


The  
Portable  
Museum

Issue 1

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# The Portable Museum

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TRANSLATOR

Lucas Lyndes

EDITORS

Jason Curran

Lucas Lyndes

Katie Sedat

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# The Mothers

## **Fabio Morábito (Mexico)**

Fabio Mórabito (Alexandria, Egypt 1955 - ) was born in Egypt to Italian parents and has lived most of his life in Mexico. He is the author of three volumes of poetry, a children's book, and three collections of short stories. In 2009, he published his first novel, *Emilio, los chistes y la muerte*. He is also the translator into Spanish of the complete poems of Italian Nobel laureate Eugenio Montale.

*La lenta furia* (“The Slow Fury”), the collection which originally included *The Mothers*, was first published in Mexico in 1989 by Tusquets Editores and reprinted in Argentina in 2009 by Eterna Cadencia. “*Las madres*” was also included in the Fondo de Cultura Económica (Mexico) collection entitled *Antología de la narrativa mexicana del siglo XX, Volumen 2*.



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# The Mothers

by **Fabio Morábito**

It would start at the beginning of June, sometimes earlier, sometimes later. In any case, it was hardly pleasant to be playing at a friend's house and suddenly—a second after he'd taken off to use the bathroom or get a glass of water from the kitchen—see his mother come out of the next room all naked and willing. She had to be taken on without anyone's help, since the mother almost always locked herself in the room with you, bolting the door shut. They had taught us to strike the mothers in the chest, in the head, and in the lower abdomen; but there were muscular mothers, mothers as limber as deer, and fat ones who tried to squash you until you surrendered and gave in to their whims.

Falling into a mother's possession meant being trapped in her clutches for the entire month of June. From dusk on you had to be careful of the ones who remained stationed in the trees. Normally they went about naked, scrambling up some trunk or other, their breasts swollen, and the children amused themselves by launching pointy objects at the mothers with their slingshots. If one showed the intention of coming down, people withdrew to the opposite sidewalk and from there they observed the descent of the mother, who invariably had wounds and cuts all over her body from rubbing against the bark.

It was there, in the trees along the street, where the mothers spent the greatest part of their time, moaning with desire and shaking the branches

At dusk almost all of them descended and curled up in an entryway to spend the night; sons and daughters took advantage of these moments to treat their wounds, bring them food, and cover them with a blanket. Many of the mothers would wake up later and



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begin to wander aimlessly, or with the only aim that kept them alive: to be taken, shaken, and scratched. They became more spiteful and crafty; they ran noiselessly and set up small ambushes.

It was commonplace to hear at dawn, coming from a vacant lot or a building under construction, the panting of the mothers subduing their prey. One could approach with complete calm because a mother who already had her prey did not represent any danger. The victim (an office worker, a manual laborer), gripped between large thighs, would twist like a worm in the beak of a bird. The mother did with him as she wished for the whole month of June.

Those mothers who had not yet captured their prey remained in the trees, moist and dripping and on the prowl. Their bellies were watery and soft, and when one fell from a tree a faint splosh was heard and then she would be seen scrambling back up the tree without the slightest scratch. Sometimes they would fall on purpose in submission to their fever, and there on the ground, bland and hot on the sidewalk cement, they looked like jetsam left by the outgoing tide. This complete abandon electrified the men, who shivered upon seeing them. Coupling with a mother in that state was to truly touch the bottom of all that was vulgar and base, and the mothers needed only one look to recognize those men who had fallen in previous years. They knew how to deal with them! The mothers ordered them to crawl over to their feet and the men obeyed pitifully in plain sight of all without being able to help themselves. The sharp smack of a heel on the nape of the neck was the only thing those poor souls got for their efforts.

The mothers also climbed fences, balconies, beams of buildings under construction; municipal employees left water and food in large containers on the ground. The mothers descended hungrily, shoving and scratching each other to gain the best positions. Immediately, from the windows of nearby buildings, children would take out their slingshots and bombard them with pebbles and shards of glass, gleeful as they watched the mothers howl with rage.



At the end of June the mothers began to shut down and dry out, and little by little, one after another, they let themselves be dragged to their homes. The city entered a state of monastic withdrawal. In the houses, children and husbands slowly washed the mothers, cleaning their wounds and watching over their sleep, which sometimes lasted four or five days straight. Everyone tiptoed around respectfully so as not to wake them; rooms remained in twilight so they could rest as well as possible, and even household pets maintained an unusual composure. Offices and factories operated at a bare minimum to allow for the utmost care to be given to the mothers and almost no one went out for anything except to buy provisions and medicines.

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The Portable Museum, our digital journal of literature in translation, is dedicated to finding new and interesting authors and making their stories available in English. Adventurous readers will enjoy these original translations. Stay with us as we continue to curate a growing catalog of unique stories, many appearing in English for the first time.

We're always looking for translators who want to share their work with a wider audience via digital publishing.

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