

Familiar(idade)



“Good evening, welcome aboard, sir”, said she
“Boa noite.” respondi,

A aeromoça por mim passou
Olhei o crachá dela,
Jucicleide falou

e fui de lado, sem jeito,
entre bolsas, braços, ar,
procurando no estreito
o número do meu lugar.

Sentei, ajeitei o cinto,
o corpo no pouco que cabia.
E fiquei esperando em silêncio
a língua da próxima cortesia.

Podia ceder ao inglês,
fazer do voo coisa pequena.
Mas fiquei pensando se ela ouvia
meu português como falha ou pena.

Então resolvi sem dizer nada:
se viesse em inglês, eu ficava.
Eu respondia em português,
até ver quem de nós mudava.

No vai e vem do corredor,
primeiro o vermelho-azul do crachá,
depois a voz.

“water, trash, turbulence”, explained she.
“sim, tá bom, tudo bem, eu vi”.

Isso não vai dar certo

Espero que o destino ta pert...“moço, se meu dente cair dentro do avião ele vai nascer no céu?”

I turned.

The girl beside me was staring at me with the seriousness of a coroner, as if this had been pending between us for quite some time. She was small, maybe six, with a sweatshirt too warm for the cabin and a pink clip in her hair that had slid to one side. Her knees barely cleared the seat. She looked like the sort of child who asked questions not because she wanted answers, but because the world kept presenting loose threads and she could not stand to leave them hanging.

“Como?” I said.

“My tooth,” she said, tapping one of the lower ones with her fingernail. “If he fall here. Dentro do avião. Aí when I get home nasce outro or nasce one, um... já esqueci?”

Her father, large and bearded, turned from the aisle seat. He had thick wrists, a sun-browned, leathery neck, a shirt stretched a little over a pot-bellied stomach, and the air of someone who could lift more than he needed to (and probably did).

“Ahh, no, no, no, filha...” Then he looked at me and winced. “Sorr-ee, my frien-djee. She is... como fala... very imagina-shun. All the time. No filtro.”

“Não, tranquilo,” I said.

He blinked, then smiled at once.

“Você fala português?”

“Falo.”

“Ahhh, então beleza,” he said, settling back with visible relief. “Because my English is... is working, but not beautiful, you know?”

The girl leaned toward me again.

“But nasce onde?”

“No céu não,” I said. “Acho que nasce normal.”

She narrowed her eyes.

“Normal where?”

“Na gengiva.”

She sat back, dissatisfied in a way that suggested she would revisit the matter later.

The father held out a hand like we were closing a business deal.

“Prazer. Reginaldo.”

I shook it. His palm was broad, dry, calloused.

He told me the girl’s name was Milena, though she interrupted to say that everybody called her Mila except one aunt who called her “Mileníssima” when she was in trouble. Then she asked if I thought airplane water came from a montanha fora de nossa janela. Reginaldo closed his eyes briefly and apologized again in English, slower this time, trying to be polite but knowing its probably futile.

“She make too much question. I am sorry, really. Ela no have shame.”

“Sem problema,” I said. “Ela é engraçada.”

“É, engraçada...” he said, in a less-than-convinced tone of voice.

We got to talking because they were from Minas, from a town he named first too quickly and then again with pride, as if I should have known it.

“Cláudio,” he said.

“Perto de Montes Claros?” I asked.

He pointed at me again, delighted.

“Isso! Perto. Aí sim. Você conhece Minas mesmo.”

I told him I had learned Portuguese there, and that should’ve made room for my story, maybe, but it did not. It only gave him a better foothold for his own.

“Minas é bom demais da conta uai,” he said. “People there sabem como to live, né? Diferente. I always digo. Você vai para São Paulo, tudo correndo. Go to Rio, tudo aparecendo. But Minas... Minas o povo sabe. Bes-tchee foo-djee em todo o Brasil!”

The last phrase he delivered with a small satisfied smile.

He didn’t really explain what he did. He circled around it tactfully. Something with metal. Structures. Machines. Maintenance. Trucks. He had men working under him, that much was clear. There was a warehouse, or a yard, or both. There were contracts. There were clients he

described only as “gente grande.” He continued, “Meu trabalho is dirty, mas é honesto,” and then adjusted Mila’s seatbelt without looking at her.

They had been in Miami visiting family. A sister, a cousin, two nephews, one aunt who had “casado with a Cuban man very louco mas gente goo-djee.” Then Disney.

“Djee-sney is nice, yes,” he said, “but meu amigo, aquilo ali é feito para arrancar o couro do cidadão. Everything is fifty dólar, sixty dólar, one hundred dólar. Até smiling there cost money.”

“I got the Elsa cup,” Mila said.

“You got five cup,” he replied.

“And the Minnie ears.”

“And cry because wanted another Minnie ears.”

“She was from another park.”

“She was the same orelha.”

“Não era.”

He looked at me and shrugged, tendo desistido.

Mila leaned across me slightly to look out the window, although there was almost nothing to see now the mountain had passed except for a wing light blinking steadily.

“Você mora where?” she asked.

“Em Utah.”

“Is that perto da Flórida?”

“Mais ou menos,” I told her. “Depende do dia.”

She accepted that immediately.

She wanted to know if my mother still told me what to do. If airplane pilots could get lost. If people who slept with their mouths open woke up with different dreams from those who slept with them shut. If American dogs thought in English too. Each time Reginaldo would begin an apology, and each time abandon it midway and launch into something about his own life.

His wife, he told me, did not come because she hated flying and did not trust “essas latas voando.” His brother-in-law in Miami worked with flooring, made decent money, but “no head for business.” His oldest brother back in Minas still refused to expand, even though Reginaldo had told him a hundred times that staying small was for people who liked worrying. His mother prayed too much. His father had worked himself into silence. His daughter ate only the yellow candies from the packet and refused the red on principle.

At some point the flight attendant came by with headphones, and Mila had just started asking me whether fish got embarrassed, when Reginaldo straightened up and raised a finger toward the aisle.

“Moça? Moça? Tem fones?”

Ela deu-os com um sorriso falso e foi embora.

“brigado”

He fought with the embalagem por mó tempão, mas finalmente got them on, tilted his seat back a notch, folded his arms, and within what could not have been more than four minutes, was asleep.

Not drifting.

Gone.

Apagou geral.

His mouth loosened. His beard settled against his chest and his hand on his stomach.

Mila watched him, then looked at me.

“Ele ronca demais,” she whispered, rindo.

“Imagino.”

“Certa vez minha mãe put a pillow on his face mas só de brincadeira.”

The flight attendant came by again, the same one, or at least I thought it was the same one. Juci- I can't remember the rest.

“Would you like headphones?” she asked me.

I looked up at her.

“Não, eu tenho já, obrigado.”

It was small. Almost nothing. But I felt again that odd resistance in me, that insistence on staying where I had started.

She gave the briefest pause, then nodded.

“Okay.”

And passed.

Mila had been leaning more and more in my direction while pretending not to be tired. First her elbow touched mine, then her sleeve, then her whole small upper arm. She tried once more to ask whether dwarves spoke Portuguese in Brazil and Spanish in Mexico. The sentence got lost halfway through. A minute later her head was on my shoulder.

Great, I thought.

Now a stranger’s child is asleep on me.

I stayed very still.

There was the weight of her, slight but complete, given without permission and without doubt. One shoe half untied. One hand still loosely clutching the corner of the blanket her father had not really managed to spread over her.

And because there was nothing to do with that except bear it, a mente mudou de novo.

Foi algo legal dessa família
Me fez sentir saudade de Minas Gerais
Eu lembro comendo muito beans and rice

Essa aeromoça fala direito
Ele deve achar estou longe de perfeito

Talvez, do lado dela, eu também fosse outra espécie de distância

talvez minhas respostas nela caíssem torta, curta, dura demais

talvez o que vinha dela trouxesse mais treino que escolha

talvez eu teimasse além da conta

talvez restasse entre nós

um vão quase pronto

um quase encontro

quase ponte

almost

...

Já foi o último trash check. Good.

Primeiro dia e eu ainda lembrava de tudo:

cross-check, smile, galley, seatbelt, service.

Não podia esquecer nada.

Tanta coisa pra decorar

e eu decorei.

Tanta coisa pra aguentar

e eu aguentei.

Miami me ensinou isso.

O calor preso nos prédios,

o aluguel alto,

o studio pequeno,

a luz da cozinha que pisca

e a vista sem vista.

Still mine.

Ainda meu.

Conquistado na unha.

Single again.

Melhor assim, maybe.

Men always like the accent

until they hear who is actually behind it.

Só gostarem da ideia, the novelty,

e não da pessoa.

Até o English sair redondo
e o português denunciar o resto.

Passei pelo corredor
contando braços, copos, sacos, rostos.
Everything in place.
Quase tudo.

Aquele americano na minha mente,
sempre respondendo em português,
como se quisesse provar alguma coisa.
As if my English wasn't enough.
As if he needed to pull me back
to somewhere eu já havia atravessado..

Mas talvez não.
Talvez fosse só teimosia.
Talvez fosse nervousness.
Talvez ele nem soubesse
how hard this was.

As palavras treinadas,
o sorriso treinado,
o corpo em pé quando tudo dói.
The way I learned a country
without ever being invited into it.

Water, trash, turbulence.

Tudo saiu no tempo certo.

Tudo saiu certo demais.

O interfone acendeu.

“Cabin crew, prepare for landing”.

Pronto.

...

Acordei com luzes,
com mãos,
com assentos subindo.

“coloca o assento pra cima...”

Minha mente viajava

“**Sir**, you need to put your seat up.”

Agora atento, levantei o banco.

Olhei o crachá dela —
Jucicleide
A ponte virou fronteira