

5 LIKE MANY OTHER social institutions, slavery brought with it certain trades and implements. I will mention only a few of those implements because of their connection with a particular trade. There was the neck iron, the leg iron, and the iron muzzle. The muzzle covered the mouth as a way of putting a stop to the vice of drunkenness among slaves. It had only three holes, two to see through and one to breathe through, and was fastened at the back of the head with a padlock. Along with
10 the vice of drunkenness, the muzzle also did away with the temptation to steal, because slaves tended to steal their master's money in order to slake their thirst, and thus two grave sins were abolished, and sobriety and honesty saved. The muzzle was a grotesque thing, but then human and social order cannot always be achieved without the grotesque or, indeed, without occasional acts of cruelty. The tinsmiths
15 would hang them up at the doors of their shops. But that's enough of muzzles for the moment.

The neck iron was fitted to slaves who made repeated attempts to escape. Imagine a very thick collar, with a thick rod either to the right or the left that extended as far as the head and was locked from behind with a key. It was, of course, heavy, but was
20 intended not so much as a punishment as a sign. Any slave who ran away wearing one of these would instantly be identified as a repeat offender and quickly recaptured.

Half a century ago, slaves often ran away. There were large numbers of them, and not all enjoyed enslavement. They would sometimes be beaten, and not all of them liked being beaten. Many would merely receive a reprimand, either because someone
25 in the household would speak up for them or because the owner wasn't necessarily a bad man; besides, a sense of ownership moderates any punishment, and losing money is not itself without pain. There were always runaways, though. In a few rare cases, a contraband slave who had just been bought in the Valongo slave market would immediately escape and race off down the streets, even though he didn't know the
30 town at all. Those who stayed put—usually the ones who already spoke Portuguese—would arrange to pay a nominal “rent” to their master and then earn their living outside the house as street vendors.

A reward was offered to anyone who returned a runaway slave. Advertisements were placed in the local newspapers, with a description of the fugitive, his name, what he
35 was wearing, any physical defects, the area where he had last been seen, and the amount of the reward. When no amount was given, there would be a promise: “will

be handsomely rewarded” or “will receive a generous reward.” The advertisement would often be accompanied at the top or the side by a drawing of a black figure, barefoot and running, with, on his shoulder, a stick with a small bundle attached. It also carried a warning that anyone sheltering the runaway would feel the full force of the law.

Now, pursuing fugitive slaves was one of the trades of the time. It might not have been a very noble profession, but, since it involved helping the forces who defend the law and private property, it had a different sort of nobility, the kind implicit in retrieving what is lost. No one took up that trade in the pursuit of entertainment or education; other reasons lay behind such a choice for any man who felt tough enough to impose order on disorder: poverty, a need for money, a lack of any other skills, pure chance, and, occasionally, the desire to be useful, at least to one of the parties.

Cândido Neves—known to his family as Candinho—is the person caught up in this tale of an escaped slave; he had already sunk into poverty when he began recapturing fugitive slaves. He had one grave fault: an inability to hold down any job or trade; he had no staying power, although he himself put this down to bad luck. He started out wanting to be a typographer, but soon saw that it would take a long time to become really good, and that even then he might not earn enough, or so, at least, he told himself. Then a career in commerce seemed a good idea, and he eventually found a job as a clerk in a notions store. However, being obliged to attend to and serve all and sundry wounded his self-esteem, and, after five or six weeks, he left of his own volition. Bookkeeper to a notary, office boy in a department attached to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, postman, and other positions were all abandoned shortly after he took them up.

When he fell in love with Clara, all he had were debts, although not as yet that many, for he lived with a cousin, a wood-carver by trade. After several attempts to get work, he decided to take up his cousin’s trade, and had already had a few lessons. It was easy enough to get his cousin to give him a few more, but, because he wanted to learn quickly, he learned badly too. He never made anything very fine or complicated, just claw-and-ball feet for sofas or mundane carvings for chair backs. He wanted to be working when he eventually married, and marriage was not far off.

He was thirty years old, and Clara was twenty-two. She was an orphan and lived with her Aunt Mônica, with whom she made a living as a seamstress. Her work was not so arduous that she had no time for flirtations, but none of her potential suitors proved serious. Whole evenings passed with her looking at them and with them looking at her, until it grew dark and she had to return to her sewing. What she noticed was that she did not really miss any of them and none filled her with desire; she didn’t even know the names of some. She did, of course, want to marry, but, as

her aunt said, it was like fishing with a rod and waiting for a fish to bite, but all the fish swam straight past, apart from the occasional one who stopped, swam around the bait, looked at it, sniffed, then swam away to inspect other bait.

5 Love, however, always recognizes its intended recipient. When she saw Cândido Neves, she felt at once that he was the husband for her, the one, true husband. They met at a dance; this—to take an image from Candinho’s first job as a typographer—was the opening page of that book, one that would leave the presses badly composed and even more badly bound. The marriage took place eleven months later, and it was the most splendid party their relatives had ever attended. More out of envy than out
10 of friendship, Clara’s friends tried to dissuade her from the path she was about to take. They did not deny that her husband was a decent enough fellow, nor that he loved her, nor even that he had certain other virtues, but, they said, he was rather too fond of having a good time.

“Thank heavens for that,” retorted Clara, “at least I’m not marrying a corpse.”

15 “No, not a corpse, but . . .”

The friends did not explain further. After the wedding, the newlyweds moved into some shabby lodgings with Aunt Mônica, who spoke to them about the possibility of their having children. They wanted only one, even though it would, of course, be an added burden.

20 “If you have a child, you’ll all die of hunger,” her aunt said to her niece.

“Our Lady will provide,” said Clara.

Aunt Mônica should have issued this warning or, rather, threat when Candinho came to ask for Clara’s hand in marriage, but she, too, liked a good time, and the wedding would, after all, be an opportunity for a party, which it was.

25 All three of them enjoyed a laugh. The couple, in particular, would laugh at almost anything. Even their bright, snow-white names—Clara, Neves, Cândido—were the subject of jokes, and while jokes might not put food on the table, they did make them laugh, and laughter is easily digested. Clara took in more sewing, and Cândido did odd jobs here and there, but never found any fixed employment. They still did not give up
30 their dream of having a child. The child, however, unaware of their hopes, was still waiting, hidden in eternity. One day, though, it did finally announce its presence, and regardless of whether it was male or female, it would be the blessed fruit that would bring the couple the happiness they sought. Aunt Mônica was horrified, but Cândido and Clara laughed at her anxieties.

“God will help us, Auntie,” insisted the mother-to-be.

The news spread from neighbor to neighbor. All that remained now was to wait for the great day to dawn. Clara worked even harder than before, well, she had no choice, since, on top of her paid work, she was also busily making the baby’s layette out of odds and ends. Indeed, she thought of little else, measuring out diapers, sewing dresses. What little money they earned was slow to come in. Aunt Mônica did help, but only reluctantly.

“You’re in for a wretched life, you’ll see,” she would sigh.

“But other people have children, don’t they?” Clara would ask.

10 “They do, and those children are always guaranteed to find food on the table, too, however scant . . .”

“What do you mean, ‘guaranteed’?”

“I mean because their father has a guaranteed job, trade, or occupation, but what does the father of this poor unfortunate creature do with his time?”

15 As soon as Cândido Neves heard about this conversation, he went to see the aunt, not in anger, but nonetheless rather less meekly than usual, and he asked if, since living with them, she had ever once gone hungry.

“The only time you’ve fasted was during Holy Week, and that’s only because you chose not to have supper with us. We’ve never gone without our salt cod . . .”

20 “I know, but there’s only the three of us.”

“And soon we’ll be four.”

“It’s not the same thing.”

“What would you have me do, beyond what I’m already doing?”

25 “Something that would bring in a steady wage. Look at the cabinetmaker on the corner, or the haberdasher, or the typographer who got married on Saturday, they all have guaranteed employment. Now, don’t be angry. I’m not saying you’re lazy, but your chosen trade is so uncertain. There are some weeks when you don’t earn a penny.”

“Yes, but other nights make up for that entirely, or even more so. God is by my side, and any fugitive slave knows I mean business. They rarely resist and some give themselves up straightaway.”

5 He was proud of this, and spoke of hope as if it were money in the bank. Then he laughed and made the aunt laugh, too, for she was, by nature, a cheerful soul and was already looking forward to another party when the child was baptized.

Cândido Neves had abandoned his job as a wood-carver, as he had so many others before, both better and worse. Catching runaway slaves had a certain charm. He was not obliged to spend long hours sitting down, and all the job required was strength, a quick eye, patience, courage, and a length of rope. He would read the advertisements, 10 copy them down, stick the piece of paper in his pocket, and set off in search of fugitives. He had a keen memory too. Once he had fixed in his mind the features and habits of a slave, it did not take long to find him, secure him, tie him up, and bring him back. Strength and agility were what counted. On more than one occasion, he 15 would be standing on a corner, chatting, and along would come a slave, looking no different from any other slave, and yet Cândido would recognize him at once as a runaway, his name, his master, his master's house, and the size of the reward; he would immediately interrupt the conversation and set off after the villain. He wouldn't stop him there and then, but would wait for the right place to nab both slave 20 and reward. Occasionally the slave would fight tooth and nail, but, generally speaking, Candinho emerged from such encounters without a scratch.

One day, though, his earnings began to dwindle. Runaway slaves no longer surrendered themselves only to Cândido Neves's hands. There were newer, more skillful hands around. As the business grew, other unemployed men took themselves 25 and a length of rope and went off to the newspapers to copy out the advertisements and go hunting. Even in his own neighborhood, he had more than one competitor. In short, Cândido's debts began to grow, and, without the instant or almost instant reward he had garnered before, life became much harder. They ate poorly and on credit; they ate late. The landlord would send around for the rent.

30 Clara was so busy sewing for other people that she barely had time to mend her husband's clothes. Aunt Mônica helped her niece, of course, and when Cândido arrived home in the evening, she could tell from his face that he had earned nothing. He would have supper, then go straight out again, on the trail of some fugitive or other. On a few rare occasions, a blindness brought on by necessity caused him to 35 pick the wrong man and pounce on a loyal slave going about his master's business. Once, he captured a free black man, and although he apologized profusely, he was soundly beaten by the man's relatives.

“That’s all you need!” cried Aunt Mônica when she saw him and after he had told them about his mistake and its consequences. “Give it up, Candinho, find another way of earning a living, another job.”

5 Candinho would have much preferred to do something else, although not for the same reasons, but simply for the sake of variety; it would be a way of changing skins or personality. Alas, he could find no job that could be learned quickly.

10 Nature continued to take its course, the fetus was growing and was soon a weight in its mother’s belly. The eighth month came, a month of anxieties and privations, then the ninth, but I won’t go into that. It would be best simply to describe its effects, which could not have been crueler.

“No, Aunt Mônica!” roared Candinho, rejecting a piece of advice I find painful even to write down, although not as painful as it was for Candinho to hear. “Never!”

15 It was in the last week of the final month when Aunt Mônica advised the couple that, as soon as the baby was born, they should take it to the foundling wheel at the convent on Rua dos Barbonos, where they took in abandoned babies. Abandoned. There could have been no crueler word for those two young parents expecting their first child, looking forward to kissing and caring for it, watching it laugh and grow and prosper and play . . . In what sense would that child be abandoned? Candinho stared wild-eyed at the aunt and ended up thumping the table hard with his fist, so
20 hard that the rickety old table almost collapsed. Clara intervened.

“Auntie doesn’t mean any harm, Candinho.”

25 “Of course I don’t,” retorted Aunt Mônica. “I’m just saying what I think would be best for you. You owe money for everything; you’ve no meat in the house, not even any beans. If you’re not bringing in a wage, how is the family to grow? After all, there’s still time. Later on, when you’ve found some steadier job, any future children will receive as much care and attention as this one, possibly more. He’ll be well cared for, he’ll lack for nothing. Giving him to the foundling hospital isn’t like abandoning him on the shore or on a dung heap. They don’t kill children there, no child dies of neglect, whereas here, living in poverty, he’s sure to die . . .”

30 With a shrug, Aunt Mônica turned and went to her room. She had hinted at such a solution before, but this was the first time she had spoken with such candor and such passion, or so callously, if you like. Clara reached out her hand to her husband, as if to comfort him; Cândido Neves pulled a face and muttered something about her aunt being mad. This tender scene was interrupted by someone banging on the street door.

35 “Who is it?” asked Cândido.

It was the landlord, to whom they owed three months' rent, and who had come in person to threaten his tenant. His tenant invited him in.

"That won't be necessary . . ."

"No, please, come in."

5 The landlord came in, but would not accept the proffered chair; he glanced around at the furniture to see if there was anything worth pawning, but found very little. He had come for the unpaid rent and could wait no longer; if they didn't pay up in the next five days, he would put them out in the street. He hadn't worked hard all his life just to give others an easy time of it. To look at him, you would never think he was a
10 landlord, but his words gave the lie to his face, and, rather than argue, poor Cândido Neves chose to say nothing. He gave a slight bow, which was both promise and plea. The landlord would not be swayed.

"Pay me in five days, or you're out!" he repeated, reaching for the door handle and leaving.

15 Candinho also left. At such moments, he never gave in to despair. He always relied on being able to get some loan or other, even though he didn't know how or from whom. He also went back to check the newspaper advertisements. There were several, some already old, but he had looked for all those runaways before with no success. He spent a few profitless hours, then returned home. At the end of the fourth day, he had still
20 not managed to scrape together any money, and so he decided to try his luck with friends of the landlord, but all he received was that same order to quit the house.

The situation was critical. They couldn't find alternative lodgings or anyone who might take them in; they would definitely be out on the street. They had not, however, counted on Aunt Mônica. She had somehow or other found accommodation
25 for the three of them in the house of a rich old lady, who promised to let them have the use of four rooms, behind the coach house and looking out onto a courtyard. Even more astutely, Aunt Mônica had said nothing to the couple, so that, in his despair, Cândido Neves would be forced to take the baby to the foundling wheel and find some steadier way of earning money; so that he would, in short, mend his ways. She
30 listened patiently to Clara's complaints, but without offering her any consolation, either. On the day they were evicted, she would surprise them with the news of this gift and they would sleep far better than expected.

And so it was. Once evicted from their house, they went straight to the new lodgings, and, two days later, the baby was born. Cândido felt both enormously happy and
35 enormously sad. Aunt Mônica insisted that they take the child straight to the foundling hospital on Rua dos Barbons. "If you don't want to do it, I'll take him."

Cândido begged her to wait, promising that he would take him later. Yes, the baby was a boy, just as his parents had wanted. Clara quickly gave the child some milk, but then it began to rain, and Candinho said that he would take the baby to the foundling wheel the next day.

5 That night, he went over all the notes he had taken about runaway slaves. Most of the rewards were mere promises; some did specify an amount, but it was always some very paltry sum. One, though, offered a hundred mil-réis. The slave in question was a mulatta; there was a description of her face and clothes. Cândido Neves had looked for her before, but given up, imagining that perhaps some lover had taken her in.
10 Now, though, he felt encouraged both by the thought of that generous reward and by the desperate straits he was in. The next morning, he went out to patrol Rua da Carioca and the adjoining square, as well as Rua do Parto and Rua da Ajuda, which was the area where, according to the advertisement, she had last been seen. He found no trace of her, but a pharmacist on Rua da Ajuda recalled having sold an ounce of
15 some drug three days before to a woman answering that description. Playing the part of the slave's master, Cândido Neves politely thanked the pharmacist. He had no better luck with any of the other fugitives for whom the reward was either unspecified or low.

He returned to their rather gloomy, temporary lodgings. Aunt Mônica had made
20 some food for Clara, and had the baby all ready to be taken to the foundling hospital. Although Candinho had agreed to this, he could barely conceal his grief. He could not eat the food Aunt Mônica had kept for him; he simply wasn't hungry, he said, and it was true. He thought of a thousand ways that would allow him to keep his son, but none of them worked. He thought about the slum in which they lived. He consulted
25 his wife, but she seemed resigned. Aunt Mônica had painted a picture for her of what awaited their child—still greater poverty and with the child possibly dying as a result. Cândido Neves had no option but to keep his promise; he asked Clara to give the child the last milk he would take from his mother. Once fed, the little one fell asleep, and his father picked him up and headed off toward Rua dos Barbons.

30 More than once, he considered simply taking him back to the house; he also kept him carefully wrapped up, kissing him and covering his face to protect him from the damp night air. As he entered Rua da Guarda Velha, Cândido Neves slowed his pace.

"I'll delay handing him over for as long as possible," he murmured.

35 However, since the street was not infinite in length, he would soon reach the end; it was then that it occurred to him to go down one of the alleyways connecting that street to Rua da Ajuda. He reached the bottom of the alleyway and was about to turn right, in the direction of Largo da Ajuda, when, on the opposite side, he saw a woman:

the runaway slave. I will not even attempt to describe Cândido Neves's emotions, because I could not do so with the necessary intensity. One adjective will have to suffice; let's say "overwhelming." The woman walked down the street, and he followed; the pharmacy we mentioned earlier was only a few steps away. He went in,
5 spoke to the pharmacist, and asked if he would be so kind as to look after the baby for a moment; he would return soon.

"Yes, but—"

Cândido Neves did not give him time to say anything more; he left at once, crossed the street, and continued on to a point where he could arrest the woman without
10 making too much of a scene. At the end of the street, when she was about to head off down Rua de São José, Cândido Neves drew nearer. Yes, it was definitely her, the fugitive mulatta.

"Arminda," he called, for that was the name given in the advertisement.

Arminda innocently turned around, and it was only when he removed the length of
15 rope from his pocket and grabbed her arms that she realized what was happening and tried to flee. By then it was too late. With his strong hands, Cândido Neves had bound her wrists together and was ordering her to walk. She tried to scream, and she did perhaps call out more loudly than usual, but saw at once that no one would come to free her; on the contrary. She then begged him, for the love of God, to let her go.

20 "I'm pregnant, sir!" she cried. "If you yourself have a child, I beg you for the love of that child to let me go. I'll be your slave and serve you for as long as you like. Please, sir, let me go!"

"Walk on!" repeated Cândido Neves.

"Let me go!"

25 "Look, I don't have time for this. Walk on!"

There was a struggle at this point, because she, heavy with her unborn child, kept moaning and resisting. Anyone passing by or standing in a shop doorway would have realized what was going on and would, naturally, have done nothing to help.

Arminda was telling him that her master was a very bad man and would probably
30 beat her, and in her present state that would be even harder to endure. Yes, there was no doubt about it, he would have her beaten.

"It's your own fault. Who told you to get pregnant and then run away?" Cândido Neves asked.

He was not in the best of moods because he had his own child waiting for him at the pharmacy, and, besides, he had never been a great talker. He continued to drag her down Rua dos Ourives toward Rua da Alfândega, where her master lived. On the corner, she struggled still more fiercely, planting her feet against the wall and trying vainly to pull away from him. All that she achieved, though, with the house now so near, was to delay her arrival a little. They did at last arrive, she reluctant, desperate, panting. Even then, she knelt down, but again to no avail. Her master was at home and ran out to see what all the noise and shouting were about.

“Here’s your runaway,” said Cândido Neves.

“So it is.”

“Master!”

“Come on, in you come!”

In the hallway, Arminda stumbled and fell. And there and then her master opened his wallet and took out two fifty-mil-réis notes, which Cândido Neves immediately pocketed, while the master again ordered Arminda to come into the house. Instead, on the floor where she lay, overcome by fear and pain, she went into labor and gave birth to her now-dead child.

That unripe fruit entered the world amid the cries and moans of the mother and the despairing gestures of the master. Cândido Neves watched the whole spectacle. He had no idea of the time, but whatever the hour, he urgently needed to go back to Rua da Ajuda, which is precisely what he did, quite indifferent to the consequences of the disaster he had just witnessed.

When he arrived at the shop, he found the pharmacist alone, with no son to return to him. Cândido’s first instinct was to throttle the man. Fortunately, the pharmacist quickly explained that the child was inside with the family, and when both men went in, Cândido Neves furiously snatched up the baby, much as he had grabbed the runaway slave a little earlier—a very different fury, of course, the fury of love. He brusquely thanked the pharmacist; then, with his son in his arms and the reward in his pocket, he raced off, not to the foundling hospital, but back to their temporary lodgings. When Aunt Mônica heard his explanation, she forgave him for bringing the child back, given that he also brought with him the hundred mil-réis. She did have a few harsh words to say about the slave-woman, though, both for running away and for having miscarried. Kissing his son and shedding genuine tears, Cândido Neves, on the other hand, blessed the fugitive and gave barely a thought to her dead child.

“Not all children make it,” his heart told him.