

Part 2 - Chapter 7 (Francisco Amorim Pereira de Castro)

From the first moment, our laughter and silly jokes broke the rigidity of the lessons. Pedro tried hard to camouflage (or accentuate?) his intellectual air with casual and often tattered clothes. He seemed to take pride in his appearance as a humble but free soul, a mixture of Bob Dylan and Georges Moustaki, even if he couldn't match their gift for song, because that was an art for other gentlemen. He dressed badly and his clothes fitted him poorly. And he was apparently sloppy. Apparently. In truth, everything was thought out in detail. In front of others, he proudly assumed the posture of the detached, the pure idealist. His perfectly scrunched hair and the dark circles under his eyes gave him the look of a homeless con artist or an eternal bohemian, depending on the time of day or night, but revealed to anyone that he was a dreamer.

Even so, Pedro didn't need any clothes to assert himself, he was astute and perceptive like the best. PIDE took notice of him on the first, maybe, second day, and didn't let him go ever since.

He lived uptown in Coimbra, in number 98 of the commonly known Rua do Correio Velho, in the famous Republic of the Terrapins. Community life was based on democracy when it came to making decisions, an unusual concept in those days. In order not to scandalize the monarchy, student republics were once referred to as 'real republics'. The adjective added a touch of wisdom to the name, even though they were already run like real republics. There was perhaps one exception: it wasn't ordinary citizens who lived there, but brothers. And that's exactly what I discovered: there are brothers beyond the bonds of blood and flesh.

That house was undoubtedly a 'public thing', because a bit of everything was to be found there. Founded in 1933, the Republic of the Terrapins had already made a name for itself and deserved renown, and its values were passed down from generation to generation, from veteran terrapin to freshman terrapin.

If there was a lot of partying, there was also a lot of solidarity; and if there was a code of conduct, it was guided by the intense protest intervention of its residents. Many of those who passed through those halls made history, but they didn't have the disadvantage of being the sons of PIDE colonels. Perhaps my name remains in the memory of some terrapins as a vague recollection. I certainly have the merit of being little more than an unknown.

It wasn't without some envy that I saw Pedro surrounded night and day by the "brothers" of the republic. How could I not? While they proclaimed, in the tone of those who seek the strength of unity, "We are one of the oldest republics in the world!", I staggered alone, eager for more, eager for everything. They had a bond of their own and the others were left out.

At first, perhaps repressed by shyness or envy, I'm not sure, I

felt excluded, banished from this pact of brotherhood, but the initial shame was replaced by enthusiasm for student life, awakened little by little by Pedro. So, I began to follow him everywhere, as the disciple follows the master, and I ended up fitting in in that environment.

At the end of my first year, in one of my proudest moments, and even though I didn't live in the republic, I almost spontaneously and certainly deservedly became a terrapin too. The republic quickly became my second home: it was the daily meeting point for all the "brothers", the epicenter of interaction and bashes, but where the fight for democracy and freedom was tenacious. Pedro and I were inseparable then; sometimes I could even read his thoughts.

The entire republic was housed in a narrow four-story house, tucked between a similar building and a staircase, the famous and very popular terrapin stairs. Two simple double-leaf doors on the first floor and two small square windows on each of the upper floors through which little light came in, decorated with the most bizarre objects, filled the plain façade. The front door was always open to acquaintances and strangers alike. Inside, chaos was commonplace. Mrs. Virginia, or Gina, as everyone affectionately called her, as she was also part of the fraternity, had been serving there for many years. It was her job to cook and help with maintenance, stoically preventing the house from collapsing on everyone. Throughout the thirty-four years she worked for the republic, the brave woman must have seen a bit of everything, but she never lacked the patience to deal with the boys' naughtiness, or to hastily prepare another dish for a guest - or two or three or four - at the very last minute.

Part 3 - Chapter 6 (Coronel Augusto Pereira de Castro)

Dr. Azevedo wasn't just an intellectual who believed that theories and café discussions could change the world. He also belonged to that species of men contaminated by a pernicious obsession with other people's women. Humiliation gnawed at me. I could already imagine the greatest of embarrassments. Sooner or later, the truth would come out. Trapped by my wife's adultery, what would become of me? A woman's betrayal is nothing like a man's: it's sharper, more stinging. It's not flesh she's after, but soul. And there is no meeting of souls without passion.

Despite offended honor and deep bitterness - and anger, too! - I was incapable of hating her. I suffered in secret. I suffered and loved in secret. I loved until I suffered. It sounded more like martyrdom than love, but I couldn't imagine life without her. I just wanted her to love me. And there are so many ways to love... Gratitude is one of them.

I had received warnings from everywhere, but I never wanted to see them and, incredible as it may seem, the worst was yet to come.

Doctor Azevedo had an unkind fate in store for him. No ordeal

would be severe enough for that creature from hell! And he deserved nothing less.

The day after the revelation, I met up with Coutinho. I skipped the ritual of the walk, tavern, bagaço, detour and shutter and went straight to his house. I needed to know more, I needed him to give me more details. The lights, the voices, the smells coming from the neighboring houses were all indicative of the approaching dinner hour. I knocked on the door. He appeared seconds later and stared at me with his astonished green eyes. He looked one way, looked the other and looked at me again. There was no one around. Only me.

He invited me inside in a distressed tone, because if 'bushes have eyes and walls have ears', the streets of Beira-Mar have very sharp eyes and ears. I glanced at the house. I didn't see any woman. It seemed like a humble house, with no luxuries and certainly not much bread, but I didn't dwell on it, either in my observation or in my visit: just the few minutes it took for Coutinho, somewhat under pressure, to tell me about Azevedo. I wanted to know everything, I couldn't bear to stay in the dark.

Assaulted by sudden dashing manners, 'Sal' described him as "intelligent", "well-spoken", "confident", "elegant" and with a host of other attributes. He seemed to enjoy rubbing so many qualities on my face. For all the good he told me about him, he couldn't have been a good person. Not a single fault, not a single criticism. I've always been suspicious of people like that. As far as I was concerned, he was just another one of those intellectuals with empty words, as savvy as he was a charlatan.

Intellectuals like Azevedo didn't respond well to beating. They deserved another kind of torture. A torture for egos. For those who believed that blabbing around a table could change the world and free it from all its evils. Those erudite gentlemen, with lives more bizarre than the words they spoke, possessed such inordinate vanity and arrogance that it wasn't in everyone's power to torture their ego. Not even Ramos. His character was too soft for such cases. But when it came to the whip, PIDE knew where to turn.

Instead of punches and kicks, the reputedly efficient torture of sleep was used. Without sleep or rest, and still deprived of a bath, the prisoners were only allowed to rinse their faces and, if they were lucky, brush their teeth. Their pedantry was soon knocked out of them. Those people lived on self-respect, it was what was most valuable to them. Without ever neglecting their posture and attire, they liked to hear themselves inflame, dressed up in elegant and fashionable suits, in enlightened speeches that reach very few. It was almost scathing. But the PIDE agents, between two or three kicks and half a dozen punches, promptly ruined their dignity with the shrill sound of the beating. For those upper-crust communists, it was a straight punch to the ego.

The Last Flight of the Salt City Seagull

The Last Flight of the Salt City Seagull is a novel narrated in three voices, mixing drama, mystery and reflections on the human condition and the passage of time. Set between 1967 and 2012, it's a book presented in the form of a memoir that bluntly explores personal conflicts, as well as the nuances of human relationships, offering an intimate perspective on how people dealt with the challenges triggered by the oppressive political context during Portugal's transition from the Estado Novo (New State) to democracy after April 25, 1974.

The story takes place in Aveiro, but with some passages in Coimbra and Brazil, which provides a rich and varied setting. The landscape and the atmosphere linked to the salt harvest in the small and discreet city of Aveiro play an important role in building the atmosphere.

The narrative unfolds through the perspectives of a salt worker, an emigrant and a regime censor, whose stories intertwine in an original way, maintaining the mystery until the end. The characters, presented with great psychological depth, provide a multifaceted look at life during the Portuguese dictatorship, allowing the reader to understand the complexities and dilemmas faced by ordinary people under an authoritarian regime. The author uses love in all its forms (maternal, paternal, fraternal, romantic and even friendship) to explore profound themes such as political repression (Portuguese and Brazilian), censorship, clandestine printing houses, infertility, abortion, longing, loss, betrayal, hope and resilience.

The love story between Maria Antónia Coutinho, a young salt worker from Aveiro and daughter of a clandestine printer, and Francisco de Castro, a law student in Coimbra and son of a censorship colonel, serves as a guiding thread for exploring these themes. The forbidden relationship between these two characters not only reflects the social and political tensions of the time, but also emphasizes the personal and emotional consequences of living under an oppressive regime.

S. Costa Brava is praised for her ability to combine fiction with real historical elements, basing her stories on detailed research and interviews. The book was also reviewed by Professor Maria José Curado, a specialist in the evolution and urban history of Aveiro. S. Costa Brava's prose is described as engaging and emotional, capable of holding the reader's attention from start to finish. The author invites readers to explore resistance, love and the search for freedom in a complex period of Portuguese history. The depth of feeling and the complexity of the situations portrayed lead the reader to reflect on human nature.

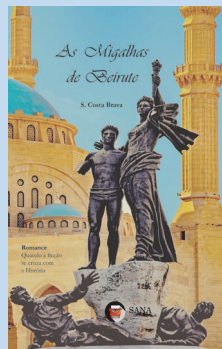
How far would you go for love? How far would you go for the love of a child?



S. Costa Brava

S. Costa Brava was born and raised in Paris but did a Languages and Literature degree in Portugal. She worked for several years as a teacher in Portugal before moving abroad with her family. While she was living in the Middle East, her desire to write was awakened. She began with an essay and a children's short story that won a literary competition, before making her debut novel with *As Migalhas de Beirute* [The Crumbs of Beirut] (Sana Editora). In 2018, she moved to Africa and the passion was immediate. She then wrote her second novel: *O Veneno de KwaZulu* [The Poison of KwaZulu] (Sana Editora). *O Último Voo da Gaiota da Cidade do Sal* [The Last Flight of the Salt City Seagull] is her third novel. She currently lives in Portugal, where she combines her profession with writing.

Other books by the author:



THE LAST FLIGHT OF THE SALT CITY SEAGULL

S. COSTA BRAVA

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SANA
EDITORA

O ÚLTIMO
VOO DA
GAIOTA

DA CIDADE
DO SAL



"Dizia ter medo de trovoadas, mas guardava no coração mil tempestades.
No seu íntimo, o receio maior era ser normal. Por sorte, a normalidade
nunca foi o forte da família Amorim Pereira de Castro."

S. COSTA BRAVA

