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The beginning of Catharsis

The computer's already set up in my new apartment. The e-mail address hasn't changed. As soon as the technician went out the door, I flew to the inbox to check if I had any mail. I did. As you would expect, my first message was from you...I'm enjoying living in my new apartment. I have more or less everything in place, I just have to plug in the hi-fi. I'm tired but happy. I'm now heading out to the graduation party for the final year students at my School.

The letter I've just read left me encouraged that you're fitting in well to your new place, "the corner of your own." At the same time it had the effect of bringing back a multitude of memories, half faded but still there, linked with houses and respective moves and the complications involved. (...) Your change of address and move to a new city must have been the best and wisest decision that you've made in the last few years. It was becoming unbearable and depressing to live for almost four decades in the same city, where you suffered so much both physically and psychologically! [...] Our home is a reflection of us, or as the English proverb puts it: "An Englishman's home is his castle..." And your new house, situated out of reach of tragic memories, unpolluted by bitter tongues and negativity, will end up being your place of refuge. ...Don't hang pictures of the ghosts that haunt you on the walls. Organise your belongings carefully. It's a very calming job. Put your books within close reach of your hands and your head. They'll make you pleasant company, quiet (even better), who knows if they won't even lavish you with special affection, precisely because by nature they are blind, deaf and dumb. When you're feeling particularly lonely, you know you have them there at your beck and call and, at any time, you can ask them the silliest questions, they'll not be offended, nor will they be grumpy if your visits are quite far apart. They don't water the flower of jealousy. Nor do they listen to evil gossip. By nature and as part of their role, they're tolerant and never protest. If some nasty grievous memory comes knocking unexpectedly at your door, turn it away quickly and excuse yourself: go for a walk, go swimming, drag out a happy memory and ask it to get rid of the destructive one...I'm sure this house move and new city will be the beginning of a new phase in your life. Enjoy it to the full. When you open your door, don't forget to wipe your feet, so that no last particles of troubled memories can get in. Hard? Of course! But the impossible is not and never was an inhabitant in free will's kingdom. You must remember that you phoned me the evening before the move. Of course you'll remember that. The sadness in the tone of your voice didn't deceive me. I felt worried: I could foresee a last minute relapse...I suffered with you, I couldn't let you tell from my voice, the sudden worry that had invaded my body. [...] Some of our closest family members had a tendency to fall prey to serious psychological upsets every time they moved house. Do you remember Maria Manuela, Mané, Aunt Maria da Ascensão's daughter? Before setting sail for America, she moved house seven times! To paraphrase the poet Manuel Alegre, you could say she was *looking for the home that doesn't exist...*

I was lucky enough not to have inherited that family trait: just the ghost of the house at Alto da Granja pursued me for some time, especially in dreams and nightmares. In fact, with half a dozen

outings up above there, early morning, going for a run, I faced the spectre that was gnawing away at my noblest entrails and, bit by bit, the spectre was wiped out of my emotional memory. I was left exorcised, free of the impertinent apparition.

Before that, and still a student, I had moved rooms and street at least three times and it didn't faze me. My house on the island, looking over the sea and opposite its other twin sister, was like an ersatz or, if you prefer, a placebo." (Cristovão de Aguiar e Francisco de Aguiar, *Catharsis. Epistolary Dialogue in the form of a novel*, Lápis de Memórias, April 2011, pp11-14)