

The Reader of Time: A Moreninha

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Rio de Janeiro, 1885

I was sitting on the sofa, a book in my hands, anxiously awaiting my husband's arrival. At last I heard a knock at the door. I rose in haste to open it.

"My dear, how good that you have come!" I greeted him with a kiss. "I was waiting for you."

I linked my arm through his and, leading him to the sofa, said: "Sit here; I must discuss a matter with you."

"You seem anxious. Has something happened?" he asked, alarmed.

"I have a perfect plan for these coming days," I answered, smiling.

"If you are this animated, it must be a good plan... or something I should genuinely worry about," he said, with his usual humor.

"We shall go to the island of Paquetá."

"You wish to travel to the island?"

"Are you not pleased? I am certain it will be great fun for the children."

"Yes, it seems a good idea to me. I only did not expect it now. But why this sudden wish?"

"I have been reading *A Moreninha*," I answered, showing him the book that lay on the table.

"It had to come from one of your readings..."

"Of course; I am a well-informed woman!" I replied, with a satisfied smile, and went on: "What is interesting is that the author does not say exactly on which island the story takes place. But tell me: which island lies so near the Court and is so esteemed for summer outings?"

"I do not know."

"Come now, husband! Think a little. Paquetá, of course!"

"That detail had escaped my memory. And what does this book tell?"

"The story begins with four young friends who go to spend the feast of Saint Anne on the island, and..." I looked at him with an air of suspense. "The rest I cannot tell. You will have to read it to find out."

"Ah, my dear, you know well how busy I am. I have no time for reading!"

"I believe fifteen minutes a day given to books would not disturb your routine. And this is a book that deserves attention, for it is one of the most celebrated works of our literature. Joaquim Manuel de Macedo published it in 1844, when he was only twenty-four, in the same year he graduated in medicine. The story became a great success and won readers throughout the country. Interesting, is it not?"

"Certainly."

"And so, do you like the idea of our going to Paquetá?"

"The place is beautiful, peaceful... The children will enjoy themselves greatly. But I had thought to settle some matters of the farm in these days."

"My dear, matters of the farm can be settled on another occasion. But Paquetá awaits us! Besides, did you know that the island was, for a long time, a place much appreciated by the Court? They say Dom João VI held Paquetá in great esteem and went there several times. They say too that it was he who gave the island the nickname Isle of Loves. Before Petrópolis, Paquetá had its place as the Court's summer refuge."

"And why did that change?"

"With the building of the Imperial Palace in Petrópolis, the gaze of the Court left the sea and turned to the mountains. The mountain climate, in the summer months, is far more agreeable. Is that not why we spend December and January in Petrópolis? The book shows precisely the period when Paquetá was a destination esteemed by the Court."

I smiled and took up the book again. "You see? A novel can open the doors of an age. Fifteen minutes a day, my dear, and you will already have read many pages. And, of course, you will have an excellent reading companion!"

"I promise I shall try, my dear," he answered, kissing my forehead before leaving the room.

Now I ask you, dear reader: are you also too busy to read? Do me this favor: read *A Moreninha* and discover for yourself the charm of a story that became one of the great successes of Brazilian literature.

Anapúena Havena. From the series "The Reader of Time".

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