

The Competing Loves of Emilio Entaban and Vitór Mapasa

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Emilio Entaban and Vitór Mapasa were born on the same day one year apart: first Emilio, then Vitór. Emilio, for that first year, had a look of perpetually mounting anxiety, like he was waiting for something to happen: something to arrive. His eyes attended any movement. He made people uncomfortable.

As a baby Emilio would refuse to stop crying unless Vitór was nearby: he could sense him within twenty paces. Vitór himself never cried. As a kindness to Emilio's mother, Vitór's mother agreed to let them nurse together, though Emilio should have been too old for it: side by side, each at a breast. And so Emilio and Vitór grew to be something like brothers: they grew to be *hermanandos*.

For six years neither Emilio or Vitór spoke a word. This was a great concern. Doctors were sent for from the city. None of their prescriptions had any effect: mud and coloba berries and honey rubbed on their chest; wedges of lemon lodged in their mouths as they slept; severe tongue-lengthening procedures. Vitór's first words came after his family had at last acquiesced to his silence, after church: They were: "please, I'm hungry." Emilio, too, was speaking within the week.

Neither Emilio nor Vitór showed any interest or aptitude for games. When they were placed in their positions on the ball field, their attention inclined towards the insects below or whatever moved in the sky, and they often finished the game where they had first been placed, looking. When darkness ended the game, they would compare with each other what they had noticed, or collected. Shortly they were not asked to play at all; they used the time instead to forage in new areas, and to fish: by their early teens Emilio and Vitór were acknowledged to be the best fishermen in the village. They knew where in the river to find the fish, and how to coax them into their nets. It was told that Emilio could catch fish with dried leaves, and Vitór could do it with finger shadows. Sometimes the men from the village watched them in secret from the woods, trying to learn their tricks.

During his thirteenth year, Vitór grew astoundingly. Until then, both boys had been small; people assumed it was because they shared one lifeforce, enough for one vigorous boy or two short boys. But Vitór grew to more than six feet by the end of the year, and the hair on his face came so fast that he had to shave in

the mornings and the afternoons. He was as skinny as the trunk of a mabano tree, and often walked about with no shirt. Emilio showed no ability in matching Vitór's growth; though this seemed to go unnoticed between them.

Mid teens: time for the boys to do serious work. Emilio showed skill as a goatherd, and Vitór, so tall, was to tend the banana fields. It was the first time the two had been apart for extended time. When Emilio demonstrated himself capable of handling the goats without a chaperone, he tried to bring the herd to the banana fields, but the goats proved too clever at eating the bananas off the trees, and he had to take them back to the rocky hillsides.

This is how three years passed, Vitór in the banana fields and Emilio with his herd. Sometimes before sunrise they fished together, catching lunch, talking a little. Emilio grew to be a sturdy young man, as tall as his father.

In Emilio's eighteenth year, there was a development with a village girl, Lucia. To everyone she had been simply Manuel the corn farmer's daughter, with tangled hair, reckless, often dirtied with mud. But one day in the spring (no one could say which one exactly) a force of nature captured her and returned her to the village changed. Everyone noticed. She moved differently, as if nature had seasoned her blood with sleepiness. Her face seemed to smile without smiling. Here was a new creature who had stolen the name and shape of Lucia—but no, if you looked closely, her shape was different somehow, and her name meant something new. The women of the village remarked on it. The men, a little bit wary, kept quiet.

This new creature did not go unnoticed by Emilio and Vitór. They spoke about it early one morning, fishing.

“What do you think happened to Lucia?” said Emilio.

“She is beautiful now,” Vitór said.

“It is very strange. I don't like it.”

Vitór pulled a thingilled trout from the river. “Maybe she will return to normal.”

That evening Vitór paid a visit to Lucia to see if she had returned to normal. He brought her a bunch of bananas. She was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed beneath her. Vitór laid the bananas out in front of her.

He said to her, "I brought you a bunch of bananas."

She looked at him.

"It is the best bunch. The bananas at the bottom are not quite ripe, but the ones at the top are just right. By the time you eat the ripe bananas, the other ones will be ready." He looked at his bananas. "I carried them here from the fields."

She looked at the bananas, then back at Vitór. "I will be seeing you around," he said, and left her house.

News of the bananas reached Emilio. Later, as they fished, Emilio asked him, "So you gave her some bananas?"

"Yes."

"What did she do?"

Vitór was silent for a minute. "I don't think she did anything."

That morning Emilio gathered some goat milk, and spent the afternoon pressing it into a cheese. He spiced it with some basil and crushed habaña seeds that grew on the hillside, and in a few weeks he had enough to fill a small bucket. He brought it to Lucia.

"Sometimes," he told her, speaking as if he were reading the words off the top of his feet, "the afternoons pass very slowly. I have made you some cheese." He set the bucket on the ground in front of her. "If you let it sit out the taste will be stronger. But it is good to eat now too." He looked around to see any evidence of bananas, but he couldn't find any. "Have you been to the hillside where I tend the goats? There is a cave I've discovered, where rock spears that hang from the ceiling do battle with ones that rise from the floor. I can show you, if you'd like to see it, some afternoon."

Every afternoon for two weeks Emilio thought about her visit, what he would say when she arrived. They would get to talking about his work, about the goats he looked after, how years of goatherding had taught him to recognize individual animals by their coat or their call or their gestures. Sometimes she was coming: her shape approaching from the direction of the village, but no, she always resolved into a faraway goat or a cloud's shadow.

Maybe she had forgotten his offer. He changed his route from his house to his herd so that he passed Lucia's house. He looked for signs, signs of any kind: that she was home, that she had been home, that Vitór had been by, that she had tried the cheese. One evening at dusk Emilio passed her house and the odor from the open door announced *frying fish*. It smelled delicious. Then Emilio looked up to see tens of fish hanging from the clothes wire on the balabo tree. Vitór! He brought her these fish! He counted them: twenty eight. He kicked a rock bigger than his own foot the rest of the way home. He thought, all right *rilocón*, all right.

Vitór's ladder had lost a rung and he was repairing it. His stomach had been bothering him for the past few weeks and he didn't know what it was or how to remedy it. He wasn't even sure his stomach was the problem; he felt a little less than nauseous, fluttery but weighted down, sad and slow. It was somehow tied to his emotions; it took very little to turn him downhearted, and the melancholy was thicker than he was used to. He had thrown up unexpectedly three times in the last week. His mother had asked him what the matter was, and he had said Nothing without looking at her.

He finished the ladder, tested it. Then he looked at the sun: almost four o'clock. Lately around this time Lucia would come from the river, east of the banana fields, on her way home. Running an errand, Vitór had run into her accidentally one afternoon; the next afternoon he timed his chore to see if their meeting had indeed been a coincidence of routine, or just one afternoon's good luck. When he ran into her that second afternoon, it was decided: every day he would head back just after four.

He put away his tools and ladder and gathered two heavy bunches he had cut to bring home. They pained his back, but maybe she would recognize how heavy they were, how much he could carry. He reached their meeting place, but he couldn't see her anywhere. He slowed his pace; maybe today she was late. If he slowed himself enough, she would catch up: it was a matter of mathematics. He took half steps and then quarter steps. He wanted to set his bananas down, but he didn't dare, because if that were the moment she spotted him, she might think him lazy or weak. He stopped altogether and pretended to look at something along the path. He took a few steps and then stopped again.

He heard her voice: "Vitór."

“Lucia,” he turned smiling, but the weight of the bananas on his shoulders seized his momentum and nearly sent him twisting to the ground. He caught himself awkwardly.

“Are you all right?”

“It is nothing.” He attempted to smile, but he couldn’t control the proper muscles; he had no idea what his mouth was doing. He tried to sober up his expression, but that too was difficult because the pain in his back was vying for control of his face. At least she would notice his fortitude, mastering his pain.

They walked to the town side by side. He waited for her to say something, but she was silent and he was forced to say, “how have you liked the fish?”

She said, “there’s so much,” and then was silent again. He was sure his face was red and distorted, so he looked at the ground and let his hair fall over his eyes.

They reached her house and she said “goodbye,” and he said “goodbye, Lucia.” As soon as he was out of sight from her house he dropped the bananas on the ground and fell to his knees, holding his back.

Before dinner, his mother asked him, “What is the matter, Vitór?”

“I will be fine,” he said. He was lying on his stomach on his bed.

“Are you hurt?”

“My back is a little sore today. I will be fine.”

“You can’t do your work with a sore back. Here.” She brought a plate of rice and bananas and set it on the ground in front of him. She soaked towels in warm tea and laid them on his skin, then massaged his back through the towels as he ate. “Go easy tomorrow.”

That night, awake from the pain, he imaged their next walk home. Perhaps he would walk with a limp and she would see it and assist him. She would take his arm and place it on her shoulder: you can lean against me, she would say. Her grasp would be at once gentle and firm. He would only lean on her slightly, and she would sense his hesitation and say, I mean it Vitór, you don’t have to be gentle. Her kindness made something clog his throat.

Early the next morning Emilio picked up Vitór for the morning’s fishing. These days they were only fishing together twice a week. Emilio sat on a riverside log and teased his line. Vitór stood on the bank working his net.

“Why aren’t you sitting?”

“I can’t sit today. I tried to carry too many bananas at once.”

Emilio nodded, thinking, too many bananas at once? This is a suspicious thing: he is bringing her more bananas. He wants me to know this, or why would he say it?

“I should be going,” Emilio said, tying away his line. “I should get back to the goats.”

Vitór pulled in a mudback catfish and tossed it back. He was thinking if he should catch more fish for Lucia; if she meant yesterday’s “there’s so much” to tell him *and you’re so generous to give it to us*, or *Vitór, all right, enough is enough*. He considered how she said it: what her body motions implied. She was so beautiful. “What?” asked Vitór.

“I’m leaving.”

“See you. Tomorrow?”

“Tomorrow.”

Emilio spent the afternoon crafting a plan. He would wait until dark and go himself to the banana fields and cut a bunch and hide them. Then, weeks later, when they had browned and softened, he would leave them at her door: what could she think except that Vitór had left her rotten bananas? What kind of a person brings rotten bananas? No kind she would be interested in, for sure. And Emilio would bring her more cheese. Vitór: forgotten. And when Lucia was Emilio’s, he would show her the best places in the hillside, and take her there as he pleased.

It took Vitór’s back a week to straighten itself out. The pain was worse on the second day, and even worse on the third, but less and less after that. He walked with a slight limp, his hands above his backside, forging a look of placid dignity. If people remarked on it, on his injury and his courage in enduring it, if word reached Lucia, and if compassion and admiration infiltrated her heart, well, that wasn’t something so hard to imagine happening.

Vitór waited every day after four for Lucia; he wanted desperately for her to see him limp. He walked the route so slowly that it took him fifty minutes instead of fifteen. He would drop a button from his

shirt on the ground and pretend to be searching for it, looking sidelong in the direction she might come from. A number of times he lost the button in the underbrush; his shirt was shortly out of buttons. Some days Lucia caught up, others not. They didn't speak very much. They didn't touch. He maintained his limp for two weeks after his body stopped demanding it of him.

Emilio left the goats untended and stood in the shadow of a nariño tree beyond Lucia's house. He witnessed Vitór and Lucia emerge together from the path a number of times, sometimes two days in a row. Often they walked in silence, as if they had something to hide. Well: things had gone far enough. It was time to do something: that night he retrieved the mashed bananas, and hours before sunrise he planted them at Lucia's door.

The next morning he checked: they were gone. He imagined Lucia's reaction, frowning, disgusted. Boy had she been wrong about Vitór. How could she have let herself get so carried away by a boy who leaves rotten bananas at someone's door? That afternoon, though he had slept very little the night before, Emilio felt energized and light: alone with the goats, he smiled often, and even wrestled with some of the young ones.

Emilio strategized. Now that Vitór had been dispatched, it was his time to act. He could not rely upon his tongue: the last time he had approached her, with the cheese, he had rehearsed his words several hours a day for a week, and he had managed barely seven sentences. And it would have to be more eloquent than an ordinary gift, because the cheese hadn't even worked, and what's more, look where Vitór's bananas and dozens of fish got him: nowhere.

And then an idea: poetry. He would give her a book of poems. This was definitely the best approach. He could reveal the force of his feelings: he could smuggle her the words he himself could not say in other people's poems. He would copy the most potent-looking poems he could find onto a scroll, and deliver it personally to her, so that there could be no question of his purpose.

Emilio obtained a book of poetry from his uncle, a collection his great-great grandfather had assembled for his great-great grandmother. The book was worn and on the even pages the printing was hard

to make out, but Emilio couldn't read anyway, so he selected poems from the odd-numbered pages which featured the most attractive and passionate pictures. He copied the letters, one after the other: *Isabella When I look at your face I'm amazed By the grace Of your face I love to taste the taste Of your face And gaze At your chaste necklace of grace*. He even sketched some of the pictures from the book, which were mostly sunsets and sunrises, sometimes adding goats to the scene as a personal touch Lucia would recognize.

It took him three weeks to finish. He couldn't locate a blank scroll, so he copied the poems onto individual leaves of paper and bound them together with a paste made from crushed juniper berries and salt. When the town's priest, from whom he had stolen the paper, interrupted him on his second day of work and tried to persuade him return it, Emilio chased him off with a rock. He spent an entire afternoon inspecting it for blemishes, and then, the following morning, brought it to Lucia. He said, "I have made this for you. Here." He put it into her hand, looking into her eyes. "We will see each other," he said, and walked on to the hillside.

Vitór's back had healed, but without the insistent distraction of pain, his melancholy and upset stomach reasserted themselves. Vitór was vomiting twice a day now, often in the evenings as he lay in bed. He had learned to recognize the compressed, hollow feeling in his throat which usually preceded it, and two out of three times he made it outside. He used a foot-sized piece of slate to bury his vomit, and then sprinkled burned jasmine and habaño leaves over the hole to conceal the smell.

There was more: at odd and unforeseeable moments, Vitór would begin to cry. He couldn't determine what brought it on; sometimes, hearing of people's kindness or heroism would set him off. Sometimes simply imagining it. Thinking of a favorite melody. Watching the sunrise. Or it was nothing—his vision would blur, and he would feel under his eyes and his fingers would wet with tears. He was himself bewildered; he had not even cried as a baby. Something had tenderized his emotions, left him unbalanced.

He was losing weight; his cheeks had begun to turn inward, and without his trousers his legs looked like long fractured candles. He often noticed he was lightheaded. He walked into walls and trees and other people, and once he fell asleep on his feet, walking somewhere. He fell weeks behind tending the bananas

fields. And sleep: he rarely slept more than a few hours at a time. His dreams woke him; they were fierce and living, mostly filled with incarnations of Lucia. She ran off with his bananas, hiding them one by one; he brought her to her first dinner with his parents and grandmother, and she was bashful; after many years of marriage she had died, and he stood alone with the priest at her funeral, wanting to die.

It was the last Sunday of the month and his grandmother was over for dinner. After prayers, Vitór's grandmother said, "Vitór, you look terrible. What is the matter with you? Is your back still bad?"

He looked up from his chicken. "My back is fine."

"Eat your food. You look like death."

He wondered if he really looked that bad. Was it obvious enough for anyone to see? Was it bad enough to hope for sympathy and concern? Because sympathy and love are like parallel vines: they help each other grow. Maybe Lucia would even be compelled to pay him a visit, to see if he was okay.

He tried to concentrate on eating. His parents were not talking but his grandmother spoke constantly, so much that it stayed her eating: the fork remained perched just above her plate. She spoke about all levels of government and about town gossip and about people who had died before Vitór had been born. She mentioned something she had heard about Lucia's family: that they had managed to obtain four bottles of wine from Europe, but this week the bottles had gone missing and Lucia was suspected. Vitór watched his plate with intensity.

"What? What is it?" his grandmother said to him.

"What?" he said, eyes on his plate.

His grandmother was silent for the first moment of the evening, scrutinizing him. Then she said, "Vitór! It's that girl!"

"What?" Vitór mumbled.

"This is terrible!" She turned to Vitór's mother: "How long has he been like this?"

"It's been so gradual," she said.

She leaned over to Vitór's father and hit him in the back of the head. "It could be fatal, you ass. You two should know better." She turned back to Vitór. "Haven't you heard the story of the winged demon baby who shoots love arrows at the innocent?"

"Yes Abuela, everyone knows that story."

"Well it is true. He is real! He shoots gnarled rusty arrows right into your flesh." She approximated this sound with her mouth. "You bleed from it, for sure, and the wound gets infected and if you don't treat it right away it kills you. You die! It has killed plenty of men stronger than you, boy."

Vitór kept his eyes on his plate and was silent.

"Your father had a burro infected with the disease. It wouldn't do any work. Tell him about the burro, Jorge."

"The burro wouldn't do any work."

"He would just stand there. He would stand there and look at his beloved. The burro stopped eating. He wouldn't pull anything or carry anything, no matter how much you whipped him. The animal loved the whip! And he kept the other animals up at night with a terrible moaning."

"Yes, the moaning was awful," said his father.

"Does the boy cry in his sleep?" Vitór's grandmother asked.

"Sometimes he cries out," his mother said softly.

"Do you know how that burro died, boy? He died on his feet. He didn't even fall over; he passed from life to death standing up. He had been bones for so long that no one noticed. The only difference death brought was that his head wouldn't follow that other damn burro." She put her fork on her plate and stood up. "We are going to fix this first thing tomorrow."

She slapped Vitór across the face and left the room. Vitór spent the night throwing up into a bucket.

The next day was a big one for Emilio. It was the first day that he would see Lucia since giving her the poems. It would decide things, resolve them. He would tell her how things stood. He had accumulated a

small collection of rocks: curiously shaped, unusually colored, beautiful, rare, grotesque. He would bring some of them to her. She would appreciate them.

In the morning he gathered flowers from a sibosa bush and rubbed their fragrance into his neck and chest. He used a needlegrass seed to clean the dirt from his fingernails and the skin of his elbows. As he was polishing some of his rocks in the river, the goats began to bleat and scatter. He scanned the hills: what? Then he saw it—it was a mountain lion. Emilio had only heard of mountain lions from other herders; he had never seen one. He was furious. He seized the most dangerous rock, a pointed spear tip as large as his forearm, and set off sprinting after the mountain lion.

There was no question the mountain lion was Vitór's retaliation for the rotten bananas. But this was a profane revenge: it was like burning the banana fields, burning Vitór's house. Emilio hadn't set fire to anything: though certainly he could have. He could have done much worse than spoiled bananas. This: this was out of bounds. This was unforgivable.

He ran up on the mountain lion, busy with an adult goat he had brought down. The lion heard Emilio coming: it turned its head, keeping the goat pinned with a paw. Emilio ran at him screaming. The lion looked at Emilio for a second, then turned completely towards him, snarling. Emilio dove at the cat from two bodylengths away and landed the rock in its throat, just as it had adjusted itself for an attack. The two creatures struggled on the ground, biting and tearing at each other. The cat bit into Emilio's shoulder and held on. Emilio found the rock with his free hand, ripped it from the lion's throat and plunged it into the flesh at the base of the its neck, pounding it deeper with his fist. Each blow drove the cat's teeth deeper into his own shoulder.

When the mountain lion stopped moving, he pried its teeth from his shoulder, ripped the rock from its neck and walked out towards the banana fields.

Vitór had been in Lucia's bedroom for the greater part of the morning. He sat on the bed. His grandmother had spent most of that time pacing about the room, speaking in bursts. Lucia had not yet returned home; she was out running errands, and though she was expected back before noon, her reliability

had lately shown signs of diminishing. Vitór's grandmother told Lucia's mother that they would wait in her bedroom: this was of great importance.

"This is terrible. Do you know that? This is terrible because you are my grandson. Grandmother and grandson: that is the right kind of love. Not the kind that eats you from the inside out. That kind is good for nothing. That kind of love was given to us by demons."

Vitór wasn't speaking. He was terrifically tired. He had thrown up all he could; sitting on Lucia's bed, he gagged on the air. His eyes were dry; they confessed a capitulating weariness.

"I've never seen a case as bad as yours end up well. I have to say it. Your face—it looks like it's already lost. It's going to take as much will as you can muster, boy. And frankly—"

Lucia walked in. She had a slight smile, whose meaning was hard to parse. "Afternoon Vitór, Señora."

"Now you listen to me, girl," Vitór's grandmother said, coming at her. "You know exactly what is going on here, and I should break your neck right here for letting it go on this long."

"I—" said Lucia, backing away.

"Look at him. Look at my boy! He's fit to die! And you—you watched it happen! Did his dying make you feel good? Did it amuse you? Ah! You deserve death, *chipuja*."

"Abuela," said Vitór.

"I—" said Lucia.

Vitór's grandmother slapped Lucia hard, then slapped her again. Lucia felt at her face where she had been hit.

"Come with me," Vitór's grandmother said to Lucia, taking her by the wrist and leading her out. She pointed at Vitór: "Stay here!"

Emilio arrived at the banana fields: no Vitór. He decided to burn down the whole field, but he had no matches or glass to start a fire, and his mind couldn't seize on another way to carry this out. Screaming a curse, he stabbed a banana tree with the arrowtip rock, fracturing his wrist. The rock stuck in the bark; he

pulled it out and hacked at the tree until he lost his breath. Maybe Vitór is catching his lunch. He set off for the river.

When Lucia and Vitór's grandmother returned to the room, Vitór hadn't moved: he was sitting on the bed. Lucia had her hands folded in front of her; she approached him, looking at the floor.

"Vitór, I have no feelings for you. I don't even like you very much. You're like a dog that follows me around, except you speak even less than a dog. How can I have feelings for a dog?"

She paused, unsure. She looked to Vitór's grandmother: Vitór's grandmother looked as if she was ready to gut her with her hands.

Lucia continued, "I don't want to see you around from now on. I hope I don't see you anymore. You waste my time."

Vitór was not at the river, not at any of the fishing spots Emilio knew about. It had been months since they had fished together; maybe he had found a new spot. He walked upstream for some time; he could keep on walking, he could walk forever. The river was endless. But no: Vitór is not there, this is useless. He would go to Vitór's home: he would wait there until he returned from wherever he was.

Vitór still hadn't moved. His face looked emptied out, like there was nothing inside his body to keep it living, and at any moment the air would scatter his atoms.

"Let's go," his grandmother said to him. "We're leaving."

He didn't move, so she grabbed him by his hair, and his body pitched forward on to the floor. Lucia backed out of the way.

"Get up!" his grandmother said.

Emilio positioned himself in the bushes behind Vitór's house, but he couldn't keep himself still: his itching bloomed into twitching and then into pacing. Finally he walked up to the house, and then inside.

Vitór's mother was in the front room, working in a far corner, kneeling.

"I need to see Vitór," he said.

Vitór's mother looked up, startled, at Emilio: bloodied, wet, twitching, vacant. She said, "Oh God."

"Where is Vitór!" Emilio yelled, slamming the arrowtip rock against his hip.

"At Lucia's house..."

Lucia's? Emilio stared at her. She stood up and backed away, out of his line of vision. After a minute, he walked out of the house, unable to make sense of his own thoughts.

Vitór's grandmother succeeded in raising Vitór to his feet. She walked in front of him, at once pulling him and supporting him through town.

"Where are we going now?" he managed to ask.

"We're going home. Then you're going to live with your cousins."

"But," he breathed, "The banana fields..."

She yanked on his arm, jerking him forward, sending him to the ground again.

Thoughts settled, one by one, in Emilio's brain: he would deal first with Vitór, then with Lucia. What had happened? Vitór, yes, his perfidy was well known, but what cause had he given Lucia to do this to him? He loves her, he will provide for her, he will take care of her needs; why would she look elsewhere for anything? She must be wretched. That is it: Lucia is falsehearted. He must have overlooked this somehow. No. No. He would settle things with both of them.

Vitór's grandmother had to rest; she leaned Vitór up against the wall of a neighbor's house and took a position next to him. His head settled slightly back, angling to the left. She breathed hard.

"Damn this," she said.

When her breathing evened she gathered up Vitór and headed on.

Emilio spotted Vitór: he was being walked like an unwieldy, oversized doll. Everything tensed. He howled. He came at Vitór, knocking him and the old woman to the ground together. He kicked him until the two bodies were separated, then dove onto him, stabbing his shoulder with the rock, stabbing, driving it through his shoulder and into the ground. The rock pinned him there. Emilio worked at prying Vitór's arm off: twisting and pulling at it, biting into it, jerking it furiously. When the arm wouldn't detach, he pulled the rock out and reached into the wound and pulled at the bones until the tendons between them came free. For a moment, skin, like loose soup membrane, held the arm and body together, but Emilio tore it with his hands and had the arm free.

Vitór looked. He saw the arm tossed away from his body, and Emilio gathering the rock and striking at his other shoulder. Vitór looked at Emilio's eyes and couldn't see pupils. Emilio's mouth was open, the rictus of a scream, but for Vitór everything was silence. His grandmother entered his vision, clutching Emilio's back, biting Emilio's ear. Emilio shook her off; when he rose to dispatch her Vitór saw the messy bud of blood where Emilio's ear had just been. He saw two men, men he recognized, tackling Emilio, beating him and holding him to the ground as he struggled, screaming without sound.

Vitór looked to his arm, lying on the ground below his legs. His thoughts collected in the silence; pain, waiting, existed outside, where sound did. He thought: I have no arm. I will be an old man with one arm. But at least there is this: my arm will keep me from being sent away. I must be tended here. And maybe she will come to see me. Maybe, seeing me, she will cry: she will confess her regret at the terrible things she said. She will take my hand in both of hers. And then, after years.... His thoughts loosened, images swirled, noise surged in: his grandmother screaming, Emilio howling, the two men grunting, his own dull moan.

Emilio and Vitór were buried in the town's cemetery, a respectful distance from one another, though one service was held for them both. All the town turned out. Lucia wore a sun hat she bent downwards to cover her face; she cried evenly, with almost no sound. The families of Vitór and Emilio sat next to each other; Vitór's parents acknowledged that the cat's bite which shortly killed Emilio must have first driven him mad; Vitór's mother had personally witnessed the effects. Vitór's grandmother, wheezing out of a punctured lung, voiced her doubts.

The priest read from scriptures and the service ended. The town lined up behind the families to place bobella petals and salted water on the graves. Vitór's grandmother went first: she bent down to release the petals, and the pain in her chest was so piercing she couldn't speak, she couldn't breathe. She remained in that position until the pain rolled her eyes up in her head and her son had to reach under her arms and lift her away.