

## How to Clean a Fish: And Other Adventures in Portugal

**Esmeralda Cabral**

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Covering her extended stay in Portugal, Esmeralda Cabral's memoir *How to Clean a Fish* is infused with insights and sensuality.

Informed by the Portuguese concept of *saudade* (a wistful, transient sense of longing; "love and loss combined"), Cabral's memoir discusses her immersion in the Portuguese language and the country's culture over the course of eight months. She was more than a casual tourist, and her memories of growing up in the Azores before immigrating to Canada at age seven blend into her present experiences, becoming substantial to her efforts to resolve questions of identity. Surrounded by the first language she learned to speak and overcome with *saudade*, Cabral paused to take stock of how her experiences differentiated her from those who never left Portugal.

Honest, self-aware, and sentimental in the best sense of the word, the text recalls daily visits to the market for bread, vegetables, and fish; they were a complex testing ground for Cabral's double identity, and also occasions for colorful experiences of food and architecture. Graceful conversations with others at the market, at bus stops, and in cafés served multiple purposes, revealing bits of Portuguese political history and small personal dramas over unfamiliar bureaucracies and passport snafus. Cabral also experienced the pressures of translating between cultures.

The book assumes a comfortable, even meandering pace, lingering on moments from the past and present and making ample time to taste the delicacies on offer. The question of whether Cabral is Portuguese, Canadian, or perhaps a combination of the two is explored at length. And for those who want a literal taste of Cabral's experiences, twenty pages of recipes are included after her story's conclusion.

Complex and introspective, the memoir *How to Clean a Fish* covers sweet travel adventures in Portugal.

MICHELE SHARPE (May / June 2023)

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