



# Short stories

Raquel Couto Antelo



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## **Why do you love me?**

- Hi! – he said coming in.
  
- Hi! – she said from the ironing room – so there were a lot of people in Maria's?
  
- I'm late – he said putting the bags on the table – when I arrived there were only two customers and I waited, but one of them bought almost the whole grocery – looking in the oven – did you have to get lunch? I should have come, we only needed bread.
  
- Can I see remorse in your words? – she said smiling.
  
- You always have to get lunch, haven't you? – he said sadly.
  
- Yes – she said without compassion.
  
- Our neighbour from the fifth floor came in and started to talk to another woman in there.

- Aha – she said.
  
- I cannot say how it started or what made me pay attention to them, you just know me; I'm always in my world.
  
- Yes, sure – she said smiling, almost laughing.
  
- Our neighbour was angry, she didn't stop moaning about her husband, what she is going to talk about, that's why I still don't know how I paid attention, she is always moaning about her husband.

She was smiling and waiting.

- I suppose it was something the other woman said, something about don't appreciate the things we have, nor flowers, nor romantic dinners. The other woman said that her husband was so considerate – he said imitating the woman.

She smiled.

- The one Maria was serving said that her husband was a gentleman too, and for the first time I realized that our neighbour was really suffering. Then I thought about you, sometimes I don't take care of you; perhaps I don't pay attention enough. You never say anything and... Well, when I was coming up stairs I thought that you probably were suffering too. Do you love me?
- Yes, of course, I thought I showed it every day, of course I love you – she said.
- Yes, you show me your love every day but I'm afraid of not showing my love for you; why do you love me? I never bring flowers not even in your birthday. You never forget my birthday.
- No, I never do, but I had better memory than you – she said.



- I should remember, these are important things – he said seriously.
- It's a day like the others – she said.
- It's the most important day in my life, don't request me the divorce. I bought a diary.

She smiled.

- I'm serious! – he said taking off the diary from the bag – I'll never forget anything, I promise, why do you love me?

She smiled.

- Because even in my huge memory I can't find a single time, since I met you, that I had needed you close to me and I didn't have you. That's why I love you.

## Survivor

I, I arrived after a shipwreck, the one of the ship I was in. It was a Portuguese ship; not me, I am from the South. Illegal, of course. It happened in November, we were piled into the ship's hold. Well, it started time before, when they kidnapped us; I really didn't want to come but that's how things are. At first it was calm but the sea broke and the ship listed to port, we were spread all around in few seconds. I haven't seen them again, we knew since we were children; some of them were my brothers. I try to hear from them... I hope they are fine.

Here I am now, ok after all; but it wasn't easy. This was not what I had dreamt of. I run aground on Orzán beach, I had so much water inside that drying took several years. Gossip has it that the salt comes out when I get angry. They took me to the council's warehouse. I was there until they decided what to do with me. I was almost resigned myself to stay there for the rest of my life. At the end they took me to the garden, they put me close to a dilapidated bench and turned me into what I am. I would like to be on the prom, beside the sea, the beautiful sea, yes, the sea. But

it had to be here. The ones on the Ánimas split their sides laughing at me.

During this years I have seen lots of things, I am almost unshockable. Now, I prefer relaxing things; gossip basically, with the strawberry boy. We two are studying the best way to get the afternoon girl involved with the gardener. They look each other with so much tenderness. It's so romantic!

## **Diana the hunter**

Mummy always let me go out to play. She doesn't say anything, just smiles. She doesn't talk too much, well, she really can't. She only talks her funny ways, I can hardly teach her. And even so, she is great. Today we will go to the aquarium. We go there very often, across the mountain. It's very easy go down and the carer never tells us off.

I don't like rain; I don't like it at all. Water is terrifying, when mum wants to bath me I always try to run away but, in the end, she persuades me. When it's raining I go up stairs to play with my neighbours, they are little but fantastic. We play run and catching and, although they cheat all the time, I always win.

Once in the street we go along Cervantes street to Hércules Avenue and then, then comes the real difficult thing, cross the promenade. We are big, tall, yes we are, but they don't see us. They drive too fast. One day, mum got the fright of her life; she was on her daily walk in the promenade. I'd forgot to ask for permission, I crossed; she tried to warn me her way, she can't say

my name. I run and... she didn't shout at me. She never tells me off even though sometimes...

I rather go late, everything is quiet and mum doesn't have to wait for me to have dinner. The carer makes as we were not there, he keeps on working. I like seals; we always go to see them. They like water and the true is that it seems so enjoyable watching them swim, dive, play with the ball...

We amuse people, they take photos; mum has a lot of pictures of me and sometimes, when she has nothing to do, comes behind me to watch if I'm playing pranks.

- So you are Diana – tells me the visitor while stroking me – you might be a good hunter ¿aren't you?

- That was what I thought, but one day I went up stairs and there she was, playing with the mice – mummy said laughing.

## **Interesting things always happen in foggy days**

“Interesting things always happen in foggy days” she said hours before as a spell; but she was not enthusiastic nor half-heartedly. She moved leading by the crowd, without feeling. The sardines didn't taste as before, the smoke didn't smell as before and the bonfires weren't as warm as before. The city moved slow motion around her involved in a purifying smoke, exorcizing fortune spells and impossible wishes.

Monte Alto's Caribbean played the soundtrack that led her to dreamland. She saw them in a hurry at midnight to burn the accidents, the dismissals, the robberies, the forgotten, the loveliness... She remained disconnected, watching the scene from another dimension.

It was that hand grabbing her leg that gave her back to reality. She looked at him. She smiled playing him down, let go of his hand trying to go back to her trance. He insisted. She looked at him again. “Too handsome to pay me attention without alcohol” she thought. He smiled asking for attention.

At last, she sat down close to him. He was not given every help, but he didn't matter; he even got a beautiful smile from the distrust. She said goodbye before the night ended. "Too handsome to pay me attention without alcohol" she thought again watching him vanish in the fog. She would like to play him down.

One day she saw him again. "He will not remember me" she thought, as he was getting closer. She looked at him. He smiled asking for attention.

## **It's moving!**

- It's moving! – she said excited – have you seen it, Lúia? It's moving!

Lúia looked at her restless while the tractor ploughed the threshing floor. All her savings wasted for that noisy stinking monster. She barked at the tractor, she even showed it her teeth, but she only got that mummy made her stay tied with a rope to the kid's hand.

Lúia loved the kid, she played with her, she didn't scare when she put her legs on and she always gave her so delicious food to eat. But they had to understand it; there were all her savings, every piece of meat and every piece of chocolate.

Now, seeing a life work wasted, she thought about how better it had been eating those delicacies when the kid gave her. Why did she always insist on keeping them for a better moment?

- There is no better moment than now – she decided



analysing the tractor – keep calm – she thought moving from one side to the other – perhaps I still haven't lost it all, maybe it only changed the place.

She lay down and sighed:

- I had it so well organized – Lúa thought – the meat under the lemon tree, because hens never go there since a lemon knocked one of them out. Chocolate was just by my side, to eat some if I felt like at night.
  
- Look Lúa, it has moved again – the kid said looking at her – don't you think so? Yes, it has moved! Yes, it has!

Lúa didn't understand what was the interesting thing in that tall mast with the three sticks on the top, but the kid was so excited and looked at her with the dreamer eyes of seeing an aeroplane... they looked at each other and sighed.

## **It was raining**

- Are you ok? Have you hurt? – He said worried.
  
- Yes... Err... No... It was a severe blow but... at least I haven't torn my trousers – she said.
  
- Coruña pavements aren't as miraculous as the saints of Santiago, don't insist, please – he said laughing – take this, they fell down – he gave her a lot of plans that were on the pavement.
  
- Thank you, thanks a lot... – she said while she was cleaning her clothes.
  
- Thank you? Thanks and nothing else? Don't you even give me a kiss? Or your phone number? Or ask me to marry you? – he said making a drama out of it.

She smiled, she didn't mean to. It was the first time she smiled in the whole dull day. It was funny. He got to surprise her. Of course he was joking but it was funny. She gave him two kisses and her card.

- And... To make me ask you to marry, you will have to work just a little more - she said.

He smiled.

## Sugar, please

I brought my index fingertip to his sunburnt neck, not touching him, almost not brushing him. I went down slowly following the route his backbone set me. From his hair's root to his t-shirt's border. I felt the shiver of his skin on my nape, the hot clouded my eyes, my heart started to beat too fast. Bumbubum. And suddenly:

- Hey! - he said.

- Hi, could you please pass me the sugar in my table there is only sweetener? - bumbum, bumbum, bumbum.

### **Marginal note**

It was about three in the morning and the pile of notes didn't reduce in spite of being fighting them all night. Knowledge neither seemed decided to get into her head as easy as she had planned; the calendar didn't stop to remind her she should have started before and the despair was turning into hysteria. Then she looked up, saw the Delgado of Economy, she smiled, closed her eyes and went back again to that morning in the library after the coffee break when she caught him writing in her book. He went back to his seat nervous and embarrassed without saying a word. She sat down and read "wish I were a book to be under your eyes all day" in pencil in the margin.