

# Lower Beira

The trip was short. The road quickly led me to the destiny, almost without notice. With no stops or bypasses.

On arrival, a sweet sensation, a home appeal that slips Gardunha hillside and escoes through mountains and hillocks of this Beira Raiana. Once more, Beira Baixa serenely welcomes me in the soft wrinkles of its raised land, as in a final shelter.

The whole Beira Raiana, fortified refuge of memories of a time that floats away, looking for a primary essence. The Beira I can only find in a unutterable haze of memories, with an insolent happiness of who reinvents the past, immaculate and glorious.

A sudden surprise on arrival. The last curve of the road emerging in a magic time, end of August, the replete air with a scent of a coming storm that fills our mind and caresses our senses. The smell of a warm land, humid, the rain drops falling, thick, on a overdried ground of Summer, is filling the air in the way that only rain in this land can do.

Rain of a sudden heavy thunderstorm, that lifts the leaves of the cork-trees into the air, that makes the round acorns drop in the ground, that rudly shakes the parched giestas and bewilders the soul with desire and fear. Refreshing or destroying thunderstorm. The people of the land know. The summer has come to an end.

As I dismount, the bell strikes in the white belfry of the old church, deep inside my memories. I knock the door. " may i come in, Ti Antonia?". Without waiting an answer, I make my way to the forno. Smells of firewood and hot oven. The masseira (wooden porringer) on the table, the bread being kneaded. "May our Lord grow it, like the souls in heaven forever", a long rambling ritual, the final ingredient to bake the bread and satisfy us all. The flour blows, so light as the sacred gesture, forever repeated. "Let's have it kneaded-"

A hug, a kiss, a cheerful chat, how are you all... what have you been doing... The hands of Ti Antonia follow her words. I hear, reply, and let myself be invaded by the soft sensation of going back on time, to childhood.

I help setting the table, need to make space for another masseira, for the olive oil cakes. "Eat – said Ti Antonia – you don't have this in the city!". Oddly wrapped up in a cincho – Ti Antonia always kept it like this until it was served- the cheese is brought to the table and at once cut in large pieces, the bread still piping hot, the butter, the olives and the wild cherry marmelade. A tasty gap in time, broken by the one dissonant felling, almost painful, the concioussence of the present.

"Look at our cachopala!", a smile, a shaque-hands, the modesty of "simple" people who don't hide the affectionate nature of a fraternal conversasion of the ones who live passionatly. Tio Domingos just left the sheep on the redil, surrounded by the nostalgic noise of the cattle bells. The employees stayed responsible for the milking, mechanised, as the "queijeira" must obey to the recent european norms, just haven't substituted –yet – the flower of the wild "cardo do campo"

The present and the future tangled in the memories of a past I wished to revive, escaping from the cruel reality of the daily life, sterile and mechanic, of the big cosmopolitan city. The time is the same and so am I. My deep roots, the ways I chose to go and the roads that I wanted to follow, as mine as the city I also love and to which I already belong, as mine as this "Beira Raiana", fastened in these bordering layers, craved to the deepest of my being.

There are spaces and times that belong to us forever , to which we would like to go back, sometimes, like parallel dimen-tions to revive.

There are daily ingredients that give their savourings, their perfume, their noise and contributes to the building of our projects of life. There are people – like Cristina Ataíde – who have the magic to make us counscious of the complex mixture we are and offer magic moments, because in their hands, in their art, the substance, the stone and the granite ate the "Philosophical Stone" that clears up Life.

*Cristina Granada*  
4.9.2002