

# GILLETTE’S MALANDRINO PROFESSOR

The day after, I had a meeting to rent an apartment. The city of Lisbon was fantastic, but hardly affordable given the cost of rent, and I was forced to end up in the capital's last frontier, the historic outskirts: AMADORA BORDEA.

The area was typical because it hosted the homeland of the Portuguese foreign community, but not only citizens of Portugal — also a few infiltrators, like me.

Father and son arrived to welcome me, but when I stepped inside the house, they showed me a bunk bed shared with three other people, inside a 9-square-meter room, in an apartment with three rooms, nine people, one bathroom, a small kitchen, three refrigerators, and cockroaches as resident guests — all inside about 60 square meters, for 230 euros a month.

That left me exactly 70 euros a month to eat and live on, but I understood something else: I was going through a course in how the poor must learn to manage wealth — and nobody teaches that.

One by one, the guys came over to introduce themselves, saying their name and their country of origin, watching me to figure out how I'd behave, and whether I was racist.

I gave everyone a smile and a greeting in their own language: ANGOLA, MOGADISHU, SÃO TOMÉ, BRAZIL, PORTUGAL, CHINA, RUSSIA, and SAUDI ARABIA.

That evening they invited me to their dinner — they had arranged the occasion to welcome me. I was the oldest of the group, and after 20 minutes of shyly talking with everyone, my new Portuguese identity was born the moment I heard myself called:

*The Malandrino Professor*

They were all young guys who had left mothers, wives, or girlfriends behind, far from home and from the people they loved, and I decided to tell them a true story from experience — in exchange I'd get a reaction from each of them that would help me measure their character and personality. None of them knew my method.

I told them that in 2021 I had allowed myself a vacation in Brazil, in the city of Natal — a place known for its dunes and its local rituals — where, as day turned to night, the girls at the top of the dune would come down backwards, working their way toward each man waiting undaunted at the

bottom, to make his acquaintance and build new relationships, maybe even a future for themselves.

I stayed in that city for forty days — it really was my Brazilian quarantine — but I never took part in the game. I remained a spectator, and I watched.

Today I think, more than ever, how much it truly served me to know Brazil — even with the unexpected arrival of the woman CEO of Gillette — and if she should ever ask me about her homeland, I could tell her:

*THE RITUAL OF THE DUNES,*
*I KNOW IT,*
*BUT I NEVER TOOK PART,*
*BECAUSE I OFFER NO ONE A FUTURE,*
*ONLY THE PRESENT.*

The thing that struck me most in that city was the story with the rector's daughter, whom I met by chance on a Monday evening at a singles party.

I arrived with 100 paper cards I had prepared, with my name and a Brazilian phone number, which I exchanged with the women in the venue — the ones I liked, who said they were single, divorced, or widowed. The next day I found four of them at the supermarket doing their shopping with husbands and children, and there were no words exchanged, only silent glances.

Camilla, the rector's daughter, was a beautiful and overwhelming woman. She was the one who took me home at two in the afternoon and had me leave at ten at night, and it was there I understood that my colleague upstairs had wanted to punish me — to make me understand that a woman can defeat a thousand men, but a thousand men cannot defeat one woman.

Without going into details, I took her straight afterward to dinner at an Italian restaurant and ordered two bottles of white wine and 14 lobsters just for her. The Brazilian waiter asked if I wanted some bruschetta, but exhaustion — or my treacherous hearing — made me perceive the word as “bussetta,” and I was already exhausted and ready to flee.

All the guys in the room were laughing, looking hypnotized — they were still stuck with the twelve-page Amazon version of how love is sold. How could I go on without risking that they'd explode?

I closed the conversation and went to sleep.

The next morning, everyone around the house was saying “Brazilian bussetta” and “bussettero,” which in Colombian Spanish means bus driver — but the wordplay made everyone smile anyway.

I left on November 22, 2025, and everyone was sorry to see me go — even the cockroaches that slept in my bed with me had a moment of sadness, because it's only in that instant, when you've been happy with someone and they leave, that you understand what you'll never have again.

Ferdinando