

DIDASCÁLIA

Warm night. Faint light over the whole scene. In the Upper Centre (UC), a house. A single-storey building, covered with pale yellow and blue tiles. A large gate on the left. A front door in the centre. Two windows on each side. A second door further to the right, with large window. Separately, Upper Left (UL), a sign identifies the place: *Rua Dr. António Garção*.

The theatre programme says you can get there by going from *Largo Alexandre Herculano* down *Rua Capitão Paes Falcato*, cutting through to the right along *Rua Miguel Bombarda*, and then left to get to the house.

At the Lower Centre (LB), or proscenium, with their backs to the audience, two children are sitting on the floor: Hugh and Fanny. Still. Waiting.

Children do not wait. Children have little to invest in waiting. And they'll fill up the waits in no time.

Hugh and Fanny knew of 'Sousel's fears'. They heard stories about it at home in the evenings. For a long time, 'the inhabitants of Alamo farm, near Cano, had heard some strange words in the dead of night followed by a hoarse cry'. And they were scared.

Fanny and Hugh had secrets. That's right. Children trade waits for secrets. And they know how to fill secrets like grown-ups fill waiting. They knew about the António Garção Library. It was huge. And they knew that a library is a place where words meet. That's why there are houses that talk. These are the houses with libraries. People not in the know run away from them, afraid. And that's also why, at night, it's rare to find anyone walking down Rua Dr. António Garção in front of that house that talks.

The children were there now, with their secret.

They knew that António Garção, a doctor, had his surgery at home. On the right-hand side if you are looking at it from the front. At that added door with the large window. And they knew about the human skeleton, which was whole and standing next to the desk.

So Hugh said to Fanny:

- Do you know that at night the skeleton leaves the office and goes to the library? You'll see it's not the house that talks. Maybe it's the skeleton reading out loud.
- Do you think those are the strange words you hear on Alamo farm? - ventured Fanny.
- Nobody knows. But the words on the hill must be in the library.
- What if we went there? No one goes there.

Hugh hesitated. He was afraid that in the house the dead who live in the standing stones would gather at night, and that the cries heard on Alamo farm would be like this. After all, he thought, the thing about naming it Alamo Tower and Camões Tower must have something to do with libraries. And he began to feel the cold of the night. But when he looked, Fanny was already climbing through the window overlooking the surgery. And he went after her.

- Wow! So many books!

Many were open in the middle of the table.

Look! - said Fanny - There are some new words written by hand, around the words in the books. They must be the ones walking around, all over the house. The ones that jump into the street, like we jumped in.

Hugh knew about the notes written by the doctor on everything he read.

- Look here - Fanny said - Look inside this book:

'José Régio, this physically small person, was great, very great, the greatest of his time, in spirit, in soul, in the moral sphere, in psychic strength'.

- And this one! You want to hear it? - he said:

'The POET João de Barros, who worshipped beautiful things, finds in the People the dynamic and basic element of his devotion to life'.

Fanny and Hugh knew that the dead sing and play and recite poems. And they were sure that those were the ones they heard on Alamo farm. And the ones they were hearing right now there, in António Garção's Grand Library. And they listened.

Villaret recited the Black Canticle, by José Régio.

He lived with his father, Frederico Augusto Villaret, a doctor like Garção, and a guitarist. They all came from Girona, in Catalonia.

Can you hear that? - Fanny asked - Can you hear playing? It's a guitar.

- Look at them, over there in the corner. Do you know who that is, the taller one? He's a doctor, too. Francisco Maria Roldão.

- The one who gave the smallpox vaccine to newborn children?

- That's the one. And saved a lot of people from dying. He was also a man of words. Like the others, here, at the gathering. Manuel Gomes, Jerónimo Gomes, great figures from Cano.

- Jerónimo was the one who went around the world and fought courageously for the rights of native people, wasn't he?

- People from Cano, Fanny. People from Cano.

- And that lady, who is she?

- That's another story. That's Mrs. Aldona Saltona.

- Saltona?

- On her husband's side, who had the nickname *Saltão*.

- And what do we know about her?
- Whoever comes after us will ask.
- What are they singing now?
- It's a folk song. Of this people of which João de Barros speaks. Of the people, Fanny:

*'Alentejo has no shade
Except that which comes from heaven'.*

Discreet. Hidden behind the curtains, the skeleton watched intently. It had much to tell its doctor. And questions to ask him:

- Can children know so much, about so many things?

And it would hear António Garção reply:

- Friend! They weren't children. Didn't you notice the names? They were just words. People who inhabit books. And what you heard was Poetry. It was our library talking.

The sky becomes more alive. It's dawn. The house lights up. A window is now open wide. The people arrive, filling the street.

If there is a
CURTAIN
it can fall.

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