

THAT HAIR

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*Djaimilia Pereira  
de Almeida*

*translated by Eric M. B. Becker*



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Elizabeth Eckford and Hazel Bryan, photograph by Will Counts, September 4, 1957. All rights reserved. © Will Counts Collection: Indiana University Archives (<http://webapp1.dlib.indiana.edu/archivesphotos/results/item.do?itemId=P0026600>).

*For Humberto*

*Giving thanks for having a country of one's own is like being grateful for having an arm. How would I write if I were to lose this arm? Writing with a pencil between the teeth is a way of standing on ceremony with ourselves. Witnesses swear to me that I am the most Portuguese of all the Portuguese members of my family. It's as if they were always greeting me with an "Ah, France! Anatole, Anatole!" the way Lévi-Strauss was greeted in a village in the Brazilian countryside. The only family members we manage to speak with, however, are those who are unable to respond. We operate under the belief that this family interprets the world for us when in reality we spend our lives translating the new world into their language. I say to Lévi-Strauss: "This is my aunt, she's a great admirer of yours." Lévi-Strauss invariably replies: "Ah, France! Anatole . . .," etc. To write with a pencil between one's teeth is to write to a villager who finds himself before his first Frenchman. The matter of knowing who is responding to what we write might provide us with relief from our miniature interests, bringing us to imagine that what we say is important, despite it all. To stand on ceremony with what it is we have to say is, however, a form of blindness. Writing has little to do with imagination and resembles a way of coming to deserve the lack of a response. Our life is overrun all the time by this taciturn family—memory—the way Thatcher feared that English culture would be overrun by immigrants.*

Translator's Note by Eric M. B. Becker

## EXPEDITIONS INTO THE DEPTHS OF IDENTITY

In 2017, a couple of months after I'd first translated work by Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida, I found myself in the middle of a brief stopover in Lisbon on my way to a literary festival in Cabo Verde; some Brazilian friends had sent me their own personal guide (a sentimental one, perhaps?) to the city. They recommended I trace a path from the traditionally bohemian Chiado—home to the iconic Fernando Pessoa statue—to the Feira da Ladra, a 900-year-old market in the Graça neighborhood. Along the steep and winding ascent to Graça, I passed the sun-bleached façade of the Igreja de São Vicente de Fora. Its edifice dates back to the time of Afonso I—the first king to rule Portugal following the expulsion of the Moors in 1147—and the church serves as the burial site for many of the members of the Brigantine Dynasty. (Its art collection features an eighteenth-century ivory statue of Jesus from Goa, a Portuguese colony until 1961.) The whole structure might be seen as an emblem of the nation, from

the siege of Lisbon in the middle of the twelfth century through the end of Portugal's colonial project in the late twentieth.

My intention that Tuesday afternoon was to visit the used book stands, a Lisboa version, perhaps, of Paris's Left Bank bouquinistes or the ever rarer sight of used book dealers lining the sidewalks of New York's Upper West Side. I came away with a few volumes that are now within comfortable reach of my desk in New York, but it was an encounter with a man selling antique stamps that had the greatest impact on me. A congenial man initially, he quickly pivoted to his time in the Portuguese army during the 1960s and '70s, when several of the country's African colonies waged wars for independence. My interlocutor wasn't, he explained earnestly, opposed to their sovereignty, but he was deeply offended by the way the Portuguese "handed everything over on a silver platter" to their former subjects.

It is in this context, barely forty years removed from the independence of Angola, that Djaimilia Pereira de Almeida's *That Hair* steps in to plumb the depths of Portugal's grisly history—its broader consequences, but above all its personal costs. Like her narrator, Mila, Almeida was born to a family that is Portuguese on one side and Angolan on the other. Like her narrator—"the most Portuguese of all the Portuguese members of my family"—Almeida moved from Luanda to Lisbon at a

young age and is at once entirely Angolan and entirely Lisboaeta. However, Mila's indomitable hair is a constant reminder that she doesn't entirely belong in Portugal, while her childhood exploits with her cousins in the streets of Lisbon are proof that the city is not entirely *not* hers, either.

"The truth is that the story of my curly hair intersects with the story of at least two countries and, by extension, the underlying story of the relations among several continents: a geopolitics," Almeida writes in the opening pages of this hybrid novel, which sits somewhere between fiction and the essay (another genre at which she excels).

The story of the four-year-old Angolan girl who would grow up Portuguese traverses not only landscapes—from the Rossio to Mozambique to Little Rock, Arkansas—but eras. Photo albums from Mila's Lisbon childhood in the 1980s and '90s, and old films from her Portuguese family's African days, amount to more than a personal story—concomitantly, they form a story of colonialism, of enduring racial and gender prejudices, of reparations.

If the thematic material of *That Hair* is vast, so too is the gamut of other literary works with which it dialogues. Within Portuguese-language literature of the postcolonial era (which includes writers such as António Lobo Antunes), or from the perspective of those Portuguese who returned following the African colonies' wars of liberation (such as Lídia Jorge), or the work of African

writers like José Eduardo Agualusa or Mia Couto, Almeida's is a first: the first work to be written from the perspective of one who left Africa for Lisbon, and whose family history straddles both the Iberian Peninsula and Portuguese Africa.

It would, however, be folly to read Almeida's work in a Lusophone context alone. *That Hair* is also of a piece with Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah*, English writer Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*, or Somali Italian writer Igiaba Scego's *Adua*. Like these writers, Almeida is concerned with exploring the spaces between cultures, the vagaries of identity and belonging.

Almeida's sources also stretch back much further than the recent past. In *That Hair*, Mila's search for her origins is a search à la Whitman for the multitudes within, as the author herself has acknowledged. The reference to Whitman necessarily recalls Pessoa. Other influences include Benjamin's *Berlin Childhood around 1900*, with its "expeditions into the depths of memory," and Danielle Allen's writing on Will Counts's iconic 1957 photo of Elizabeth Eckford on her way to integrate Central High School in Little Rock. ("It is the portrait of a self-persecution and the daily struggle to achieve indifference," Mila posits during her own reckoning with this "X-ray of my soul.")

Translating an X-ray of the soul is no ordinary task. Portuguese and English are, often, languages at odds

with each other. Whereas much of mainstream writing in English since the time of Hemingway has favored the short sentence, Portuguese is many times more permissive of and malleable to discursive detours, repeated pivots, and elliptical flights of lyrical fancy, all in the same phrase. A challenge I faced from the outset, with this book and every book I've translated, was deciding what was simply Portuguese and what was a matter of style. There's a philosophical bent to Almeida's work, which, as Portuguese critic Isabel Lucas described it, operates as extended soliloquy. In a book riddled with questions and few straight answers, it was clear that the digressions, the sentences that sometimes stretched a page and beyond, were Almeida's way of including the reader in Mila's arduous journey toward self-discovery, of fostering understanding and common cause.

The expedition into, or excavation of, memory that is central to *That Hair* unfolds in the context of Mila's confessed unease at writing the biography of her hair ("How might I write this story so as to avoid the trap of intolerable frivolity?"). It's a discomfort that recalls Virginia Woolf's reservations about the biography (or "life-writing") and its related genres, from her weariness of "the damned egotistical self" to misgivings about "[writing] directly about the soul. Looked at, it vanishes" (*Virginia Woolf*, by Hermione Lee). Almeida, through Mila, takes that position one step further, claiming: "Memory is a demagogue: it doesn't allow us to choose what we see; it thrives on the temptation

to make less of the people we *were not*.” At every turn in this journey to the past, there is the risk of reinforcing caricature where one seeks an origin. There is always “the trap of sentimentality” to be avoided.

It would be wrong to situate Almeida within this pantheon and risk leaving her novel desiccated, by which I mean that I want to properly appreciate the vitality and urgency of her narrative on its own terms. *That Hair* is not only an exploration of identity, race, and a stagnant past; it is one possible manifestation of American intellectual Christina Sharpe’s concept of “wake work,” a process of recognizing the legacy of colonialism and its racist systems that thrive to the present day. Sharpe’s multitudinal metaphor of the wake—as keeping watch with the dead, the path left by a ship, the consequences of a racist past that stretches across borders and seas, and, finally, as an awakening to consciousness—is the heartbeat of *That Hair* (a work that preceded Sharpe’s *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* by just one year). It is present in the rejection Mila faces at certain Lisbon salons, in her sojourns to far-flung hair studios, in her remote journey toward the ruins of the past. Writes Almeida, “It is we who . . . survive as if the only castle in a miles-wide radius: a sign that life once existed where today there’s only dead grass, olive trees, and cork oaks.”

As Mila exhumes and interrogates these signs of life, she soon finds that her true discoveries are made along

the way, via detours, in the places and artifacts that lie beyond what was sought. She finds questions of nationalism, of who is permitted to belong and what that belonging means, and of the borders—real and imaginary—that exercise so much more influence over some lives than others. In *That Hair*, the question Almeida seems to be asking of all of us is: If we are so often the details we considered mere incidentals in our search for ourselves, who then are the people we claim to be?

*June 2019*

*New York, NY*

THAT HAIR

# 1

My mother cut my hair for the first time when I was six months old. The hair, which according to several witnesses and a few photographs had been soft and straight, was reborn coiled and dry. I don't know if this sums up my still-short life. One could quite easily say just the opposite. To this day, along the curve of my nape, the hair still grows inexplicably straight, the soft hair of a newborn, which I treat as a vestige. The story of my hair begins with this first haircut. How might I write this story so as to avoid the trap of intolerable frivolity? No one would accuse the biography of an arm of being frivolous; and yet it's impossible to tell the story of its fleeting movements—mechanical, irretrievable, lost to oblivion. Perhaps this might sound insensitive to veterans of war

or amputees, whose imaginations conjure pains they can still feel, rounds of applause, runs along the beach. It wouldn't do me much good, I imagine, to fantasize over the reconquest of my head by the soft-stranded survivors near the curve of my neck. The truth is that the story of my curly hair intersects with the story of at least two countries and, by extension, the underlying story of the relations among several continents: a geopolitics.

Perhaps the place to begin this biography of my hair is many decades ago, in Luanda, with a girl named Constança, a coy blonde (a fetching "typist girl," perhaps?), the unspoken youthful passion of my black grandfather, Castro Pinto, long before he became head nurse at Luanda's Hospital Maria Pia; or perhaps I ought to begin with the night I surprised him with braids that he found divine. I'd spent nine hours sitting cross-legged on the floor at the hairdresser, head between the legs of two particularly ruthless young girls, who in the midst of doing my hair interrupted their task to turn some feijoada and rice pudding from lunch into a bean soup, and I felt a warm sensation on my back (and a vague odor) coming from between their legs. "What a sight!" he said. Indeed: perhaps the story of my hair has its origin in this girl Constança, whom I'm not related to in any way, but whose presence my grandfather seemed to seek in my relaxed hair and in the girls on the bus that, after he was already an old man living on the outskirts

of Lisbon, would take him each morning to his job at Cimov where, his back hunched, he swept the floors until the day he died. How to tell this history with sobriety and the desired discretion?

Perhaps someone has already written a book about hair, problem solved, but no one's written the story of *my* hair, as I was painfully reminded by two fake blondes to whom I once temporarily surrendered my curls for a hopeless "brushing"—two women who, no less ruthless than the others, pulled my hair this way and that and commented aloud, "It's full of split ends," as they waged battle against their own arms (the masculinity of which, with their swollen biceps bulging from beneath their smocks, provided me, the entire time, with a secret form of revenge for the torture they inflicted). The haunted house that every hair salon represents for the young woman I've become is often all I have left of my connection to Africa and the history of the dignity of my ancestors. However, I do have plenty of suffering and corrective brushings after returning home from the "beauty parlor," as my mother calls it, and plenty of attempts not to take too personally the work of these hairdressers whose implacability and incompetence I never summoned the courage to confront. The story I can tell is a catalog of salons, with Portugal's corresponding history of ethnic transformations—from the fifty-year-old returnees to the Moldavian manicurists forced to adopt

Brazilian methods—undergoing countless treatments to tame the natural exuberance of a young lady who, in the words of these same women, was a “good girl.” The story of surrendering my education in what it meant to be a woman to the public sphere is not, perhaps, the fairy tale of miscegenation, but rather a story of reparations.

No white woman on a city bus ever gave my Grandpa Castro the time of day. Humming Bakongo canticles to himself, Papá was a man whom you would never suspect of carrying this time-honored tradition with him as he sat next to you on the bus. A man of invisible traditions—and what a ring this would have to it, capitalized: *The Man of Invisible Traditions*, a true original. No one ever looked at him, this man who, by his own account, was rather cranky, “the Portuguese kid,” as he was known as a young man, who was always shouting, “Put it in the goal, you monkey,” referring to black soccer players, and who categorized people according to their resemblance to certain jungle animals, even describing himself as “the monkey *type*,” the kind of person who patiently waits for the conversation to come to a close before proffering his wisdom.

I come from generations of lunatics, which is perhaps a sign that what takes place inside the heads of my ancestors is more important than what goes on around them. The family to whom I owe my hair have described the journey between Portugal and Angola in ships and

airplanes over four generations with the nonchalance of those accustomed to travel. A nonchalance that nonetheless was not passed on to me and throws into stark relief my own dread of travel; a dread of each trip that—out of an instinct to cling to life that never assails me on solid ground—I constantly fear will be my last. Legend has it I stepped off the plane in Portugal at the age of three clinging to a package of Maria crackers, my hair in a particularly rebellious state. I came dressed in a yellow wool camisole that can still be seen today in an old passport photo notable for my wide smile, the product of a felicitous misunderstanding about the significance of being photographed. I'm laughing with joy, or perhaps incited for some comic motive by one of my adult family members, whom I reencounter tanned and sporting beards in photographs of the newborn me splayed atop the bedsheets.

And meanwhile it's my hair—not the mental abyss—that day in and day out brings me back to this story. For as long as I can remember, I've woken up with a rebellious mane, so often at odds with my journey, no sign of the headscarves recommended for covering one's hair while sleeping. To say that I wake up with a lion's mane out of carelessness is to say that I wake up every day with at least a modicum of embarrassment or a motive to laugh at myself in the mirror: a motive accompanied by impatience

and, at times, rage. It's occurred to me that I might owe the daily reminder of what ties me to my family to the haircut I received at six months of age. I've been told I'm a *mulata das pedras*, as they say in Angola, not the idealized beauty that *mulata* conjures for them but a second-rate one, and with bad hair to boot. This expression always blinds me with the memory of rocks along the beach: slippery, slimy stones difficult to navigate with bare feet.

The lunacy of my ancestors factors into the story of my hair like anything else that demands silence; it is a condition from which the hair might be an ennobling escape, a victory of aesthetics over life, as though hair were either a question of life or aesthetics, but never both. At the same time, my deceased ancestors rise up around me. As I speak they return as versions of themselves distinct from the way I remember them. This is not the story of their states of mind, which I would never dare to tell, but that of the meeting between grace and circumstance, the encounter of the book with its hair. There is nothing to say of hair that does not pose a problem. To say something consists of bringing to the surface that which, because it is second nature, often remains undetected.

Stepping off the plane, evoking the image of a statesman's lover who lands hours after the plane full of government officials, the girlish Constança would begin by unbuttoning her jacket. The steamy Luanda air hinted at

the long-awaited absence of her aunts from strolls through the park, during which, by simple miracle, there's nothing to suggest that she'd been discovered walking hand in hand with my grandfather. From the state of the weather to the state of the state, she traded bits of conversation in exchange for being hand-fed biscuits dipped in tea. I can identify in her Papá's noble carriage, in the era's high-waisted pants, the coat, the hat, a certain uprightness that his old immigrant's hunchback would later subdue. During the newscast's commercial break—a toothpaste ad—Constança was a frequent subject of conversation between my grandfather and me, our fear of hurting my grandmother's feelings often interrupting. But it was also a pretext to blackmail an irritated Grandpa Castro: either he gave us money for candy or "Hey, what about that blonde girl?"—as though we'd divined that there was more to this girl than the promise of fresh breath and reduced tartar. I leave her here, like a half-empty tube of Couto-brand toothpaste, abandoned in a plastic cup covered in a layer of mineral scum, next to the toothbrushes, in memory of my dear Grandma Maria, in whom a burning jealousy took root that would last for the rest of her life.

I never did take the bus route with Papá to Cimov, a place that comes back to me now in almost mythic proportions. I don't know what the city would look like if I were to see it with his eyes. Today, I find myself thinking of the

row of high-rises along the way—a steely gray against the darkness—like an image of my grandfather’s thoughts, of his introspective manner as he sat on the bus in those pre-dawn hours. It was always quite clear to him what the day would hold. A wandering repairman of household goods, he always had a passion for widgets: first, gauze, syringes, scalpels; later, first aid kits, pain-relief balms, razor blades wrapped in paper, Bactrim, thermoses, plastic bags, pens, the pocket of his shirt misshapen by blocks of lottery tickets and folded sheets of paper where he had worked out the algorithm for what, according to him, were the winning numbers.

There’s nothing romantic about these things. The pain-relief balm and the rusty medical supplies were simply instruments from life as a nurse in Luanda, which he saw no reason to forget and which he in fact never left behind. He maintained the very same routine, diligently applied to his kin, of injections, medical prescriptions, and a few home circumcisions, which by a stroke of luck all the boys survived. The minute anyone sneezed or complained of a migraine, he would administer antibiotics; and he continued doing so, deaf to our protests, for the rest of his days.

He’d attended nursing school in Angola, studying by candlelight, a habit he would pay for with a premature case of cataracts. He prided himself on having survived the entire course on only bananas and peanuts, a diet he recounted to me sometime during the ’90s, already in this

other hemisphere, with the same nostalgia with which he used to speak of the butter and marmalade of our family's golden years. Ever since I was a little girl, I've pictured him studying, half-naked in his hut, the lantern tucked beneath his chin, angled toward his books—as though, in an implausible synthesis of times and places, he were a greenhorn working on the railroad, fearing a coyote attack on his camp as he slept—battling insomnia, the heat, mosquitoes; but I know all too well that nothing could be further from the truth. In Papá's house in Luanda, where I would spend school vacations, everyone still ate margarine from a giant can, something I'd never seen before. As they scraped pans clean in the afternoon heat, the neighbor girls listened to my stories of Portugal. I introduced them to the concept of an “escalator,” which caused them to break out in song: “I'm happy as can be, there's nothing else I want for me.” Not so many years later, as Papá left the house at sunrise, off to the bus and to Cimov, the air on the outskirts of Lisbon—laden with the refreshing chill of morning dew that I too would come to love—saturated everything with the vague scent of ammonia.

In the early morning hours when my Grandpa Castro was born, his father was at sea. This in M'Banza Kongo, in Angola's Zaire province, a place that has assumed mythic status in the family lore. In the distance, on the beach, the albino man's blond hair was a speck of light on

the horizon. He could often be found fishing with spear amid the rocks, waiting until a fish appeared. The next moment, the fish would burst out of the water, dark blood spurting everywhere, bringing into focus the fisherman's own reflection against the surface. At times, on similar mornings when the tide was full at the break of day, the man would raise his spear into the air, parting the sea and taking his time as he crossed the gap, strolling between the parted waters, the waves forming a soaring wall at his side. He would never do this in the company of others or in a moment of danger, only when enjoying a stroll alone. However, being the only one to attest to a gift he could not share with others left him convinced he was one of the chosen. The satisfaction gained appears to have had an inverse relationship to the size of his audience: it was a ceremony to be performed in solitude. The day my Grandpa Castro was born, his father had left the house with a certain fish in mind, something special he'd seen swimming nearby. The beach was empty, the fog hovered low. As if he found himself before the only fish alive, my great-grandfather steadied himself on a rock, ready to pounce, stretching his arm skyward and holding his silhouette pose—milk on oil—his hair behind him in one long tress, as the fish darted below and then burst to the surface with all its size and weight. At home, his wife gave birth to a son. As the fisherman had foreseen, and as others later confirmed, the little Castro child had spoken, not

cried, as he emerged into the dark of the ramshackle hut illuminated with fish-oil lamps, reeking of fish as all such huts did. It's possible there aren't even beaches or fish in M'Banza Kongo.

I inherited from my Grandpa Castro a collection of imitation Parker pens he had stored inside a suitcase for the previous decade. He had come to Portugal in 1984 with the aim of seeking treatment at a hospital in Lisbon for one of his sons, who had been born with one leg shorter than the other. The leg required medical treatment unavailable in Angola at that time. He came to Portugal not as an immigrant in search of work, but as a father, staying longer than expected and then remaining, to the tune of operations and physical therapy, until the end of his life, a pleasant coda to Angolan years. In Lisbon, he and his son found lodging in boardinghouses near the hospital, as a great number of Portuguese Africa's ill did at the time and still do, whether for the duration of their medical treatments or indefinitely.

At the entrance to the Pensão Covilhã, kitty-corner from the Casa de Amigos in Paredes de Coura, the ill take in the Lisbon air. One of them has a bandage over one eye, another a gangrenous thigh, an arm protected by a tattooed cast that's begun to crumble, a chopstick repurposed to itch beneath the layers of plaster and cotton. They are the remnants of empire, accidental Camões at the tender age of nine, spared from becoming childhood

mortality statistics so that they might enjoy what to them seems like a vacation in the city. Even with a bit of luck, they are destined, each and every one, to discover in Portugal nothing more than the world from which they've come.

Visiting the Covilhã is like sticking one's nose into an old suitcase. The boardinghouse doesn't carry the scent of alcohol one smells in hospitals, but that of ointments past their expiration dates mixed with the rotting odor of infections and a faint metallic note like blood, traces of mothballs, a concoction at once chemical and organic, attenuated by the tang of ketchup or Old Spice spilling from upended bottles into the suitcase between strands of hair and iodine tincture, rendering a package of Valium useless. My grandfather, dozing off to this odor with a perfect forbearance, asks my uncle if the room doesn't smell of woman. "It's just your imagination—go to sleep, Papá," his boy responds.

In the tavern next door, the sick make conversation with old men in whom, despite some initial repugnance, they inspire a measure of compassion. The sick take the day's sports section from one of the tables back to their rooms at the Covilhã and celebrate each Belenenses goal scored the Sunday prior. The sight of the ill provokes strong reactions in the old men, sometimes ruining their appetites before they've even left home or inducing vomiting, transporting them back to the war and to their

youth; but they stifle such anguish and downplay it to their wives, telling them that a deviled egg didn't sit quite right or that "Tio Zeca must be serving bad wine, the sneaky bastard." These same men frequently offer a deviled egg to their young friends, something the younger group has never seen, or introduce them to the ketchup they then proceed to get all over their noses as they eat. "Go on, squirt, make a wish!" they goad the kids, explaining that's how it's done when you try something for the very first time, an explanation that doesn't quite compute.

And that's how, between stepping on dog shit in open-toe sandals (which they sport in spite of the autumn weather) and making love to *placards* advertising Olá-brand ice cream—reason in itself to live—the sick young men spend their days trying out new flavors and the old men redeem themselves for the queasy sensation they experience at the sight of the young men, a queasiness they dismiss with a wave: "OK, OK, OK." Then the little squirts close their eyes and ask for a Perna de Pau. It's in this exchange that the old men reveal themselves to be good souls, though they have only themselves in mind throughout this entire marathon, patiently awaiting the kids' reactions in order that they might feel something for the young people before their eyes.

Lisbon's teeming Covilhã is not some charming countryside inn but a roadside leper colony, simultaneously at the very center of the city and at the margins, because it

only takes one wrong turn for you to find yourself in the middle of nowhere. From their bedrooms, the sick can see between the window bars to the back of the hospital; they watch as the trash is collected and entertain the hope of a larger room, envisioned just beyond the gray walls of a building that more closely resembles a factory than a health-care facility.

Often, the sick spend years at the Covilhã. They manage only a glimpse of the city, and of the country nothing beyond the concept of *chanfana*, which Dona Olga—a woman who probably comes from Seia and is owner of the boardinghouse—translates for them on good days, when she isn't busy calling everything a pigsty as soon as she's had a glance at the mountains of suitcases, dirty clothes, and empty bottles that characterize the rooms of the sick, rooms she never enters and from which can be heard the sound of a cassette tape playing the *lambada*. The sense of Portugal one gathers from the lobby of the Pensão Covilhã is that of the country's typical dishes, the basis of our ignorance about any country: a banquet of rudimentary explanations, about the taste of pork rinds, the taste of snow peas, the taste of pig's blood stew. The garden must be ripe for the picking this time of year, think Dona Olga and the legion of the sick.

My grandfather stashed the pens he would later bequeath to me in one of his suitcases over a period of ten years, rusty utensils wound together with a piece of string.

He had come prepared to assume obligations, provide signatures, sign contracts, when what really awaited him was years of sharing a bathroom, years his aftershave went unused. A decade later, he would leave the Covilhã for São Gens, a shantytown on the outskirts of Lisbon, sending for his wife and other children in Angola, storing the very same half-unpacked suitcases beneath a new bed, in a new house filled with the same whiff of old suitcase.