet of you! I’d love to play tonsil hockey and grind bellies.”

In the end, Max just asked, “Você tem uma camisinha?” [Do you have a condom?]

They tried to get intimate, but didn’t seem to be physically compatible. Or at least, Max wasn’t motivated enough to make it work. In the end, Max got his siesta, lying naked next to Felipe, and then left in time for his 3:30 Brazilian Culture class.

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It was October 4<sup>th</sup>. Four days after Max’s 20<sup>th</sup> birthday. Two months after the incident. *It’s Ernani’s birthday*, he remembered. *I should go tell him happy birthday. Replace his water jug, give him some wine or sweets ... oh yeah, never mind. He’s diabetic.*

Going back and forth, trying to decide whether he should walk to Ernani’s house or his new host family’s house, he got caught up in a conversation with André and McKenzie. Before he knew it, it was dinner time and he was hungry. He shouldn’t go home and expect dinner at his host family’s house: they served dinner at 6 o’clock, and if you weren’t there, you snooze you lose. André suggested they eat on campus. Given his experience back in August with Felipe, he knew that would work. He also had cash on him this time, so he wouldn’t have to bum a couple of *reais* off of anyone.

In line, they met up with two of André’s friends. Max was curious how they met, and none of the three were every particularly clear on that account. One was tall, mahogany-toned skin, with a wide smile and big teeth. The other had long, greasy



chocolate brown hair split down the middle and curling up at the ears, and chestnut skin. The taller one had green eyes, despite his skin tone. The lighter-skinned one had dark chocolate eyes.

McKenzie participated in the conversation, and all five were very open about their queer affiliation: four gay men and one androgynous lesbian. The pair was introduced to Max as João and Eduardo. They sat on the north side of the table, elbow-to-elbow, while André and Max sat on the south side of the table, Max across from Eduardo, André across from João. McKenzie sat to the east of Eduardo, slightly marginalized from the sausage fest.

Both João and Eduardo flirted with Max throughout the dinner, but João was more overt and forward. Eduardo suggested his desire for a long-term relationship, and how he takes things slow.

As Max was leaving the dining hall, João pulled him back, behind everyone else. As soon as they left the canteen, his lips attacked Max's lips. Max went along with the kiss for only a beat, and then pulled away and walked toward the others. They asked what was taking so long. João responded to Eduardo, Max responded to André and McKenzie, both with a wink.

João walked right next to Max on the entire walk home. Max made sure that André and McKenzie knew how to get him to his new residence, since he was unfamiliar with the walk home from campus to his new host family's house. They all exchanged numbers along the way. Before João split ways with André, McKenzie and Max, Eduardo

on his hip, he asked Max if Max wanted to “drink açai” together that upcoming Friday (it was Tuesday). Max said he’d think about it and text him before Friday.

André and McKenzie asked him “What was there to think about?” as soon as Eduardo and João were out of earshot.

“ I didn’t want to seem to eager.”

They laughed.

Max met up with João, saying to meet him at the açai joint closest to his own apartment at 6 o’clock sharp. Max was there at 5:55, when the sky was already streaked with golden altocumuli clouds. By 6:10 there was no sign of João, so Max ordered a beer and texted *On your way?* João responded with an excuse about class going late. He got there 15 minutes later and they ordered their icy fruit dishes. João paid for all of it, including Max’s beer from before João had arrived.

As soon as Max was done with his açai, João gathered up all of their used beer cans and disposable açai bowls and threw it away. He reached his hand out for Max to grab, and said, “Where to next?”

Max said, “You are the one who’s from around here. You tell me.”

“Campo Grande?”

Max remembered there being a big, beautiful plaza in that neighborhood. He was unsure about going to a gated park at night, but nodded his head.

When they got there, Max remembered what else Campo Grande was known for, as soon as he saw all the neon lights. Next to the plaza was the symphony hall, in the

middle of Avenida 7 de Setembro and another major city road. Between the Symphony Hall and the police fortress that overlooked the bay there was a row of hotels that one rents by the hour.

“Quer entrar?” João offered, gesturing at the bar on the ground level of one of these establishments.

“I don’t think so. I think my beer is hitting me. I’ll walk you home, though.”

João seemed disappointed, but when they got to his dorm hall, he insisted they keep on walking. It was completely dark by now. Max was a little nervous, but asked if João was going to walk him home. “Indeed,” he responded.

João texted him in the middle of Galician class that week if Max wanted to go out again the next Friday. Max responded, “I’d love to, but I’m going to Rio this weekend.” Which was completely true. His program had organized a group trip, paid in full by the program fees, to Rio de Janeiro. Max’s dad had even promised him a birthday gift of paying for one extra activity during the trip.

While Max was in Rio, he used his dad’s birthday gift to go paragliding over the city. It took a whole day, after waiting hours to get started, and then waiting hours for everyone else to finish (the wind started being dangerous as soon as Max had landed). But it was totally worth it.

After Max got back from Rio, João bombarded him with text messages. Max responded, and before he knew it, he was greeted with gifts and outings every day after Portuguese class. He got a potted plant of yellow daisies in front of all of his classmates

one day, which made him turn scarlet and drag João into an unused classroom to thank him all over his face (when he returned he told everyone that he was telling João to not give him gifts publicly). When they went out with the other students to the clubs, João bought him a rose from the man selling flowers on the bus ride out to Rio Vermelho. One day it started raining on Max's way into school. Squishing past an office that João was in, unbeknownst to him, on his way to Portuguese Culture class, João spotted him and gave him a dry set of clothes he happened to have in his office.

After João bought a pair of tickets to a Symphony, and then bought Max a whole bottle of his favorite Châteauf-du-Pape at the Orchestral Fine Cuisine restaurant afterward, Max finally agreed to go to Campo Grande with João. As soon as it was dawn the next day, however, he got up. João got dressed as soon as he saw Max trying to leave, and they left together. They walked toward their homes together, João arriving at his fraternity house first. Not long after, Max told João it was time to start seeing other people. Max said he was feeling “suffocated” or “smothered.”

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Max came out of Phil's room. He was wearing an orange-and-salmon sundress, a wig of Phil's maid's, Lupe's heels, and whatever lipstick had been plastered on his face before he went into the back room. He was hyper-self-conscious of the bulge between his legs where women have to worry about camel toe, but at least this apartment was chilled to freezing, so there was no fear of an erection.

He danced to “Man, I Feel like a Woman,” by Shania Twain and “It's Raining Men.” Everyone cheered.

Rodrigo walked in halfway through a song, and looked very confused. Some hands grabbed him and pulled him into the center. Max and Rodrigo danced provocatively together.

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Max had been promised by some of the students who had been hosted by SAI that they would take him to Beco das Artistas and other GLBT or queer hangouts in the city. A handful of them found places to stay beyond the typical extension of the study abroad program (since, after all, they didn't have to go back to their own universities in the States until August). Their time overlapped in many cases for a few days, and these few queer students were staying with their girlfriends and boyfriends for a month or more after their program ended.

By August 2<sup>nd</sup>, however, all had gone home to North America. But now Max was craving the nightlife—a release from his night terrors—more than ever.

Since nobody was going to take him, he finally decided to go on his own. One night, sitting at a bar out on the open street, outside the clubs, a certain gentleman caught his eye. He was taller, probably 5'11", dark black hair. His teeth weren't perfect, but not repulsive either. They were endearingly irregular. He had what looked like a permanent five-o'clock shadow. He had hazel eyes. Or rather, they had a two-toned effect, marbled like agate between jade and cinnamon. His skin was fairer than the average Brazilian's. He seemed to constantly smoke. A chain smoker, except only while he was outside.

Max approached him and offered him a menthol and to buy him a beer (Max had picked up smoking since August 2<sup>nd</sup>). One night his buddy Phil didn't have any cash and

was craving a smoke, so Max bought it for him. He then figured that since he paid for the pack, he should get some use out of it. Besides, he was told once that smoking helped calm the nerves and since he was jumpy all the time...). Max enjoyed this new camaraderie he had found recently through smoking together.

When the waiter arrived with the beer, the gentleman paid for it before Max had a chance to fish a few *reais* out of his pocket.

It turned out this agate-eyed man wasn't Brazilian at all. He was a Spaniard that taught literature (Portuguese and Spanish, but strictly European) at the Catholic University of Salvador, the institution that competed for students, faculty and grants with Max's placement, the Federal University of Bahia. He looked 30, tops. He said that he had been teaching here in Salvador for 4 years now, and had taught in Coimbra, Portugal for 10 before that. Max calculated that he must be at least five years older than he looked. His name was José (not HO-zay, but zho-ZAY), and he went by Zê.

As the night wore on, Max felt that the probability of seeing Zê's apartment was steadily increasing. However, the closer he felt he was getting to Zê, the more Zê seemed intent on getting him drunk. At first, Zê bought him a half-dozen beers while they talked and chatted with Zê's work colleagues and other friends of the older gentleman's. Then he bought him Cuba Libres and Caipirinhas when they moved inside to the dance party in the smaller of the two main nightclubs. It was like Zê wasn't reading any of Max's signals, that he was interested in him from the beginning, but instead thought he had to get Max drunk in order to take advantage of him. There was no need for advantage-

taking, as far as Max was concerned. He would have been willing before even the first beer.

Finally, as the sun was rising, they started walking out of the nightclub, toward their apartments. They had said goodbye, but soon discovered that their apartments were both eastward, along the waterfront from the club. So they ended up just walking together, which did more to ease Max's nerves than an entire pack of Menthols could have.

The sky was a pallid salmon color from the eastern horizon, and hazy purple on the western horizon, showing where people were still celebrating late Friday night, rather than being forced to greet a hung-over Saturday. As they walked along the broken concrete of the boardwalk, the water to their left had dark lapis lazuli shadows, and crests that showed the worst wine-must reflections of the sky above. The sun should have been up, but was obscured by the Atlantic altostrati clouds. Zê must not have been taught the implications of cloudy weather and the general preferability of azure skies, for he insisted that it was the ideal time of day to go swimming. Max protested that he didn't have the proper swimwear, but wished Zê luck. Instead of acquiescing to part ways, Zê tugged on Max's elbow, pulling him away from the beach into the nearest neighborhood.

He didn't exactly explain where they were going when Max asked, but said that not having a swimsuit was no excuse to not go swimming on a Saturday morning, and greeted a security guard who let them into a gate under a precariously architected apartment cluster of rooms, windows and balconies.

Zê's suitcase was packed and sitting by the front door, as if Zê hadn't fully unpacked in the four years he had lived in Salvador. He carelessly rifled through carefully folded tee shirts, socks and underwear, procuring a Speedo decorated with neutral, but clashing, colors. He handed it to Max, and headed up the stairs, gesturing for Max to refrain from following him up the spiraling metal stairs, like the ones one might see in a professor's office, leading up to more bookshelves, instead of in an apartment leading from the kitchen to the bedroom like these ones were.

Max felt shy, like he should change in the bathroom. He didn't know where the bathroom was, and didn't want to obnoxiously yell upstairs to ask, so he patiently waited for Zê to return.

Zê returned, fully dressed, with a much more tastefully designed Speedo in hand. Instead of having changed upstairs, and instead of going to the bathroom to change, he stripped down all of his clothes between Max and the apartment door. It was less of a striptease and more of a way of bragging how fast he could change outfits. He didn't fold his clothes, but threw them on the heap crawling out of his suitcase. His penis and scrotum bounced with the speed and energy he exerted performing this exercise. Finally, he snatched his Speedo back up off the floor and hopped in to them. With another vertical jump he hoisted the suit up both legs simultaneously. Finally, he pulled the front forward, toward Max, with his left hand as he carefully repositioned his junk with his right hand. He then snapped the Speedo back to his navel, and casually walked to the kitchen to check whatever leftovers he had left on the stove before going out the night before.



As if his actions were as normal as writing notes on the whiteboard before lecturing a class, he asked Max what the hell he was doing still in his street clothes. Hesitantly at first, and then excited by his first marginally exhibitionist performance, he took off his shirt, shoes and socks. He folded the socks together, stuffed them in one shoe, and set them by the armrest on the couch. He folded the shirt and then placed this on the armrest itself. He unzipped his pants, pulled them down like a kid who still lets his butt remain visible while using a urinal. He sat down on the sofa to finish the procedure, revealing a semi-hard phallus in the process. As he folded his boxers on top of his jeans, he found himself fully erect. He wasn't sure if he was relieved or disappointed that the kitchen wall obstructed him from the view of the stove.

He put on the Speedo. His unhooded glans peeped out from behind where the cords hung for him to tighten the swimwear to his body. He always wore board shorts while swimming back in Colorado, as well as every previous beach experience here in Brazil. He didn't know how to solve this problem. He wanted to go into the kitchen and have Zê help him get dressed, but he also wasn't sure if Zê was just being friendly in his offer to go swimming, and would find this too forward, to slutty.

Finally, he tiptoed around the support column, onto the linoleum of the kitchen, and said, "Because you got undressed in front of me, now I can't keep dressed. I don't know how to keep my dick in my pants."

Zê looked up from what he was doing (what he had been doing in basically Spandex briefs) and laughed. "Come on, have you never worn a *sunga* before?"

"No."

“Let me show you.” Zê set down his ladle and spatula, and gently pulled Max’s Speedo out. He gently grasped Max’s penis in all five fingers, and tucked it to one side, and released Max’s Speedo. You could pretty much see Max’s erect phallus through the tight nylon, but at least all of its flesh was covered as it made a 45° angle toward his left hip.

Before long, both Speedos were off again anyway. By the time they got to the beach, it was no longer dawn and they were pretty full. They quickly lost interest in the tepid seawater, and returned to Zê’s apartment. Zê wouldn’t let Max go home until he washed the sand off of Max’s body in his tiny shower.

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Standing outside the SAI offices after Brazilian Culture class, there were several groups of students chatting, shooting the breeze, and casually deciding on different plans for later that night. The veggies all decided to go grab a vegetarian, pay-as-much-as-you-can-afford burrito on their way home.

As Max walked away from the health-nut dinner planning, he heard from the conversation of “dudes” that he was approaching, “When we go to the club tonight, you know those girls in booty shorts that show off half their butt cheeks are just asking for it. So I’m prepared to give it to them!”

Max’s torso sprang forth with emotion. He had the desire to speak up, but silenced himself, weighing the importance of letting Lupe control her own story against the importance to speak out against this dismissive, patriarchal attitude toward this violent crime. Just as he had decided he should let it go so Lupe could go home without

“outing” her survivor status, she yelled,

“Gaetano, I am sick and tired of your bullshit. That is not something to joke about. Women have a right to their own bodies, to decide what happens to them. Rape is not a laughing matter.”

Gaetano retorted that it was pontificating feminists like her that made such a big deal about rape that gave everyone a bad taste in their mouth when it came to gender equality. She should just suck it up, it was just a joke anyway, he continued.

Max quietly said that he though Lupe had a right to her opinion, and while neither needed to be yelling, Gaetano was much less in the right to do so. He then took Lupe’s hand and led her to the bus stop.

On the way, she started apologizing, but he shushed her, saying that he himself should have spoken up sooner.

Later that night, Max texted Phil, asking him if anyone was planning on going out. Phil said that Gaetano and some of the boys were going to meet up at Gabriel’s apartment, pre-game with some joints, beers and cigarettes, and probably go clubbing at Porto da Barra or in Rio Vermelho.

Rather than apologizing, Gaetano confronted Max. “You two have a reason to be defensive, don’t you? Something happened on that island, when I was at Morro de São Paulo, and the hippies all went to Cachoeira. Tell us why you don’t go out at night anymore.”

Before Max had a chance to weigh the options of his loyalty to Lupe or his own right to tell his own story, it was all pouring out of him.

Afterward, he put out his joint on the table in front of Gaetano, stood up, and said he was going to walk home. He didn't exactly feel like going out tonight after re-living that experience.

After finally having told his story, Max slept better than he had since July. He had neither flashbacks nor nightmares that night.

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After getting home to the United States for the next semester, however, he would often get the question: "How was Brazil?"

He came up with a quick response the first time he was faced with the question, and stuck with it each time hence. "Well, I lived a 5-minute walk from the beach, and my host family prepared fresh Passion fruit and pineapple juice for me every morning. So you can imagine."

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For the first time in eighteen months, Max was at the beach. He had gone to visit his brother in Puerto Rico. He sat on an igneous rock formation, with air holes that let light in to the grottoes below. In front of him, the places where escaping gasses had created pockets as this boulder had cooled let water in. The waves poured grottoes and chambers, becoming white as the pumice-rough rocks broke the water and allowed nitrogen and oxygen gasses to mix in with the brine, which then rhythmically emptied out a beat before filling in again with the styrofoam-white air-encrusted brine. Max looked out to the horizon, where he could see the turquoise and aquamarine waters of the coral

shelf dropped off to a marine trench. A line separated these warm, light blues from the distant cerulean and indigo of the deeper ocean waters.

His cell phone rang in his pocket. Lupe Zengotita was the name on the screen.

“Hey Lupe,” said Max.

“I go by ‘Coa’ now.”

They chatted for maybe half an hour. Apparently she had finally cried a few days ago. She cried for the first time in a year and a half. He should go down and visit her in New Orleans for Mardi Gras, she said. “As soon as I have my big-boy job.”

When he hung up, Max got up and walked back to his brother’s house. It was time to start his next adventure.

## Afterword

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I don't tell anyone about what happened, because I don't want them to see me as damaged goods. I don't want people to pity me. And yet, I find myself in a Catch-22, where I want everyone to know my story in a general sense, because I want people to realize that rape is prevalent, it still exists, it happens every day. Rape jokes are a problem because a survivor is *always* in earshot, statistically speaking. Rape is not something to be trivialized.

One of the challenges of writing the rape scene, aside from how horrific it is for the writer to re-live that moment every time he sits down to edit, expand, change and modify how it is written in his manuscript, is that I was trying to show how arbitrary the choice was between which victim to use to demonstrate his power and control.

Counselors will often let a rape survivor know that the event had little to nothing to do with sex. Rape happens because the rapist wants to demonstrate his power in a male-dominated world. He has been conditioned by his society to think that asserting himself in this violent sexual act is one way to establish that masculinity.

Both Max and Lupe were looking for adventure that week. They were also both looking for isolation, for an opportunity to get away from the main beaches, away from

the crowds. They had no idea that they were putting themselves in *more* danger by doing so.

He could have just as easily raped Max. If Max had been born with the female body he often wished he had, as evidenced through some of the backstory throughout the work, it would have been him that day. If Lupe and Max were two women, it would have been both of them. Even with Max as a male, he could have forced him to perform fellatio or to anally rape him rather than vaginally rape her. He didn't, however. Either because he thought that sex with a man would emasculate him, or because "stealing another man's woman" was more enticing to him (assuming he viewed Lupe as a romantic partner of Max's), he chose to take control of her. Maybe it has to do with nothing more than the sexualization of her breasts in the media that he consumes.

On that beach on August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2011 I wanted to be a hero. I even envied the real-life Lupe, because in my eyes, she was my hero. In a way, she saved my life, or at least a certain amount of my physical wellbeing, by providing what I could not. "She gave herself to save me."<sup>3</sup> I would have gladly taken her place, at least so I thought at the time, and in the months directly following the incident. However, I was not given that option. In writing this, I finally have my chance to be a hero. My agency was taken from me that day, but I now have the ability to be an agent, an actor, a subject in the story of that day. "If you make the truth survive, however terrible it is, you are retaliating against

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<sup>3</sup> Ninh, Bao. *The Sorrow of War*. Trans. Phan Thanh Hao. Frank Palmos, ed. New York: Riverhead Books, 1993. p. 191.

inhumanity, in the only way the powerless have.”<sup>4</sup> Directly following the rape, the first thing the rapist told us was that we needed to not tell anyone else. He threatened to kill us if we went to the police. Several of my therapists since this incident have told me that this is a common tactic that rapists use to further remove agency from their victims, furthering the evidence that rape is not a sexual act, but an act of power and domination. Often, rapists are given this silence, since society surrounds events like this with counterproductive tendencies of victim-blaming and filling the victim her- or himself with embarrassment, shame and remorse. By fighting against these agents that work to silence our voices from telling about our experience, I am taking the first step toward making a societal change to prevent it from continuing to happen in the future. “I believe stopping it means exposing the horror until the horror is conscious to everyone.”<sup>5</sup> Once we realize that rape is not an exaggerated trauma that only happens in extreme situations, and once we can prove to others how prevalent it is, people will be more motivated to work to eradicate this form of oppression for good. I am not only making sure that the world knows that it really happened, but I am also expunging my trauma from myself. “Literature of trauma is written from the need to tell and retell the story of the traumatic experience, to make it ‘real’ to both the victim and to the community. Such writing serves both as a validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatized author.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hynes, Samuel (1998-04-01). *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to a Modern War* (p. 269). Penguin Books. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Rizzuti, Terry (2011-08-04). *The Second Tour* (Kindle Location 299). Spinetinglers Publishing. Kindle Edition.

<sup>6</sup> Tal, Kali. *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*. New York and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Print.



Like I said in the Preface, sometimes this process of telling the story as it happened to me involves fiction. As Tim O'Brien states:

By telling stories, you objectify your own experience. You separate it from yourself. You pin down certain truths. You make up others. You start sometimes with an incident that truly happened ... and you carry it forward by inventing incidents that did not in fact occur but that nonetheless help to clarify and explain.<sup>7</sup>

Many of the events that follow the rape scene are completely fictionalized. However, they communicate real, possible ways of a victim coming to terms with what has happened to them, and making sure that sexual encounters they are involved in happen on their own terms. Max allows Felipe to become intimate with him not because Max was particularly interested, but because Max is so appreciative of the fact that Felipe gave him the option to decline. Max breaks up with João as soon as he is feeling an emotional connection with João. He is not yet ready to expose himself and make himself vulnerable after what happened on the beach. He gets involved with Zê way to quickly, so that he can re-assure himself that he is in control of the situation.

Like O'Brien, I think sometimes that "if I could ever get the story right" I could make sense out of what happened to me, what happened to her, what I witnessed. "If I could somehow recreate"<sup>8</sup> the events of August 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>, then maybe others could understand the importance of bringing down the patriarchy, of moving toward a world of gender equality (and maybe, perhaps, gender irrelevance). Like Kien in *The Sorrow of War*, I often wish that I "could shed all other needs of everyday living and concentrate all

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<sup>7</sup> O'Brien, Tim. *The Things They Carried*. Mariner Books. Kindle Edition. p. 152.

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, p. 80

[my] energies into writing.”<sup>9</sup> If I just wrote more words, more times, maybe finally I would be able to explain myself, and to explain that Lupe and Max were not naïve when they went to the beach: they just were taken advantage of when they were in a moment of vulnerability.

There’s a part of *The Things They Carried* where O’Brien is trying to exact revenge, not on the people that actually shot him, but on the poor medic who did a poor job helping him (since this medic was very green to real-life combat and real-life combat wounds). The emotion that O’Brien describes in trying to justify his actions is the reason that I was terrified of myself and needed to come home early from Brazil, the reason I thought I should write down my experiences, so I could either sublimate my trauma into something productive, that can change the world, or at least folks’ misconception about the prevalence of rape, or at least cathartically expunge it from my system and move on with my life. In his words, “There was that coldness inside me. I wasn't myself. I felt hollow and dangerous.”<sup>10</sup> For example, for a solid two months after the event, I would find myself distracted from whatever task was at hand, whomever was talking to me, whatever school assignment I was supposed to be doing at the time. I would find myself wasting hours fantasizing about going back to the island with a gun or a knife to do brutal things to the perpetrator’s body.

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<sup>9</sup> Ninh, Bao. *The Sorrow of War*. Trans. Phan Thanh Hao. Frank Palmos, ed. New York: Riverhead Books, 1993. p. 122.

<sup>10</sup> O'Brien, Tim (2009-10-13). *The Things They Carried*. Mariner Books. Kindle Edition.p. 197

“All those things [I] had once considered important ... suddenly seemed meaningless.”<sup>11</sup> I got wrapped up in fantasies of changing the past, of exacting vengeance, of preventing it from ever happening again to anyone ever. In moments without this mania, I am able to realize that these things are not possible, but when I think about writing down what happened to me as a first step toward making a positive change in the world, at least I know that I have “...some wonderful truth deep inside” me.<sup>12</sup>

The false answer that Max gives in response to the question, “How was your time in Brazil?” is reflected by other writers of trauma as well. For example, Kien in *The Sorrow of War* “avoided talking... to avoid suffering.” He kept his wartime trauma to himself, not only in the noble attempt to protect others from that eponymous Sorrow of War, but also because in re-telling of his painful past, he felt that he re-lived it.

O’Brien is helping me to realize that there is power in telling my story. It is often painful to re-live the trauma by recounting it. “But this too is true: stories can save us.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ninh, Bao. *The Sorrow of War*. Trans. Phan Thanh Hao. Frank Palmos, ed. New York: Riverhead Books, 1993. p. 74.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.* p. 76

<sup>13</sup> O'Brien, Tim (2009-10-13). *The Things They Carried*. Mariner Books. Kindle Edition.p. 213