LA VIDA SENSE LA SARA AMAT
Author:
Pep Puig

La vida sense la Sara Amat is a coming-of-age story that primarily takes place over the course of ten days in August of 1981, ten days that changed the protagonist's life, marking his shift from a boy to an adolescent. The narrator is the forty-something man who was that boy, and who looks back on that summer—those ten days—as his entire life. Or as he puts it "The rest has been what it's been, and as they say, I'm not complaining."

One evening when they are playing hide and seek, the girl Pep has a crush on—Sara Amat—disappears. They imagine she's just gone home, disenchanted with the childish game. As Pep is praying for her safe return before retiring for the night, he hears someone calling his name: Sara is in his bedroom, there at his grandparents' house. He hides her under the bed while the town searches and conjectures on what has happened to precocious Sara, who never did seem to fit in in Ullastrell. Her character is rebellious, intellectually gifted, and jaded. His is innocent, trusting, and head over heels in love. Together, over ten intense days, they come to grips with what it means to leave childhood behind.

La vida sense la Sara Amat is written in a very straightforward style that reflects the narrator's naiveté, and the dialogue is spot-on, revealing the discomfiture inherent in the slim yet significant gap between Sara's maturity and Pep's innocence, and the sparks when those two tectonic plates brush up against one another. The setting is childhood, and therefore has a timelessness to it that transcends borders and could travel easily to the UK, where the Mediterranean backdrop would add to the book's allure.

The story moves at the pace of a sleepy small town in summer, the rhythm picking up somewhat after the first third of the novel, but this book is one that revels in the small details: in the home-cooked meals and Mass and gossip of Ullastrell; in the texture of olive groves and chirping crickets and the town's very delineated physical geography; in the dynamics of Pep's family visiting the matriarch and the routines of life in town and in her home, the customers who come in to buy shoes and the farmers getting their hair cut on Saturdays. There is one chapter entitled "Cinema Paradiso," and the reference is very apt; at its best moments, Puig's recreation of this small town is quite charming.

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