



Half-Chewed Counsellors and Statesmen

Paul Castro

One day last week, when the heat was roasting and thirst burnt my throat, I decided to take some refreshment. I was just about to enter *Balduino's* when I spied Santimano, my old friend Santimano, a licensed advocate who was very influential in village politics.

Santimano had just arrived and taken a seat at one of the little marble tables. When he saw me, he gave a bellow of satisfaction and invited me to join him in a lemonade.

‘I’m ordering a *lim’nada*’, he said. ‘Let’s have a *lim’nada*.’

‘Lemonade? Not a chance. Beer’s our drink’ I said, and ordered two *bocks*.

After I had taken a couple of sips, wet my throat and cleared my voice, I asked:

‘So, what’s new in your village?’

‘Grave happenings, my friend, grave happenings. Our *Corporation*, despite the *Association* and the *Magazine*, risks going down the drain.’

‘Down the drain! But how?’

‘Just picture this: that Bostião, the son of our *mocadão*, the one who took measurements for the surveyor Barbosa and has been working as a government debt collector of late, came to me a few days ago with a gown over one arm and a copy of the civil code in his hand. On his head he wore a battered old straw hat. He informed me that he was now a licensed advocate and that he hoped he could count on my support when he stood for election to the Legislative Council in two years’ time.’

‘But that’s perfectly in order’, I observed. ‘I fail to see how that could send your *corporation* down the drain. It’s natural he should want to become a councillor after making it to advocate. He’s officially qualified for any position.’

‘Qualified? Qualified how? He didn’t make it past primary school and can’t read or write Portuguese!’

‘My friend, I didn’t say *really* qualified. I said *officially* qualified. *Officially* he’s fit to occupy any role. It’s as though he had a law degree.’

‘You say that because you don’t know him’ Santimano insisted. ‘If he makes it to the Council, he’ll sure as hell try to worm himself into Administrative Litigation and, as he’s tricky operator, he’ll surely get his way. Then, once he’s

comfortably ensconced, he'll study the cases in a *half-chewed* way, file *half-chewed* reports, deliver *half-chewed* verdicts and all the resultant court rulings will be *half-chewed*. Finally, all that *half-chewed* mess will be laid at the feet of us licensed advocates and, as Bostião belongs to our *corporation*, we will be hounded out of the courts never to return.'

'It seems to me that you're also thinking of getting involved in Administrative Litigation' I observed. 'What would it matter to you if licensed advocates were excluded from it anyway?'

And Santimano, tossing off the rest of his beer in one draught, told me the story of *half-chewed* Bostião:

'When we were back in primary school, Bostião, as my classmate and the son of our foreman, was invited over to ours for lunch on Sundays.

'At his house, it seems, all they had for lunch was white canjee with a *toca-boca* of salted fish. Meat must have been for special occasions, judging by the way Bostião tucked into our steaks and roasts. He ate with such ravenousness that, with every mouthful, an old aunt warned him:

"Don't gobble your food half-chewed, it's bad for you. Don't gulp it down half-chewed, it's not good."

'Bostião found the term "half-chewed" magnificent. Taking it as a synonym for "swiftly", there he was, from then on in, shoehorning the word into every conversation:

"It did this *half-chewed*. I came to school *half-chewed*. I dressed *half-chewed*." And so on.

'Finally, examination day arrived.

'Well aware that his studies were *half-chewed*, Bostião was petrified of flunking. As he sat his oral he was gripped by a painful cholic. He went white, clutched his belly and, with a symptomatic grimace, asked to be excused for a few moments.

The examiner took pity on the poor lad and gave his permission.

Bostião scuttled out. He returned a little while later, panting but looking greatly relieved.

“So, did you do the needful?” the examiner asked

“Yes, sir” Bostião answered, “but I did it *half-chewed*.”

The examiners were greatly amused and gave him a *half-chewed* pass.

I found the story equally amusing. I paid for our beers and was taking my leave of Santimano when he caught me by the arm and asked:

‘So, you don’t want a *lim’nada*? *Lim’nada* is a fine with a splash of gin.’

‘No, thanks’ I answered. ‘After this beer the only thing I want is for you to give our *half-chewed* Bostião your support when he stands for the Legislative Council.’

‘My support? To him?’ Santimano stammered furiously. ‘He can go where he went on the day of the exams and do a *half-chewed one*!’

‘Quite right!’ I shouted from the doorway as I left. ‘Quite Right! Send him to the Council: He can dump it out there the same way...’

Author's Bio: José da Silva Coelho

José da Silva Coelho (1889-1944) was a Goan journalist and short story writer. In 1922 and 1923, in the newspaper *O Heraldo*, he published a satirical series entitled 'Regional Stories' that skewered colonial Goa's pretensions, foibles and chimeras under the Portuguese First Republic (1910-1926).



Translator's Bio: Paul Castro

Paul Castro is a lecturer in Portuguese and Comparative Literature at the University of Glasgow. He is a regular literary translator of Portuguese-language texts from across the world. His latest translated book is *Life Stories: The Collected Stories of Maria Elsa da Rocha* (Goa, 1556, 2023).

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