



*Yvonne A. Pereira*  
*By the spirits Bezerra de Menezes*  
*and Camilo Castelo Branco*

# ON THE CANVAS OF THE INFINITE





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Yvonne A. Pereira

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*Translated by Jennifer Byers, Darrel W. Kimble and Marcia M. Saiz*



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*I was seized in spirit on a Sunday, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, “Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches”...*

*Revelation 1:10, 11*



PART ONE  
A SAD STORY

By the Spirit  
Adolfo Bezerra de Menezes

# 1

On a certain day in November of 1928, an unpleasant domestic incident led me to believe that life was very bitter; as a result, I felt unhappy and hapless. As I had been sternly reprimanded by my mother for the blasphemy I had uttered, the intensity of my displeasure grew and a flood of the bitterest tears erupted from my eyes, lending the scene an exaggerated air of drama, which, due to my lack of sense, I thought was appropriate. And yet – my God! – how insignificant were the causes of that annoyance, which today, as I peel back the thin veils of my memory in order to write these pages, I can scarcely remember, forgotten as they have been along the winding paths of nearly three decades...

However, deeply hurt at the time, I retired to my humble bedroom, whose large window overlooked the road that bordered the fertile fields of the Gammon Institute (an agricultural college), a notable establishment of higher learning that still exists in the town of Lavras, in the state of Minas Gerais, where I lived at the time. I leaned on the windowsill and contemplated the peacefulness of the sunny day. Far away on the bright green hills the trumpet trees<sup>1</sup> were in bloom, their soft, multicolored tones blending in with the landscape, whose horizon was broken by the zigzagging outline of the mountains. From the window I had a full view of the agrarian fields, where future agronomists often experimented with their agrarian knowledge – large straw hats on their heads, plough in hand, much like stalwart country folk crowned by the tawny rays of the sun; the pastures where the cattle grazed on the sweet, tender grass; the majestic avenues lined with Jabuticaba<sup>2</sup> trees laden with fruit in the orchards of the magnificent institute; the lithe bamboo, swaying with tender ingratiation at each soft stroke of the passing breeze scented with the essence of the trumpet trees; the melodious birds singing a marvelously orchestrated variety of songs: sublime arias, melodies, hymns

and harmonies reminiscent of a magnificent choir from the spheres of the spirit world, so grand was that concert, the intelligence with which they called out and were responded to, the splendid beauty of the inimitable tones and colors, engendered by the sublime talent with which creation had endowed them ... because Lavras is famous for its variety and quantity of birds...

My spirit, so at odds with nature's sweet richness, was slowly quieted down by the bucolic scene, which little by little wore down the rough edges with which my bad mood had surrounded my mind ... I felt the divine enchantment emanating from nature's harmony infiltrating my sense of feeling, dominating it, serenading it with the benevolent kiss of the majestic example ... As if by magic, I saw myself completely at one with that gentle nature, always so lovely and so good, expressing God's touch in the details laid out for the contemplation of the thinker! Those trumpet trees, the rich and generous crops in the distance, so protecting and friendly; the cattle and the birds, the tall, stately trees, the blue firmament and the radiant sun that embraced it all, lending it beauty and life – all these resounded in the folds of my being, as if enveloping me in a fraternal embrace. An unusual harmony flowed through my arteries, at the same time soothing my troubled heart and strengthening my mental waves, which were predisposed to a grateful communion with the Divine! I recalled Francis of Assisi, who, illuminated by his knowledge of higher science, felt a brotherly communion with all of creation's manifestations: with the winds and the sun, with the waters and the animals, with the roses and with the trees! Thus, as I mentally recited the Hymn to the Sun, it rose like a prayer that my spirit offered to the Supreme Idealizer of so much magnificence...

Suddenly, a strong magnetic current poured out the irresistible attraction of its superior powers on my soul's faculties...

I sensed that a venerable spirit, coming from realms bathed in love and in light, was calling me to something important, and that it would not be permissible to ignore that honorable invitation...

My corporeal envelope felt stiff, as if gentle signals from liberating death were singing alleluias to my spirit, desirous of a grateful return to its spirit home ... Hence, I went to my bed and fell asleep under the strong spell of a magnetic slumber...

I woke up immediately, but in my spirit body, fighting to detach myself from the corporeal burden, which seemed to hold me with invincible chains ...

I managed to partially detach myself from it after a mortifying, painful struggle!

Once in possession of the freedom won through magnetic sleep, my first thought was of my mother. I looked for her inside the house and found her seated at her sewing machine, pensive and sad as always. I kissed her forehead lovingly and asked her to forgive me for the trouble I had just caused her; I caressed the white curls of her hair ... But of course she could not see me ... Irresistibly attracted to the view outside, I remember that I climbed over the windowsill next to where my mother was working and went out, hurling myself through light-filled space, like a feather upheld by a magnet keeping it balanced in the atmosphere...

An uncontrollable joy sang with ineffable happiness in the depths of my being ... The beauty of the view I had contemplated moments earlier with my physical eyes was now sublimated before my spirit's eyes ... I approached the gentle cattle grazing peacefully, held one by the horns, and with the kindly poet-saint of Assisi in mind, I said to it, "You are all my lesser brothers," whilst I repeated like the kindly servant of the Lord: "These trees, these birds, these trumpet trees – even that sun – are all my brothers before God!

The noble animal was startled and shook its large head: could it have seen my spirit?

Then ... nothing more except profound unconsciousness...

When my lucidity returned, I was soaring over the lovely bay of Botafogo, in Rio de Janeiro, where the undulating waters shimmered like liquid emeralds in the golden sunlight. I do not know what excellent fluidic-magnetic waves were protecting me, enveloping my spirit and vigorously sustaining it, balancing it in the air without threat of dropping it from the heights into the tenebrous bosom of the emerald abyss. Lively breezes arose from the water, imbuing my physical-spirit organization with a gentle coolness, like a healing tonic that benefitted it and replenished its spent forces, enabling it to acquire new, regenerating, health-distributing energies.

Possessed by unusual joy, I gave way to pleasurable laughter, happy with the indescribable freedom I was enjoying. I began to float like a leaf carried by the lively breath of the breeze: I danced, I twirled, I swayed, evoking the classical steps that I loved so much, to the sound of tunes that I remembered and sang in full voice; I descended until I touched the liquid bed of the waves;

I ascended, breaking through the air like a daring, winged seagull – clothes and hair fluttering gently in the breeze...

If stronger forces at times threatened to hurl me into the depths, I was immediately pulled up to the appropriate altitude – puppet that I was, stabilized thanks to the watch-care of some attentive spirit and its generous fluidic outpourings ... And so, fearless, unconscious even, I carried on in my extraordinary game with the lovely maritime breezes...

Suddenly, a snowy and vaporous silhouette subtly appeared, revealing that I had been accompanied the whole time ... I saw it in front of me, with its back to me. From time to time, undoubtedly through intuition, I could distinguish a male aspect in this spirit, because I could see by its indistinct contours that it had a venerable, very white and translucent beard. A profound reverence made me control my enthusiasm. I remained in an uncertain state between fear and veneration.

This is because that silhouette, which was hard to see amongst the generous blessings of the sun and the wholesome emanations of the ocean – was my diligent friend of many years, my beloved spirit helper, whom I had learned since childhood to revere as the apostle of the Spiritist Doctrine in Brazil, the same one whose protective and sincere radiations enabled me to work daily on the medical prescriptions at the “Lavras Spiritist Center,” where the seeds of the Good News were starting to germinate with rewarding promises for the future – after the noble figure of Augusto Jose da Silva, the unforgettable humanitarian doctor, cultivated the land with the benevolent plough of faith...

It was Bezerra de Menezes!

Could it be?

Why couldn't it if, as an apostle, he was to extend the fragrance of Christian Charity wherever the demands of the Lord's Vineyard should take him?

The translucent and beloved spirit began to move away from the water. I followed him, attracted by an irresistible magnetism, always just behind him, never by his side...

We glided along through the streets of Rio at the height of the second floor of an apartment building. The densely clustered houses of the old city spread out like a busy hive warmed as much by the fires of daily concerns as

by the blazing summer heat ... Sometimes my vision was momentarily granted rays of penetration – in spite of myself I was able to see inside some of the homes located at the level at which we were traveling. This caused me some anguish since I sometimes saw scenes that were less than edifying...

As we sailed along, I recognized the beach of Flamengo, whose calm waters the sun set ablaze with millions of golden reflections, multiplied by the dazzling and bountiful ebb and flow of the waves. I passed through Catete – the presidential district with its many, moving memories – and through Gloria ... I reached the city's center, Cinelandia, with its graceful layout representing the Praça Paris<sup>3</sup> and the indescribable blue of the ever-proud and seductive sea ... Now a cluster of narrow streets appeared, ablaze with the unbearable heat, stretching out before my feet in a strange carpet of rooftops and tiles, streets that today have mostly disappeared to make way for the construction of the magnificent Presidente Vargas Avenue; the old and cramped Central do Brasil<sup>4</sup> station, since at that time – 1928 – the regal construction of the current D. Pedro II station had not yet been envisaged...

The unexpected tour amused me no end.

I had never visited Rio before then, and it was only in 1930 that I was granted the satisfaction of reacquainting myself with the same places I had visited in my spirit body.

My wonderful guide let me have my way, involved as I was in my own observations. He made no comment at all. However, he did make it clear that he was taking me to a certain place for some ennobling enterprise, for there was no possibility that his plans simply entailed offering me a pleasant outing to merely while away the time. I understood him, even though I could not discern his intentions for me.

And now, stretching before our winged spirits' eyes was the endless ribbon of the railway lines from Central Station, with their polished steel gleaming in the sun like sinuous snakes, along which the suburban trains traveled all day amid clouds of smoke and the sharp shriek of whistles.

Lauro Müller, Sao Cristovao<sup>5</sup>... the Quinta da Boa Vista<sup>6</sup>, where it was said that Emperor Dom Pedro's venerable shade still wandered about...

Intrigued, I suddenly remembered a certain poem written by Castro Alves<sup>7</sup> when he found himself in an identical situation in one of his poetic fantasies, and which contained this line:

*“Where are you leading me, Divine Angel?”*

The recollection of the verse was meant as a question. The answer was not long in coming since, as if a powerful telepathic spark had intuitively told me where we were heading, I espied to the right and directly ahead, as though enveloped in shades of gray, hillsides covered with miserable, sordid hovels, stark examples of the many sores that even today tarnish the face of the capital<sup>8</sup>, which a witty poet chose to describe as “marvelous,” thereby heaping responsibility on its high society and its government.

Oh, the hillsides!

Somber dens of vice and crime!

Bitter strongholds of misery, of dishonor, of utmost suffering, where ignorance and disgrace join forces for the tragic perpetuation of dismaying problems that cannot be solved in a single lifetime!

Ah! My noble friend was taking me to Morro do Querosene.<sup>9</sup>

We scaled the slope ... The stark reality of the first hovels came into view ... I felt that I had entered an unknown world, as strong and shocking impressions started to arouse anguish in the sensitivity of my being.

Nowadays such hillsides are also home to a large number of honest inhabitants, hardworking laborers who heroically overcome the difficulties of their lives in the sweat and toil for their daily bread; humble workers, unable to provide their families with suitable homes because of the extremely high price of rentals, since, in the capital of the Republic, and possibly all over this enormous country of Brazil, there is still no long-term program that aims to provide housing to the less-privileged classes.<sup>10</sup>

So, in Rio de Janeiro, the poor mainly build their shacks on the hillsides, either out of old planks, empty crates bought at the grocery store, and used sheets of galvanized steel, out of bricks and adobe, or even out of demolition debris, shacks which they themselves build with their own admirable will to succeed. And right there in the Federal District, they endure the discomfort, the heartbreaking difficulty of living each day without water, electricity, schools, sewer system or any social rights, at the mercy of their unruly neighbors, the legal inhabitants of the area, who might well divest them of their very lives at any moment! At the time, the hillsides had no honest residents at all, but rather a high ratio of criminals, drug addicts and unemployed, for whom breaking the law was a way of life.

Until that moment I could not conceive of a sight as replete with suffering and degradation as the one that unfolded before my senses, sharpened as they were by the flow of intuition resulting from that incredible concourse with my guiding spirit. Little by little my impressions became unbearable, in a crescendo of regret for the consternation caused to my soul, accustomed as it was to the gentleness of wholesome standards and a life within a fraternal and honest society in the interior of the state of Minas. During my lifetime I had seen pigsties and stables that were more hygienic and comfortable than those infected dens where human beings languished, squeezed by irremediable misery instead of ascending to God, helped by their peers from a better situation on the social plane. I had known dogs that were fed and cared for much better than the wretched children who appeared here and there to my spirit's eyes – starving, unkempt, filthy, sickly, angry, rude little savages, already steeped in vice at the dawn of their lives and meant for an implacable fate!

I unwillingly found myself forced into deep scrutiny, from which nothing could escape, as if the teacher who was so generously guiding me had intuitively thought it best to deliver a profoundly analytical lesson! I felt in the essence of my being the incalculable effects of the evils that surrounded those poor people, stuck in a vicious circle of hopeless situations, just as I had recently felt the sweet flow of nature penetrating my soul, filled with enchantment and the life-enhancing gaiety of the magnetism of the sea ... The impressions and sensations became transfused within my spirit's senses, leaving me dazed and confused, able to feel and suffer along with them all of their dolorous and dramatic predicaments!

From the innermost soul of those beings, devoid of any social support, exploded sentiments of hatred, rebelliousness, jealousy and resentment, whilst all their habitual attitudes bore witness to the disease of despair that ate away at their ability to react; the brutality of their instincts; the widespread vice; everything bad that total suffering could produce; everything that hunger, ignorance, bad upbringing, lack of faith in God, physical and mental infirmity was capable of inducing in the human character; and all of that enormous volume of resultant bitterness poured over me like a storm cloud that enveloped me in an invincible maelstrom, heightening my affliction, bringing me to a state of such suffering that, terrified and prey to intense insanity, I cried out amidst my tears:

“Enough, for pity's sake! I can't take any more of this!”



We glided half way up a large slope.

Far away the panorama of the city spread picturesquely, bordered by the blue ribbon of the sea. The venerable spirit stopped suddenly, and showing more understanding of my limited capacities, said gravely amidst heightened expressions of sadness:

“This is one of the places most scorned and forgotten by the societies of Rio de Janeiro, the famous capital of beautiful bays and elegant beaches. Oh! The jubilant metropolis where Momo<sup>u</sup> rules over waste and gross excess! ... Here, in this place, and in others like it, Pain is felt in its sharpest and most excruciating form!

“Here, there is Hunger – that satanic specter responsible for irremediable chains of events!

“Do you, by any chance, understand the meaning of living hours and days tormented by the abominable suffering caused by the lack of daily bread?

“No! You do not understand – at least in your present existence...

“The starving individuals, my child, the miserable beings who are chained to the post of this incalculable torment, do not even have hearts with which to love, nor the sensibility to lead them towards that which is beautiful, that which is worthy, that which is right and good! They go mad and lose their way beneath the suffocating torment of that imperious obsession! All that they can feel, coursing through every channel of their being, is the immediate need to help themselves, to relieve the pain that tortures them, while the sight of the food that they cannot obtain becomes engraved on their minds like a stubborn mirage that commands them to get it regardless of the means or origin! Because of this, I will tell you right now: succoring the hungry, bestowing on them your fraternal help in such a time of adversity; providing them with honorable work that will enable them to earn a living; protecting with kindness those incapable of working, who agonize and suffer amidst extreme necessity – this is not just to pacify the physical needs and the demands of basic sustenance, but principally, to console the soul torn apart by misfortune! It is, above all, to restore the heart, which, like everyone else’s, was created for the ennobling functions of Love!

“A little while ago you thought yourself unlucky and your thoughts blasphemed; you lacked the tolerance to endure a temporary unpleasantry.

How fragile you are, my child, and how I lament such weakness, inappropriate as it is for a follower of the Testament of Jesus!

“Me, unlucky?! Why?’ you might ask.

“By any chance are believers forsaken, those whose hands hold the Gospel of the Lord, which was written for them, and which for them will no longer present mysteries or difficulties of understanding because glorious intuition guides them through its redemptive pages? ... Will they be disgraced, those who believe in a promising Eternity, in whose bosom they hope to win their truest triumphs, surrounded by the paternal blessings of an All-Loving and All-Powerful Being? ... Those who believe because they know; who know because they have been shown convincing proof, and who, at their side, feel the vibration of the watchful beings of the Hereafter – like you, yourself, do at this very moment?

“Unfortunate – if such is the case – must be those children you have just seen, deprived of any comfort and help!

“Pain – that is what those mothers suffer as they see their cooking fires reduced to cold ashes while their children complain with hunger!

“Misfortune – that is what afflicts those drunken men, struck down in the prime of their lives, who have lost their will-power along the road of expiation, turning them to a life of crime, thereby worsening the blame brought with them from an ominous spiritual past. Brutalized by their vices, they beat their wives and mistreat their kids, blaming them for the constant misfortune of their existence!

“Misfortune, tears and bitterness are not the problems that afflict you, my friend, for if you do suffer, the Gospel reveals itself to your understanding as a learner, smoothing your way with the soothing balm of the words of the Lord, which so appease the anxieties in the believer’s soul! If you weep, unveiled friends from the invisible realm rush to offer you solidarity, giving you comfort, drying your tears so as to reawaken in the folds of your spirit the kindly light of Hope! Misfortune, pain – these, therefore, would be the catalogue of setbacks and problems that have accrued on the paths of those whom you see here, and whose existence is so distasteful to your faculties – because you are a medium and have never conceived of such strong images in the reality of human life!

“But ... further on, at the top of this hill, there is a certain spirit, also welded to the realm of expiation. I would like you to meet her so that by her

example you can learn the lesson you need. It's a young girl of little more than twenty springtimes, a fragile creature who raised herself above all the dishonor that she has come across during the life that she chose. She is as pure and as good as any immaculately white, sweet-smelling lily that has flowered in our swamplands!

“Ah! It was only with the intention of visiting her that my thoughts have drawn you to this place, whilst at the same time teaching you all that it represents.

“Let's go on up.”

I found myself inside a miserable room whose walls of rusted sheets of steel had holes through which the cold and recalcitrant wind from the higher elevations blew in. At one end two girls about ten and twelve years old were weeping silently; at the other end was a young, blonde and squalid woman reclining on the wretched remains of a mattress laid out on a narrow sheet of galvanized steel on the earthen floor. The thin flower of her wasted body, still in the dawn of its existence, was covered by a few worn out clothes, bits of blanket and an old piece of burlap.

The young woman was moaning dolorously, while from time to time she was racked by strong fits of coughing, bound by suffocating convulsions. A profuse, malodorous sweat drenched the filthy pillow, while a high fever, which dried her palid skin and tinged her cheeks bright pink, caused her to mutter deliriously amidst groans that would have broken even the most indifferent heart.

“Tuberculosis!” I exclaimed, overcome by incalculable anguish.

“Yes, T.B.!” confirmed my honorable guide. “She has only a few days of suffering left! The Calvary of death is coming to bring her deliverance! Poor child! She has heroically borne the cross of extreme suffering imposed by Conscience as due reparation for a past of dreadful downfalls ... and now she is crowned with the august diadem of the redeemed to ascend to new stages of progress on the evolutionary path.”

He placed a luminous hand on the purplish forehead of the sick woman, transmitting a celestial balm that liquefied into tiny showers of immaculate light. She lay back, calmed by the beneficial action of the benevolent visitor, and peacefully fell asleep.

Before my spiritual sensitivity, the past and painful odyssey of the three

abandoned females quickly unfolded – it was shown to me through the powerful will of my noble Instructor, who brought to life, with the spell of his enlightening words, the archive of adversity whose epilogue we were witnessing – intensely dramatic, like any realistic film such as we see daily in the various social levels in Rio as part of their degrading and pain-filled program.

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1 Tabebuia, or locally, Ipê. – Tr.

2 Also known as Brazilian Grape, a native, fruit-bearing tree. – Tr.

3 A square in the district of Gloria, designed to represent a Parisian square. – Tr.

4 The first station on the Dom Pedro I railway, in the center of Rio de Janeiro. – Tr.

5 A train station at the time. – Tr.

6 The park containing the residence of the emperors of Brazil in the 19th century – it means *Park with the Nice View*. – Tr.

7 Castro Alves – 1847-1871 – Brazilian poet and playwright. – Tr.

8 At the time, the capital of Brazil was still Rio de Janeiro. – Tr.

9 Literally, Kerosene Hill, a shanty town in the North Zone of the city. – Tr.

10 This was the picture then because there was no governmental housing for low income families as there is now. – Tr.

11 The “King of Carnival” – Tr.

## 2

They lived on public charity. Every morning the two children would descend the slopes of the famous hillside. Badly dressed, disheveled, starving, tragic examples of a society that continues to ignore the misfortunes of others, they would wander around the neighborhood – and sometimes much farther – asking this or that passerby for “a little help for our sick sister...”

How much bitterness was building up in the delicate hearts of the two unfortunate young girls, who, at the tender age at which a girl needs solid guidance in the sanctuary of the home and family, found themselves exposed to a thousand difficult situations, witnessing iniquity here and there, hearing lewd insinuations wherever they went, punished always by the misery in which they floundered!

Back when she was able to work, the now diseased young woman never had to resort to begging. Of course there were privations. Often, the all-consuming phantom of Hunger invaded the miserable loneliness of her shelter, bringing sadness and despair to that humble place, and extinguishing any flame of happiness or hope. Even so, she never begged, because poor as she was, she was rich in dignity and would not resort to outside help as long as she felt youthful and capable of looking after herself and her little sisters. However, the unhealthy workload and constant privations slowly sapped her physical strength, rendering her susceptible to other serious infections. One day, necessity forced her to take work in the home of a wealthy family, where one of the members, a woman, was slowly dying, a victim in the grasp of the epidemic that plagued the great Brazilian metropolis – tuberculosis!<sup>12</sup>

Faithfully carrying out the duties for which she had been hired, she was obliged to care for the sick woman, who paid her generously, thereby

bringing some relief to the afflictions constantly borne by herself and her little sisters.

Her caring and nobly faithful sentiments led the blonde woman to be excessively exposed, oblivious to the fact that the illness was seriously contagious. She was tirelessly devoted, trapped by the sympathy she felt for the poor sick woman, excluded from the love and attention of her family because they feared catching the dreadful disease from her. In her turn, the patient, who only had this fine servant for a nurse and friend, became demanding and abusive, caught up in the neurasthenia of the incurable illness.

Eventually, the nurse became contaminated and came down with the disease!

She began to lose weight and to collapse in frequent fits of coughing, which alarmed the other residents in the house. In spite of her desperate protestations, they put the woman in a sanatorium and quite simply fired the servant!

What followed was the culmination of the pain-filled path of that spirit, the work of redemption.

The hemoptysis had begun. The poor folks who lived in her neighborhood stayed away, fearful of the disease. Little by little the customers who had been bringing their clothes to be washed slowly withdrew, as they learned from the woman's neighbors the nature of the sickness that was undermining her health. Total abandonment, together with the most abject misery, descended on the sordid dwelling ... and she finally resorted to begging, consumed by tears and humiliation.

Now she was dying, tasting the last drops from her chalice of gall. Confined to her deathbed, worn out by unfathomable setbacks, her thoughts were not on the searing pain that was torturing her, but on the uncertain future of her sisters, who without her would be more vulnerable than ever.

In his kindness, Bezerra de Menezes sought to banish the painful worry that would not allow the dying woman's mind the serenity to attune to the realms of peace. His aim was to finally undo the ties that were keeping her bound to her corporeal burden and free her to search for comfort and much-deserved respite.

He approached the older of the two girls in a fatherly way. He whispered something in her ear, which I could not make out. The tear-filled eyes of the

suffering girl brightened, as though some extraordinary spark had been lit in them. Her features were transformed, half-ecstatic, half-surprised, as though they had received enriching injections of the enlivening strength of Hope. She got up cheerfully, as though propelled by a beneficent magnetic fluid.

“Come with me,” she said to the younger girl. “She’s sleeping ... I got an idea ... I’m going to ask Sister P... for help.”

They left in a hurry, running down the rough paths as the pebbles rolled beneath their dirty, bare little feet.

“Where are they going?” I asked, my interest aroused.

“To knock at the door of a heart sincerely disposed to obeying the redemptive dictates of Charity and Love, and where sufferers who have sought it have always found shelter and comfort. I gave her the idea ... she will follow it because she really wants to help her sick sister ... As for the rest, she will be led by unspecific guides ... And the balm of effective watch-care will visit this antechamber of death even today.”

To whom would the two young orphans resort?

The Instructor did not say. However the noble image of a nun of the Order of St. Vincent de Paul appeared to my sight – an elderly woman, bathed in light, between the two small beggars.

Our dedicated friend waited a few minutes, absorbed in deep concentration. It was obvious that he was concentrating on helping the poor girls. Either he was guiding them by his own telepathic force, or on their behalf, he was beseeching the blessing of Jesus and the host of spirits who specialized in this kind of help. Meanwhile, I turned again to the sleeping TB patient, whose spirit remained somewhat dazed, as if lethargic, beside her body. And I thought to myself, unable to resist being overcome by an implacable wave of sorrow:

“God – the Creator of All Things – is Sovereign Justice. Her expiation, such as we were witnessing right now, could not but have had some cause that was equal in harshness to this particular effect. What spiritual past was hidden in the folds of this poor girl’s consciousness to cause such a bitter present?!”

In spite of his deep concentration on mental forces, it was obvious that the tireless servant of Jesus – whose expressions of charity I had so often had occasion to witness – had felt the vibrations coming from my thoughts, because after a few instants he responded:

“Of course, my child, the Laws of the Omnipotent Lord embody the supremacy of justice. God reveals himself as the Ultimate distributor of Justice, whilst we also cannot doubt that the Father is supremely Loving and Good. And this has already been explained without subterfuge or prevarication by Jesus Christ the Nazarene master, his Word Incarnate.

“*To each shall it be given according to his deeds.*’ However, you are mistaken if you think this poor dying woman has been unfortunate! She herself does not even believe so, because saintly resignation has led her to accept the fact that this suffering, as well as all the thorns that she has endured on the dolorous course of this current pilgrimage with no complaint or rebelliousness, are productive events that will render her deserving of her heavenly good fortune, for this is the candid and simple belief which she espouses.

“Her misfortune,” continued the generous elucidator, “does not derive from this catalogue of adversity that so impresses you – oh no! Rather, it comes from the dark splendor of a past life full of wrongs and false illusions! It comes from disastrous actions taken in rebellion against the Good, inflated by pride and selfishness, which cast her into an abyss of sins that can only be atoned for by expiatory journeys, between the hardships and tears of lives renewed over time ... In times past, amid unharnessed pleasure and careless laughter, the poor thing allowed herself to be carried away by the torrents of evil. She was truly wretched back then! Today, between tears and rags, she is expunging from her ravaged conscience the ‘virus’ that laid waste to her, slowly rehabilitating herself for the dawn of redemption! Now, she is, in fact, truly blessed! She senses it! She recognizes it in the inner sanctuary of her truly repentant soul, which soothes itself by its own acceptance in the midst of this excruciating redemption, for glorious intuition has blossomed in her mind, confirming that such harsh expiation is the fastest route to honorable readjustment before the supreme Law that she failed to respect!”

I was extraordinarily moved. I could foresee that pitiful scenes of grandiose moral teaching would unfold before my faculties, for in the depths of my spirit the sources of spirit sight were already making themselves known. The separation from my physical body, which was resting like a useless burden there in that picturesque town in the southeast of Minas Gerais, asserted itself more strongly, rendering the situation even more painful for me. But there was my diligent friend, solicitous and kind, laying



his translucent hands on my fluidic body, calming me and renewing my strength so that the lesson could continue.

He continued to develop his magnificent thesis:

“In a few days, this heroic spirit will leave the setting of this earth, on whose soil it has been atoning for the violence committed against itself in the past. And today, when the western horizon darkens beneath the melancholy farewell of the sunlight, the most sacred figure of Charity will appear in the loneliness of this room, intoning the canticle of smiling dawns for the poor woman’s new journey ... Merciful women, inspired by the love of the Immaculate Lamb, will climb these slopes ... They will be accompanied by the servants of a noble charitable institution, who will gather up the poor wretch on a stretcher ... And the maiden, safe in a hospital bed, will depart in peace to the Spirit Land, leaving loyal guardians to look after her younger sisters, whose uncertain future was her worst torment! So, let us be on our way ... There’s no need for this vigil ... Others have received the task of watching over her...

He then embraced me strongly, luring me with irresistible fluidic currents.

I felt dazed, confused and unable to tell what was happening, as if a strange swoon prevented me from any expression of will. I felt a strange sensation of distance, of rising straight up without being able to see a single thing.

I soon regained my senses. It was as if nothing had happened at all. I felt calm and confident, and saw that I was wandering through an enormous park, where the vegetation, full of life and beauty, invited me to meditate, leaving me open to enchantment. A gentle blue pallor cast a light as if a hazy moon were illuminating the pathways, pouring out hues of unusual and enchanting light, the memory of which shall never be erased from my spirit’s remembrances, which even today yearn for so much enchantment and so much harmony! Birds warbled tunes that echoed sweetly into my soul, clearly and wonderfully, whilst the figure of my kindly friend became clearer to my eyes.

The solitude was complete. No sound other than the dulcet tones of the birds hidden in the thick branches where the sky-blue light cast its delicate effects.

Finally, my wonderful mentor broke the silence, realizing that I was

finding it impossible to forget the sad story of the blonde young woman.

“Your curiosity is justified,” he began, touched. “Yes! What somber wanderings from the paths of moral-spiritual balance gave rise to the drama on the wretched hill we have just visited?”

“This will all be shown to you now.”

And as if from a massive film projector, here is the drama that unfolded before me, as if set in those pleasurable surroundings with the soft background of birdsong. Right there, the wise words of Bezerra de Menezes began explaining and narrating the story, whilst all around, the indescribable harmonies seemed to translate the protective blessings from on High, as they guided the generous wishes of the loyal apostle of Fraternity.

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<sup>12</sup> At the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, TB was the biggest cause of death in Rio de Janeiro – Tr.

# 3

In the final decades of the 19th Century at the Court of Rio de Janeiro, graced by Dom Pedro II's stern virtues as a magnanimous monarch, there lived a young woman, famous for her dazzling beauty and renowned in bohemian circles for her constant lapses into ambitious and unreasonable behavior.

She was the famous courtesan Palmira, a seductive and irresistible creature, who, like the lovely apple tree, would lure the wanderer into obsession and madness, then ruin him on the gauntlet of her insatiable, panther-like selfishness!

Rich, ambitious and extremely beautiful, she used these traits to exercise her vile domination over any admirer who sought her attention, with no thought for the consequences of tears and desperation that her whims caused to other hearts and homes

She lived in a splendid seaside mansion that was surrounded by leafy mango trees and lovely, tall, slender palm trees. It also boasted luxurious and ostentatious decoration.

Her home was unrestrainedly busy every day amid splendid parties attended by persons of high social standing: nobles, capitalists, high-ranking military officers, diplomats, students, etc. Amid the rumors of alacrity that poured into the night whilst the ocean crashed onto the sand, moaning in regular and constant convulsions, it was said that her house resembled Lucretia's *Palazzo Ridente*, where the demonic flame of iniquity overwhelmed the protests of Morality and even of Nature herself!

Oh! When, in the hot, dry afternoons, after her perfumed bath, she deigned to appear in public displaying all the bewitching beauty of an imprudent sinner, ostentatiously riding around the streets of the metropolis on

the soft, black silk cushions of her open-topped carriage pulled by four horses that shone like onyx, in a show of premeditated exhibitionism; whenever she went out, swathed in lace and muslin, with her affected gestures, her provocative attitude, her seductive and immodest glances, Palmira thought herself a goddess of antiquity, who made sin the pedestal on which she stood!

Honorable women, her defenseless, humiliated victims, hated her for tempting their husbands from their duties, which often led to the disruption of their hearts and their homes, formerly so peaceful and secure. And when she passed by they would speak ill of her, predicting her misfortune! Men, however, would smile at her; some enchanted; others, scorned and despondent – depending on the degree of victory or disappointment lodged in the ignoble catalogue of the bohemian memories stored in their minds – as they glimpsed her gracefully reclining on the cushions of her carriage. And even children – those impressionable and angelic beings still fragrant with innocence – envied the dogs they saw in her arms, devouring tasty treats and wearing brightly colored ribbons that hung with amusing charms that jingled on their necks whilst they yapped fussily, demanding more treats, which Palmira would happily give them while doting on them ...

But ah! Alongside that abominable ostentation, in the grimy footsteps of the shameless luxury of which she was so proud, walked the black specter of the wrongs she committed daily, ready to fling itself on the unsuspecting woman with implacable revenge!

However, in the recesses of her soul, where the unblemished sources of true sentiment are to be found, Palmira was neither as odious nor as evil as she would have liked to appear.

There is no doubt that every human being possesses veins of incorruptibility in the depths of his or her spirit, capable of germinating a future of regenerative attitudes, programming moral rehabilitations and the appropriate conscience for a more-evolved life.

Often, in the silence of these obscure depths, a gentle and moving voice would rise in soft tones of guidance and speak to the confusion in Palmira's troubled mind, inviting her to abandon that inglorious pathway, frightening her as it appealed to her reasoning with an account of her misconduct against the laws of Morality and the dictates of Duty! But, afflicted and confused by the acknowledged authority in that inner voice, so caring and protective, she would force it to keep quiet and would keep on distracting herself in an

attempt to escape reason and avoid considering any repentance. She would abandon herself to pleasure with even greater ardor, fearful of weighing the consequences or prognosticating her future. She would forcefully repress any hint of remorse with ever greater excesses, thereby adding to the growing list of misdeeds that compromised her spirit more and more with each passing day!

It was Conscience warning her! It was the efforts of Intuition as it murmured words of redemptive advice from her Spirit Guides, desirous of calling her to make emends so as to keep her from having even greater future debts to pay, but which she repulsed, discouraged by the difficulty of the regenerative tasks that would be required of her.

Nevertheless, the beautiful courtesan had been raised with indisputable examples of honesty and even virtue in the comfort of her parental home, enriched and blessed by the unswerving devotion of her father and the calm selflessness of her exemplary mother.

But her home was a modest one, and Palmira gave wing to ambitious thoughts. Her parents could only offer her a humble and simple life, but Palmira, proud and unable to accept it, harbored fancies and passionate dreams that with each passing day poisoned her self-centered heart more and more!

Palmira's family consisted of her parents, as honest as they were poor, and her five younger brothers. When she was fifteen and possessed of an extraordinary physical beauty that was becoming quite famous – but also making her vain and conceited – her father passed away, and she found herself obliged by bitter circumstances to help her mother support the family.

At that time, they were living in an old house on Matoso Street in the Sao Cristovao district, which at the time was not as well-developed as it is nowadays. It had dark, abandoned streets and alleyways alongside residential farmsteads that were as large and well-kept as they were gloomy in the romantic isolation they enjoyed.

Mother and daughter lived by the needle and sewing machine to support their large family. Obligated by the absence of their beloved head, they both struggled heroically, toiling through the night on their exhausting tasks: one seated at the sewing machine, the other with a tiny needle between her fingers, attaching fine embroidery and delicate lace to their customers' linens

and silks. They had enormous responsibilities, were constantly assailed by worries, and suffered continual privations.

Her mother resigned herself to the struggle, inspired by her own unshakeable self-confidence and the belief that the dawn of a less harsh future awaited them, to be granted, no doubt, by the Divine Power at an opportune moment that only His Omniscience would be able to determine; but despite this, Palmirinha<sup>13</sup>, as her little brothers called her, could not conform to the situation and rebelled, irascible and impatient, exasperated by the fear that the responsibilities that obliged her to suppress her glowing youth and radiant beauty, of which she was so proud, would continue and she would be stuck in that tiring and often badly-paid work forever.

To see her mother forever enslaved to the duty of providing for the demanding needs that ravaged the modest family home, slaving away for days and nights on end so that hunger would not overcome her brood; to see her innocent little brothers always wanting for something, with their tattered clothes and broken clogs on their feet, whilst she herself, Palmira, slowly faded away as she singed her silky lashes in the smoky light of a kerosene lamp, sewing pretty outfits for other children no more charming or more polite than those so dear to her; to see herself humiliated by her poverty, reduced to the lowly condition of a destitute laborer, poorly dressed, badly fed, ignored by the upper classes – she, who was more beautiful than the rich customers, for whom she created luxurious outfits for balls and the theater – was just too painful a situation for the desires that floated almost imperceptibly in her heart, where her burning and indomitable longings simmered!

And so her mind, poisoned by envy and by the disappointment of seeing herself slighted by a society that could not overlook the ignominy of her condition, would fantasize about a thousand foolish possibilities that would snatch her from the humble reality of her life and take her to the heights of happiness and fortune: her own enchanting and sumptuous marriage to some high-born young man who would surrender unconditionally to her charms; an unexpected fortune inherited from some millionaire or aristocratic customer who had sympathized with her impeccable manners – for Palmira thought herself irresistible; a marriage for Dolores, her mother, to some old minister of State ... any extraordinary fact, any event that would take her out of the insufferable misfortune which, in her rebellious mind, was represented by the

heroic actions of her destitute mother and her hapless brothers, who relied so much on her concourse as the firstborn.

But the miracle never came, in spite of the vain young woman's reiterated pleas to the realms of fantasy, and this only served to strengthen the ill-will that she allowed herself to embrace more and more in her inner potential.

The patient mother tried in vain to reorient the girl, either by teaching her patience or by inducing her to the comfort of faith in the solitude of the Most High, who was merciful enough to help them benefit from the harshness of their situation, even if only through acceptance. She warned her fruitlessly against the dangers of fanciful dreaming, because the gifts that bring happiness do not reside only in the realms of social privilege but also at more modest levels, where the peace derived from the accomplishment of Duty is the most solid guarantee of the advent of wholesome joy to the spirit. And in an attempt to dissuade her from her obsessive concerns, she tried to distract her, sometimes accompanying her on outings that they could afford, or allowing her to go to the simple dances that took place within their circle of friends, although in doing so she deprived the younger children of better-tasting milk or a more decent pair of shoes so that the young girl could enjoy a bit of fancy ribbon or a pretty shawl. However, Palmirinha did not respond well to this kindness. She remained resolutely unyielding concerning her desires, bad-tempered, ill-willed towards her family, impatient with her brothers' pranks and reproachful of them, whilst disdainful of her mother's pleas for reason.

The human mind is a powerful magnet. Unaware of the intrinsic power of their psychic nature, human beings abuse this precious gift conferred on them by Creation, and caught up in the flow of subaltern desires, they love to trigger those energies to satisfy the corrupt passions to which they are usually attached. It is a great power because the human mind can work for good or for evil, depending on the vibrational impulse emitted by the active will. By thinking a lot about a certain subject, and insistently desiring that this or that peculiarity envisaged by the innermost imagination come true – thereby exerting an irresistible magnetic attraction – very often persons achieve what has been modeled in their thoughts, because all along, they have been preparing themselves for this outcome. Quite often such accomplishments, far removed from the honorable principles of Incorruptible Law, turn disastrous for the very artist whose mind conceived of them. They rarely attest to high

ideals or provide enduring satisfaction, since normally the human mind wants only to reap the meager fruits of the inferiority into which it has sunk.

That is what happened little by little in the world of Palmira's personality.

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The daily struggle wore on in its usual monotonous way until suddenly, one day, the whole picture changed dramatically, marking a new chapter in the fate of our humble characters.

One bright morning in March the professional services of the honorable widow of Sao Cristovao were requested for a certain aristocratic residence in the district of Tijuca.

Palmira had insisted on accompanying her mother because she was anxious to see the elegant surroundings that so intrigued her. The humble worker, beautiful and attractive as she was, found herself for the first time in the company of a twenty-four year old man, the family's firstborn and an inveterate charmer who was always on the lookout for adventures to relieve the boredom that so often overcame him. His name was Guilherme, and the respectable family name he carried in society at that time rang seductively in the girl's ears when he furtively took her hand and told her of the favorable impression she had made on him.

Radiant with happiness, Palmira did not hesitate to return his attention, thus being open to further advances.

The mismatched courtship, given the stark difference between the two social positions, proceeded passionately under the force of the couple's wild emotions that were mutually attuned by a magnetic attraction that was also subaltern and addictive!

Dolores was troubled and intervened with advice, telling her daughter to distance herself from the abyss that her motherly fears were certain would engulf the girl. Her wisdom and experience did not allow her to believe that a legitimate union would be the end result of this infatuation, in spite of the repeated protests of young Guilherme, who started to frequent the house and to flatter the girl with valuable gifts while declaring that he was completely at the mercy of her personal charms.

As always, Palmira rejected her mother's loving interference with utter



rebelliousness and continued to accept the increasing attentions of the seducer as he waited for an opportune moment to cast his treacherous net over his prey, who in her turn, was eager to be conquered.

In fact, it would not have been out of the question in their society if this young man had been inclined to matrimony and if the lady in question, Palmira, aware of being the object of his evil intentions, had placed herself under the protection of discretion and nobleness, both qualities that so enhance the female character.

Well, the incautious damsel breached such principles – those indispensable ornaments of a woman's dignity, no matter what her position in society, her marital status or her age – and this surprised him disagreeably, presenting him with the opposite of what he actually wished to see in her! The difference in social position would of itself have been too important for him to ignore, and he became more disappointed as he realized that the one he had chosen, apart from providing daily proof of her thoughtlessness, had no more to recommend her than a pretty face and an elegant figure. The truth became quite clear: it would be far more convenient to take Palmira as his lover, since at that time an elegant young man, whether aristocratic or not, rarely went without such a conquest. It was a social accessory and one which no young man, whether a wealthy heir or a student poet, could neglect without being ridiculed. Paris dictated the rules. The entire world – at least the entire idle world – looked to Paris to dictate fashion, which made futilities and deceitful passions the objects of admiration. Moreover, the young seamstress, if presented in bohemian circles, would have earned the vain seducer a worthy triumph, given the exceptional nature of her beauty.

So, Guilherme did not hesitate to carry out his ignoble plan ... He began to invite Palmira to theaters and parties, and in doing so, offered her the appropriate dress. However, Dolores intervened forcefully to control the waywardness of her rebellious daughter and never allowed her to accept the invitations. She managed to sever relations with her daughter's suitor. He stopped coming to the house and she became ever-watchful in the hope that the romantic incident would be entirely forgotten.

One night at about ten o'clock, Dolores and the young Palmira, who had just turned eighteen, were diligently working on finishing several rich and detailed items of clothing that belonged to a certain high-society lady who was about to marry her daughter to a gallant attaché from a foreign embassy. Embroidery, lace, ribbons, ruffles and frills galore had occupied the

hardworking women's time for about a month, preventing them from attending to other clients because the lucky bride was in a hurry for her order. Palmira, much to her distaste, had thrown herself into the work, toiling away magnificently! The corsets, skirts, jackets and robes were veritable jewels crafted by the hands of fairies dedicated to that fine domestic art. Dolores had also dived into the worthy endeavor, pricked by the anxiety of need, thinking that the pieces of the outfit were coming along too slowly and that the sparse supplies in her kitchen were disappearing frighteningly with no money with which to restock them. Thus, she was in a rush to finish the work before the last crumbs vanished. Indeed, in spite of their exhaustive efforts, the last frugal and insufficient morsels had disappeared at lunch time that day, without the pieces having been finished so that they could get paid and buy more supplies. There was no dinner for the children that evening ... That is why mother and daughter were still at work at that late hour, desperate to finish the items in the luxurious wedding set, since the next day's meal depended upon it.

That same morning Palmira had gone to the illustrious woman's home on her mother's behalf to ask for an advance of half the agreed-on payment for the work, since there was not enough money available to finish it. However, the woman had been born into wealth, which had left her heart hardened in the shadow of unusually fierce pride and unable to feel compassion for the suffering of other hearts thanks to the selfishness of her character; thus she sent a slave to dispatch the girl with the message that it was not her habit to advance payment to mere servants.

The girl returned home, her eyes wet with the tears of humiliation and disgust. She felt as if her heart was breaking whilst inconsolable anguish stirred in her soul, nurturing strange sentiments of rancor towards the great and the powerful, whilst at the same time the extreme pity she felt for her mother and her unfortunate little brothers suggested extreme measures to her overexcited mind in light of the situation. If Palmira had been moved by sentiments that were noble and resigned, and had surrounded herself with an aura of patience and dignity in the face of adversity, then certainly some redemptive proposal would have blossomed in her mind, guiding her towards more honest and dignifying solutions, which would have been the fruit of wholesome inspiration from the loving guides who respond from the invisible planes to the sincere appeals of those sufferers who are willing to be helped. But full of hate and rebelliousness, the poor girl lost her way and found

shelter in sinful suggestions that enveloped her in waves of confused and inferior vibrations.

Back at home, a letter from her former suitor surprised her. Unbeknownst to Dolores, one of her neighbors had delivered it – a girl as young and as reckless as she herself, and with whose help the passionate couple corresponded. It was laconic and specific, saying only:

“It’s now or never! I’ll be waiting for you in my carriage at ten o’clock on the corner. If you don’t show up, then farewell forever!”

She felt weak all over. She spent the whole day in silence. She did not even comment on the unhappy incident of that morning! It was as if evil spirits had stolen her ability to speak to keep her in a state of anxiety, and she involved herself in the thoughts caused by the cruel missive. All she could do was to bend feverishly over her work, knowing that she was living her last hours of honor in the sanctuary of her maternal home! Cold sweat broke out on her pale and shiny forehead and on her hands, illustrating the violent emotions that assailed her spirit. Her heart, which throbbed in torment in the sacred ark of her chest, was like a broken clock sounding off at every instant as she remembered Guilherme’s words and the decisive events that would take place as the clock struck ten that night, and which would put her future forever in the balance!

Oh! She thought, trapped by intense, even painful and anguishing spasms of emotion. What if Guilherme were really to fulfill the promises he repeated a thousand times in her ears over the last year! If, at his side, she could rise in society, make a fortune, and gain influence and relationships, then women like the one who this morning had spurned her so cruelly would pay dearly for their rude and futile millionaire pride and for all the misery that she and her loved ones had endured!

And if, as her mother suspected, Guilherme was no more than a wretched adventurer and seducer? ... It mattered not; even she did not love him as she once had, thanks to the fact that he had still not married her because he judged himself above her ... She would also be able to get her revenge on him somehow...

A dramatic atmosphere of heterogeneous waves surrounded the girl’s face, and in her spirit there was not one tiny spark of goodwill that her invisible mentors might have seized upon to save her, so as to defend her from the somber, jagged cliffs upon which her fate would be thrown as a

result of the letter. And she thought, and thought ... tracing around herself in advance the terrifying torrent, into which she would be hurled!

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13 Diminutive form of Palmira. – Tr.

# 4

Night had fallen completely. Tiny stars appeared timidly, dotting the firmament between patches of rain clouds scattered by the wind.

All around the house the children whined in fear, miserable from the lack of dinner. Their long-faced, melancholy looks pleaded with their mother and sister as to what steps they were going to take to resolve the gnawing demands of their stomachs. From time to time Palmira glanced at them furtively, as if terrified. Then she would return to her work, her dry eyes burning with the unspeakable desire within her as if an infernal torch were stoking the unquenchable rebelliousness in her heart as it beat amid the throes of death. She had only eaten frugally in the morning, but she felt no hunger; she only felt hatred and despair! At this point Dolores rushed off in desperation to a nearby bakery. She begged for a few bread rolls in order to appease her children; she would pay for them tomorrow. They tossed the worst ones they had at her so that their loss would be less if payment were not made. The children settled down and fell asleep chewing on the bits of hard bread like poor puppies that had been given a dry bone ... And Dolores, feverish and miserable, but devoted and patient, went back to her post, resigned to starting the day in her role as a hardworking and loyal mother.

Heroic woman! Poor, desperate mother! What queenly diadem would shine more brightly in the kingdom of the Most High than the saintly crown of your dreadful suffering, a crown woven in the sacrosanct tears of your patient and selfless heart?!

If she could, Dolores would have used her own blood to fabricate the food that she could see her darling children needed so desperately. But, powerless to achieve such a noble desire, she gave them her own strength

instead, the energies she bore so admirably, her endless sacrifices, and - ah! - even the noble blood of her soul!

Palmira sat at the sewing machine embroidering in silence. The agile needle was guided frantically as it came and went piercing the cloth, leaving behind it the beautifully worked swirls of the pattern. Occasionally, a wild and furtive glance at the old clock hanging on the wall signaled the inner distress that assailed her. It might seem like she did not notice the unspeakable torment that gripped her mother's heart, or the quiet whining of her little brothers, resigned to their deprivation. However, she was aware of it all!

Suddenly, in the sad and destitute house the old clock struck the first chime of ten o'clock, followed slowly by another, and another ... The beautiful seamstress threw her sewing and needles onto a nearby table, and with a sudden, brusque gesture, she tore the clean, delicate cotton apron from her doll-like waist, pounded on the table nearest to her and to her mother's surprise, exclaimed:

“Oh! Enough of so much suffering! I can't put up with such misery and despair! I'd rather die! A thousand times over, give me death!”

She left the room in a rush, shut herself in her ill-furnished bedroom and quickly changed her clothes. Alarmed and fearing the worst, Dolores got up and tried to calm her, admonishing her with the gentle authority that is always the expression of motherhood. But as always, Palmira refused to listen to her advice and warnings and rushed furiously out into the street, wrapped in her delicate blue woolen shawl.

Surprised, Dolores ran after her, bewildered by the rebellious girl's behavior.

Frail and afflicted, she called to her repeatedly, desperately fearing that the young girl intended to end her life. As she ran, she called out to her anxiously amid tears to please tell her where she was going at that hour of the night! But Palmira was too fast and was stubbornly intent on the extreme course of action that would rescue her from the endless misery of her struggle. She had already reached the street corner and had jumped into a waiting carriage, helped by an elegant gentleman who greeted her with a smile and a friendly gesture of triumph...

When the poor mother finally reached that spot, it was only in time to see her daughter lying back amongst the cushions next to her old boyfriend as

the whip cracked on the horses' backs and the carriage sped away...

\* \* \*

When morning came Palmira had still not returned.

Feeling feverish and worried and suffering from a feeling of deep grief such as she had never felt before, Dolores had waited the whole night at the small windows, sometimes weeping burning tears that felt like fires searing her heart, sometimes with eyes dry and swollen, wide with horror at the cruel truth before her. With each passing moment of the night, she became more desperate and fearful at realizing the meaning of that deliberate moment of flight, fully understanding the infamy it represented, since for some time her ravaged motherly heart had been plagued by dolorous suspicions!

With each sound of footsteps out on the dark and lonely street – some night-owl going home – with each gust of wind whistling between the thin shutters, bringing dawn and its light, the wretched woman's heart would leap in excited expectation that it was her daughter returning. Then, disappointed, her emotion-driven heartbeat, whose rhythm had increased painfully because of the effort of hope, making her feverish, causing her to break out in a cold sweat, and generating terror and hallucinations in her mind, would once again revert to the saintly maternal desire to see Palmira, her daughter, come home.

Dawn had finally come, its bright tones bringing light to the vast horizons of the graceful city bordered by the sea, but Palmira had not returned...

The warm light of the lantern had gone out completely because the smoky kerosene in its bowl had dried up ... The room had been in darkness for some time, although Dolores had not even noticed. Her staring eyes – the mirrors of a soul shocked by an irremediable sight – were glued to the street through the glass, on the look-out for occasional passers-by who would venture there – a patient and anguished vigil of which not even the jealous doubter or the highwayman lying in sinister ambush was capable!

And on the sewing machine, abandoned and forgotten, lay the rich pieces of the trousseau ... The poor mother had not sewn any more that night! Palmira had abandoned her and her brothers for a scoundrel, and this undeniable reality, which stamped itself more clearly in her mind with each passing minute, sapped her energy, confusing her, crushing her!

By eight o'clock in the morning, still sleepless and unable to accept the

supreme misfortune that Palmira's flight represented to her heart, the poor woman could only cry in exhaustion, incapable of making any effort for her starving children, who had woken early and who were as distressed as she was.

“What'll we do now? What'll we do?!”

She loathed the thought of running to the neighbors to tell them the bad news or to ask the authorities for help or a solution. What would people say?!

What insinuations and mockery would such an action provoke against her poor daughter, for whom she felt endless compassion!? ... And who amongst her acquaintances would agree to stand by her through this vile situation, in which the main protagonist was from the highest social class, against the other, who was unknown and undefended? How could she go out to look for her daughter or human justice, if she was exhausted and burning with fever, and did not even have one copper coin with which to pay for a coach? ... And if she had to finish the sewing, press the clothes and take them to their owner so as to be able to tend to the urgent needs of the little ones?

She pondered this, struggling against the cruel dilemma in which she was caught, when suddenly she heard someone knocking loudly at the door. Anxious for any ray of hope that might shed some light on the conflict within her, her ravaged heart leapt and began to beat furiously at the thought that finally her crazy, dear Palmira had returned home to the loving and compassionate arms of her mother who could forgive ... Oh! She could forgive anything!

She rushed, with eyes askance, disheveled and worn, to learn the truth.

But one of the little ones had hurried dutifully to answer the door, and now handed her a sealed envelope.

“A letter, Momma!” he exclaimed.

“Who's it from?” she asked nervously, running to the door and looking up and down the street, hoping to detain the messenger since she sensed the importance of the message.

“It was a man with a mustache and a hat, Momma!” replied the boy, innocently.

She quickly tore open the envelope. She took from it a folded piece of paper and a large note of one hundred thousand reals<sup>14</sup>, a sum worth a small



fortune at that time to someone in Dolores's situation.

She trembled and her teeth chattered, while cold sweat poured down her face, pale with extreme suffering! The folded paper was a letter. The letter was from Palmira. Oh! ... Her little Palmira!

Dolores read it once, twice, three times, without being able to grasp what she was reading. She could not, would not understand, so cruel was the absurdity laid out in its words. She read it two, three more times, as if the letters dancing beneath her eyes as they joined into sentences were thorns that mercilessly pierced her forlorn mother's heart!

Finally she understood, and then the little remaining energy she still had abandoned her completely. She fell into the frightened arms of the little ones, who were weeping loudly, and for a long time she allowed herself to succumb to a strong attack of nerves. Then she rested in the consolation of the unconsciousness that the angel of Mercy imposed on her in a supreme moment of charity!

Palmira's letter was brief, for it only said:

“Momma, forgive me! I could no longer stand the horrible situation in which we lived. Yes, I am ungrateful and inhuman; but misery and the humiliation drove me to despair! I shall never return home. I must not return! I'm sending some money with this letter because you and the children must eat today. Farewell!”

\* \* \*

And so it was. Palmira never went back to her family home! She preferred to remain where she had been led by her disloyal friends, by her illusions, by the imponderables of the young who have no respect for Family and no love for God, as well as by the base impulses of her ambitious nature! There she stayed, morally destitute in a chasm of mire and rottenness!

Perhaps the young Palmira could have contained herself, preferring maternal shelter to the immoral aberration of licentiousness, if the demanding bride for whom she was creating the sumptuous trousseau – a woman who had as many items of fine cambric as she had selfishness and darkness in her heart – had showed some humanity and agreed to advance part of the payment that had been requested that fateful morning. What is certain is that Hunger is a terrible counselor, that misery induces rebelliousness and waywardness, and that only a heart inspired by the ardor of immaculate Faith in Heavenly

Goodness can survive trials such as these, fulfilling the teachings of the Gospel, that is, making use of the sweetness of Patience, supported by the shepherd's crook of Hope! As such, one can deduce and recognize the need for Christian souls, or even merely kind ones, to reach out to help those who lie starving in agony on the hard pallet of thorny difficulties, equally bereft of bread and of moral-spiritual light, in order to save them so that they may fulfill the sacred commitments to the laws of Duty!

And so it was that after she so disrespectfully insulted her honorable parents' home and name – which should have been so carefully safeguarded – the dissolute young girl's life became one of high-living and splendor. She became as powerful as she had previously been humble and ignored!

She betrayed her first lover within a short time, avenging herself for the disdain with which he had treated her by shying away from marriage. Other lovers followed in ever-increasing numbers. From the heights of her miserable glory, the former working girl turned her back on who she had once been, on how much she had suffered in the struggle against situations molded by poverty, and hid amongst the shadows of the most deceitful selfishness! During the first months she had continued helping her mother and brothers with paltry crumbs from her leftovers, although she never went to visit them. Sickened and drained by the bitterest grief, her poor mother accepted the assistance as an insulting form of charity, which more than anything reinforced the bitter taste of her daughter's irreparable dishonor. Later however, when she heard that her mother had moved away from the Capital after having married a generous Portuguese landowner who had a modest fortune and wished to move farther inland, she lost interest in hearing any news and never again knew what had happened to her own family.

And so the years passed with the persistent flow of the hourglass, from where all the hours, days and centuries originate!

Within a short time, the beauty of the lovely seamstress from Matoso began to fade, just as at dusk, when the sun falls from its perch, the drooping rose falls from its stem.

The fresh softness of her rosy cheeks and the firm flesh of her slim and graceful figure began to droop and wither little by little ... Old age – the desperate old age of the vain and selfish who deify themselves, abusing every kind of passion to satisfy their basest whims; that dark decline of one who fears growing old after having become a slave to worldly illusions – tainted

the once silky black hair with long streaks of silver ... Her skin wrinkled ... Her cheeks became sunken ... Her eyes, tired of shining, now contemplating a life lost along the paths of dissolution, seemed to retreat into a painful introspection of her conscience. Her teeth, rotting and corroded by pyorrhea, fell dramatically one by one from their now unsmiling, reddened enclosure!

Now that reality had forced her to take stock of the moral resources she had won in the course of her existence, Palmira found herself descending into the depths of her consciousness. She examined what she had been and the deeds she had done, and was horrified to see the responses from the sinister memories of her past! She had amassed plenty of wealth, for like the avaricious ant that prepares itself against future misfortune, she had known enough to safeguard herself against the anguish of nights, such as the last one she had spent amongst her loved ones. Even so, she realized that if in those terrible times privations had rent her heart, her soul had been warmed by the honorable flames of blessed love, whereas now the coldness of loneliness and the unbearable misery in her heart tore her apart! In her old age, when she might have been worshipped by the children of her own flesh and blood, all she could see around her were the ghosts of her own deeds, intent on flogging her conscience!

The first truly sincere tears fell from her eyes. Thus began the cleansing of her despicable character. From the sacrosanct hideaways in her being a strong urge for reparation began to stir ... and for the first time Palmira thought of the pain that tortured other hearts! She began to perform acts of charity ... By preference, she helped impoverished orphans and widows, remembering how her mother had suffered from the blows of daily vicissitudes. Oh! That poor mother whom she had abandoned in the midst of her struggles and for whom she now endured the most painful longing!

Finally, one misty and lonely winter morning, her favorite servant found her dead in her bed. A sudden heart-attack had struck her, with no friendly hand nearby to soften the throes of death. Her still-plentiful material goods were plundered by unscrupulous judges and lawyers who did not respect the final wishes that she had written in her will. She had wanted to leave her fortune to the servant who had looked after her and to certain poor widows whom she most pitied.

# 5

The story ended.

It was as though a grey curtain had been drawn over my faculties – which for a moment had entertained precious abilities – shutting out the scenes of a past submerged in the torrents of Forgetfulness, and which had been brought to life. My entire being was infused with the extraordinary feelings I had felt so strongly during the fascinating story, and which would continue to echo in my soul until I could translate them into human language, in accordance with the orders of that good servant of the Lord.

Nevertheless, I found myself back at Morro do Querosene in the wretched residence of the poor girl with tuberculosis...

The young woman was still asleep, gasping feebly, but soothed by the security of protective, benevolent sleep.

As he watched her languishing on the remains of the rotting mattress and covered in rags, my noble friend turned to me to collimate the lesson:

“That is Palmira!” he said gravely, nodding toward the sleeping woman. “That’s her, the ungrateful daughter, the great seductress, so self-centered and vain! She is at the end of the stage that followed the one we have just revisited. She is finishing up a different life of trials and expiations, in which she has nobly suffered deep remorse for all her past misdeeds!

“She, who once abandoned her own family in a moment of thoughtless rebellion, fleeing her duty at a crucial time, in which she was called by the Law of Cause and Effect to prove the resilience of her character when faced with the normal pains of daily life; she, whose desire for material things and whose vanity did not waver even when faced with the most sacred imperatives of honor, returned immediately to a new life of extreme poverty,

orphaned once more, unappreciated, with two younger sisters to care for as their only breadwinner; thus, in the stimulating trial of loneliness, she has learned the sublime worship of Family! She has suffered cruelly. Abandoned at a very early age, her heart tainted by grief, she has felt the lack of motherly love and has bravely borne the anguish of each day! And as an abandoned woman, she has felt only humiliation, the misfortune of never being able to rely on the protection of a man's arm; she, who only yesterday had snatched from loving wives and trusting children the love of formerly respected and attentive husbands and fathers!

“Having previously resorted to cupidity and the aberrations of immorality, now, in a stage of rehabilitation, we see her back on earth amidst abominable surroundings, heroically resisting following the paths of evil! She has struggled against all the pitfalls of the surroundings in which she has lived! She has unmasked all the temptations and opportunities that were presented to tempt her into dishonor! She has pushed aside treachery, turned her back on mirages and deceits that slyly called to her from the misery in which she lived, and of her own accord, by the natural order of the law of reparation, she has found a way out of the chasms into which she was lured in order to prove her respect for the sacrosanct duties of feminine dignity! And under the blows of such an arduous struggle, she has expiated the nefarious wrongdoings of the mad Palmira of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

“Still, she will have to reincarnate again. It is not enough for a guilty or ignorant spirit to repay formerly accumulated debts merely through expiation. In order to become greater and be glorified – like all those who participate in the divine nature – it is also necessary to build: to serve Love, to walk hand in hand with the Good, to cooperate devotedly with the magnanimous work of Creation through deeds and attitudes that are governed by fraternal selflessness...

“In the lesson you have received today you should mark the example of this self-rehabilitating spirit who has made herself worthy with renunciation, patience, and submission to each new onslaught of difficulties that have torn her apart! Like Palmira – like the whole of humankind – if you suffer, it is because the behavior you formerly chose to follow in a past existence caused it by leading you astray from the path of Duty or of Justice, for wise, equitable and harmonious laws govern our destinies, as summarized in the undeniable words of the Supreme Justice:

‘To each according to his deeds!’

“And remember, my friend, to tell your brothers and sisters, one day, what you have just witnessed ... because you will be performing the sacred duty of one who has intermediary powers between earth and the Invisible World.”

\* \* \*

I went back slowly, repossessing my body and experiencing the strange phenomena that the act of awakening brings about. Little by little my carnal shell warmed up, came to life ... My consciousness, like my memory, began to glow normally, reacquiring its habitual control over the somatic functions of my brain, in spite of my complete inability to move even my eyelids...

Suddenly, a strange magnetic fluid – perhaps the true essence of Life – simultaneously penetrated my brain and my heart and made me grasp the strand of existence that had momentarily been interrupted...

Ah, poor me! Imprisoned once again in the sarcophagus of the flesh!

In the simple room the loving fluids of the friendly spirit who had honored me with his generous protection still lingered.

I rose from my bed as though unwillingly rising from a tomb that had opened the doors of the Infinite to me ... Fluttering amongst the fronds of the trees, the birds still sang out their melodious calls ... I looked at the little alarm clock on my bedside table: I had sought the refuge of my little room at 2:00 p.m. and was surprised to see that the time was only 2:17!

The exciting events that had taken my spirit by force; the awe-inspiring drama of two existences that marked decisive stages in the spiritual destiny of one individual, had all unfolded to my mediumship in the short space of just a few minutes!

Oh! How majestic is the Science of the Invisible! And how lovely is the Doctrine of the Spirits!

PART TWO  
THE CASTLE TREASURE

A Mediumistic Story Narrated by the Spirit  
Camilo Castelo Branco

*“Do not lay up treasures for yourselves on earth, which are perishable, but lay up treasures in heaven, which are immortal.”*

*...”for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”...*

*“If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then, come, follow me.”*

*“Truly, I say to you, as often as you helped one of these, the least of my brethren, you helped me.”*

*JESUS CHRIST – The New Testament*

*“Without charity, there is no salvation.”*

*ALLAN KARDEC*



# 1

## The Flight of a Soul

That night I had been told to go to bed early and get some sleep, setting any worries aside. I received these instructions telepathically from the benevolent spirit of Charles, one of the dear assistants who honor me with their watch-care, and whose efforts on behalf of the cause of Truth – efforts so often witnessed during my endeavors of assistance while at my Mediumistic Post and also in secluded rooms at the Spiritist center – recommended him to me as a loyal worker in the Vineyard of the Lord.

I would see him fairly clearly from time to time, resplendent and handsome, wearing the original garb of an Egyptian or Hindu initiate, with a turban inset with a splendid emerald, a tunic with long sleeves, another emerald on his left ring-finger ... I knew him to be a member of a phalanx of hardworking spirit instructors, a dedicated assistant not only to me but to several discarnate spirits in training, who were in constant communication with us. Thus, I respected him by heeding to his wise counsel and his learned and kindly instructions.

It was May 1930, and a soothing inner peace made me feel especially blessed, moved by the loving outpourings that I felt penetrate my being, particularly on my return from the meeting I had been asked to attend in the conference room of the Beneficencia Spiritist Association, in the district of Barra do Pirai<sup>45</sup>, from whose podium we heard the committed and sincere words of Claudino Dias, the venerable president, and the soothing utterances of Jose Firmino de Lima, simply known as Lima, so helpful and charitable, and whom the whole town praised for his kindly acts that were witnessed daily. These talks were given weekly in presentations that were as simple as they were profoundly elucidating, using the good tidings of the Kingdom of

Light to quench the longings of those in need of faith and justice, like new crusaders defending the rights and ideals of the Divine Lord.

Faithfully following the advice of my friend from the invisible plane, to whom I felt connected by unbreakable spiritual ties, I willingly went to bed early and slept deeply, succumbing to a restorative and calm sleep in which all my faculties rested, and during which no dreams or impressions manifested.

At 2:00 a.m., however, I woke up and fully recovered the awareness of the waking state.

The sweet fragrance of the flowers out in the garden, basking in the blessing of the abundant night mist, wafted in through the Venetian blinds ... And all around, a sanctuary-like silence kept watch over the night and the repose of every creature...

Suddenly, my mediumistic senses are aroused by an unusual commotion, advising me that venerable friends from the invisible plane are coming to fetch me for a glorious outing in the spirit world under the care of their solicitude and protection. As I flutter about in my small and humble bedroom amidst gentle soul-soothing vibrations, I can actually feel the delicate figure of a friend from the Beyond, enveloped in waves of a suggestive fragrance...

My body immediately becomes rigid ... My teeth clench ... I feel an uncomfortable cold that renders my muscles numb and even painful as it slowly spreads through me, taking over my physical organization. I shrink in fright, for I have a vague sensation that it is death itself that covers my physical being with the shrouds of eternal silence...

Oh! The critical moment of expiration must be very similar to this!

I get the feeling that a great deal of time has elapsed.

Total darkness ... Unconsciousness ... Emptiness ... Forgetfulness ... Annihilation ...

To be honest, I could not say if this unconsciousness lasted seconds or centuries. But thank God, my experience of what causes it tells me that it lasted only a few minutes.

Like a dragonfly imprisoned inside its cocoon, my spirit has resolved to leave its body behind. A painful and exhausting struggle. Powerful currents pull me back towards it. Other currents, no less vigorous, pull me away from

it in violent jerks. This tortures me, shattering my brain, smiting my heart, leaving me confused, dizzy ... and I suffer dreadfully...

Just a bit more ... And now I'm free! I can breathe! I sigh! I move with lightness. Extraordinary clarity illuminates my mind, with no vestige of surprise; only a profound feeling of happiness and joy...

I have the remarkable opportunity to contemplate my pale and stiffened body. As if I were regarding something that belonged to someone else and not to me, I recognize it, and saddened and troubled, I chastise myself, finding it disagreeable and despicable...

The room where I had gone to bed, and which was completely dark when I left my body, has suddenly become light-filled. I can see and perceive everything in it, as if unfathomable moonlight were enhancing my sight.

Where is this light coming from?! ... From the Invisible? ... From the presence of my friendly helpers? ... From me, myself, perhaps? ... because I know that phosphorescence is one of the beautiful attributes of our perispiritual form ...

What is certain is that there is light, and I look at and examine everything around me, consumed by an unusual curiosity.

I crouch down beside the bed and examine my body, which continues its pull on me. I even examine details such as my eyelashes and a few spots that blemish my complexion. A worrying doubt springs to mind:

“Have I actually discarnated?” I ask myself. But I quickly turn from such thoughts and lose interest in this concern.

There is a certain fickleness in my attitude as I remain near my material envelope. I have a thousand overwhelmingly exhausting and confusing thoughts in my head all at the same; and this painful state changes only after I submit more fully to the direction of the high order spirit that guides me.

I move towards the dresser. I look at myself in the mirror, comb my hair, apply the face powder I normally use, put on my earrings and a necklace, and decide that I look good ... I tell myself that I look charming as I contemplate the form of my spirit body. I say to myself: “This is my perispirit!<sup>16</sup> How lovely it is!”

I admire my hands, my arms, my figure, my embellished face and my shiny hair – splendid!

“What beauty!” I think, rejoicing in the agreeable self-examination I am carrying out. “How lovely I am! I’m milky white and phosphorescent! My ‘skin’ has the delicate complexion of a flower!”

For a few moments I seem to shimmer in tones of whitish-blue, although this new body strikes me as rather dense, very different from the spirit I see at times, whose form seems to have a celestial fluidity!

All this makes me feel so fortunate that I smile contentedly, excited by feelings of happiness that I could not experience in any other way!

Suddenly, without having perceived the transition, I find myself outside the room, suspended in space. Above my head is the slightly blue, starry, night-time firmament, which the full moon fails to lighten, but which the enchanting brilliancy of the suns that float in sidereal space lights up with a thousand multicolored beams. Unknown powers enhance my visual capacity because the noble guardians who have attracted me to them have lent me their precious faculties, giving me the opportunity and ability to survey the stunning panorama of the stars and the constellations on their fascinating march amid the majestic and indescribable beauty of sublime harmonies! My spirit expands, gripped by a delight that is impossible in the waking state! But this exciting vision lasts only a fraction of a second: a hapless individual enslaved in flesh could not bear it for even one minute without feeling as though his or her brain and heart were shattering, as well as his or her own animal-like life, too fragile for such a lofty feat!<sup>12</sup>

However, I can still see the room where my corporeal burden is. There is a long stream of light, like a cord, that stretches from my spirit self to my physical one, transmitting to my brain the impressions being offered to it. Every once in a while, by means of this stream of light, I can see my corporeal burden, as if reflected in a mirror.

This sight disturbs and confuses me. I compose myself. I find that I am more intelligent than I usually am, and I feel as though manifold knowledge is springing from my soul, making me the owner of appreciable learning. I contemplate this important fact, certain that it was in past journeys that I acquired such resources, which now lie buried in my subconscious in my present incarnation. Only in these fleeting moments of independence do they manifest. Suddenly, however, it comes as no surprise as I find myself beside a friendly and stately figure, as snow-white as I, but more vaporous, more shiny and comely.

I recognize him immediately: it is Camilo<sup>18</sup>, the great and tormented Camilo, who has come to fetch me from my sepulcher of flesh to bring me into his glorious company; he, whose affinity with my spirit so delights me and consoles me so completely. He greets me lovingly, only then making himself visible:

“Praise the Lord, my friend!”

“Peace, master!”

We smile, enchanted with each other like a pair of lovers delighted to be meeting again. Intense excitement stirs in my being. The spiritual love of kindred souls is more ardent and emotive than we generally suppose.

Camilo does not have the tormented look of most suicides. His attitude is calm, serene and confident. He treats me with friendliness and unmistakable affection, and I am touched by his attention. I sense in him the aroma of enchanting good-manners, of a superior courtesy. I adore his company and enjoy an indefinable sense of well-being and trust in his presence. Even so, he still has moments of biting criticism and often amuses me with his refined irony.

We converse normally. There is no mysticism in our speech. He does not speak to me gravely like Bezerra de Menezes, nor with the authority of Bittencourt Sampaio or Charles. We speak only of subjects inspired by our preferences. I can see him easily and I assume that my company is not entirely disagreeable to him, since he has often led me on outings such as this. However, he says something like this:

“I know you are interested in noble subjects of times gone by. So, I’d love to tell you an old story about a haunted castle and proud noblemen, infused with a small amount of that precious essence which is always so desired, and which remains eternal among mortals and immortals: Love!

Focus your strength and your trust on me ... Please understand that what you are about to witness happened some three centuries ago, in the legendary lands of old Portugal – may God keep her. **Besides it being an entertaining story**, you will see that Love, Goodness and Kindness are noble qualities that are indispensable for people’s peace of mind no matter what state they may find themselves in; and that long hours of suffering will befall the wretch who has ignored these qualities through callous laziness or insane ideas about life, which we usually insist on molding according to our personal desires rather

than molding ourselves to it – as logic would call for – so as to save our consciences from disastrous conflicts.”<sup>19</sup>

Painful turmoil stirred in the depths of my being. I did not know what obscure, powerful forces were acting on me. My noble friend enveloped me as if in a tight embrace. And so, in the magical expression of his educated speech, which brought to life the scenes lived and felt in all the colors of reality, he slowly unfolded before my spirit eyes this fascinating story from the 17th century, the ancient flavor of which is truly so much to my liking, and which I will try to describe as well as my memory will allow.

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<sup>15</sup> Municipality in the State of Rio de Janeiro. – Tr.

<sup>16</sup> “The spirit is surrounded by a substance that might look vaporous to you but which is still quite dense to us [the spirits in the spirit world]. . . . As a fruit seed is enveloped by the perisperm, the spirit per se is surrounded by an envelope, which by comparison, may be called the perispirit.” *The Spirits’ Book* (Question #93). – Tr.

<sup>17</sup> Following these trances I would become ill, and for several days I would feel drained and deeply saddened. This did not happen, however, when I did not remember what I had seen. (*Medium’s note.*)

<sup>18</sup> Reference to Camilo Castello Branco (pen name Camilo Candido Botelho), spirit author of the book entitled *Memoirs of a Suicide* (FEB, 2012) – Tr.

<sup>19</sup> I know that the great Camilo is eager to write mediumistic works, but he struggles to find competent mediums. Unfortunately my small intellectual capacity does not permit him to enlarge too much. Although I have the greatest affection and affinity for this enchanting spirit, I lack the intellectual resources to serve him as he would like.

He has led me on several outings such as this one, and on all of them, he has told me interesting stories. But I was not able to remember most of them; I lost them completely upon awakening, and so was left only with vague impressions of our outing. (*Medium’s note*)

## 2

# The Black Castle

Portugal, 1640

Old streets with rows of imposing houses, mansions lying gloomily in their austere medieval architecture, with wide Gothic arches bearing stained-glass windows, and doors with iron-studded, hermetically sealed coats-of-arms ...

Dead-ends, alleys, squares, aristocratic neighborhoods, or dark and destitute streets of the old Portugal of yesteryear – all come to life and begin to move before my attentive spirit eyes.

Winding sidewalks, gutters with cloudy, foul-smelling water running down rough, stone-paved streets; niches carved into walls lining the street, housing images of saints; smoky lanterns hanging from iron bars on the street corners, or from the doors of the inns and the noble houses; the customs and habits of Portugal in 1640 – a time I find so enchanting – emerged as if by magic to catch my attention...

We volitate<sup>20</sup> just above the ground. At times, however, as I go pass down those streets, it seems as if I actually enter the mansions, see the details ... For me this is not a reflection of the past. It is the actual present, and I am living in it and enjoying it.

We leave the towns behind for the countryside. It is as if we are traveling through space. It is as if everything I see has been engraved in the eternity of the luminous waves of energy since that time, and now my friendly Guides can select what they want for the lessons they have in mind. We head for a

chosen place. There are rustic landscapes dotted with cattle, their herders engaged in work: that faithful friend that ennobles persons in any era ... There are high mountains covered with thick undergrowth; gentle streams or torrential rivers bringing nurture to the fields and nearby valleys, sweeping all sorts of other lives along in their turbulent flow!

Activity, productivity, life, progress and light! Such is Nature's ode to its own glory! Such is the inimitable hymn that descends, eternal and indecipherable, from sacred tabernacles, bringing beauty and harmony to that same Life, and which then evolves again in bursts of successive vibrations!

I am enthralled by those scenes of nature, which I worship as an act of God that has manifested itself for humankind ... and I thank Camilo – my kind guide – for the generosity of this beautiful vision.

A steep, black cliff, rising massively at the edge of a violent sea, grabs my attention. I sense things are about to happen, and I try as far as possible to escape the pull of my craft of flesh so that I may witness them. I suffer indescribably. My guides reassure me, recharging my soul with reviving energies.

Set in a spacious squared-off area atop this cliff stands an old feudal fortress embellished by artistic hands with frilly Gothic touches, like decorations on worn-out fabric. Bulky towers rising at the four cardinal points, adorned with embrasures, spires and balconies, lend the stern majesty of ancient poetry to the fortification. As the embattlement that it unquestionably was, that fortress would have been unassailable. As a dwelling, it would have been charming with its Gothic embellishments, yet disdainful of the dangers that surrounded it below. To the south and southeast is the raging sea, with its powerful swells crashing against the rocky crags at the foot of the slope, covering them in white clouds of waves and foam. To the north and to the west, weaving a semicircle around the cliff, a narrow stretch of sea forms a deep moat that flows out the other side, following a necessary and obligatory circuit. An iron-plated drawbridge made of sturdy planks is the only point of communication between that monument to antiquity and the outside world. Though lowered permanently in present times, in days-gone-by that tribute to feudalism only rarely let out its aristocratic chains to allow passage. Such a lair would not be a home, but more like a refuge for demons. An unfortunate wretch would be he who carelessly twisted an ankle up there on the edge of the ramparts overlooking the sea. He would be dashed to pieces as he tumbled over the rocks, before



disappearing beneath the angry swells that wailed in the heart of the ancient sea, so voracious in its deadly appetite.

It seemed that, set on the edge of a precipice, such a fortress might have been a look-out point for spotting pirates and invading hordes; or might date from ancient Moorish times, when aggrieved Portuguese lords, defending their legitimate rights, would entrench themselves in refuges less assailable than heaven or hell itself!

Even so, that haven for ancient warriors was not completely devoid of elegance. The cliff was spacious, and by chance, there was arable land on the side opposite the sea.

Some of the castle lords that inhabited it after the wars against the Moors had spent their idle moments cultivating that fertile side with the patience of a monk. Flourishing there, and adorning the earthy slopes, were lovely willows, old and bushy elms, slender pines and elegant acacias, which in May were already coming back to life with crowns of colorful clusters. That unusual park, sown with rich beds of well-tended flowers and suspended on the edge of a precipice, was ostentatiously planted in overlapping terraces, with winding flights of steps cut right into the mountain.

It was beautiful. And with no wars, nor pirates, nor Moors; without the cries of impending attack, and neither the moans nor the plagues brought by the vanquished and the invaders; in the bucolic peace of the countryside, with the monotonous sound of the sea whose raging would never reach the top of the hill, an unambitious soul might live, enveloped in dreams of wholesome plans.

The vegetation was abundant and life was pleasant in the surrounding fields. Small farms, hamlets, old estates pungent with bulging, red fruit emitting inviting fragrances from their well-kept orchards; settlements, villages, little churches painted blue and white, festively ringing their hollow bells; fearless young people; such varied charms would banish the sinister cloud that superstition had created around Black Cliff Castle in 1640.

If in back of that old palace lay the dread and fear of the raging swells that rose up in hordes to smash themselves, rumbling on the shattered precipice as they crashed into the unyielding rocks, how different was the spectacle displayed in front! Here, the poetry of the fields fell like sweet, consoling dew on the surroundings! There were woods of pine trees and willows shading meadows sprinkled with strongly scented wild roses; hills

covered with imposing oaks, which provided good firewood; fragrant valleys where lilies blossomed, igniting a censer of exciting fragrances throughout the spring!

A lovely panorama of small farms, little churches and shepherds!

The Castle was divided into two separate, and in a manner of speaking, very different parts: the right wing and the left wing.

The former, furnished with exceeding good taste and opulence – lavish even, for the habits and comfort-levels of the time – would have been the splendid home of a prince. In spite of so many merits, it lay uninhabited and isolated, as if ravaged by fever; and thus it jealously guarded the secret of its splendors, even from the residents of its neighbor, the left wing. Only silence, darkness and dust paying court to wealth! Locked archways, tightly closed windows, drawn draperies, loneliness and mystery concealing opulent rooms, exotic studies, luxurious cabinets where golden tableware and India porcelain slept the sleep of relics. Ornate candelabras carved of rare wood or marble lend elegance and majesty to almost all the rooms. There are lanterns and lamps carved by magical chisels, some guided by the inspiration of geniuses. Hanging from the ornate ceilings, they lend the air of opulence of bygone eras, when monarchs and sultans would climb the staircase to celebrate their victories! Oriental carpets, damask draperies, whole rooms furnished in the art and customs of the East, and music rooms with harps, violins, bandores and other strange instruments from that marvelous part of the world, all leading one to suppose that the castle's benefactors were actual Moors or Arabs, or someone who had, at least, traveled to those far lands, and had brought back the rare treasures that mingled there with western objects.

In a large formal room, whose austere furniture is reminiscent of a courtroom, a long gallery of oil portraits displays old canvases showing dignified images of stern Portuguese gentlemen, along with ladies with lofty hairstyles and disdainful eyes, refuting the notion that young Moors had been the inhabitants of the old fortress. No, Moors had not lived there. The inhabitants had been Portuguese and Spaniards, all those imposing barons stuffed into their embroidered doublets, with their aristocratic European necks ringed by the extravagant ruffled collars that had exasperated more than one sensible government in Europe.<sup>21</sup> Not a single dainty, graceful head of a sultana with languid eyes and provocative lips! Not a Moorish prince, his heart burning like the sands of his homeland! In that long gallery, only

embroidered doublets, gentlemen with lordly goatees, and high-born ladies with carefully concealed breasts and arms...

The right wing looked like a museum, or the tomb of some modern Pharaoh, who satisfied himself in death with the worldly goods that had surrounded him in life.

Meanwhile, the latter, the left wing, undoubtedly guarded treasures too. It is like a poor farm compared to a palace of vain monarchs. Nonetheless, it is currently inhabited, whilst its neighbor on the right lies in complete solitude, concealing its mysteries.

A substantial library in the left wing, with rows of imposing books, makes it clear that the lords of Black Castle are amongst the rare noblemen who are given to reading. Superb Italian renaissance furniture adorns it with impeccable artistry. This room has a religious atmosphere that is very moving.

A young man of little more than twenty years sits at the main desk in a large, high-backed chair carved in the Florentine style. He is dressed in the fashion of the period, but his hair is wavy and does not come down over his ears; and his clothes, although made of excellent velvet, are worn and faded. He is dark, and quite handsome. He tosses back his shiny, wavy hair. His eyes are bright and they shine with the ardent black glow of the Spanish countenance and the malevolence of the southern Portuguese. His name is Diogo-Antonio-Jose-Francisco-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca-d'Alvarada-y-Aragon.

He is the noble castellan of Black Cliff.

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<sup>20</sup> A spirit's ability to travel through space. Such ability is inherent to its moral advancement, i.e. its degree of detachment from matter. *Glossario Espírita* (Spiritist Glossary) at [www.osgefic.org](http://www.osgefic.org). – Tr.

<sup>21</sup> The “collarete” of the 16th century.

### 3

## A Sad Story of Two Noblemen

The lord of the castle is concentrating on reading a large book with golden clasps, with pages of special, finely crafted paper and a tortoiseshell cover with gold and ivory inlay. The book is so large that d'Alvarada, reclining in his Florentine chair, has lifted his well-formed legs and crossed them on top of the table in front of him. It is on this unusual book-stand that he is supporting the strange volume that absorbs him so. Dom Diogo d'Alvarada is as idle as any young nobleman who takes himself seriously – he will not be uncomfortable, not even in order to study.

The book is a treatise on magic and the Cabala, and is written in Arabic. The castellan is also a man of unusual intellect, and it is not difficult for him to grasp the secrets of this faraway language. D. Diogo had recently inherited the grand mansion we have described from a distant relative; and upon finding the priceless library, which prided itself on being the most important room, not only in the left wing but in the whole castle, he came across a startling variety of treatises on magic and evocations of deceased souls! He peruses everything; he eagerly reads and examines it all and is enthralled by the interesting stories told by Eastern fakirs and sorcerers. He studies arduously, excitedly, with total dedication, and aims to train himself to try out the risky experiments contained in the Arab and Hindu manuscripts. As we can see, D. Diogo, although very young, is almost a scholar. Books in Arabic, Hebrew, Greek and ancient Latin are spread out on the table. He reads them all. He was educated in a Benedictine monastery and learned many wondrous things there!

Some of his religious relatives imagined that the young man was enamored with the order, and would continue on there. But D. Diogo had very

unusual blood coursing through his veins. He educated himself and learned good and terrible things. He also had the habit of observation, and delving deeply, he found, to his dismay, many vile evildoings within the vestries, amongst the cassocks and in the darkness of the cells. And since he himself happened to be honest and benevolent, he was ashamed of his masters and disgusted with the cynicism of his fellows; so, he asked for a dispensation and freed himself from the disgraceful claws of the black flock that squawked repeatedly at him. Thus, instead of becoming a monk, he became a castellan so that he could study magic and seduce, with monkish insolence, the neighboring village ladies...

Nevertheless, there is want in Black Cliff Castle. Yes, there is want there, and this affliction troubles its owners. The draperies hanging in the left wing are torn and dusty; the ancient carpets – the newer ones were sold – merely serve as reminders of the wealth they once represented; the furniture, valuable as it is, needs repair and varnish; and the candelabras and lamps on the mantels of cold fireplaces, or hanging unlit from sculptured ceilings, are spiteful taunts from a glorious past to insult an adverse present.

In the larder, there are only leftovers. There are no provisions for the winter. It has been weeks since a good thick soup has received the required attention worthy of a banquet. The smokehouse, almost totally empty of any morsels, saddens the head cook and the big-bellied pots and cauldrons echo emptily, whilst in the spacious wine cellars, groups of empty barrels are stacked up, witnesses to the penury that set in when the last one of them ran dry. In the stead of more dignified “occupants,” there are merely a few wineskins containing a mediocre local product...

It is December, and Christmas is coming.

A sharp, biting wind is filling the air with snowflakes as large as the islands' apples<sup>22</sup>, freezing the earth and stiffening the trees with its snowy shroud. In the castle, only one fire has been lit: that of the lady of the castle. Even d'Alvarada, in his Oriental library, makes do with goat's wool blankets as he reads his tomes of evocations. Asian rugs, Indian draperies, golden candelabras, galleries with portraits of constables and barons from the Crusades, and of ladies with haughty eyes, in addition to Mongolian artifacts and sandalwood inlaid with ivory, gold and silver, hidden from view, and a Renaissance library with papyri written in Hebrew and Arabic are no more than an insolent insult to D. Diogo's worn doublet and the small sticks burning in the fireplace of the baroness, his mother.

There is want there, and with it, despondency and idleness. D. Diogo d'Alvarada y Aragon, with his unusual reading habits, can attest to that.

\* \* \*

The lady Dona Angela-Mariana-Magnolia-Francisca-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca-d'Alvarada-y-Aragon is sitting in the old burgundy damask and golden armchair that time has faded; her white feet are in warm woolen slippers and rest on an Indian footstool next to the weak flame in her fireplace. She has not yet deigned to leave her private chambers, although it is already well past lunch time. Not only has she demanded that her meal be served in her room, but she has also refused to receive her son and kind heir, Diogo, who had wanted to greet her, as he does so politely every morning.

Baroness d'Alvarada was angry. The rage that inflamed her depressed nerves and the cold that froze her bones, aggravating her bronchitis, infuriated her even more, making her unbearable towards Margarida, a favorite old servant – the only one who served her personally – and even towards Diogo. The baroness had become excessively irritable, absurdly so. And this excessiveness and this absurdity were obvious to anyone from the disarray in which she found herself at that hour of the afternoon: her face lacking makeup, her hair lacking cosmetics or ribbons, her bulging body lacking a corset and stuffed into a white flannel robe, long and ugly as a shroud – she, who normally made herself up early in the day, since not even in front of her son would she consider neglecting her appearance.

There must be a very good reason for this!

Certainly, it was not the empty cauldrons, nor the fireplaces bereft of logs: D. Mariana Magnolia had long been used to doing without these frivolities. A much more serious reason was upsetting her habits! It would not have been the smokehouse with no provisions, nor Diogo wrapped in goat's wool blankets, whilst two imposing fireplaces in the library stood empty waiting for something to burn and heat the room, that irritated her. To add to her irritation, there was the terrible winter, the insistent snow that would not stop falling on her beautiful terraced garden and that kept her from enjoying the sweet, sad leisure of reading under the elm trees, or daydreaming on the sills of the shady balconies, for Baroness d'Alvarada was romantic and thoughtful, and loved to ponder old legends of crusades and military heroes who returned from the wars covered in the glory of courageous deeds, their hearts bursting with burning love!

What snow! What cold! What horror!

And as her irritability rose by one degree each hour, while the temperature fell by one degree each hour, she was riled at the laziness of that impudent fire grimacing at her through the flicker of its thin flames – languid offspring of the consumptive kindling – which Ricardo, the steward and only male servant, and the good Margarida insisted on gathering nearby so that it would not be necessary to fell the leafy trees. Now and again she rises, moves towards the nearest arch and through the curtains and the openings in the windows spies the long road that stretches out below in sinuous curves, covered in ice: she looks, and looks again, as if searching for something, and then returns to sit near the fireplace, where she rings the old bell of ancient, graying silver to call Margarida and issue the same orders previously given and carried out, and to question reasons already much explored:

“Margarida, for Heaven’s sake! What are you doing? Have you, by any chance, prepared the girl’s room with the new bedcovers, as I told you to do? Come along, get on with it Margarida! Do it now! Arrange everything as nicely as possible, as we cannot have that sassy girl from the Court arriving here suddenly and seeing our difficulties...”

“Everything is ready, just as you ordered, Baroness! You need not worry, for if young Aurora were to arrive in the next minute, she would not find anything lacking, nor anything to criticize!”

“Have you stuffed the hares that Diogo raised for Christmas? Have you roasted Ricardo’s young goat? And the pie, Margarida? What have you done about my fig pie? I’ve told you over and over again since yesterday that it is for tonight’s dinner!”

“I haven’t forgotten anything Baroness! Your dear pie is also ready and waiting for young Aurora, as are D. Diogo’s hares and Ricardo’s goat, and also some...”

“Ah! I thought as much, that you would have prepared everything and the best of everything to welcome the girl ... Why should I care or bother to do my best to court her with kindness ... Oh! Holy Saints in Heaven! Have you not acted as a go-between for Aurora and Diogo for a long time? Do you think, you, disloyal servant, that I don’t know about your whisperings and little secrets with D. Diogo? Do you think that I don’t know that those whisperings are about Aurora? Come, my good Margarida, answer me

truthfully: do you, or do you not love your mistress? Are you, or are you not a faithful and dedicated servant?”

“Oh my dear, good lady, do you really doubt your humble servant, who loves you so much, more than the blood in her own veins?!”

“Well then, answer me: what do you and Diogo whisper about? What does he say to you about her? What does D. Diogo think and feel about Aurora de Casablanca?”

“But ... Baroness, I swear by my patron saint, Our Lady of Peace, that neither D. Diogo nor I have said anything about the dear girl...”

“Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! ... How she mocks me with her lies! And do you know what else? D. Diogo shall never marry Aurora, because I, his mother, shall never consent to it! That impudent girl thinks we are rich because we inherited all this from our cousin Baron Andre, who, it must be said, could have just as well forgotten to bequeath us this huge, unbearable castle, so ugly and so sinister, with all its horrible traditions! That stupid man would have done us a favor if he had not left it to us upon his death...”

“You say such sad things my lady because you are not fond of your niece, who is so chaste and good, and because in your loneliness, you have come to mistrust everyone...”

“Yes, she thinks we are rich, that troublemaker from the Court, so she pursues my Diogo and announces that she will spend Christmas with us, even though she must know how terribly cold it is in the countryside at the moment ... Look here, Margarida: when Aurora gets here, only you and Diogo will receive her. As for me, I will only show my face tomorrow at lunch time! That’s all that I need: to act as a procuress for a miserable wretch like Aurora! You receive her. I will not be nice to her nor pay any attention to her, for if she is received with smiling faces – Holy Saints in Heaven! – she’ll stick by Diogo’s side and I’ll have to put up with her as my daughter-in-law for the rest of my life!”

“But mistress, the poor girl is pure goodness, and I can assure you that she does not pursue the young man as you say ... She holds you in high regard, and what is more, the poor thing has suffered greatly ... She is a poor orphan with no home of her own. She spends time here over Passion week, and there waiting for Christmas, or goes somewhere else to spend the autumn and somewhere else again to wait for spring...”



“That’s enough, Margarida! You dare contradict me? Sweet and poor, you say? Opportunist is what you should call her, living off other people! Why doesn’t she go to a convent and wash the nuns’ dirty clothes, if she is so poor? She would rather pay court to me and ensnare my son with her innocent ways because she supposes us to be rich from the inheritance of the deceased baron ... Did you call her “good”? A troublemaker is what she is. An insolent troublemaker! Don’t you remember how she shamed herself at Court by behaving badly at the Countess of Frazao’s balls, on Baron Castelar’s hunts and at the English ambassador’s parties? She flirted with ten young men at once, listening to their confidences, laughing uncontrollably, rushing madly after the bucks, fanning herself like a common woman and offering herself wantonly. And now, discouraged, she is looking for a husband in the provinces because those in high circles ... ha ha ha! ... they know her all too well! And they will not be tempted by one of such insipid talent!”

“Oh my Lady of Peace! Bless me! My lady Baroness, forgive me, but you are wrong! I swear that this was all Madam d’Alcantara Fialho’s gossip! I know the girl! She is not capable of such things! It was gossip, it was! The poor girl is genuine and as pure as a dove, and she has loved D. Diogo since she was a little girl!”

“Ah! You see? You see? Did I not say you were the go-between? I already knew it, you traitor, since knowing that I oppose this union, you dare to protect the lovers, encouraging their disobedience! I know that you used to permit them to meet alone when you accompanied them to mass at Our Lady of Remedies Church at the crack of dawn...”

The good servant was chastened and began to cry, helpless in the face of the accusations – which happened to be true – of her mistress, whose servant she had been since they were both girls, and whom she loved faithfully. Margarida was one of those servants who gain the trust of the family, and thereby end up becoming part of it. To be fair to Madam d’Alvarada’s sentiments, she did care about Margarida, giving her the freedom of her rooms and even going so far as to discuss intimate subjects with her – a sure sign of great affection. Margarida accepted the freedom, but never took advantage of the power it gave her. She had served Mariana during the fleeting days of prosperity; she had been part of the few shining moments of happiness that the baroness had enjoyed; she had followed her on the odyssey of nuptials to the illustrious d’Aragon; and afterwards, when the decline of a thousand ruins cast shadows over the unlucky lady’s life, and tears and

mourning filled her torn heart with bitterness, Margarida was the only servant – the only real friend – who did not abandon her! Because of all these good traits, old Margarida was now permitted to contradict her mistress, to argue, to get involved in family issues and to whisper with and scold Diogo, whom she had held in her arms since his first newborn cries.

She and Mariana enjoyed endless discussions. They loved each other dearly like sisters. They could not see being apart from each other. But they argued over the smallest and the largest things. These insistent arguments invariably ended with Margarida in tears, which moved the good mistress greatly and she would immediately be kinder to the old servant; this repetition is why she never forgot this part of the sequence.

“Ah! You’re crying?” continued Mariana, seeing the servant hide her convulsing face in the folds of a large woolen shawl. “Crying? Well, it must be the remorse that’s pricking your conscience for having betrayed your mistress, who has been such a good friend to you all your life! All right ... all right ... Let’s stop arguing ... calm down ... calm down ... But just tell me, my good Margarida, why do you foster the love between Diogo and Aurora when you know that I have reasons to convince him to marry Madam d’Alcantara Fialho?”

“Sweet Jesus! Oh my Lady of Peace! An old lady for a boy?”

“Old, you say? Old?!... And what about you and me ... what are we, if Madam d’Alcantara is old?! Perhaps you have forgotten that she is not yet forty-five and still makes heads turn?”

“And the boy is barely twenty, for God’s sake!”

“Oh, come now ... Don’t pay so much mind to the boy Margarida! It’ll be worse for you if you keep on spoiling him! What does the difference in ages matter if the woman is rich, and we need to look out for Diogo’s future? A match with Aurora will bring us nothing but more of the unhappiness we already have.”

“But they both adore each other, madam Baroness!”

“Well, I adored D. Antonio d’Alvarada, and you are well aware of the depths to which that love reduced me ... No, no and no Margarida; I tell you this: we will drive Aurora away and install Madam d’Alcantara Fialho ... and her gold too! Ah, what a noble and respectable lady, who, rich as she is, falls in love with a wretched provincial nobleman, and a very poor one at that; yet

she is generous enough to propose marriage so as to protect him properly and prepare him for a bright future!”

“But he doesn’t love her back, Baroness! He wants Aurora! Oh, if she is so noble and respectable, why does this grand lady not retire to a convent to serve God?”

The baroness, pale with rage at such insolence, was about to answer the servant, banishing her from the room with the usual insults, when at that moment a manly voice, warm and agreeable, resounded in the antechamber:

“Margarida, Margarida, where are you hiding?”

“Here, D. Diogo, here I am, I was just on my way ... Excuse me my lady, with your permission...”

Angela Mariana d’Alvarada y Aragon was left alone. Indignant at receiving no support from her faithful servant for the plans she had in mind, she reached for the smelling salts, inhaling them fretfully; she sat up straight on her burgundy damask seat, rearranged the pleats of the shroud that passed as a robe, coughed, got up, peered through the window at the road that stretched away across the plains, sat down again, fanned herself (in spite of the cold), recomposed herself and began to curse like a punished soldier. She hated her niece; not because she or her niece was evil, but because she hated the poverty in which she lived. She planned to escape it by marrying her Diogo to a fortune. She had opposed the poor girl’s visit to the castle with every ounce of the neurosis instilled in her nerves by her disappointments. But Diogo, who ardently loved and was loved by his cousin, invoked his rights as head of the household with such ardor, supported by his nursemaid, that the baroness, defeated, had agreed to receive her. Aurora de Casablanca would arrive that afternoon.

Meanwhile outside, the white snow still falls, putting a glaze on the byways and making them impassable. Whilst we wait for Aurora’s carriage, and whilst Diogo and Margarida either discuss the finishing touches on the preparations for the reception of such an elegant visitor or snigger furtively as they remember Madam d’Alcantara Fialho and her pretensions, and whilst Madam Mariana Magnolia’s irritation grows as she coughs and mutters next to the fireplace with its paltry flames from the flimsy kindling, we will revisit the past and disclose some minor events that will tie in to our story.

\* \* \*

Dona Angela-Mariana-Magnolia-Francisca-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca-d'Alvarada-y-Aragon was a poor descendant of old Portuguese and Spanish lines, and as genuine and virtuous as she was unfortunate. Whilst still a young woman, she had married for love a Spanish nobleman who gave her one of the most illustrious names on the Peninsula, but few financial advantages. Conspiratorial and combative, with a forceful and impulsive nature that made him the perfect model of a Spanish warrior, Aragon found his assets confiscated more than once and himself thrown into the dungeon, from whence his guiding star plucked him repeatedly – thanks to his good name – as often as he was flung there. But so many intrigues, resulting in imprisonment and inevitable captures, eventually devastated his courage and his fortune completely, and one fine day, D. Antonio Jose d'Alvarada y Aragon found himself broke and facing alarming difficulties. So, he emigrated over the Peninsula. In spite of his strong Spanish background, he went to live in Portuguese territory. There he met and fell in love with D. Angela Mariana and married her. But emigrating has traditionally not brought satisfaction to those who nurture ambition and pride in their own name, and who only know how to conspire and wield a weapon. He returned to Spain and began to scheme again. This time, he succumbed to the inglorious struggle and died, leaving behind, at the mercy of painful vicissitudes, his wife – still young and as pretty as she was good – and a son who was their dearest joy, his Diogo, then barely three years old.

Mariana, the victim of this harsh trial, returned to Portugal in deep mourning, and with her son, she retired to an enchanting estate in the Algarve inherited from her father. The disconsolate widow lived off the meager proceeds of this small property, since no riches swelled the coffers of the Casablanca family into which she was born. She tried in vain to recoup a few bits of D. Antonio d'Alvarada's confiscated assets for her son.

She laid out her arguments, sent messengers, wrote tearful tomes of letters and requests, but all in vain. The Spanish rulers were stubborn and continued to uphold their worthy laws, caring little for the fact that from the depths of a Portuguese province a poor mother pleaded desperately for what rightfully belonged to her son.

But such is life – men do as they wish, and not as they ought. Finally, Mariana accepted the cold, hard facts and resigned herself, never again writing any tomes nor trying to regain what was hers.

However, knowing of her struggles, a few of her wealthy relatives

helped her at first, perhaps due to an unusual lapse in their normal, everyday judgment. Notable amongst them was Baron Andre-Luis-Januario-Francisco-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca, her first cousin, known as the wealthiest of all the Castanhede e Casablanças, and who had been in love with her in times gone by. He had even signed a formal betrothal agreement with her before d'Alvarada showed up. So, thanks to the selfless favors of Baron Andre de Casablanca, Mariana was able to educate her son in style in a Benedictine monastery, for she was an educated lady – an exception in her time – and she desired for Diogo his father's courage, tempered by the enlightenment of his dedicated patron; for if D. Andre was respected by the members of his family, it was not only because of the extent of his wealth but also because of the large store of learning he possessed. Diogo, too, became learned. However, he disappointed his mother and his teachers by not acquiring a penchant for war from his books, and even less so, a penchant for the Church. Nonetheless, he became as enlightened as his noble cousin, whom he never even met, since D. Andre Luis Francisco, eccentric and obstinate, would never agree to receive visits or thanks from his former fiancée, in spite of all his protection of her and his apparent regard for her.

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<sup>22</sup> The expression in Portuguese, “maçãs das ilhas,” possibly refers to the Hesperides (also called the Fortunate Isles), a name given by the ancients to a series of islands located to the extreme west of the then known world. These may have included the Canary Islands, the Madeira Islands, and Cape Verde. ([www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Mythology/Hesperides](http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Mythology/Hesperides)) – Tr.

# 4

## The Castle Demons

As we were saying, Baron Andre loved D. Angela Mariana before she was married; she was a kindly noblewoman who inspired great love in more than one young man in her time.

The baron's love for Mariana was born in the dawn of adolescence. The sentiment grew with the fire of youth. It persevered, grew stronger, took hold of him and made him fall unremittingly in love, such as can only happen and be felt only once in a lifetime!

With his love reciprocated, his ardently romantic soul inspired by heartwarming hope, and already enslaved to the happiness that he had dreamed of enjoying with his promised love at his side, he succumbed to his idealism with thoughtless desire, without ever considering the possibility that his fortune might change.

One day, when the future looked most promising, Aragon, the noble gentleman, arrived in Portugal, banished from Spain; a gentleman who exceeded D. Andre in distinction and good manners and was as seductive as any Spaniard of high or low breeding.

D. Andre de Casablanca found that he had been replaced in the affections of his beloved betrothed by D. Antonio de Aragon: Angela Mariana betrayed her promises! Beguiled by the Spanish gentleman's grand name, the entire family encouraged the girl's new inclinations, in detriment to her first betrothed. And D. Andre de Castanhede e Casablanca, after lengthy pleading and vain protestation, after foolishly trying to defend his noble love and his rights, and after dueling in vain, found himself beaten and chased away like a dog in the night whose incessant barking is disruptive and inappropriate.

After D. Mariana and D. Antonio were married, Baron Andre left Portugal, having sworn eternal hatred towards her and her family.

For a long time nobody knew where he was. At first it was thought that he had hidden himself in the depths of a monastery, there to lament the disappointment of his betrayed love, like any young man without dignity or valor. Later, however, it emerged that he had embarked on highly risky journeys and was traveling the world, probably in an attempt to hide his pain from prying eyes.

He never did marry. He had sworn eternal fidelity, and kept his promise. His love, his passionate ardor, destroyed all his romantic feelings upon finding himself betrayed. Rejected, miserable, ashamed, he disappeared from the salons and royal antechambers, to return never more!

He returned to Portugal a few years later, and from that time on, he would occasionally set foot in the country of his birth.

However, he never visited his family or appeared at social gatherings. And if anyone tried to penetrate his loneliness by trying to pay him a visit, D. Andre would not receive them. Angela Mariana was the only one whom he was kind to after the unfortunate incident with Aragon, the gentleman. Even so, he never did pay her a visit, nor consent to let her visit him. His charity was delivered by the Benedictine monks who educated Diogo at his expense.

On one of these visits to his homeland, the nobleman acquired the Black Cliff fortress, whose picturesque solitude appealed to his soul, disturbed as it was by the onset of neurasthenia. He bought it for a song and moved there immediately because the old towers, full of superstitious legends, were much to his liking.

The workmen arrived. The parts that had been damaged by the weather were refurbished. The enchanting park was replanted and embellished. The interior was redecorated under the artistic eye of the strange proprietor, whose knowledge of architecture surprised even the artisans working there. Caravels arrived on the adjacent beaches and unloaded treasures which were carried up the winding steps to the fortress. A palace worthy of true monarchs was built there. It was said everywhere that D. Andre de Casablanca was going to marry a princess.

However, no outsider's eyes ever saw the riches that were rumored. The solemn castellan was discreet, and if he did have riches, he hid them in the towers on the edge of the precipice.

At night, bright lights shone from the Gothic arches in the right wing, where the baron preferred to live when he was in Portugal, bringing life and a festive spirit to the calm fields adorned with daisies. But no one knew what occupied the evasive figure of the baron, ever discreet and serious, with his goatee and his black velvet coat. The gossip-mongers said that in the dead of night, when the silence had lulled the dogs to sleep and all was quiet and drowsy, two black forms, two figures cloaked in large, heavy, woolen jackets, with wide-brimmed hats on their mysterious heads and small masks on their faces, would fly across the bridge, climb the stairs and enter the fortress through a small door, guided and helped by the castellan himself!

According to the pious women and the nobleman's servants, these figures were nothing if not demons in disguise, visiting the baron – a heretic who never went to Mass – and who had a pact with him for reasons unknown to anyone. This was evident from these visits, which never occurred in daylight, but only very late at night, and ended before dawn after their despicable colloquy in the smoldering rooms and studies.

There were also more humane and less serious rumors surrounding the visits.

Some thought that these cloaked figures were not demons at all, but women, and that the bright lights that shone in the Gothic windows illuminated orgies, not discussions. Noble ladies, suddenly remembered for previous calumnies, were the subject of gossip; poor village women, whose husbands owned similar hats and cloaks, emerged from the shadows to figure in the scenes that were invented about the baron.

As always, the lie fed the rumor, and for reasons invented, the solitary nobleman was despised in the surrounding areas. The truth was that Andre Januario merely applied himself to honorable occupations, whilst around him the absurd stories strengthened. Given to great studiousness, he devoted himself to the high science of the Occult; and having attended certain schools in the East that taught medicine, he had fallen in love with chemistry. In short, he was a competent doctor, pharmacist and student of the Occult, with an above-average passion for discovery. Consequently, he had to work constantly on experiments. Black Cliff Castle, set in the solitude of the dangerous precipices, was perfect for these experiments. D. Andre de Casablanca was smart: he lived in the castle because its isolation was favorable to his plans.



However, such work was not worthy of a nobleman – except possibly for riff-raff who had no breeding – and the baron, being a scientist, who had also become a smuggler and a money-grubber during his long journeys around the world, applied himself to chemical experiments, the summoning of dead souls, and the business of smuggling – all in careful secrecy to safeguard his family’s good name.

Perhaps thanks to the indiscretion of some prattling servant, the story circulated that he was amassing a fortune in his fortress. Here and there it was said that each time his ships and caravels returned from a journey, they would work all night long unloading heavy trunks and large chests, with which the secretive nobleman was particularly careful. But if the sailors and servants found them heavy, and if the smuggler took suspicious care of them, no one ever discovered what was in them – not even his two disciples, the clever demons!

It was absolutely true. The fortune did exist!

Having lost his passion for love, Andre Januario had been captured by another sentiment, a hundred times more sinister: the passion for gold! At first he had traveled merely in order to study and to amuse himself.

But when he discovered incalculable riches in foreign lands, he desired them; he fought for them and possessed them!

He had no need for them, really. Already rich, single, with no family responsibilities to bore him, alone and with no duties since his mother, whom he had loved dearly, had died many years before, Andre-Januario-Francisco desired to have even more gold merely for the pleasure of seeing it glisten in his chests! Well-educated and favored by the noble qualities that befit many men of his era, he was unable, however, to avoid one of the gravest wrongs that can weigh heavily on the shoulders and consciences of men: he became miserly.

He loved gold as much as he had once loved Angela-Mariana. He became a slave to it, just as he had previously been enslaved to the woman he loved! He made plans and built complicated hiding places, true enigmas, whose full secrets only he knew; and there, in those devilishly constructed tombs, he buried his treasure. To this end, he brought skilled workers from far-away lands, and threatened them with death if they ever revealed the secrets they knew. In fact, being a better designer and engineer than his

helpers, the baron was the only one who knew the full secrets of access to his coffers. His helpers had only the vaguest notion of what they were doing.

Indeed, dismayed by the defeats he had suffered in his love life, poor Andre Luis Januario – unlike most of the young men who seek to forget such disappointments by embracing a bohemian lifestyle that degrades their character and their sentiments – tried to forget his unexpected misfortune in love by living a life of hard work and reclusion. As we already know, he traveled for education and amusement. But unfortunately, he, who remained so dignified in the face of the frustration of his romantic hopes, allowed himself to fall in love with shameful ambitions on his journeys!

He visited India, China and Japan; he lived in Egypt, stopped in Greece, went deep into the woods of Santa Cruz, went back to Persia and to Palestine, and in these remote lands, he became not only more and more educated but also fabulously richer! Gold and diamonds from the famous mines of Santa-Cruz; medicinal herbs, completely unknown to the old peoples of Europe; wood, whose value, beauty and usefulness would outdo even gold; pearls, emeralds, gems of unbelievable splendor, unimaginable wonders; utensils, furniture, exquisite works of art unknown in Portugal; porcelain, tableware, tapestries, rare perfumes, treasures – everything that D. Andre uncovered in Santa-Cruz, in Africa, in Greece, he smuggled into his home country by way of his powerful ships each time he visited, and locked it up in the right wing of Black Castle after selling what he did not wish to keep. And each time he returned, the same things happened: two demons would visit late at night and were courteously received by the castellan, who would honor them both with macabre festivities, something that scandalized both the good and the bad people for five leagues around. The two devils, close friends, were also evokers and apothecaries, and partners to the baron in the sale of contraband. They visited their friend, discussed any business of interest and illegal commerce, too.

Still, the wisest devil was D. Andre himself, who, for his own enjoyment, kept the best part of his goods hidden from the profane eyes of his partners.

These two close friends were the most honorable of figures: a priest and a governor, both of sufficient malice to disguise themselves and visit a man who was a renowned heretic, sorcerer and smuggler.

Yet, in spite of appearances, the meetings between these three men had

noble intentions. But, it was true that they were greedy. It was also true that they cheated the State, avoiding the fair payment of taxes.

Still, it was no less true that they worked through the night exhaustively and patiently, now trying a new formula, now another, inventing or translating ancient oriental recipes into a more comprehensible vernacular. They would get very excited, rushing around here and there, from table to table, cupboard to cupboard, chest to chest ... They opened bottles, lit ovens, diluted mixtures, heated metals, brewed herbs, prepared stills, ground pestles against mortars, filtered essences through elaborate spiral tubes ... ever conscientious, devoted, swift ... until dawn came to bathe the solitude of the mountains in light and prevent them from finishing their tasks, unmasking them as they busied themselves with deeds unworthy of any of the three...

The priest, a disciple of the nobleman, was a student of medicine and a kind of doctor in the area. Andre would teach him his ointments and tisanes, his filters and infusions, and the priest would use them whenever the circumstances required, never forgetting to say, each time he used them, that a good angel had created the recipes and had taught them to him in dreams...

The baron's laboratories were set up in large rooms in the right wing, where he preferred to store his treasures and to study. When he returned to Portugal, he would spend peace-filled days there.

At night, from far away, the peasants who already knew of the ghastly customs in the fortress, would see the incandescent reflection of the flames in the laboratory leaping from the arched windows, and the flash of quick explosions during the experiments, whilst human figures came and went hurriedly, looking as though they were ablaze, unrecognizable, and they would be transfixed with horror, and would complain about Casablanca, reproaching him for being a monster, assassin, demon, magician and seducer. They hated him. They accused him of being self-centered and rude.

The lonely nobleman was surrounded by a sinister atmosphere of hostility and antagonism. Nobody passed by the evil dwelling without carrying a large cross or crossing themselves repeatedly. For his part, the nobleman never addressed travelers when he would meet them on his morning outings in the fields, looking for medicinal herbs and flowers. And as they observed him bending down here and there to collect his plants, they reasoned that he was using poisonous herbs to make magic ingredients for charms and spells.

But D. Andre paid them no attention. Aloof, discreet, proud and neurotic, he avoided relationships and rebuffed politeness, if by any chance any came his way.

No one ever heard of him selling any of his treasures in order to use the proceeds for charity. He did not care about the world with its difficulties and misery. He did not notice anyone around him. He was a prisoner of himself, lost in the grief of disillusionment, perhaps extremely disappointed, but also incontestably dominated by an extraordinary selfishness!

However, he finally grew tired of traveling. Jealous of his treasures, he could no longer relax at sea nor enjoy the pleasure abroad. An obsessive fear that his treasure would be discovered and stolen plagued his thoughts, making him constantly on-edge and apprehensive. In order to keep an eye on it, he stopped traveling and stayed for good in the old towers over the precipice. There, close to his belongings, he spent days and hours of unspeakable happiness. To live life like this, surrounded by his accumulated wealth was pure heaven!

He became unsociable such as he had never been, wanting to live, breathe and think only about his miserly love of his own fortune. His excessive attachment to his riches and his depression had turned him into a caged beast.

Some of his more courageous relatives tried to approach him, hoping to derive some financial benefit. He rejected them all in his customary angry manner, without even a semblance of civility.

A wild man in his sinister lair, he dedicated himself even more energetically to his favorite studies, and so his unfortunate reputation for being a sorcerer grew. From the Gothic arches, continual flames blazed out over the golden wheat fields in resplendent shades of red.

The two demons, his disciples – the priest and his friend the governor – visited him more frequently and stayed longer than before. As a result, the priest, working as a doctor in his spare time, could offer new tisanes, new purges and the latest ointments, the fruits of his enchanted dreams with the archangels of the celestial court...

One fine day the baron was afflicted by an illness that he realized was incurable. He was dismayed by the idea that he was going to die. He tried all the drugs he had invented and found them to be useless. He became furious and destroyed a large number of stills and bottles of infusions, which in his

selfishness he had not shown the priest. However, he took advantage of him as the ultimate refuge, and asked him for full absolution of whatever sins he had committed. The visits now took place in daylight with much attendant fuss. It involved regenerating the soul of a dying man who had fallen into mortal sin, and lifting him up to God for the honor and greater glory of Holy Mother Church. No matter how many sins the baron confessed, the good priest forgave him! There was absolutely no problem with it. For this purpose, the priest was the authentic representative of the good Lord, anointed, consecrated and tonsured ... with full powers to connect and reconnect that which would be connected and reconnected in Heaven ... in spite of being just a tiny bit sorcerer and smuggler, just as the baron was ... No, there were no problems – the dying man repented, after all! And the priest helped the baron so much in discharging his conscience that the proud D. Andre Luis believed he could smuggle himself into Heaven too, and felt light enough to ascend to Paradise in one leap, even though he had spent his life dishonored as a heretic...

This went on for months. Each time he confessed, however, the dying nobleman somehow forgot to tell his beloved guide that he had buried a treasure in the walls of the castle, in spite of the very worthy prelate helping him with serious soul-searching. The priest did not want the penitent to forget anything, insignificant as it might be, any little secret that might trouble his immortal conscience later on! But it was all in vain. The forgetful baron never seemed to remember the treasure, whose existence the caring priest anxiously suspected!

The illness progressed. It was the gout. The attacks kept coming. His strength was sapped. D. Andre de Casablanca was weakening visibly.

Realizing that he was dying, the baron resigned himself. He thought of his property and his relatives, who detested him. It hurt him to bless them with his death, they, who in the past had encouraged Mariana to betray him and to break his heart! It hurt him that his extensive efforts, his exhaustive labors would, upon his death, be a gift to these unworthy heirs. A fearsome decision set his thoughts on fire. He would avenge himself now for the affront he had suffered by their preference for D. Antonio de Aragon. He would take the secret of his wealth to his grave so that, until they found it, they too would toil and suffer.

However, one last flicker of his love for Mariana moved him in his final hour. She was his first love, and his last. She had given him the only hours of

real happiness that his soul had ever known. If unclean hands were one day to touch the treasure he had hidden, let them be the only hands that his lips had ever kissed in those fleeting, cherished moments of hope! Oh! But he would avenge himself of her – the liar, the unfaithful one!

He called the notaries and lawyers and drew up his will in the utmost secrecy. Having made a few changes, he ordered the doors of all the rooms in the left wing which led to the long gallery separating them from the right wing to be boarded up and sealed with bars of iron, for let us not forget that the grand mansion was divided in two separate parts.

Thereafter, he lived only in the left side, never again visiting the other, where he had just buried his enormous riches forever.

And his last days ended like that: sadly, filled with nostalgia, bitterness and selfish thoughts ... much to the dismay of his friend and disciple, the priest, who with his other friend and disciple, the governor, closed his eyes and commended him straight to Heaven...

And the tomb was closed with the secret of the immoral riches inside...

# 5

## The Inheritance

The ovens of Black Castle had gone out. The bright lights no longer shone through the ornate arches, and demons no longer ascended the stairs for macabre colloquies and midnight meetings and sabbats.

Nevertheless, a few days after the death of the austere nobleman, the left wing of the stately fortress shook and trembled, as though the former goblins had returned to that side and were setting about their business again. These demons, however, climbed the famous winding steps in the shade of the acacias and elms in the full light of day, unconcerned that the surprised local villagers might recognize them.

They were the relatives of the deceased. Having heard of his death, they were arriving to mourn him with opulent burial rites, having forgotten – so benevolent were they! – that the deceased was a heretic, a smuggler, as hateful as he was hated!

Faithful to their thorny mandate, as they understood it, the lawyers had advised their client's cousins and nephews that there would be a meeting for the reading of the will in order to relieve them of suspicion and responsibility, as they well knew that the strange wishes of the late baron would cause a scandal.

The Castle itself was chosen as the place for this all-important ceremony.

Cousins, nephews, brothers-in-law, godfathers of cousins, godchildren, cousins of grandparents, sons-in-law of uncles, in-laws of relatives of deceased uncles and even mere friends, who at the last minute considered themselves relatives, all rushed there without delay.

In the courtyard, paved and clean in the orderly manner that ruled the entire dwelling, the carriages, vehicles and pack-mules gathered, jangling their shrill bells, now muted by mourning bands. Within a few days, on the pretext of offering Masses and condolences, they were all there. There were tears. The haughty ladies' bodices were swathed in heavy mourning crape, as were the gentlemen's jackets. But of course no one was actually thinking of the baron. The only matter of interest was the will, only the longed-for will, which would soon reveal – perhaps even favorably! – the secret of the treasure that so fascinated them all!

The lady Angela-Mariana-Magnolia-Francisca-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca-d'Alvarada-y-Aragon, being a legitimate cousin, found herself amongst the relatives, also wrapped in long and sentimental mourning crape.

The heirs gathered in the vast formal hall, presided over by portraits of proud-eyed ladies and gentlemen with aristocratic goatees; this room, along with the library, was the richest part of the left wing.

It was the wonderful day, the hour, the grand hour of the reading of the famous will!

Shudders ran down the spines of those who were most nervous and most in debt, as they agonized in a mixture of emotions. Some of the ladies wept for the loss of the distinguished deceased. Now and then, Angela Mariana, romantic and thoughtful, remembering that she had once been loved by her deceased cousin, wiped a tear from the corner of her eyes with the corner of her black-bordered handkerchief. Diogo, skeptical in such surroundings, an honest man and a true heir to Spanish chivalry, was the only one who did not feign his sentiments. He remained indifferent and showed a dignified lack of interest, far too incredulous and arrogant to entertain the possibility of being the heir to a man who, in spite of having paid for his education, did not even know him. He limited himself to flirting with Aurora, who almost smiled at him as she pretended to mourn the dead man.

Finally, the reading was about to begin.

The notary and his flock, composed of a reader and two witnesses – the very serious and worthy priest and governor – prepared to get this thankless job off their shoulders.

A richly carved Mongolian table, covered in majestic mourning cloths, lent even greater solemnity to the ceremony. It must be said that it was truly a moving moment. On the table were scribbled papers: receipts, stubs,



notebooks, lists, more and less important documents, all of which the notary felt he should present. In the center, right in the center of the table, was a scroll, bulky and white – the idol of infamous Levites – a long, genuine Egyptian parchment, sealed, very well sealed with signets. And hanging from one end were some sky blue and purple ribbons – the colors of Casablanca, with a gold medallion bearing a coat of arms.

It was the will!

The man of the moment, standing tall and magisterial, the notary, upon whose lips hung the downfall or the glory of the anxious bystanders, turned to his audience to begin his duty. Nobody heard his introduction: what the audience wanted was the will, oh! the will!

Nevertheless, the sobbing increased. They fluttered their handkerchiefs shamelessly, showing each other that they were drying their tears, which most of them knew were non-existent. And suddenly, in the midst of the general commotion, the voice of the local reader, a throaty voice, irritating, comical, brazen, sinister, and repulsive! – struck the hopes of the bystanders like a bolt of lightning: the famous will was opened and, incredibly, it said only the following:

“I, Andre-Luis-Januario-Francisco-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca, being of sound mind, with neither constraint nor coercion on the part of any other, and by my own free will, record the following document, and do declare:

“**a** – that, contrary to what is generally thought of me, I am not rich;

“**b** – that my fortune was spent on journeys, adventures and on my studies;

“**c** – that I possess only this Black Cliff Castle **and its contents**;

“**d** – that the income I had come from two farms that I have just sold, and with the proceeds, I paid off some debts;

“**e** – and that I bequeath this, my Black Cliff Castle, **as well as everything that is in it**, to my beloved cousin D. Angela-Mariana-Magnolia-Francisca-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca-d’Alvarada-y-Aragon, to whom I was engaged to be married long ago;

“**f** – but that I make this bequest subject to a formal oath that, before the Shrine of the Consecrated Host, she shall swear to obey my final wishes, which are:

“– to forever respect, and never to enter, the right wing of my Castle, in which I lived and practiced my learning and experiments in Magic, Sorcery and Occultism; under penalty of revenge after my death, for I do not wish this wing to be desecrated.

“And by my faith in God, whom I recognize, revere and worship, I do swear that it was I who conceived, wrote and signed this document.”

The baroness, taken by surprise, was stunned at first. However, she composed herself quickly, such was her sense of good manners in society. She merely wiped a tear away – more romantic than sincere – for the deceased nobleman, who had never forgotten her.

Thus, before the Shrine in the small village church, Mariana swore to respect the wishes of the dead man and on that same afternoon was solemnly recognized as the heir to Black Castle and **everything in it...**

“A fine memento of D. Andre!” exclaimed Diogo irritably, as he and his mother climbed into the vehicle that would take them to the inn where they lodged. “A fine memento! A disreputable, sinister castle with a wing we cannot enter, full of unexplained things – and empty coffers, to boot!”

“Poor Andre! He wasn’t wealthy after all! The little he had, he bequeathed to me! How poorly I loved him!” Angela-Mariana-Magnolia answered her son, sadly...

## 6

# A Soul in Turmoil

A year after the preceding events, D. Mariana found herself in the difficult position of having to abandon her small property in the Algarve<sup>23</sup> and move to the castle inherited from her former betrothed. She did this, however, out of extreme necessity and not out of preference for the aged residence.

Her neglected property was poorly managed by Diogo (who would have made a good doctor but never a competent farmer) and produced alarming losses, preventing her from developing any business and often leaving her in critical circumstances, in which she even suffered certain privations.

Black Castle's land did not lend itself to farming; consequently, it could not be leased out. She would rather have sold it, but due to its reputation as worthless, no one would want to buy it. So, overcoming her scruples and her repugnance, and after sleepless nights thinking about the problem, she decided that she would live in the fortress.

Margarida was against it. Black Castle, the cursed residence of a sorcerer, inhabited by demons that had lit fires inside it without ever burning it down, was not a place where baptized, God-fearing people should live. Diogo protested, calling the old nursemaid a fool for believing in the superstitions of spiteful common folk. Mariana insisted, saying that only the right wing was cursed and not the left; and that the late D. Andre had only prohibited entry to the former. Furthermore, the holy father, the priest, could be summoned to exorcise it, and, with a good shake of holy water, cast out any evil goblin that remained.

There were arguments. It would be preferable to live in poverty than to willingly place themselves in the claws of demons – that was Margarida's

opinion. Mariana reiterated her own string of explanations. The servant disagreed. The mistress became angry. Margarida burst into copious tears. The baroness comforted her, and a month later they settled into the huge left wing, in the most meager comfort imaginable.

Once there, they lived the best they could, considering the lack of resources and the castle's sinister background.

Margarida never stopped complaining, and Mariana continued to patiently explain the pressing reasons that had led them to accept this way of life. Without argument, quiet as always, Diogo was delighted to take over the library and spent days and nights on end there, absorbed in the books, which he perused with passionate concentration.

Despite D. Mariana's sacrifice, however, they continued to suffer shortages and difficulties. To cover their needs, she would sell furniture and works of art that were part of her inheritance from Andre. But sometimes she could find no buyer for them, and then her worries seemed boundless.

For the first six months, the minor nobleman who had leased the Algarve property paid on time. But in the second period he did not, complaining that the land was bad and his harvest had been poor. Ricardo delivered letters of complaint to him, written by the baroness, inviting him to settle the debts that were piling up. The old servant brought back equally unpleasant replies, with tiny payments that were quickly used up.

Thus Mariana lived, beset by the bitterest misfortune.

Confined to her ancient residence like a prisoner, a skeptic might say that the only thing keeping her alive were her memories of better times gone by. Acute bronchitis was weakening her. The burden of constant problems brought on neurasthenia, and she was always in a bad mood. All that remained of the beautiful, sweet Mariana, who had been so loved by D. Antonio and who had caused the baron of Casablanca's demise, was a heart broken by adversity!

Such were the circumstances of the owners of Black Castle a year after they went to live there, when an extraordinary event happened that shook them to their bones, enmeshed them in a maelstrom of powerful sensations, and plucked them from the unflagging lethargy of their routine...

One warm and peaceful afternoon, D. Diogo and his mother met as usual in the evening before dinner. They were enjoying a calm and gentle

conversation. Diogo, a polite and respectful son, behaved with charming tenderness towards his good mother, whose qualities, such as dignity in the face of misfortune, he so admired. Mariana worked at her loom and Diogo alternated between pleasant rhetoric and old books telling of heroic feats by brave crusaders. They were in a small room with windows looking out over the park. Heady scents rose from the flower beds down below, mingling with the delicate essence of the flowering acacias, whose yellow blooms swayed in the gentle sea breezes. Out in the fields, all was calm. The lamentations of the sea drifted amid the waves and died at the foot of the cliffs. The air held a mysterious peace and it seemed as if angels were gliding around, intoning soft melodies that melted into the folds of each of their souls.

Suddenly, they heard terrible cries coming from other rooms, and the peace that had enfolded their souls was shattered. Before they could even exchange a glance, the curtains parted and Margarida burst into the room like a meteor, looking like a madwoman, eyes bulging, paler than a ghost, trembling like a reed – and fell fainting at the baroness’s feet.

Astonished, Diogo runs to the aid of the old governess, comforts her, helps her up, shakes her and makes her sit down in an armchair, assisted by his mother. Desperate with worry as she helps her son, the baroness begs her to explain:

“Blessed creature, what’s wrong?! Have you gone mad? ... What has happened? Explain yourself! ... For God’s sake, tell your mistress, good Margarida, or I think I may go mad as well!”

“Oh!” murmured the innocent, trembling creature. “The demons, madam baroness! The demons are here! ... So help me, my Lady of the Sacred Harmonies!”

“What demons, Margarida!” intervened Diogo with usual amiability. “Don’t you see that these are the superstitions of peasants and that there is no demon here?!”

But the poor servant was not convinced by the nobleman’s words and continued, transfixed with fear:

“But I saw one of them, Master D. Diogo! I saw it with my very own eyes! It was D. Andre! It was he and none other! ... And he seemed troubled ... he wanted to speak to me ... to lure me ... and drag me into the darkness of hell! O Lady of the Holy Harmonies! Save me by your seven sorrows!”

“But Margarida,” replied Mariana tersely, not wishing to encourage her, “will you please explain yourself properly? What do you mean by all this?”

“Oh, my good madam baroness, we must leave here, leave this damned house.”

Little by little the poor woman calmed down. She took courage from D. Diogo’s obvious nonchalance as he listened to her narrative without any apparent concern. And the attentions of her mistress, D. Mariana, who comforted her, gave her strength after a few minutes to tell them what had happened.

She had been wandering somewhat aimlessly through the rooms and chambers adjacent to the sinister gallery. As was her duty, she had been polishing the furnishings in those rooms, dusting here, polishing a candelabrum there, or shining a mirror. She had wandered like this as far as the forbidden rooms, when suddenly the sound of hurrying footsteps, as if muffled by the carpets, but still very real, made her turn in a fright to see who was there. Numb with horror, she saw D. Andre Janeiro “in person,” in a state of agitation. He brushed past her, as if calling her to help him pull off the metal plates that, before he died, he himself had ordered to be fixed to the dividing doors! It all happened so fast. She finally regained control of her senses and was able to scream and run, doubtless frightening away the condemned soul that had tried to pervert her and lure her into its sinister dwelling!

Mariana was deeply upset and came down with a headache. Diogo became pensive. Fear began to encircle the three naïve souls of Mariana, Margarida and Ricardo. Only Diogo was unaffected. He merely spent more time in his library, concentrating on the strange studies of magicians and fakirs from the East, examining the books and parchments he had inherited together with the castle from this same D. Andre.

Some days later, the same thing happened again to Margarida.

And a few days after that, the dead castellan appeared again, but this time Ricardo was chosen to witness the dreaded apparition. In general, the events seemed to occur in the area that divided the two wings. It was evident that the baron’s lost soul continued to live in his former wing, and that, just as in life, at the head of his band of demons, he would come down the stairs to lure peaceful souls to his wing in order to consume them in the fires of his old ovens.

Masses were said in makeshift chapels near the fortress. The baron had really been a heretic and had never built altars and chapels inside the famous residence. Mariana spent the money that would have enabled her to meet their needs for a month or more and built an actual chapel that left nothing wanting. The priest came – venerable and pious – and blessed it. The neighbors were invited to participate in the services, in an atmosphere of Christian humility. And the neighbors did come because they were simple villagers who felt honored by the friendliness of the aristocrats. They said every kind of mass imaginable for the lost soul of D. Andre de Casablanca. At night the baroness herself got down on her knees and said novenas for the souls of those in the castle, with Ricardo in attendance as sacristan. Basins of holy water were sprinkled in every corner of the gloomy fortress, while the soul of D. Andre was exhorted to abandon his old home and return to where he belonged – taking with him, however, the entire flock of goblins that he might have kept there. Never had so much faith been witnessed nor so many prayers heard in all of Portugal! Mariana, Margarida and Ricardo spent days and nights in fasting and prayer. Life was not lived: it was prayed!

Diogo, on the other hand, kept to himself. He did not pray; he studied! He did go to the masses, but nobody would find him beating his chest crying “mea culpa”, nor following processions through the rooms and corridors as they sprinkled holy water blessed by the venerable priest.

Confronted by all these measures, the late D. Andre appeared to have been intimidated, and for about a month he did not appear to any of his diligent wards. Perhaps it was because no one had ever dared to spy on him in his own surroundings, or perhaps he had been embarrassed and made to look a fool by the circus that had been mounted – he, who had always been circumspect and wary of any fuss; or perhaps because the masses had in fact succeeded overwhelmingly in keeping him a prisoner in the halls of the Invisible. What is certain is that for one whole month peace reigned in that splendid Castle of the Black Cliff. Everyone sighed with relief! And their sentiments of faith were thus redoubled. Candles and large torches were lit on altars in thanksgiving. There was less praying than before, since they were all convinced that they would not be disturbed again. They now walked around without furtive glances over their shoulders, and with a firmer step. They no longer crossed themselves with every breath they took. They no longer invited simple villagers to the masses, having lost all vestiges of Christian humility...

Peace reigned...

A month of hours passed by on the lovely pendulums placed here and there on the shelves and mantels – works of art that had belonged to poor D. Andre de Casablanca.

However, what D. Mariana d'Alvarada y Aragon could never imagine, prayers, masses and fasts notwithstanding, was the determination of her late beloved. Likewise, what a certain priest, consecrated and inspired by an even more consecrated and inspired church, was unable to perceive, notwithstanding his extraordinary qualities, was that the aforementioned deceased was tired of the play-acting and had hidden himself away angrily in his rooms in order to compose himself and to think of new and more effective methods of attack. D. Andre, scholar and heretic, had also become cunning after his death. If he had still been a man living on earth like other men, he would have made them answer at the tip of a sword for their lack of respect. But now, he was merely a spirit, and nothing more, for which reason it was urgent to think carefully about what was best to do in order to get what he wanted.

He thought hard.

He let them think that they had won. He granted them a truce so that they could recover from the attacks on their nerves, under the glorious assumption that guardian angels had imprisoned him in jails of the Beyond, and had done so with the laudable intention of pleasing Mistress Mariana and Master Priest.

The religious pedantry performed in his house had convinced him of the need to avenge himself against such mockery. The miserly baron needed them to hear him and help him, but those people were trying to drive him out of his own house. He had moaned and pleaded desperately with them to help him, but they had offended him instead, promising the saints gifts of gold, silver, linens and lace and even wax so that he, Andre-Luis-Januario-Francisco-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca, grandson of crusading barons, would be charged by the celestial militias and detained in purgatory, such as befell the souls of highwaymen.

Now, D. Andre had always been stubborn and had the diabolical defect of not believing in masses, so he was not affected by them. It was ever thus. Death would not make him otherwise. It is quite true that in his last hour, feeling uncertain, fearful and intimidated, he had made his confession to the priest for extreme unction and absolution as insurance. After all, the worthy



minister of the holy Church had said that, in view of the enormous fees he had left for the saying of a large number of masses – like a sort of hot-air balloon carrying the souls of the dead to their heavenly resting places – his place in the palaces of Heaven was guaranteed. All well and good! But having not believed in masses, nor having taken very seriously his lofty studies with Indian fakirs and Egyptian wise men and mages regarding the secret knowledge, the illustrious grandson of crusading barons found, beyond the doors of the tomb, not the heaven promised by his priest friend, but the hell of his own convulsively erupting conscience, bringing him, in review, the shameless sight of his multiple character defects and the wrongs and obsessions that derived from them. For this and many other reasons he not only disregarded the masses but also dismissed the inspired thoughts of the good priest, whose level of virtue he knew firsthand.

And therefore, thus prepared, with his neurasthenia and bitterness growing, he returned to the fray, ready to fight, in order to be understood.

One beautiful day, feeling quite at ease, Dona Angela Mariana decided to choose something to put up for sale. She had spent more than she should have on building the chapel. She was having financial problems. Consequently, she picked out some valuable Italian Renaissance pieces that a certain neighbor had his eye on. She started examining them with the help of her old servant, Margarida. There was dust in the rosettes and carvings, so the two women began polishing them.

Poor Mariana! So good! So lovely! So noble! Bearer of the most illustrious names on the Peninsula, yet humbly toiling away with the lowliest of servants! Polishing furniture, hurting her hands, kneeling on the hard floor, the sweat running from her forehead down her face like tears! ... With no dignity left, no luxuries, no court ceremonials!

It was enough to make one cry!

Of course, the soul of the Casablanca nobleman, consumed by burning emotions, had arrived at the same conclusion, for just then, Mariana and her servant heard him walking about in the adjacent room. Both women turned to the door in one spontaneous movement, expecting to see Diogo appear to help them with their lowly task. But, instead, Dom Andre's austere spirit appeared before them and as fast as lightning he bent over Mariana and tore from her hands the wool she was using to polish the furniture, threw it into a corner

and said – yes! He spoke, and both of them recognized the low, hoarse voice from before:

“Mariana! I am suffering! Listen to me, for God’s sake! I need to speak to you!”

It was as swift as a streak that lightens the sky. And, like lightning, the dead baron’s act had the powerful effect of mesmerizing the two poor women. Mariana fainted into the trembling arms of her old housekeeper, who, once past the initial shock, began to scream for help, as if hordes of murderous soldiers were whipping her, pushing her towards a bottomless pit.

But it was in vain. In that labyrinth of parlors and galleries her voice disappeared like an echo in the hills. Nobody heard her. Seeing that no help was forthcoming, Margarida composed herself and did her best to drag the precious burden of her still-unconscious mistress to a safer place.

They decided that same day that they would leave Black Castle. Andre Luis Januario de Casablanca was such a rebellious individual that neither holy masses, nor holy water and holy processions could ever convert him! They no longer begged God in fine-sounding prayers to save the wretched soul. They excommunicated him. They disowned him. They execrated him!

Diogo protested. He was against the idea of moving. He was passionate about Black Castle with its wealth of legends and mysteries. He did not mind hearing his loved ones talk about the appearances of his dead cousin; in fact, he wanted to see him for himself. In the depths of his soul he pleaded for him to show himself to him, Diogo, and to speak to him. But D. Andre, obstinate even in death, disregarded his wishes and showed himself to those who wished neither to see nor hear him.

These after-death incidents continued without interruption. At night, just after his aristocratic heirs had gone to bed and silence filled the atmosphere with mystery and fear, the old man would entertain them with his unusual ghostly kindnesses.

From their beds, they would hear his swift footsteps, just as they had been while he was alive. He went up and down the corridors and through the rooms. He called them, all of them, by name, with that voice, always the same voice, that they knew so well! They heard him cough. Death, it seemed, had not relieved his chest of the bronchitis which, it was said, he had contracted during his ocean voyages. D. Andre took great pains to go to the door of the room of the one who had perjured his love, and beat against it loudly several

times with clenched fists, just as if he were alive, missed her, and wanted to enter and pay her a visit. Many times the baroness, transfixed with fear as she suffocated under the heavy sheets, in the absence of more effective protection, heard him say – gently now, as if murmuring words of love at her bedside:

“Mariana, listen to me, for God’s sake! There’s nothing to be afraid of ... I mean you no harm ... It is I, your poor and unfortunate Andre, whom you disgraced with your ingratitude! I still love you and always will. Do not shut me out ... Listen to me! I’m relieving you of that terrible oath ... Come, come to my home ... Call the locksmiths ... Call the experts who make and open secret safes ... I am rich, very rich...”

But he could never finish speaking. His murmured words were lost in the depths of D. Mariana’s soul, as she fainted in terror.

Feeling misunderstood, as usual, the crazed spirit would then go looking for Margarida and Ricardo for the same purpose ... And when dawn broke, gilding the wild roses in the fields or gently blowing the waters of the ocean like a gentle lover playing with her beloved, it would find the three of them sleepless, with swollen eyes, ravaged faces and desperate hearts. D. Andre de Casablanca had tormented them all night with his devilish excesses.

“I tell you, my lady baroness,” warned Margarida – for whom the continual apparitions were becoming either less terrifying or more familiar – as she applied balms to the forehead of her mistress who lay prostrate on the bed with the headache that always followed these scenes, “I tell you, with all the respect due this noble house of Castanhede e Casablanca, which I have served for forty years: your dear cousin has lost his poor little soul ... But you know, my lady, this misfortune was quite predictable ... That one was not a man of God: he never went to mass ... he lit big fires in the rooms of the castle without burning it down ... he played host to cloaked demons at all hours of the night ... he concocted enchanted liquors using magic ... In other words, he was a complete heretic, so much a heretic and a demon that he managed to fool even the Holy Church, since, as we have seen, he managed to escape the fires of hell!”

“Ah, Margarida, for God’s sake, please don’t talk to me of such dire matters or I shall go crazy!” moaned the depressed lady in response. “Don’t speak ill of him with your comments, for he still walks hereabouts and will be able to hear us and at night avenge himself of this malicious gossip. Instead, let’s sympathize with him and continue to say the novenas to see if we can

placate his anger ... Why don't you offer something to your Mother Protector so that she will rid us of this spirit in return?"

Ricardo rode the horse at a slow pace to the old farmstead in the Algarve to tell the cheating minor nobleman that his mistress was throwing him out because she was going back to live in her little cottage there. The nobleman arrogantly refused. He had just planted a crop. The lady would have to wait until the end of the harvest and the receipt of the income. Ricardo returned to the castle at an even slower pace, with a heavy heart and an air of dread about him, fear running through his nerves.

There was nothing to do but wait, despite the unfavorable circumstances.

So they waited.

And while they waited, the apparitions continued and Diogo applied himself more and more to his books. The priest, whose venerable presence was often required by D. Andre Januario's victims, no longer knew in which prayer book to look for the exorcisms that would tame his furious old smuggling partner. He realized that he was unable to do anything about the attacks. Thus defeated, he would no longer expose himself to such embarrassment, because, whenever, at D. Angela Mariana Magnolia's request, he dared to spend the night in those sinister surroundings, he was the troubled spirit's favorite victim. To be on the safe side, Margarida took to sleeping in her mistress's bed. And Ricardo, whose terror bordered on insanity, took embarrassed refuge at Diogo's side. The latter, totally serene, neither saw nor heard a thing.

Nevertheless, during the calm hours of the day, the importunate spirit would invade the hushed sanctuary of his library, where only the young master d'Alvarada ever entered. At such times he would feel moved, as though he had entered a temple of worship.

There was Diogo, leafing through old books, translating the directions for obscure projects in the science of the occult.

He would watch him. Little by little, he would soften.

He admired the young student, having discovered that he possessed a noble heart and character. Going beyond himself, he could perceive that charming promise of morality which he had yearned to find in his friends of long ago, but never had! After all, was this honorable young man not the son of the only woman he had ever loved? What did it matter that he, Andre de

Casablanca, was not actually the blessed father of this worthy offspring?! He certainly would have been if he had married D. Angela Mariana!

Had he not, perchance, been somewhat of a father to that young man whose countenance radiated intelligence? Had he not paid for his education in the monastery of the Benedictine monks? Out of love for Mariana, had he not paid for his lodging and clothing until he reached his majority? Yes, he had done for Diogo d'Alvarada what any father would do for a dear son ... and now, watching him, he felt deeply drawn to him...

The old castellan's eyes would mist over with tears. He would draw closer. He saw that Mariana's son loved the lofty study of science. Diogo was concentrating, absorbed in his perusal of the manuscripts, while an aura shone around him. Casablanca admired this and it filled him with reverence:

"This one is chosen ... He has been designated..." he would murmur to himself, remembering the magnificent lessons of the Hindu wise men and the Egyptian mages. "I shall help him because only he is capable of furthering my wishes."

With such thoughts, he seemed to envelop him in a tender, fatherly embrace. Diogo would feel him intuitively, pleasantly sensitized by the delightful presence of the visitor. The young doctor burned with splendid emotions, opening his spirit to the possibilities of the immense joy of being remembered by this famous goblin who wandered the rooms and corridors of his fortress...

A harmonious current united those two souls attuned to each other in the same wave of tenderness. They both felt affection for each other!

The old smuggler was patient and painstaking as he whispered secrets into the ears of the young scholar, who, with a heavy frown, as absorbed and serious as an old man – for he was lost in lofty thoughts – would go, without realizing that he was being guided, to search shelves and discover secret drawers, finding books and parchments to leaf through in utter amazement! D. Andre would whisper to him once again. D. Diogo, leafing through those pages of wisdom, would focus on a certain paragraph and study it fervently. D. Andre would whisper yet a third time. D. Diogo would take up the quill, scribble in the margins as he translated, with astonishment, the most difficult lessons that the world had ever known, lessons which were due to the self-sacrifice – even martyrdom – of predestined teachers who willingly transmitted to men the wisdom and the virtues of Heaven. Here, he would

find an incalculable treasure capable of enriching minds and hearts! There, he would uncover the ancient doctrine of the Vedas, the science of Zoroaster, the secrets of Hermes, the beautiful teachings of Krishna, the wisdom of the Greek philosophers, of the Chaldeans, of the magicians of the Esoteric Universities of the East and of the eminent prophets of Judea. Along with that enlightened phalanx of thinkers, there also arose from those ancient manuscripts, yellowed by centuries of dust, the eminent, unmistakable, intriguing figures of Pythagoras, Aristotle, Socrates and his favorite disciple, Plato – and the love-filled sermons of Jesus of Nazareth, shining like suns amid the constellations – in the sublime exposition of their striking virtues!

Here, the moral precepts were: the fasting of the spirit, the abstinence from evil and all that is inferior, in order to be one chosen for the communication between individuals and the souls of the dead! There, severe discipline of the heart and mind, in order to receive, retain and transmit to human beings the inspirations of the saints, their masters. Also, strict control over willpower and other spiritual forces to transform them into power for beneficial purposes. And finally, prescriptions and directions for evoking the souls of the dead – the bright and shining reward for all such preparation!

Feverish, excited, aware, his mind glittering, illuminated by noble effort, his heart vibrating with the strength of honorable influences from the invisible world – Dom Diogo read, studied, understood, considered everything sublime and venerable, and delved with excitement into the realms of a new world for himself!

The sciences of the East – the mysterious East, the patron of Wisdom – these consumed him with passion! Through this study, he learned from concrete facts that the human soul really was immortal! That it descended from a divine spark, and that one day he too would rise to the heart of its origin, crowned in splendor, which he himself would acquire over the course of the millennia! That a soul detached from its earthly body can come back to earth and to its family and loved ones as many times as it is permitted; or it can simply remain in the circles where it used to live and continue to go about its business and relationships with mortals! The parchments and papyri that he courageously translated from Arabic, Hebrew and Greek taught him that it was possible to evoke those same souls, to take hold of them and perhaps even oblige them to speak! A horizon without limits emerged for Diogo through those pages of wisdom. Consequently, he understood the reasons behind D. Andre's studious and solitary life: the priceless knowledge no

doubt acquired at great expense and preserved with unusual care, full of invaluable annotations – some in the baron’s own hand – in the margins of the pages or in footnotes. He discovered the reasons behind his dark reputation as a sorcerer, when in fact he was a wise man. He admired his wisdom, honored his memory and more than ever felt that an exceptional bond of affection bound his soul to that of the deceased nobleman!

But D. Andre who, from beyond the grave had undertaken the noble mission of guiding his young cousin along the twisted paths of Occultism, which he himself had not followed as he ought, was disappointed, and suffered whilst his disciple progressed with the preparation he needed: D. Diogo d’Alvarada did not seem to possess the gift of actually seeing or hearing spirits! He could only sense them!

Anxious, annoyed by this obstacle, which exhausted and exasperated him, and desiring more deeply each day to commune with the beloved son of his soul – as he considered Diogo – Andre-Januario decided to appear even more clearly, more perfectly, more spectacularly in his already spectacular manifestations.

“I will have to grab his attention as much as possible,” moaned the suffering soul, “to keep his enthusiasm from waning, so that, as the instructions recommend, he will call out to me.”

To this end he would call on helpers in the invisible realm – spirits like himself. He was absent from the castle for a few days. He wandered around neighboring villages, looking for anyone who might be useful to him. For his purpose he would not have to leave the earth and plunder the spirit world – the logical and presumed home of souls bereft of their bodies. He knocked at the houses of ill-repute, places preferred by drunkards, gamblers, brawlers and licentious women. In that company, which, as we know, had little to recommend it, he found what he was looking for. He employed certain wayward spirits who were neither good nor bad: they were the bohemian type; scoundrels who remained in earthly places out of habit, not wanting to leave, and in whose squalor they continue to live, in spite of being spirits and not men. Thus, he reluctantly went into one of these places – he who had always been so dignified and sober – observed and then approached a playful, good-natured spirit who seemed to be the leader of other such playful spirits, and casting aside his old aristocratic prejudices said:

“Listen to me, my friend! I am someone who has lost his human body,

just as you all have.”

“I can see that, sir...”

“The difference between us is that I am suffering, whereas you are enjoying yourselves.”

“I’m sorry that you are suffering, sir, but I myself prefer that we continue to enjoy ourselves.”

“It is precisely because I am suffering that I would like to ask a favor of you, a bit of help ... so that you may alleviate my misfortune.”

The spirits were not bad ones, as we have said. They could all, as one, tell that aristocratic soul to go look for those of his own social class and beg their favors, for they owed nothing to the nobility.

They had been miserable folk, who were born into poverty and died in poverty. They had received nothing from the nobility other than injustice and persecution. However, they were not bad men. They realized that they had no real reason to complain against this particular nobleman. In addition, his manners and request aroused their curiosity and their compassion. The self-proclaimed leader of the gang answered for them all:

“I guess I don’t see how miserable folk like us could help someone of your standing.”

Dom Andre sighed sadly, as if to chase away uncomfortable memories:

“That’s all in the past, my friends. True, I used to be a nobleman, but today I’m just like you. I am merely a spirit who’s suffering. Death makes equals of everyone ... because it is just towards all of them.”

“So, tell us why you’ve come here, nobleman.”

“Well, it’s like this: do you know where I used to live?”

“Black Castle.”

“Yes, I did. I wish to show myself to my heirs and speak to them. There are urgent reasons that compel me to do so. I have made every effort to get them to listen to me, but they get scared, they curse me, they offend me and thwart me every time. Now, I have only one last recourse ... I intend to make them understand that I am not just a hallucination – as the priest tells them in order to calm them down. I want to show them inarguable visions, things that are impossible to attribute to hallucinations or the inventions of demons. I



want them to finally comprehend my pressing need to be understood, my grievous urgency that they pay attention and listen. I intend to convince them, but without causing them any harm.”

“I see.”

They all discussed the matter. The old baron was not ashamed to confess his failings to these bohemians. He told them the reasons behind the anguish keeping his conscience in turmoil. And having told them what he would like them to do, he concluded:

“I have received permission from superiors who inspire me – represented by the loving soul of she who used to be my very dear mother – to do whatever is necessary. They have granted me not merely license, but liberty, as long as I do not surpass the limits of good sense and the fraternity owing to others – whom I have absolutely no wish to harm. If you happen to find the priest there, torment him so that he will leave. His presence disturbs me: he knows to evoke the souls of the dead, but for personal reasons it is not appropriate for me to speak to him myself.”

“We understand, sir. If he should discover the treasure... “

“Do nothing to disturb or shock Dom Diogo d’Alvarada, the young man whom you will see studying in the library: he needs peace and quiet in order to improve his skills at uncovering the secrets of death.”

With everything settled, the leader gathered up his gang of five personalities: merry-makers and revelers, all ready for the follies of the afterlife.

“Let’s go fellows!” he bellowed by way of marching orders. “We have a party to attend at Black Castle! We are going to forget our sorrows in the dance of the baroness’s furniture!”

The result of that collusion of spirits was soon to come.

So it was that, on that same night, an unusual occurrence gave rise to a series of frightening events, such as had never before been imagined.

At the supper table, D. Mariana and her son conversed discreetly while Ricardo, always the perfect steward, served the modest dishes of the day. All of a sudden the light coming from the chandelier on the ceiling began to oscillate. Intrigued, they looked up to see what was happening. The chandelier swayed gently, rattling the crystal pendants, as if shaken by human

hands. The stained glass windows were closed, preventing even the sea breezes from entering. Nobody had touched the chandelier – not even with a thought! But it kept swaying and swaying ... now rattling the pendants even more forcefully, as if trying to catch someone’s attention for a discussion. Meanwhile the candle flames danced and danced, transforming the dining room into a place of illusions, where everything – people, furniture, walls, utensils, objects – seemed to be in movement...

“O my God!” cried Angela-Mariana, her headache threatening. “It’s going to come loose from the ceiling and crash onto the table!”

As if her words could influence the situation, the chandelier suddenly became quiet, but a heavy painting fell off the wall, and as if by magic, crashed at her feet.

This was a portent of things to come. From that night on, chairs would move from place to place; closet doors would fly open and then slam shut over and over again, as if unruly children were amusing themselves with the mischief. In the pantry, kitchen and bathrooms, utensils would fly off the shelves, making a deafening noise. Heavy tables teetered on two legs, or even on just one; other, smaller ones, would hang in mid-air, dancing or running, dragged down the corridors by invisible hands. Armchairs kept changing places. Sewing baskets, slippers and warm shawls were snatched from their places and flung about, even if they were on the baroness’s feet or on the servant Margarida’s shoulders. Within moments of a candelabrum being lit, as many puffs as there were candles could be heard, blowing them out, while deafening laughter echoed around the corridors...

“These are D. Andre’s devilish tricks,” accused Margarida anxiously, without consideration for the noble house of Castanhede-e-Casablanca...

“That’s not possible, my good Margarida! Something strange is going on here!” argued the baroness, nearly going mad. “You can see that there are five puffs at the same time because the candelabrum has five candles ... Casablanca could not blow them all out at the same time, since the candelabrum is spread out in a pyramid shape...”

“It seems to me, madam baroness, that you are forgetting that the gentleman was a magician. And do you know what else? I no longer have a Protecting Mother! I am orphaned, madam baroness, orphaned and forsaken, for Our Lady of Good Harmony has rejected me and no longer answers my pleas!”

Ricardo went back to the estate in the Algarve on the back of the placid mule. But personnel assembled by Castanhede-e-Casablanca followed him to find out what the cowardly wretch intended to do far from the walls of the old fortress.

On behalf of his mistress, the somber servant ordered the young minor nobleman to move out within forty-eight hours because her ladyship was packing her trunks in readiness to return to the estate. However, the young nobleman argued that he had finished the harvest and was now starting to make wine. Ricardo insisted, wearily. The gang of bohemians from the Invisible intervened. Brave words were whispered into the bellicose ears of the wine-making nobleman, to whom they felt attracted, thanks to the magic of the good wine he produced. Strengthened by such support, D. Angela-Mariana's tenant became angry. He challenged Ricardo:

“No! I will not leave this estate before the agreed-on term has expired. The rental contract gives me the right to stay for five years, and only two have passed. Got that, Mr. steward? Only two have passed! Go and tell that to your mistress, in case she has forgotten. She would do well to remember it, and stop pestering me all the time! What do I care if the castle is haunted by ghosts? Get back there! My family and I don't have relatives who frighten us in the dead of night. We are all honest workers. And our dead are all very upright people. So now, Mr. steward, off with you, and fare you well, and your mistress too, and your dead, and may the devil take them!”

Ricardo threatened to complain to the authorities. The wine-maker beat the aristocratic steward unceremoniously, put him on the back of the patient mule and sent him on his way.

Diogo was thrilled by D. Andre's latest manifestations!

“He wants to make himself understood,” he thought, observing the furniture moving about, the lights being extinguished, and the various attacks on his mother and Margarida. “The signs are too intelligent and expressive to mean anything except that he wants to be listened to!” Diogo already understood D. Andre well enough. As far as it is possible for an intelligent and dedicated individual to grasp a theory, penetrate its secrets, and absorb its essence, the young castellan mastered, penetrated and absorbed the magic of the lessons from the East.

D. Diogo's veins boiled with the noble blood of the adventurer. He was fearless, and if his courage did not manifest itself in an obvious and

aggressive way, it was obviously due to the gentle guidance of his mother's character and the reserved education he had received behind the walls of a monastery. In fact, when he was a student, he was far too incredulous to accept theories and miracles without investigating their positive side, that is, their causes. So, he did investigate and dared to try out the teachings contained in the old journals so that, by his own efforts, he would arrive at the truth. Deep down, he believed in the phenomena. D. Diogo reasoned:

“No! What was written in the old parchments is too magnificent and wise to have been forged within the confines of human minds! The obstinacy of earthly know-it-alls could never reach such heights, incapable as they are of inventing doctrines glittering with divine thoughts! Yes! Yes! It was true! Human beings could never invent the idea of speaking with the dead if the deceased had not approached them first and assured them: *We do exist! Speak to us, and we shall speak to you!*”

Yes, it was true, it had to be true!

Since he understood the texts and because they stated that only the great ones chosen by the Invisible would be granted psychic powers in order to understand them, he considered himself chosen and enlightened!

Diogo d'Alvarada, noble character, sincere soul, generous heart, given to lofty expressions of faith, to pure and profound thought, where fertile intuition flourished; distinguished, with that worthy superiority that raises an individual above basic commonality and elevates him by means of his own personal qualities; reverent towards God, observing, patient, dedicated, persevering – all the ennobling qualities essential to a soul probing the planes of the hereafter!

Consequently, he dared to try experiments with the same conviction, which, long ago, in the sacred temples of India and Egypt, led initiates to venture into the realms of wisdom after decades of austere reclusion.

Thus, he moves stealthily through rooms and down corridors until he stands before the bolted doors to the mysterious gallery in the right wing.

His intention is to enter the prohibited rooms because he believes he will find there the troubled soul of D. Andre-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca in suffering and tribulation. And right there, in the rooms sealed off from outsiders, and which only yesterday vibrated in wonderment at the contemplation of sacred mysteries – that is where he wants to approach the afflicted entity and question it.

His heart is pounding with emotion. His learned forehead is beaded with icy sweat. His heart tells him to break the seals of the doors and run to Andre Januario's aid. However, his sense of duty tells him to refrain from violating the dead man's orders. The young man battles with his conscience. In the will, a clause prohibits entry to the right wing of the castle. However, his manifestations seem to indicate that the late Andre regrets the severity of his orders and is giving urgent signs for them to go with him to his rooms. The prohibition in the will refers to Mariana, and it was she who swore the terrible oath of obedience. It is not she who will invade the closed rooms; it is he, Diogo, who will do so. And he, Diogo, was not prohibited from doing so; he had not sworn to any oath that would keep him from it!

Duty wins the battle. Three times he ponders, undecided, before the heavy oak doors, and three times he is forced to return to the library.

Once again, D. Andre appears to the baroness in her bedroom:

"I am suffering!" he pleads. "Come with me to my quarters!"

More prayers and processions stir up and bless the old Moorish fortress. Diogo finally makes a decision.

All alone, composed but excited, he grabs tools, pulls nails, and undoes screws, bolts and locks with a strength he has never felt before. But he works calmly, with the resolution and the patience of those who are sure of what they do.

He enters the gallery. No one sees him. However, he feels that he is not alone. A mysterious gust of air surrounds him. In the half-light, filtered by the stained-glass windows, he moves along imbued with holy righteousness! He has the strange sensation that a tomb has been opened!

The gallery is vast, immense, stately and worthy of a mansion for kings. To the right and to the left there are rows of Gothic-style doors, half-concealed by curtains of the finest Damask. All around, more Gothic windows let in the dim and melancholy light through costly stained glass. Staircases made of precious woods, winding in fanciful spirals, their handrails, decorated with carved latticework, paying tribute to the masters who created them, ascend to the four corners of the huge room. Here, the young man's fine taste is captivated by stately columns with Byzantine capitals, rising in two majestic rows to support the frame of the upper floors. Large candelabra standing on shelves along the walls and above the doors, and beautiful chandeliers of silver and crystal hanging from the perfectly

sculpted ceiling speak of enormous wealth, and lend a cathedral-like air to the stately gallery.

A tomb-like silence shrouds the atmosphere. Sublime poetry fills the air, drawn from the mystery of life by the iridescent tones of sunlight that filter gently through the stained glass of the Gothic windows. Diogo feels it, and is moved by it. He is awe-struck. To him that gallery is a shrine, not a lair of demons! A vague anxiety flutters around him, touching his soul: it is the invisible being of D. Andre, who welcomes him with much emotion!

True to his upbringing, he cannot avoid a sentimental and superstitious fear, reminding himself that he has entered there against the deceased man's wishes. He becomes anxious, reminded of the threatened vengeance. Filled with last-minute uncertainty, he wants to go back. However, he is fortified by willpower of an unknown origin, which grounds him where he stands. He rationalizes that the will said only that the right wing should not be entered. Well, he has not entered it; he has simply come as far as the gallery, that is, the dividing line between the two halves of the castle.

"I will not go beyond this point, I swear to you, D. Andre! I will faithfully obey your orders," he states, reaching out his right hand in the certainty that he is being heard.

The learned young man puts his plan into action.

First, he invokes the Higher Powers. He entreats them to surround him with the heavenly brightness that shines around the Elect. He begs them fervently, eyes raised heavenwards in search of the infinite, body completely stiff, controlled by the total absorption of all his physical senses; copious tears flow from his wide-open eyes without causing the slightest eyelid contraction, as if those tears did not originate there; his arms outstretched, rigid, pointing east and west!

It is ecstasy!<sup>24</sup>

Uttering sacred words, he draws the magic circle on the mosaic floor and lights some resins.<sup>25</sup>

Once again, he goes into ecstasy. Then, when he feels himself sufficiently ready to face the sacred mystery, he pronounces the final sacramental words, those of the Elect – those that are part of the supreme secret, the supreme honor accorded to those initiated into the mysteries; and

he orders the wandering shade of D. Andre-de-Casablanca to return and make contact, to come forward and speak to him.<sup>26</sup>

Close by, silver censers blow puffs of scented smoke...

D. Diogo waits.

He is still in rapture; now, however, his eyes are sparkling, phosphorescent in their inscrutability, fixed in the center of the circle. With his arms crossed over his chest, his forehead white as ivory and haloed by desire, his soul boasting the ardor of faith and his heart bursting with love – his demeanor is matchless!

D. Diogo waits.

The shade does not appear.

He perseveres and continues to wait.

D. Andre is taking his time.

He forces himself to take heart, and still he waits.

The sacred circle remains empty!

Then, exhausted, discouraged, he gives up. All his work has been for nothing! His first experiment has failed! However, he is certain that he followed the rituals in the books of wisdom...

His arms fall trembling and painful at his side. A deep sigh, like the cry of a desperate man, tears through his disappointed chest. D. Diogo has been thwarted!

Slowly, sadly, he extinguishes the resins. He erases the magic lines of the circle. He curses and swears to give up on all his experiments. He leaves the gallery, carefully closes the door and returns to reality.

A few days later he tried again: – a waste of time!

Once again he consulted the ancient parchments, offered up more prayers and spells, more thoughts, fasts and experiments. However, either due to his own ineptitude, his lack of the gift of vision that abounded in the others, or just because of the ill-will of the soul he had summoned; whether for lack of specific psychic resources for this sacrosanct mission, or because of his own fear at being caught by a member of the household – an annoying and irritating fear – what was certain was that yet again the circle remained

deserted, and yet again the evoked soul did not respond to the call of his will, and that no voice from the tomb answered his heartfelt appeals!

Visibly annoyed, D. Diogo d' Alvarada was despondent and sad for several days, realizing that he was too insignificant to be compared with the initiates of the East. Humiliated, he swore to the heavens that he would never again apply himself to solving mysteries, for he was still not worthy of them. He closed the Hebrew books and put away his beloved rolls of Egyptian papyri. In spite of all this, he was still careful, for the manifestations became more and more intelligent, as if seeking an understanding. But he felt inept, and day by day his heart became sadder and more ardent with the pain of his failures.

Such was the diligent young man's spirit when a happy event occurred, certainly not one so noble as the events that saddened him, but perhaps a more interesting one for his energetic youth. It came to stir him up, making him forget about Hindu, Egyptian, Greek and Hebrew parchments, occult sciences and the soul of D. Andre.

A letter arrived from Cintra telling the baroness that her niece, Aurora de Casablanca, was requesting permission to spend the Christmas festivities with her because December was already approaching with its snow and traditions.

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23 The southernmost region of Portugal. – Tr.

24 Powerful concentration, trance. – Spirit Author's note.

25 Simple old formulae that accompanied the spiritual work for evocations. Over time, they were abandoned as they were considered unnecessary. – Spirit Author's note.

26 Final sacramental words, only used after long periods of renunciation and sacrifice by the old eastern initiates: "In the name of Omnipotent God, Creator of the Universes, Center of Life, Beginning and End of all things!" – Spirit Author's note.



# 7

## Aurora

No one could argue that the girl from Casablanca was as pretty as the dawn. That her lovely name perfectly matched her sparkling character, her easygoing and wholesome spirit, the chasteness of her affectionate and warm heart. It was also inarguable that she willingly gave to others of her own natural gifts. It was enough to know her and be with her for a few hours to be convinced of the fact that she charmed everybody.

She and Diogo d'Alvarada had loved each other for many years, and they had planned to get married once they came of age.

Aurora, who now had eighteen happy summers behind her, was as rich in goodness, beauty and good manners as she was poor in wealth. This, therefore, was the obstacle that bothered D. Mariana and caused her to withhold her consent to the dreams patiently cherished by the two enamored cousins. She wanted to spend her old age protected from the poverty that had always plagued her, and Aurora marrying Diogo offered no such guarantee.

A certain Mrs. d'Alcantara Fialho – an aging, plump, although still lighthearted and jovial widow – had proposed an advantageous alliance, which would bring a respectable fortune in return for the pleasant-sounding title of “Baroness d'Alvarada y Aragon”; this at once turned the good and simple Mariana against the tender hopes of her noble niece, and caused her to ingratiate herself even more to the grand dame from d'Alcantara.

However, Dom Diogo-Antonio-Jose-Francisco- d'Alvarada-y-Aragon was a young and passionate man in love with his beautiful cousin, and for the first time ever, he was ready to disobey his mother. He rejected the advances

of the old treasure chest – that is, Mrs. d’Alcantara Fialho – and remained true to his cousin, making fervent plans for everlasting love.

Aurora had been raised at Court, thanks to some generous relatives who had taken her in when she was orphaned as a small child. She could, in plain language, be described as a nice girl!

She read, wrote, weaved and spun, embroidered intricate tapestries and fine linen handkerchiefs; she played the clavichord and the harp, sang sweetly, danced gracefully, rode a horse with courage and conversed intelligently. If her riches had been as great as her personal charms, by now she would certainly be a princess to some noble prince enslaved by her love. Her greatest charm however, was the natural goodness of her angelic heart! Oh, what a kindly soul! What a brave spirit! What a lovely and intriguing character! One could never feel down when in her company. Radiant and pure as the sun, happy as the swallows returning in the spring; affectionate, helpful, delicate, kind and pleasant, she carried goodness within her and shared her virtues with whomsoever she encountered, radiating her special talents and virtues all around.

When, on a stark and wintry afternoon, she climbed, laughing, the long zigzagging steps of Black Castle and set foot in its old rooms, it seemed as if a ray of heavenly light had lit up those dark rooms filled with bitterness, casting out worries and spreading hope and confidence where there had been only despair and uncertainty. At least, such was the impression she made on Margarida, Ricardo and the young Diogo. The fear of the evil spirits disappeared. All sadness and lamentations were dispelled. Faces lit up with pleasure. Her irresistible and magical presence warmed hearts and filled them with trust.

Although they were spirits, even D. Andre and his gang of servants had to admit they were enchanted by the loveliness of the pretty girl. They stayed quiet that day. They were unwilling to trouble her because she was so good, so kind-hearted. In addition, the bright light that surrounded her like a frame woven from strands of sunlight filled them with awe, and they realized that the girl had descended from a worthy spiritual lineage, as the frame indicated that she was loved in Heaven. This belief was strengthened when, in the dead of night, as they wondered whether or not to continue with their bold manifestations, they heard soft noises – whispered songs of praise, as if angelic thoughts were offering prayers to the Divine Powers. They listened attentively. The melody was coming from the new arrival’s bedroom. They

spied fearfully, reverently, realizing they might be intruding on the intimacy of a virgin's room. D. Andre, who in the afterlife had not forgotten his good manners, knocked gently on the oak door, announcing his presence. When she saw him, Aurora stopped singing – for it was she who had created the sweet notes that had impressed him – and responded with an affectionate greeting:

“Come in, D. Andre. Come and pray with me, but bring the peace of the Holy Virgin with you.”

But D. Andre did not go in; his courage failed him!

The picture that he saw before him was too grandiose to be profaned by him, the sufferer, persecuted by the remorse of greed.

Next to the modest bed her aunt had reserved for her – the plainest in the old Moorish fortress – Aurora was kneeling with her hands folded in a gesture of devotion, pleading eyes raised, heart and mind fixed on the imaginary silhouette of the Virgin of Nazareth and fixed also on him, D. Andre de Casablanca, as she prayed for him. The deceased man listened to her and was truly moved. It sounded like the melody of angels. Her words and intentions, simple, sincere, childlike, fell like a balsam on his troubled, burning spirit. The dim, fading light of a single candle lit the room. But perhaps coming from the infinite, a luminous cascade enveloped her, as if it were a blessing from the saint she had invoked. In her simple prayer, the girl said:

“Holy Virgin, my Mother and Guardian:

“From what I have seen, D. Andre-Januario, my dear cousin, has still not gone to Heaven, which pains me very deeply. I actually feel that he is suffering. In view of such great unhappiness, I would ask you, Holy Mother of Mercy, for your protection and intercession with God the Father so that his suffering may be relieved. If I could help my poor cousin, I would do so with all my heart. But since I can do nothing, I appeal to your maternal heart, so that you may take pity on him, dry his tears, console him in his pain, and draw him into your arms. If there are demons in this house, as the good housekeeper Margarida says, I also beseech your motherly love and protection for them. Help them to reach Heaven, for the dead should live there together with the saints. I beseech you to tell them, on my behalf, not to frighten me with their tricks. I need to spend some time in this castle because I am an orphan and do not have a home. I receive charity from my relatives, who are all very good to me, and I have to move around from here to there, so as not to overburden any of them. If these my brothers – the demons –

frighten me too much, I will have to leave here, and go I know not where, because all my relatives have grown tired of me, and I am embarrassed to beg so much of them! I would prefer to stay in this castle for the time being. I will pray to you on their behalf every night, as I am tonight. I am very fond of my cousin D. Andre and the others who accompany him. I pray for your blessing on us all. Amen.”

D. Andre de Casablanca left the room, moved and thoughtful. The bohemians, too, silently left, one by one, with heads bowed and gathered under the elms in the park, in spite of the biting cold. The former smuggler realized he was in a delicate situation.

“What to do?” he wondered, absorbed in his own thoughts. “If I keep on taunting them, the poor, sweet and delicate girl will leave the castle, and I, grieved by her difficulties, have no wish at all to make them worse! But if I put a halt to the manifestations, I run the risk of being forgotten by Diogo, who was disheartened by my unsuccessful attempts earlier ... What to do, my dear God? I need to speak to Diogo, or to anyone who is worthy enough to understand me and heed my words.”

The troubled deceased man was extremely interested in Aurora. He already seemed to regard her as a daughter. She and Diogo filled his soul with such tenderness that on that night he realized what a grave mistake he had made in maintaining his barren faithfulness to Mariana’s love.

“Yes, I was wrong, very wrong!” Mariana had not loved him and should have been forgotten in favor of another woman’s love! He, Andre, should have gotten married, should have been a father, and should have raised children under his watchful love, which would certainly have been most dedicated! His misfortunes, his wild selfishness, his crime of greed, were nothing but the disastrous consequences of the loneliness with which he surrounded himself, the sentimental insanity which hindered him and kept him from the care of a wife and the love of dear children. Oh! Watching Diogo and Aurora, he knew that if he had had these things, he would be happy watching them now! And how he regretted not having adopted the poor, orphaned Aurora, and not having left her a castle of her own to live in, a dowry that would enable her to marry whenever she wished – he, who had been so rich! But he had not even known about her! He had just met her now for the first time! He had heard of her vaguely, without concerning himself, as ever true to his wicked selfishness. And now he suddenly found her there,

praying for him, the only truly sincere and selfless supplications he had ever witnessed on his behalf!

His astral body's sad eyes misted over with tears. His spirit was suffering!

He addressed his servants:

“My friends,” he said, “I am deeply grateful for your services. You have helped me so very much. However, I beg you to hold off for a while, without attempting anything more. I need to time to think ...”

He retired to his old renaissance library. He loved that place. Downcast, he sat down in the big, high-backed armchair. It still held the marks where Diogo's body had been a few hours ago. He wept copiously. The image of Aurora on her knees, praying tenderly for him, calling him *her dear cousin* – and referring to him as such to the Holy Virgin – deeply stirred his innermost being. That miserly soul, in spite of the selfishness that had driven it to madness, realized that it had lacked love! It desired love! He had wanted everyone – everyone, really – to truly love him, and if he had been loved, he would have loved them all in return! However, he had been starved for affection and had lived his life in the terrible misery of never having been loved by anyone. But now, suddenly, two children, two young hearts, had opened like sweet-smelling flowers and were surrounding him with affection, loving him spontaneously with the liveliest, the most virtuous and holiest sentiment that his poor unfortunate soul could aspire to!

“Diogo! Aurora! God bless you, dear children, for the good that you are doing me by offering me your love, your loyal prayers, your kindly wishes ...”

He fell on his knees beside the armchair and he, too, prayed. Inspired by Aurora's sweet prayers, he prayed with fervor to the Virgin Mother who protected her, and who was loved by her young heart. He prayed with the gentle girl's whispered melody still in his ears, as if it were guiding his uncertain steps along a path lit by visions of hope!

Outside the wind blew; and the sea, as always, crashed against the rocks.

Little by little, a gentle calm enveloped his spirit. A soft ray of light appeared, warming his cold fears and soothing the worry of his uncertainties. Two affectionate arms surrounded him in a motherly embrace. He got up, and transformed, exclaimed as if in a dream:

“My Lady! My Blessed Mother! Oh! Bless you, for coming to my aid!”

Actually, the luminous figure of his own mother had answered the appeals of his own tormented spirit and the beseeching of the girl from Casablanca. And here she was, ready to guide and inspire her son just as she had been doing all along, so that he might be strengthened on the thorn-filled path of reparation. She gave him advice, inspired by the mercy of Aurora's patron saint:

That the overt manifestations should cease; they were no longer necessary because Aurora was there. She was good and caring and was ready to help him. That while Aurora slept, he should seek out her friendly spirit and ingratiate himself to her, gain her trust, and thereby strengthen the close ties that naturally existed between them. That he should appear to the girl, now and then, when she was awake. But that he should do so gently, without alarming her. That he should be calm, joyful, even, and loving, like a father. And slowly, he would convince her to listen to him, for the charming girl possessed the sublime talent that permits communication with those known as the dead, that is, the inhabitants of the invisible world!

And so it was that ever since the stark and wintry evening when Aurora, laughing, had climbed the zig-zagging steps of the old fortress, the dread of the bad souls had disappeared. The chaos caused by the demons that inspired so much fear ceased, not only for Mariana, Margarida and Ricardo, but also for the entire surrounding area!

It truly seemed as if Aurora were redemption itself! The young girl imbued the left wing with the strange light that lit her from within: she sang, she played the bandores and harps that she found in the rooms; she amused herself by amusing others with tales of life at Court; she told funny stories to Margarida and Ricardo; she danced, worked and filled the atmosphere with the untiring energy of those who are good, and who are of goodwill.

She was soon known in the surrounding area, and visitors – even peasants – came calling with gifts. Aurora received them all graciously and kindly, as if she were in her own home. And she charmed them all – despite the formality that the baroness and the steward Ricardo insisted on, with customs and manners from Court that were twenty years out of date. Later, she would return the visits, accompanied by Margarida and D. Diogo. And when Christmas arrived, she hastened to the popular festivities and did not shrink from attending the Great Mass in the little village church like any other country woman. At last it was the New Year, and the inimitable Aurora

organized dances and festivities in Black Castle, which for the first time reverberated with true happiness!

Diogo had to admit that he was captivated! He was madly in love with his cousin more than ever. Margarida was delighted by this and kept their dates a secret from the baroness. She no longer prayed to Our Lady of Harmonies for the tortured soul of the baron of Casablanca. Instead, she prayed for the baroness d'Alvarada to like Aurora and to hate the ugly, fat Mrs. d'Alcantara Fialho.

Amidst all these events, the late baron Andre-Luis Januario-Francisco wasted no time. He followed his loving mother's advice to the letter. Like a lover who is jealous of his beloved's company, every night when all was quiet, he would go to the door of the sanctuary – for that was how he regarded his gentle cousin's bedroom. As always, before going to sleep, she prayed to the Holy Virgin for her suffering relative in the other world, more or less in the same terms. Now however, in addition to her own humble prayers, she added thanks to D. Andre and his cohorts for having stopped their tricks, and the following day, would offer them flowers, placed in vases at the foot of the Virgin's image. Profoundly attracted to her, the late baron would watch her, and would often smile tenderly, in spite of his bitterness, when he witnessed her efforts, always so devoted, silent, discreet, never telling anyone else about what she did.

However, as we were saying, when Aurora went to sleep, D. Andre would eagerly go meet with her spirit. He would kiss her forehead like a loving and joyful father. From there, he would take her to purer and more tranquil places in the Invisible with the support and help of his solicitous mother. The nobleman's sad spirit would tell her of his adversities, his hopes and his disappointments. He begged her that if she saw him while awake, she would not mistrust him or flee from him, but that she would listen to him, for he, the wretch, very much needed for her and Diogo to have enough charity and bravery to enter the right wing of the Castle, where he lived, and where he had buried his riches...

And on their return to the bedroom, he would end by saying:

“My greatest fear is that you will completely forget these conversations. You will think that it was all just a silly dream, a consequence of the impressions caused by Margarida and Ricardo's tales.”

The girl would try to comfort him, responding with affection and

devotion:

“I shall not forget you, sir, my dear cousin: the Holy Virgin will be kind enough to preserve in my heart the memory of our conversations so that I can help you in any way you need.”

The following day, nervous and impressed, she would speak to Margarida quietly so that her stern aunt would not hear:

“Margarida, I dreamed that D. Andre de Casablanca took me with him to the right wing, showed me many treasures and asked me to go there when I woke up...”

The pious old lady would cross herself, shuddering with dread, and would prudently advise:

“Avoid him my dear girl, avoid him, by reciting the holy Creed from back to front, blessing yourself with every word: for what that devil wants is to lead you astray ... seducing you to follow him to hell, where he is! I cannot believe it ... Oh, he’s lost!”

D. Angela-Mariana was the only one who treated the girl badly. She offered her no tokens of affection nor ever smiled at her, constantly disappointing the loving heart that had captivated even the rascals from the Spirit World, who served the priest’s late ex-partner. She did admire her, in spite of herself, but remained entirely aloof and did not look favorably upon the progression of the love that Diogo so obviously displayed.

One day, long after Christmas, the old baroness called her niece for a private talk in her study – her usual austerity in clear evidence. Intrigued, the girl from Casablanca agreed. The conversation was a long one. Diogo became worried, foreseeing unpleasant consequences. Margarida became so flustered that she could not contain herself: she finally went into the antechamber and listened at the door, but she could not hear a single word!

When the meeting was over and the door opened, Aurora came out with a sad face, and her lovely eyes, the color of the sky, were brimming with tears. The baroness had been extremely harsh; more than harsh – she had been merciless, barbaric, in ordering her desperate niece to renounce her plans to marry Diogo. According to her, destiny would never consent to such a union! Since both were penniless, with no prospects for better days in the future, what would they do once they were married? What imaginary resources would they use to build a home, since Aurora had no dowry and Diogo would



have no inheritance? No, a thousand times, no! Aurora was not a suitable wife for Diogo; Diogo was not a suitable husband for Aurora. She must resign herself to forgetting him. She should go back to Court, where wealthier husbands abounded, and find one there while she was still attractive. Besides, Diogo was going to be married shortly to a certain very respectable lady, with whom Mariana herself already had an agreement.

The old noblewoman's reasoning was a blow that broke the poor girl's heart. Margarida tried in vain to cheer her up and console her in her humiliation. But Aurora could only weep for the ending imposed on her sincere affection of so many years! For his part, Diogo, similarly warned by his mother, who demanded that he abandon his youthful dreams, was in despair. He seemed to be capable of the greatest folly in order not to let the only happiness he could imagine – Aurora's love – slip from his grasp!

Sorrow reigned in the castle once more. All that remained were the memories of the simple joys that the captivating young girl's arrival had aroused in him. Silence, tears and discouragement had taken their place.

Aware that she was an intruder in a place where she had come with pure and noble aspirations, and with her heart tortured by extreme disappointment, the girl from Casablanca should not and would not remain as a guest in her aunt's mansion. So, she prepared to leave. Her bags were all packed. Mules and carriages were ordered. There were just a few farewells to say in the surrounding area, which would take two or three days at most. They were sending her away from Black Castle in disgrace! So, she would leave forever! Her heart would break; she might even die from the pain of losing Diogo, but she was proud, and she intended to bid him a worthy farewell! And so a web of pain, tears and anguish surrounded the two gentle souls that fluttered in the darkness of D. Andre de Casablanca's old mansion.

\* \* \*

It was Sunday morning. Aurora was to leave in three days.

Spring arrived, radiant, full of joy and fragrances in the air. In the beautiful park the branches of the trees were brimming with life, the window boxes full of roses and geraniums festooned themselves with colors and aromas, and in the fields, life burst forth eagerly, more abundant than ever!

At Black Castle there was talk of moving to the estate in the Algarve, and valuable items were put up for sale.

More in love than ever, Diogo retired to his library to mourn and to think things over. For several days, the poor young man had been racking his brains for inspiration that would solve this terrible problem: he just had to marry Aurora!

Marry her! He had not wanted, had not dreamed of, anything else since his adolescence! So now his only longing was to marry his cousin Aurora de Casablanca!

But ... marry her, how? Since she was orphaned and poor, what of the dowry she should offer him when they signed the papers? And what of the linens and laces, the jewels and the tableware – gifts that any nobleman presents to his wife as part of the rights of betrothal? Where could he find such riches when his own jacket was thread-bare and he could not even light a fire in his library every day during winter? Inflict his poverty on her, she, who was so pretty and so good, who deserved to reign over a nation, together with her sovereign, a slave to her love? In marrying her, could he shroud her in the funereal cloak of his own disillusionment, only to see that laughter that enchanted him so extinguished forever, just as the smiles on his mother's face had been extinguished once and for all? Chain her to him by the laws of matrimony, only to bury her in a country backwoods, where the poor little bird could not spread her wings?

Oh no! Ruined, and worse, in misery, vanquished, without a friend to extend a helping hand, without underhand resources that would afford him victory, his life was in decline in the flower of his youth and he imagined himself quite unable to offer any happiness to the one he so loved.

Yes! His mother was right! He should give Aurora her freedom, and bid her a last, final farewell, thereby allowing her better opportunities. Obviously, a nobleman in his sensitive condition must make an advantageous marriage, and the same applied to a girl in Aurora's situation! Love – oh! Only those who are not suffering in poverty can enjoy its divine outbursts, possessing and enjoying it in its splendid fullness. Yes, there was truth in his mother's bitter experience – one cannot spend days and nights wondering what one will eat next month! His mother was right, absolutely right! He must give up his claim to Aurora! Oh, God! Mrs. d'Alcantara Fialho!...

Overwhelmed by the thought, Diogo mourned, weeping burning tears as he swallowed this most bitter of pills. His misfortunes were truly grim. The hopelessness of this seemingly insoluble situation made his benevolent heart

despair. Alone in the library, misunderstood and without a friendly voice of encouragement, or some good advice to calm the endless anguish that churned in the depths of his being, he gave free rein to his pain and allowed cowardly thoughts to fan the fire of despair in the corners of his mind, like volcanic magma boiling in the bottomless pits of the earth.

He repeated a thousand times the tragic farewell he would bid to his cousin, freeing her from her spoken vow. A thousand times, in the tumult of his mind, he saw her collapse in tearful moans, throwing herself into his arms; and a thousand times he kissed her tenderly, asked her forgiveness for his insult, he himself shrinking back from the freedom he was offering!

Thus he was brooding in his renaissance armchair – wealth ridiculing the penury that chilled his heart – head hung low like a condemned man, arms lying limp in discouragement, legs up and resting on the table, as was his habit when he was alone, when the door slowly opened and Ricardo entered after having ceremoniously asked permission to enter, in the manner due a member of the Aragon family. The old servant addressed his master with his habitual gentleness:

“My Lord, if you will permit me, I have come to tell you that the noble lady from Casablanca has ordered me to summon you because she wishes to discuss something of utmost importance. She awaits you in the Indian parlor.”

Ricardo had barely delivered his message when D. Diogo leapt out of the chair, crossed to the door, climbed the stairs in two leaps and rushed into the parlor where the lovely Aurora awaited him.

## 8

# The Dead Man Speaks!

Diogo hungrily kissed her fine, lily-white hands. His love had intensified greatly, ever since he had deemed it impossible, and it transfigured him. Never had Aurora seemed so beautiful, so desirable, as in that hour as they faced impossibility!

He was emotional and pale. What would his beloved fiancée say to him? Would she renounce him before he could renounce her – he who had not sufficient strength to hear her and obey?

He feared she did not love him anymore. Aurora comforted him. As radiant and kind as the sun, which knows how to share its goodness wherever it passes, she did everything she could to soothe the worries that troubled the heart of the one she loved!

When she saw that he had calmed down enough to pay proper attention, Aurora, that lovely creature who seemed to surround herself with a host of archangels, fixed her innocent gaze on him and asked:

“Have you known me a long time, cousin Diogo?”

Surprised by her question, which would have been pointless, except that it contained so much emotion, young d’Alvarada replied with a forced half-smile:

“I believe so, my dear Aurora; otherwise, I would never have dreamed of being happily married to you.”

“Well ... I’m not asking whether you love me, since of that I am sure; but whether you have known me for many years.”

“Oh, yes; of course I have, since childhood! Yes, yes! Good heavens!”

“And in all that time, have you ever noticed that I displayed a lack of intelligence, or that my reason had at any time lapsed?”

“Dear God! What are you getting at, Aurora? You’re making me nervous, darling!”

“I’m asking you, cousin, if I have always been in my right mind, or if I have ever shown signs of madness.”

“My God! No, Aurora! I don’t know of a more balanced character or of saner mind than yours.”

“Well, if that’s so, I can disclose to you a strange fact, without being afraid that you will make fun of me or doubt my reason.”

Diogo stared at her in wonder, and the young girl, wiping the nervous sweat from her forehead, little by little left her listener transfixed with each new paragraph of her declaration.

“I, too, Diogo, I myself have seen D. Andre de Casablanca’s shade! I saw it! It spoke to me, and I answered!!!”

The young man started, surprised by the very subject that excited him most, that is, after his passion for his cousin.

“What? You saw him? He spoke to you? You replied? How, Aurora? How could you, if even I have never managed to? Oh! But where did this happen? What did D. Andre say to you? Tell me, dear Aurora, tell me at once!”

He moved closer. He took her tiny hands, and encouraging her to explain without fear of embarrassment, he heard from her own lips the curious tale:

“When I arrived at Black Castle, my dear Diogo, on the very next day my aunt told me that the right wing was full of ghosts, and that was why it was blocked off from the rooms in the left wing. She reminded me that D. Andre de Casablanca, when he bequeathed the castle to her, had prohibited her in his will from entering the part that he had inhabited, on pain of terrible vengeance by his soul for the sacrilege of disobeying him...”

“That’s the way it was, Aurora,” Diogo replied in surprise, thinking that he had already discovered the gallery, and also mindful of how disgraceful it was going to be for him to renounce Aurora’s love for the riches of Mrs. d’Alcantara Fialho.

“My aunt forbade me to approach the rooms that lead to the other side, those that were so carefully sealed and bolted by the baron Casablanca himself. Also, Margarida told me of frightful events that had apparently taken place in D. Andre’s time; he, who was regarded as a sorcerer, commanded armies of demons, carrying out all manner of crimes and evil deeds with them ... which led her to the conclusion that the poor man’s soul was damned, and as such, was wandering amongst the damned, luring and condemning whoever fell into his clutches.”

“I hope, dear Aurora, that you soon realized that this whole tedious story was nothing but a legend woven due to ignorance of our poor cousin’s learned and solitary life ... Believe me: D. Andre was a wise man and not a sorcerer, and he spent his hours in the holy service of lofty study for humanitarian ends. He did not deserve the repulsive insult cast upon his memory!”

“I thought nothing less of him, Diogo; I did not mistrust D. Andre, because I do not mistrust anyone. I also gave no credit to the good Margarida’s foolishness. I merely remarked that some specific reason must have made our noble relative seal off his home in such a way, and I swore to myself that I would not leave this mansion without finding out what was in the other wing.”

“So, did you dare, when I myself never had the courage to delve into the mysteries referred to in the will?!”

“And why shouldn’t I have dared, cousin? I have never feared errant<sup>27</sup> souls. I live in harmony with them all because I respect them; I love them because I wish them peace, and ever since I was a little girl I have devoted myself to praying for all of them ... Consequently, D. Andre’s threats did not alarm me, and I swore to myself that come what may, I would visit the right wing.”

“And how did you manage to see him and hear him?”

“Very easily! It was like this: whenever I could, I would escape from Margarida’s vigilance and steal away to those rooms. Driven by some strange desire to get to the other side, I would examine the plates and bolts that our cousin had put on the doors. But I couldn’t remove them. I scraped my hands and calloused them using improvised tools in an effort to pry them off ... I bruised my knuckles, knocking on walls to discover some false entrance! But all was in vain. Nothing! I couldn’t get the plates off! I didn’t discover any false doors! It was impossible to get to the other wing! My anxiety grew in

the face of these difficulties. Night after night, I dreamed that D. Andre, suffering inconsolably, was encouraging me to open the locks somehow and venture into his old haunts. I was devastated by my inability to help him.

“But why? What unusual interest could arouse such a strange desire in me?”

“There was no particular interest whatsoever to encourage me. If there was, it would have to have been D. Andre’s interest influencing me, since in all my dreams he tirelessly pleaded with me to heed him and to continue looking for a way in. What I had was an unbearable curiosity, which my own willfulness demanded I satisfy.”

“Oh! What a woman you are, my wonderful Aurora!”

“However, D. Andre de Casablanca, although discreet and learned, was unknowledgeable enough to have sealed off his old oak doors on our side. If he had sealed them off on the other side, and then gone out through some secret passage, they would have been impossible to break into. But he didn’t do that.

“Well, yesterday, while examining the doors, I discovered that one of them had been damaged by someone, and therefore offered a simple solution.”

Diogo shuddered, remembering what he had done in the gallery, and his interest was aroused.

“I lifted the latches, which were only resting in place; I removed the nails, which had not been properly driven; I hurt myself, but I finally opened the door, and mad with joy, I conquered the obstacle created by that will, which had certainly been dictated by a mind already weakened by illness in order to torment us all.

“Diogo, I found myself in the most stupendous gallery that anyone accustomed to being at Court has ever seen! I crossed it from one end to the other, a little fearfully ... Doors with coats of arms, half-hidden by heavy draperies stood before me. I chose one at random and entered the room of the famous heretic who had commanded armies of damned beings! Oh, Diogo! What a stately palace! What splendor I saw in those rooms! I went from room to room, drawing the curtains and opening the stained-glass windows. I was enchanted by the richness of all that I saw! I did not see even one trace of evil-doings! Just beautiful furniture, drawing rooms, bedrooms, studies,

libraries, carefully assembled laboratories, beautiful collections of all types that would make the palace of a monarch, an artist or a wise man proud! D. Andre's home is a museum of beauty, of art, of science and of good taste! Warm satisfaction and indescribable joy lit up my soul and swelled my heart! However, a 'certain person' was following me, one whom I sometimes engaged in friendly conversation, and who, for some unknown reason, I had not really noticed, unfortunately for me ... Sometimes this 'certain person' came so close to me that it seemed I could feel the soft warmth of his body and his light touch, as though he were caressing me gently and discreetly with velvety hands ... But of course I was in a strange state of abstraction, for I had not yet thought of facing or talking directly to the character that followed me ... as I am doing now to you...

"However, desiring certain information on an important collection of porcelain, whose origin was quite unknown to me, I turned to ask him a question ... and it was as if I had awakened from an extraordinary state of somnolence! Only then did I clearly understand where I was, and that I was absolutely alone! But, I thought, 'No! I was not alone!' Someone was following me, and the proof was that I had not gotten lost in that labyrinth of rooms and studies, studies and rooms; that I had gone through them all in a methodical and deliberate manner when, in fact, they were all new to me!"

"Oh! What you are telling me is marvelous!" exclaimed the young scholar impulsively, smiling happily.

"At first I was astonished," continued Aurora, shuddering, as if the memory had returned to her in the excitement of her account. "Imagining that it was you who stealthily accompanied me in order to play a trick on me while you amused yourself with my terror, I looked for you behind the draperies, under the big table and the sideboards with the tableware, and even behind the stained-glass windows that I had opened when I entered. I saw that I really was alone, but that I had been followed! I became frightened. My nerves were consumed by a painful feeling of anxiety. I felt my whole body stiffen with the unbearable iciness of fear. I remembered Margarida's tiresome stories, and at that moment I believed them all to be true. The image of D. Andre, in his solitary and enigmatic life, appeared in my mind. I was horrified by the idea that he was my companion, and terrified, I ran out, rushing unseeing through rooms and studies, whose doors I had flung open distractedly, without closing them again; and then, without losing my way, I reached the



gallery and returned to this side, as though I had risen from a tomb! This happened yesterday.

“Today I awoke quite certain that my curiosity had been completely satisfied. While attending mass at the village chapel, I prayed fervently for D. Andre, and I asked him to forgive me for my disobedience. I also promised to keep secret all that I had discovered in his home. But ... Diogo! It was as if some higher power, stronger than me, was making me break my promises, bending my will! Several times I resisted the impulse. But this strange force impelled me again, stronger and more powerful, until at some moment, when I was quite out of myself, I went back to the very place I wished to avoid, and before I knew it, I was right there in the gallery!

“A white figure stood before me, inviting me to hear him and follow him up the stairs and through the corridors of the great residence. He had something to show me. I feared him ... I hesitated ... Was this a creature of God? I was terrified ... I did not want to obey him.

“Then the figure grew larger, became clearer, and revealed itself. The august image of D. Andre de Casablanca stood, quite clearly, before my surprised and unblinking eyes!

“‘Fear not!’ he said to me, ‘It is I; I suffer and only you can save me. But you are too weak. Go! Run and call Diogo ... If you leave the castle before I can speak to you, I shall be lost.’

“And so now you know, my dear cousin, why I have interrupted your studies: D. Andre is calling you to his rooms. Am I mad? Is this an illusion? I think not!”

Diogo, his soul transported by the most sublime consternation, merely stood up and replied, with a strange glow in his eyes:

“No, it is not an illusion, Aurora! What you say is the truth! Oh! You, my darling, are the essential vehicle for this type of invocation, of which the manuscripts speak. You are what I have been missing! D. Andre calls for me? I shall go to him ... but you shall come with me!”

\* \* \*

Dom Diogo and his cousin Aurora went immediately to the residence of the old baron who, even after his death, insisted on inhabiting his old fortress.

The large sacred book of invocations, written in Hebrew, whose pages

were strips of special wood and which had a beautiful tortoiseshell cover speckled with gold, was taken by Diogo to the gallery. In order to avoid the watchful eyes of the other people with whom they lived, Aurora had complained of an unbearable headache and had retired in pain to her rooms, while young d'Alvarada had grabbed a shotgun and supposedly went off to hunt partridges by himself.

They arrived, and Diogo prepared everything for the sacred rite. He was faithful to the books he revered so deeply. This time the result came quickly. Having been evoked, or rather, its wishes having been fulfilled, D. Andre de Casablanca's otherworldly shade began to appear vaguely next to Aurora, who, in full trance induced by D. Diogo's powers, offered up to the dead nobleman the precise and simple elements with which to manifest himself. Around her was the symbolic circle that some ancient magicians used to use in rites of evocation in order to guard against any outside surprises; such circles would have the marvelous magic property of facilitating the phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> Around this circle, or rather, at the four cardinal points just outside it, small candles made of sacred resins were lit, while the young man spoke the words that the ritual required. And nearby, the silver censer puffed the gentle smoke of the fragrant spiritual incense.<sup>29</sup>

Having positioned himself as demanded by the lofty service he was performing, Diogo stood before Aurora and began to speak. The shade, at first hesitant, began to take shape and the image of the baron emerged before Diogo's delighted eyes as he drank from the divine cup of the elect who are admitted into the circles of those who no longer inhabit the earth.

Aurora, half-conscious, lying on a cot that her cousin had put in the center of the circle, was the gentle vehicle that enabled the poor, desperate soul to cross over from the chasm of death and be understood. Then D. Diogo asked the shade, which was now completely solid:

“Are you D. Andre-Luis-Januario-Francisco-de-Castanhede, the illustrious baron of the Casablanças?”

His voice was grave, his attitude solemn and majestic, his soul, filled with grace!

The voice, ah! The voice of D. Andre – his actual voice, hoarse, hesitant, austere like his august features – resounded, slowly, in D. Diogo's ecstatic ears as he experienced a heavenly joy!

“Thank you, dear Diogo, for answering my call. Yes! It is I, Andre-

Januario de Casablanca, who is speaking to you!”

“Then I am here at your service, sir! It gives me great pleasure to answer your call; and if there are any thanks in order, they are mine for the happiness you give me by still existing, by living, thinking and feeling!”

“You are an upright man, Diogo de Aragon! And as you serve me, I shall employ you for your own happiness! Listen to me: yes, I do exist. Yes, I do live, think and feel! But above all else, I suffer! And so that you may relieve my unhappiness, I wish to speak to you!”

Diogo, deeply moved, replied in the same affectionate and noble vein, which immediately enchanted the evoked soul:

“I regret and share in your misfortunes, sir! And I shall do whatever you wish. In fact, for some time I have been trying to talk to you, and if I have only managed to do so today, I assure you it was not for want of trying.”

“I know that Diogo, and your sincerity moves me. You are the most loyal soul that I have ever found anywhere! I wish I could have gotten to know you, and I am proud now of my decision to have you educated.”

“Thank you, sir!”

“While you wished to speak to me, I in turn was anxious to communicate with you. You rushed things, however. You trusted too much in your little-explored powers. You would call me without thought of whether or not it was possible for me to answer you. I could see and hear you, but you were not aware of me. You were too weak to overcome your deficiencies, impose yourself on me and oblige me to reveal myself to you. We both lacked the means to realize our desires. Outside help was needed. One day it arrived, in the radiant purity of this saintly soul, so humble and charitable, whom you see here, providing her generous essence so that I may talk to you and so that you may understand.”

“Yes, I can see and hear you perfectly, sir, as if you were just like me; and I am proud of myself for being worthy of this destiny and of your most merciful generosity.”

D. Andre interrupted gravely:

“It is solely thanks to God that you deserve this gift, you foolish young man. Understand that above our own possibilities, pitiful as they are, there is a wisdom that upholds the law upon which you and I support ourselves so that

we can see and speak – you, at the edge of my grave, and I, still on the edge of life.”

There was a short pause. Diogo, profoundly moved by the extraordinary fact of speaking to a deceased person, was so ecstatic that every nerve in his soul tingled, and tears ran freely and gently down his cheeks; D. Andre, baron of Casablanca, briefly in possession of material fluids, seemed troubled; and Aurora, semi-conscious on her cot, showed signs of unusual suffering. The breath of archangels fluttered around the three of them; the wondrous scene was bathed in holy grace: it was the glorious work of Heaven that manifested itself to joyful mortals!

The human shade of the former smuggler continued, now filled with despair:

“Diogo, my son! I am suffering, and I have not found peace in death!”

“It truly breaks my heart to hear such a sad confession from you, my venerable cousin! Masses have been said in praise to the Lord for mercy on your soul...”

“Masses ... yes ... masses ...” said the former castellan’s sad soul, “I fear that they did me no good whatsoever, Diogo. I have been disillusioned by mortals too long to ever believe that they can pledge true mercy!”

D. Diogo sighed deeply:

“Regretfully, I took part in them thinking of you, D. Andre!”

“I understood that, my dear Diogo, for I too was there. I felt your concern for me and the dignity of your loyalty. Your inestimable sentiments and your noble qualities attracted me and soon made me your friend. Also, during those ceremonies, you, a so-called heretic, were the only one who was inspired with true charity! Alas! What a bitter truth! Not even your mother, whom I so loved, showed any true contrition! Everyone, including her, was untrue to the sentiment of mercy that they pretended to have. Everyone, starting with her, was acting in their own interest, without a thought for the watch-care of the poor wretch who writhed in pain right next to them!”

“By any chance, sir,” replied the young man quickly, “by any chance is loyalty a common virtue? No, certainly not. In order to understand it and practice it, the heart must first have been hammered on the anvil of unhappiness, and suffered long hours of searing pain. It is necessary for those grinding pains to soften the fibers of the soul so that only then can the saintly

and sweet essence of that virtue, so rare and invaluable, be infiltrated within it, for it is only known by hearts that are well on their way to understanding. I, who never had friends, feel despised by those disloyal individuals who disparage the poverty that surrounds me. I take pleasure in being loyal because I learned from the pain of misfortune the secret of the promise of joy in this inestimable quality, so rarely displayed by men!”

“Oh, young Diogo! How gratefully your noble words echo in my no longer human ears! Yes, you are right, my son; you are right! Usually, men are only true to their own interests; they are selfish, that’s what they are! Before assessing the moral qualities that ought to support their affection for someone, they look for the personal advantages that such a relationship might hold for them. If you were a grand nobleman, surrounded by luxury, a rabble of cynical flatterers would fill your home, groveling at your feet like servile dogs, inflating your vile instincts with false praise. Are you in want, however? Are you humble in the loneliness of your bitter existence? Do you suffer in the state of abandonment in which those whom you would most like to trust have left you? Your qualities go unnoticed; your actions, as benevolent as they may be, attract only indifference, while not a single friend will come to ease the worry of your dark hours of misery with his comforting presence! And all because you are not rich! Your qualities and virtues have not attracted the affection that gold could bring you!”

“Woe is me! So it is, D. Andre,” sighed Diogo, with deep sadness.

“That is why, my good Diogo, I turned my back on society and chose solitude. My ideals were not understood and I was hated. But I didn’t care. To live in a hypocritical and cynically selfish society was never the desire of my character. For me, the only friends were those who raised themselves above the mire of vile self-interest. Perhaps you see me as a skeptic, and my former reputation surprises you. However, I was not a skeptic. I was disillusioned and humiliated, certainly, and I suffered greatly, so I looked to books and to the sea for more faithful friends.”

“I know what you mean, sir, and I am pleased to be able to share your opinions and sentiments.”

“Diogo, time is pressing; this poor child is suffering, and we cannot continue to sacrifice her like this. Tell me, my son, haven’t you ever had any friends?”

“I have never had any friends, D. Andre ... Oh, well, yes! I did have one,

just one: you yourself, to whose generosity I owe my education.”

“Do you suffer, my poor Diogo?”

“Poor me, sir! I despair! When you called me, my mind was full of the hallucinations of the disillusioned!”

“Child! You must fight against such despair; it does no good at all! Be strong Diogo, for Victory is the reward of the powerful! But why do you despair? You love and are loved. At your age, what more do you want?”

“To have love! But for me, it’s not possible!”

“Yes, it is painful, as I well know! But who told you that you cannot have your love?!”

“The facts are obvious, noble friend.”

“The facts as you know them; but there are others that you do not know.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“Listen, young man! I am aware of your difficult situation. I want to fix it and make you happy, for your happiness will make me happy.”

“But ... how can that be, with all due respect? Can a deceased person’s circumstances be intimately related to those of a living one?”

“Oh! Many intimate relationships exist between the deceased and the living, Diogo, between those who were once men and women and humankind! Death, my son, is an infamous lie created by those who cannot evolve. The story of a life does not end beneath the seal of a tomb. Enclosed in his tomb, a man is reborn from his own dust. He unties the knots that had bound him to the flesh and he comes alive once more to feel, to get excited, to enjoy or to suffer, just as you see me doing at this very moment! Yes! Yes! Insoluble ties connect those who no longer exist to those who are on earth! Oh! Didn’t you learn anything from the scholarly books I left to you?”

There was a solemn, pious pause. D. Andre seemed pensive. D. Diogo d’Alvarada was lost in the marvel of this moment that was so far beyond his dreams.

The human shade came closer to the line of the circle and was now so close to the wise young man that, transported to the heights of amazement, he could feel the warmth of that strange body, brought by the essence provided by Aurora, deep in trance.

Suddenly, with a light touch on Diogo's arm, the troubled soul of the smuggler said:

"Listen, Diogo."

"I'm listening, D. Andre..."

"In this grand castle, the relic of my unusual life, and which was bequeathed to you and your mother ... there is a hidden treasure!!!"

"Sir!" exclaimed D. Diogo in surprise.

"Yes, Diogo d'Alvarada, an incalculable store of prodigious and marvelous wealth. I acquired it on long and dangerous journeys, and I myself hid it away through sordid greed! You've never had any friends? From my position beyond the grave, let me tell you: In me, young man, you shall have the friend that humankind has denied you!

"Has no friendly hand ever offered you support to relieve you of your myriad troubles? I have met death itself; I have broken the barriers erected between life and the grave, and I now extend my right hand to you in sincere protection! You are very poor. You suffer because you love, and you believe your glorious dream of happiness is impossible? I, who loved without being loved in return, have come from beyond the grave to assure you: You are wrong, kind youth! Your dream is possible! Yes! I want to help you and I can. I will tell you: Over there, at the top of that high tower that looms in the north, over the treacherous sea cliffs, embedded in extravagant cabinets dug out of the slabs in these old walls, there is an incalculable treasure! I give to you, for it is mine, and I no longer wish to own it! Giving it to you will make you happy. Disconnecting myself from it will make me happy!"

The nobleman paused briefly and then continued, hesitant and consumed by anguish:

"Oh, Diogo! Those jewels burn my conscience, and the brightness of their incomparable splendor shines sinisterly within my soul, making my existence beyond the grave a devastating torment!

"Ah! I may wander far and wide, across endless oceans that I still visit in my never-ending thirst for knowledge, enchanted by glimpses of the future that enrapture my faculties of feeling and imagining, inviting them to extend themselves to glorious conquests on the planes of spirituality. Oh my, Diogo! Everywhere I go, the searing brightness of that fateful treasure that is stuck here punishes me with its evil appearance, calling me back to the place where

I was damned! My misfortune is that I am forced to lock myself in that tower, where I hid it. I have become a prisoner, tortured by the same weapons that once delighted me!

“I must do something my dear Diogo; I must make a clean sweep and detach myself from the bitter memories that still wound my repentant self. I must search for new learning and discover new horizons on the lofty path of evolution! I must, in the pure lymph of Truth, quench the thirst of my soul, which is avid for vast knowledge, and find peace in glorious realms that are blessed by the love I was never able to find on earth!

“Poor, sad wretch that I am: my wings are hampered by the iron locks forged around that fortune, whose richness shines with the insolent laughter of cynical vengeance! My God! My God! The weight of my sin of greed crushes all the qualities that should be helping me in my conquests of the Infinite!

“O Omnipotent God! Why, being alone in this world and already so powerful, did I cover myself in vile ambition and the desire for more gold? What evil and devilish sentiments inspired me to become so miserly? Why, since I had so much wealth, did I not share it in my final hour, at least with my own family? As I amassed this splendid fortune that so torments me today, what was the reasoning that made me cause so many tears to be spilled from others’ eyes, to insist that unknown arms work to exhaustion for miserable remuneration, and to extract so much sweat from miserable brows – far more worthy than mine, but still bent low by grueling toil? Why, my God, did I steal? Why did I cheat the just laws of my country?

“Poor, humble people of Santa Cruz! Forgive me! Forgive me! Forgive me! You lowly fishermen of the Indies, who wrenched from the ocean’s depths the fabulous treasures I fancied! You sad African hunters, who faced death to satisfy my vanities! You merchants of Persia, you archivists of Egypt, you apothecaries of Asia, you artists of Greece, you perfumers and talents of Italy – one hundred times my soul bows down to kiss the ground beneath your feet, for I deceived you all; I lied to you all; I harmed you all with my insatiable tentacles!

“And all for what?

“Merely for the vile satisfaction of possession!

“In conquering the female, the primitive male was never as ferociously brutal as I consider myself to be from having hoarded so much wealth without



using it for the common good.

“There are children who go through a whole winter without a flame and old people who shiver by the roadsides with no shelter. Yet in Black Castle, while the desolation of old people and children parades before it – in Black Castle there is an impossibly huge treasure that could help an entire population for years on end!

“Winter comes and the snow whitens the fields. There is no work. Laborers languish as their money runs out. Villagers are in despair over the implacably terrible weather. Workers lay down their tools because their earnings do not compensate them. Hunger, tears, anguish and misery abound, while the snow continues to fall! And yet, my God, there is gold here, lying useless inside my coffers! I did not use it to give work to those who needed to earn their keep!

“What infernal madness prostituted my mind, Diogo, to make my wealth so barren, when I could have used it to build workhouses that at least would have supported those wretches in the winter?

“The woman I loved, abandoned and alone, suffers the chill of adversity and a thousand degrading humiliations in the very mansion I bequeathed her, without suspecting that the bequest was by way of revenge for the grudge I bore, and that, for this reason, while she herself suffers, the miserable soul of he who swore eternal love to her is consumed by tragic remorse for not having shown her, at the final hour, the fortune he had won in her name.

“I am suffering Diogo, and I am sorry! The wealth accumulated in this wing, where I used to live, and my remorse for my addiction to it, have driven my spirit mad! I want to be rid of it! I hate it! Yet, even though I cannot stand it, I find myself forced to guard it like a watchdog; to gaze on it, to scrutinize it, to turn it over, while in front of me I see the sad images of those whom I cheated to amass that wealth, along with the most wretched images of the poor in the clutches of misery; and I feel, in this atrocious torture to which I subject myself, all the punishment for my ugly ambition!

“In order to be rid of it all, I have been disrupting your life with my insolent appearances. I lured you to the edges of this noble gallery so that you would understand the desires that torment me, and so that you would enter this wing and take possession of all you find here. Do not offer masses for me; instead, accept this treasure! I was in despair at your lack of comprehension, and I had resigned myself to endless torment, when Aurora

showed up, bringing with her the flame of Hope! She was charitable and listened to me – a ray of light in the darkness of exile, softness shielding strength, a mother’s kiss on the burning brow of the desperate dead man...

“That is why I called you in haste. Help me, Diogo! Take from my shoulders – blessed Cyrenian – the heavy cross that these riches have been! Accept them! I give them to you! Accept them, and by doing so, relieve me of the burning fire that consumes my troubled conscience...”

The afflicted man wept acrimonious tears, which fell on D. Diogo’s sensitive soul, distressing him while at the same time alarming him by their intensity.

The deceased nobleman’s woes really did seem unbearable, and his honest confession filled young d’Alvarada’s heart with pity. Never, until now, could Aurora’s beloved imagine that a Castanhede e Casablanca could throw away five centuries of aristocratic pride and confess that he was a despicable criminal!

D. Diogo, feeling moved and weeping copiously, made the following suggestion, which seemed to be the simplest solution:

“Order me, sir, and I shall obey: tell me to fling this treasure into the unfathomable depths of the great sea, and without so much as touching it, I shall do so immediately!”

“No, no! That is not what will help me,” protested the spirit. “That infernal tarantula has woven such a web around me that now, in order to free myself from its restraints, I must weigh up actions, thoughts and attitudes. In the hidden depths of the great sea I would still find it, and gather its pieces one by one! I feel connected to it, like a fetus to the egg that generated it! Its evil glow would transcend the emerald mass of the waters; it would spread itself through the air; it would be reflected through endless space in its search for my conscience; and even if I were in heavenly splendor, comfortably in the bosom of the Omnipotent – it would drag me from there, implacable, and cast me upon it to torture my senses with the abominable contemplation of it!”

“Then, what should I do?”

“I will tell you: a part of the treasure shall be yours. The other part shall go to the poor. My treasure contains two separate parts: mine, originating from my own toil, exhaustion and perseverance; and that of the unfortunate

laborers whom I exploited in order to get it more easily. What was mine shall be yours; on my behalf, you shall give the poor what should be theirs. There are children who suffer from cold and hunger, and who need an education. There are old people, shriveled by illness and disappointment. There are the tears of desperate women to dry. There are young men and women who need to be guided away from the paths of evil. Diogo, keep what I give you. But in the holy name of God, I beg you, in remembrance of what I have told you and of those whom I exploited: the other part you must use on my behalf to help those miserable children, to clothe those shaky old people, to relieve the insane anxiety of those unhappy women and to guide the paths of the forsaken youths.

“CHARITY! That is what I beg you to do with the riches I have accumulated in the coffers of greed, kind young man!

“CHARITY! That is where my soul, enslaved in the shroud of regret, desires to see the sparkle of the gold that was mine! You must give my desolate conscience the glorious relief of using my enormous wealth to spread goodness, love, peace, care and the kindly touch that soothes pain and assuages bitterness! Use Charity to repair the harm caused by my selfishness, Diogo! And may my tears be dried and my conscience soothed by the sight of smiling children, sheltered old people, satisfied women and young men and women living in dignity – all blessing the name of the unfortunate man who forgot them in life but who remembered them in the after-life, and who returned to the world to redeem himself by consoling them!”

“Oh, D. Andre de Casablanca!” exclaimed Diogo, unable to control himself in the height of his emotion, “Rest in peace in your tomb! Dry the burning tears that sear your troubled soul! Trust what I say! Your wishes, your orders, are sacred to me! In the name of the Most High, and on your sacred remains, which I now honor more than ever, I swear to you: Your assets shall be given to those who suffer!”

Thus, in the midst of this glorious ritual, an incredible scene – marvelous, macabre, sublime or fantastic? – unfolded between the strange characters in the great gallery, dimly lit by the warm, rainbow colors sifting through the stained-glass windows.

The evoked man’s shade, imperious and strong, crossed over the magic circle, disobeying the sacred rules and ignoring the protests of the operator. He dragged the sleeping Aurora behind him like a sun pulling its moon. She

was pale and cold, no longer the rosy individual that enchanted everyone with her natural qualities, but merely an automaton slave to the irresistible orders of a dead man.

“For God’s sake, man, what are you doing!” cried the young scholar in horror, since in the sacred books he had not learned how to deal with such a case. “You will ruin me and you will ruin Aurora!”

“Poor child!” responded the old smuggler sweetly and kindly, soothing Diogo’s alarm. “Calm down and follow me ... There’s no imminent danger and I know what I’m doing. Do you think it is possible, Diogo, for human forces to impose themselves on a free soul and hinder it, if it is aided by higher laws and if it is only moved by goodness? Just compose yourself and follow me.”

The procession formed: D. Andre at the front, slender, serious, thoughtful, just as he was in life; then, Aurora; behind his cousin, Diogo, as if suspended in a fantastic dream, completed the unusual group.

On D. Andre’s orders, Diogo would go ahead to open the doors. They passed through rooms and corridors. They descended stairs. They crossed galleries. D. Andre, silent but anxious; Aurora, in trance; D. Diogo de Aragon, respectful and full of emotion.

They reached the basement, where the air was heavy and hard to breathe. There, the human shade, ever watchful, exclaimed:

“To your left there are torches on the wall and flints to light the flame. You will need them. Light one, Diogo.”

Aurora’s fiancé obeyed respectfully: he found a torch and struck the flame.

They descended farther. In the sinister light of the resin that crackled as it burned, D. Diogo, terrified, could see along the damp corridors inhabited by clusters of disgusting animals, the gloomy doors of ancient dungeons, some of which were flung open revealing the dark interior where, no doubt, in times gone by, precious lives had been slowly and desperately extinguished!

They continued to descend. The air was now painful for Diogo, who felt nauseous in the unbearable fetidness that heat and humidity produce over the years. At last, the old lord of Castanhede e Casablanca spoke, as they arrived at a sort of circular room at the bottom of the last staircase:

“Over there, hidden in that huge pile of stones on your right, there is a crowbar. Bring it to me Diogo.”

Once again, the young man obeyed, as if he, like Aurora, was unconscious and subservient to a higher power.

“Count three steps on this staircase in front of you. It leads to some secret passages. Come on! One... two ... three! Here, take the crowbar ... like this Diogo! Oh! Don’t take so long! Hurry, young man! My God! Why can I not move as I used to? Take the crowbar ... insert it here, under the third step. Try harder, Diogo! You have to move the whole step ... it’s the humidity, it has covered it in moss and it is stuck to its neighbors. Be strong now, for the slab is heavy! Come on, harder, boy! Hurry, for your Aurora is feeling tired! Oh! There it comes! Very good! Bring the torch ... See that iron box hidden in this infernal place that no mortal would ever find?”

“Oh! Is that the treasure?”

“My goodness, Son, no, it’s not! That box merely contains the keys to the coffers. Only with them can the cabinets embedded in the walls of the great tower be unlocked!”

“Poor D. Andre ... I am beginning to understand the tremendous worries that so afflicted you in the loneliness of the tomb!” stammered the young man to himself, amazed.

“Yes!” murmured the miser’s shade, capturing his thoughts. “Poor wretch that I am! You, young man, would never understand the intensity of my anguish as I remembered that such a hiding place would never be suspected by anyone! They would only have found it if by some chance they demolished the fortress and moved every stone, one by one, from the sunken foundations! But could I wait for the centuries to solve this? And what if they never did demolish it, and if, during some violent storm a fierce ray of lightning struck it, destroying its towers and hurling them into the depths of the ocean? My deadly treasure would be hurled in with it to founder in the green heart of the waters, and no one would ever make use of it, which would condemn me to eternal damnation!

“These were the worries that smote me. My anxiety grew daily. Shaking with the pain of remorse, I prayed to God to relieve my terrible suffering, and give me the opportunity to repair the wrongs I had committed. I prayed for his mercy to consider the hard lessons I had learned – the severe punishment for my imprudent and selfish actions. That someone, guided by his assistant

angels, would dream of its existence and discover the secret! That if this person should retrieve it, he would make the best use of it, and thus ease the unbearable weight that crushed my conscience! I cried so much and was in such torment, sad and humiliated as I recognized my wrongdoing, that Eternal God heard my call and sent me the help that I needed.

“My saintly and glorious Mother – my beloved mother, whom I lost early in life as a young boy – appeared one day, with a laurel of fragrant roses and surrounded by pure, celestial light. I was ecstatic to see her, as if Heaven’s bounty had touched my troubled spirit. She comforted me mercifully, mother that she had been, saint that she still is, and distressed as I was! She dried my tears with wise and noble advice; she soothed the fierce flames of my passion with murmurs of hope; she quieted my roars of revolt; and surely my days were less poisoned by despair, for the good Lord heard my piercing, repentant cries and sent her to me – my dearly beloved mother – to guide me along new paths, to undo, by her watch-care, the infamous chains of gold that bound me to the earth like a slave!

“She said to me: ‘Go, my son! Go and implore those who knew you, whom you loved, for the help you need. To free oneself from the consequence of a wrongdoing, it is necessary to destroy it altogether! Go! Show yourself to someone. Ask that person to have mercy and listen to you. Talk to him. Do something. The work will be difficult for you, as arduous as if you had to demolish your castle with your own hands in order to reveal to human eyes your unholy secret! But that is what you must do. You will moan and gnash your teeth in the face of the obstacles you will encounter, for you must cross the chasm between life and death in order to be understood. But it is absolutely necessary!

‘You will require much patience, the glorious patience of the noble martyrs. You shall have it my son, just as you had it to amass the huge fortune that has been your downfall! You shall have it because it is the only way; and you must do what reasoning tells you to do for the best: resign yourself! Any wrong a man commits must be repaired. Often, centuries pass while such reparations take place. But every wrongdoing must be righted, regardless of the time and the cost, which may involve great sacrifice. That is the Law. And as it is the Law, there is nothing to be done but to bow to the facts; otherwise, our conscience will be in eternal conflict, and a burning conscience, as you well know, is not something to be borne for a long time.

‘Fortunately for you, you can now start to repair your situation, which in

some ways will avoid more tears in the future ... So, for your own sake, repair it as soon as possible. You must go to the incarnates and convince them to listen to you. You will find generous individuals who will listen to you and take an interest in you; they will be willing to help. Go! The hardest part is the chasm you must cross. However, you must do so if you want to waste no time in soothing the anxieties that consume you.'

"And how shall I cross this chasm, Mother," I asked in distress, "if I speak and no one hears me, if I ask and no one helps me, if I show myself and they all flee, despising me? Do you not know, my lady, that those whom I loved know nothing of the after-life, as they cling to comfortable, superficial beliefs that keep them from the truths of the spirit? Woe is me! I shall forever be condemned to the torture of this infernal prison!"

"Ask God for more strength, my son, and God will give it to you,' she replied with frankness, 'for you are sincere. Act in faith and without fear. Insist. Show yourself as if you were still incarnate, and in the end you will get your way!'"

"Ah, Diogo! You and Aurora, with your noble and idealistic youth, generous souls devoid of mean prejudices, you heard me through the burning fires from where, struggling, I begged for your pity! Were it not for your kindness, your compassion for the unfortunate soul whose memory was despised, and your wisdom, enlightened by the reflections of the all-powerful light of the Invisible, my endless suffering would have continued, who knows ... for centuries! Your noble gesture in listening to me; your valuable knowledge of the hidden life of the Beyond, consorting with superior, sublime resources so as to help me, shall ease the journey that I shall make in the future, when it is necessary for me **to be a new man, born again from a maternal womb and, having again acquired too much gold, and venturing again into greed, I can correct myself and make better use of the riches that I have denigrated!**

"God bless you, kind youth! I am the starving man whom you and Aurora have sated! I was the desperate, eager wayfarer without guidance or hope – and you are the precious balm that soothes the sting of the journey! I was a slave to the murdering clutches of remorse, and you two, like sweet angels of mercy, came to untie the fetters that bound me to the ignominy of slavery!

"Bless you, bless you both!"

And keys were removed from the little coffer, the slab replaced. D. Andre, with the immaterial, fine, pale fingers of his temporary material body, which Diogo did not dare to touch, showed him by the light of the torch the Arabic characters engraved on various parts of the complicated locks, characters which, having been matched to their other halves, which were elsewhere on the locks in the tower's hiding places, would form the sacramental phrase, the secret which would enable them to open the infernal cabinets that hid the infamous relics from human eyes.

“Can you read this code, dear Diogo?” inquired the troubled soul, half smiling.

“Impossible, my noble cousin! There are syllables missing here, whole words!”

“Yes, impossible! Here you will find only part of the magic phrase that opens my coffers. It is half of a poem, Diogo, these odd syllables that you see before you. Over there, in the tower, is the other half of the same padlock, embedded in an unimaginable place! You will match this part to its twin ... you will patiently turn both the dials, linking the letters to each other as they move by ... until you form the unusual poem that tells the whole, painful story of my solitary life:

“Andre – Mariana – a – charming – dream – of – love – which – the – burning – breath – of – Fate – destroyed.”

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27 In Spiritism, the term ‘errant’ means any soul awaiting reincarnation. – Tr.

28 This circle, a simple formula, was replaced by the powerful concentration of several mediums around a table, something which, in fact, becomes an active force along with the communicating spirit, facilitating its manifestations when all the vibrations are in unison and harmony. (Medium's note.)

29 An ancient practice, which the progress of philosophy abolished. (Medium's note.)



## 9

# The Castle Treasure

They went back along the same gloomy corridors that earlier had so impressed the sensitive Diogo; D. Andre at the front, his temporary form becoming more and more vaporous, dragging Aurora like a satellite, followed by Diogo, his emotions at a peak.

This time they took a new route to the tower. The climb was difficult for Aurora, driven by an outside force, and also for the ex-smuggler, who, in order to achieve his mission, summoned patience he did not know he had. They continued to climb. They passed through more rooms and went down corridors that led them more quickly to where they were going. Still they climbed, and finally, a small, humble room appeared before Diogo's eyes. They were at the top of the great tower. Above them, only spires and embrasures; below, as far as the eye could see, the wild, fearsome sea. Suspended over the precipice, the tower seemed to want to hurl itself at any moment onto the wave-thrashed rocks.

Excited, Diogo imagined himself in a dream. But his hearing was again delighted by the former nobleman's deep, hoarse voice, in all its wondrous reality.

"We have arrived. Come, my Diogo, hurry, for my resources<sup>30</sup> are almost spent. O my God! My God! O Lord, allow the miserable culprit to wash away the evil stain that dims the brightness of his conscience!"

The miser's shade was showing signs of anxiety and anguish. D. Diogo, nervous and emotional, approached eagerly, forgetting that he was dealing with a being from another plane of life. According to the guiding spirit's instructions, young d'Alvarada opened a door covered with heavy iron

plating. They entered a cold study whose floor and walls were completely lined with large, square slabs of stone. A small window set at head-height, with powerful iron bars, was the only opening that allowed a fragment of the aroma of life into that small cell. It was hard to breathe in there. The study was gloomy. For the first time in his epic adventure, Diogo experienced painful, unbearable feelings. It felt like a tomb. However, it was obviously a horrific den. At the center, a low, rustic table and an armchair that lacked stuffing. On the table, a wineskin, still half-full of fine wine, and a wine jug that held the unconsumed remains. Painful anguish tore at the young sage's delicate heart. A strange terror made beads of cold sweat break out on the noble dreamer's brow. D. Andre recognized the symptoms and said with tender kindness:

“Don't worry, Diogo. There are no evil beings here. There is only my poor, afflicted soul, whose every fiber trembles at being back in this awful room! You are experiencing my anguish. The terror you feel is also mine.

“Oh!” he continued bitterly, “this is the prison that keeps me chained in slavery! My soul lies bound here, Diogo, along these slabs lined up on the wall to your left! Behind them, my deadly treasure gleams sinisterly. Ah! My implacable tormenter! The slabs cannot hide it ... I can see it ... and its brightness shatters my wretched conscience! Ah, Diogo! Here, in this dreadful room, which speaks of crimes and murders, whose atmosphere disturbs the noble peace of your virtuous mind – - here, I would come to enjoy long hours alone with my ambitions, in the burning pleasure of contemplating what I had brought here! On this table, I would spread out the gems, the gold, the silver, the ivory, whose touch aroused my pleasure and made the blood flow faster in my veins, as if I were touched by amorous passion! After my love for your mother, this was my fiercest passion. The satisfaction that love denied me, the possession of my treasures granted me!

“I spent days and nights of execrable pleasure here! See these wineskins, these jugs that still hold the remains of strong drink? They will speak to you of the hours I spent toasting my possessions, which today, like dissolute lovers witnessing my downfall, laugh at me, chortling with evil revenge that drives me to despair, madness and downfall! Diogo, oh Diogo! I cannot go on! I must get out of here! I must erase this castle, these art collections, this room, these slabs, this infamous wealth from the conflagration of my mind, so that my soul may not be lost forever, cursing the moment that it left the hands of the Creator!”

He paused briefly, as if choked by a painful sob, and then continued, while young Aragon listened and obeyed.

“Come closer, dear Diogo, stand here. Count the fifth slab from the door, right in front of the left doorway... That’s it ... that’s the one! Get the crowbar over there from among those broken swords in the corner. Get to it, young man, for the block is very large and heavy! Good ... now it’s coming loose ... move it out of the way ... that’s it! See, where the slab was, that iron plate with a hole in the middle? That’s a trapdoor, a passageway. Take the largest of the four keys and turn it three times to open the trapdoor. Very good, well done! The trapdoor does not recede; you have to fold it back, and there are three steps leading into a cubicle. Let’s go down. Here it is, Diogo, hidden from human sight, the infernal mechanism that operates the doors to my cabinets. Turn the rosettes on this iron plate to the left and to the right at the same time ... that turns a hidden spring that opens the plate, revealing another plate with strange openings, while more halves of padlocks can be seen hanging. Insert the halves that you have into those openings and fit them together ... You can see that the padlocks are now matched and whole. But... Oh, Diogo, compose yourself! Don’t shake so much, young man. Your eagerness slows you down and we are losing precious time. Did you insert them? Good ... Take the three smaller keys ... these are the locks, above the padlocks ... Turn each key to the left three times; then, turn the barrels of the padlocks ... you already know the magic phrase; you will only have to match up the syllables ... like this ... like this ... My poem is complete: ‘Andre – Mariana – a – charming – dream – of – love – which – the – burning – breath – of – Fate – destroyed...’

“Oh! My God! My God! Praised be the Lord my God! You have solved the mystery of my suffering beyond the grave! The chains that bound me to the gallows of remorse are undone! It is open, Diogo, it is open! Thank you, my son! A hundred times thank you, Aurora, pure and loving soul, who had the patience to transmit the wretched, trembling voice from the Beyond!”

In the small room, along the whole length of the wall on the left side, a huge, iron-plated door had opened, which the slabs had disguised, and which now revealed a large cabinet with wide shelves, embedded in the wall. On these shelves, sacks, iron pots, copper cauldrons, wooden chests with bronze or iron plating; boxes, trunks – all were carefully arranged. Diogo looked in stupefaction, while the smuggler’s spirit, envisaging his most urgent desires, trembled for the last time:

“That is my treasure!” he said, stretching his arm, still swathed in the lace and chains he had worn in life, and pointing to the laden shelves. “The splendor that assaulted your eyes in the wing where I lived is nothing compared to this! Here are pearls from the East, emeralds from India, jewels from Persia, diamonds and gold from Brazil, lovely ivory from Africa – a thousand and one varieties of precious stones from every country; gold and silver in dust, in bars, coined, minted, molded into tableware, objects and utensils of incomparable value – everything that my ambitious octopus tentacles could acquire! This is what once made me happy! This is what today destroys me, robbing my wounded conscience of the peace of the afterlife! And yet my son, of all the things I owned, the only thing of real value that I bequeath you – oh! Not these material riches that come from my moral poverty! These will disappear one day, lost and forgotten in time. The lifelong treasure that I leave you, the one that will survive through the centuries, defying death and rising in the Beyond, is the knowledge that elevated your mind as you poured over the sacred works in my library! It is the precious archive of Secret Knowledge, which illuminated your generous soul, revealing to you the divine laws upon which rest the possibility of speaking to the dead! That library is yours, too! That priceless treasure of immortal value, which Heaven accepts and respects – **the only real treasure that you found in my solitary refuge** – that too, young man, you must share with others, for its magnificent teachings will lead them to the higher service of uncovering the secrets of the afterlife so that in time, just as you have done, they will be able to console the burning tears of their searing remorse! What would have become of me, Diogo, if that worthy library had not existed in the left wing of my castle? Oh! What an excruciating and miserable time my wretched spirit would have had, waiting to be able to come back to earth in order to make amends for the nefarious crime of greed! However, this waiting will now pass productively and tearlessly, encouraged by the progress that already stirs my spiritual senses.

“All this is yours, Diogo d’Alvarada! All this I put in your hands so that, as much as you can, you will dispense the Charity that I did not, in memory of my soul and in the sacred name of the Almighty, for only then shall I feel free within my tomb to attempt a journey of redemption! Do not forget the children who cry for lack of resources, the old people who shiver, the women who suffer, the abandoned youths and the jobless men. Remember how tormented I was for forgetting them! Remember how much I suffered because of this oversight; and that, in despair, I had to cross the chasm that separates

death from life in order to tearfully beg a man to help me! So, go! The treasure is yours! I place it in your hands with my trust, you sublime young idealist! Take my treasure, remove what is yours and with the remainder, spread the Good.”

Diogo turned and was about to swear to solemnly obey. But the shade began to wane, became white and transparent like the mists of winter, and slowly vanished.

\* \* \*

Dom Diogo d’Alvarada y Aragon wiped his sweat-soaked brow. His eyes were wide open. He was pale, extremely moved, and he trembled.

What had happened to him?

A dream? No! The reality was right there, on those wide-open shelves that seemed to smile at him. He approached them. He examined the pots, lifted the lids of the trunks and chests and took a step back in shock: so much wealth was disturbing to his modest aspirations! The now-vanished nobleman’s pleas still tore at his heartstrings. That gold now seemed sacred to him, for in it he could see the ardent expression of D. Andre de Casablanca!

A moan from Aurora brought him back to reality. He woke her up gently, as the sacred books in the library of the secret knowledge instructed. He revived her, and only then did he tell her, as best he could, about the extraordinary events.

The surrounding area was in an uproar. The news crossed borders and spread around the country: a fabulous treasure had been discovered in Black Castle by the young D. Diogo d’Alvarada, its lord! The late baron’s supposed old heirs arrived, certain that they had a claim to some of the items in the discovery. They, who had abandoned Mariana and her son to all manner of adversity, now hoped to receive something from them. There were bitter complaints. They disputed rights that did not exist. The judges and notaries got busy. D. Andre de Castanhede e Casablanca’s will was re-read and re-examined. But the baron had obviously foreseen the possibility of such a mess, for he knew the underhand ways of the relatives who had favored D. Antonio de Aragon over him, and he had stated his last wishes simply and clearly, as explained in paragraph “e” of the famous will:

“...and I bequeath this my Castle of the Black Cliff, **as well as everything that is in it**, to my beloved cousin D. Angela-Mariana-Magnolia-

Francisca-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca-d'Alvarada-y-Aragon, to whom I was engaged to be married long ago... “

However, this formal decision was challenged by the obstinate relatives, who said that paragraph “f” stated that the baroness d'Alvarada would inherit only on condition of her vow to never investigate what was in the wing where the deceased man lived. Well, the treasure was found in the wing that Diogo and Aurora had violated; therefore, paragraph “e” was annulled by the circumstances; to which the judges replied that the baron's only heir was D. Angela Mariana; that the prohibition to enter said wing was directed solely at her; that it was not the baroness, but her son Diogo and niece Aurora who had disobeyed the baron; but they had not sworn to obey him; that the soul of D. Andre de Casablanca himself had come back from the grave and willingly divulged the secret of his coffers to the two young people, and offered them the treasure; and finally, that if D. Angela-Mariana had no rights to ownership of those new assets, in spite of condition “e”, the other relatives would have even fewer rights, since they had not even been mentioned by the testator...

Even so, Mariana and her son, whose hearts beat to the rhythm of good virtues, did not disappoint their eager relatives. They received them all with kindness, bestowed favors on them, and quite forgot that these same old scoundrels had ignored them in the last twenty, lonely years of bitterness!

\* \* \*

A few months later, just as in the fairy tales, D. Diogo-Antonio-Jose-Francisco-de-Castanhede-e-Casablanca- d'Alvarada-y-Aragon was joined in matrimony to the very lovely and kind young lady, Aurora de Casablanca.

This auspicious event was celebrated by the venerable priest in the village church, decorated with white roses by Aurora's good lady friends from the village.

And speaking of the venerable priest, it should be made clear to the reader that this worthy representative of the courts of Heaven was generously favored by the humble Mariana, with a few large pieces from the sensational discovery in the north tower of the castle. In this way, Mariana wished to express her thanks, and compensate him for the embarrassment the good man had suffered at the hands of the invisible gang of bohemians.

The ceremony was very plain, for D. Diogo was modest by nature and opposed the wishes of his mother and the good Margarida, who thought of

buying a palace in Lisbon for a huge wedding reception to be attended by the Court.

The baroness d'Alvarada blessed them as they went to their nuptials and accompanied them, sparkling with silks and jewels, looking twenty years younger and with no sign of chest infections or other ills.

Mrs. d'Alcantara Fialho was never mentioned again.

When Diogo had stumbled down the stairs of the tower with his cousin Aurora, to tell his mother about the marvelous discovery, he was careful, as he told the story of D. Andre's appearance in his own words, to include that the baron had bestowed part of the treasure on him, on the strict condition that he promise to marry Aurora, whose interests the donor took most seriously. Mariana, beside herself in the face of so much splendor, fainted from happiness into Margarida's arms. But when she awoke, and had recovered from the shock, she called D. Diogo and her niece Aurora, placed their hands together and kissed them. Displaying deep emotion and shedding copious tears, she exclaimed:

"In memory of the noble soul of poor Andre de Casablanca, who loved me so much, your marriage has my blessing, my children!"

\* \* \*

Diogo d'Alvarada was faithful to the wishes of the deceased nobleman. He generously used most of the treasure for charitable endeavors. He traveled all around, and wherever he discovered poverty and pain, he healed it with the gold of his cousin, to whose memory he devoted his utmost reverence. Right in front of the castle itself, in the pretty meadow adorned with wild rose bushes, an imposing building was constructed on the orders of Aurora's husband. Some good nuns arrived to take care of it. It was a sacred dwelling. Within it, unfortunate children and poor, downcast women were sheltered; decrepit old people were given help; and down-and-out young men and women received guidance. All who passed through there, departed with their spirit fortified for life.

Diogo also shared, as much as he could, the real treasure he had inherited from his cousin: THE TEACHINGS OF THE SECRET KNOWLEDGE AND TRANSCENDENTAL PHILOSOPHIES. He was cautious, for the religious and civil laws at the time would burn at the stake all those who dared to devote themselves to such studies and practices, that is, the relationship

between human beings and spirits, which today takes place so freely. Thus, the young man also spread the benefits of such treasure. He gained followers. He taught them the strict rules for a perfect initiation – without which no one can consider himself one of the elect! He elevated them to the condition of honest and virtuous men and women.

He dedicated himself more to experiments. Now, in the formerly gloomy castle, the star of redemption shone, while in front of it, hospitable houses had been built to protect the destitute. Inside its ancient rooms, afflicted souls, inhabitants of the invisible world, came to lament their regrets for their past wrongdoings. But Diogo, who had learned in the wise books of the learned men of the East to distribute the bread of Heaven, would talk to them, consoling them, advising them, pointing them in a new direction so that they might relieve the weight of their heavy burdens.

“This journey, my friends,” explained the enlightened young man to the dead souls that visited him, “mapped out over millennia by the most important missionaries of the Omnipotent that have ever graced our world with their presence and their perfectly divine teachings, ends in these three virtues that human beings and spirits must understand and strive for, for their own sakes and those of their neighbor: Love! Faith! Work!”

D. Andre-Luis-Januario himself often came back to visit and counsel D. Diogo. He brought the gang of bohemians, who, like others who went there, were guided towards the Good.

And all this was done in honor of D. Andre de Castanhede e Casablanca, according to his specific wishes from beyond the grave. In this way, the honor of his memory was restored, and within a few years he was spoken of with respect, love and admiration!

Such is the value of Charity!

Blessed be Charity, favored by Heaven! May all humankind’s problems be solved in your protective shadow!

May the peace your acts represent bring the blessedness of Heaven to earth!

And bathed in the divine brightness of your inspiration, may men and women love each other as brothers and sisters, just as they were loved by the greatest divine missionary who ever graced the earth with his presence –



Jesus of Nazareth, that unmistakable example of tolerance, love and forgiveness!

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30 That is, ectoplasm. – Tr.

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