

Angel

Senhor Silva sat on the wall, his hands on top of his walking stick, watching the young girls leap down the granite steps. He loved this quiet spot, so close to the town, where he, too, had played as a child, a bower, favoured by the ancients who worshipped the elements and delighted in the shady woods and gurgling water.

Time stopped.

He woke, startled, a skein of saliva trickling from his slack jaw.

The older girls had drifted home, only Angela, his granddaughter, remained. A six year old, charged by her mother to babysit him. The ignomy of it.

He felt good, revived, his bones enlivened by the warmth of the sun.

‘Angela, can you do this?’

Discarding his cane, he stood on the last step and finding his balance leapt deftly to the ground, clicking his heels in mid air and landing squarely on both feet. Angela clapped with delight. ‘Now you try.’

The child was quick to learn.

‘Now watch this.’

Moving up a step, he sprung forward and executed a perfect handstand, somersaulted, finishing neatly with an exaggerated bow. Angela squealed with amazement.

‘You do the handstand and I’ll help you.’

With words of encouragement, the child allowed her back to be supported and after a several practice attempts was able to complete the sequence with only a little help on the landing.

‘More, Granddad.’

‘OK, just one, then home.’

Again, from the second step but facing inwards. With a few seconds teetering on the granite edge, he performed a perfect back flip.

With confidence and poise the child knew exactly what was being asked of her. With complete trust and after a few more tries, the pair delighted in their shared achievement. No need for words.

‘Now home.’

Angela picked up the cane and they set off up the cobbled street, the swallows wheeled above them, distant dogs barked and the aroma of dinner hastened their step.