



Gustavo Homsi

From Brazil, passionate child for aero models attends Military High School, and college at; car mechanical engineering at FEI and civil engineering at FEB.

He works building banks, houses, sugar mills and dams.

Gustavo makes many trips to Europe, Scandinavia, USA, Canada and American South Cone. He visits most of the museums, cathedrals, monuments and important cultural events in these countries.

In Ilhabela, he designs and executes thirty works, dream houses and hotels, many published in the Architecture and Construction Magazine, Abril Editions. He falls in love with diving, boats, fishing and cooking.

He moves to Miami, continues with the projects in Brazil and studies English at FIU.

After inheriting a farm, he's back to school, post-graduate, specialist in Ruminant Production at ESALQ-USP. He dedicates to genetic improvement of Quarter Horse, and Nelore cattle. He has a Japanese restaurant and writes a page, Loves & Flavors, about behavior and food, at a city newspaper.

Currently, the author develops many projects in the arts and literature.

GUSTAVO HOMSI



BIN LADEN'S WOMAN

a novel by GUSTAVO HOMSI

translated from the Portuguese

by Tulana Oliveira

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This is a work of fiction, an attempt to share the Brazilian experience, where East and West live in perfect harmony. Any word that comes to be understood as an offense to any of the two cultures is not intentional.

To Tulana, by the encouragement, by the trust and above all, by the patience!

## Damascus

- Georgie, my son - said Zobaida. You are broke. The sooner you face it, the better it will be. I asked to your uncle and he checked your accounts carefully. We can't help you anymore; I am sorry, it would be an injustice to your brothers.

George almost crying listens to his mother in silence.

- You haven't had any legal debt collection yet. Sell out your stock and go with your family to Brazil. People there are having a good time, by now. My cousin, who lives there, told me that. Thank God, your father is no longer here. It will be a shame to the family, but we can bear it.

And she continued.

- Remind! You've done all the stupid things you could possibly do. Hand in all the

remaining money to Samira and let her manage it. Come on, don't cry, give me a hug.

## *Tupã*

And so, they did. George Naffah, his wife Samira, their daughter Sammy and Eli, their little boy, have gone to Brazil. More precisely to *Tupã*, countryside of Sao Paulo, where Zobaida's cousin was living.

Soon they realized that things weren't doing so well with their relatives in Brazil. The cousin's husband was dead and the widow was facing hot times to keep the nice house at the fancy neighborhood. Well, money was short, but they haven't lost their style and prestige.

Anyway, the widow received the arriving family at home with care and endorsed the lease for their new house.

After the trip, Naffahs' possessions got even more limited. They saw many houses and finally decided to rent a street corner building

facing a church. It wasn't the finest place in town, but it was good.

There was a commercial room in the front; just behind it, a house with backyard, trees, chickens, anyway, everything else for the family. It belonged to another Arab man who had returned to his homeland. It was really quite a find.

The language, of course, was a problem; everyone was struggling to learn it. The widow sent Carolina to live with them. She was Brazilian, one of her goddaughters, her parents died some years before. She got to the cousin's house when the situation was better; now, it was difficult to manage another mouth to feed

Anyway, Carolina was a blessing, diligent, intelligent, always ready to help, and at ease with Arabic and Portuguese. She was the same age as Sammy, they became friends immediately. Finally, Carolina felt at home again.



In the beginning, everything was difficult. Samira used to control every single penny. Finally things started getting better.

The *commerce* received the pompous name of "The Eastern Star." They didn't know exactly what they were going to sell, so they got a little of everything.

Step by step, they had to learn the neighborhood's needs. They understood that credit was the crucial point. It was unbelievable. The customers were nice people, but they were used to live on the edge. The Naffahs were surprised. How those people could spend all their money just after the pay day? How could then live that way? Depending on credit to survive until the next payment. Next month, the same again, get the money, spend it all and get back to credit.

Samira, stuffing the *kibbes*, used to think: - I have faith, I trust in the good Lord, but this people put their lives completely in His hands!

Samira was good at everything she did. In the kitchen she was unbeatable. Her delicacies were a huge success. It is unbelievable how a woman raised with all the comfort could work so well and knew so many things. Everybody worked, George used to spend hours and hours in the store. The girls used to help in the kitchen, Sammy enjoyed feeding the chickens.

Good observer, Samira noticed that she should reduce the Zathar, the traditional Arab spice, those people were not used to it. She also learned some Brazilian recipes, and soon the *coxinha* of the "Eastern Star" was the best in town. A delicious snack, pastry filled with chicken, bread crumbed and finally deep fried.

She was delighted with the abundance, especially of beef. It was hard to understand how women could pay for takeout if the ingredients were so cheap. Well... She didn't

ask any questions, she had a family to support, children to feed. Bit by bit she raised the prices.

The girls went to school together. Carol helped Sammy with the language. Sammy repaid with math, she had a natural talent with numbers, a gift.

Both girls, and Eli, the little boy, used to study in the store. The afternoons were quite slowly there. George - waiting for customers - spent hours teaching the complicated Arabic alphabet to his children.

He told them his people's stories, their legends. He was a well-educated man. Weak in business, but educated. He told them how important their family was, its titles, its wealth. He dreamed of paying his debts and going back to Damascus.

Anyway, George's mother was right.

He restarted almost from zero, living a much simpler life than they lived before, in

Damascus, but there was hope again, they would be better one day.

George was a good-natured guy, sometimes in a slack manner, but, controlled by Samira's hands, he could get successful. He was friendly with customers, knew how to listen, was kind.

Samira also got her space. As soon as she mastered the language, her neighbors found in her a strong woman, fair and wise, they could always count on her.

- Mrs. Samira! For the love of God, my son is burning with fever.

And she gave laxative to the child, teas, supported the desolate mother.

The catholic priest, from Germany, enjoyed spending some time with George at the store in the afternoon, chatting and drinking a small shot of cold cachaça, the Brazilian national drink, a spirit from sugar cane.

Finally he convinced George that God was the same everywhere and taking the family to the church on Sundays wouldn't do any harm.

Samira felt responsible about that question. At the beginning she asked the patricians where they could say their prayers. She realized their almost broke situation wasn't exactly a passport to any community.

In fact, she didn't find an Arab community. The majority of Arab immigration had happened a long time ago. The patricians got married to Italians, to locals, mixing completely. This country had received those people with an open heart, they had become Brazilians. She agreed with her husband, the Naffahs would seem less strange if they went to church.

The whole family was wearing the best clothes and went to the eight o'clock cult. When the ten o'clock one – frequented by high

society – finished, the "Star of the East" was open and was "The Point". Many people stopped to have a *guaraná*, local kind of soda, or a snack. Some Catholics can't eat before cult, because of the Holy Communion, so they were hungry.

That year, the Samira's stuffed lamb got the highest price at the charity sale. An absolute success.

The years passed by.

To Sammy, even faster. That girl - skinny, scared – grew up. She had long hair, silky, curly. Brown and awesome. From afar, it looked tangled; closely it was bright, fragrant and soft. Very soft. Her friends liked to tighten the curls, carefully, slowly.

The Naffahs bought the rented property, built another floor, it was beautiful. There was a large terrace overlooking the church square. Of course there are always ups and downs, difficulties. Still, they progressed.

Sammy was young, but embraced the universal law of smart women, foolish choices, always picking the wrong guy.

She didn't like watching her mother worn out, working from sunrise to sunset. She admired and loved her father more than anything in the world, thought he was polite, elegant. Her mother was wise enough to not let herself down for that, she went on, taking care of her daughter with love and attention.

## The Girls

Samira was already used to local habits, but that couldn't be applied to her daughters, that was another story! There was no other way; they were under control all the time.

When they completed fifteen years old, the city's social columnist looked for the Naffahs.

- My dear, my debut party cannot happen without your daughters. They are the most beautiful girls in *Tupã*.

- Really? What a marvel! - George exclaims.

Samira, who didn't like the type very much, adds diplomatically:

- We admire your work, but I'm afraid that is above our means. You understand, don't you?



- Absolutely, ma'am, but we don't charge anything for it, it's all for the party, their presence will be the 'masterpiece' at our ball!

- See, Samira? – George gets excited.

Samira, who is not easy to be persuaded, retorts.

- I'm sure there will be expenses, what would they be?

- Just a little detail. Naturally, the girls will be photographed by our studio; the pictures need to be published in the newspaper. We would then have a small expense with the photos, the clichés, you understand, of course.

The wise woman smells the setup. She ends the conversation.

- Would you like another kebab? A little dried yogurt? No? Alright. I'll talk to my husband and then call you if the girls are interested. I'll wrap some *baklava* (puff pastry with honey and nuts), I know your mother loves it. Thank you for the note in your column last

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