

# Two Stories

## Marcelino Freire

Translated by Jonathan Pitcher

Marcelino Freire (1967, Sertânia, Perriambuco, Brazil), the youngest of nine children, has lived in Sao Paulo for the past two decades. His one book of aphorisms and five collections of short stories tend to represent the dislocated waifs and strays of the Brazilian underclass. The first story is from his book *Rasif: Mar que arreventa* (2008; *Rasif: Breaking Sea*) and the second story is chapter VII from *Amar é crime* (2011; *To Love is a Crime*).

Jonathan Pitcher is a professor of Latin American Studies at Bennington College, Vermont. He lived and worked in Sao Paulo in the early nineties.

### About Peace

I'm not about peace.

I'm really not. I'm not. Peace is something for rich people. I'm not wearing any t-shirts, no sir. I'm not releasing any doves, no sir. Don't come asking me to cry any more. It's all dried up. Peace is a disgrace.

A disgrace.

Carrying that rose. In my hand, like a fool. No way. I'm not going. I'm not playing along. Doped. I'm not going to pray. I won't be taking to the square. Peace doesn't resolve anything. Peace marches on. Where is it marching to? Peace looks nice on TV. Did you see that actress? That actor on the float?

Hell, you go if you like. But I'm not going. To muster a tear. Peace is very organized. Very righteous, poor thing. Peace has a set time. The governor shows up. And the mayor. And a senator. And even a footballer. I'm not going.

I'm not going.

Peace is a waste of time.

And I have so much to do today. Black beans and rice. Not to mention the sewing. My judgment's off. Peace makes me sick. Do you know what I mean? Out of sorts. I'm very sorry. Sorry. Peace isn't going to mess up my Sunday.

Peace never comes to this neighborhood. Have you noticed? It stays over there. Is it coming? Can you see? A swarm of people. In that insane procession. Peace is very dull. Peace is shit. It doesn't stink or even smell. Peace seems like a joke. Peace is child's play. I'll tell you something I don't like: hope. Peace is totally bogus. Peace is a proper madam. Who never so much as glimpsed my face. You know? Peace doesn't live in my corner of the world. Peace is very white. Peace is pale. Peace needs blood.

I already told you. I don't want to. I'm not taking a stroll. With some demonstration. I'm not going out. I'm not budging an inch. Even if I'm dead. Even if peace comes here, banging on the door. I'm not opening it. I'm not letting it in. Peace is barred. Barred. Peace only puts in an appearance at certain times. When war is replaced. Have you seen? This is when the city gets organized. To save whose skin? Definitely not mine.

I've prayed enough not to pray in that hell. Amen. I'm not walking alongside anyone else's coffin. I'm not going.

I'm not going.

You know one thing for sure: they'll be falling to pieces.

That's how it'll be.

They'll be walking. The entire afternoon. Because I'm done. I'm all out of patience. I am. It's as though peace is laughing at me. Have you noticed? With all their rosaries. Every nerve. Their strident teeth. Have you noticed? Do I have to do more, or what? Huh?

Huh?

Who's going to bring back my son, Joachim? I won't be parading a photo of my boy down there. Baring my grief in the street. I'm not going to march, much less accompanied by the police. Every time I see Joachim's photo it ties me in knots. A longing. You know? A pain in my eyes. A cloud on my chest. Without end. A pain.

Pain. Pain. Pain.

Pain.

My instinct is to come out shouting. Roaring. Guns blazing. I swear. Jesus! Killing everyone. Really. Everyone. I'd kill everyone, make no mistake. But peace gets the blame, you know?

Peace just won't let up.

## **Armed Struggle**

"Why did you kill your granddaughter?"

The man's mouth was drooping to one side, his eyes cloudy. Despair. They were never going to understand.

A guerrilla dies a guerrilla. That was how the saying went. I fought in the Squatters' Uprising.

"Dead. Without pity or shame."

Could the old man have gone mad? It had to cross one's mind. They'd checked and the granddaughter had never done any noticeable harm. No beating or torturing of her grandfather of any sort. He throttled the girl. First with his hands and then in the wash-basin.

You wanna swim, you lowlife, so swim. I fought in the War of Santa Dica, and had my whiskers cut by force during the dictatorship. Maybe that was why.

In his granddaughter, he saw the ghost of some ape of a soldier, a lifer.

She used to talk to her grandfather a lot, the only one who paid any attention. Do you know why she bothered with him? A witness came to fill in the gaps. Another deposition: the old boy was such a sweetie. Gentle. He spent his whole day in a chair, rocking back and forth. Sometimes he would whistle. Which Brazilian song?

The key was to ask once more:

"Why, Mr. Olavo?"

They pulled up his arrest record: nothing. Just the usual notes, about things the city knew because he told them: the Caldeirão War, and another in Jacundá. His clandestine youth, the escape to Port-au-Prince. his exile in Ceará.

"Granddad. You need to keep up."

The little princess, poor girl even set up a webpage for her grandfather. To tell the people what a fighter he was. She proudly extolled his heroic past, taking legendary photos of him that would live on forever and ever.

"More than four thousand followers."

Followers? Of whom? Were any of them ever entrenched in Goianésia do Pará? Had any of them ever heard of Gatilheiro Quintino? That may have been it: the images his granddaughter managed to put up on the computer. They were so real. And alive! They must have reawakened some mystery in the old man. Murderer. He may as well have been your average killer. Instead of a communist, a torturer.

They'd googled. They'd trawled Facebook. They'd opened all the files that his granddaughter created. Given that after the crime her grandfather seemed to enter an endless void, his gaze fixed on the infinite, isn't it possible that a beast, a monster, a thug was living inside him?

"A smile, Granddad. Please, just a little smile."

No one respects silence anymore. His granddaughter was wired, buzzing with gadgets. Cellphones, radios, lights. She would pull her grandfather's head closer to the bottom of the screen, showing him the comments, the assertions. And she would read everything.

The old man was dumbstruck. Another day, she suggested the idea of reparation from the government to him. For what he suffered.

Me? You can't put a price on it. If we were armed to the teeth, it was because we believed. In freedom, I mean. It didn't make sense to go scrounging now, penny by penny, for handouts, scraps. He thought about Isadora. Dead. And about Dodora. It was hard to know whether what sprang from the grandfather's eye was a tear. His granddaughter didn't see. Christ! She was concerned with other images.

Yet later came that conversation about hydro-massage. Her grandfather jumping in the water with other grandfathers. Your muscles, granddad. Your muscles. Who knows? Yes, here's the explanation. The granddaughter bombarded the old man too much and he couldn't stand it. Why do you always believe that the old man has to live, when hasn't he already lived?

It would be both small and irresponsible to claim that this was the reason.

His granddaughter's enthusiasm.

"We now have more than six thousand followers, Granddad."

What absolute shit! The police were short on concrete facts. Did his granddaughter have a boyfriend, a lover? It could have been out of jealousy. Love. In some way, the girl rubbed her grandfather's nose in it, every day. She used to touch his hand on the monitor while she was running the site. Anyway. A longing overcame him. She had his wife's face, the one who died. In the War of Araguaia, of São Geraldo. He remarried. But it's only the first country girl who still lives in my heart.

"No, he's too old and too frail to go to prison."

The family would have to put him in a home. Or, to be safe, an asylum. They didn't know when the danger would return. Could you imagine? The old man getting out only to slaughter anyone who happened to snap him out of his solitude? His little granddaughter, such a pretty thing, insisted. Fucking unbelievable!

"How about organizing a big party, Granddad?"

Cake, balloons, and bubbles. All the followers on Twitter, there, all around him. No. I escaped from the Paranavai Massacre. I was strung up like a bat, blood rushing to my head, and I wasn't afraid. Not even of the war of São Pedro da Água Branca. I know I wasn't. It wasn't me who killed my granddaughter.

I swear it wasn't me.

It was the revolution.