

staring at Celsinho who had the face of a witch.

Carla didn't say a word. She stood up, crushed her cigarette in the ashtray, and, without turning to anyone, abandoning the party at its height, she left.

On foot, in black, on the Plaza Mauá at three in the morning. Like the lowest of whores. Alone. Without recourse. It was true: she didn't know how to fry an egg. And Celsinho was more of a woman than she.

The plaza was dark. And Luisa breathed deeply. She looked at the lampposts. The plaza was empty.

And in the sky, the stars.



PIG LATIN

Maria Aparecida—Cidinha, as they called her at home—was an English teacher. Neither rich nor poor: just properly comfortable. But she dressed to perfection. She looked wealthy. Even her suitcases were of high quality.

She lived in Minas Gerais and was going by train to Rio, where she would spend three days, and then take a plane to New York.

She was much sought after as a teacher. She loved perfection and was friendly, though strict. She wanted to perfect her English in the United States.

She took the seven o'clock train to Rio. It was really cold. And she with her suede coat and three suitcases. The car was empty, just an old woman sleeping in a corner under her shawl.

At the next station two men got on and sat down in the seat in front of Cidinha's. The train began to move. One man was tall, thin, with a little mustache and a cold eye, the other was short, paunchy, and bald. They looked at Cidinha. She quickly turned her eyes away and looked out the window.

It was uncomfortable in the coach. As if it were too hot. The girl uneasy. The men on the alert. My God, thought the girl, what could they want from me? There was no answer. And on top of it all she was a virgin. But

why, oh why, had she thought of her own virginity?

The two men began to talk to each other. At first Cidinha didn't understand a word. It seemed a game. They spoke very quickly. But the language seemed vaguely familiar to her. What language was it?

Suddenly she understood: they were speaking Pig Latin—to perfection. Like this:

"Idday ouyay eckchay touay atthay ettypray ick-chay?"

"Iay uresay idday. Eshay's ay eautybay. Eshay's inay ethay agbay."

In other words: "Did you check out that pretty chick? I sure did. She's a beauty. She's in the bag."

Cidinha pretended not to understand: to understand would be dangerous for her. The language was the same one they had used as children to protect themselves from the grownups. The two went on:

"Iay antway otay crewsay atthay irlgay. Atwhay outabay ouyay?"

"Emay ootay. Enwhay away etgay otay ethay unnel-tay."

In other words they were going to rape her in the tunnel. . . . What could she do? Cidinha didn't know, and she trembled with fear. She hardly knew herself. At least she had never known herself deep down. As for knowing the others, that made it even worse. Help me, Virgin Mary! Help me, help me!

"Fiay eshay esistsray away ancaiy illkay erhay."

If she tried to resist they might kill her. So that's how it was.

"Eway ancaiy abstay erhay. Danay obray erhay."

Stab her to death! And rob her!

How could she tell them that she wasn't rich? That she was fragile, that the merest touch would kill her.

She got a cigarette out of her pocketbook in order to smoke and calm herself down. It didn't do any good. When would the next tunnel come? She had to think quickly, quickly, quickly.

Then the idea came to her: if I pretend that I am a prostitute, they'll give up, they wouldn't want a whore.

So she pulled up her skirt, made sensual movements—she didn't even know she knew how, so unknown was she to herself—and opened the top buttons on her blouse, leaving her breasts half exposed. The men suddenly in shock.

"Eshay's razycay."

In other words, "she's crazy."

And she undulated like no samba-dancer, down from the hills. She took her lipstick out of her bag and lavishly painted her lips. And she began to sing, off-key.

So the men began to laugh at her. They found Cidinha's foolishness amusing. She was desperate. And the tunnel?

The conductor appeared. He saw it all. He didn't say a thing. But he went and told the engineer. The engineer said:

"Let's do something about it. I'll turn her over to the police at the next station."

And the next station came.

The engineer climbed down, spoke with a soldier named José Lindalvo. José Lindalvo didn't fool around. He climbed into the car, saw Cidinha, grabbed her brutally by the arm, gathered up the three suitcases as best he could, and they both got off.

The two men burst out laughing.

In the small station painted blue and pink there was a young lady with a suitcase. She looked at Cidinha with scorn. She mounted the train, and it left.

Cidinha didn't know what to say to the police. How could she explain Pig Latin? She was taken to jail and booked. They called her the worst names. And she stayed locked up for three days. They let her smoke. She smoked like mad, inhaling, crushing the cigarettes on the cement floor. There was a fat cockroach crawling along the floor.

Finally they let her go. She took the next train to Rio. She had washed her face, she wasn't a prostitute anymore. What was bothering her was the following: when the two had spoken of raping her, she had wanted to be raped. She was shameless. Danay lay maay aay ore-whay. That was what she had discovered. Humiliation.

She arrived in Rio exhausted. She went to an inexpensive hotel. She quickly realized that she had missed her plane. At the airport she bought a new ticket.

And she walked through the streets of Copacabana, desolate she, desolate Copacabana.

It was on the corner of Rua Figueiredo Magalhães that she saw a newsstand. And hanging there the newspaper *O Dia*. She couldn't have said why she bought it.

In black headlines were the words: "Girl Raped and Killed in Train."

She trembled all over. It had happened, then. And to the girl who had despised her.

She began to cry there in the street. She threw away the damned newspaper. She didn't want to know the details. She thought:

"Atefay siay placableimay."

Fate is implacable.



BETTER THAN TO BURN

She was tall, strong, and hairy. Mother Clara had a dark stubble and deep black eyes.

She had entered the convent at the will of her family: they wished to see her sheltered in the bosom of God. She obeyed.

She fulfilled her obligations without complaint. She had many obligations. And then there were prayers. She prayed with fervor.

And she went to confession every day. Every day the white host that crumbled apart in one's mouth.

But she began to get tired of living only among women. Women, women, women. She chose a friend as a confidant. She told her that she couldn't stand it anymore. Her friend counseled her:

"Mortify the body."

So she began to sleep on cold flagstones. And whipped herself with a scourge. It was useless. She just caught terrible colds and got all covered with welts.

She confessed to the priest. He ordered her to continue to mortify herself. She continued.

But at the moment in which the priest touched her mouth to give her the host, she had to control herself in order not to bite his hand. He noticed this but said nothing. There was a silent pact between them. Both mortified themselves.