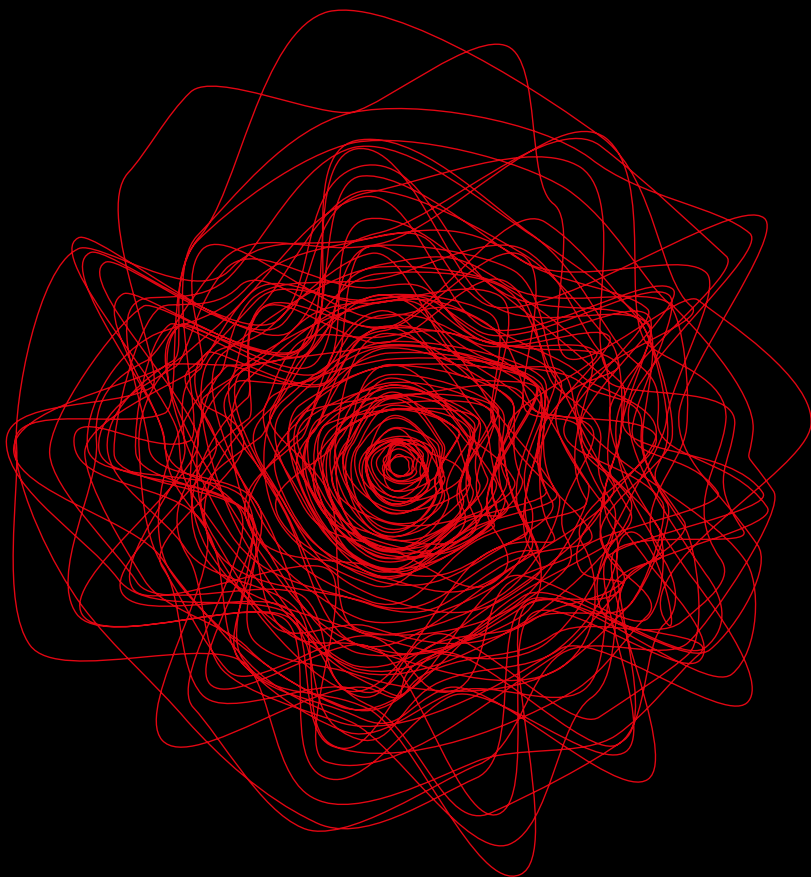


Pandemonium

NINE NARRATIVES BRIDGING
SÃO PAULO-BERLIN



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Ruth, fearless

A L I N E B E I

Translated from the Portuguese by Daniel Persia

RUTH NEEDED TO PICK UP A FEW THINGS AT THE MARKET, rice,
bleach, two or three bottles of
Liquor.

she had never been much of a drinker, it's true
lately, however, her neck was so stiff, her back so tight.
the doctor said it was her nerves, always her nerves.
he prescribed some drugs but her aches persisted and so
apart from the pills, on pure
instinct

Ruth began taking
a small shot
of liquor
at night and

God knows how relaxed her muscles felt, nothing in the world
had a similar effect to alcohol entering
and thinning
her age-old solitude.

who can bear it, after all? she thought, picking out a coat on her way out.
these times we're in

are the worst, they've taken away almost everything from me, church
is still closed, gatherings banned, but even gatherings of the Lord?
she didn't have company at home, either, her husband
had been dead for so long and her dog
too. goddamnit, how am I supposed to go on living
like this, cut off at the knees and bored stiff?

now,

if Ruth could give some advice to a young woman just starting out
it would be this: never marry someone who's older than you. never have
dogs. or kids. basically, don't get attached to anything, or only to things
you can buy. for the time being, of course, since money is a fickle thing.

in short, my dear: take a little shot of
liquor
at night, to relax your muscles
that's the truest thing I can tell you.

Ruth buttoned her coat, she liked to bundle herself up before heading out.

opening the front door to her apartment, she felt a shiver run
down her spine. she had already been stabbed metaphorically
several times in her life, and so she knew what that tingling
meant: a bad omen, sometimes it's just not our day.

she stepped into the elevator.

on her idyllic nights, one epiphany or another would bud from within.
Ruth adored having those
luminous thoughts dwelling in her mind, just the other day
a brilliant one
blossomed:
death was blind
for
if death could see
she would be sorry
for taking people from their lives, forever.

Ruth was so satisfied with her reflection that she wrote it down in her
little notebook, the one she was holding in her hands, which she also
used to make grocery lists, like today's: rice, bleach, fruit, and her magical
nocturnal (sometimes diurnal) elixir, oh
what a relief to have that ruby-red liquid
to flesh out her epiphanies at breakfast, too, why not?
to Ruth, time was no longer the God of all things,

her sweet little liquor made the hours
bend, nothing mattered to the point of hurting
anymore, quite the contrary, life gained its own
new glimmer. not even when she had fallen in love way back when
with her deceased husband Jorge Alcântara, not even when
she had been young and loved
a whole life ahead of her
had she felt so light, so creative.
she greeted Mr. Jonas, the doorman.

good morning
good morning, Dona Ruth, and your mask?
my what?
your Mask

she waved him off.

you have to wear it, Dona Ruth, haven't you been following the news?
there's no time to lose, my dear, look how old I am.
and Cátia, didn't she offer to go to the store for you? Cátia, Vânia, Mr. Paulo...
just what I needed. look, Jonas, if I ever need someone to go to the
store for me, you can go ahead and bury me, do you hear?

she banged on the gate.

you can bury me.

Jonas shook his head.

Ruth was so tired of that meddlesome doorman. couldn't everyone
just mind their own business, hunh? if people wanted to spend their

precious dimes on disposable masks that blocked their nostrils, very well then, let them. she wouldn't surrender to this kind of "collective despair," not at this stage, she had much more important things to do.

*it's the Apocaaalyypseeeeeee! someone shouted
from the window of a car flying by.*

Ruth was so frightened she stumbled.
she leaned against the wall
to catch her breath, the city was upside down,
deserted, and the few people
who appeared were utterly crazy.
she continued her walk
heading confidently toward the market, which was near, though
she still arrived gasping for air,
perhaps the coat
had been excessive
and suddenly Ruth realized
that
her Naked face had become
first an object of observation, as if they were
asking, what planet are you from?
and then
an object of indignation, who do you think you are?
she felt cornered, a tiny animal in the forest.
her, of all people, a woman who time
hadn't knocked down.
she went straight to the drink aisle
grabbed five bottles of her favorite liquor
and headed to the register. the rice, the bleach,
the fruits, well, all of that could wait.
the store workers

were all wearing masks, not ones made of fabric, like the rest, but ones made of plastic, as if they were metallurgical workers. Ruth thought people were losing their identities, turning into livestock, oxen and cows. the woman at the register asked her something.

I'm sorry, come again?

the girl repeated
one
two
three times, but
it was impossible, it seemed like she was behind a sheet of glass.

lift up that mask! Ruth shouted lift up that goddamned mask!

the security guard approached.

everything alright here, ma'am? his was made of cloth and his voice was perfectly audible.

Ruth took a deep breath.

she found her wallet in her purse and paid.

it's the Apocalypse she recycled the phrase

like a rumor running through a small town

and left,
walking home, the bag scraping her heels.

what's happening to the world?

a month ago this street was packed with people celebrating
who knows what.

Ruth never liked parties, even on her birthday she always felt a
discreet kind of happiness. celebrations, in her opinion, were
one notch above reality, look around: what was there
to celebrate, exactly?

she opened the liquor

and took a big swig

to calm her chest, she knew that somewhere around
the middle of the bottle her soul would soar
free

through unimaginable terrain,
while Something much more than that liquid itself
entered her body
through the mouth.

†

ALINE BEI was born in São Paulo in 1987. She holds a degree in Literature from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (PUC-SP) and in Performing Arts from the Célia-Helena School of Theatre. She is a columnist for the cultural site *Livre Opinião — Ideias em Debate*. She was an invited author at the 2018 Brazilian Literary Spring (Sorbonne University, France) and the 2018 Guadalajara International Book Fair (Mexico). Her first book, *O peso do pássaro morto*, was awarded the Toca Prize and the São Paulo Prize for Literature.

DANIEL PERSIA has served as Regional Leader for the US-Brazil Fulbright Commission and Editor-at-Large for *Asymptote Journal*. His work has appeared in a number of literary journals, including *Asymptote*, *Exchanges*, *Your Impossible Voice*, and *KRONline*. His translation of *Escritos (Writings)*, by Basque sculptor Eduardo Chillida, was published in 2019 for the re-opening of the Chillida-Leku museum in Hernani, Gipuzkoa, Spain. Working primarily from Spanish and Portuguese, his research explores collaborative frameworks for translating Afro-Brazilian literature. He is a PhD candidate in the Department of Spanish and Portuguese and a Lassen Fellow in Latin American Studies at Princeton University.



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