

*Rubem Fonseca*

The Taker

*Translated from Brazilian by Clifford E. Landers*

*Rubem Fonseca is one of Brazil's most influential writers and was awarded the Prémio Camões—considered the Nobel Prize of Portuguese language literature—for his body of work in 2003. That same year he was awarded the Juan Rulfo Prize. He is the author of eight novels, including High Art, Vast Emotions and Imperfect Thoughts, and Bufo & Spallanzani, all of which have been published in English translation. One of his more famous characters is Mandrake, a cynical and amoral lawyer and the basis for an HBO series of the same name. In the summer 2007 issue, The Literary Review published “The Book of Panegyrics,” another story from The Taker, his new story collection, forthcoming this fall.*

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On the door there was a large set of dentures with Dr. Carvalho, Dentist, underneath. In the waiting room was a plaque: *Wait for the dentist, he is with a patient.* I waited for half an hour, my tooth aching. The door opened, and a woman came out. She was with a large guy, maybe forty years old, in a white jacket.

I went into his office, sat down in the chair. The dentist put a paper napkin around my neck. I opened my mouth and said my back tooth was hurting a lot. He looked at it with a little mirror and asked how I had allowed my teeth to get into that condition.

What a laugh. These guys are funny.

“I’m going to have to pull it,” he said. “You’ve already lost a few teeth and if you don’t undergo treatment fast you’re going to lose all the others, including these here,” and he gave a strident tap on my front teeth.

Anesthetic injected into the gum. He showed me the tooth at the tip of his forceps. “The root is rotten, see?” he said, indifferently. “That’ll be four hundred.”

What a laugh. "I don't have it, man," I said.

"You don't have what?"

"I don't have the four hundred." I started for the door.

He blocked the door with his body. "You'd better pay," he said. He was a large man, and he had large hands and strong wrists from pulling teeth out of so many fucked-over *fodidos* like me. My slight physique encourages people. I hate dentists, merchants, lawyers, industrialists, civil servants, doctors, executives, the whole worthless bunch. All of them owe me, a lot. I opened my shirt, took out the .38, and asked with such rage that a drop of my spit hit his face, "What if I shove this up your ass?" He turned white, backed away. Pointing the revolver at his chest, I started feeling lighthearted: I took the drawers from the cabinets, dumped everything on the floor, kicked the vials as if they were balls. They crackled and exploded against the wall. Busting the cuspidor and motors was harder; I even hurt my hands and feet. The dentist looked at me. Several times he must have thought about jumping me; I hoped he would, so I could put a bullet in that big fat shit-filled belly of his.

"I'm not paying anything more, I'm tired of paying!" I shouted at him. "From now on I'm just taking!"

I shot him in the knee. I should've killed the sonofabitch.

The street full of people. I say, inside my head, and sometimes out loud, "Everybody owes me!" They owe me food, pussy, blankets, shoes, a house, car, watch, teeth, they owe me. A blind man is begging, rattling an aluminum cup with coins. I kick the cup, the sound of the coins irritates me. Marechal Floriano Street: gun store, pharmacy, bank, prostitute, portrait photographer. The electric company, vaccinations, doctor, clothing store, people everywhere. In the morning you can't even walk toward the train station, the crowd moves like some enormous lizard that takes up the entire sidewalk.

Those guys in Mercedes irritate me. The car's horn bugs me too. Last night I went to see a guy in Cruzada who had a Magnum with a silencer to sell, and when I was crossing the street some guy who'd been playing

tennis in one of those fancy clubs blew his horn. I was distracted because I was thinking about the Magnum when the horn blew. I saw the car was moving slowly and stopped in front of it.

“What’s your problem?” he shouted.

It was night and no one was around. He was wearing white. I took out the .38 and shot out his windshield, more to shatter the glass than to hit the guy. He gunned the car, to run me over or get out of there, or both. I jumped aside, and the car went by, its tires squealing on the asphalt. It stopped a few yards ahead. I went over. The guy was lying with his head back, his face and chest covered with thousands of tiny fragments of glass. He was bleeding from an ugly wound in his neck and his white clothing was all red.

He turned his head, which was leaning against the seat. His black eyes were bulging, and the whites were a milky blue. And because the whites of his eyes were bluish, I said, “You’re dying, man. Want me to finish you off?”

“No, no,” he said, strongly. “Please.”

In the window of a building I saw a guy watching me. He hid when I looked at him. He must have called the police.

I walked away calmly, went back to Cruzada. It was great smashing the windshield of the Mercedes. I should’ve put a bullet in the hood and one in each door. Then the body shop guy would’ve had his work cut out for him.

The guy with the Magnum was already there. “Where’s the dough? Put it in this sweet little hand,” he said. His hand was white, smooth, but full of scars. My body is full of scars; even my dick is full of scars.

“I wanna buy a radio too,” I told the smuggler.

While he went to get the radio, I examined the Magnum. Oiled and loaded. With the silencer it looked like a cannon.

The smuggler returned with a transistor radio. “It’s Japanese,” he said.

“Turn it on, so I can hear the sound.”

He turned it on.

“Louder,” I said.

He turned up the volume.

Poof. I think he died at the first shot. I shot twice more just to hear poof, poof.

They owe me high school. A girlfriend, sound equipment, respect, a mortadella sandwich at the lunch counter on Vieira Fazenda Street, ice cream, a soccer ball.

I stay in front of the television to increase my hatred. When my rage is diminishing and I lose the desire to collect on what they owe me, I sit in front of the TV and my hatred comes back right away. I'd really like to get the guy who does one of the whiskey ads. He's all dressed up, nice looking, wrinkle-free, hugging a dazzling blonde and tossing ice cubes into a glass. He smiles, showing all his teeth, and his teeth are perfectly straight and real. I'd like to take a razor and slash both cheeks up to his ears, and those beautiful white teeth of his would be on the outside of a smiling red skull. He's there now, smiling, and he gives the blonde a kiss on the mouth. He can wait.

My arsenal is almost complete: I have the Magnum with the silencer, a Colt Cobra .38, two straight razors, a carbine 12, a snub-nosed Taurus .38, a dagger, and a machete. I'm going to cut off somebody's head with a single blow with the machete. I saw a ritual in the movies—in one of the Asian countries, back in the time of the English—that consisted of cutting off the head of an animal, a buffalo, I think, with a single blow. The English officers presided over the ceremony with an air of boredom, but the decapitators were true artists. One clean blow and the animal's head rolled, its blood gushing.

At the house of a woman who picked me up in the street. Middle-aged, says she goes to night school. I've been there, my school was the most nighttime of all the night schools in the world. It was so bad that it doesn't even exist anymore; it was demolished. Even the street it was on was demolished. She asks what I do, and I say I'm a poet, which is rigorously true. She asks me to recite a poem of mine. This: The rich like to go to sleep late / just because the rabble / have to go to sleep early to get to work in the morning / That's one more chance they / have to be different: / to

parasitize, / to disdain those who work to earn their food, / to sleep late, / late / one day / good thing, / too much.

She cuts me off by asking if I like movies. “What about the poem?” She doesn’t understand. I continue: I knew how to dance and fall in love / and roll on the floor / just for a time. / From the sweat of my brow nothing was built. / I wanted to die with her, / but that was another day, / yet another day. / In the Iris Theater, on Carioca Street, / the Phantom of the Opera / A guy in black, / black briefcase, his face hidden, / in his hand an immaculate white handkerchief, / jerked off the spectators; / at the same time, in Copacabana, / another / who had not even a nickname, / drank the piss from the theaters’ urinals / and his face was green and unforgettable. / History is made up of dead people / and the future of people who are going to die. / You think she’s going to suffer? / She’s strong, she will resist. / She would also resist if she were weak. / You, now, I don’t know. / You pretended for so long, hit and screamed, deceived. / You’re tired, / you’re finished, / I don’t know what keeps you alive.

She didn’t understand anything about poetry. She was alone with me and tried to fake indifference, yawning in exasperation. The farcifying of women.

“I’m afraid of you,” she finally confessed.

This poor, fucked-over woman doesn’t owe me anything, I thought; she makes sacrifices to live in a two-room apartment, and her eyes have bags under them from drinking crap and reading about the life of society women in *Vogue*.

“Want me to kill you?” I asked as we drank cheap whiskey.

“I want you to fuck me,” she laughed anxiously, in doubt.

Put an end to her? I had never strangled anybody with my bare hands. There’s not much style, or drama, in strangling somebody; it looks like a street fight. Even so, I felt like strangling someone, but not a miserable person like her. For a nobody, only a bullet in the back of the head?

I’ve been thinking about that lately. She had taken off her clothes. Flat, wilted breasts, the nipples gigantic raisins that someone had stepped on. flaccid thighs with nodules of cellulite, spoiled gelatin with pieces of rotten fruit.

“I’m all shivery,” she said.

I got on top of her. She grabbed me by the neck, her mouth and tongue in my mouth, a viscous vagina, hot and fragrant.

We fucked.

She’s sleeping now.

I am just.

I read newspapers. The death of the smuggler in Cruzada wasn’t even mentioned. The swell in the Mercedes died at the hospital, and the papers said he was attacked by a criminal from Boca Larga. What a laugh.

I write a poem called “Children or New Smells of Pussy”: Here I am again / listening to the Beatles / on Mundial radio / at nine at night / in a room / that could belong / and did / to a mortified saint / There was no sin / and I don’t know why they leper me / for being innocent / or stupid / In any case / the floor was always there / to dive into. / When you have no money / it’s good to have muscles and hate.

I read the papers to find out what they are eating, drinking, and doing. I want to live a long life, so I have time to kill them all.

From the street I see the party on Vieira Souto, the women in long dresses, the men in black suits. I walk slowly, from one side of the sidewalk to the other; I don’t want to awaken any suspicion—the machete inside my pants, strapped to my leg, doesn’t allow me to walk right. I look like a cripple; I feel like a cripple. A middle-aged couple passes by and look at me with pity; I pity myself too. I limp and feel pain in my leg.

From the sidewalk I see the waiters serving French champagne. Those people like French champagne, French clothes, the French language.

I’d been there since nine o’clock, when I passed by, fully armed, at the whim of luck and misfortune, and the party had begun.

The parking places in front of the apartment were all occupied, and the guests started parking on the dark side streets. One of them, a red car with a young and elegant couple in it, interested me greatly. They walked to the apartment building without saying a word, with her adjusting her gown and hair and him his bow tie. They were preparing for a triumphal

entrance, but from the sidewalk I saw that their entrance was, like the others, met with indifference. People get all beautified at the hairdresser, the designer, the masseur, and the only thing that gives them the attention they hope for at parties is a mirror. I saw the woman in her flowing blue dress and murmured, I'm going to give you the attention you deserve, it wasn't for nothing that you wore your best panties and made so many trips to the seamstress and rubbed all those creams on your skin and put on that expensive perfume.

They were the last to leave. They weren't walking with the same confidence, and they were irritated, arguing in slurred, confused voices.

I came up to them as the man was opening the car door. I was limping, and he gave me a quick, appraising glance and saw a low-rent, harmless cripple.

I stuck the revolver in his back.

"Do what I say or I'll kill you both," I said.

It wasn't easy getting in the back seat with my stiff leg. I had to stretch out, with the revolver pointed at his head. I told him to head for the Barra da Tijuca. I was pulling the machete out of my pants when he said, "Take the money and the car and leave us here." We were in front of the Hotel Nacional. What a laugh. He was sober by now and wanted to have another little whiskey while he phoned the police. Some people think life's a party. We drove toward the Recreio dos Bandeirantes, until we came to a deserted beach. We got out. I left the headlights on.

"We didn't do anything to you," he said.

They didn't? What a laugh. I felt hatred flooding my ears, my hands, my mouth, my entire body, the taste of vinegar and tears.

"She's pregnant," he said, pointing to the woman, "she's going to have our first child."

I looked at the belly of the slim woman and decided to be merciful. I said, "Poof," above where I judged her navel was, immediately wiping out the fetus. The woman fell face first. I placed the revolver against her temple and blew her brains out.

The man watched all this without a word, his wallet in his outstretched hand. I took the wallet from his hand, tossed it into the air, and,

as it was falling, kicked it into the distance with my left foot.

I tied his hands behind his back with a rope I carried with me. Then I tied his feet.

“Kneel down,” I said.

He kneeled.

The car’s headlights lit his body. I kneeled beside him, removed his bow tie, and rolled his collar back, exposing his neck.

“Lower your head,” I ordered.

He lowered it. I held the machete with both hands and raised it into the air. I saw the stars in the sky, the immense night, the infinite firmament, and brought the machete, the steel star, down with all my strength, right in the middle of his neck.

His head didn’t fall off, and he tried to get up, thrashing about like a dizzy chicken in the hands of an incompetent cook. I struck him again and again and again and the head wouldn’t come off. He had fainted, or died, with his goddamn head still on his neck. I threw the body over the car’s fender. The neck was in a good position. I concentrated like an athlete who was about to do a somersault. This time, as the machete cut its mutilating path through the air, I knew I would get what I wanted. Plock! The head rolled along the sand. I raised the scimitar high and called: “Hail the Taker!” I gave a loud wordless cry. It was a long and powerful howl, so that all the animals would tremble and get out of my way. Where I walk, the asphalt melts.

A black toolbox under my arm. I say, stammering, that I’m the plumber here to do the work in apartment t-t-two-oh-one. The doorman thinks my stammering is funny and tells me to go on up. I start on the top floor. “I’m the plumber (not stammering now), I came to do the work.” Through the opening, two eyes: nobody called the plumber. I go down to the seventh floor, the same thing. I only get lucky on the second floor.

The maid opened the door for me and shouted inside, “It’s the plumber.” A young woman in a nightgown appeared, a bottle of nail polish in her hand, pretty, maybe twenty-five.

“There must be some mistake,” she said, “we don’t need a plumber.”

I took the Cobra from the toolbox. “Yes you do, and you better keep quiet or I’ll kill both of you. Anybody else in the house?” Her husband was at work and the child at school. I tied up the maid and taped her mouth. I took the housewife into the bedroom.

“Take off your clothes.”

“I’m not taking off my clothes,” she said, head held high.

“They owe me cough syrup, socks, movies, filet mignon, and pussy. Move.” I punched her in the head. She fell onto the bed, a red mark on her face. I don’t shoot. I ripped off her nightgown, her panties. She wasn’t wearing a bra. I opened her legs. I put my knees on her thighs. Her bush was thick and black. She stayed quiet, her eyes closed. It wasn’t easy getting into that dark forest, her pussy was tight and dry. I bent over, opened the vagina and spit inside, spit copiously. Even so, it wasn’t easy; I could feel my dick chafing. She groaned when I stuck my cock in as far as it would go. While I worked it back and forth, I licked her breasts, her ear, her neck, stuck my finger lightly into her ass, caressed her butt. My dick started to become lubricated by the juices of her vagina, which had become warm and viscous.

Because she wasn’t afraid of me anymore, or because she *was* afraid of me, she came before I did. With the rest of the come from my dick I drew a circle around her navel.

“Don’t open your door to the plumber again,” I said as I was leaving.

I leave the house on Visconde de Maranguape. A large cavity in each molar full of wax from Dr. Lustosa / chew with the front teeth / jerk off to a magazine photo / stolen books.

I go to the beach.

Two women are talking on the sand. One has a suntanned body, a scarf on her head; the other is light-skinned—she must not come to the beach much. Both of them have very pretty bodies; the ass on the light-skinned one is the prettiest ass I’ve ever seen. I sit down nearby and look at them. They notice my interest and immediately start moving around,

saying things with their bodies, making seductive movements with their fannies. At the beach we're all equal, us fucked-overs and them. We're better, even, because we don't have the big belly and flabby ass of the parasites. I want that white woman! And she's interested in me; she casts glances at me. They laugh and laugh, smiling. They say goodbye, and the white one heads toward Ipanema, the water wetting her feet. I get up and walk alongside her, not knowing what to say.

I'm a shy person, from having been beat up on all my life, and her hair is fine and well cared for, her neck is slender, her breasts small, her thighs are solid and round and muscular, and her ass is two hard hemispheres. A ballerina's body.

"Do you study ballet?"

"I used to," she says. She smiles at me. How can anyone have such a pretty mouth? I feel like licking it, tooth by tooth. "Do you live around here?" she asks. "Yes," I lie. She points to a beachfront building. It's all marble.

Back on Visconde de Maranguape Street. I'm killing time till I go to the white girl's house. Her name is Anna. I like palindromic Anna. I sharpen the machete on a special stone; that dandy's neck was very tough. The newspapers gave a lot of play to the couple I executed in the Barra. The woman was the daughter of one of those fuckers who get rich in Sergipe or Piauí by robbing peasants and then come to Rio. The children of those rednecks don't have an accent anymore, and they bleach their hair and claim they're descended from the Dutch.

The society columnists were flabbergasted. The jet-setters that I dispatched had tickets to Paris. No More Safety in the Streets, said the headline in one paper. What a laugh. I threw a pair of shorts into the air and tried to cut it with the machete, like Saladin used to do (with a silk handkerchief) in the movies.

They don't make scimitars like they once did / I am a hecatomb / It wasn't God or the Devil / who made me an avenger / It was I myself / I am the Penis-Man / I am the Taker.

I go into the room where Dona Clotilde has been bedridden for three years. Dona Clotilde owns the house.

“Want me to sweep the living room?” I ask.

“No, son, I just want you to give me an injection of B-12 before you leave.”

I boil the syringe, prepare the injection. Dona Clotilde’s butt is as dry as an old leaf and as wrinkled as rice paper.

“You’re a gift from heaven, my son. You were sent here by God,” she says.

There’s nothing wrong with Dona Clotilde; she could get up and go shopping at the supermarket. Her illness is all in her head. And after three years in bed, only getting up to pee and crap, she probably doesn’t have the strength.

One of these days I’ll put a bullet in the back of her neck.

When I satisfy my hate I’m possessed by a sensation of victory, a euphoria that makes me feel like dancing—I give out small howls, grunts, inarticulate sounds that are closer to music than to poetry, and my feet glide along the ground, my body moves to a rhythm of sways and leaps, like a savage or a monkey.

Anybody who wants to order me around can try, but he’ll die. I really would like to kill one of those big shots—with the paternal face of a successful crook—you see on television, a person whose blood is thick with caviar and champagne. Eat your caviar / your day is coming.

They owe me a toothy twenty-year-old girl with perfume. The girl in the marble building? I go in and she’s waiting for me, sitting in the living room, quiet, unmoving, her hair very black, her face white, looking like a photograph.

“Let’s go,” I tell her. She asks me if I have a car. I tell her I don’t own a car. She does. We take the service elevator down to the garage and get into a foreign convertible.

After a time I ask if I can drive and we trade positions. “Is Petrópolis all right?” I ask. We climb the mountainside without a word; she’s look-

ing at me. When we get to Petrópolis she asks me to stop at a restaurant. I tell her I don't have any money and I'm not hungry, but she does and she is. She eats voraciously, as if they were going to snatch the plate away at any moment. A group of young people—junior executives, who drive up on Friday and have drinks before meeting their gussied-up wives to play cards or scarf down wine and cheese while they gossip about other people—are drinking and talking loudly at the next table. I hate executives. She finishes eating. “What now?” “Now we leave,” I say, and we head back down the mountain, with me driving like lightning and her watching me. “My life has no meaning, I've thought about killing myself,” she says. I stop on Visconde de Maranguape. “Is this where you live?” I get out without saying anything. She follows me. “Am I going to see you again?” I go in and hear the noise of the car pulling away as I climb the stairs.

Top Executive Club. You deserve the best in relaxation, with caring and understanding. Our masseuses do it all. Elegance and discretion.

I write down the address and go to the place, a house in Ipanema. I wait for him to appear, decked out in gray, vest, black briefcase, shoes shined, hair dyed. I take a piece of paper from my pocket, like someone looking for an address, and follow the guy to his car. These fuckers always lock their cars; they know the world is full of thieves, which they are too, except nobody ever catches them. As he unlocks the car I stick the revolver in his belly. Two men facing each other, talking, attract no attention. Sticking the gun in the back is scarier, but that should only be done in deserted spots.

“Keep quiet or I'll fill your executive belly with lead.”

He has the petulant, and at the same time cheap, air of the ambitious man on the way up: come from the interior and dazzled by the society page, a shopper, right-wing voter, Catholic, religious seminar attendee, patriotic, comfort-loving, a sucker on the public teat, his kids studying at the Catholic university, his wife an interior decorator and partner in a boutique.

“So how was it, executive, did the masseuse jerk you off or suck your dick?”

“You’re a man, you know how it is, you understand these things,” he says. It’s executive talk for the cab driver or elevator operator. From Podunk to the board room, he thinks he’s already faced every kind of crisis situation.

“I’m not a goddamn man at all,” I say softly, “I’m the Taker.”

“I’m the Taker!” I shout.

He starts to turn the color of his clothes. He thinks I’m crazy, and he’s never faced anyone crazy in his damned air-conditioned office.

“Let’s go to your house,” I say.

“I don’t live here in Rio, I live in São Paulo,” he says. He lost his courage but not his shrewdness. “What about the car?” I ask. “Car? What car? This car, with the Rio plates? I have a wife and three children,” he says, changing the subject. What is this? An excuse, a password, habeas corpus, safe-conduct? Poof, poof, poof, one shot for each child, in the chest. One in the head, for his wife, poof.

To forget the girl who lives in the marble building, I go to play soccer in the park. Three straight hours, my legs all banged up from the kicks I took, the big toe of my right foot swollen, maybe broken. Sweating, I sit down at the edge of the field, next to a black guy reading *O Dia*. The headline interests me; I ask to borrow the newspaper. The guy says, “You wanna read the paper why don’t you buy one?” I don’t get mad, the black guy only has two or three teeth, and they’re dark and crooked. I say, “Right, let’s not fight about it.” I buy two hot dogs and a couple of cokes and give him half, and he gives me the paper. The headline says: Police Search for the Magnum Maniac. I hand the paper back to the guy. He doesn’t accept it, and he laughs as he chews with his front teeth, or rather with his front gums, which are as sharp as razors from so much use. An item in the paper: A group of socialites in the South Zone is frantically preparing for the traditional Christmas dance, the First Cry of Carnival. The dance begins on December 24 and ends on the first day of the New Year; ranch owners from Argentina, heirs from Germany, American actors, and Japanese executives—the entire international parasite army—

will be coming. Christmas has really turned into a party. Drink, frolic, orgy, idleness.

First Cry of Carnival. What a laugh. Those guys are funny.

Some nut jumped off the Rio-Niterói bridge and floated for twelve hours till a rescue launch found him. He didn't even catch a cold.

A fire in a nursing home killed forty old people; the families celebrated.

I just finished giving Dona Clotilde her injection of B-12 when the doorbell rings. The bell never rings at the house. I do the shopping, keep the place in order. Dona Clotilde has no relatives. I take a look from the balcony. It's Palindromic Anna.

We talk in the street. "Are you avoiding me?" she asks. "More or less," I say. We go into the house. "Dona Clotilde, there's a girl with me, can I take her up to my room?" "My boy, the house is yours, do whatever you want, I just want to see the girl."

We stand beside the bed. Dona Clotilde looks at Anna for a very long time. Her eyes fill with tears. "I've prayed every night," she sobs, "every night that you'll find a girl like this." She raises her arms, thin and covered with fine folds of skin, into the air, brings her hands together, and says, "Oh, my God, how I thank Thee."

We are standing in my room, eyebrow to eyebrow, like in the poem, and I take off her clothes and she takes off mine and her body is so beautiful that I feel a tightness in my throat, tears on my cheek, eyes burning, my hands tremble and now we're lying down, one on the other, entwined, moaning, and more, and more, without stopping, she screams, her mouth open, her teeth white like a young elephant's, "Oh, oh, I adore your obsession!" she shouts, water and salt and come spurt from our bodies, without end.

Now, much later, we lie there looking at each other, hypnotized, until nightfall, and our faces shine in the dark and the perfume of her body penetrates the walls of the room.

Anna awoke before I did, and the light is on. "You only have poetry books? And all these weapons, what for?" She gets the Magnum from the

drawer, white flesh and black steel, and points it at me. I sit down on the bed.

“Want to shoot? You can shoot, the old woman isn’t going to hear anything. A little higher.” I raise the barrel to my forehead with the tip of my finger. “Here it doesn’t hurt.”

“Have you ever killed anyone?” Anna points the gun at my forehead.

“Yes.”

“Was it good?”

“It was good.”

“How so?”

“A relief.”

“Like the two of us in bed?”

“No, no, something else. The other side of that.”

“I’m not afraid of you,” Anna says.

“Or me of you. I love you.”

We talked until dawn. I feel a kind of fever. I make breakfast for Dona Clotilde and take it to her in bed. “I’m leaving with Anna,” I tell her. “God has heard my prayers,” the old woman says between swallows.

Today is December 24, the day of the Christmas dance or First Cry of Carnival. Palindromic Anna moved out and is living with me. Now my hatred is different. I have a mission. I always had a mission and didn’t know it. Now I do. Anna helped me to see it. I know that if everyone who’s fucked over did like me, the world would be better and more just. Anna taught me how to use explosives, and I think I’m now prepared for that change in scale. Killing one at a time is a mystical kind of thing, and I’m free of it. At the Christmas dance we’ll kill as many as we can conventionally. It will be my final romantic, inconsequential gesture. We’ve chosen to initiate the new phase with the disgusting consumers at a supermarket in the South Zone. They’ll be killed by a bomb. Goodbye, my machete, goodbye, my dagger, my rifle, my Colt Cobra, goodbye, my Magnum, today is the last time you’ll be used. I kiss my machete. I’ll blow up people, gain prestige; I won’t be just the Magnum Maniac. And I also

won't go to Flamengo Park to look at the trees, the trunks, the root, the leaves, the shade, choosing the tree I'd like to have, that I always wanted to have, on a piece of land with tamped earth. I saw them grow in the park and was happy when it rained and the ground got drenched with water, the leaves washed by rain, the wind ruffling the branches, while the bastards' cars sped by without them even looking to the side. I no longer waste my time on dreams.

"The whole world will know who you are, who we are," Anna says.

News item: The governor is going to come as Santa Claus. Item: Less festivity and more meditation, let's purify our hearts. Item: No shortage of beer. No shortage of turkey. Item: Christmas festivities this year will occasion more victims of traffic accidents and attacks than in previous years. Police and hospitals are gearing up for Christmas celebrations. The cardinal on television: the celebration of Christmas is warped, this is not its meaning, this business of Santa Claus is an unfortunate invention. The cardinal declares Santa Claus a fictitious clown.

"Christmas Eve is a good time for people to pay what they owe," Anna says. "I want to kill the Santa Claus at the dance with my machete," I say.

I read Anna what I sent to the newspapers, our Christmas manifesto. No more killing at random, without a definite objective. I didn't know what I wanted, didn't seek out a practical result, my hatred was being wasted. I was right in my impulses, my error was not knowing who the enemy was and why he was the enemy. Now I know; Anna taught me. And my example must be followed by others, many others. That's the only way we will change the world. That's the gist of our manifesto.

I put the weapons into a suitcase. Anna shoots as well as I do, she just doesn't know how to use the machete, but that weapon is obsolete now. We say goodbye to Dona Clotilde. We put the suitcase in the car. We go to the Christmas dance. There will be no shortage of beer, or turkey. Or blood. One cycle in my life ends and another begins.