



IMPLACABLE RANGE: HINTS OF A CONSPIRACY

Excerpt from Chapter 1

1. **Cocktail Party at the Museum of Modern Art**

Rio de Janeiro, March 20th

A Mitsubishi goes along Copacabana Avenue, it moves fast through the dense late afternoon traffic. The stores are closing and mobs of people walk to the bus stops to take buses that will take them back home after a hard day of work.

Moving fast along the high rises and pedestrians that are about to finish their shopping for the day, the black car continues its journey.

Copacabana is an interesting place to look at, with its many bright neon signs and cosmopolitan atmosphere. Undoubtedly, the most diverse and curious district in the city, wherein peace and chaos live side by side as equals, without any confrontation.

Nobody seemed to notice the car that dribbled the buses in bold maneuvers, moving away from whatever was in its way. Inside it, there was only the driver. A somber silhouette, opaque and blurred, behind the car's tinted windows.

Its destination is MAM, the Museum of Modern Art in Flamengo Park, where at that very moment, political authorities, members of the jet set and of the artistic and intellectual circles, were about to witness the opening of the eccentric Zé Abude's retrospective exhibit.

Quite famous outside Brazil, with crowded exhibits in Tokyo, Santiago, Milan, Barcelona, Oporto, among other cities, Zé Abude had arrived in Brazil from Germany, where he was a citizen, especially for the showing of his latest works, among them oils, pastels and lithographs, all quite interesting from an artistic standpoint because they resulted from a rather peculiar interpretation of abstractionism while simultaneously carrying traditionally figurative elements.

The artist's deliberate intention, judging by the daring blend of styles and opposing tendencies is to confuse the media and to shock the middle class, which, according to him, is "conservative, puritan and reactionary". According to the artist's own interpretation, his style was something like a "conceptual perspective of the post-contemporary era" with echoes of "deconstructivist neoabstract metafiguratism" since it absorbs nuances of various pictorial movements such as Cubism, Concretism and Minimalism in addition to "its cosmic inspiration influenced by the stars, the planets and UFOs".

It was also his the controversial series *Capillaries*, containers made it intertwined strands of human hair whose first appearance at a solo exhibition at Fehrenback Kunstsalon, in Düsseldorf, had brought chills to the somber critic Hermann Schuhler who, at the time, defined it as "the most faithful portrait that the perversion of the human mind had ever conceived(...) the

perfect symbiosis between the presumptuous mediocrity and the cerebral vacuum of a frail and ridiculous egomaniac, who now gives the final proof that he doesn't even possess the capacity to fool illiterate individuals". Abude hated art critics — he got to the point of giving MAM's administrators a list of people who, despite having invitations, he wanted to see banned from coming to his opening — he was solemnly ignored, of course. Hermann Schuhler, his neighbor in Cologne and favorite enemy, would certainly find it amusing if he found out that his name was at the top of the infamous list.

Suddenly a lot of activity from security guards took over the gardens around the building, a black limousine bringing the Lebanese Minister of Foreign Affairs and his wife came to a halt to the red carpet that welcomed the illustrious visitors. On an official visit to Brazil, Edmond and Hoda Khazen insisted on attending the opening, because, not only was Zé Abude of Lebanese descent, but they themselves owned one of his most famous paintings, the "Sleeping Sultanness" which showed twilight in the Lebanese capital, Beirut.

The couple was welcomed at the entrance of the museum by the Mayor of Rio de Janeiro, who accompanied them to the second floor, where the party was being held. As they were introduced to Zé Abude, Edmond and Hoda Khazen, couldn't help but notice his extravagant attire, which clearly contrasted with the sobriety of the clothes they were wearing. As if it wasn't enough for him to be wearing a pair of color checkered velvet pants and a yellow jacket, Abude had also dyed the hair on the top of his head yellow, painted his fingernails with glitter black nail polish and had gotten a piercing on his nose and two others on his left ear. Despite the favorable reviews given to his paintings, he was undoubtedly the main attraction at the party, the center of everyone's attention and comments. After a quick chat with the artist, the Khazens left to watch the exhibit.

Everywhere one could hear the sound of animated chatter, mixed with the *tinkling* of champagne flutes and an occasionally louder female laughter. At a certain point, the doors that led to the terraces were open, and the guests were rewarded with the idyllic night view of Rio's skyline as a sweet ocean breeze perfumed the air and gently touched their faces. Formal and very polite, Mr. Khazen gave his attention to all who approached him and did not conceal his surprise to find out that the high society in Rio de Janeiro had a significant number Lebanese people and their descendants. He ended up buying, one of the paintings and invited Abude to exhibit his work in Lebanon the following year. The invitation was accepted immediately. The event was coming to an end and it appeared that it would be the *grande finale* to Rio's cultural agenda that summer. But the evening was not yet over.

Four hours after going through Copacabana Avenue, the Mitsubishi remained hidden in the shadows of the trees that surrounded the museum. At precisely ten o'clock, when Edmond and Hoda Khazen left the exhibition and entered the limousine, a button was pressed, triggering the tragedy that would start one of the most convoluted periods in the history of the Middle East. Far away from the tropical exuberance of Rio de Janeiro, the target was much larger, and the world would soon find out.