

AM BRAGA

# PHOTON

THE GREAT CONDUCTOR



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Translated by Ludimila Hashimoto



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ORIGINAL TITLE  
FÓTON: O Grande Maestro

LAYOUT  
AM Braga

COVER  
AM Braga

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Rio de Janeiro, July 2019

This story was born out of my certainty that it existed  
and out of my dreading not finding it.  
Thus it was written.

I am pleased to present you Photon — a real life  
fiction.

*“AM Braga*

Rio de Janeiro, July 2019.



# Prologue

MATOS FELL ON his back into the void. He couldn't see anything. It felt as if he were going through a wormhole. He saw a glaring burst of light — like the flash of a lightning bolt in a photograph of this world's aura. Another flash ripped the void above him, leaving the marks on incognito whites that opened. And the black turned into white.

*Oh, God. Am I dead?*, he wondered in terror.

His physical body lying in bed, Matos opened his eyes, but did not see anything, then closed them... and all he saw was a blinding white. Open eyes, darkness; eyes shut, light; open eyes — black; eyes shut — white.

*What is it?*

He breathed in more deeply, feeling the cold air

going through his nasal passages. As someone who experimentally puts on a mechanical glove, he moved his fingers. He tried the same with his feet, rotated an ankle... and also felt they answered. He gingerly raised his trunk and sat up. Then, eyes still closed, feeling his way out of his bed, he sat at the desk beside and turned on his computer.

Now, eyes open, Matos saw the white screen of a word processor. However, when he closed them, the other white he saw seemed about to gain color, shine, images... life.

Feeling the keyboard, fascinated with the life force of his own thoughts, Matos moved and placed his fingers on the fourth line, then his left little finger on the second column — it was on letter A, he knew it. He left two keys between his index fingers — they were on letters F and J, he knew it. From then on, he had the command of the characters as a musician would have of his instrument's notes, in clarity, in colors... leaving the job of seeing to the eyes of his soul.

And just like a person who is captured by the materialized emotion in a work of art, calculated in reason's intention, but engraved in the purity of feelings absorbed and emanated by the heart, Matos kept watching closely the images that formed before his closed... and open eyes.

It was as if he were floating in the air, at a high altitude, looking ahead. He saw the sun above the hori-

*“AM Braga*

zon, firing up the sparse clouds that levitated at the edge of the sky, embellishing it with bright colors. He could not tell if it was the dawn or the afternoon twilight, but the breeze that touched his back and went ahead made him think of the last hours of the day going down the horizon like a silent waterfall.

After some time, Matos looked down and saw a treetop. He went down to the leaves and, as he passed the branches, the child he had been looking for so long started to show...



1,

THE CLOCK ON the table said 7:30 p.m. The date on the display said the time was neither the present nor the past, but a probable future.

Sitting at his desk, His Excellency — the president of the Federative Republic of Brazil —, brown eyes, grayish hair, his face showing the signs of premature ageing, stared at the national flag with his pen in hand.

On his desk, four folders, four documents, four projects ready to be signed.

*Is this country ready to take over its mission?*, he wondered, now looking at the papers before him.

That Brazil had been conducted throughout these five centuries with the aim of occupying a specific, delicate position in the international scenario he

had no doubt, but had the time come already? Er..., he could not be so sure. But he could feel the weight of the responsibility for the nation under his government.

In the center of the opposite wall, the Christ on the cross looked down... His Excellency breathed a long sigh, spun around on his chair and looked from side to side. The walls were filled with Works of art from various cultures. He stood up and started observing them.

After going around the room, he approached a globe on a tripod by his desk. And examined it for a while, focusing his attention, his breath slow, shallow, almost imperceptible, feeling a Strong attraction that made him gaze at the globe without giving him the chance to ask why he was acting that way.

Then the globe started spinning under his scanning eyes, which swept over the Americas, the Atlantic Ocean, Africa, Europe — he felt embarrassed by something disturbing that was growing inside him — the Middle East — the discomfort grew more intense — China... The globe stopped.

*Is it this dust on its surface?*, he wondered, drawing in the air slowly, trying to figure out the cause of his unease. So he came closer to the globe and blew. The dust was gone. But the discomfort kept growing and growing, like a rope around his stomach, a knot in his throat, pulled from both ends.

*What is going on here?!*

That was when a voice spoke loud inside him:

*“AM Braga*

“The globe does not spin westward. The sun must rise in the east!”

Immediately he realized the globe had been spinning the other way around, probably in order to tell him something. But what exactly? In a spasm, His Excellency raised his head, his eyes stuck to the Christ...

Matos opened his eyes, serene, but his body felt like a hot pressure cooker about to push the valve and start hissing. He breathed in slowly, trying to quiet down in the dream he was having, to stop his heart from racing, and remained still in bed, channeling his attention to his body’s numbness.

It was still dark. The door to the porch was ajar, the curtains waved with the breeze, letting the sunlight reflected on the moon wobble in the room; and a rich harmony of waves foaming on the sand filled the atmosphere with gentleness and a salted scent.

Matos could barely feel his body now, so relaxed he was, and with open eyes, divided into two realities, he could not tell for certain which one he was living in, or which one he should believe in.

The Christ, the globe, that pen, the documents...  
*What is this dream?*

And it didn’t take long for the phone to ring, to ring loud, and make him twitch in bed.

“Hello?”, he answered even before the phone approached his ear, his heart pulsating in his temples.

“Good morning, Mr. Matos!” It was a woman’s

voice.

"Yes..."

"Waker service. I inform you that your transport will leave in thirty... thirty-four minutes, to be precise."

"What for?"

"To take you to the heliport."

"Heliport?"

"Yes, heliport."

"Oh... sure."

"Have a nice day."

"Thank you."

*Heliport...*, he thought, realizing he was not in that hotel room on vacation, but on his way to work — a semisubmersible drilling rig in ultra-deep waters awaited him dozens of miles into the sea.

2,

HELIDECK READY. Chopper on final. One hour and twenty-four minutes after taking off at the airport of Macaé, Rio de Janeiro, the tires on helicopter S92 BM-A hung some meters above the landing platform that moved up and down, tilting back and forth and side-

ways, in the *heave, pitch* and *roll* movements of the vessel, while the pilot made the final adjustments in the approaching speed, in order to land at the right moment, avoiding impacts and damage on the *helideck* and the aircraft's structure.

On the platform, the members of the drilling team moved dexterously. Preventive maintenance and repairs were carried out as usual. The Dynamic Positioning System, with its amazing precision, controlling the eight 3.5-meter diameter azimuth thrusters, capable of generating about 55 tons of thrust each, at 724 RPM — enough to counterbalance the resultant of external forces in adverse weather conditions and keep it in place, above the head of a two-thousand-meter deep oil well.

Once connected to the well, letting the platform move, missing the most adequate position above the well would certainly be a great disaster. And that was exactly what the winds, waves and sea currents tried to cause at every instant.

“Keep calm, Kalman is with us!”, Matos said to the novice Dynamic Positioning Officers who arrived there.

He referred to the Kalman filter, a mathematical equation inserted in the system, capable of using the past in order to act in the present and also foresee the future.

The platform was state of the art, with a modern

system and machines that worked according to the purpose they were designed for. But man...

They say man is a product of the environment; however, man is the one who makes the environment and, in the situation in question, the platform's commander was Dosvale, John MacMaster Dosvale — a foreigner with an authoritative style, hair the color of faded old gold, eyes tinted in the most outdated, obsolete blue blood.

Matos got off the chopper, carrying his belongings — a backpack and his electric guitar in a hard case — and proceeded to greet the commander in his office.

As he noticed someone at the doorway looking directly at him, Dosvale stared at the computer screen, frowned and squinted, his face slowly approaching the screen, smacking his teeth, his head oscillating from side to side, in his own typical threatening gesture.

Matos sighed in dismay and looked at the corridor.

Dosvale was proud of being born at the playground of culture, arts, sciences, technology, modern thought... The country where he had been raised boasted distinguished names of great thinkers, illustrious humanists, philosophers, scientists, musicians, outstanding artists... notable masters who had contributed greatly to our planet's moral and intellectual develop-

ment.

However, Dosvale himself unfortunately did not seem to have his own mouth to smile. Cast in his archaic way of seeing life, he refused to leave the enclosure and see the light. Disturbed, upset by the conflicts and sabotages of the ego, he believed he did not have to do anything to improve as a human being...

“My country is the best! I have the money. What else can I wish for?”, he would say.

Four expressions were characteristic of him. One was clear — reproach; not of what he saw in the mirror, but of everything that did not come directly from himself or his flatterers.

The second was a threatening look:

“I am the master! The master here is me!”, he would say over and over, like an insecure parrot on the shoulder of a limping pirate.

The third one was blurred, trembling, out of focus... and appeared when the effects of his stupidity caught him by surprise, off guard, before the flight.

Oh, the fourth one you can't even explain; it would only appear when someone made him look in the mirror.

“I deny it! I denied it! I am superior!”, he would tell his rational lies.

Matos decided to greet him some other time, and kept walking to his cabin, trying not to think about that.

*Being the supervisor of other people's conscience was a position he did not want to hold.*

*Let each person take care of his own conscience! I will take care of mine!*

### 3,

MATOS WAS sleeping like a meteor in the silent space, his head resting on a soft, comfortable pillow, his heart pulsating quietly, his mind far from a common place.

His last night of sleep, besides being short, had been the last one of his pause from work, and that meant in the next 14 days on board, his nights would be days, and the days would be nights to him. He would spend the two following weeks working from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., alert, not blinking, his door closed to Morpheus. Therefore, he needed to unpack fast and have some sleep, he knew it.

After he silenced his thoughts by manipulating his unplugged guitar, relaxing and slackening his muscles. His next step to fall asleep was to focus his attention on the springs of the mattress that vibrated slightly in response to the tremors caused by the machines in the vessel's structure, picturing his body levitating over

a magnetized fabric of information waves, free in time and space.

The room was completely dark. He had taken care of sealing with adhesive tape any passage of light on the porthole. He had sealed it so well that the tiny red light on the TV set turned into such a bright headlight that he had to turn it off.

However, although a meteor can fly high on a space trip, light and with no resistance, there are ways to make it fall and crash. One of them happens when the gravity of some planet calls it and, in the case in question, gravity acted fiercely.

*Bam! - Bam! - Bam! - Bam! - ... - Baaaammmmm!*

The alarm inside his cabin was loud, almost deafening. Matos was bewildered. He moved his hands in the air, trying to defend himself from the merciless whips he was still not sure what were or where they were coming from.

When he was a teenage, he invented a game with his cousin, called *Morpheus in the lion's den*. The idea was simple: both went to bed at the same time and the one who were lucky to wake up first would wake the other up with pillow strokes on his face. The first day sleepy one barely slept the following night to avoid the risk of oversleeping, and it was enough for both of them to try the feeling once for the game to be immediately

abolished.

Matos realized it was no use trying to defend himself, it was not the pillow.

*The phone!*

After some frustrated attempts at finding it in the air, fumbling in the wrong places, he finally found his phone, put it up to his ear and said "hello", but nobody answered; the only sound was the alarm screaming.

His eyes were open now, but he did not see a thing, so he widened them, and there was no difference, except for the increasing burn feeling.

*The alarm clock!*

Matos breathed in, trying to find his bearings in the darkness that surrounded him. He found the alarm clock on the bedside table, tapped on it a few times, trying to turn it off, but that didn't work either... Tired of being beaten, he was considering beating back.

*Fire!*

Finally, Matos rose to the Earth's surface. He realized he'd been hearing the General Alarm, consisting of seven short whistles, followed by a long one.

*Damn it!*

He turned on the light, searching for his individual protection equipment, looked at his guitar and stopped — something vibrated inside him.

And kept vibrating...

Until a familiar voice echoed in his ears, saying:  
"Dad, please, don't go!"

It was his son’s voice, begging him not to leave on the previous day, his eyes washed in tears.

“Son...” Matos didn’t know what to do before the little boy tugging at his suitcase, determined to unpack it. “Please, calm down. Daddy has to go to work...”

The kid sobbed, breathless with his choked, his eyes trembling, trying to explain all that his lips were not able to.

Matos hugged him.

“Daddy loves you a lot. Why are you crying so much?”, the father asked, still not knowing what to do. “Daddy is not abandoning you... I promise! I’ll go there quickly and soon I’ll be back...”

Soon? What would that word mean to a child living freely in emotional time?

“You always say so...” The boy wiped his tears. “But it is never soon!”

“But daddy *has* to go...”

“Why?” And the child has to understand.

“Daddy needs money to buy things!”

That argument was more than enough for himself... but not for the child.

“You already got your car... I got my bike... You don’t need more, daddy, don’t go, please!

However, Matos had to go...

And he was gone.

What was waiting for him on board? He didn’t even want to imagine.



MATOS HAD NEVER BEEN to a psychologist's office.

"I don't need it! That's all crazy people's stuff", he would say to his wife every time she tried to make him change his mind.

Ignorance? Lack of information? Neuro-rigidity? He would not know... But did not care either.

After being expelled from a psychiatrist's office, three years ago, where he had looked for anxiety treatment, Matos promised himself he would never return to one of those offices.

"Expelled? Why were you expelled?"

"I know..."

"How? Why?", his wife asked him, squinting and widening her eyes, not knowing if she wanted to laugh or cry. "What have you done?"

"I didn't do anything!" He was convinced. "She is the crazy one!"

"She? Elisa?"

"It's not Elisa, it's Mona Lisa!"

"Right. What did she do?"

"What did she do? Suddenly, her usual smirk

was gone, she stood up, frowning, disturbed, opened the door and gestured for me to leave.

“Just like that?”

“Like that. Believe me.”

“Eh... but... it’s not possible that you...”

“At least she didn’t try to strangle me or something”, he said, concerned with his reputation. “Imagine being strangled by a psychiatrist in her office... How would I ever overcome such a trauma? And mind you, I’ve always paid on time. I’m no deadbeat patient...”

“What did you do?”

“I didn’t do anything!”

“At all?”

“At all.”

“Are you sure?”

“Eh...” Matos stared at the floor.

“Hmmm... Go on.”

“I’ve always asked questions about the medication she prescribed me. I wanted to understand where and how it acted; if it affected the causes or just kept to the effects, if there could be side effects and which. She would never answer and sat behind the desk like a programmed robot, staring at me. I guess she wanted me to become one, too. Then I did some research, but I think she didn’t like it. That was when she lost the smirk and kicked me out...”

“Oh, my God...” She had her hand on her forehead. “And did you leave without paying?”

“Hum! After the door closed on me, it didn’t take a second for her to open it and show me her hand... asking for the check!”

“And you...?”

“Of course. And handed it to her. I couldn’t understand what was going on. I thought it was some kind of an anti-stress treatment strategy...”

“But that is an exception. Look for another shrink...”

“I don’t want to mess with these things anymore.”

“So,” she said, raising her eyebrows, “how about looking for a psychologist’s help?”

“Not ever! And the case is closed.”



However, three years later, there was Matos, ringing the bell at a psychologist’s office.

The doorknob turned, a rectangular gap opened before him, showing two abundant eyes, radiating a hypnotic indigo blue and analyzing him for fractions of seconds, but enough to touch him.

Matos froze, his eyes glued to the sight, his mind empty of any thought. It felt as if a sample of his soul were being collected for instant analysis.

“Please, come in,” she said with a subtle smile blooming from her lips.

Matos relaxed, feeling a magnetized air involve him, gently and numbingly penetrating him. The psychologist looked away discreetly, with a natural motion to give way to him. Matos entered.

It was a simple but cozy office, decorated with taste. The furniture was new, the walls were well painted, with two nice pictures above the sofa — a bridge going from a pier to the sky above the sea, and a human profile facing a sandstorm —, perfumed by flowers in a vase on the table. There was also a rough stone fountain where the water circulated on a side table by the sofa.

“Please, have a sit,” she said, pointing at the arm-chair across the desk.

Matos passed the fountain and felt attracted to it. He observed the crystalline blanket sliding softly on the rocks, gently pattering, emanating a light that seemed to pulsate with life.

He didn’t know exactly what it was, but something in the fountain had stirred something in him.

Every morning, after a brief prayer of gratitude for life which she would say before starting the sessions, she would feed the fountain from the water jug she used to drink from, stretched her hands over the running water and concentrated. In an instant, the water sheet sliding over the stones would acquire a shine not every eye could notice, but the peculiar energy it emitted could be sensed by Matos on that day.

Matos sat at the desk and looked up, his fingers

intertwined, his elbows resting on the chair's arms. *What am I doing here?*, he wondered; questioning if he should really be there.

"Mrs..."

"You can call me Amanda", she said, her lips undecided between a half and a full smile, as she scribbled down on her binder paper.

"Oh..., sure", he answered, not knowing what had led him to address someone younger than him as "Mrs.", when he considered even himself young.

But the truth is that Matos feared having to open up on and tell details about his inner world which he wouldn't tell his wife at home, strong enough reason to signal the need to keep a distance.

Amanda was fascinating, though... Her face skin smooth and pale like porcelain, her dark hair framing her angelic features, and pretty expressive blue eyes shining as if lit straight from her soul...

Matos didn't get tired of looking...

Always gracious, her movements were smooth and precise. She did not waste energy on jolts or unnecessary gestures. Her mind seemed to act outside her body, guiding it skillfully, with all tranquility. Her voice was ever soft and sleek, with a peculiar, harmonious touch.

*What a beautiful pen!*, he thought, seeing her write down fluidly, in a constant flow that did not force the pen or weighed her hand on the sheet of paper.

*“AM Braga*

Amanda interrupted her writing and looked at him, but he was silent. She then looked at her pen and resumed her notes.

*Treating anxiety...*, he thought, already considering that wouldn't work out. *Here, with... Amanda?!*

“And how are things going at work?”

“At work?” Matos looked away, just realizing he would be under Dosvale's command in a week.

And a week later...

(...)

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