

CARTA BANAL

D'apres F. Pessoa

Doctor Quaresma spoke of animosity on the part of the poor wife whom he accused of stealing the letter and plotting to poison her husband.

“But you speak of dominion, Doctor,” the maid objected from her corner. “Rather speak of her dominion over him. He is jealous of her in all things, mostly in that we all love her more than him. Not I nor the child nor any of the staff show her any such resistance as you say. We all love her. We never will believe such a thing of her...”

“You see, gentlemen,” the Doctor continued, “the hysteria is general.”

“Not so, good sir,” the maid insisted, “if you will indulge my reasoning. You speak of her paranoia. But if someone in fact meant her harm and she detected it, would that then be paranoia? I think not. The truth of this the father knew and put it in the letter. Why he could see it while you all cannot is... well, sir, you mention mental distraction, but of the wrong type. The motive in all this is obsession!”

“Chief Guedes, you first gave me the clue.” The maid continued...

“I?!” objected the Chief.

“Yes, you spoke of conspiracy and named all the principle actors and possible combinations. You hastily excluded me by your fine powers of deduction. But you neglected to name... yourself! Oh, I do not say you had anything to do with any plot. I do not believe you have the intelligence. But you also failed to realize that disparate actors may move toward the same aim without any intelligence or concord between them. Call it not meaningful synchronicity, as Jung, or even independent origination. Call it a shared obsession the object of which is...”

“No one can be expected to follow this nonsense,” the Chief interrupted.

“You asked me much about my mistress, sir,” the maid continued. “But you did not ask about her sewing. Perhaps you had not deduced the thread and needle used to remove the letter from the locked room. But neither did you ask about relations between the spouses. This would touch not just upon the pertinent point but also upon that peculiar point of your... jealousy! From your questions about my lady’s bed and toilet habits, I soon deduced you were smitten with her. You rely too much, sir, upon a maid’s discretion. I am done with you.”

“This is preposterous!” the Doctor now objected, his patience tested.

“And you too, sir, you loved her. But she rejected you. She was always true to that undeserving husband of hers. I heard you, in the corridor. Nobody notices a maid. You call her cold because you cannot believe any sane person would despise you. But there is

more, sir, in the heart than is in the mental faculties. The only poison is in you. My mistress never plotted anything in her life. You, sir, now plot base revenge.”

The Doctor attempted to distract them, “Stick to facts. If you reject the murder scheme still you must accept the missing letter you yourself reported...”

“Noticed, sir. I noted it to the recently arrived Simas to whom the letter was destined. He reported it to the master when he returned...”

“There,” the Doctor said, “then you admit the husband gone. As I was not there and you maintain the wife’s innocence, unless you accuse Simas, and I assume you do not accuse yourself, you must admit the husband could not take this supposedly menacing letter, and you must still account for whomever did...”

“Do not assume too much. I never did accuse the husband of taking the letter. Much less simple Simas. You, sir, it is who accuse my innocent lady. But you should know were she so inclined she never would be so dull as to use her own thread and needle else to point at herself or involve me. It was I who did it. Obviously I had means and opportunity. Yet you overlook me. I will tell you the motive.”

“Tell on,” the Chief became bewitched and started to notice the beauty of the maid.

“Only the letter can prove me, thus I needed it. And here it is!” She produced it from an embroidery bag she had all along.

“Arrest her!” cried the Doctor, dropping his cigar.

“Seize her,” implored the husband.

“Your father knew you intended to have your wife committed,” the maid upbraided her master. “He wrote against it here, he seemingly the only one inured to your wife’s charms by his advanced age. Why did you wish her ill or absent? Though she failed you in nothing you could no longer stand your wife’s brilliance.”

She continued, the rest too stunned to question her.

“The business of Simas it seems is quackery. He calling himself a psychiatrist abroad; he dare not do so here. The already scheming husband had once before asked his indulging wife to see Simas. When she complained to me of his methods and advances I investigated his so-called credentials. He is a fake! I knew he would not credit the letter and would instantly destroy it in order to have her in his hands. You contrived to call him here, oh you unworthy husband!”

The husband looked down. Simas looked at him sideways. The maid glared. She looked now to another.

“And you Doctor were jealous on this professional point also. They sent for him, not you! Did you really think one of her learning would call for such a quack as he? It would seem as bad now to call on you, would that we knew. You ought to have suspected the husband for this at least. Oh, but I would like to be able to say you knew more than you said, yet your obsession has no doubt made you blind. You too were a dupe.”

The maid concluded.

On the Chief's testimony the judge granted the wife her divorce and all the husband's goods. He went penniless into shameful exile with Simas and was soon in his 'care'. Doctor Quaresma also was discredited.

The Chief meanwhile proposed marriage to the maid. She refused. He proposed her a position as detective as well. She refused. She stayed in her place. It was often useful to go unheeded and unseen. She thus solved many mysteries.