

**Locker K-19.** In the taxi, Valdomiro Cardoso passed by the Basílica and recalled the passage of Our Lady of Nazareth. Now, over for another year. The driver commented on the mess left by the pilgrims. Tomorrow it'll be clean again, he said, looking at the big wheel in the park and remembering his times as a child. He got off at Hildegardo Nunes bus terminus. Goes directly to the lockers. Cautiously, looking around, no-one seems to be interested in him. He put the key in, opened, and, at the back, found a bag, one of those travelling bags, well used. When he went to pay he said he had lost the receipt. It was cheap. It must have been left yesterday, last night. Keeping his curiosity in check, he took another taxi and headed for Harbour station. Few people. Fewer tourists. I wonder how this place keeps itself going, he thought. He stayed outside, making the most of the end of the afternoon, high tide, pleasant breeze. He sat at one of the tables at Capone. He waited for the waiter to serve him and withdraw. He opened the bag. He found a simple change of clothing, of cheap material, and an envelope, unaddressed. And now? He wasn't certain. He should have left everything where it was. Been honest. He shouldn't have gone meddling. Thankfully, there was no money or documents. But what about this envelope? To open it or not?

There was a letter, handwritten, one sheet. And another envelope. Inside, various newspaper clippings. Photographs of documents. A few notes. He read.

*Netinho, read this carefully. What you are going to see below might seem shocking, even weird for you who has led a quiet life in Castanhal. In the past couple of years, you have no idea, I have been there a few times, and looked for you. I know you work at OK Autospares, but those times you weren't there and we couldn't talk. What follows is the value of my life and the purpose that I have decided to give to it. You might think it strange, so long afterwards and with no contact, putting these papers into your hands, but it's just that I need to trust in someone and I chose you. You remembered our friendship, since college. We had to leave Castanhal in a hurry and I continued my life in Belém, but I never forgot about you, someone for whom I felt a great deal. I believe that you felt the same. We didn't have time to develop that. I still feel the same. I am*

*at an important moment in my life. Many things could happen, good and bad. It could be that everything turns out right and I come back here to ask for all this back and will finally be able to lead a normal life and begin our friendship again. If it doesn't turn out right, I am going to need you for an apparently straightforward job, but of great importance to me. It's easy. If it turns out right, I will appear in your shop. If not, I want you to hand this envelope over to a journalist, Orlando Saraiva. The address you can find in any newspaper stand where they sell the newspaper he edits. It's easy. You don't have to identify yourself. Better if you don't. Just hand it over. So easy and so important. Pray that everything goes well for me. I am counting on your friendship.*

*Isabela Pastri.*

Valdomiro also knew who this Orlando Saraiva was, the 'Orlando Urubu', crusading journalist, feared by politicians and criminals, prevented from publishing his stories in the bigger newspapers, for fear of upsetting the biggest advertiser, the government. Because of this he decided, with the help of some secret friends, to publish his own newspaper, always sold out but which no-one ever admits to reading. He could hand it all over. But wouldn't it be more honest to return this bag, so that this Netinho can make the handover? Yes, I could do that, but first, please forgive me everyone, I am going to read what is written there.

**Family murdered at NHC.** An entire family has been shot dead in an audacious crime which took place in a building located in the Nazareth Heritage Complex. The preliminary findings of the police indicate that the perpetrators of this crime committed the act on Sunday night, during the festivities which closed off Nazarene Square. Alfredo Pastri, retired, his wife Maria and their twins Daniela and Marcella, in addition to the housemaid Maria das Dores and the building's doorman Walter Vasconcellos, were shot dead with large calibre bullets. The bodies were found following an alert from a neighbour, who sensed a bad smell coming from the

apartment. Apparently the perpetrators forced the doorman to take them to the 12th floor of the Queen Vesper building, where the slaughter took place. According to residents, who did not wish to be named, the family was amiable, and Maria, who was a seamstress, received clients at her home. The doorman was well trusted and had worked in the area for more than five years. Also, according to the residents, there are two surviving children who were not at the home at the time, a son who lives abroad and a daughter, Isabela, whose whereabouts are unknown. Detective Gláucio Lima, who is in charge of the case, said that his investigation was in progress and he could not say anything more. Access to the apartment has been restricted to allow the police forensic services to search for fingerprints and other clues. The Pastrri family, according to the doorman who works during the day, was originally from Castanhal, but had been living in Belém for many years.

Fred was shaking when he finished and had confirmed details by reading other newspapers. He did not notice another report, about the discovery of the carcass of a burnt-out Golf, with three burnt bodies, at Che Guevara informal settlement, possibly related to drug trafficking. He cried. He recalled the events clearly, so long ago. He felt angry at himself for not having been with his sister. Then he felt angry with her for not having forgotten and for blundering ahead, even without him. Now, his whole family had been murdered. His sisters had nothing to do with this. And what had Isabela done to cause this slaughter? The past, the blood flowing, everything was beginning to collapse around him, he who had been in the comfort of an apartment facing Central Park only a few hours before. He needed to find Isabela and decide to press on or to run away, to disappear. He had some money put away in the United States. He could take his sister there. He could organise a green card and they could forget everything. Begin a new life, far from the shame. And to press on, would that be the right thing to do? That man had killed all the family, and you, coward, you want to run away, save your skin? One way or the other, he had to find Isabela. She should have been killed. She had escaped, I don't know how. But the risk she ran had not disappeared. He went to his laptop to open his e-mails.

*Sauna privée.* Carlito knew the owners. They owed him favours. He could use the sauna whenever he wanted. On Monday, for example, specially for him and his friends. He said that, as an artist, his Sunday was on Mondays. He worked all weekend, as a promoter in gay bars, where he did sporadic cross-dressing numbers, and pimped girls for the bosses. He had a book, noting the meeting, and received a percentage. Discretion was his greatest asset. He knew that it was the soul of business. He had his contacts, now and again he would travel inland and bring girls. He gave them shopping malls, education, learning. Some of them even managed to get married. Others went back. Others disappeared. They wanted to spread their wings. Fuck them. They became street whores. During that time of all the hookers the only one who was truly different was Sílvia, if that was her real name. She never gave her address. She seemed middle class, intelligent, educated. She said she liked money. But they all say that. I had to teach her a lot of things. She was a virgin. I didn't believe it, but it was true. A cherry that was sold for a great deal. And she was ambitious. Take me to the bosses. I want the richest ones. Don't you have politicians? They're the best. They pay their dues. But after a meeting with Jamelott she disappeared. She didn't even answer her cell, the bitch, ungrateful. I bet she's sucking the cocks of all those white-bellies and raking it in. She should pay me what she owes. If she hadn't been on my books she would be a worthless whore.

He was with Dudu and Esteves, who had brought a boy to entertain him, one of those who seemed a bit out of it, pretended not to know anything, but can really perform when the time comes. That Esteves likes to pretend she knows nothing, understands nothing, stupid, stupid, stupid, I thought. The attendant switches on the sauna and goes back to the reception. Discreet, him. Damn, shit, aren't you two going to leave me in peace here in the sauna? I also want to relax, boneheads! They leave. Completely naked. The boy

hiding his cock, becoming embarrassed. What's your name? Dioclécio. What? Dioclécio? Fuck, what sort of screwed up name is that? It sounds like some sort of disinfectant. So far away, man, sitting there like you're frightened... I leave you with those queers... Don't you want to come closer?

The door of the sauna was open. The attendant, with a frightened expression. Behind him, a man in black. Revolver at the attendant's back. Who's Carlito? No-one spoke. Who is Carlito, dammit! The bastards looked at me. The whole world imploded. Come here, you, shit faggot. Come here, dammit! What have I done? Don't you know. The pistol whip catches him between temple and nose, grazing, cutting and hurting. I didn't do anything! I'm just some poor bastard! Another pistol whipping. What have I done? Again, I'm only going to ask you once, okay? Only once. Where can I find Isabela Pastri? Who? Kick in the face. Kick in the back. I'm going to give you a chance. I think it's your last one. Who is Isabela Pastri? I swear that I don't know. I've never heard that name. Isabela? For God's sake, if I knew I would tell you so that you stop hitting me. Motherfucker, my patience is finished! Shot in the knee. A hole. Intense pain. He starts screaming, crying and groaning. Kick in the knee. The others beg, scream, plead to not do any more. Carlito, for the love of God, tell him quickly who this Isabela is. In the desperate plea, a mistaken interpretation, as if he really knew who she was. You tricked me, you worm? No, I swear. I don't know. I don't know and I can't make it up because I don't know who she is. Damn, you're making things much more difficult. Don't you like living? Do you want to live? Then talk, bonehead. Talk before your time runs out. One shot and Esteves falls with a bullet in the head. I'm going to ask you again. Where can I find Isabela Pastri? One shot kills Dioclécio. Bullet in the back of the head. The attendant says everyone must just stay calm. A shot in the head. Dudu begins shitting all over the place. Putrid stench in that ambience of steam and heat. Talk, worm! Tell him because I want to live! Your friend is scared, faggot. It's up to you. Are you going to talk? Listen sir, I swear that I don't know her. I've never pimped any whore with that name. I've no girlfriend called Isabela. Okay. A shot in Dudu. The rest of the magazine into Carlito. He left. Closed everything. Got on

his motorbike. Headed off, stopped and called. Boss, nothing doing. That faggot really didn't know. Yes, I did the job. All clean. Waiting for your instructions. Yes sir. See you later.

**Isabela Pastri.** I never forgot. On the contrary. Every day of my life I remember it. Fred and me. At the mill with mom and dad. Those men came. They hit him. Raped her. As I write I see those scenes over and over again in slow motion. I will never forget that face. That man. We ran away to Belém. I stayed silent a long while. There was nothing to be said. Gradually things returned to normal. Normal? It was never normal. Nor with Fred, in his own way. My father never walked again. Nor worked. Nor left home. The new home. That apartment in Nazareth. The day-to-day sadness. Always. Day after day. Mom made friends in the square out front. She began to sew. Dondinha with us. I grew up, seeing people, and the memory ever more vivid. I wanted to know the reason. My parents said nothing. Dondinha was forced to, one day. She said the name of that man. Wlamir Turvel. My father had a sawmill in Castanhal. There were illegal shipments. My father was caught in the act. He was squeezed. There was disagreement over the price. My father was stubborn. He dug his heels in. Turvel had a judge friend. He drew up a deed of sale. Forced my father to sign. The old man took it, but said no. He changed his mind when my mother was raped. We lost everything. The sawmill was what we had. And the apartment which was an investment. And disability benefits. And mom's sewing. No-one to turn to. The two of them had come from the interior of Paraná. Without family. Lovers. They got married in Castanhal. Father sold the truck. Bought the land at the mill. And the twins? Are they children of father or of Turvel's rape? That was never explained. It was part of the tragedy. Of my vengeance. Mine. Only mine. Fred's, also. Two against the world. But his head is more in the clouds. Mine is weighed down with hatred. My life is not like that of others. My life is my vengeance. That's what keeps me going. Alive. And, with every piece of news