I don't know, and that is the fertile ground of any story. "Imitation" gave me a chance to use a monotonous tone that satisfies me very much: repetition pleases me, and repetition happening in the same place ends up digging down bit by bit, the same old song ad nauseam says something.

"The Crime of the Mathematics Teacher" used to be called "The Crime," and was published. Years later I understood that the story simply hadn't been written. So I wrote it. I nevertheless have the lingering impression that it remains not written. I still don't understand the mathematics teacher, though I know that he is what I said.

"The Smallest Woman in the World" reminds me of Sunday, springtime in Washington, child falling asleep on my lap in the middle of an outing, the first heat of May—while the smallest woman in the world (an item read in the newspaper) was intensifying all this in a place that seems to me the birthplace of the world: Africa. I think this story too came from my love of animals; it seems to me that I feel animals as one of the things still very close to God, material that didn't invent itself, a thing still warm from its own birth; and, nonetheless, a thing already getting up on its feet, and already living fully, and in each minute living all at once, never just bit by bit, never sparing itself, never wasting itself.

"The Buffalo" reminds me very vaguely of a face that I saw on a woman or on several, or on men; and one of the thousand visits I've made to zoos. That time, a tiger looked at me, I looked at him, he held my gaze, I did not, and I got out of there until today. The story has nothing to do with all that, it was written and put aside. One day I reread it and felt a shock of distress and horror.

Translator's Note

READING CLARICE LISPECTOR IS A DISORIENTING EXperience. There are the startling faces and eyes that appear in mirrors, in windows, in crowds, eyes peering out from animal masks or resembling cockroaches fringed with cilia, faces exposed like the viscera of a body on an operating table. There are the intense feelings that explode inside her characters in shifting constellations—nausea, distress, shock, fright, rage, joy. And the moments of grace punctured by jarring intrusions, as when a rat shatters a woman's communion with the divine.

Translating Clarice has meant growing attuned to the ways her sly surrealism, which can veer into the absurdist or fantastical, is embedded in her style. The logic of a deceptively simple narrative or series of declarations becomes distorted or ends in non sequiturs. "The general law for us to stay alive: one can say 'a pretty face,' but whoever says 'the face,' dies; for having exhausted the topic." Or: "Brasília is slim. And utterly elegant. It wears a wig and false eyelashes. It is a scroll inside a Pyramid. It does not age. It is Coca-Cola, my God, and will outlive me." The most dizzying feature in Clarice's writing are the surprises on the level of the sentence. Certain combinations

seem contradictory or disproportionate like "delicate abyss," or "horribly marvelous." The usual expression takes a detour, as when an elderly matriarch scornfully calls her offspring "flesh of my knee" instead of "flesh of my flesh." A comma trips up the pace where it doesn't seem to belong, like a hair she's placed in your soup.

Over and over, these stories find their force in a pivotal encounter, one that forever changes a character, drastically or in the form of a subtle but lasting imprint—a single white hair or wrinkle #3. And the language ripples along the contours of these events, lyrical or hypnotic in a moment of rapture, fragmented or puzzling when a character apprehends something previously unseen. The story "Love" hinges on one such encounter. It occurs when the housewife Ana sees a blind man on the street as she's riding the tram home from errands. He's chewing gum in a way that seems to mock her, toppling her contentment with her seemingly picture-perfect domestic life. Just as Ana is thrown into a crisis, the words start revolting against common sense. Subject and object don't match up: "everything had gained strength and louder voices." The sentences become as choppy and jumbled as Ana's consciousness: "Next to her was a lady in blue, with a face. She averted her gaze, quickly. On the sidewalk, a woman shoved her son! Two lovers interlaced their fingers smiling ... And the blind man? Ana had fallen into an excruciating benevolence."

Perhaps no one will be as distraught as the translator over what seem to be grammatical mishaps. Why all those commas, why that face? It's challenging to carry out these choices with the conviction the author is entitled to. A previous translator chose to smooth things over and interpret the face as an expression: "Beside her sat a woman in blue with an expression

which made Ana avert her gaze rapidly. On the pavement a mother shook her little boy." Yet the original really does include these oddities: "*Junto dela havia uma senhora de azul, com um rosto. Desviou o olhar, depressa. Na calçada, uma mulher deu um empurrão no filho!*" The word *rosto* is almost always just a face, sometimes suggesting a look but in the sense that "face" also can. My advantage in translating the *Complete Stories* nearly forty years after their author's death, as her international fame and readership rise, is that a growing familiarity with her style enables its peculiarities to be understood as more than arbitrary. If my first instinct is to explain, rereading almost always reveals that Clarice's mysterious decisions maintain their power in English—as they do here, where the jittery phrasing and the riddle of the face frustrate ordinary comprehension in a way that evokes the unraveling of Ana's everyday life.

If Clarice's language were more stridently experimental, finding equivalents would be more straightforward. The departures from standard Portuguese would be more emphatically marked and allow more freedom in English. Instead, she produces a maddening effect (maddening if you're tasked with reproducing it) of bending known forms nearly to the breaking point, yet almost always making them sound *right* if not correct, as if they ought to exist, or somewhere already do. These unexpected choices often make you do a double-take or blur your reading even if you don't stumble. She shuffles words, leaves out parts of speech, invents new yet generally understandable words by giving them alternate suffixes or extra syllables. These touches sometimes lend a literary effect and sometimes come off as conversational in the flexible, playful mode of spoken Brazilian Portuguese.

Clarice's most head-tilting constructions are those involving basic words. "I knew that only a mother can resolve birth," seems to invoke a saying, yet "*só mãe resolve nascimento*" is just as ambiguous to Brazilians. In the multiple meanings of *resolver*, is birth a puzzle to solve, a decision to make, or a matter to resolve? Elsewhere, she turns *morrer*, to die, into a cryptic transitive verb in the phrase *te morro*, "I die you," as in, "Oh how I love you and I love so much that I die you." And it's difficult to conclude what a husband means when he reminisces of his sinning wife, "There was no jewel she did not covet, and for her the bareness of her neck did not choke," and describes her as "awaiting me in her empty necklaces." When there's no context to determine a more recognizable sense, the most transparent translation is often precisely the most opaquely literal.

Having all these stories in one volume for the first time in any language allows us to apprehend Clarice's tremendous range, and to become acclimated to her singular style as it develops over time. The stories share certain characteristics of the novels, such as mystical, philosophical musings, passages that read like fever dreams, a certain noir feel, and intense psychological drama. Yet the stories also offer a more Brazilian, down-to-earth side of Clarice. They give a fuller taste of everyday Brazil during her time, from bourgeois ladies in Rio and drunks at the local bar to children's adventures in Recife and the dramas of small-town life. She's also more mischievous and affectionate with her characters, taking pleasure in portraying human vanity, pettiness, and idiosyncratic fixations. This makes for a diverse, often colloquial range of dialects and voices, and language that's less consistently otherworldly than in the more abstract novels like *The Passion According to G.H.* and *Água Viva*. Clarice's Portuguese, in fact, often sounds surprisingly normal in these stories, which can make the inevitable deviations hard to assimilate.

Even as Clarice's voice is distinctly her own from the start, the early stories show a young writer enamored of words and their creative possibilities, revealing a sophisticated knowledge of Portuguese and the ability to write fluid, beautiful prose when she so chooses. She takes up themes she will return to throughout her life—magnetic relationships that flame out, the passion that ideas inspire, questions of perfection versus error, and the trouble with masculine authority, with adult authority, with intellectual authority. *Family Ties* and *The Foreign Legion*, written in the period that bridges marriage, motherhood, and divorce, show a writer in full command of her literary powers. These collections contain her most tightly constructed stories; translating them required constant fine-tuning to follow her dense style. Clarice also becomes more comic during this period, especially in her family and animal portraits, mixing perverse or warm humor with a solemn, mystical tone in the same story, as in "Happy Birthday," "Temptation," and "The Foreign Legion."

In Clarice's last decade there is a rupture. The great writer is sick of literature and sick of life. She gravitates toward what she calls "antiliterature" and declares, "Any cat, any dog is worth more than literature." Her stories in *Where Were You At Night* and especially in *The Via Crucis of the Body* take on a certain rawness that goes against writerly restraint. Rejecting concern for reputation or literary refinement, in both technique and subject, she writes in a looser, more provocative mode. She dwells unflinchingly on the body's mortality and its desires, so often associated with discomfort and shame. Storylines take

whimsical turns, as when a prudish secretary loses her virginity to a being from Saturn named Ixtlan. Sentences are bare and disjointed, as in the erotic and bloody story "The Body": "Sometimes the two women slept together. The day was long. And, though they weren't homosexuals, they'd turn each other on and make love. Sad love. One day they told Xavier about it. Xavier quivered." Accounts of the author's life break into the fiction—waiting for the phone to ring, having a glass of rosé, debating whether to watch television alone, thinking of death—a feature she excised from earlier work. "That Clarice made people uncomfortable," thinks one character, suddenly interrupting the narrative in "The Departure of the Train."

In keeping up with Clarice's shifting registers and translating nearly four decades of work in two years' time, I've often felt like a one-woman vaudeville act, shouting, laughing, crying, musing, singing, and tap-dancing my way breathlessly across the stage. Her language swings between elegant, formal, and poetic in her more conventionally literary stories, colloquial in her comic moods, stark and fragmented in her abstract, oracular pieces, and spontaneous, even delirious, in her later works. Beyond the technical difficulty of capturing these diverse voices and distinguishing the standard from the strange, what makes translating Clarice especially taxing is the emotional weight of inhabiting her characters, often moody, volatile individuals caught in an upheaval. She draws you into these worlds until their logic is yours. I found myself growing as restless and combative as Cristina and Daniel while working on "Obsession." And I knew I was deep inside "The Buffalo" when I matter-of-factly described it as "a story about a woman who goes to the zoo to learn how to hate," only realizing from my friend's confused look that this "plot" wasn't perfectly normal.

What remains constant is the intimate physicality of Clarice's voice—its strong rhythms and the way she seems to be whispering in your ear like a sister, mother, and lover, somehow touching you from far away. Part of her rhythm comes from a fondness for repetition: refrains that produce an incantatory feel or thematic crescendo, anaphoric structures that lend a biblical tone, the slapstick effect of a repeated catchphrase, or the compulsive reiterations of an obsessive mind, like Laura's in "The Imitation of the Rose." Her words hold onto a sensory coherence, even when their semantic logic threatens to come undone.

Clarice inspires big feelings. As with "the rare thing herself" from "The Smallest Woman in the World," those who love her want her for their very own. But no one can claim the key to her entirely, not even in the Portuguese. She haunts us each in different ways. I have presented to you the Clarice that I hear best.

KATRINA DODSON