

**The Short Story**  
**“Sambista at a Bar Table Drinking Beer with Tears”<sup>1</sup>**

by **Flávio Moreira da Costa**

**Translator and Commentary: Marco Alexandre de Oliveira**

It ain't so bad. It's all in the stars. Better days are comin'. What? Huh? You wanna talk? Let me... Wait a sec', now it's my turn to talk. Hang on. Don't get on my nerves. Let's slow down. Trouble, pal, trouble, don't go tellin' me I got a mush brain – a mush brain, all mixed up, you hear, a jello brain, a mud brain. Where you can't see 'cause you can't understand. Things done piled up, my life's a mess, not even two plus two makes sense, if it's four or twenty-two, it all adds up to the same, I couldn't care less, it don't change nothin'. If you don't watch out I'll shit, piss, and step on you. You tryin' to pull a fast one on me, or what? Then why you laughin' over there? That's cool, but that's only what you think, pal, I don't gotta like it. And what I think is mush – mushy for a man. Or a woman. You ever noticed that it all begins and ends 'cause of them? Woman is man's demon. I like'm a lot, I like screwin' around, then I get hooked, real hooked, and end up cryin' at a bar. A *sambista's* fate? I dunno. I wrote some sambas here and there, but only one of 'em made it. I'm strugglin', at least I was. For now, just takin' it easy. Mush, mushy, a mess – what's the use of bein' sung by others if the samba's already left me, it don't belong to me anymore? I ain't got no music inside. Woman is man's demon, we come outta her and wanna get back inside of her. I really like – screwin' around. A woman's a woman. You see that fox over there? I'd do her good. Just for fun or 'cause I was hard up, I dunno, 'cause what I really wanted was to do it with the other woman, the one who was my demon. I'll tear her out from inside of me yet, you betcha. I don't want my mush brain forever. It's just a phase I'm goin' through – the heartbreak phase, got it? That's life, it's normal. But try it. Go on, fall flat on your face, come see what's good for a cough, that no syrup can cure. I'm laughin', I'm cryin'. I laugh and cry, I ain't got no shame. I laugh for no reason, in between, so I don't cry. Then I drink and the tears mix with the beer – you ever drank beer with tears? It's pretty bitter. No joke. Or do you think it's stupid? I know, but it's no use knowin', the trick is to come out on top. Let it slip, it's gone, you're in a bind; we miss the train and lose direction. Today I'm a goin' wherever my legs take me. Wobbly legs. My sorrows? You're kiddin'! I'm so sorry, even the wind carries me away. If it's to get out of this hell, we're here for you. My spirit's weak, it's not that I like to take any shit, but I ain't no hyena to be eatin' crap and laughin' like crazy. I'm available, but I'm employed, I ain't no bum. Well at this point I musta lost my job: it's been five days since I showed up. I just up and disappeared, disappeared completely, got it? I been searchin', but I can't find myself. Look, you wanna know something, I

never – no how – been like this before. I read on a truck today: “LIFE IS HARD FOR THOSE WHO ARE SOFT.” What am I gonna do? I’m soft, that’s all. She left me for down and out. I gave her what she wanted, but something musta been missin’. The cuddlin’ was good, too good to be true. All of a sudden, your will goes one way, your life goes another. Then, if you don’t catch yourself, you fall down and fall ugly. That’s what happened to me. I fell on all fours, I’m lyin’ around. Did my baby find somebody else? I don’t even know. But that’s cool, how did she get rid of me so easily, if I can’t get rid of her? Just see how it’s so complicated. You see? My head’s spinnin’ round and round. It takes two to tango; but also when there’s just one, the two of ’em end up fightin’, believe me. Am I borin’ you, talkin’ about myself? Don’t get me wrong, I just need to let it out. If you don’t mind, my friend, I’ll talk; if you wanna call it a game, that’s alright. I’ll play by myself, and strike out. You musta heard “Consolation,” my hit samba, didn’t you? You ain’t heard it? It goes like this:

*Look to the side  
and say yes.  
Look to the side  
and say no  
to these things  
that happen  
right in front  
of you.  
To this life  
of give and take,  
and this life  
that’s already given  
and taken you  
who knows where,  
my love –  
la-la-la-la-la...*

See? As I was sayin’, you already heard it on the radio, didn’t you? No, I only wrote the samba, somebody else recorded it. I managed to make a fortune, it was enough to buy a little house in Nilópolis – a small house for a poor guy like me. Where I lived with my baby up until last week. Now I’m afraid to go back, to find everything lonely. It’s what I always say, samba lyrics are one thing, life’s lyrics are another. The writing is different. As if somebody invented the words, put them in the dictionary and then thrown the dictionary away. Does that make any sense? Thrown away, just to confuse us. Samba is samba, life is life. And samba is soft for those who are hard. We’re kinda Durango Kid here, but we can still drink some more. Let’s have another beer, buddy. Life is hard for those who are soft. But it’s not soft; the writing is different, it’s another matter. I learned how to

compose samba but didn't learn how to be composed in life. I think that 'cause I didn't make up my mind myself, I let others do it. Women, of all people. When women make up our minds, we end up losin' 'em, our minds. And the women, too. Believe me. Oh, the pain! If heartbreak could kill, we'd already be at the funeral here. I'll tell you what also: if I find that girl I'll shoot her. It's easier for me to shoot her than to shoot myself. Well if I shoot her, I'll shoot myself as well. That rhymed. It's complicated, ain't it, buddy? Pretend you're my childhood friend, I need a childhood friend, there are days we need a childhood friend. You hold on 'cause today it's on me. Like in that samba: "today it's on me." What about Lupiscínio Rodrigues, you dig him? I always been a fan, there's no bla bla bla, when it was hurtin' deep inside, he would go right to shoutin' for "revenge, my friend, I just want revenge" – wait a sec', I think that one's by Nelson Cavaquinho, ain't it? Open heart, hangin' out of his chest: "you're gonna roll like the rocks that roll on the road." Son-of-a-bitch, we know it ain't gonna do no good, but somehow it's a relief. If not samba would never been born, right? My house is small but now it's huge and empty without her, I get lost inside. My sister's a medium, a priestess in Nova Iguaçu; my brother's in jail, something about politics, unions, and things like that. I'm alone, alone in the world. It ain't so bad. I got nowhere to go, anywhere is anywhere, anything. It's all in the stars. I couldn't care less, I lost my woman, my job, my bearings, my way. Drinkin', yeah I drink, I always drank – it's just that this time I'm past the limit, I can't stop. Five days, sleepin' around town, in plazas, I even laid down on the sidewalk. "The last step... of life... my love" – Nelson's right. You know he's a saint? He's the one who gave me a hand to record my samba. I recorded seven but only one of 'em was a hit: "Consolation." At least it consoles me. Am I borin' you? Drink some more to drown the grief. Who ain't sufferin' in this lil' world God's made, huh? It ain't so bad. It's all in the stars. Life's a game and I missed out. A guessin' game or a card game, it don't matter. In the cards of life I only found one queen. Hey, looky there, that could make a samba:

*In the cards of life,  
I only found one queen...*

It could be a helluva hit. It'll top the charts, it'll be another "Consolation." But – damn it! What's the use, if my lil' baby doesn't come back to my shack. It sucks: samba is samba, life is life. You wanna leave? Wait, don't go. Stay here 'cause it's on me. Call the waiter. Waiter, another *cachaça* for us, make that two to even it out. You really gonna leave? Stay, man, aren't you my childhood friend? That's cool, if you wanna go, go, you gotta do what you gotta do. We'll see each other around on the streets. If you show up in Nilópolis, just ask for Dentinho "Tiny Tooth," who everybody knows. Peace out, take care of yourself. I'll stay here by myself. By myself? Don't worry I'll deal

with whatever comes along. I still need gas. Later, man. The trick is not to get things confused. Leave it to me:

IT AIN'T SO BALLAD. IT'S ALL IN THE GUITARS.

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<sup>1</sup> Flávio Moreira da Costa, “Sambista em mesa de botequim bebendo cerveja com choro.” In: *Aquarelas do Brasil: contos da nossa música popular*. Ed. Flávio Moreira de Costa. Rio de Janeiro: Agir, 2005. 311 p.

**Commentary:**

Flávio Moreira da Costa is from Porto Alegre and lives in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. In addition to being a journalist and translator, he is an internationally acclaimed writer and has published over 20 books, which feature novels, short stories, and essays. As an editor he has also organized several anthologies such as *Aquarelas do Brasil: contos da nossa música popular* (“Watercolors from Brazil: Short Stories of Our Popular Music” – 2006), which showcases the historical interrelations between literature and music in Brazilian culture.

Included in the aforementioned anthology, “Sambista at a Bar Table Drinking Beer with Tears” (1978) is one of many short stories written by Costa that deal specifically with music as a significant theme. There are both implicit and explicit references to songs by renowned composers such as Herivelto Martins, Lupicínio Rodrigues, and Nelson Cavaquinho. The language of the story, a sad but humorous monologue about love and life, also represents the type of dialect that is characteristic of these and other popular *carioca* musicians, who traditionally come from the slums and hillsides of the so-called “Marvelous City,” home of samba and Carnival.