
Contra el viento

Author: Ángeles Caso

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Ángeles Caso's *Contra el viento* is the heart-warming tale of a woman's determination to be true to herself and her child despite constant adversity. Born to a poor single mother in Cape Verde, São quickly understands that her childhood dream of studying to be a doctor is unrealistic: at the age of fourteen she is already working long hours caring for the children of a wealthy family and has to relinquish her plans to study. With the help of friends, São eventually emigrates to Portugal, where she falls in love with Bigador, an Angolan immigrant. Their life together is initially happy but Bigador soon shows a darker side of his character, beating her while she is pregnant. Assisted by her friend Liliana, São flees to Spain with her child. Although her life there is relatively comfortable, she is concerned that her son is growing up without his father. As Bigador now seems more mature and wishes to take on his due responsibility for André's upbringing, São returns to Lisbon. But life has yet another blow for her and São is devastated when Bigador kidnaps her son and takes him to Angola. Undeterred, supported by her friends, São attempts to reclaim her child. Finding no help in the legal system, she finally goes alone to Luanda, traces Bigador's family, and he is persuaded to relinquish the child.

São's story, partially based on real life events, is told here with simplicity, sensitivity and skill. Although her life is beset by constant adversity, the narrative focuses on its positive aspects, highlighting the role of friendship, particularly with other women, in helping her to maintain a sense of self and of dignity. One cannot help but admire, as does the fictional narrator, the courage and resilience which enables this woman to continue, fighting every battle as if it were the first, to maintain hope when all seems lost. As a depiction of a side immigrant life which may be unfamiliar to many, this work would surely find an appreciative readership in Britain.

This is a summary of the reader's report by Christina MacSweeney

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