

The Seventh Bottle Films

Gustavo Camelot

Las cinco puntas del lucero (The Tree of Red Stars)

Treatment

People, events and situations profoundly affect not only who we become, but also, for better or for worse, our relationships with others. When a group of four friends comes of age in the midst of a whirlwind of political turmoil, the outcome is both unforeseen and devastating.

Act I

Magdalena flies over the Río de la Plata, a river as wide as most seas. Now in her thirties and after nine years of exile, she has decided to return to Montevideo, the city of her birth. During those nine years, Marco, her friend, lover, and rescuer, has suffered torture and political imprisonment.

The atmosphere at Carrasco International Airport is tense. Military police are everywhere, and for a brief moment Magdalena doubts her decision to return. She's terrified, and only the thought that Marco has been released and is waiting for her gives her the strength to overcome her terror.

Emilia, her childhood friend, is the only one who knows of Magdalena's return and is waiting for her at the airport. The emotional impact of their encounter releases the memories and emotions Magdalena has held in check throughout the years of her exile.

On such a day, 20 years earlier, Magdalena and Emilia sat in the branches of the poinsettia tree in Magdalena's garden witnessing the arrival of new neighbors, Jewish immigrants with a daughter called Cora. Cora becomes an integral part of the group of friends that includes the beggar-woman, Gabriela, who arrives in the

neighborhood every day in her horse drawn cart, to collect items the neighbors no longer need.

One day, Gabriela brings her little son, who has fallen and cut his head. While Magdalena's mother takes them both into the house to care for the boy, Magdalena convinces Emilia to hide in the cart and ride off with Gabriela to see the distant hillside where she lives.

From the window of his room, Marco sees them leave and follows on his bicycle. Several hours and 30 kilometers later, Gabriela, her hidden cargo, and an exhausted Marco, arrive at the Cerro. The girls are discovered and Magdalena asks Marco why he has followed them. His awkward explanation and his concern for her safety are the first intimation Magdalena has of the love that will accompany her always.

When next we meet them it is the late sixties, and Magdalena and Marco are in their teens. A wave of socialist idealism is sweeping the country, involving Marco in several protest, marches and riots. Marco's father, Colonel Traversóni, is determined not to allow his son to turn 'communist', and forces him to enlist in the Army shortly before Che Guevara's first visit to Uruguay.

Disobeying her parents and ignoring Marco's advice, Magdalena attends Che's speech at the University, accompanied by Cora and Emilia. Like Marco, Cora is active politically, while Emilia wants to catch her mother, Lilita, at the 'subversive', leftist acts she suspects Lilita of committing. She discovers that her mother is not only involved with the radical left, she is one of Che's escorts.

In spite of Che's call for non-violence, the day turns deadly when a student is shot and killed. Chaos ensues and the students rush out of the auditorium. The police, waiting outside, and unaware of what has happened inside, believe that they are being attacked, and retaliate.

The friends become separated, and Emilia, desperate to find her mother, comes across her lying in the street, bleeding profusely from a head wound. Reunited and sobered by the day's events, the girls carry Lilita home.

Act II

Marco graduates from the military academy and accepts the post of secretary to his father. Both believe that this will give them opportunities of spying on one another's activities. Marco will be privy to decisions about the fast growing Tupamaro movement, and Colonel Traverssoni believes that he will be able to control his son's involvement with the guerrillas.

Rather than weakening the movement, Che Guevara's death in Bolivia only strengthens it. Demonstrations protesting U.S. interventions in Latin America are the order of the day, and at one of them, Marco's best friend, Ramiro, meets and falls in love with Cora. Knowing that Cora's parents will never consent to her marriage to a gentile, Cora and Ramiro elope.

Unbeknownst to Marco, Dan Mitrione, a State Department official, has arrived in Uruguay to train the local police in counter-terrorist measures, including Mitrione's own specialty, electrical torture. Among his chosen experimental subjects are several beggars taken from the streets of Montevideo.

Magdalena's language skills help her to obtain employment at the United States Information Service at the United States Embassy. Ramiro, aware of the possibilities this presents, takes Magdalena to visit Cora in their hiding place, where he explains the Tupamaros' special interest in agents like Mitrione, operating under cover of USIS.

When Magdalena is asked to translate some documents for Mitrione at his home, she uses the opportunity to listen to a conversation between him and one of his torture trainees. Sickened and afraid by what she hears of the latest torture methods Mitrione has introduced, and of how he has tested them on beggars, she waits until the two men leave the room. She then investigates the photos they

have been referring to, only to find that one of them is of Gabriela, her head in a pool of vomit, dead after torture.

Profoundly altered by this experience, Magdalena goes to Ramiro and delivers the information that leads to Mitrione's capture. In exchange for Mitrione, the Tupamaros demand the release of hundreds of their jailed companions. Firm about not dealing with terrorists, President Nixon refuses to negotiate, and Dan Mitrione's body is found a few weeks later in an abandoned car.

Violence escalates all over Latin America, particularly after Chile elects the first democratically chosen Marxist president. The United States immediately begins to plot his removal, while in Uruguay, the Tupamaros kidnap British Ambassador Geoffrey Jackson, with the hope that the British will be more amenable to negotiation.

Unaware that he works for the secret service and has been investigating her mother's involvement with the Tupamaros, Emilia falls in love with one of the British Ambassador's aides. A trap is set for Emilia at his house and she is arrested and tortured.

Traumatized by her experience and bitterly resentful of her mother and Magdalena, who she blames not only for her imprisonment but for the loss of the man she loves, Emilia announces after her release that she will no longer be marginalized. She joins Magdalena in her visits to the underground hiding place where Cora, Ramiro, and other Tupamaros are hiding.

On one of these visits Magdalena is arrested and held for several months in solitary confinement in one of the military's secret prisons.

Marco searches desperately for her and begs his father for help. Reluctantly, Colonel Traversonni signs the papers that will free Magdalena from prison, with the stipulation that Magdalena and Marco leave the country.

Marco rescues Magdalena and boards the small plane that will carry them to safety. At the last moment, unable to abandon the country he has pledged to serve, he jumps to the ground, knowing full well the fate that awaits him.

Act III

The recollections come to an end with Emilia and Magdalena seated on Emilia's bed looking out at the street where they grew up. The moment has come when Magdalena will need to face Marco. Considering herself responsible for his nine years of suffering, she can barely look at him when he appears, thin, grey, and ill.

They walk to the beach to watch the sun set, something Marco has been doing every day since leaving prison, and he reveals the reason for his release. The years of confinement and torture have taken their toll on his health, and he has been given six months to live.

At first, the news threatens to undo Magdalena, but just as she did during her months of solitary confinement, she draws on the strength that sustained her then and refuses to believe that her love will fail to heal him.

511 Ocean Front Walk, #3, Venice CA 90291, USA, + 1-310-3961186

TheSeventhBottle@yahoo.com

www.TheTreeofRedStars.com