

Xabier Montoia

itxaropen / hope





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'Euskal hiria sutan'; 'Fucking Artists'; 'Hondamendia'.

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Itxaropen

HONDAMENDIA

LORIA OMEN ZION HALABEHARRAK GORDEA

ITXAROPEN

HONDAMENDIA

Elkarrizketa bat egin zioten behin. Ez zen preseski izan berak, Aitor Urkolak, espero zuena (abuztua zen, kazetariak egunkariak betetzeko larrien ibili ohi diren garaia), baina bai sekula egin dioten bakarra. horregatik du oraindik gogoan, horregatik eta harrezkero hamaika aldiz irakurri duelako ere bai. Amaren etxean du, bere gainerako altxorrekin batera: Maddi eta biak (irriz!) ageri diren argazkia, bere liburu bakarraren zenbait ale, eta abar. Ongi gogoan du elkarrizketatu zuen kazetari gaztea ere –bolizko matrail-hezurak, begiak bi esmeralda, ezpain bete gonbidagarriak, zango luze bikainak–, eta nola galdetu zion, ernegu antzeko zerbitu ahotsean: Baina, zu zer zara, zehazki?

Hondamendietan aditutzat jo zuen bere burua, erantzun umoretsu bat eman nahian. Kazetariari kopeta akasgabea une batez argitu zitzaiolako uste osoa izan zuen, eta, urte anitz joanagatik ere txinpartatsua nahi zuen definizio haren ondotik, oraindik horretan dago. Nolanahi ere, hark serio demonio jarraitu izan balu ere, berari bost, gero eta egokiago baiteritzo orduko erantzunari. Bere lanbidez ari zitzaion kazetariari, jakina, azken hogeitaka urtez munduan izan diren hondamendi ugarietatik askotxotan ibili ondoren. Gerrak, lurrikarak, haizeteak, goseteak, suteak, izurriteak, zer ez du ezagutu? Ibiliaren ibiliaz ikasi du dakiena, eskarmentu hutsez. hori adierazi nahi izan zion.

Traketsa da hitzekin (horregatik idazten ote?), beti izan da. horrek hainbat buruhauste eragin dio, hainbat nahasmen petral. hala iruditzen zaio, bere bizitza zer izan den pentsatzera derrigorturik dagoen honetan. Gérin ere horretan ari da, irudiz. Burumakur, kopetilun, haren baitako zurrunbiloa erraz irudika dezake. Aspaldiko lagunak dira, eta ongi baino hobeki ezagutzen dute elkar, beraz. Urkolak asko zor dio. Irakatsi zion lanbidez gain, bizia ere zor dio: hilik legoke Ruandatik atera izan ez balu. Kigali sutan zegoenean eta bera bakar-bakarrik hotel merke bateko gela batean, haraino lagundu zuen argazkilariak deus esan gabe alde egin ondoren. Médecins sans Frontières erakundearentzat lan egiten zuen Gérinek, eta haren laguntzaile hasi zen, batez ere antolakuntza lanetan. Errefuxiatuen guneetara eraman beharrekoak eramateko kamioiak bilatzen eta ordaintzen zituzten, sendagileak eta erizainak bertako sasi ospitaleetan banatzen, eta beste hamaika halako. harrezkero, elkarrekin ibili dira biak, hainbat kontinentetan barrena.

Gérinek begiak itxita dauzka. Thompson ingelesak ere hausnarrean dirudi. hirurak dira paretak Koranaren suraz beterik dituen gela honetako bizilagunak. Bizilagunak? Ez, bahituak. Alepon lanean ari zirelarik atxilotu zituzten, oraindik zehaztu ezin duten erakunde islamzale baten partaideek. Atxilotu eta, egun batzuk batera eta bestera ibili ondoren, gela honetan sartu zituzten, aspaldi, oso aspaldi.

Ezer gutxi dakite gertatzen ari zaienaz. Sirian jarraitzen dutela uste dute, baina Iraken edo Libanon ere egon litezke. Edo basamortu baten erdian. Aukera ugari, gutxienez, bahituak

dituztenen nortasunari buruzkoak beste. horren gaineko hipotesiak egiten eman ohi zuten hasieran denbora. Bakoitzak bere iritzia azaldu eta horren aldeko arrazoiak aipatzen zituen. Laster, ordea, alferrik ari zirela ulertu zuten. Aspertu egin ziren. zentzurik gabeko jarduna zen hura, inondik ere. hortik aitzina isilik egon dira, gehienbat oroimenaren matazan harrapaturik. Esperantza zapuztuak, bizitza oso baten damuak, bazuten zeri eragin, bai, eta eragiten aritu dira harrezkero, handik ez zirela bizirik irtenen susmatzen hasi zirenetik, batik bat.

No future!

Gaztetako lelo hori kantatu ohi die Thompsonnek, etorkizun dutena solasera ekartzen duten bakoitzean. Gauza bera kanta dezakete haiek ere: ozta ordu batzuk lehenago bahitzaileek grabaturikoak argi utzi die zer gertatuko den hurrengo. zer gertatuko zaien. Bakoitzari dagokion gobernuari salbatzeko erregu etsiak filmatu eta, luze gabe, hondarreko grabazioa etorriko da, behin betikoa: begiak tapatuko dizkiete eta aitzo zorrotz batek egingen die, kameraren aitzinean, zintzurra. hiru fedegabe, hiru deabru gutxiago munduan. horra.

No future, hiruretariko inork ez baitu uste gobernuak deus egingen dutenik. Ezin dugu terroristekin negoziatu, adieraziko dute, hori eginez gero, bahiketak ugarituko lirarteke, eta terroristak sendotuko. Politikariak ezagutzen dituzte, eta haien baitan ez dago esperantza izpirik: haienak egin du. horregatik daude isilik. Amorrua eta ernegazioa esperantza bezain alferrikakoak direla ikasi dute, denboraren poderioz. Badakite beren egoeran edozein keinu zakar edo hitz gora, alferrikakoa izateaz gain, itsusia ere litzatekeela. Oroimena geratzen zaie soilik, eta horri atxikitzen zaizkio, kosta lain kosta.

Urkolak behiala kazetari panpoxari emaniko erantzuna oroitzea ez da kontu nartzisista hutsa: guztiz irrigarria da bere egoeran, aise irudika daitekeenez. Aitzitik, bere bizitzaren funtsa horretan datzala iruditzen zaio. hondamendirik gabe ez litzateke ezer. Esaterako, Maddik eragin ziona gabe, sekula ez zen etxetik mugituko. Edo, bere ustezko lagunak Kigalin traizioa egin izan ez balio, ez zukeen Gérinekin topo egingen –hobeki agian, begira nora ekarri duen–. Edo bere literatur hondamendia: inork irakurri ez zuen *Lili bat apika* izeneko poema bilduma. Poema onak ziren, bere ustez, batere aipamenik gabe oharkabean pasatu zirenak, kritikariek askoz okerragoak ziren beste poeta batzuk famatzen eta Parnasora –edo Olinpora ote zen?– goratzen zituzten bitartean. hori gabe, ordea, inoiz ez zen azken urteetan esku artean izan duen egitasmo erraldoian murgilduko. Baina lotu egin zitzaion, halako lanak derrigortzen zuen gisan. Eta lotu ere, zer egin behar zuen hausnartzen makina bat hilabete iragandakoan. Orain bezala, egin zioten elkarrizketa bakarrean esandakoak gogora ekarri eta, bat-batean, argi ikusi zuen: hondamendiak, horra nire gaia, horra zertaz mamitu behar dudan nire ametsetako liburua, euskal irakurle eta kritikari ezjakinak ez ezik, mundu osokoak durduzatu eta txundituko dituenak. Ideia horrek eraginiko pozarekin batera, lehenago bururatu ez izana damu zitzaion, euskal kritikariei bere balioa lehenago aitortu ez izana damutuko zitzaien bezalaxe. hain zen ideia sinplea, hain zen logiko eta begi-bistakoa: hondamendia. Dena zegoen horretan, edozein gizon edo emakumeren sentipenak, muturreraino eramana, gainera. hil ala biziko egoerak izan ohi dira hondamendienak, ez itxurakeriarik, ez gezurrik onartzen ez dutenak. Maitasunak, adibidez,

goia jotzen du halakoetan, biluzien eta distiragarrien agertzen da, itsugarrien. Semea edo alaba salbatzearen bere burua galtzen duen ama edo aitarengana doakio gogoia, eguneroko ogia mikatz duten herrialdeetara, hango lazgarrikerietara. Beirut, Sudan, Kaukasoa, Bali, El Salvador... handik eta hemendik, atertu gabe datozkio ehunka irudi bortitz, oinazearen entziklopedia eskerga osatzeko. zerbait shakespearretarra, nolabait adieraztearen: hotsa eta ardaila. Edo tolstoitarra: gerra eta bakea, epika eta maitasuna, lirika eta kanoikadak batera. Gaixo bere garuna, zenbat lan.

Lanaren erraldoitasunak ez du inoiz kikildu; ordea, hari eskaini dio bere astia. Kobazuloetan idatzi du, erortzeaz zeuden etxeetan, zaurituz beteriko ospitaleetan, haien oinazezko garrasiei eta kanoien danbateko hurbilei sorgor. Nonahi eta nolanhia idatzi du eta dozenaka kaier bete, munduan barrena ikusi, entzun, sentitu eta pentsaturikoa paperean gorde nahian. hala, xehe-xehe jaso ditu ezagutu behar izan dituen bazterretako jendearen aztura, jokaera eta izaera, aberatsen harrokeria eta lukurreria zein pobreen ezinbesteko morrontza eta miseria. Deus ez du isildu.

Bizitza oso bateko lana da, bere *opus magnuma*, eta, jakina, islamistek kenduriko hiru kaierak izan ezik, amaren etxean ongi gordeak ditu gainerako guztiak. horiexek ditu gogoan, anitzetan bezala, atea ireki delarik.

Peter da, ingelesez mintzo den beren zaintzaile bakarra. Abdala omen du benetako izena, baina haiek hala esaten diote, sortzez ingelesa delakoan. Thompsonek jakinarazi zien: azentu horrekin... Londreseko iparraldekoa.

Gu akabatzeraz al zatoz?

Zaindariak erantzun ez, baina beltzuri egin dio Thompsoni.

Ez, Joe, zerbait behar ote dugun galdetzeraz etorri duk, diotso Gérinek.

Eta Urkolak: Gure azken nahia, hain zuzen ere.

Nik emazte bat nahiko nizek, Thompsoni.

Oraindik ere, ilun zaindariaren bekokia.

Ongi legokek hori, bat dator Thompsonekin Gérin. Emakume bat eta, aukeran, whisky botila bat ere bai.

Are ilunago zaindaria.

Txorakeriarik ez, mesedez, erregutu die kideei Urkolak.

Txorakeriak?, harritu da Gérin.

Txorakeriak hireak, bota dio Thompsonnek, Urkolak deus esan ahal izan baino lehenago. Alferrik ari haiz zakil-poto hauekin. Ez ditek errukirik ezagutzen, hiri ere berdin-berdin eginen diate zintzurra, horretarako garaia heltzen denean.

Hala moduzko frantses batean solastatu dira, Peterrek bisitatu dituen bakoitzean egin duten antzera, zaindariak frantsesa ere ulertzen duela hirurek susmatu arren.

Hiru ogi kozkor, zenbait datil eta pegarra bete ur utzi eta alde egin du zaindariak, etorri bezain muturik.

Haiek ere hitzik gabe jan dute, poliki, ogi aski gogorra murtzikatu orde, opil gozo bana erabiliko balute bezala ahoan. Otordua eta gero etorri dira hitzak.

Gaizki esan zioat Peterri, hasi da Thompson. Emazte bat ez, oroz gain, zigarreta bat diat gutizia.

Nik ere bai, baina zintzurra garbitzeko beste zerbaitekin batera, dio Gérinek.

Zintzur malapartatua berriz ere. Ez aipa halakorik he-men, mesedez, eskatu dio Urkolak.

Isildu dira hirurak. Luzeak izan ohi dira haien isilaldiak eta horiek profitatzen ditu Urkolak, bere liburuaz pentsatzeko. horiek eta ia gainerako aldi guztiak, etenik gabe ari baita, nola edo hala, horretan. Obsesioa du, aitortu beharrean dago, Gérinek maiz leporatu dion gisan. Gérin aluak ongi ezagutzen du. Behin ere ez dio *Hondamendia* aipatu, baina urte luzetan izan du bere idazteko premiaren lekuko mesfidatia. Nekeza zaio ulertzea nola norbaitek eman dezakeen egun osoa horretan, bizitzak eskainiriko atsegin bakan iragankorrei uzkur.

Bitxia haiz gero.

Gérinen iritzia, Maddirena ere bazen. Behin baino gehiagotan jakinarazi zion ahantzi nahi eta ezin duenak. Bitxia.

Bere ustez, bitxia izatea kaltegabea da. Kaltegabea ez ezik, onuragarria ere bada, batez ere, poeta izanez gero, zinezko poeta izanez gero, bera gaztetatik izan den gisan, aspaldi poemarik idatzi ez badu ere. hala eta guztiz, seguru da *Hondamendia* poesiaz beterik egonen dela, mota askotako poesiaz. Liburua idatzi ahal izanen ote duen, aldiz, ez da horren seguru. Bizidunek baizik ezin idatzi, eta Urkola laster hilik egonen da. horrek beldurtzen eta ikaratzen du, noski, baina areago du beldurtzen eta ikaratzen jakiteak burutu gabe utzi beharko duela hainbeste neke eta buruhauste eragin dion lan erraldoi bikaina. hori bai mingarria. Libururik gabe, oro alferrik. Liburua da ahantzia ez dela izanen bermatzen ahal dion bakarra. hori gabe, fini bere ametsak: euskal literaturaren historian merezi eta, Thompsonnek esanen lukeen gisan, *establishmentak* (argitaletxeak, kritikariak, irakasleak...) beti ukatu dion leku gorenaren aitortza; Maddi, azkenean, beraz harro eta abar. Justizia poetikoa, funtsean.

Ez da Thompson bezain argia izanen, ez eta Gérin bezain maltzurra ere, baina aski ibili da, justizia –poetikoa edo bestelakoa– arras lore bakana dela jakiteko. Errealitateak arrazoia eman nahiko balio bezala, orduan entzun du ateko sarrailen hots nahastezina. Peter da, jakina.

Peter, barkatu, Abdula, agurtu du adeitsu Thompsonnek, kamera batekin espero zintudan, eta esku-hutsik zatoz.

Esku-hutsik ez.

Non dago, ba, lehenago eskatu dizudan emaztea?

Emazterik ez. Zuentzat nahi dituzue guztiak, noski. Ulegarria da. Gazteak zarete eta ezin duzue paradisura heldu arte iguriki.

Ez emazterik, ez eta whiskirik ere, gaineratu du Gérinek.

Musulman bati ez eskatu bekatu egiteko.

Guretzat, ordea, bertutea da, karitatea, egarri denari edateko ematea bezala.

Harriturik entzun ditu Urkolak lagunaren hitzak, hura betidanik izan baita ateo amorratua. Adar joka ari zaio, ziur.

Ez naiz teologiaz edo erlijio-konparaketez aritzera etorri, eten dio zaindariak.

Noski.

Baina zer edo zer ekartzera ere ez zara etorri. Esku-hutsik zatoz eta.

Ezetz esan dizuet. Hartu!

Zaindariak zerbait utzi du Thompsonen esku-ahur zikinean.

Emazterik ez dugu, baina profetak mujahidinoi zerurako agindu zigun beste hori bai, azaldu die, egin berri duena zurrizko premia balu bezala.

Bola txiki ilun bat da Thompsonnek eskuan daukana. zigarreta mutur bat, pipatzeko papera eta pare bat pospolo ere utzi dizkie. zaindaria alde egitera doalarik, geratzeko esan dio Gérinek.

Harrigarriro, eskatu bezala egin du zaindariak, eta begira geratu zaio frantsesari, jakin-mina ezkutatu ezinik.

Whiskirik ekarriko ez duzunez, har ezazu nire hondarreko eskaritzat, eta erre ezazu gu garen bekatari handiekin, behingoz. Nekaturik gaude gu hirurok elkarrekin mintzatzeaz eta eskertuko dugu beste ahots bat aditzea. Onik eginen digu eta zuen jainkoaren oniritzia izanen du. Bakarrik dagoena lagundu, horixe duzu karitatea.

Zalantzarik gabe, ustekabez beteriko gizona da Gérin. Urkolak ez zuen sekula susmatuko seminariotik iragana zenik. Frantximant alua.

Karitatearen aipamenak izan du eragina zaindarengan. Ate ondoan dago, pentsakor.

O.K.

Horixe esan du zaindaria, dagoen tokian jarri eta haiei so geratu aitzin.

Berehala mintzatu da Gérin: Ederki!

Eta Thompson ere berehala lotu zaio lanari. Artolak ezin du ingelesaren eskuetatik begirik baztertu, ikuskizun deritzo haren trebeziari. Ezagun du anitzetan aritu dela langintza horretan. Aise ari da, ia automatikoki. Mihi zuriar paperaren xerrenda itsasgarria busti, txirriari hondar ukitua eman eta, burututzat jo duelarik, zaindaria harro eskaini diola ikustea ere harrigarria izan da Artolarentzat. Susmagarria ere bai. Lehenbizi Gérin, Thompson orain: elkar harturik ari ote, berari deus aipatu gabe?

Ezekoa eman dio zaindaria Thompsonen eskaintzari. Pipatu lasai, zuen ondotik pipatuko dut neuk. Hark eskatu bezala egin dute. Thompsonek piztu du eta Gérini ezarri dio ezpainetan gero, pare bat xurgada sakon egindakoan. Antzera jokatu du Gérinek. Urkolak, aldiz, jarraian nahi izan dio zaindaria pasatu, sekula ez baita drogekin ongi moldatu.

Pipatu lasai, poeta, badugu astirik. Zaindaria eskatu bezala egin du, haren hitzak gogoan. zergatik poeta deitu, zer adierazi nahi izan du astia badutela esan dionean? zertarako astia? hiltzeko, noski. Brastakoan jo du hotzikarak. hatsa hartu du: lasaitu beharrean dago. haxix, kifi edo pipatu berri duen dena delako horregatik ote den jakin gabe, badaki paranoiaren sarean erortzekotan dela.

Bitartean, Urkolaren arrangura sumatu ez, eta solasean ari da Thompson zaindariaekin: Banekien mutil jatorra zinela funtsean, bihotz onekoa, nahiz eta orain arte ez erakutsi. Antzeman nizun, ordea, antzeman nizunez.

Thompsonen hitzek, irudiz bederen, eragin berezirik ez zaindariaengan. Urkolaren esku dardaratsutik jaso zigarreta dauka berean, ezpainetara bidean.

Ona izan behar baita –Thompson solasean beti Londreseko erosotasuna, familia, lagunak, oro utzi eta hemengo mortu hauetara etortzeko. Eskuzabala izan beharra dago. Zigarreta berriz heldu zaion arte, hizketan jarraitu du Thompsonen. Jakina, Gérinek txanda hartu dio, zaindariarekiko lausengu saioan.

Segitu koipea ematen, segitu, ea zerbaiteko balio dizuen horrek, bere baitarako Urkolak, sutan. Argi dago, alde zuzenetik zehaztutako plan baten arabera ari dira. hain zuzen ere, berari ezkutaturiko plan baten arabera. zer dela eta? Bera sakrifikatu beraiek salbatzearren, hori ote dute asmo?

Argitu egin da zaindaria begitartea halako batean, hain nabarmenki argitu, non Urkola ere ohartu baita, hausnarketa goibeletan hondoraturik egon arren. Zuk ez dakizu deus nitaz, zaindaria Thompsoni. Nik, aldiz, asko dakit zutaz. Zer edo zer badakit, hala ere. Esaterako,

badakit Londresen sortu edota txikitatik han bizi izan zarela. Are gehiago, Londreseko iparraldekoa zarela esanen nuke.

Nahi duzuna esan dezakezu, onartu dio zaindariak. Baina ez ahantzi nik zuen pasaporte eta paperak ditudala. Britainia handia, Frantzia, Espainia. Betiko hiru estatu fedegabe eta inperialistaren pasaporteak.

Ni euskalduna nauzu, argitu nahi izan dio Urkolak. Ez espainola. Areago, Espainia eta Frantzia dituzu gure zapaltzaileak, zuek zapaltzen zaituzteten berberak. Hori esan eta lagunena begiraden zitzadak nabaritu ditu lepo ondoan. zer espero zuten, ba?

Euskalduna?

Baietz, Urkolak.

Musika ona, euskalduna.

Aho zabalik utzi du zaindariak. Utzi ditu, ikustekoak baitira Gérinen eta Thompsonen aurpegiak ere.

Ezagutzen duzu? Zer edo zer. Aspaldiko kontuak dituzu horiek niretzat, fededun bilakatu aitzinekoak.

Eta nor ezagutzen duzu, Mikel Laboa agian?

Ez, hori ez. Negu Gorriak aditzen nuen gaztetan. hara. Baina... ulertzen al zenuen haiek kantatzen zutena?

Kantuen hitzak hainbat hizkuntzatan agertzen ziren diskoetan.

Noski, erdi desenkusatu da Urkola. Ni ere ederki oroitzen naiz disko haiez.

Egia dio Urkolak, Maddiren talde kutuna zen Negu Gorriak. Aspaldi, biak bereiztezinak ziren garaian.

Gora herria, ei, kantatu du zaindariak, euskara xelege batez.

Gora!, irten zaio Urkolari deblauki.

Gora Athletic!

Gora!, berriz Urkolak.

Beste egoera batean, beste nonbait egon izan balitz, lotsatu ere egingen zen bere buruaz, hala oihuka ikusirik. Orain ez. Pipatu duenaren eragina izanen da seguruen, baina bost axola zaio dena. hala behar du, noski, heriotzaren atarian egonik.

Iritzi berekoak dirudite lagunek, solasean ari baitira bizi-bizi. Aspaldiko partez irri dagite. Bistan da, berataz jabetu den lasaitasun sakon bera jabetu da haietaz ere. Areago, zaindaria berak ere sekula baino *humanoago* dirudi, terroristez sekula fidatzerik ez badago ere, honezkero ongi dakienez. Bere gogoetatik Thompsonnek atera du: zer talde mota da hori? Rock, rap, folk? Ona behar du izan gure adiskidearen gustukoa izateko.

Rock eta rap ere bai, nik uste. Dena den, ez egin kasu handirik, musikaz ezer ez dakit eta.

Literaturaz bai, ordea, diotso zaindaria.

Gorritu da Urkola, eta irten ez zaion zerbait esatera ahalegindu da.

Ez dut zuen hizkuntza ulertzen, baina esanen nuke literatura dela zure kaier horiek muturrez mutur betetzen dituen. zuen espioi-lanaren txostenak ez badira, behintzat. Zaindaria azken hitzek isiltasun astun bat eragin dute bahituengan. Mututu dira, bat-batean, solasak. horregatik, eztanda gorgarria izan da haietaz zaindaria irri-karkaila, gela osoa bete duen parte txarreko harrabotsa.

Jakina ezetz, Urkolak agudo. Literatura hutsa da.

Nobela bat?

Lasaitu ederra hartu dute, zaindaria galderak aditzerakoan. Adarra jo die, ziur daude. Trufa egin die. Droga gorabehera, nagusia berak jarraitzen duela izaten oroitarazi nahi izan die, agian.

Bai eta ez, erantzun Urkolak. Badu nobelatik, baina badu beste zenbait generotarik ere dezente. *Collage* moduko bat da, nolabait adierazteko, zati arras ezberdinez osaturiko testua. Dena ardatz bakar baten inguruan bildua.

Interesgarria, ausartu da Gérin, ironia silaba bakoitzean nabarmen.

Oso interesgarria, gehitu du Thompsonnek, era berean. Zein ardatz?

Harrigarria zaio zaindaria interesari. hori dela-eta, tartea hartu du mintzatu aitzin: Guztiaren akabera, guztiaren deuseztatzea, mundu honetako hondamendi txiki eta handiak, mota askotarikoak.

Oraingoan zaindaria da *interesgarria* dioena. Interesgarria. Eta zergatik gai hori eta ez beste bat, edozein?, jakin nahi izan du gero. Hobekien ezagutzen dudana delako. Urteak eman ditut hondamendiz hondamendi. horretan aritu gara hirurok.

Baietz, Gérinek eta Thompsonnek batera, baietz.

Amerikarren txotxongilo aritu zarete zuek. Baina ez dezagun gure gaurko besta txikia honda eta bazter dezagun hori oraingo.

Noski, berriz batera Gérinek eta Thompsonnek.

Haxix puska hartu du berriz Thompsonnek, esan berriaren berme. Jarrai dezala bestak. Jarrai dezala zaindariak solasean. Eta hala egin du, Urkolarengana itzuliz.

Lan eskergea, zeure buruari ipini diozuna. Ulertzekoa da kaier horiek letra ñimiñoz arras beterik izatea. Hala da, onartu dio Urkolak. Lan gaitza da, alimalekoa. Kaier horietan dagoena, gainera, ez da Euskal herrian gordeta dudanaren ehuneko hamarra ere. Pentsa. Dozenaka kaier, milaka orrialde. Bizitza oso bateko lana. Dena alferrik.

Et, et, et, Urkolaren begi parean astindu du zaindariak Thompsonnek pizteko pasatu dion txirria. zuk piztuko duzu, diotso Urkolari, honek kontsolamendua emanen dizu. Baina, esan, nola bururatu zaizu testuak molde horretan antolatzea? zein izan duzu eredu, Danteren *Divina Comedia* akaso?

Oi Dante, asaldatu itxura egin dute Gérinek eta Thompsonnek. Dante Alighieri. harrapa ezak!

Joyce?

Joyce!

Mutu dago Urkola, pentsakor eta laguneren pitokeriei sorgor. Ezin dizut esan, hasi da azkenean, poliki joan zitzaidan bururatzen, denboraren poderioz. Egia esan, zuk aipatutako liburu hori ez dut irakurri.

Joyce?

Joyce! lagunek.

Ez, Dante. Joyce irakurri nuen, aspaldi.

Ulysses?

Ez, *Dubliners*. *Ulysses* irakurtzen ere saiatu izan naiz hainbat aldiz, baina bertan behera utzi behar izan dut beti, asper egina.

Uuu, uuu!, oihera egin diote lagunek, estadio batean balira bezala.

Inori ez diot orain arte aitortu, segitu du Urkolak. Indartsu ekiten nion, gogotsu; alferrik, ordea, ezin inolaz ere bukatu.

Eta ez zara beldur gauza bera gertatuko zaiola jendeari zure liburukote horrekin?

Inolaz ere ez. Gure espeziari buruzkoa da nirea, gutariko bakoitzari buruzkoa, gizon nahiz emakume, zuri nahiz beltz, hemengo nahiz hango.

Liburu hori aspaldi idatzita dago!

Korana? Bai, noski, liburu hori beste edozein libururen gainean egonen da beti, onartu dio zaindariari segituan Urkolak. Nirea, aldiz, beste mota batekoa da, fikziozkoa.

Fikzioa sekula ez da fikzio hutsa. Jakin beharko zenuke.

Uuu, uuu! Estadioan segitzen dute Gérinek eta Thompsonnek.

Bai, hala da. Baina nireak ere badu asmo argi bat. Ez da-eta alferrik hasten munduaren sorrerarekin batera kasik. historian barrena eta, beraz, munduan barrena ere egiten dut hortik aurrera, ezinbestean. Salgado argazkilaria ezagutzen duzu?

Uuu, uuu!

Seguru haren argazkiak ikusi dituzula, behin baino gehiagotan, gainera.

Salgado handia, txalo egin du argazkilari ere den Thompsonnek. Sebastiao Salgado, argazkilarien jainkoa!

Ilundu egin da zaindariaren begitartea. horrezaz Urkola ohartu eta zerbait esatera saiatu da. hots lodi zenbait baizik ez da haren ahotik irten. Mintzatu nahi eta ezin, azken batean, berak ere irrigarri baiteritzo zaindariaren bat-bateko asaldatzeari, hala nola gainerako guztiari ere, noski: laurok osaturiko lagunarte bitxia, solasa...

Irriz ez lehertzeko Urkola hamaika ahaleginetan ari den bitartean, berean jarraitzen du Thompsonnek: zuen jainkoak kondenatuko nau, baina Salgadok jakinen du nire bekatu ugariak barkatzen, jakinen duenez.

Ba al dago jainkoren bat alkoholikoontzat? Gérineren galdera xaloa gehiegi izan da zaindariarentzat. Tutik esan gabe jaiki, atea ireki eta hura gogor joz egin du alde, isiltasun larri bat bere giblean utzirik, danbatekoaren oihartzuna erabat itzali den arte iraun duena. Elkarri begira geratu dira hirurak orduan, oraindik mutu. Irri karkailak ondoren etorri dira.

Intelektual gaitza gure Peter!

Sekulakoa!

Izugarria! Horretan bat datoz hirurak. Urkolak zaindariarekin nola jokatu duen ebaztean, aldiz, iritzi ezberdinekoak dira. Irri egiteari inoiz utzi gabe, purrustadaka hasi zaizkio beste biak. Traidoretzat jo dute.

Baita zuek ere, bihurritu zaie euskalduna. Ez naiz ni izan eskuzabala eta ona esan diona. Ez horixe!

Gure aldera erakartzera entseatu nauk, dio Thompsonnek, halako enpatia sortaraztera. Baina orduan hi literatura eta gainerako zozokeria horiekin tematu haiz. Hura izan duk, ez ni.

Hik esan diok euskalduna haizela, Gérinek.

Hala nauk eta.

Bai, baina... Zuek bezala, hura gure aldera erakartzen saiatu nauk neu ere.

Ona, alu hori, ona, lepotik heldu dio Thompsonnek. Irriz ari da Gérin; baita, pixka bat geroago, Urkola bera ere. Irri eta mirri jarraitu dute, beraz, luzaz eta gogoz, harik eta pixkanaka betazalak astundu, noizbait loak hartu eta dena isiltasun bilakatu den arte gela, basamortu, mundu hartan.

Atearen karrankak iratzarri ditu. Begiak ozta ireki dituztelarik, ahoa lehor eta burua astun nabaritu dituzte. Bestondo gogorra. Kafea omen den goizeroko ur uher hari behingoz muzin egin eta, hitzik trukatu gabe, bazterreko pertzera banan-banan hurreratu eta burua sartu dute bertan, urak ajea arinduko dielakoan. Ikuzirik, beren onera itzultzen hasi dira, emeki. Lehenik eta behin, gosariarekin Peter-Abdala agertu ez izanaz harritu dira.

Gu bezain izorratuta egonen duk, erabaki dute, beste arrazoirik aurkitu ezinik.

Goiza oso poliki joan da. Gero, eguerdia heldu eta bazkaria ekarri dietelarik, berriz harritu dira, Peterren partez, goizeko zaindari bera azaldu denean.

Abdala? Zaindari berriak ulertu ez dioten zerbait esan die arabieraz.

Elkarri begiratu diote. harridura ez ezik, kezka ere ageri da beren begitarteetan. Orain arte izan duten solaskide bakarra galdu dute, antza.

Zigortu egingen zitean, ausartu da Gérin.

Zigortu? zer dela-eta zigortu?

Bart arratseko bestatxoagatik, noski.

Ezetz, Thompsonnek, seguru beste nonbaitera eraman dutela, honezkero ez baitute gurekin komunikatzeko beharrik. Gure gisako beste gizajo batzuk atzemanen zitiztean eta haiengana igorriko zitean.

Litekeena, onartu diote lagunek, kopetilun. Edonor da gauza gu akabatzeko, seguru.

Seguru, ordea, ez da ezer, eta, atea atzera ireki delarik, ahoa bete hortz geratu dira Peter ikusterakoan. Serio dago, betiko gisan, bart gauekoa haien ametsetan baizik gertatu izan ez balitz bezala. Mutu, jarraitzeko keinua egin dio Thompsoni. zurbildu da ingelesa, baina zaindariaren gibeletik segitu du otzan, lagunei begiratu gabe, ahapetik kantari: No future, no future...

Dardarka geratu dira Gérin eta Urkola, zaindariak atea irekitzean sarturiko haize izotz batek jota bezala. Fini, dio Gérinek.

Gureak egin dik, ados Urkola.

Saia gaitezen duinki hiltzen, behintzat, gaineratu du Gérinek. Ez dugu-eta beste zereginik.

Horregatik, ordu erdi bat geroago, Peter, Abdala edo dena delakoa berriz agertu delarik, Urkola tinko besarkatu eta, besterik gabe, harekin doa Gérin, zangoetako dardarari eusteko ahalegin nabarmenez.

Bakarrik geratu da Urkola, beraz, begirada pareta zikinari josirik. hurrengo bera izanen da.

Hamaika aldiz irudikatu du bere heriotza, sarraskiz sarraski eta hondamendiz hondamendi iraganiko bere mundualdi ziztrinean. hala ere, nola irudikatu hesteak korapilatzen dizkion izu alimaleko hau, damuaren harrak zulatu dion putzu beltz kirastua, hainbat oroimen zornaturen biltoki. horiek denak ahanzteko diotso bere buruari haserre, ahanzteko bera zinez sekula maitatu ez zuen emakume harekin emaniko une gozo bakanak, ahanzteko kontsolamendu eskasa eta buruhauste ugari eragin dion liburu asmo zoroa nahiz Thompsonnek (goian bego) bezperan literatura eta gainerako zozokeria horiek deitu zituenak.

Atea ireki da, halako batean, amesgaizto batean bezala. zaindaria keinurik edo hitzik egin aitzin jaiki da.

Euskaldunak gogorak zarete, diotso hark. Ez duzue ingeles kakati horien antzik. Badakizue hiltzen eta, beraz, bizitzen ere badakizue.

Deus aditu izan ez balu bezala, isilik jarraitu du Urkolak, kamera ezarri duten tokiraino. Laranja koloreko lan-jantzi bat eman diote, amerikanoek Guantanamoko presoek jantziarazirikoen tankerakoa. Itxura horrekin ezarri dute kameraren parean. Bere gibelean Peter zaindaria du, ezkerreko eskua bere sorbaldan eta eskuinekoan altzairuzko aizto beltz bat daukala.

Bi berri ditut zuretzat, euskaldun: txarra bata eta ona bestea. zein nahiago duzu lehenengo?

Urkolak ez dio erantzun. Ezin du.

Txarra emanen dizut, ba, aurrena: hiltzera zoaz. Jakin nahi al duzu ona?

Ez du jakin nahi, baina ezin esan, ezin erantzun, ezin ezer egin, aski lan baitu bere hanken jabe jarraitzeko eta bertan behera ziplo ez erortzeko.

Ona da euskaldunak ez zaretela trebeak musika egiten edo futboleak soilik, esan dio belarrira. Armak egiten ere oso txukunak zarete, laster zintzurra egingen dizun nire aizto zorrotz hau adibide. Aitor Jungle King II. zure izen berekoa, konturatzen al zara? zure herrian eginga. Ala jakintsua da. Al-lahu-àkbar! oihera egin du gero.

Horra Aitor Urkolak aditu duen azkena.

LORIA OMEN ZION HALABEHARRAK GORDEA

TALDE bat osatu izan dugu beti, baita elkarrengandik urrun egon garenean ere. Benetako talde bat. Hiru mosketeroak. Hala esan ohi ziguten Bartzelonan. Banaezinak ginen. Jatorri ezberdinekoak izanagatik, La Masiara urte berean heldu eta hasieratik ibili ginen elkarrekin. Horrelaxe ibili ere, Barçaren gazte eta behe taldeetan gora egin genuen urtez urteko bidaian lehen talderaino. Ia mutiko batzuk ginela familia utzi eta hara joan ginen, hurrengo Romario, Ronaldo edo Rivaldo bilakatzea amets. Sol Mexikotik heldu zen, Bartzelona ondoko Sabadelletik Quim, eta Iruñetik neu. Gure jatorriak bezain ezberdinak ziren gure jokatzeko erak ere. Quim erdilaria zen, txiki samarra eta pilotarekin iaioa. Sol, aldiz, hegaleko jokalaria zen, eskuinean jokatzera ohiturik zegoen, baina, bi zangoekin ederki moldatzen zenez, beste aldean ere joka zezakeen. Nik gibelaldean jokatzen nuen, defentsaren erdian. Elkar ezagutu eta agudo ohartu ginen Sol eta biok Quim zela gutariko hoberena.

Begi-bistan zegoen. Pilota bereganatu eta nekez galtzen zuen. Burua une batez altxatzea aski zuen, hobekien kokaturiko kidea ikusi eta pilota haren oinetara igortzeko. Horregatik joan zen beti gure aitzinetik. Gutariko lehena izan zen Barça B-ra heltzen, baita ondoren lehen taldera ere, Van Gaal entrenatzaile egon zen azken urtean. Partida gutxi jokatu zuen orduan, baina guztietan utzi zuen agerian bere kalitatea. Luzaz txalotu zuen jendeak zelaitik irtetean, eta, egunkariak haren gainean erranak sinestera, *crack* bat izanen zen laster. Horretan geunden gu ere. Eredutzat genuen. Harekin jokatu nahi genuen, talde berean, eta, horretarako, bagenekien hark adina lan egitea genuela bide bakarra. Hark beste lan egin eta hura bezain egoskorrak izan. Gogotik ahalegindu ginen.

Sol eta biok lehen taldera heldu ginelarik, beste holandar bat zen Barçaren entrenatzaile: urte gutxi batzuk lehenago arte futbolari handia izaniko Frank Rijkaard. Jokalari anitz zituen min hartuta eta gu ezarri behar izan gintuen haien ordezkio. Denboraldiaren erdian sartu gintuzten taldean, eta minutu gutxi jokatu genuen, egia esanda. Berdin zigun. Amets gozo batean bizi ginen, esne mamitan: Kluivert eta Saviola eta, batez ere, Ronaldinhorekin batera ari ginen hiru lagunok, aldagela eta zelai berean, eta bidaiak ere haiekin egiten genituen. Sinesteak ere lanak ematen zizkigun. Gorritu egiten ginen izar horietako batek zer edo zer esaten

32 zigun aldiro. Gorritu eta harrotu, noski. Partida jokatu eta biharamuneko egunkariak erosten genituen, haiek gutaz zer erranen. Bost minutu jokatuta ere, goitik beheiti miatzen genituen, gutariko bat aipatzen zuten albiste edo artikulua bereiziz. Jakina, horietan Quim zen aipatuena, baina Sol eta biontzat ere izan zen noizbait hitz gozorik. Ezin omen zitzaigun gehiegi eskatu. Ikasten ari omen ginen, baina bikaina omen zen gure geroa.

Oker zeuden hain etorkizun zoragarria iragarri zigutenak. Hala ere, ezin kexa. Hirurok alde egin behar izan genuen Bartzelonatik hurrengo denboraldirako, baina Camp Nou jokatu genituen

partida gutxi haiek aski izan ziren, nonbait, futbolari lanbidean egonkortzeko. Holandatik hots egin ziguten. Van Gaal Amsterdameko Ajaxera joan zen Bartzelonatik eta, futbolari gazte eta merkeak behar zituenez, gutaz oroitu. Quimez bereziki, noski. Ajaxera eraman zuen. Solek eta biok, aldiz, AZ Alkmaar-en bukatu genuen. Mikatza izan zen hirurontzat gu saltzeko Barçaren erabakia. La Masian heziak ginen hirurok, eta bertan jokatu nahi genuen, beste edozeren gainetik. Hala ere, ulertu genuen klubaren erabakia. Behar baino jokalaria gehiago zuten eta hoberenak beste inor ez zuten gorde nahi. Argi adierazi ziguten. Sol, erraterako, Monacotik ekarri berria zuten Giullyren ordezkoa izatera hel zitekeen gehienez, baina Lionel Messi zuen atzean, hau da, Masia osoko jokalaririk hoberena. Quimen egoera ere antzekoa zen. Besteak beste, Xavi eta Iniesta zituen bere aitzinean. Niretzat ere haientzat bezain latza edo are latzago zegoen kontua, Pujol eta Oleguer han egonda.

Holanda txikia da, motza Alkmaarretik Amsterdamerainoko tartea. Entrenamenduak goizez egin ohi zituzten bi taldeek, eta Amsterdamera joaten ginen arratsalde anitzetan. Quimekin bildu eta zinemara joaten ginen, hirian barrena galtzera edo haren etxean geratzen ginen bestela, Play-Stationa berotzen. Gure arteko txapelketa koskorrak antolatu eta, hirurok Barçarekin jokatu nahi genuenez, txandaka hartu behar izaten genuen. Benetako munduan ez bezala, alegiazko hartan Sol eta biok ginen jokalaririk hoberenak, ez Quim. Adarra jotzen genion hori zela eta. Hura ere adarjotzailea izan eta irri egiten zigun, AZ Alkmaarek sailkapenean zuen leku kaxkarra solasera ekarriz. Sailkapena gorabehera, ederki pasatu genituen gure egonaldiaren lehen hilabeteak. Guztiok ari ginen jokatzeko, eta gustura bizi ginen Holandan.

Sailkapena gupidagabea da, ordea. Hark zehaztu zuen gure ibilbidea. Asteak igaro ahala, goitik beheiti etorri zen AZ Alkmaar, Ajaxek sailkapenaren buru-buruan jarraitzen zuelarik. Zaleek entrenatzailea hartu zuten erruduntzat. Entrenatzaileak, aldiz, jokalaria. Hor hasi zen gure gainbehera. Pixkanaka, joko-zelaian baino gehiago, aulkian elkartzen ginen Sol eta biok partida gehienetan. Galdurik genuen entrenatzailearen konfiantza, eta ez zirudien berreskuratzeko aukera emanen zigunik. Ikusi ere ez gintuen egiten. Gorroto genuen. Ez genuela behar beste egin onartzeko prest ginen, baina ongi genekien taldekideak baino gutxiago ez ginela

34 saiatu. Horretan behintzat ez genion inori huts egin. Ziurtasun horrek amorrarazten gintuen gehien, partidaren bezperan batik bat, biharamunean jokatzeko zirenen izenak irakurritakoan. Nola ulertu entrenatzailearen ezinikusia? Maiz mintzatu ginen horren gainean hirurok. Hain min gaitza eragiten zigun galderari ezin Sol eta biok erantzun sinesgarriarik aurkitu. Etsiturik ginen.

Borrokan segitzeko esaten zigun Quimek, denak hobera egiten zuela laster. Baietz guk, bakean utz gintzan, ez jakin-eta zertaz ari zen zehazki. Zein borroka zen haren ahoa betetzen zuena? Gutaz trufatzen ari zela pentsatuko genukeen, gure hobe beharrez ari zela jakin ez bagenu. Aspaldi amore emanda geunden, baina. Ohetik jaiki eta, euri nahiz eguzki, entrenatzera joate hutsa ere ahalegin aski handia zen gu biontzat. Beharrik Quimi guri baino hobeki zihoakion. Erdiguneko enperadorea hasi zitzaizkion kirol-prentsan deitzen. Gol anitz sartzen ez bazuen ere, hobe zina omen zen taldearen joko antolatzen eta zuzentzen. Barçan ozta antzematen

zitzaion talentuak goia jo omen zuen Ajaxen. Luze gabe, Eredivisie utzi eta hurrengo denboraldian Premier Leaguen jokatu zuela hasi ginen irakurtzen. Egunero sartzen ginen Sport egunkariko orrialdean interneten, Barçaren martxari jarraitzeko, eta bertan aipatu zuten Ingalaterratik ailegatu omen zitzaizen zurrumurrua. Quimi berari galdetu genion. Ez zekien ezer. Apiril hasierako egun batez, aldiz, Ferran Bonetek deitu eta baieztatu egin zizkion ordura arte Ingalaterrako prentsa horiko hotsak baizik ez zirenak.

Hirurok ordezkari genuen Ferran Bonetek Bartzelonatik telefonoz kontatu zionaren arabera, bera kontratatzeko asmo sendoa agertu omen zion Londresko Arsenalak. Quim pozez gainezka zegoen noski, entzute handiko kluba baitzen Arsene Wenger altsaziarrak zuzendurikoa. Dirutza eskaintzen zioten taldez aldatzeko. Berehala eman zien baiezkua. Ajax eta Arsenal salmentan ados jarritz gero, Quim prest zegoen ligaz eta herrialdez aldatzeko. Ferran Bonetek esan ohi zuenez, trena behin baizik ez da pasatzen eta hartu beharra dago.

Adiskidearen arrakastak benetan poztu gintuen. Gure arrakasta iruditzen zitzaigun nolabait, besteak beste gure laguntzari esker lorturiko zerbait. Gu baztertzean Barçak eginiko hanka-sartzea salatzeraz zetorren zerbait. Gutxienez hirurotako batekin ez zutela batere asmatu argi uzten zuen zerbait, azken finean. Justizia poetikoa edo.

ASKI urrundik jarraitu genion Quimen ibilbideari. Elkarri hots egin eta mezuak igortzen bagenizkion ere, ez zen hirurok Holandan bizi eta ia egunero biltzen ginenean bezala. Ingalaterran hasiera gogorra izan zuela bagenekien, espero baino minutu gutxiago eman zizkietela. Bonetek kontatuta genekien hori, Quimen ahotik ez baitzen inoiz kexurik irten, gure egoera berea baino hagitzez makurragoa zelako, ziurrenik.

Ez zaituztete nahi, erran zigun Bonetek. AZ Alkmaarrek ez zaituzte nahi. Eskertzekoa zen klubaren argitasuna. Beste norabait joan beharko omen genuen, hurrengo denboraldirako.

Beste norabait. Nora ordea?

Nabartu egin ziren Ferran Boneten begi urdinak. Alkmaarren ginen hirurok, eta, zer erantzun pentsatzen ari zelarik, kez bete zigun egongela txikia. Ikusiko, goiz da oraindik, erran zigun azkenean, pipa ahotik urrunduta. Ondoren, afaltzera eramán gintuen.

Erruz jan eta edan genuen gau hartan. Biharamuneko entrenamenduan jabetu ginen osoki. Goiz hartakoa bestondo latza izanagatik, ez zen, egia erran, lehendabizikoa. Interneten ibiltzeaz, Playn jarduteaz eta gure zorigaitza aipatzeaz noizbait nardatu eta garagardoak edaten hasi ginen, batere konprenitzen ez genuen telebistari beha. Marrazki bizidunak, albistegiak, lehiaketak, telesail eta filmak, orotarik iragan ohi zen gure begi aitzinetik, arrastorik txikiena ere utzi gabe gudan. Orduak ematen genituen hala. Sukaldeko hozkailura joateko baizik ez ginen egongelako sofatik jaikitzen. Botilak hustu ahala, geu ere arranguraz hustu eta leku abegikorragoa bilakatu ohi zitzaigun mundua. Irri egin genezakeen berriz ere, esperantza apur

bat ukan. Egunen batean –halakoetan hurbil sentitu ohi genuen egunen batean– gure zoria hobetu eta Quimen gibeletik joanen ginen gu ere, ordura arte gertatu ohi zen bezala. Geure burua Premieren ikusi eta Ingalaterraren alde egiten genuen topa, udan han izanen ginela sinetsirik.

Sekula ez genuen Premieren jokatu. Uda heldu eta Eskoziako ligako Aberdeen talde apalera igorri zuten Sol. Gaitz erdi. Nik, aldiz, Alkmaarren segitu nuen, jaulkian beti. Inork ez omen ninduen nahi, eta bertan egonen nintzen bi denboralditarako sinaturiko kontratua bukatu arte. Hura nire urterik txarrena izan zela erranen nuke, ondoren etorri zirenak hura bezain txarrak izan zirela ez baneki. Solentzat ere ahanzteko gisakoa izan zen. Min hartu zuen belaunean denboraldiaren hasieran eta sei hilabete egon zen jokatu gabe. Eta, hondarrean jokatu zuelarik, astirik ez, behar bezalako sasoa hartzeko. Aldi makurra izan zen Sol eta biontzat. Ez, ordea, Quimentzat. Ezin hobekiago ari zen Ingalaterran. Solek kontatzen zizkidan hango egunkari eta telebistetan gure adiskidearen gainean erranikoak. Biok beste inork baino hobeki genekiena baizik ez zuten Ingalaterran baieztatzen, itsu batek ere ikusiko zukeena. Gure erdipurdikeria ere aise ikusiko zukeen moduan. Horregatik, Quimek goiti egiten zuelarik, beheiti egin genuen guk. Dena ari zen etortzen bere onera. Arsenalak kontratua luzatzeko eskaini zion Quimi, eta Espainiako selekzioan jokatzeko deia laster jasoko zuelako hotsak entzuten hasi ziren bazterretan. Hala zioten biok (Aberdeen ilun eta urrun hartako bere txokoa Solek, eta hagitzez argiagoa ez zen nire Alkmaarrekoan neuk) irakurtzen genituen Bartzelonako kirol egunkariak. Gure bakartasunean, garagardo bana eskutan, urrunetik miresten genuen lagunaren ibilbide txundigarria.

Zapart egin du Quimek, zioten egunkariak, agerian utzi du bere talentu mugagabea. Izarra izateko jaioa omen zen, Historian sartzeko gauza. Loria omen zion halabeharrak gordea, kirol egunkarien prosa hanpatuan adierazte aldera. Gutaz ere ez zen halabeharra ahanzi. Gordea ziguna, ordea, ez zen Quimentzat gordeta omen zuena bezain atsegina.

Ferran Bonet: horra halabeharrak guretzat hartu zuen itxura. Hark egin zigun, Bartzelonatik, eskaintza. Barkatzeko erran zigun, baldin eta jakinarazi behar zigunak min egiten bazigun. Ez omen zen bere asmoa, baina kontua hala zegoen, makur. Ongi heziriko gizona zen Bonet, Ingalaterrako unibertsitate batean ikasirikoa eta bazekien proposatzera zihoakigunaren gogorra. Haren erretorika bihurri eta luzea saihesteko, erran dezagun Bartzelonara itzultzea eskaintzen zigula, baina ez Barçara, bigarren mailako Sabadell taldera baizik. Biok batera, hori bai.

Soldata ere, mailaren arabera izanen da noski, argitu zigun hondarrean, argitu beharrean balego bezala.

Luze gabe eman genion baiezkua. Dirua goiti beheiti, jokatu egin nahi genuen. Batez ere hori, jokatu. Elkarrekin jokatzera gindoazen berriz ere Sol eta biok, Quimen sorterriko taldean, gainera. Harro ez, baina kontent itzuli ginen Holanda eta Eskoziatik hainbestetan oroituriko Bartzelonara.

Gracia auzoan aurkitu genuen etxea eta handik joaten ginen Sabadellera entrenatzera eta jokatzera. Gure antzera, taldea ez zen txarra, baina ezta bereziki ona ere (sailkapenaren erdian zegoen, linbo gisako batean). Merezi genuen taldean ginen, beraz, eta ordurako begi-bistakoa zen geuretzat ere. Onartzeko zaila zen, mingarria. Beharrik ia bi denboraldi generamatzan horretan. Ez ginen bakarrak. La Masian ezaguturiko pare bat lagun aurkitu genuen Sabadelleko aldagelan, gure antzeko ibilbidea eginak haiek ere.

Fucking Losers, atera zitzaion Soli, Aberdeengo ahoskeraz, haiekin topo egin genuenean.

Denok ulertu genuen eta irri egin ere, ez genuen-eta beste zereginik. Batzuek goiti eta beste batzuek beheiti egiten zuten etengabe, eta geu beheiti genbiltzan. Gurpila ez zen sekula gelditzen. Horregatik geure buruaz irri egiten ikasi behar genuen, horixe genuen salbabide. Irri egin genuen, hortaz, matrailean min hartzeraino. Sobera arrazoi genuen kontent egoteko. Gehien maite genuena egitearen truke bizi ginen, zer gehiago eska genezakeen?

Anitzetan egin genion galdera hori elkarri, Arsenalen partidei begira. Denok ezin gintezkeen Henry edo Quim bestekoak izan, argi zegoen. Horixe erran genion Quimez galdezka etorri zitzaigun ingeles kazetari bati. Boneten bitartez heldu zitzaigun, mikrofono eta kamerez arduratzen ziren beste bi lagunekin batera. La Masia gibelean genuelarik, hamaika galdera egin ziguten gero eta gutxiago ikusten genuen adiskideaz. Telebista aitzineko gure solasaldi alkoholikoetan hainbatetan axolagabeki aipaturiko zenbait kontu berritu behar izan genuen kameraren parean. Orduan, ordea, ez genuen garagardo bana eskutan, eta Ferran Boneten begirada pean ari ginen hizketan. Ezinbestean erne eta adi geundenez, aski agudo jabetu ginen kazetariak zer zerabilen bere artean. Sol lehena, jakina. Boneten itzulpenaren zain egon gabe, galderak berehala konprenitzen zituenez, gutxi behar izan zuen britainiar kazetariaren asmoa igartzeko. Futbolaren irabazleak eta galtzaileak aurkeztu nahi zituen, heroia eta haren zorigaiztoko lagunak. Istant batez elkarri behatu eta, hitzik gabe, haien jokoa onartzea adostu genuen.

Fucking Losers!

Handia, oso handia zen Quim, eta horixe erran genion kazetariari, benetan uste genuena ez besterik. Batzuetan, gure lagun minaz ari ginela ahantzi eta mito batez solastatzen ginen, gure egongelako lasaitasunean ere. Hark Londrestik hots egiten zigunean, ordea, berehala ahantzarazten zigun kazetariak sorturiko pertsonaia, eta betiko lagun xalo eta jatorra irudikatzen genuen guri mintzo. Ingalaterrako hiriburuan zeraman bizimoduaz hitz egiten zigun, han ezaguturiko jendeaz, batik bat neskez. Behar baino gehiago omen zituen eskura. Bagenekien ez zela harrokeria. Eta ez horixe, bisitan joan gintzaizkionean ongi ikusi genuen bezala.

Uztailaren hasieran joan ginen Londresera. Quim Seven Sisters karrikan bizi zen, bere klubaren estadio zaharra egon zen berebanean, hain zuzen ere. Arsenal hurrengo denboraldiaren prestaketan ari zen buru-belarri ordurako. Quimek goiz samar alde egiten zuen etxetik eta arratsaldea arte ez genuen ikusten. Afaltzeko elkartzten ginen hirurok. Etxetik kanpo afaltzen

genuen gehienetan, guretako aski goiz. Quimek indiar jatetxeak maite zituen, eta inguruko hoberenak ezagutzen zituen.

Sasoi betean zegoen, ilusioz gainezka. Arsenalera helduriko jokalarien gainean mintzatzen zitzaigun, haien izaeraren eta ohituren gainean. Wengerren asmoak ere aipatu zizkigun, aste batzuk lehenago harekin izan zuen bileran errandakoak. Ardura eta partida gehiago eman behar omen zizkion. Pozik onartu zuen altsaziarraren erronka, nahiz eta desafioaren handiak zenbaitetan beldurtu –hala aitortu zigun afari haietariko batean. Lasai egon zitekeen, arrakasta izanen zuela agerikoa zen guretzat.

Arsenaleko jokalaria batzuk bildu ohi ziren pubera joaten ginen afaldu eta gero. Heldu eta berehala txunditu gintuen bere ingeles txukunaz, baina ostatu hartan ikusi genuen ezin argiago ez zuela, gugandik urrun, astirik galdu. Aise mugitzen zen han, edozein futbol zelaitan bezain aise. Ostalariak bostekoa eskaintzen zion eta gisa berean jokatzen zuten bezeroetariko anitzek. Barratik bueltan eskuetan zekartzan garagardoei ezaxola, jendeak geldiarazi eta harekin solastatu nahi izaten zuen. Irriz hartzen zituen guztiak, esker onez. Maite zuten, bistan zegoen.

Gu ere ezin hobeki hartu gintuzten. Quim's friends ginen, ez beste turista txepel pare bat. Jendez beterik egoten zen barran eskatzeko tarte bat egin eta, zenbaitetan, gonbidatu ere egiten gintuzten. Gu ere crack, izar sentiarazi gintuzten aldi labur batez, Sabadellen egon ordez, artean ere Barçan bageunde bezala. Ez geunden ordea. Baina hartaz ez genuen pentsatu nahi, ez oporretan ginen bitartean behintzat, ez Quimekin ginen bitartean. Ongi pasatzeko premian geunden. Emirates Stadium aldean ez bezala, gogorra izanen zen hurrengo denboraldia ere Sabadell aldean.

Ongi pasa genuen, beraz. Hain ongi non, Quim jaiki eta etxera joaten zelarik ere –sobera goiz gure iritziz, biharamunean entrenatzera joan behar zuen eta–, gu hantxe geratzen baikin, nekez ulertzen genuen hizkuntza batez mintzo zitzaigun hainbat lagunekin solasean.

Aluak!

Hala erraten zigun Quimek, afaltzera joan beharrean, gu biok egun osoa ohean igaro eta gero, benetan gosaltzera gindoazela jabetzen zelarik. Gutaz trufatzeagatik erraten zizkigun halakoak, kontent bera ere gu kontent ginelako.

Ea zer kontatzen duzuen nitaz Sabadellen, gero. Neuk ere badut zuetaz kontatzeko franko, ohartarazten zigun, adar joka.

Gu oporretan gaituk, protesta egiten genion.

Bai horixe. Eta hala jarraituko duzue, nik zuen berri Sabadellen zabaldu ondoren.

Gazteak gaituk. Parranda egitekotan orain, ez berrogeita hamar urterekin, ezta?

Parrandazale bezain zurrutero galantak zarete bi-biak!

Zuzen zen Quim, artean ohartzen ez baginen ere. Hori dena ginen, bai, eta hirurok uste baino areago, gainera.

Guztira hamar egun egon ginen Quimenean. Denboraren iragaiteak eta alkoholaren lurrinek lausotuak ageri arren oroimenean, hirurok batera zoriontsu izan gineneko azken egunak izan ziren, eta haietara itzultzen da behin eta berriz gure memoria, gerora gertaturikoaren hazia hor balego bezala. Ez dago, ordea, sekula ez da egon.

Halabeharraren eskuetan gaituk, bat gatoz Sol eta biok, egongelako sofan jarrita, beste botila bana zabaltzean. Halabeharra, patua, horrela erraten diogu, hoberik ezean, definitu ezin duguna adierazteko kirol egunkariak erabiliriko hitz berberak erabiliz. Halabeharra, Jainkoa edo, zentzurik gabe itxuraz, batetik bestera garamatzen esku itsua izendatzeko balia daitekeen beste edozein hitz.

HURRENGO denboraldia aurrekoa bukatu zen gisa bertsuan hasi zen guretzat. Wengerrek agindu bezala, Quimek partida gehienak osorik jokatzen zituen Arsenalekin. Guk biok ere bai, Sabadellekin ordea. Hala ere, pozik ginen hirurok. Ezin argiagoak ziren hala egoteko Quimen arrazoiak; ez hainbeste, beharbada, gureak. Beti bezala, lagunaren arrakastak pozten gintuen, baina, horrez gain, geure heineko arrakasta txikiak ere leuntzen zigun bizimodua. Handik aitzina gure bidea, ezinbestean, beheitikoa izanen zela onartzeak lasaitasun handia eman zigun. Horretan zetzan, hain justuki, gure arrakasta koskorra.

Garai batean batera igo gintuan hirurok, erran zidan behin Solek. Barçatik irten ginenetik, aldiz, bereizten hasi gintuan, Quim goiti eta gu biok beheiti, beti beheiti.

Ageriko etsipenik gabe erran zuen, egunak gaua dakarrela edo horren begi-bistako beste zerbaite erran izan balu bezala. Halaber, futboletik kanpo bizitza bazegoela jabetzea lasaigarria izan zen guretzat. Edo, hobeki errateko, pilota baten gibeletik korrika ibili gabe. Aski genuen ingurura begiratzea horretaz ohartzeko. Bai, gu adimenduz aski motzak izan eta luze jo zigun aldamenen genuenari erreparatzeak. Ferran Boneti, adibidez.

Egun osoz pipatu eta telefonoz noizbehinka mintzatu, horra hark zer egiten zuen, crack batek adina diru irabazteko. Aitak utziriko negozioa kudeatu besterik ez zuen egiten futbolaz tutik ez zekien Bonetek. Gero eta gutxiagotan ikusten genuen, batzuetan telefonoz hots egin eta dena ongi zihoala ziurtatu nahi izaten omen zuen.

Soldata hilero jaso eta, hortaz, kontent ginela erraten genion.

Zuek segi lanean. Ez dago inoiz jakiterik. Egun batean Quim bezain izar dirdiratsuak izatera ailegatzen ahal zarete.

Jo eta bertan akabatuko genukeen, hori erraten zigunean. Arestian argi utzi dudanez, ergeltzat jotzen gintuela iruditzen zitzaigun. Hitz egin zezala Quimen gainean nahi bezain luze; goraipa zezala, baina gu horrenbeste gutxietsi gabe, behintzat.

Selekziorako deitu dute, kontatzen zigun, egunero Sport irakurriko ez bagenu bezala. Premiereko hileko jokalaririk hobereana izendatu dute. Nikeren iragarki baterako nahi dute, Thierry Henryrekin batera...

Nardatu egiten gintuen. Zertarako hots egiten zigun, zer espero zuen gugandik?

Motibatu egin nahi gaitu, agian, bururatu zitzaigun, baina guk ere ez genuen hori sinesten. Bonetek ezagutzen gintuen eta bazekien gurekin egin beharreko sosak aspaldi samarrean eginak zituela. Zena zelarik ere haren deien zioa, bost axola guri. Sabadell gaizki zihoan, batez ere ekonomikoki, eta gure soldatak handienetarikoak izanik talde osoan, ez genuen uste hurrengo denboraldian han jarraituko genuenik. Patal ari ginen jokatzeko, zertarako uka, eta inork ez du alferrik ordaindu nahi izaten. Hortaz, handik irtendakoan zer egin? Maila bat behetitu eta bigarren B-n, Sabadell baino are apalagoa zen beste talde batean jokatu? Gaizki ginen, baina ez horrelakorik onartzeko bezain gaizki. Aspaldi harrokeriarik gabe bizi baginen ere, artean harrotasun izpi bat geratu eta, aukeran, nahiago genuen beste zer edo zertan aritu. Gure etorkizuneko jarduna zein izan zitekeen hausnartzen hasiak ginelarik, aldiz, Quimena gertatu eta horrek nahastu zuen guztia.

RICHARD Murrayk eta Quimek oso gogorki jo zuten elkarren kontra, gainera zetorkien pilotaren bila ia batera jauzi egitean. Bien buruek talka egin eta atera zuten hotsa hain izan zen nabarmena, non guk ere, Bartzelonan, aditu baikenuen, telebistari esker mundu erdiak aditu zuen bezala. Curling Cupeko partida batean gertatu zen, Leedsen, eta ikaratu egin ginen, biak zelaian luze etzanda ikusi genituenean. Bertako taldearen defentsa zen Richard Murray eta guretzat bezain ezezaguna Quimentzat ere, Leeds Utd. ez baitzen Premiereko taldea. Partida bigarren zatiaren hasieran zegoen istripu zorigaiztokoa gertatu zenean. Haien zelaira itzuli ez eta haien ordezkioak irten zirelarik, kontu larria zela konprenitu genuen. Telebistakoek baieztatu zizkiguten susmo txarrak handik hamar minutura: ospitalera eraman zituzten.

Interneten sartu eta gertatutakoaren berri jasotzera saiatu ginen. Anitz ziren horren gaineko albisteak, baina gehienek zelaian ikusitakoa aipatzen zuten soilik. Dardarka ginen. Boneti hots egin genion. Hark ere ezer gutxi zekien. Zerbait jakinez gero erranen zigula aginduarazi genion deia bukatu aitzin. Behingoz ez zuen bere hitza jan eta haren mezua jaso genuen handik ordubetera. Quim hobeki omen zegoen. Konortea berreskuratu omen zuen bederen. Leeds Unitedeko defentsak ez.

Hori besterik ez genekielarik oheratu ginen. Gosaltzera eseri ginenerako, aldiz, dena argi zegoen: Quim hobera egiten ari zen bitartean, Richard Murray zorigaiztokoa gorpu zetzan Londres iparraldeko ospitale batean.

Ba al daki Quimek?

Ezetz erantzun zigun Bonetek, ez ziotela erran nahi izan, goizegi zela.

Bi egun geroago erran behar izan zioten, beste jokalariaen egoeraz galdezka ari zen eta. Lur jota geratu omen zen, albiste lazgarria entzun eta gero. Negarrari lotu eta ordutan egon zen hala, harik eta iluntzean lasaigarri bat eman zioten arte. Lotan utzi omen zuen Bonetek.

Aurkitu zuen lehen hegazkinean sartu zen Ferran Bonet, Londresera lehenbailehen heltzeko. Handik hots egiten zigun gauero.

Astebetetz izan zen ospitalean Quim. Lehenago ere igor zezaketen etxera, harturiko burukadak, gogorra izanagatik, ez baitzion deus apurtu edo odol-jariorik eragin. Hala adierazi zuten egin zizkioten azterketa ugariak. Osasunez ongi zegoen, antza. Hala ere, mutualdi eta negarraldi luzeek agerian uzten zuten makinek nekez antzeman dezaketen oinaze gorria. Horregatik ez zuten etxera joatera utzi, horretarako eskaria egin zienean. Froga osagarri zenbait aitzakia, beste egun batzuk ukan nahi izan zuten begipean.

Bonet bat zetorren sendagileen erabakiarekin. Richard Murrayren heriotza deitoragarriak eta haren ingurukoek (hildakoaren senide, lagun eta kideen adierazpenak; autopsiaren emaitzak; hileta elizkizunak, eta abar) oihartzun gaitza izan zuten Ingalaterrako komunikabideetan eta, beraz, zurrumbilo horretatik ahalik eta urrunen egotea komeni zitzaion gure Quimi.

Gu, bitartean, amorraturik geunden Bartzelonan, Quim ikustera joan ezinik. Richard Murrayren heriotzak ez baldin bazuen Ingalaterrako Premiera geldiarazi, are eta gutxiago Espainiako bigarren maila eta, hortaz, Sabadellen egon behar genuen ia egunero, txapelketaren bukaera arte.

Londresera joan beharrean gu, Quim etorri zen Sabadellera. Arsenalekoen ideia izan zen, sendagileek gomendaturik. Lasaitasuna behar omen zuen beste ezeren gainetik, eta non etxean baino hobeki. Hots egin genion, bisitatzera azaldu aitzin. Amak telefonoa hartu eta oraindik itxaroteko eskatu zigun, semea aski urduri sumatzen zuen eta. Bere kontu utzi behar omen genuen. Deituko gintuen, semea gurekin egoteko gisan izan orduko. Ados ginen noski, eta hala adierazi genion.

Bonet, ordea, haserre zegoen lagunaren senideekin, amarekin batik bat. Begirunerik ez ziotela kontatu zigun, alferrik zela semearen ordezkaria zela gogoraraztea.

Poztu egin ginen. Bonet Quimen ordezkari legala zen, baina gu haren lagun minak ginen, gero. Gure iritzien berri jakin gabe ere, Quimen gurasoek Bonet baino gehiago maite eta guri hots egin ziguten lehen-lehenik, hura ongi samar zegoela ikusitakoan. Hala erran zigun Quimen amak: Zatozte, pitin bat hobeki dago honezkero.

Beharbada hala zen, beharbada hagitzez okerrago egonen zen aurreko asteetan, baina guk behintzat gaizki ikusi genuen. Quimen amak egongelara pasarazi eta haren bila joan zen. Nekez

ezagutu genuen, amaren gibeletik agertu zelarik. Amak berehala alde egin eta bakarrik utzi gintuen hirurok. Elkarri beha geratu ginen. Quim zurbil-zurbil zegoen, oso argala, eta betzulo nabarmenak zeuzkan. Horrek denak kezkatu arren, areago kezkatu gintuen begietan sumatu genion tristura mugagabeak. Mutu, zer erran ez genekielarik, elkar besarkatu genuen. Besarkada trinko hartan bilduak, talde baten partaide ikusi zuen gutariko bakoitzak bere burua. Garai bateko hiru mosketeroak ginen berriz ere. Eta, berriz ere indartsu sentituz, ataka gaitz hartatik onik irteten jakinen genuela ziur izan ginen.

la egunero bildu ginen handik aitzina. Entrenamendua burutu eta Quimen etxera joaten ginen, hura ez baitzen artean karrikatuzera ausartzen. Jendearen beldur zen nonbait, eta nahiago zuen gurasoen etxeko lasaitasuna, Sabadelleko jendearen aupada eta animo zintzoak baino. Bihotz ematera ahalegintzen ginen gu ere, baina gure ahalegina haren herrikideena bezain alferrikakoa zen. Quim lur jota zegoen, eta ez zirudien inork laguntzen ahal zuenik. Nahiz eta sekula aitortu ez, kostata atera genizkion hitz bakanak aski izan ziren buruan etengabeki zerabilena jakiteko, Richard Murrayren izena inoiz aipatu gabe ere.

Bere esker ona erakusten zigun Quimen familiak, horretarako parada zuten bakoitzean. Arras estimatzen ziguten Quimi eskainitako arreta, batez ere Boneten ezaxola ikusita.

Ez naiz gobernuz kanpoko erakunde bat, erran zigun Bonetek, Quimi ez ote zion kasu handiagoa eskaini behar galdetu geniolarik. Haserre erran zigun, zertaz ari ginen benetan ez baleki bezala.

Udan arrunt aldatu zen dena, batez ere niretzat. Solek Sabadellen jarraitu zuen, baina neuk Girona taldera joan behar izan nuen, futbol profesionalean jarraitzekotan. Sabadell baino are talde apalagoa zen Girona orduan, aurrekontu eta liga apalagokoa. Klubarekin lotzen ninduen agiria sinatu eta haren elastiko zuri-gorria argazkirako eskutan hartu nuelarik, banekien hura izanen zela jantziko nuen hondarrekoa, hantxe bukatzen zela nire ibilbidea –nireari horrela deitzerik egonez gero, jakina. Nire antzeko sentipenak zituen Solek ere.

Gureak egin dik, etsi zuen Quimek, gure hausnarketa goibelak adituta.

Amore ez emateko eskatu genion arrenka, nahiz eta guk berdin uste. Quim zetzan zulo beltz sakon ikaragarritik noizbait irten eta zorigaiztoko istripua arte izan zen futbolari aparta berriz izanen zelakoan geunden, egia erran, baina pozik onartu genion iritzia guri zegokigun heinean. Ez genuen beste aukerarik.

Aldaketa horiek guztiak zirela eta, arrunt gutxiago bildu ginen hirurok, denboraldia hasi zenetik. Gironara egunero joan behar nuenez, ezinezkoa zitzaidan ordura arte bezala jarraitzea. Quimek eta Solek maiz ikusten zuten elkar, Solek eta biok bezala, hirurok batera biltzea hagitiz zaila zen, ordea. Quimez nekiena Solen bitartez nekien, hark kontatuta. Makurrak izaten ziren Sabadelletik etorririko albisteak, Quimek goiti eta beheiti handiak omen zituen, eta batzuetan sitsa baino harroago agertuagatik, kaka baino ezdeusagotzat jotzen zuen bere burua beste batzuetan.

Ez al ziotek lasaitzeko zerbait eman? galdetu nion Soli, kontaktzen ari zitzaidana konprentitu nahirik.

Pilula mordoa ematen ziotek. Haren amak erranda zakiat.

Eta?

Horregatik omen ditik goiti eta beheiti gogor horiek. Abaildurik dagoenean pilula irentsi eta harrotu egiten duk. Eta kontrakoa gertatzen zaiok harroturik dabilenetan. Izugarri apaltzen ditek pilula horietariko batzuek.

Hala zen. Quimen itxurak zeharo berretsi zizkidan Solek kontaturikoak. Gabonetan, berriz bisitatu ahal izan nuenean, kostatu zitzaidan ezagutzea. Lodi zegoen, hobeki erran, puzturik, haizea sartu izan baliote bezala soinean eta aurpegian, eta lanak zituen mintzatzeko. Ohartarazita nengoen, baina Solen hitzek nekez prestatzen ahal ninduten hartarako. Oso muturreko sentipenak ernarazi zizkidan Quimen itxurak. Bateko, amorrua sentitu nuen, gure adiskidea egoera hartan ikusita; besteko, errukia, haren alde ezer gutxi egin zitekeela jabeturik.

Sentipen itsusiak ziren gureak. Lagunaren egoera bezain itsusia, bederen. Nahigabeturik, damaturik, ahaleginak egin genituen Quim laguntzeko. Karrikara irten zedila saiatu ginen, mendira eta itsasora eraman genuen, zinemara. Debaldekoak izan ziren gure ahaleginak: Quimek bere munduan segitu zuen.

Susmatu genuen moduan, denboraldi hura izan zen azkena guretzat. Ezin erran egoerak ustekabeen harrapatu gintuenik. Gure hasierako susmoez gain Boneten ohar ugariak genituen, zer zetorkigun jakiteko.

Ez zarete gaztetxo hasi berri batzuk, erraten zigun, denboraldiaren bukaerak ekartzen ahal ziguna aipatzean.

Horrenbeste bagenekien, baina, bizitza erdia pilota astintzen eman ondoren, geroaren beldur ginen. Gure artean horretaz aritzen ginelarik, zer edo zer sortuko zitzaigula erraten genion elkarri, moldatuko ginela nola edo hala. Horretan sinetsirik geunden. Inozo galantak.

Berandu baino lehen espero genuen kolperako ustez prest egon arren, pot eginda utzi gintuen, denboraldia bukatzeko pare bat aste falta zirenean, Bonetek eman zigun albisteak: inon ez gintuzten nahi, ezta liga apalenetan ere. Ez zegoen zereginik, sobera garesti eta ez sobera gazteak omen ginen.

Topa egin dezagun gure bizitza berriaren alde, proposatu zigun Solek.

Hala egin genuen noski, ordurako topa edozeren alde egiten genuen eta. Gure bizitza berria zaharraren luzapena besterik ez zen, ordea. Luzapen makurra, gainera. Entrenamendurik gabe, zurrutean hagitzez lehenago hasi eta hagitzez beranduago oheratzen ginen. Laburrak ziren Bartzelonako gauak guretzat. Ostaturik ostaturik eta diskotekaz diskoteka igarotzen genituen. Jende anitz ezagutzen genuen. Gehienek gu maite eta laguntzat hartzen gintuztela uste

genuen. Hala zen itxuraz. Jadanik futbolariak ez izan arren, Barçan noizbait (eta laburki) jokatu izanak itzal handia ematen zigun haien artean. Fitsik ere ez zekiten futbolaz, baina haientzat bazen zerbait Camp Noutik pasatze hutsa. Jakina, ez genituen beren okerretik atera. Horretan jarrai zezatela, pentsa zezatela inoiz Ronaldinho edo Samuel Eto' o bezainbeste izan ginela, pentsa zezatela nahi zuten guztia. Egia erran, onura besterik ez zekarkigun gure ustezko lagunak. Tragoak ordaintzen zizkiguten. Haiekin komunera joatera gonbidatu eta koka lerro luzeak atontzen zizkiguten. Beren etxe dotoreetan antolaturiko jaietara eramaten gintuzten, portuan zituzten belaontzietara. Kaburik gabeko asteburu batean bizi ginen, inoiz gelditzen ez zen zurrumbilo batek harrapatu. Agudo zihoan gure inguruan oro.

Futbolik gabeko gure bizimoduari ezin hobea iritzita ere, aski urrunarazi gintuen Quimengandik. Lagun min genuen artean ere, baina lehen baino hagitzez gutxiago ikusten genuen. Egunez lo egin eta berandu jaikitzen ginenez eta, gainera, bestondoak eta buruko minez maiz, gogorik ez gehienetan Sabadellera joateko. Hala ere, noizbait gogoak alferkeriari nagusitu eta hara egiten genuen.

Ongi etorriak izaten ginen, beti bezala. Gehienetan, Quimen amak atea ireki eta semearen egoera aipatzen zigun, ahots apalez. Andre aski elizkoia zen eta, guri bezainbeste, Jainkoari zuzentzen zitzaion, semea ahotan hartzen zuelarik. Bere hitzen bermetzat jotzen zuen. Gauzak eskatzen zizkion. Guri, aldiz, ez zigun deus eskatzen, beharbada semeari bezain gutxi eskatzen ahal zitzaigula ohartzen zelako. Nolanahi ere, Quimen bila joaten zen korrika txikian, hara azaltzen ginen bakoitzean.

Quim berdintsu egoten zen. Ematen zizkieten pilulen arabera izaten zuen, aspaldiko goibeltasun astunaren barruan. Baldarturik zegoen, baldarki mintzatu eta baldarki mugitzen zen, zangoetan beruna balu bezala. Tokitan zegoen Emirates Stadium osoak miresten zuen gizon txiki samar baina guztiz dotorea. Bere larru zurizko besaulkian jarrita ikusi, eta Buda koskor baten parean ginela iruditzen zitzaigun, hain zegoen puzturik eta, itxuraz behintzat, orori soraio anitzetan. Hirurok futboletik kanpo baginen ere, artean futbolaz aritzen ginen batik bat. Barçaz batik bat. Benetan maite genuen taldeak. Haren balentriek pizten zuten gehien gure lagun tristeak. Horregatik, Camp Noura gurekin etortzeko erraten genion. Hark baietz, baina etxean geratzen zen, partida telebistaz ikusten. Neskatan gurekin etortzera ere gonbidatzen genuen, alferrik. Bere zokoa nahiago.

Horrela utzi genuen duela hiru egun, Bartzelonara itzuli ginenean. Egun hartan ere nola ikusi genuen jakin nahi izan zuen Quimen amak. Sobera baikorrak izan gabe, esperantza gordetzera lagunduko zuen zerbait erratera ahalegindu ginen. Bistan da ez genuela lortu. Nolanahi ere, hura izan zen bizirik ikusi genuen hondar aldia.

AMETS bat izan zuen Quimek. Kontatu zigunez, aurpegia moztzeko batez ezkutaturik zeraman norbait ametsean agertu eta pistola bat atera zion. Quimek besoak altxatu eta moztzerodunaren aginduei men egin zien behingoan. Zangoak dardarka zeuzkan eta hilik

zekusan bere burua. Era absurdo batez, gainera, pistolaz mehatxatzen zuenak beste batekin nahastu zuela seguru baitzegoen etsai edo aurkaririk sekula izan ez zuen Quim. Horixe adierazi nahi izan zion. Isiltzera behartu zuen mehatxugileak, ordea. Quim urduri zegoen, noski, baina mozorroturiko gizonaren ahotsa hagitz ezaguna zitzaion. Erne, oroimenari eragin eta ahots haren jabeari zegokion aurpegiaren bila aritu zen bere artean. Ezagutzen zuen jendea gogora ekartzeko ahalegina egin eta trumilka etorri zitzaizkion ahotsak eta aurpegiak. Anabasa hartan, nola kausitu bilaturikoa? Halako batean, aitzitik, besoa luzatu eta pistola kendu zion mozorrodunari. Koldartzat zuen Quimek bere burua eta ezin zuen konprenitu hura egitera zerk bultzatu zuen. Edozein izanik ere egin berri zuenaren zioa, bere burua harriturik utzi zuen Quimek hala jokaturik. Harrigarriena, dena den, hari mozorroa erauzi, eta berak espero zuen Richard Murrayrekin topo egin beharrean, bere buruarekin topo egitea izan zen.

Lagunak kontaturiko amets horretaz oroitu gara, haren heriotza jakin dugunean. Haren amak hots egin digu. Negarrari ezin eutsiz aditu dizkiogu semearen heriotzaren zehaztasunak. Etxeko barne patiora bota omen du bere burua. Ikaraturik, hitz kontsolagarri zenbait bilatu dugu geure baitan, Jainkoak berak ere ezin kontsola dezakeen Quimen ama gajoarentzat. Zer edo zer zezeltzera heldu gara ozta-ozta.

Telefonoa utzi eta sukaldera joan da Sol zuzenki. Izotza eta pare bat edalontzi ekarri ditu handik.

Topa egin dezagun, egin dit gonbita, begiak dir-dir.

Quimen alde, erran dugu biok batera, edalontziak hustu aitzin.

Edalontziak berriz bete eta berriz nahi izan du topa egin Solek: Gure alde, hiru mosketeroon alde!

Gure hobe beharrez proposatu du Solek hori, bistan da, baina zer pentsatua eman dit. Sol bizkorra da, argia, eta jakin du, hitz gutxi horien bitartez, gure sentipenen berri zehatza ematen. Egia da, sekula baino batuagoak gaude hirurok. Hain batuak, hain elkar harturik, non laster Quimen gibeletik joanen garen geu ere. Seguru gaude. Gure buruaz beste egiten ari gara geu ere. Beste gisa batez, lasai eta patxadan, baina horrexetan ari gara, azken finean. Tragoz trago eta botilaz botila ari gara, presarik gabe, baina horrexetan. Ez da harritzekoa, gainera, Quimen gibeletik joan izan baikara beti, futbolearen nahiz bizitzan bertan. Jakina, hura baino motelagoak gara. Hura bezain leialak gara, ordea, eta ez dugu berriz bakarrik utziko.

Berriz ere Quimen alde egin dugu topa.

ITXAROPEN

Zarama naiz. Gogorra da esatea, jakina, baina onartu beharra dago. Gezur gehiegi esan diot neure buruari, eta bada garaia egiaren bat aitortzeko. Hil ala bizikoa da neuretzat. Zarama naiz benetan eta, zarama izateari utzi nahi baldin badiot behintzat, horixe onartu behar dut ezer baino lehen, mozkorrak bere mozkorkeria onartu behar duen bezala. Nahitaezkoa da sendabidean aurrera egitekotan. Hori gabe alferrikakoa nuke gainerako guztia. Horrenbeste erakutsi zidan aita alkoholiko baten semea izateak.

Egunero edaten zuen: bazkarian, iluntzean lagunekin tabernarik taberna, afarian. Edozein aitzakiak balio zion botila eskuratzeko. Eta haserretu egiten zen, amak edo izebak edo gutariko beste edonork gehiegi edaten zuela leporatuz gero. Bere antzera edaten omen zuen haren aitak, eta hala ere laurogeita hamahiru urterekin hil zen, burua argi eta lotan zetzala, zaharraren zaharrez. Aita, aldiz, aitonak baino hogeita hemezortzi urte gutxiago zituela hil zitzaigun, gripe baten ondorioz, txikituta zituen giltzurrunek huts eginda.

Haren heriotzak ez ninduela batere mindu esan nahiko nuke, baina gezurra litzateke. Aita eta senar axolagabe eta traketsa izanagatik, ez zen gizon txarra. Egia da gehiago arduratzen zela bere lagunez, gutaz baino. Dena den, ez da batere berdina gaur egun uste dudana eta orduan uste nuena. Aita gorrotatu behar zuen gatzetxo bat nintzen, adinak eskatzen zidan, noizbait gure semetxoari neu gorrotatzea eskatuko dion bezalaxe. Eta poztuko naiz, horixe poztuko naizela, horrek adieraziko baitu oraindik bizi garela, hildakoak ere gorrota daitezkeela ondo baino hobeto jakin arren.

Kokaina da gustukoa izan dudana droga bakarra. Alkoholak inoiz ez nau erakarri. Aitagatik seguru asko. Haxixak ere ez, moteldu eta lotan uzten nauelako beti. Eta hies-aren sasoiari heroinak aspaldi galdua zuen noizbait izan omen zuen xarma.

Anfetaminekin hasi nintzen, koka geroago etorri zen. Hamabost-hamasei urte izango nituen lehendabiziko speed lerroa sudurreratu nuenean. Aste nagusian izan zen. Gaupasa egiteko baimena genuen, eta aprobetxatu beharra zegoen. Santutxuko gure betiko tabernara elkartu ginen lagunok bazkalostean. Gurasoek emandako dirua bildu eta Somerara jaitsi ginen zuzen. Bertan erosi genuen. Batzuek berehala nahi zuten, baina gauerako gordetzea erabaki genuen gehienok, Gas plazan egongo zen rock kontzertu itzelerako. Txosnetatik ia atera gabe eman genuen arratsaldea, eta bertan ginen su artifizialak hasi zirenean ere, mozkor samar ordurako.

Gas-ean aurre-aurrean ipini eta, deiadarka eta txaloka, burua astindu genuen izena ahaztu dudana talde heavy batekoekin batera musikari jarraiki, buruaz libratu nahiko bagenu bezala. Elkarri bultzaka, salto eta jauzi egin genuen nekatu gabe. Zoragarria izan zen. Zoragarria bezain laburra zoritxarrez, arin baino arinago heldu zitzaigulako etxeratzeko sasoiari. Ordulariari begiratu, eta sinesgaitza zitzaigun denbora hain bizkor igaro izana, hain oharkabean. Arratsaldea eta gau osoa berbetan eman bagenituen ere, hamaika kontu interesgarri geratu zitzaigun

aipatu gabe mihi puntan, eta biharamunean, ohean nentzala lokartu ezinik, iluntzean lagunekin hitz egin beharreko kontuen zerrenda osatu nuen neure artean.

Inoiz ez genuen nahikoa astirik. Gauza gehiegi gertatzen zen gure inguruan dena aipatu ahal izateko. Lanpetuta genbiltzan. Neskekin batez ere. Artxandara joaten ginen batzuetan, bikoteak espiatzera. Ezer gutxi ikusten genuen, jakina, bikoteek autoetan zihardutelako eta ez edonoren begi-bistan. Gauez azaltzen ziren hara eta, beraz, gutxitan izaten genuen zer edo zer ikusteko abagunea. Baina horrek erakargarriago bihurtzen zuen dena guretzat. Begiak ezin zuena, benetan zen baino ederrago ikusten genuen irudimenari esker, interesgarriago. Emakume baten zenbait zentimetro azal hautematea nahikoa genuen, aldizkari pornografikoetan miretsia berritzeko.

Zakila jaten ari zaio, iragartzen zuen Juliok, eta ez zuen gehiago esan beharrik guk ere gauza bera ikusteko. Julio taldeko zaharrena genuen, eta besteok baino urtebete gehiago ez izan arren, munduko jakintsu handienetakotzat jotzen genuen, edozein guraso edo irakasle baino jakintsuago, noski.

Aste nagusian ezagutu nuen Begoña, ez speed lehendabizikoz dastatu nuen hartan, hiru urte geroago baino, haren lagun bat Juliorekin ibiltzen hasi zenean. Egun hartako gomuta gutxi geratu zait gogoan, eta geratu zaidan apurak zerikusi txikia du Begoñak kontatutakoarekin. Berbetan ihardun omen genuen egun hartan, eta Begoñak dioena sinestera, nahikoa luze. Bera hurbildu omen zitzaidan eta horrela izango zen seguru asko, lotsati samarra izan naiz-eta txikitatik, batez ere neskekin. Egun hartan horiz jantzita zegoela, ordea, ez zait ahaztu, ezta zein polita iruditu zitzaidan ere. Tamalez, urtebete igaro zen ostera ikusi nuen arte.

Garbiñeri, Julioaren neskeri, noizbehinka galdetzen nion bere lagunaren berri, zeharka beti. Zapuztuta geratzeko beldurrez seguruena, ez nituen nire sentimenduak agerian utzi nahi. Bartzelonan dago, izaten zen Garbiñeren erantzuna.

Han ikasi eta oso tarteka etortzen omen zen Bilbora. Horregatik pasa zen urte oso bat berriz ikusi aurretik, eta beste bat, harik eta parranda gau batean ametsetan baino gertatzen ez zitzaidana benetan gertatu zen arte. Urte bi lehenagoko gau hura ez bezala, ondo gogoan dut oraindik gure estreinako musuarena.

Ruper Ordorikak Plaza Barrian kantatu behar zuen eta Kortatuk (edo Negu Gorriak ote ziren ordurako?) Gas-ean. Neskek Plaza Barrira nahi zuten, Gas-era mutilok. Erdibide bat topatu genuen azkenean, eta bietatik apur bat ikustea erabaki genuen. Gas-era heldu ginenerako bost axola niri Kortatu, Negu Gorriak edo munduko beste edozein talde. Begoñaren hitzetarako behar nituen nik belarri biak oso-osorik. Gorputz osoa behar nuen harentzat, ordurako geldi ezinik nuen gorputza. Lerrotxo zuri bat ipini nion Begoñari zoko batean, eta orain ezetz eta ezetz tematzen bazait ere, badakit horrela izan zela. Gau hartako speedak bultzatuta bezala, elkarrekin jarraitu genuen uda amaitu eta Bartzelonara itzuli behar izan zuen arte. Eta handik aurrera ere bai, gutxienez hilabetean behin joaten nintzaiolako bisitan.

Diseinua ikasten zuen eta hainbat ikaskide euskaldunekin bizi zen, El Born merkatuaren ondoan, eta bertan ematen genuen egunaren zatirik luzeena, ohean. Gauetz baino ez ginen kaleratzen, zer edo zer jatera edo Begoñak hainbeste maite zuen auzo gotikoan eskutik lotuta ibiltzera. Ikasturte bat pasa genuen horrela. Bilbora itzuli zen Begoña gero, lanera. Ordurako hala nenbilen neu ere, argigailuen artean.

Ikasle txarra betidanik, elektronika ikastera bidali nindutenean ikasitako apurrari esker sartu nintzen argizatze kontuetan. Diruz ni bezain urri zebilen antzerki talde batekin hasi nintzen, laguntzaile. Herririk herri ibiltzen ginen, gutxi kobratzen baina ikaragarri gozatzen. Argi txiki eta kolorezko paper soil batzuk nahikoa genituen antzezpenak behar zuen giroa sortzeko. Gai ginen ia ezerezetik eguna edo gaua sortzeko. Jainko koxkorrak ginen.

Asko ikasi nuen haiekin, eta ez argizatzeaz soilik, furgonetako ordu luzeetan entzun nuenari esker. Antzezle haietako bati zor diot zineman sartu izana ere, nitaz hitz egin ziolako bera protagonista zuen film laburraren zuzendariari. Texas zuen izena laburrak eta hango kartzelaren batean heriotzaren zain urtetan egondako preso baten azken orduak kontatzen zituen. Txarra zen, oso txarra. Hala eta guztiz ere, beste bat egiteko deitu zidaten ondoren, baita beste baterako ere handik gutxira.

Zoritxarrez, zinemaren sasoia kokarena ere izan zen niretzat. Travelling, kamera edo argiak bezain beharrezkoa zuten zinemagileek filmak egiteko. Kamera eskutan, argi naturala eta antzezle amateurrak erabil zitezkeen dirua aurrezteko. Koka, berriz, behar bezalako beti. Barra-barra ibiltzen zuten, baita edozein ezezagunen lehen laburra grabatzeko ere. Bazirudien hauts zuriek bihurtzen zutela zuzendaria zuzendari, ez norberaren talentuak edo lanak. Gauza bera esan zitezkeen antzezle, kameralari eta laguntzaileez ere, edo argizatzaileez, noski.

Benetan urte politik hasierako haiek, lan, barre eta parranda itzelezkoak. Begoña eta biok elkarrekin bizitzera joan ginen Errekaldera, bertan alokatu genuen etxe batera. Biok geniharduen lanean, eta handik laster bigarren eskuko auto bat erosi genuen, mendira eta oporretan joateko. Geu elkartu ginen aldi bertsuan sorturiko beste bikote batzuk bananduak ziren aspaldi samarrean eta jende askok harrিতuta begiratzen zigun, artean maiteminduta jarraitzen genuela ulertu ezinik. Ika-mika gogorrak izaten genituen, nola ez, baina, haietako bakoitzaren ondoren, suspertu baino ez zen egiten gure artekoa. Txundituta geunden geu ere, hain txundituta non batzuetan ezkontzaz ere berba egiten genuen. Elkarrekin bizi ginen, ezkondurik bezala, eta hala ere asmo horrekin jolasten ginen, batik bat ekaitzaren ondoko barealdi gozo haietan. Maitasunaren aldarean egin zitezkeen sakrifizioak goren irizten genion ezkontzari, betiko zorionaren bermea gure harremanean.

Luze berba egin eta lehen seme-alaba edukitakoan udaletxetik pasatuko ginela erabaki genuen azkenean. Eta kalkuluak egiten hasi ginen, seme edo alaba hori izateko unerik egokiena zein zitezkeen asmatu nahian. Diru apur bat behar genuen, jakina, baina handik urtebetera nahikoa izango genuela ikusi genuen. Afaltzera joan ginen hori ospatzeko eta, kafearen zain geundela, hurrengo urteko egun berean pilula utziko zuela idatzi zuen Begoñak beti alboan eramaten

zuen libreta gorrian: Maiatzak 5. Urtebete geroago, ostera, pilula hartzen jarraitzen zuen, nahiz neuk uzteko behin baino gehiagotan eskatu.

Begoña ez da egoskorra izatez, baina argi zegoen hartan ez zuela amore emateko asmorik. Maite ninduen, nire haurra nahi zuen, ez ordea hark aita drogazale bat edukitzea. Istilu galantak izan genituen hori zela eta. Dena bere onetik ateratzen ari zela esaten nion, koka gustatzen zitzaidala, bai, baina ez nindukala harrapaturik. Hark baietz, bestela saiatzeko ezer sudurreratu gabe bizitzen, ea zer gertatzen zitzaidan. Baketan uzteko eskatzen nion hasieran, gero ez, bizkor konturatu nintzelako lelo harekin jarraitzeko asmoa zuela. Erronka onartu nion, beraz. Onartu, eta galdu ere bai, estu loturik bainindukan hauts demonioak. Oso gaitza zen ingurukoak lerroak ipintzen ikusi eta haien eskaintzari ezetz esatea. Gaitza baino gehiago, ezinezkoa.

Nire drogamenpekotasunaren onarpenak, kokatik urrundu ordez, gehiago lotu ninduen. Kostata onartu nuen, oso kostata, eta horrek eragindako depresiotik kokak bakarrik ateratzen ahal ninduen. Irteerarik gabeko zirkulu baten barruan nengoen.

Madrilera joaten nintzen lanera orduan, gero eta gehiago. Ordurako oso film gutxi egiten zen Euskal Herrian, eta Espainiako hiriburura alde egin zuen hemengo ekoizle eta zuzendari askok. Haien atzetik abiatu behar izan genuen teknikook ere. Dena den, asteburuak Begoñarekin pasatzen saiatzen nintzen, Bilbon. Elkarrekin egoteko genuen egun pareta arin joango zelakoan, eta ez zapuzteko seguruena, koka edo haurrarena ez aipatzen ahalegintzen zen Begoña. Biok genekien hor zegoela gure harremanaren koska, ordea. Hitzez ezer ez adierazi arren, begietan irakurtzen nuen etengabe bidaltzen ari zitzaidan mezua. Horrela uste nuen behintzat. Gaur egun, aldiz, duda egiten dut. Kokazale zaharrengan hain ugariak izaten diren paranoiaren bat izan zitekeen neurea ere. Eta, egia esan, batzuk izan nituen, Madrilen batik bat. ETA zela eta, gertutik zaintzen zituen poliziak han bizi ziren euskaldunak, batez ere gazteak. Bat baino gehiago izutu zuten etxera ordu txikietan azalduta edo kalean hartu eta komisaldegira eramanda. Berehala zabaldu zen beldurra gure artean, beraz, eta edozein izkinatan, edozein tabernatan sentitzen nintzen espiatuta. Atzetik zetozkidala iruditzen zitzaidan eta norbaitekin egoten saiatzen nintzen, badaezpada ere. Hain handia izatera heldu zen neure paranoia, non egun batean erabaki nuen ezin nuela gehiago, eta lanean ari nintzen telesailaren atala amaitu.

Asmatu nuen. Dena zen errazago Begoñaren ondoan. Luze gabe hobeto nengoen, lasaiago, kontentuago. Hain nengoen pozik eta baikor, hain aldatzeko gogoz, non koka utziko nuela agindu nion. Atseginez entzun zidan promesa, nahiz eta isiltzeko eskatu, hamaika aldiz agindutakoa ari nintzela errepikatzen gogoraraziz. Egia zen, askotan esana nion gauza bera, gehiegitan, baina zintzo eta benetan guztietan. Benetan bezain alferrik. Ulergarria zitzaidan Begoñaren jarrera. Otsoa zetorrela behin eta berriz aldarrikatu, eta otsoa sekula azaldu ez. Nork sinistuko zidan? Nire betiko asmo on hutsala ez zela frogatzeko eskatu zidan. Froga? Zertaz ari zen? Bazekien Madrilen gorriak pasa nituela, bazekien beldurrak airean ibili nintzela eldarnio eta paranoiak tarteko, ez al zen hura nahikoa serio ari nintzaiola jakiteko?

Proyecto Hombre-n sartu behar duk, esan zidan orduan.

Baietz nik, zinemara joango ginela esan izan balit legez. Ezer gutxi nekien erakunde horretaz. Jonki kontu bat zen hura niretzat. Eta neure burua haien parean ikustea ez zen samurra. Onartu egin nion proposamena, Begoña pozik uzte aldera batik bat.

Bera arduratu zen guztiaz. Informazioa bildu, deitu eta bertakoekin berba egin zuen.

Bulego argitsu batera pasarazi ninduten. Begoña kanpoan geratu zen nire zain.

Bostekoa eskaini zidan Ramon Goiti zeritzan gizon bizardun batek. Musu ingurua urdinduta zuen eta beltz-beltza gainerakoa. Urrezko kate bat zeraman lepoan, Kristo edo Ama Birjinaren irudiari eutsiko ziona, nik uste. Begoñak azaldua ziola nire arazoa esan zidan lehenengo eta behin. Hala ere, emazteak (hitz hori erabili zuen) esandakoa baino askoz inportanteagoa omen zen neuk esateko nuena. Nik, ordea, gutxi nuen esateko, perpauz bakar bat justu: Koka utzi nahi dut.

Asko adierazi nion hor, dena. Goitik, aldiz, gehiago nahi zuen. Pozik emango nion gehiago, baina esku-hutsik nengoen eta, nire buru motelduaren zokoak sano arakatu arren, batere ez nuen aurkitu pop art tankerako bizar xeble haren jabea lasaitzeko. Hala ere, nekatu gabe ziharduen hark, niri galde eta galde. Antzeko galderak egiten zizkidan beti, egiteko era aldatzen saiatuz aldi bakoitzean. Lasai hartzea erabaki nuen, nekatuko zen noiz edo noiz.

Baboa ni: Goiti, Gizakia Helburuko guztiak oro har, nekaezinak ziren. Nekaezinak, ez ergelak. Goitik zer nahi zuen argi zegoen. Nire moduko zarama gizaki bihurtaraz zezaketela ziurtatu nahi zuen itaunketa amaiezin haren bitartez. Ordu erdia baino ez nintzela bulego barruan egon entzun nion harriturik Begoñari handik ateratakoan. Goitirekin emaniko nire lehen ordu erdia, beste hainbaten estreinakoa.

Bospasei bider joan behar izan nuen Deustuko etxe hartara. Goitik hartu ninduen guztietan. Bostekoa eman, zelan zagoz galdetu eta berehala lotzen zitzaion betiko itaunketari, bezperan utzia zuen leku berean. Neure paranoiagatik izango zen beharbada, baina apur bat beldurtu ninduen. Txikitan izu-ikaratan utzi ninduen film bat ekartzen zidan gogora nire egoerak. Neguko gau batean telebistan ikusiriko hartan denborak ez zuen aurrera egiten, ordu bera adierazten zuten beti ordulariek: elizakoak, udaletxeak, eskola, lantegi, denda eta etxeetakoek.

Egun batean, berriz, onartuko nindutela jakinarazi zidan Goitik, nire harridurarako eta Begoñaren pozerako. Inozoa ni, ezin orduan susmatu zetorkidana. Sindromearen infernua ez dut hemen berrituko, gaixotu egiten naiz-eta gogoratze hutsaz. Izugarria izan zen. Eta haren ondorengoa ez zen askoz gozoagoa izan. Telefonoa, txartelak eta diru guztia kendu zizkidaten. Edonora joateko Begoñak lagundurik joan behar nuen. Lana eta lagunak utziarazi zizkidaten. Alkohola debekatu zidaten. Eskerrak tabakoa onartu zidaten behintzat. Gainera, hori dena gutxi zela iritzita beharbada, komunitatean (horrela esaten zioten) bizi behar izan nuen bost

hilabetez. Bertan lo egiten nuenetan izan ezik (birritan aste gehienetan), han egoten nintzen egunero, iluntzean etxera bueltatu arte.

Goiti bizardunaren ordez Edurne zeritzan emakume mikatz batek hartu zuen nire arduraren orduan. Ez zen seguru asko maltzurra, baina, nire moduko jendilajearekin urtetan iharduteak zailduta, bazekien zelan jokatu. Moja izango zela iruditu zitzaidan hasieran, baina ezetz esan zidaten nire kideek, ezkontuta zegoela.

Hamar bat ziren, ni bezalako kokazale damutuak denak. Ondo konpontzen ginen, eta eskerrak, egun osoa pasatzen genuelako elkarrekin. Lanean, telebistari begira edo xakean nahiz partxisean ari ez ginenetan (kartak erabat debekatuta genituen) berbetan egongo ginen, gure bizitza elkarri kontatzen, gure zokorik zokoenak ere denen begi-bistan uzten. Edurneren begirada zorrotzaren pean sarri.

Pentsatzea ez da sekula izan gehien egin dudana. Bizi egin naiz, batez ere. Gauzak etorri bezala hartu, eta aurrera. Han, aldiz, pentsatzera behartzen gintuzten: amaz, aitaz, emazteaz, neure buruaz. Buruko mina izateraino hausnartu behar izan nituen kontu horiek, nazkatzeraino. Nire barnea arakatu, eta inoiz susmatu gabeko zulo beltz bat aurkitu nuen. Eta kiratsa zerion, higuigarria zen. Orduan onartu behar izan nuen estreinako orain honen ondo dakidana: zarama nintzen, zarama naiz.

Ama, aita, Begoña, neurekoi jokatu dut hirurekin. Itsu maite ninduen amak; seme-alabetan zaharrena ninduen eta, seguru asko, ni nintzen benetan inoiz desiratu zuen bakarra. Aitari, berriz, gorroto nion. Zorionez, han jabetu nintzen haren gogortasuna itxura hutsezko eta behartua zela. Eta maitatzen hasi nintzen, nolabait, ulertu nuelako funtsean neu bezain ahula zela. Horrelakoak ginen han geunden guztiok, egia esan, nahiz eta guk bestela uste izan. Bai, borondategabeak ginen, errealitateari buruz buru begiratzeko ezgauzak, bizizale amorratuaren mozorroaren azpian, oharkabea, heriozale porrokatuak.

Denok kakaz gainezka geundela jakiteak elkarrengana bultzatzen gintuen. Elkartasun hori, ostera, ederra izanagatik, arriskutsua ere izan zitekeen, Edurneren iritziz. Taldeak laguntzen ahal zigun, jakina, baina bertan gozo egotera eramaten ahal gintuen. Horren arriskurik ez, nire ustez, Edurne bertan egonik. Lagun bat baino gehiago kanporatu zuten, eta batek baino gehiagok alde egin zuen, hango bizimodua gehiago eraman ezinik.

Hilabeteak eman nituen berba eta berba, iraganera eraman ninduen bidaia batean. Leku ospela da iragana, ez inolaz ere oroimenean gordetzen dugun erresuma epela. Gaizki pasatuko zuten gurasoek dena falta zen sasoi hartan. Nahikoa lan seme-alabak ikastera bidaltzen, gure traumez arduratzeko. Inor gutxik zekien orduan hitz hori bazenik ere. Dena den, inoiz seme-alabarik izanez gero, trauma guztietatik babesten saiatuko nintzela erabaki nuen. Badaezpada ere. Eta neskato bat balitz, hobe, Begoña arduratuko baitzen nire klona izan ez zedin.

Horrelako kontuak nerabiltzan behin eta berriz neure artean, itxaropenez eta –zergatik ukatu?– apur bat beldurrez ere bai. Begoñak bazuen nire burutapenen berri, baina ez zitzaion

mutila ala neska izatea axola, osasuntsua izatekotan. Dorleta izendatuko genuela esan nion, txikitan eskolan ezagututako norbait gogoan. Onartu egin zidan, neska izanez gero. Hala ere, gaineratu zuen, Gizakia Helburukoa amaitu beharko duzu beste edozeren aurretik.

Hilabete luze horien ondotik, beste urrats bat egin nuen sendabidearen ibilaldi amaigabearen ere. Bergizarteratzea esaten zioten gizon libre eta osasuntsu bihurtuko ninduenaldi horri. Lana topatzea nuen inportanteena orduan, izan nuen azkenarekin zerikusirik izango ez zuen beste edozein. Bila hasi nintzen, beraz, baina, ikasketa gutxikoa naizenez, inon ez ninduten nahi. Goizero egunkaria erosi, lan eskaerak begiratu, eta telefonoz deitzeari ekiten nion. Berriz hots egiteko esaten zidaten batzuetan, beharbada laster izango zutela ni bezalako norbaiten premia. Gainerakoetan, ezta hori ere.

INEMera ere hurbiltzen nintzen. Amorragarria egunak modu horretan pasatu behar izatea.

Bai Edurnek bai Begoñak lasai egoteko esaten zidaten, zerbait topatuko nuela berandu baino lehen. Esan, erraz esaten da, baina, egunak joan egunak etorri, Begoña lanetik etxeratu eta ni telebista parean topatzea gogorra zen gero. Biontzat.

Itxura egiten saiatzen zen, sentitzen zuena ezkututzen eta alai agertzen, ni gehiago hondora ez nendin. Asteak eman nituen horrela, arratsalde batean Begoñak niretzako lan bat zuela esan zidan arte. Norbait behar zuten bere koinatuaren dendan.

Rafak, Begoñaren ahizparen senarrak, Indautxun du denda. Loreak saltzen ditu. Berak bezeroak eta euren eskaerak hartzen zituen, eta neu eskaturikoa ahalik eta hobekien prestatzen saiatzen nintzen; Rafaren aginduei jarraiki lore sortak atontzen. Mota eta kolore ezberdinekoak nahasten nituen. Ureztatu eta garbitu, sortak paperean bildu, eskaeraren arabera beti, ez baitira berdinak ezkontza edo hiletakoak, jakina. Batzuetan dendaren atzealdean lan egiten nuen, beste batzuetan, aldiz, furgoneta hartu eta loreak banatzera joaten nintzen. Bada lan txarragorik. Neure argiekin jarraitu nahiago nuen, dudarik gabe, baina ez nintzen gehiegi nekatzen edo aspertzen. Rafak ondo hartu ninduen hasieratik, eta, nire arazoaren berri zuela, ahalegintzen zen nirekin egonarriz jokatzeko. Neu ere ahalegintzen nintzen.

Hilabete gogorrenak atzean utzita, inoiz baino hobeto geunden Begoña eta biok. Otorduak elkarrekin egiten genituen eta, afalostean, alokatutako bideoak ikusten genituen lantzean behin. Tarteka Gizakira joaten nintzen eta, Begoñak kontatzen zidanez, han baikor ziren nire etorkizunaz. Ondo ari omen nintzen, haiek espero baino hobeto.

Hain erabatekoa izatera heldu zen nire konfiantza eta Begoñaren harrotasuna, ze Gizakian amaitzeko pare bat hilabete falta nuela, pilula hartzeari utzi ziola iragarri zidan. Inoiz baino gehiago maite nuela esan nion, eta benetan.

Gizakian amaitu nuen egunean, afaltzera joan ginen biok. Egun handi haren ospakizuna biribiltzeko, haurdun zegoela esan zidan Begoñak kafe-sasoian. Mutu, izoztuta bezala utzi

ninduen berriak. Kezka aire bat nabaritu nuen Begoñaren aurpegian, eta orduan baino ez nuen ahoa zabaldu, egiten ahal zidan oparirik onena egin berri zidala esateko.

Atzera jaio nintzelako irudipenak ez ninduen hurrengo hilabeteetan utzi. Ahaztua nuen bizimodu hark egunero harritzen ninduen. Kontu txikiez gozatzeko gaitasuna, pozgarria izateaz gain, harrigarria ere bazen. Begoñarekin izandako berbaldi garrantzi gabeenak ere edozein hauts zurik beste asebetetzen ninduen. Bai, horrelako konparaketak egiten nituen nirekiko sarri, artean kokaina burmuinean nuen seinale. Hura ahazteko egin nuen ahalegin mingarriaren ondotik, penagarria irudi zezakeen ezin ahazte horrek. Eskerrak Gizakian kontu hori behin baino gehiagotan aipatu eta garrantzi handirik ez ematen ikasita nengoen. Begoña puztu ahala, puztu zitzaidan harenganako maitasuna ere. Belarria sabelean ipini eta alaba aditzen nuen zozoturik –gero eta seguruago nengoen neskatoa zena. Lagunik gabe jarraitzen nuen, baina lasai nengoen. Begoñarena izan ezik, ez nuen inoren beharrik. Zinemara edo osteratxo bat egiten joaten ginen. San Mamesera ere joaten nintzen noizbehinka, Athleticzale itzela den Rafak gonbidaturik. Horrela, Begoñak eta Rafak lagunduta, igaro ziren egunak, asteak eta hilabeteak. Bizimodu beti berdinarean abantailez jabetuta, beldurrik gabe begiratzen hasi nintzaion geroari. Ziur nengoen edozein arriskuri aurre egiteko gauza izango nintzela, Begoña aldamenean edukirik, bizitzak ipinitako tranpetatik onik aterako nintzela. Horregatik, poza besterik ez nuen sentitu Juliorekin topo egitean atzo.

Urteak ziren ikusten ez nuela, argiekin hasi nintzen sasotik, gutxi gorabehera. Gutxitan agertzen nintzen Santutxura, eta hango lagun gehienen arrastoa galdua nuen, haiek nirea galdua izango zuten legez. Dena den, amari adituta edo, banekien Julio itsasoan pilotu zebilena.

Indautxun egin genuen topo, lanetik atera berria nintzela. Larrua beltz, bibotea sarri eta burua soiltzen hasia izanagatik, behingoan ezagutu nuen. Hark ere segituan ezagutu ninduen, orain ilea motz-motza eduki eta nire janzkera seko diferentea izan arren. Elkar besarkatu genuen, estu, luze. Hunkiturik, hitz egiteari lotu eta arin konturatu nintzen hura nire betiko laguna zela, bezperan bereiztu eta biharamunean atzera bildu izan bagina bezala. Taberna batera jo genuen. Maltaren bandera zeraman petroliontzi batean nabigatzen zuen Juliok, Itsaso Beltzetik Atlantikora eta buelta. Lanbide gogor eta bakartia omen zen, baina ondo ordaindua, eta, ezkongabe jarraitzen zuenez, berarentzat egoki samarra. Maite zuen batetik bestera ibiltzea, maite zuen askatasuna. Hori alde batetik. Bestetik, andre asko egoten ei da portuetan marinelen esperoan. Horrelako aukera izanik, zertarako bakar batekin ibili?

Ez nion Juliores galderari erantzun. Begoñaz gogoratu nintzen, baina bere kontaketa jarraitzen utzi nion. Portu bakoitzeko andreen ezaugarrien berri ematera zihoakidala, bion edalontziak hutsik zeudela ohartu eta beste taberna batera joateko esan zidan. Oso bakanetan sartzen naiz tabernetan, Begoña edo Rafarekin beti, baina onartu egin nion eskaintza. Aurrenekoan neuk eskatu nituen tragoak. Bigarreanean, aldiz, Juliok eskatu nahi izan zituen. Garagardoa, ezta?

Baietz nik, baina alkoholik gabea.

Alkoholik gabea!

Gizakia Helburu, nire mendekotasuna, dena kontatu behar izan nion. Arretaz entzun zidan. Hala ere, bere begiradan errukia eta ironia batzen zirela iruditu zitzaidan. Gero, ni isildu eta Julio berbetan hasitakoan, zuzen nengoela konturatu nintzen.

Itsasoan ni bezalako asko ezagutu zuela esan zidan, berak ere ondo ezagutzen zituela drogak, nik ezagutzen nituenak, baita horiek baino okerragoak ziren beste zenbait ere.

Ezagutu, denak, esan zidan, baina erabili neurrian beti, droga neuk menperatuz eta ez alderantziz.

Inbidiaz begiratu nion. Juliok, aldiz, samatik hartu eta berarengana erakarri ninduen, ni ere gogorra nintzela esanez. Kokainaz libratzeko gauza izan nintzen, eta horrek agerian uzten zuen, haren aburuz, zein indartsua nintzen. Bere edalontziaz nirea jo eta topa egin zuen: Hire alde. Sekulakoa duk-eta egin duana.

Ezin jakin zenbat alkoholik gabeko garagardo edan ote nuen ondorengo tabernetan. Egarritu egiten gintuen berriketak, eta elkarri kontatzeko askotxo genuen, hain bolada luzean bereizita egon ondoren. Dena den, gehiegi edaten ari zela iruditu zitzaidan. Segituan mozkortuko zen, hala jarraituz gero.

Goazemak afaltzera, esan nion, gose nauk.

Gustura genbiltzan, oso gustura, eta merezi zuen berbaldiarekin patxadaz segitzea. Alde zaharrera joatea erabaki genuen. Bidean, ostera, Begoña etorri zitzaidan gogora. Telefonoz deitu behar niola azaldu nion Juliori. Hark baietz, deitzeko, ezagutzen zituela bikote bizimoduaren ajeak eta horregatik ez zela ezkondu, gorroto zuela inoren edo ezeren menpe egotea.

Haurdun zagok, zortzi hilabetekoa, kontatu nion neure burua zuritu nahian.

Jatetxetik bertatik hots egin nion. Ez zuen erantzuten. Ordulariren bat bilatu zuten nire begiek. Ama edo ahizparenean egongo zela pentsatu nuen. Geroago deituko nion atzera.

Semearena kontatzeko eskatu zidan Juliok, telefonotik itzuli nintzenean. Alaba izango zela argitu nion.

Ekografia ikusi duzue?

Ez. Baina bazakiat.

Menua aztertu eta, jana aukeraturik, ardoa eskatu zion Juliok zerbitzariari.

Ura ere bai, mesedez, gehitu nuen nik.

Nire eskaria aditu eta behingoan ilundu zitzaion bekokia lagunari: Uraz jan behar duk txuleta? Ondo duk hire burua zaintzea, baina gehiegikeriarik gabe, aizak. Neurrian zagok koska. Ez al ziaten hori Gizakia edo dena delako horretan azaldu? Ardoa duk, txo, naturala. Ez duk kokaina.

Zentzuzkoa zirudien Julioaren aholkuak, eskarmentu handiko norbaiten hitz zuhurrak, inondik ere.

Gainera, jarraitu zuen, hire seme edo alabarena ospatu behar diagu, eta ez diagu ospatuko ur hutsez, ezta?

Horixe izan zen argudiorik erabatekoena niretzat. Arau guztiek, estuenek ere, badute salbuespenik. Behin bakarrik bihurtzen da inor aita estreinakoz. Ba ote aitzakia hoberik?

Hots zorrotz bat aditu dut halako batean, telefono batena, antza. Jo eta jo ari da, baina ni mugitu ez. Ametsa beste nonbaiterantz eramaten saiatu naiz, isiltasun urragaitzerantz. Ezin. Ahanzten ahalegindu naiz ondoren. Alferrik. Hor dihardu temaz. Hain tema txarraz, ze begiak zabaltzera behartu nauen azkenik. Nekez zabaldu ditut, betileak berunezkoak banitu bezala. Mina nabaritu dut, eta buruan ere mina. Lehor, kartoi eginak ditut eztarri-mingainak. Zer ordu da? Non nago? Goizeko zortziak direla dio iratzargailuak, neure betiko iratzargailuak hain justu. Etxean nago, beraz. Ahal bezala ohean agondu eta, lotan oraino, altxatzen hasi naiz apurka. Telefonoak berean segitzen du errukigabe, eta muin-muineraino zulatzen dit burua. Mingarria da. Hala ere, ura behar dut beste edozer baino lehen, ezingo dut ez berba ezta beste ezer ere egin bestela. Sukaldera joan naiz arineketan.

Bete-betean jo nau egunaren argiak. Txorrotatik bertatik edan dut. Orduan baino ez naiz hitz egiteko gauza sentitu. Bai? ilun bat atera zait eztarriaren sakonenetik. Rafaren ahotsa ezagutu dut. Ea non ibili naizen galdetu dit, haserrea ezkutatu ezinik. Bart ordu biak arte ihardun ei du niri deika. Ezer erantzuteko abagunerik eman gabe, bezperako hamarrak hamar gutxitik aita naizela jakinarazi dit.

Zelan dago Begoña?

Begoña nahikoa ondo.

Eta alabatxoa?

Semea eduki duzue. Gurutzetan dituzu biak, zure zain.

Dutxatu, jantzi eta kalera jo dut arrapataka, taxi baten bila. Zorte ona eduki dut behingoz eta arin topatu dut. Sasoi honetan Bilbo zeharkatzea ez da lan makala, eta gidaria nire eskaera larriei jaramon egiten saiatu den arren, astiro joatera derrigortu du trafikoak. Aldika inguratzen gaituzten autoei eta aldika ordulariari begira joan naiz, behar izan nauenean Begoñak ez nauela ondoan eduki burutik kendu ezinik: gehien behar izan nauenean, nik kale.

Gelditu baino lehen ordaindu nahi izan diot taxilariari. Ulertu du. Jende piloa dabil Gurutzetan. Zuriz jantzitako norbaiti galdetu diot. Harrerara bidali nau, bertan esango ei didate Begoña non topatu.

Senarra zara?

Halako errieta isil bat sumatu dut harrerakoaren itaun itxuraz kaltegabe. Ez dut nire susmoaren funtsaz gogoeta egiteko astirik, ordea.

Rafa topatu dut gelako atearen ondoan nire zain. Zabaldu egin nahi izan dut, baina hark galarazi egin dit: Txarto pasa du Begoñak, oso ahul dago eta atsedena behar du. Utzi lo egiten.

Eta umea?

Begira, hasi zait, dendan gustuko izango ez dudan zerbait esateko erabiltzen duen ahotsaz.

Non dago semea? Zer edo zer gertatu al zaio?

Lasai zaitetz apur bat, mesedez. Arazoak izan ditu. Gela berezi batera eroan behar izan dute.

Gela berezi batera! ia oihu egin dut.

Ixo! Hori baino ez dakit. Berba egizu medikuarekin.

Ezker-eskuin begira, medikuaren bila hasi naiz. Inon ez da ageri. Sarreran ez bezala, jende gutxi dabil ospitaleko korridoreetan, gaixoen senideak gehienak. Uniforme zurien arrastorik ez, baina. Artega nago, gero eta artegago. Korridoreetan barrena noala, erizain bat aurkitu dut azkenean.

Beldurtu egin dut. Gainera etorri zaion norbait ikusi eta beldurtu egin da. Begietan nabaritu diot.

Neure semetxoa!

Apur bat lasaiarazi, eta nor naizen ulertu duela esan dit. Medikuaren bila joango dela eta bertan itxaroteko bueltatu arte. Orduantxe bai ezin izan diodala eutsi: orain arte mediku aluaren bila ibili naizela azaldu diot deiadarka, gure lehen semea dela, txarto dagoela eta lehenbailehen ikusi gura dudala. Amore eman ezean izugarrikeriaren bat egingo ote dudan beldurrez, jarraitzeko esan dit eta ez ikaratzeko ikusi behar dudanarekin; hemen dituzten jaioberri gehienak ahulegiak daudela, besterik ez, eta itxura txarra dutenak ere sendatuko direla denboraren poderioz. Horixe egin dut, beraz, atzetik joan natzaio, orpotik, ia haren bizkarrean arma bat edukiko banu bezala, nire arnasa saman senti dezan. Irakurri ezin izan dudana zerbait ageri da erizain ikaratuak zabaldu duen atean. Gela luze bat ikusi dut, alde banatan sehaska moduko batzuk dituen elkarren segidan eta erdi itzalean.

Hitz pare bat etorri zait behingoan gogora: Death Row, Texan zeritzan film labur hartatik buruan izan dudana. Amerikako espetxe batean aulki elektrikoan hiltzera kondenaturiko preso bat lege sentitu naiz, bere azken daraman korridorean barrena. Belaunak dardarka ditut, nekez ibil naiteke. Albo bietara begiratu eta ikaratu egin nau begibistan dudanak. Ezkerreko

sehaska-lerroan nahiz eskuinekoan, edonor izutzeko moduko jaioberriak daude. Umeak baino gehiago munstro txikiak dirudite, gorpuzki desitxuratuak. Burua soina baino handiagoa dute batzuek, kontrakoa beste batzuek. Hanka edo beso bat du zenbaitek faltan, soberan beste zenbaitek. Ikuskizun ikaragarria da, munstrokeriari eskainiriko museo bat. Erizainaren atzetik noa, baina handik alde egin nahi dut. Nahikoa ikusi dut, ez dut jakin nahi ere gurea zelakoa den, zerbait duen faltan edo sobran. Niregatik jaio baita horrela, niri egunero gogorarazteko zelako kaka zaharra naizen. Andrea ospitalean erditzen eta ni bitartean mozkorkerian. Argi dago: zarama denak zarama baino ezin sortu.

hope

DISASTER

DESTINED FOR GLORY

HOPE

TRANSLATION TEAM:

Nahia Alonso

Paul Beitia

Laura Alberdi

Eneko Maurtua

Jon Bilbao Morga

Ainhoa Etxautz

Ane Iturriarte

Jon Braceras

Aitor Ibarretxe

Elena Zubiaga

Ane Atxutegi

Ainara Zuazo

and Sarah Turtle

DISASTER

He had been interviewed only once. It hadn't been what he, Aitor Urkola, had expected (it was during August, a month when journalists are worried about how to fill the newspapers), but it was the only one he had ever given. That is why he remembers it, and also because he has read it about a thousand times. He keeps it in his mother's house, with his other treasures: a picture of Maddi and him (laughing!), some copies of his only book and suchlike. He also remembers the young journalist who had interviewed him – an ivory chin, emerald eyes, full eye-catching lips, perfect long legs – and how she had asked him, with something like anger in her voice: But what do you do exactly?

He had introduced himself as an expert in disasters in an attempt to be funny. He had completely believed for a moment that the flawless forehead of the journalist had lit up, and, even though many years had gone by since that brilliant explanation, he still believed it. Either way, had the journalist taken him entirely seriously he wouldn't have minded at all since the answer he had given has seemed more and more on target. He had been talking about his job, of course, and he had witnessed many disasters over the previous twenty years. Wars, earthquakes, tornadoes, hungers, fires, epidemics... what had he not come across? He knows what he knows from experience, pure experience. He had been trying to explain that to the journalist.

He isn't very good at talking (is that why he writes?), and he has never been. This has caused him many big headaches, many considerable problems; so it seems to him that right now he really does have to think about his life. Gérin seems to be doing the same thing. He could easily paint the storm inside himself; he's sad, devastated. They've been friends for a long time, so they know each other very well. Urkola owes a lot to him. As well as the profession that he had taught him, Urkola owes him his life: he would have been dead if he hadn't got him out of Rwanda. Kigali was in flames and he had been alone in a cut-price hotel room. The photographer had helped him and left without saying a word. Gérin used to work for Médecins sans Frontières. Urkola had started as his assistant, mainly organising his work. They were responsible for finding and paying trucks that would take what was needed to refugee camps, distributing medicines and nurses to war-torn hospitals all over the place. Since then they have worked together in many continents.

Gérin's eyes are closed. The Englishman Thompson, too, seems to be reflecting. The three of them are the inhabitants of the room. A room with walls covered with extracts from the Koran. Are they inhabitants? No, they're hostages. They were kidnapped while they were working in Aleppo by members of an Islamist group that they can't specify. Kidnapped, and, after being moved around, locked in this room. A long, long time ago.

They know nothing about what's going on. They think they are still in Syria, but they could just as well be in Iraq or Lebanon. Or in the middle of a desert. There are many options. As many as the possible identities of the kidnappers. At the beginning, they spent time making guesses about that. Each would give his opinion and reasons to back it up. They understood quite soon these were futile. They became bored. The activity was senseless. They have remained silent since then, caught up in their memories. Ruined hopes, lifelong regrets. They have things to things about. They do. That is what they've been doing ever since they realised they wouldn't escape from there alive.

No future!

Thompson usually sings that childish ditty to them each time they talk about the future. They can sing it too: the recordings of the kidnappers, made just a few hours ago, clearly show what's going to happen next. What's going to happen to them. They will record hopeless petitions for each of their governments to save them. Soon after, the final recording in which someone will cover their eyes and, in front of the camera, a sharp blade will cut their throats. Three atheists, three demons less in the world. That's it.

No future, since none of them think that their governments will do anything. We can't negotiate with terrorists, they will say, if we do that there will be more kidnappings, and the terrorists will become stronger. They know politicians and place no hope in them: they're lost. That's why they remain in silence. During this time, they've learnt that anger and annoyance are as useless as hope. They know that in their situation pulling a face or raising their voices would be unattractive, and completely useless. They only have memories. Memories they hold on to at any cost.

The fact that Urkola remembers the answer he had given to that pretty journalist a long time ago isn't just narcissistic: in his situation it's really funny, as anyone can imagine. However, he believes that does summarise his way of life. Without any disasters, he would be nobody. For instance, without what Maddi did to him he would never have moved from home. Or without his so-called friend's betrayal in Kigali he wouldn't have met Géri – better if he hadn't; look where that's brought him. Or his literary disaster: a book of poems nobody has read called "Maybe a Lily". The poems were good, in his view. But they had inadvertently slipped away without a mention, while critics had been making other poets – worse than him – famous and and lifting them up to Parnassus – or was it Olympus? Nevertheless, without that, he would never have got involved in the biggest project he'd ever taken part in. But he had got fully involved, something inevitable in that kind of work. So he had got involved after spending many months reflecting about what he should do. And now, as he remembered what he had said in the only interview he had ever given, suddenly he saw it clearly: disasters, that's my motif, that's what the book of my dreams will be about. A book that won't only delight Basque readers and ignorant critics but also excite and astonish people all over the world. The idea made him truly happy, and he regretted not having coming up with it earlier; in the same way that Basque critics were going to regret not recognising his merits earlier. It was such a simple idea, so

logical and obvious: disasters. It included everything, every man and woman's feelings taken to the extreme. Disasters are life-or-death situations. Situations which do not allow for pretending or lies. Love, for instance, touches the sky in those moments. It appears more naked and sparkling than ever, blinding. He remembers parents who die to save their children, whole countries that eat bitter bread. Those horrible places. Beirut, Sudan, Caucasia, Bali, El Salvador... hundreds of violent images from different places come to mind nonstop. They fill the gaps in the encyclopaedia of suffering. Something Shakespearean, so to speak: whisper and hubbub. Or something Tolstoyesque: war and peace, epic and love, the lyrical and literary canon. His poor brain, so much work for it!

He's never got cold feet because of the enormity of his work. In fact, he has spent all his free time on it. He has written in caves, in houses which they were about to tear down, in hospitals full of injured people, remaining silent and indifferent to their cries of sorrow and the cannons' boom. Anywhere and anyway. He has filled his notebook with what he's seen, heard, felt and thought all over the world, wanting to have it all written down on paper. So he's elaborately garnered the customs, behaviour and identity of the people he has come across, the pride and greed of the rich and the slavery and misery of the poor. He has relegated nothing to silence.

It's a whole life's work, his magnum opus. Except for the three notebooks that the Islamists have taken away from him, all the rest is safe in his mother's house. He was thinking about those notebooks, as he often does, when the door opened.

It's Peter, the only guard who speaks English. Apparently, his real name is Abdala, but they call him Peter as he seems to be English from birth. Thompson had told them: with that accent... north London.

Are you coming to kill us?

No answer from the guard, but a long face in Thompson's direction.

No, Joe, he came to ask if we need something, said Gérin.

And Urkola said: Our last wish, in other words.

I would like a woman, said Thompson.

The guard was still frowning.

That would be nice, Gérin agreed with Thompson. A wife and, if possible, a bottle of whisky as well.

The guard looked even gloomier.

Stop that silly nonsense, Urkola begged his friends.

Nonsense? Gérin sounded surprised.

Nonsense? The way you're acting is nonsense, Thompson said, before Urkola was able to say anything. There's nothing you can do with these wretches. They don't know what misery is. They'll cut your throat just the same when the time comes.

They spoke in poor French, as they always did when Peter visited them, although the three of them suspect that the guard in fact speaks French.

The guard leaves them three bread crusts, some dates and a pitcher of water and leaves.

They also eat without saying anything; instead of chewing the stale bread, they pretend it's a sweet roll of bread.

I said the wrong thing to Peter, started Thompson: Above all, more than a woman, I wish I had a cigarette.

Me too, but together with something to clean my throat, says Gérin.

Your damned throat, again. Don't mention talk about things like that here, said Urkola, kindly.

The three of them shut up. Their silences were long and Urkola took advantage of them to think about his book, then and on other occasions, continually. He has to admit that he is obsessed, as Gérin has told him many times. That idiot Gérin knows him very well. He has never talked to him about "Disaster", but, for many years, they have been apparent in his writing. He finds it difficult to understand how a person can spend the whole day like that, enjoying the few ephemeral pleasures life can offer.

You're very odd.

Gérin and Maddi were of the same opinion. They often reminded him of what he wanted to forget but couldn't. Odd.

For him, being odd is being harmless. It would also be beneficial if he were a real poet, as he has been since he was young, even if he hasn't written a poem for a long time. Nevertheless, he is sure that "Disaster" is full of many types of poetry. However, he is not sure if he will be able to write a book: only the living can write, and he will soon be dead. That scares him, of course, but what scares him most is that he won't finish that wonderful big piece of work, the one that has made him so tired and given him so many headaches. What a painful thing. Without books everything is useless: the book is the only thing that will ensure that he is not forgotten. Without it, his dreams are over: being worthy of a place in Basque literature, and, as Thompson would say, the recognition which the establishment (publishing houses, critics, teachers...) has always denied him. Maddi, in the end, being proud of him, and so on. Poetic justice, basically.

He wasn't as bright as Thompson, nor as crafty as Gérin. However, he had spent a lot of time finding out that justice – poetic or otherwise – is the only truly worthwhile prize. As if reality were telling him that he was right, he then heard the sound of the lock. It's Peter, of course.

Peter, sorry, Abdula, Thompson says politely. I thought you would bring a camera, but you've come empty-handed.

Not empty-handed.

Where is the woman I asked you for earlier?

There's no woman. Of course, you want them all for yourselves. I understand. You're young and you can't wait until you get to Paradise.

There's no women or whiskey, added Gérin.

Don't ask a Muslim to sin.

For us, on the contrary, it's a virtue, charity. It's like giving a drink to somebody who's thirsty.

Urkola was surprised when he heard his friend's words as he has always taken him for a convinced atheist. He's pulling his leg, for sure.

I didn't come here to talk about theology or to compare religions, interrupted the guard.

Of course.

But you didn't come to bring anything, since you've come empty-handed.

I told you I haven't. Take this!

The guard put something into Thompson's dirty palm.

We have no women, but we do have what the Prophet ordered us Mujahidin to have, he explained to them, as if he needed to make up for what he had just done.

What Thompson has on his hands is a little dark ball. The guard also left them a cigarette butt, smoking paper and some matches. When the guard was about to leave, Gérin told him to stop.

Surprisingly, the guard did so and he looked at the Frenchman, unable to hide his curiosity.

Since you won't bring any whisky, take this as my last wish and have a smoke with us big sinners for once. We're tired of speaking with each other and we would appreciate hearing another voice. That will do us good and God will approve. Your charity is to help whoever is alone.

Gérin is certainly a man full of surprises. Urkola would never have suspected that he had trained to be a priest. Bloody Frog.

Mentioning charity had no effect in the guard. He stands thoughtfully by the door.

O.K.

That's what the guard said, standing there and looking at them.

Gérin replied immediately: Great!

Thompson also started working. Artola can't tear his eyes away from the Englishman's hands; his skill is quite a show. He's clearly done this many times. He does it easily, almost automatically. Wetting the sticky paper with his white tongue, putting a touch of sand on the end to seal it. Artola was surprised when he offered it to the guard arrogantly. It was also suspicious. First Gérin, now Thompson... are they working on something together, without saying anything to him?

The guard refused Thompson's offer. Smoke and relax, I will smoke later. They did as he asked. Thompson lit and put it in Gérin's lips after deeply inhaling a few times. Gérin did almost the same. Urkola, on the contrary, wanted to pass it to the guard, since he has never got on with drugs.

Smoke and relax, poet, we have time. He did as the guard said and wondered at his words. Why poet? What did he mean when he told him they had time? Time for what? To die, of course. Suddenly he shivered. He took a breath. He needs to keep calm. Without knowing if it was because of the hashish, kief, or whatever he had smoked, he knows that he is about to fall into the world of paranoia.

In the meantime, without noticing Urkola's worry, Thompson is talking with the guard: I knew that you were a nice, kind-hearted man, even though you hadn't shown it until now. But I did realise.

Thompson's words had no influence on the guard. He takes the cigarette taken from Urkola's shaking hands and brings it to his lips.

He has to be good – Thompson goes on. To come to this wilderness, he left behind comfort, his family, his friends and everything in London to come to this wilderness. He has to be generous.

Thompson kept talking until he had the cigarette again. Of course, Gérin took his place, trying to flatter the guard.

Keep on flattering him, keep it up, let's see if it's worth doing that, said Urkola to himself, furious. It's clear they're doing this as part of a plan, a plan they hadn't mentioned to him.

You don't know anything about me, said the guard to Thompson. However, I know a lot about you.

But I do know something about you. For example, I know you were born in London or you have been living there since childhood. In fact, I'd say you're from the north of London.

You can say what you want, the guard admitted. But don't forget that I have your passport and papers. Great Britain, France, Spain. Passports of those three eternal unbelieving and imperialistic states.

I am Basque, Urkola wanted to clarify. Not Spanish. Moreover, Spain and France are our oppressors, the same states which oppress you. After he said that, suddenly he noticed his friends' piercing gaze on him. What had they expected him to do?

Basque?

Yes, said Urkola.

Good music, Basque music.

The guard has left him open-mouthed. Left them open-mouthed, because Gérin and Thompson also have looks of incredulity on their faces.

Do you know Basque music?

A bit. I found about about it a long time ago, before I became a believer.

And which music do you know, maybe Mikel Laboa's stuff?

No, not him. When I was young I used to listen to Negu Gorriak.

But... did you understand what they were singing about?

The lyrics were in many languages on the discs.

Of course, Urkola almost apologised. I remember those discs really well too.

Urkola is telling the truth: Negu Gorriak had been Maddi's favourite group. A long time ago, back when they had been inseparable.

"Gora herria", sang the guard in peculiar Basque.

"Gora!" Urkola quickly replied.

"Gora Athletic!"

"Gora!" Urkola answered.

In another situation, if he had been somewhere else, he would have been ashamed of seeing himself shouting like that. Not now. It may be the result of smoking, but he didn't care about anything. It must be like that, of course, when you're about to die.

The friends look like they share that opinion because they're chatting away. They have been laughing for a while. Clearly they have relaxed in the same way that he has. Moreover, the guard seems more human than ever, even though you can never trust terrorists, as Urkola already knows too well. Thompson asks: What kind of group is that? Rock, rap, folk? They must be good for our friend to like them.

Rock and rap, I think, but don't pay much attention to what I say: I don't know anything about music.

But you do know about literature, the guard says to Urkola.

Urkola blushes but doesn't manage to say anything.

I don't understand your language, but I would say literature is what you fill your notebooks with, if it isn't reports for your spying, at least.

The guard's last words put the hostages into a heavy silence. They become mute suddenly, which makes the guard's guffaw deafening, like an explosion, a sound of bad taste which fills the whole room.

Of course not, said Urkola quickly. It's just literature.

A novel?

They relax after hearing the guard's question. He's joking, they're sure. He's been pulling their legs. In spite of the drugs, he wanted to remind them again that he was still the boss.

To an extent, responded Urkola. It is like a novel, but it also has quite a lot from other genres. It's something like a collage, to put it one way: a text made up from completely different pieces. Everything gathered around a single hub.

Interesting, Gérin dares to say, imprinting clear irony on each syllable.

Very interesting, Thompson adds at the same time. What but?

The guard's interest amazes Urkola, and he hesitates before speaking again: the end of everything, the destruction of everything, big and small disasters in this world, different kinds.

Now it is the guard who says it is *interesting*. Interesting. And why that topic and no other, any other? He wanted to know then.

Because it is what I know best. I have gone from disaster to disaster for years. We three have been to all of them.

Yes, replied Gérin and Thompson at the same time: Yes.

You've all been the Americans' puppets. But don't let's ruin our little party today, let's forget that for the moment.

Sure, said Gérin and Thompson at the same time again.

Thompson has picked up the piece of hashish again, feeling protected by what he has just said. Keep the party going. Keep the guard talking. And he does that, turning toward Urkola.

You've given yourself a lot of work. You can understand why these notebooks are full of your tiny writing.

That's right, accepts Urkola; it's difficult work, there's a lot of work there. But what's in these notebooks is less than 10% of what I have stored away in the Basque Country. Think about it. Dozens of notebooks, thousands of pages. A life's work. All in vain.

Wait, wait, wait, the guard shakes the joint Thompson has passed him near Urkola's eyes. You're going to light it, he says to Urkola: it will console you. But how did you think of organizing these texts like this? What was your model? Dante's "Divine Comedy", maybe?

Oh Dante... Gérin and Thompson pretend to be angry. Dante Alighieri. How about that!

Joyce?

Joyce!

Urkola is dumbfounded, pensive and indifferent to his friends' stupidities. I can't tell you, he says finally. I thought it up slowly over time. To tell the truth, I haven't read that book.

Joyce?

No, Dante. Joyce I read a long time ago.

"Ulysses"?

No, "Dubliners". I have tried to read "Ulysses" many times, but I always have to give up because I get bored.

Oooh, Oooh! shout his friends, as if they were in a stadium.

I haven't confessed anything until now, continued Urkiola. I started off with a lot of enthusiasm; but there was no real point, no possibility of finishing.

And aren't you afraid that the same thing will happen to the people when they pick up that big book of yours?

Absolutely not. Mine is about our species, about each and every one of us, man and woman, black and white, from all around the world.

That book was written a long time ago!

The Koran? Yes, of course, it has always been above any other book, Urkola admitted right away to the guard. Mine, however, is different; it's fiction.

Fiction is never pure fiction. You should know that.

Oooh, Oooh! Gérin and Thompson are still in the stadium

Yes, that's right. But mine too has a clear purpose. Because it doesn't just start at the world's beginning, it goes through history and, so I also look at the world from that moment on, inevitably. Do you know Salgado the photographer?

Oooh, Oooh!

I'm sure you've seen his pictures, more than once.

The great Salgado, photographer Thompson applauds. Sebastiao Salgado, the god of photographers!

The guard's facial expression has blackened. Urkiola realises and tries to say something, but he only manages to make some guttural noises. Trying to talk and unable to, in the end he too finds the guard's sudden irritation ridiculous, just like everything else: friendship between the four of them, talking...

While Urkiola is trying not to laugh out loud, Thompson goes on and on. Your God will condemn me, but Salgado will know how to forget my many sins.

Is there a God for us alcoholics? Gérin's simple question is too much for the guard. Without saying anything, he stands up, opens the door and slams it hard as he goes out, leaving a deep silence behind him, which lasted until the echo of the door slamming had completely died away. The three men look into each other's eyes, still silent. Then they smile openly.

What an intellectual our Peter is!

Amazing! Incredible!

The three of them agree. However, when Urkola explains how he behaved with the guard, they have different opinions. Without stopping smiling, the other two start grumbling. They see him as a traitor.

But so are you, the Basque complains. It wasn't me who called him good and generous. Of course not!

I tried to bring him round to our side, says Thompson; to create some sort of empathy. But then you went on about literature and other nonsense.

It was him, not me.

You said you were Basque, said Gérin

Well, I am.

Yes, but...

Like you, I tried to bring him over to our side

Good move, you idiot. Thompson grabs him by the neck. Gérin is smiling; Urkola is too a little later. So, they carry on smiling, long and hard, while their eyelids move slowly, until they fall asleep and the room falls silent, a desert in that world.

The squeaking of the door wakes them up. They can hardly open their eyes, their mouths feel dry and their heads heavy. A nasty hangover. They spurn the muddy water which is supposed to be morning coffee, and, without saying a word, they go up to the pot in the corner and, one by one, put their heads into it, hoping that water will lessen their discomfort. Once clean, they gently start to come to their senses. First of all, they're surprised that Peter-Abdala hasn't shown up during breakfast.

He's just as annoyed as we are, they decide, without thinking of any other explanation.

Abdala? The new guard says something they don't understand in Arabic.

They look at each other. Not only surprise, but worry, too, appears in their facial expressions. It looks like they had lost the only person who had spoken with them until now.

Did they punish him? Gérin dares to ask.

Punish? Why punish?

Because of yesterday afternoon's party, of course.

No, Thompson says: I'm sure they took him somewhere else, he doesn't have any obligation to communicate with us. They'll probably say we were just some poor guys and sent him to us.

Probably, his friends agreed, frowning. Anybody can kill us, that's for sure.

I'm sure it's nothing though, and when the door opens, they are stunned to see Peter. He is serious, as always, as if last night had only happened in their dreams. Silent, he gestures for Thompson to follow him. The Brit turns pale but tamely goes after the guard, without looking at his friends, and singing under his breath: No future, no future...

Gérin and Urkola are shaking, as if when the guard had opened the door and they had been hit by cold wind coming in. Fini, says Gérin

We're done for, agrees Urkola

At least let's try and die honourably, added Gérin. There's nothing else for us to do.

Which is why, half hour later, as Peter, Abdala or whoever he is appeared again, Gérin hugs Urkola tightly and, without further ado, follows the guard, while making an obvious effort to steady his shaking legs.

So Urkola is left alone, staring at the dirt wall. He is next.

He had imagined his death plenty of times, in his insignificant life that went from killing to killing and from disaster to disaster. However, how could he have imagined this fear that turns his stomach, the stinking black puddle that the worm of regret has dug, the meeting place of many contaminated memories. He angrily talks to himself, telling himself to forget all those memories, to forget the few sweet moments he spent with that woman who never really loved him, to forget the insufficient consolation and the many brain-teasers generated by that crazy book, literature and all the other nonsense mentioned by Thompson (Rest in Peace) the night before.

Suddenly, the door opens, as in a nightmare. He stands up without the guard saying anything or making any gesture for him to do so.

You Basque people are tough, says the guard. You aren't like that English coward. You know how to die, and so, you know how to live.

As if he hadn't heard him, Urkola remains, until they reach the place the camera has been placed. They give him an orange coloured overall, like those that the Americans give to the prisoners at Guantanamo. They put him in front of the camera looking like that. Peter the guard is behind him, with his left hand on his shoulder and his right hand holding a black steel knife.

Basque, I have two pieces of news for you: one good and one bad. Which one do you want first?

Urkola doesn't respond. He can't.

I'll give you the bad piece of news first. You're going to die. Do you want to know the good news?

He doesn't want to know, but he can't say it, he can't answer, he can't do anything, he's having a hard time trying to keep control of his legs and not fall over.

It's good that you Basque people are skilled not only at making music and playing football, the guard whispers to him. You're very good at making weapons too, as one example is this sharp knife that will slit soon your throat. Aitor Jungle King II. Same name as you, you know? Made in your town. Allah is wise. Al-lahu-àkbar! he then shouts.

That was the last sound that Aitor Urkola heard.

DESTINED FOR GLORY

We've always been a team, even when we've been away from each other. A real team. The Three Musketeers. That's what they used to call us in Barcelona. We were Inseparable. We came from different places, but we arrived at La Masía the same year and started going around together right then. And every year we made our way up from Barcelona's youth and lower teams to the premier team. We had left our families when we were little more than boys, and our dream was to become the next Romario, Ronaldo or Rivaldo. Sol came from Mexico, Quim from Sabadell, a town near Barcelona, and I came from Iruñea. Our playing styles were as different as our places of origin. Quim was a midfielder, quite short and very skilled. Sol, on the other hand, was used to playing on the right wing, although he could also play on the other side. I used to play in the central defence area. As soon as we met, Sol and I realised that Quim was the best player among us.

It was clear for all to see. When he got hold of the ball, he hardly ever lost it. Raising his head for a moment was enough for him to check the location of the best placed teammate and kick the ball over to him. That's why he was always ahead of us. He was the first of us to join Barça B and the premier team during coach Van Gaal's last year. He didn't play many games back then but he always showed his quality. People applauded enthusiastically when he came onto the field and the papers reckoned he was soon going to be a star. That's what we were trying to do, too. He was our role model. We wanted to play in the same team as he did, and we knew that the only way to do that was by working as much as he did. Working as much as he did and being as selfish as he was. We really tried.

When Sol and I got into the premier team, Barça had another Dutch coach, Frank Rijkaard, who had been a football player until not very long before. There were many injured players and he needed us to substitute for them. We were put into the team in mid-season, and in fact, we only played for very few minutes. We didn't care. We were living a very sweet dream, sharing the pitch and changing rooms with Kluivert, Saviola and, especially, Ronaldinho. We also travelled with them. Believing in it was hard work too. We blushed every time one of those stars said something to us.

We blushed and were proud at the same time, of course. We used to buy the papers the day after the matches to find out what they said about us. Even if we had only played for five minutes, we carefully examined each page and took out the pieces of news or articles in which one of us was mentioned. At that time, of course, Quim was most mentioned, although Sol and I also received words of praise sometimes. Apparently, they couldn't ask for more from us. They reckoned we were still learning, but our future was bright.

The people who foresaw that marvellous future were wrong. However, we can't complain. The following season the three of us had to leave Barcelona. But the few games we had played at

Camp Nou were enough to give us a steady job in football. We received a call from the Netherlands. Van Gaal had gone from Barcelona to Ajax in Amsterdam. As he needed young, cheap players, he thought of us. Especially about Quim, of course. He took him to Ajax, while Sol and I ended up at AZ Alkmaar. Barça's decision to sell us on was hard for all of us to take. The three of us had been brought up at La Masía and we wanted to play there more than anything else. We did understand the club's decision, though. They had too many players and only wanted to keep the best. They said that clearly. Sol, for example, could have become Gully's substitute at the most, a player they had just brought from Monaco. However, Lionel Messi, the best player in the whole of La Masía, was coming up just behind him. Quim was in a similar situation: he had Xavi and Iniesta, among many others, coming up behind him too. The situation was as hard or even harder for me, as Pujol and Oleguer were there behind me.

The Netherlands is small. The distance from Alkmaar to Amsterdam is short. Both teams used to train in the mornings, and, many afternoons, we used to go over to Amsterdam. We met up with Quim and went to the cinema, got lost in the city or, otherwise, just stayed at his house and played on PlayStation. We used to organize little tournaments and, as the three of us wanted to play for Barça, we took it in turns. Unlike in the real world, Sol and I were the best players in the imaginary one, not Quim. We used to pull his leg about that. He laughed back, pulled our legs about AZ Alkmaar's low position in the league. Apart from the league, we had a great time the first months there. We were all playing and living happily in the Netherlands.

However, the league is ruthless. It determined our fate. As the weeks went by, AZ Alkmaar went right to the bottom, and Ajax were at the top. The fans blamed the coach. The coach, however, blamed the players. That was when our decline started. Little by little, Sol and I found each other more and more often on the bench than on the pitch. We had lost the coach's trust, and it seemed as if we had no chance of regaining it. He didn't even use to notice we were there. We hated him. We were ready to accept that we hadn't done as much as we should have done, but we well knew that we didn't try less than our team mates. At least we didn't let anyone down. And that's what made us angriest when we read the list of players on the day before the match. How could we understand the coach hating us? The three of us had several conversations about that. Sol and I couldn't find a credible answer to the question that we found so hurtful. We were desperate.

Quim used to tell us to keep on going for it and soon everything would get better. We agreed, so that he would leave us alone, and as we didn't even know what he was talking about exactly. What grandiose fight was he talking about? We would have thought he was laughing at us if we hadn't known he was doing his best for us. But we'd given up a long time before that. We got out of bed and, rain or shine, training had become a real drag for both of us. It was better for Quim. The sports press started calling him the Midfield Emperor. Although he didn't score many goals, they said he was great at organizing and directing the team's game. His talent, quite hidden at Barça, reached its peak at Ajax. Shortly afterwards we started reading that he was going to leave the Eredivisie and play in the Premier League during the following season.

We looked at Sport webpage every day to see what Barça's was up to, and they mentioned the rumours from from England. We asked Quim. He knew nothing. One day early in April he received a call from Ferran Bonet who confirmed what the English sensationalist press had already said.

Ferran Bonet, who was the agent for all three of us, phoned him from Barcelona and let him know that Arsenal in London was very interested in signing him on. Quim was brimming with happiness, of course, because the team managed by Alsatian Arsene Wenger was very well known. They were offering him a huge amount of money to change teams. He accepted immediately. If Ajax and Arsenal came to an agreement, Quim was ready to change league and country. As Ferran Bonet used to say, you don't want to miss the boat: get on board while you have the chance.

We were really happy about our friend's success. We thought that in some sense his success was thanks to our help. And that was something which showed up the mistake Barça made by excluding us. Something that showed that they had got it wrong at least with one of us. It might have been poetic justice.

We followed Quim's career from a distance. Although we used to phone and text each other, the three of us didn't live in the Netherlands any longer, as we had when we used to meet practically every day. We knew he had had a difficult beginning in England, as they gave him less time on the pitch than he had expected. Bonet told us about it because Quim never complained to us, probably because our situation was much worse than his was.

They don't want you two, said Bonet: AZ Alkmaar doesn't want you. We appreciated the club's sincerity. Apparently we needed to go somewhere else for the next season.

Somewhere else. But where?

Ferran Bonet's blue eyes lit up. The three of us were in the changing room at Alkmaar and he filled it up with smoke while he thought about the answer. We'll see, it's still too early, he said finally pulling his pipe out of his mouth. He took us out to dinner after that.

We ate and drank a lot that night. We certainly felt it during the next morning's training. The truth is that hangover hadn't been the first one. We sometimes got bored surfing the Internet, PlayStation and talking about our misfortunes, so we used to start drinking beer and watching television which neither of us understood. Cartoons, the news, series and films... it all passed before our eyes, not affecting us in any way whatsoever. We spent hours like that. We only got up from the couch in the living room to go to the fridge in the kitchen. As we emptied the bottles, our worries disappeared too, and the world became a nicer place for us. We could laugh again, we were a little bit more hopeful. Someday we would become luckier —and on those days that someday felt closer— and we would follow Quim's lead, just as we always had done. We saw ourselves in the Premier League and used to drink to England's health, thinking that we would be there by summer.

We'd never played in the Premier League. After the summer Sol was sent to Aberdeen, a modest Scottish side. Just as well. I, on the other hand, carried on at Alkmaar, but always on the bench. Apparently nobody wanted me. So I stayed there until the contract that I had signed for two seasons ran out. I'd say that was my worst year, had I not known that the following ones would be just as bad. It would have been better for Sol, too, to have missed out on that year. He injured his knee at the beginning of the season and didn't play for six months. And, even though he played at the end of the season, he didn't have enough time to get back into shape. It had been a tough period for Sol and me. Not, however, for Quim. He was doing as good as it gets in England. Sol used to tell me what the English papers and television said about our friend. In England they just confirmed what we already knew better than anybody else, even a blind person could have seen it. Just as he could have seen our mediocrity. That's why Quim was going up while we were going down. Everything was settling down. Arsenal offered to extend Quim's contract, and rumours were spreading that they would soon call him to play for Spain. The sports papers from Barcelona which Sol and I read said so too; Sol read them in dark, remote Aberdeen and, I did in much brighter Alkmaar. In our loneliness, with a beer in hand, we admired our friend's astonishing career.

Quim's broken out, said the papers: he's shown his unlimited talent, he was born to be a star, to be part of history. He was destined for glory, the swelling prose of the sports papers said. Fate hadn't forgotten us either. But what it had in store for us wasn't as good as what was awaiting Quim.

Ferran Bonet decided what our fate looked like for us. He was the one who made us the offer from Barcelona. He apologised as if what he was going to say might hurt us. He told us he didn't mean to hurt us, but things were bad. Bonet was a well brought-up man and had studied at a university in England; he knew that what he was about to suggest was difficult. In order to avoid his complex, long-winded rhetoric, let's just say that he offered us to bring us back to Barcelona, but not to Barça, to the second-division Sabadell team instead. But it would be both of us.

Of course, the wages, too, would be in line with the division, he clarified eventually, as if it was necessary to make that clear.

We accepted the offer straight away. Regardless of the money, we wanted to play. To play, above all. Sol and I were going to play together again, what's more, in Quim's home team. We came back not proud, but happy, to our Barcelona, to the city that we'd remembered so often in the Netherlands and in Scotland.

We found a house in the Gracia neighbourhood, and from there we used to go to Sabadell to train and to play. Just like us, the team wasn't bad, but not especially good either (it was halfway up the league, in a kind of limbo). So, we were in a team that we deserved, and, by that time, that was obvious to us, too. It was hard to accept, painful. Fortunately, we'd been doing that for almost two seasons. We weren't the only ones. In the changing rooms at

Sabadell, we came across two friends we had known at La Masía. They had had similar experiences to ours.

Sol said 'Fucking Losers' in an Aberdeen accent when we came across them.

We all understood it and laughed, we had no other choice. Some people always up go and other people always go down, and we were always going down. The wheel never stopped. That's why we had to learn to laugh at ourselves, it was the only way out. So, we laughed until our jaws hurt. There was every reason for us to be happy. We earned our living from doing what we loved, what else could we have asked for?

We often asked each other that question while watching Arsenal matches. Not everyone could be as good as Henry or Quim, that was clear. That's precisely what we had told an English journalist who had come to ask us about Quim. Bonet had put him on to us, and he came along with two colleagues who were in charge of the microphone and the cameras. With La Masía behind us, they asked countless questions about the friend that we saw less and less. We had to repeat some things on camera that we had said so many times in our alcoholic conversations in front of the TV. That time we didn't have a beer in our hands, though, and we were being watched by Ferran Bonet. As we had to be alert, we realised quite fast what the journalist was up to. Sol first, of course. As he understood the questions at once without waiting for Bonet's translation, he immediately noticed the British journalist's aim. He wanted to present the winners and losers of football, the hero and his unfortunate friends. For an instant we looked at each other and, without speaking a word, we agreed to play along.

Fucking Losers!

Great, Quim was great, and that's what we told the journalist, what we truly thought, nothing else. Sometimes we forgot we were talking about our best friend and we talked about a myth, even in the tranquillity of our own living room. But when he called us from London we immediately forgot the celebrity that the journalists had created, and we could see it was our great friend talking to us. He used to tell us about his lifestyle in the capital of England, about the people he had met there, mainly about girls. He said he had more than he could handle. We knew it wasn't an idle boast: no way, as we clearly saw when we went to pay him a visit.

We went to London at the beginning of July. Quim lived on Seven Sisters Road, precisely where his club's old stadium used to be. By that time, Arsenal was working hard to get ready for the following season. Quim used to leave home quite early and we didn't see him until the evening. We met up for dinner. Most days we went out for dinner, fairly early for us. Quim loved Indian restaurants and he knew the best ones in the area.

He was in very good shape, full of hope. He talked to us about the players that had arrived at Arsenal, about their personalities and habits. He also informed us about Wenger's intentions, which he had told Quim about in a meeting some weeks before. Apparently, Wenger was going to give him more responsibility and matches. Quim accepted the Alsatian's challenge gladly,

even though the magnitude of the challenge sometimes scared him – that’s what he told us at one of those dinners. He could rest assured, we were sure he would succeed.

After dinner, we used to go to a pub where Arsenal players used to meet. As soon as we got there, we were amazed by Quim’s good English, but in that pub we realized that he didn’t mess around as we had done. He moved easily among people, just as he moved on any football pitch. The bartender high-fived him, and so did many customers. Ignoring the beers he was bringing back from the bar, people stopped him and wanted to chat with him. He would smile at everyone gratefully. They loved him, it was obvious.

They welcomed us, too. We were Quim’s friends, not some other dumb tourists. They made space for us at the crowded bar so we could order drinks, and sometimes they even bought us one. They made us feel like star players for a short time, as if we had still been playing for Barça, and not for Sabadell. We weren’t, though. But we didn’t want to think about that, not while we were on holiday, not while we were with Quim. We needed to have fun. In contrast to the Emirates Stadium, the next season at Sabadell was going to be hard.

So we had a great time. Such a great one that even though Quim stood up and went home early – too early in our opinion; he had to train the following morning – we stayed there, chatting with friends who spoke a language we could barely understand.

Bastards!

That’s what Quim used to tell us when he realized that Sol and I had spent the whole day in bed, and he added that we were really going to have breakfast instead of dinner. He used to say those things to make fun of us; he was happy because we were.

Let’s see what you say about me in Sabadell, then. I can say a lot of things about you, too, he warned us, pulling our legs.

We’re on holiday, we complained.

Of course. And you’ll still be on holiday after I spread the news about you in Sabadell.

We’re young. Now’s the time for us to party, not when we get to our fifties, don’t you think?

You both drink as much as you party!

Quim was right, even though we hadn’t realised it yet. Yes, we were all that, and even more so than any of us knew back then.

In all, we stayed ten days at Quim’s. Those were the last days the three of us were happy together, although they became blurred in our memories by the passage of time and the smell of booze. We remember those moments over and over, as if the seed of what would happen afterwards had been planted back then. But there was never any such seed.

We're in the hands of fate, Sol and I agree, as we sit on the living room sofa and open another bottle. We call it fate, destiny (we have no other choice); we use the same words that they use in sports papers to express what we can't define. Fate, God or any other word to name the unknowing hand which, apparently without it signifying anything, takes us from one place to another.

The next season started the same way the previous one had ended. As Wenger had promised, Quim was playing in almost all the matches at Arsenal. Both of us were too, but at Sabadell. Even so, the three of us were happy. Quim's reasons to feel like that were very obvious; not so much, maybe, ours. As always, our friend's success made us happy, and, in addition to that, our modest success also brought some sweetness to our lives. Necessarily, accepting that from then on our career would take place at a lower level calmed us. That, in fact, was the basis for our modest success.

Sol once told me that back in the day the three of us had come up together. When we left Barça, however, we started drifting apart, Quim going up while we always went down.

He said that without regret, as if he were saying that night follows day, as if he had said something which was really obvious. And knowing that there was life beyond football was reassuring. In other words, life without running after a ball. It was enough to look around to realise that. Being not so intelligent it took time for us to notice the people around us. Ferran Bonet, for example.

He would spend the day smoking his pipe and talking on the phone once in a while; that was all he did to earn money like a crack player. Bonet was only managing the business his father had left him and he knew nothing about football. We saw him less and less, sometimes he called us when he wanted to check that everything was all right.

We got paid every month, so we told him that we were fine.

You two keep on working. You never know. You could become shining stars like Quim some day.

We could have knocked him dead every time he told us that. As I say, we thought he took us for idiots. He could talk for a long time about Quim and praise him all he wanted to, but he could at least have done that without belittling us.

He told us that Quim was going to play for Spain, as if we didn't read Sport magazine every day. They voted him the best player of the month in the Premier League. They wanted him to appear in a Nike advertisement along with Thierry Henry...

He made us sick. Why did he call us, what did he expect from us?

He wanted to motivate us, maybe, we thought, but we didn't believe that. Bonet knew us and he knew that he had made all the money he was going to with us a long time ago. Whatever

the reason for those calls, we didn't care. Things at Sabadell were wrong, especially financially, and having the highest salaries in the club we didn't think we would be able to carry on there the following season. We were playing appallingly, why deny it, and nobody wants to pay for nothing. So what after leaving that? Go down a division and play in second B, in a club lower than Sabadell? We were bad, but not so bad as to accept something like that. Even if we had long given up bragging, we still were a bit proud of ourselves and, being able to choose, we preferred to do anything but that. We had started to think about our future, but what happened to Quim disrupted everything.

Richard Murray and Quim crashed into each other very hard when they were in the air reaching for the ball that was coming their way. Their heads crashed together and they make such a noise that even in Barcelona we heard it on the television, just as half the world did. It happened in a Curling Cup match in Leeds and we panicked when we saw both of them lying on the ground for so long. Richard Murray was a defender at the local club, we'd never heard of him and neither had Quim, since Leeds Utd. was not a club in the Premier League. It was the second part of the match when the unfortunate accident happened. When they didn't go back onto the pitch and substitutes came on we knew that it was serious. The television confirmed our suspicions ten minutes later; they had been taken to hospital.

We searched the Internet to try to find out what had happened. There were many pieces of news about it, but most of them only mentioned what we had seen happening at the stadium. We trembled. We called Bonet. He didn't know much. We told him to tell us as soon as he knew something. For once he kept his promise and we received his message an hour later. Quim was better. At least he regained consciousness. The Leeds United defender had not.

We went to bed knowing no more than that. But when we sat down for breakfast everything was clear: while Quim was getting better, the unfortunate Richard Murray was lying dead in a hospital in the north of London.

Did Quim already know that?

He told us that he didn't, they did not want to tell him yet, it was too soon for that.

They had to tell him two days later as he kept on asking about the other player. Apparently he went to pieces after hearing the horrific news. He cried for hours until they gave him a tranquilizer at nightfall.

Ferran Bonet took the first flight he could find in order to reach London as soon as possible. He called us from there every night.

Quim stayed in hospital for a week. They could have sent him home before, because the blow to his head, even if it had been hard, had not damaged him or made him bleed. That was an indication of the multiple examinations he underwent. It seemed that he was in good health. Despite that, he had some moments when he did not speak or was crying, thus revealing the

terrible pain that machines could hardly recognize. They did not allow him home because of that. They used complementary medical testing as an excuse in order to keep him in some more days to provide additional care.

Bonet agreed with the doctor's decision. Richard Murray's unfortunate death and issues connected with it (statements from the dead man's relatives, friends and teammates; the results of the autopsy; the funeral, and so on) were all over the English media, so it was best for Quim to be out of the storm as much as possible.

In the meantime we were in Barcelona and anxious about not being able to go to see him. If Richard Murray's death hadn't stopped the Premier league in England, still less had it stopped the Spanish second division, and so we had to spend almost every day in Sabadell until the end of the season.

Instead of going us to London, Quim came to Sabadell. The idea came from people from Arsenal, it had been the doctors' recommendation. It seemed that he needed tranquillity above all, and nowhere was better than home. We called him before visiting him. His mum picked up the phone and told us to wait a bit; she thought he was quite nervous. It seemed that we had to leave her in charge. She would call us when her son was in a fit state to be with us. We agreed and told her so.

Bonet, however, was angry with our friend's relatives, with his mum especially. He told us that they hadn't taken him into account, and that it was useless reminding her that he was her son's manager.

We were happy about that. Bonet was Quim's legal agent, but we were his close friends. Even if Quim's parents knew nothing about what we thought, they loved us more than Bonet and they called us first when they saw that he was quite well. Quim's mum told us: Come over, he's a bit better now.

Perhaps he was, perhaps he had been even worse over the previous weeks, but we thought he looked awful. Quim's mum told us to go into the sitting room and went off to bring him along. We hardly recognized him when he appeared from behind his mother. She left the three of us alone soon. We stared at each other. Quim was very pale, very thin, and he had huge bags under his eyes. That worried us enough, but the limitless sadness in his eyes worried us even more. Speechless, not knowing what to say, we hugged him. Together in that intense hug we all felt like members of a team. We were the Three Musketeers once more. And, feeling strong again, we were sure that we would be able to overcome that difficult situation.

We met almost every day from then onwards. After training we used to go to Quim's house because he wasn't up to going out. He seemed to be afraid of people, and preferred the tranquillity of his parents' home to people in Sabadell trying to cheer him up. We tried to provide support, but it was as futile as the support people in town gave him. He was depressed and nobody seemed to be able to help him. Even if we never mentioned what had happened,

the few words he uttered were sufficient to know what he was thinking about it all the time, even though he never mentioned Richard Murray.

Quim's family showed us their gratitude whenever they had a chance to do so. They were very grateful to us for taking care of Quim, especially in view of Bonet's indifference.

I'm not a charity, Bonet used to tell us when we asked him if he wasn't going to pay more attention to Quim. He got angry when we asked him as if we didn't know what we were talking about.

That summer everything changed completely, especially for me. Sol stayed in Sabadell, but I had to move to Girona if I were to carry on playing football professionally. Girona was an even smaller team than Sabadell at the time, with a smaller budget and in a lower league. After having signed a contract with the club, and now wearing a red and white stripe, I knew it would be the last one I would wear. I knew my career would end there – if mine could be called a career, of course. Sol felt the same.

We're done, said Quim after hearing our sad thoughts.

We begged him not to give up, though we thought the same thing. We truly did think that Quim would get out of the vast deep, dark hole he was in to become the fantastic player he had been before the accident once again; but, as for us, we happily accepted his opinion. We had no other option.

As a result of all the changes that had taken place we seldom saw each other after the start of the season. I had to go to Girona every day and so I couldn't carry on as before. Quim and Sol saw each other often, so did Sol and I, but the three of us were hardly ever together. What I knew about Quim I heard from Sol. The news from Sabadell was tough to hear: Quim was very unstable, and though he sometimes seemed as proud as a bull, other times he felt like shit.

Haven't they given him anything to calm him down? I asked Sol, trying to understand what he was telling me.

He takes tons of pills, his mother told me.

What does that mean?

That's why he's so unstable. When he's down it's the pills that bring him up. And the same when he's hyped up. Some of those pills can really pull you down.

He was right. I saw what Sol had told me when I saw Quim. During Christmas, when I was able to visit him again, I hardly recognized him. He was fat, or rather bloated, as if somebody had pumped air into his body and face, and he had problems talking. Sol had warned me, but I wasn't ready for it. Quim's appearance really affected me. First I felt angry at seeing our friend in such a bad shape; then I felt sorry for him, knowing that there was little we could do for him.

Our feelings were as bad as the shape our friend was in: sadness, regret. We tried hard to help Quim – we tried to make him go out, we took him to the mountains and the sea and the cinema. But it was all in vain. Quim never left his private world.

As we had suspected, that was our last season. It was no surprise, of course. In addition to our initial suspicions, Bonet had told us plenty of things about what was awaiting us.

You're not rookies, he said when talking about what would happen after that season.

That much we knew, but we had spent half of our lives kicking footballs around, and now we were scared. We will find something else, we told each other when we talked about it; we'll figure something out. That's what we thought. Idiots.

We thought we were ready for whatever might happen, but what Bonet told us just before the season ended was still a shock. Nobody wanted us, not even in the lower leagues. There was nothing we could do; we were too expensive and not young enough.

Let's drink to our new life, Sol suggested.

And so we did. By that time, we used to drink to anything. But our new life was no more than a continuation of the old one. A feeble continuation of it. We didn't have training anymore, and we started drinking earlier and going to bed later. The nights in Barcelona were short. We went in and out of bars and clubs. We thought that most people treated us like friends and loved us. That's what it seemed like. Even though we were no longer football players, we had once (briefly) played for Barcelona, and that gave us high status among them. They knew nothing about football, but the fact that we had played at Camp Nou was quite a thing for them. Of course, we didn't tell them that they were wrong. We didn't mind them thinking we had once been like Ronaldinho or Eto'o; they could think whatever they wanted. In fact, our supposed friends did us nothing but good. They paid for our drinks. They invited us to the bathroom and spread out long lines of coke for us. They took us to parties at their fancy homes, to their sailboats at the port. We lived in a never-ending weekend, trapped in an eternal whirl. Everything around us happened fast.

Even though we very much liked our life without football, it separated us from Quim. We were still close friends, but we saw each other much less now. We slept during the day and woke up late, often hung over and with a headache, and so we weren't usually in the mood for going to Sabadell. But sometimes we overcame our laziness and went over there.

We were always welcome there. Usually Quim's mother opened the door and told us how her son was doing in a quiet voice. She was a rather religious woman, and when she talked about her son she was talking to God as much as she was talking to us. She found some kind of refuge in God. She asked Him for things. But she never asked us for anything, perhaps because she was aware that we couldn't give her any more than what her son gave her, alright? Anyway, every time we showed up she used to trot off and get Quim.

Quim never changed much. His mood changed depending on the pills they gave him, but he was immersed in a deep sadness. He had become clumsy, and he talked and moved clumsily, as if his legs weighed too much. The small but elegant man that the whole Emirates Stadium used to marvel at was gone. He was bloated and apparently insensitive to everything. When we saw him sitting on his white leather armchair we used to have the feeling that we were looking at a little Buddha. Even though the three of us were out of the business, we still talked mainly about football. Mostly about Barça, the club we loved most. It was its achievements which gave our sad friend his best moments. That's why we used to tell him to come to Camp Nou with us. He used to say yes, but would then stay home and watch the match on TV. We used to invite him to come and hang out with some hookers, but he wouldn't do that either. He preferred his own space.

We left him that way, three days ago now, when we went back to Barcelona. That day, as always, Quim's mother wanted to know how we had seen him. Without being too optimistic, we tried to articulate something that would help her keep her hopes up. It obviously didn't work. In any case, that was the last time we saw him alive.

Quim had a dream. From what he told us, someone in a mask appeared in the dream and pointed a gun at him. Quim raised his hands and immediately did what the person in the mask told him to do. His legs were trembling and he thought he was dead. In an absurd way, too, since he was sure that the person pointing the gun at him had mistaken him for somebody else; he had never had any opponents or enemies. He tried to tell him that. But the threatening person forced him to keep quiet. Quim was nervous, of course, but the stranger's voice sounded very familiar to him. Attentively, he dug into his memory in the search for the face for the voice. He tried to remember people he knew, and hundreds of voices and faces rushed through his mind. How could he find, in such chaos, the one he was looking for? Suddenly, however, Quim put his arm out and took the gun away from the stranger. He thought of himself as a coward and he couldn't understand what had made him do that. Whatever it had been, Quim had surprised himself. The most surprising thing, though, was that when he took the mask off the stranger's face he didn't find Richard Murray, as he had expected. He found himself.

We are thinking about that dream when we're told that Quim is dead. His mother calls us. We can barely hold back our tears while she gives us the details. He jumped onto the patio in their block of flats. Very scared, we try to find a few comforting words within us for Quim's poor mother, to whom even God can't give comfort. We barely mumble something.

Sol hangs the phone up and comes into the kitchen. He brings ice and a pair of glasses.

Let's make a toast, he tells me, with watery eyes.

For Quim, we say together, and empty our glasses.

Sol wants to fill the glasses and make another toast: To us, the Three Musketeers!

Sol has suggested it for our sake, of course, but it has made me think. Sol is clever and intelligent, and he has got our feelings right in those few words. It's true, the three of us are as united as ever. We are so united, so close to each other, and we will follow behind Quim. We are sure. We too are committing suicide. In another way, smoothly and calmly; that is exactly what we are doing. Sip by sip, bottle by bottle, without rushing, but that's what we are doing. It's not surprising; we have always followed Quim, both in football and in life. We know we are slower than him. But we are as loyal as he was, and we won't leave him on his own.

We drink to Quim again.

HOPE

I'm trash. It is hard to say that, I know, but I have to admit it. I've lied to myself too often, and it's time to accept it. It's a matter of life and death for me. I'm real trash and, if I really want to stop being it, I must accept it first, just as a drunk has to accept his drunkenness. It is indispensable if I want to move forward with my treatment. Without it, everything else would be useless. Being the son of an alcoholic father taught me that.

He drank everyday: at lunch, in the evening – when he and his friends went from bar to bar – and at dinner. Any excuse was enough to pick up a bottle. And whenever mum, an aunt or any of us accused him of drinking too much, he used to get angry. Apparently his father had used to drink in just the same way, and, even so, he passed away in his sleep at the age of ninety-three, his mind still lucid. In other words, he had died of old age. Nevertheless, my father died thirty eight years earlier than his father, as a result of 'flu, during which his battered kidneys failed.

I'd like to say that his death didn't hurt me, but that'd be a lie. Even though he was a clumsy, careless husband and father, he was a good man. It's also true that he cared more about his friends than about us. Nevertheless, what I feel now is completely different from what I used to feel back then. I was a young man who had to hate his father, my age required me to do so, just as it will force our little son to hate me someday. And I'll be happy, no doubt about it, because it will mean that we're still alive, although I do know that dead people, too, can be hated.

Cocaine is the only drug I've ever liked. Alcohol has never attracted me. Probably because of my dad. Neither has hashish because it makes me too relaxed. And during the AIDS period heroin had already lost the charm it had once had.

I began with amphetamines, cocaine came later. I must have been fifteen or sixteen when I first snorted speed. It happened during the main festivities in Bilbao. We were allowed to party all night, and we had to make the most of that. After lunch, we met at the bar in Santutxu that we used to frequent. After pooling the money our parents had given us, we went down to Somera Street and bought speed there. Some people wanted to snort it right away, but most of us decided to save it for the night as there was an amazing rock concert in Gas Square. We spent almost the whole afternoon at the open-air bars, and we were still there, by then quite drunk, when the fireworks began.

In Gas Square we were in the first row and, yelling and clapping, shaking our heads in time to the music of a heavy metal band whose name I have forgotten. It was like we wanted to get rid of our heads. Pushing each other, we jumped and hopped around tirelessly. It was amazing. Unfortunately, it was as short-lasting as it was amazing, and the time to go home came sooner than expected. We all looked at our watches. We couldn't believe that time had gone by so

fast, so unnoticed. Although we had spent all our time talking, there were still many interesting topics that we hadn't managed to talk about, and the following morning, unable to fall asleep, I made a list of things that we should all discuss in the evening.

We never had enough time. Too many things were happening around us and we didn't have time to talk about all of them. We were so busy. Especially with girls. Sometimes we used to go to Artxanda to spy on the couples. We hardly saw anything since couples used to do their things in cars and not outside. They used to go there at night, so we seldom got the chance to see anything. But it made everything even more attractive to us. What we couldn't see with our own eyes, became even more beautiful and more interesting for our minds. Just a few centimetres of a woman's body was enough to remind us of what we used to love about porn magazines.

They're having oral sex, Julio used to tell us, and that was enough for us to see the same thing as he was. Julio was the oldest of us all, and although he was only a year older, we used to see him as one of the smartest people in the world, even more intelligent than any parent or teacher, of course.

I met Begoña during Bilbao's main festivities, but not the same year I first tried speed three years later, when one of her friends began dating Julio. I hardly remember anything about that day, and the few things that I remember have little to do with what Begoña told me. I guess that we spoke that day, and, according to Begoña, for some length. It was she who came up to me, I'm pretty sure of that because I've been a shy person since I was a child, especially with girls. Nevertheless, I haven't forgotten that she was wearing yellow that day, nor how beautiful she was. Unfortunately, we didn't see each other again for a year.

I sometimes asked Garbiñe, Julio's girlfriend, about her friend, but always indirectly. Probably afraid of getting my heart broken, I didn't want to express my feelings. "She is in Barcelona" was always Garbiñe's answer.

She was studying there and rarely came back to Bilbao. That is why we didn't see each other for a year, and another year went by until something that only happens in dreams really happened to me. Unlike that night two years before, I really do remember our first kiss.

Ruper Ordorika was going to play in New Square and Kortatu (or were they Negu Gorriak by then?) in Gas Square. The girls wanted to go to New Square, and we, the guys, to Gas. We reached a compromise in the end and we decided to go to both concerts. By the time we finally got to Gas, I didn't care about Kortatu, Negu Gorriak or any other band in the world. I needed both of my ears to listen to Begoña's words. I needed my whole body for her, a body that was on edge by then. I offered Begoña some speed, and although she firmly denies it, I know that happened. As if pushed by the speed we snorted that night, we spent the whole summer together until she returned to Barcelona. And later on, too, because I went to visit her at least once a month.

She was studying Design and lived with some other Basque students near Born market. We used to spend almost the whole day in bed. We only left home at night, mainly to eat something or to take a walk holding hands in our beloved Gothic district. That is how we spent a year. Begoña returned to Bilbao then, to work. I was working as an electrician by then.

I'd always been bad at school, and I got into the world of lighting thanks to the little I learned when I was forced to study electronics. I began working as an assistant in a theatre company that was as poor as I was. We used to move from town to town, earning very little but enjoying ourselves a lot. Some small lights and pieces of coloured paper were enough to create the atmosphere the play needed. We were able to create both day and night from nothing. We were little gods.

I learned a lot with them – and not only about lighting matters – thanks to what I heard during the long hours in the van. I am also indebted to a workmate from that time for the chance to get into the film business; he spoke about me to the director of a short film he was starring in. The short was called “Texas” and it was about the last hours of a prisoner who had long been sentenced to death. It was awful, really awful. Nevertheless, they called me again to work on another short film, and another, soon afterwards.

Unfortunately for me, that time in film also meant consuming cocaine. Cocaine was as necessary as cameras, travelling and lights. In order to save money, cameras were hand-held, natural light was used and amateur actors were hired. But there were no limits when it came to cocaine. They used it a lot, even when filming an unknown director's first short film. It was as if that white powder made the director a director, rather than his or her talent or work. The same could be said for actors, cameras and assistants; and also lighting technicians, no doubt about that.

Those first years were amazing, full of laughter, work and parties. Begoña and I moved to an apartment we rented in Errekalde. Both of us were working, so we bought a second-hand car to go to the mountains and go on holiday. Begoña and I got together at a time in which many couples were breaking up, so not being able to understand that we were still in love, many people were surprised to see us. We certainly used to have big rows, but after each of them our relationship was relit once more. We, too, were amazed, so much so that we would sometimes talk about getting married. We lived together as if we were married, but even so we used to play with that idea, particularly in those periods of calm after the storm. A wedding was the greatest sacrifice that could be made at the altar of love, the guarantee of permanent happiness in our relationship.

We talked a lot and we finally decided that when we had our first-born child we'd go to the City Hall to get married. And we started making calculations, trying to guess the best moment to have that son or daughter. Naturally, we needed some money, but we realised that within a year we'd have enough. We went out to dinner to celebrate and, while waiting for the coffee,

Begoña wrote in her red notebook that she would stop taking the pill on 5th May. However, a year later she was still taking the pill, although I asked her to stop again and again.

Begoña isn't stubborn by nature, but it was clear that she had no intention of giving in on that. She loved me, she wanted to have a child with me, but she didn't want his or her son's father to be a drug addict. We had huge rows because of that. I told her that everything was getting out of proportion. I did like cocaine, that was true, but I wasn't addicted. She said that I was and I should try living without snorting anything and see what would happen to me. At first I asked her to leave me alone, but I quickly realised that she was going to carry on like that. So I accepted her challenge. Accepted it and lost too, because the hellish dust got me really tied down. It was very difficult to see people around you sniffing lines and say no to their offers. More than difficult: it was impossible.

Far from distancing me from cocaine, the recognition of my addiction tied me more closely to it. I found it hard to admit that, very hard, and cocaine was the only thing that could lift me from that depression.

At that time I went to Madrid more and more for work reasons. Back then very few films were being made in the Basque Country and many Basque producers and directors went off to the capital of Spain. We, the technicians, were forced to go along with them. Nevertheless, I tried to spend the weekends with Begoña in Bilbao. Begoña tried not to mention the topic of the cocaine or the child and not to get angry, thinking that the two days we had to be together would pass quickly. However, we both knew that was where the crux of our relationship lay. Although she said nothing in words, I read in her eyes the message she was constantly sending me. At least, I thought so. Nowadays, however, I doubt it. It could also have been a kind of paranoia old cocaine addicts have. And, to be honest, I had some of them, in Madrid above all. Because of ETA, the police closely monitored the Basques living there, especially young people. The police scared more than one person returning home at dawn, or stopped them on the street. So fear soon spread among us, I felt myself spied on in every corner, in every bar. It seemed to me that they were coming after me and, just in case, I used to try to be with someone. My paranoia grew to such an extent that one day I decided that I could no longer deal with it and that I'd return to Bilbao as soon as I finished the section of the series I was working on.

I had done the right thing. Everything was easier beside Begoña. Soon I was better, calmer, happier. I was so happy and optimistic, so ready to change, that I promised her I'd give up cocaine. She heard my promise with pleasure, although she asked me to be quiet, reminding me that I was repeating the same thing I had promised a thousand times before. To tell the truth, I had told her the same thing many times, too many times, but always honestly and truthfully. As truthful as it was futile. I found Begoña's attitude understandable. Warnings about crying wolf had been given time and again, but it had never appeared. Who would believe me? She asked me to prove that my promise wasn't in vain. Some proof? What was she talking about?

You have to join Proyecto Hombre she told me then.

I agreed as if she had asked me to go to the cinema. I knew hardly anything about the organization. I thought it was for junkies. And to see myself next to them wasn't easy. I had accepted Begoña's proposal, mostly to keep her happy.

She organized everything, gathering information, calling and talking with them.

They showed me into a brightly lit office. Begoña waited for me outside.

A bearded man called Ramon Goiti held out his hand to me. He had grey hair around his mouth and the rest of his beard was black. He was wearing a gold chain around his neck which, I reckoned, held an image of Christ or of the Virgin Mary. First of all, he told me that Begoña had already told him what my problem was. However, he said, what I had to say was much more important than what my wife – he used that word – had told him. But I didn't have much to say, just a single sentence: I want to give up cocaine.

I told him a lot of things, everything. However, Goiti wanted more. I would happily have told him more, but I had nothing more to say and, even though I examined every corner of my dim brain, nothing seemed to satisfy the man with the pop-art beard. He went on asking and asking me, never getting tired. He went on asking me similar questions, trying to change the way he asked them each time. I decided to take it easy; he'd get tired at some point.

Stupid me: Goiti, like everyone at Proyecto Hombre in general, was tireless. Tireless, not foolish. What Goiti wanted was clear: to prove that they can change trash like me into human beings through endless interrogation. When I got out of there I was surprised to hear Begoña say that I had only spent half an hour in the office. My first half an hour with Goiti; the first time for many things.

I had to go to that house in Deustu six or seven times. I saw Goiti every time. He gave me a high five, asked me how I was, and then re-started the endless questioning where he had left off the day before. Maybe it was because of my paranoia, but he scared me a bit. The situation reminded me of a horror film which had scared me when I was young. In that film I had seen on television one winter the time didn't change; it was always the same time on the clock at the church, on the town hall, at school, at factories, at shops and at home.

But one day Goiti told me that they were going to accept me, to my surprise and Begoña's delight. Stupid me: I had no idea then what was coming. I won't talk about the sheer hell of my withdrawal syndrome, because the very thought of it makes me sick. It was horrible. And what came after was not much easier either. They took my phone, cards and all my money away. Begoña had to go with me wherever I went. They forced me to leave my job and abandon my friends. They banned alcohol. Thankfully, at least, I was allowed to smoke. As well as that, and as if that wasn't enough, I had to live in the community (as they called it) for five months.

Except for the days that I slept there (twice a week generally), I spent all day there until I returned home at dusk.

Instead of the bearded Goiti, a bitter woman took care of me. Her name was Edurne. She probably wasn't all that intelligent but she knew what she had to do after having spent many years with people like me. At first, she seemed like a nun to me, but my fellow inmates told me that she wasn't; in fact, she was married.

There were ten of us, more or less, repentant cocaine addicts. We got along with each other, which was just as well because we spent all day together. When we weren't at work, watching TV or playing either chess or ludo (card games were completely forbidden) we talked, told each other about our lives, laying open all our nooks and crannies, often under Edurne's strict gaze.

Thinking has never been my main activity. Mostly, I've just got on with living, taking things as they come and carrying on. There, though, they forced us to think: about my mum, my dad, my wife, myself. I had to think about all of that until I had a headache, until I was exhausted. I examined my inner self and I found a black hole there whose very existence I had never suspected. And what a stench: it was disgusting. Then I had to admit for the first time what I now know so well: I was trash. I am trash.

Mum, Dad, Begoña, I had been selfish with all three of them. Mum loved me unconditionally. I was the eldest of her children, and probably, I was the only one she had ever wished for. Dad, on the other hand, I had hated. Luckily, it was there that I realised that his harshness had been put on just for the sake of appearances. And I started to love him, because, somehow, I understood that he had been as weak as I was. In fact, everyone in there was like that, even if we thought otherwise. Yes, we had no will; we were incapable of looking reality in the eye from behind our mask of bonvivants; without realising it, we were devotees of death.

Knowing that we were all full of shit brought us closer together. However, Edurne thought that that kind of solidarity, even if it was beautiful, could also be dangerous. The group helped us, of course, but it also allowed us to feel comfortable there. There was no danger in that, I thought, as long as Edurne was present. More than one of us was thrown out and more than one left, no longer being able to cope with the lifestyle.

I spent months talking non-stop, on a trip that led me into the past. The past is a cold place, nowhere near the warm realm of our memories. It must have been difficult for our parents back then when everything had been scarce. They'd had too much of a struggle sending their children to school to have time to worry about our traumas. Few people even knew what that word meant back then. Anyway, I decided that if I ever had children I would try to protect them from any type of trauma. Just in case. And if it was a girl, so much the better; Begoña would make sure she didn't become my clone.

Those were the kind of things I thought about again and again, hopefully and – why not admit it? – I was a little scared too. Begoña was aware of my thoughts, but she didn't mind if it was a

girl or a boy, as long as it was healthy. I told her that we would call her Dorleta, thinking of someone I met at school when I was little. She was alright with that, as long as it was a girl. However, she added, you'll have to finish at Proyecto Hombre before any of that happens.

Throughout those long months, I did make progress on the endless road of getting better too. Reintegration was the name they had for the moment when I would be free and healthy again. At the time my most important challenge was getting a job. One that would have nothing to do with the last one I had. And so I started searching, but, as I had left school as young as I could, nobody wanted me. Every morning I bought the newspaper, looked at the jobs page and started to phone around. Sometimes, they told me to call again, saying it might not be long before they needed someone like me. Other times they didn't even say that.

I even went to the Job Office. Having to spend my days like that was awful.

Edurne, as well as Begoña, used to tell me to relax, saying I would find something before it was too late. It's easy to say that, but, as the days went by, it was hard for Begoña finding me in front of the TV whenever she came home from work. It was hard for both of us.

She tried to pretend, tried to hide what she felt and to appear to be happy so that I wouldn't sink even further. I spent weeks that way, until, one afternoon, Begoña told me that she had a job for me. They needed someone at her brother-in-law's shop.

Rafa, Begoña's sister's husband, has a shop in Indautxu. He sells flowers. He received the clients and placed their orders, and I tried to prepare them as best I could, arranging the bouquets of flowers following Rafa's orders. I mixed different kinds and colours. I watered and cleaned them. I wrapped them in the paper in different ways depending on each order because wedding bouquets and funeral bouquets aren't the same, obviously. Sometimes I worked at the back of the shop; other times, however, I took the van and delivered the flowers. It isn't the worst job there is. Of course I would have preferred to continue with my lighting job, but I didn't get too bored or tired. Rafa made me welcome from the very beginning, and, being aware of my problem, tried to be patient with me. I tried to do my best too.

After the hardest months were over, Begoña and I were better together than ever before. We ate together and, sometimes, after having dinner, watched a rented video. Once in a while I went to Hombre and Begoña used tell me that they were optimistic about my future. Apparently I was doing well, better than they had expected I would.

Such was the confidence I had in myself and so great was Begoña's pride that a couple of months before I was going to finish at Proyecto she told me that she had stopped taking the pill. I told her that I loved her more than ever, and I meant it.

The day I finished at Hombre, we went out for dinner. To complete the celebration, Begoña told me that she was pregnant while we were having coffee. Mute, as if frozen in place, that's

how the news left me. I noticed an air of worry on Begoña's face, and only then did I open my mouth to tell her that it was the best gift she could possibly have given me.

Over the following months I always had the feeling that I had been reborn. Every day I was amazed by that way of life I had long forgotten; the ability to enjoy little things, as well as being gratifying, was amazing. Any insignificant conversation I had with Begoña satisfied me as much as any white powder could. Yes, I often made such comparisons to myself, implying that I most certainly had cocaine in mind. Considering the incredibly arduous effort I had made to forget it, that inability to forget seemed rather pitiful. Thankfully, I had brought that issue up at Hombre many times, so I had already learned not to obsess over it. My love for Begoña grew just as she did. I put my ear on her belly and listened to my daughter spellbound - I was increasingly sure that it was a girl. I still had no friends, but that was okay: I needed no one apart from Begoña. We used to go to the cinema or for a walk. Sometimes I even went to San Mames, invited by Rafa who was a huge Athletic fan. And so, with Begoña's and Rafa's help, days, weeks and months went by. Being aware of the advantages of a monotonous life, I started to look forward to the future without fear. I was confident that I would be able to overcome any danger; with Begoña by my side, I would overcome any trap that life might throw my way. Which is why, when I came across Julio yesterday, I was simply happy.

It had been ages since I had last seen him, when I started working with lighting, more or less. I rarely went to Santutxu, and it had been a long time since I had last had any news about my friends' whereabouts, just as they had probably heard nothing about me. Anyway, I knew that Julio was in the merchant navy; I had probably heard that from my mother.

We came across each other in Indautxu, just when I was leaving work. Even though his skin was tanned, he had a thick moustache and he had already started to go bald, I recognised him immediately. He recognised me too at once, even though my hair was very short and my clothes completely different. We gave each other a long, firm hug. Moved, I started to talk and soon realised that he had always been my friend; it was as if we had parted the previous day and were meeting again the day after. We went to a bar. Julio was working on an oil tanker under the Maltese flag which went from The Black Sea to the Atlantic and back again. It sounded like a tough, lonely job, but it was well paid, and, as he was still unmarried, it was suitable enough for him. For one thing, he loved to come and go from place to place, he loved the freedom. For another, the ports were full of women waiting for the sailors. Having such opportunity, why settle for just one?

I didn't answer Julio's question. I remembered Begoña, but I let him carry on telling me his story. Just when he was about to tell me what the women in each port were like, we realised that our glasses were empty and he suggested we go to another bar. I very rarely went into any bars, only ever with Begoña or Rafa, but I accepted. The first time it was me who ordered the drinks; the second time, though, Julio wanted to order: Beer, right?

I agreed, but alcohol-free.

Alcohol-free!

Proyecto Hombre, my addiction... I had to tell him everything. He listened carefully. However, I had the impression that his eyes filled with a blend of pity and irony. After that, when I fell silent and Julio started to talk, I realised that I was right.

He told me that he met many men like me at sea, he too was familiar enough with drugs, those which I knew and some which were even worse.

I know all of them, he told me, but I always use them in moderation, I control the drugs, they don't control me.

I looked at him with envy. However, Julio caught me by the neck, and he brought me toward him, telling me that I was strong enough too. I'd been able to free myself from cocaine, and for him that was proof enough of my strength. He tapped my glass with his, and we made a toast: To you. 'Cause what you've done is incredible.'

I don't know how many alcohol-free beers I drank in the bars after that. Chatting made us thirsty and we had a lot to say not having seen each other for so long. In fact, I thought that he was drinking too much. He would get drunk very quickly if he went on that way.

Let's have dinner, I told him; I'm hungry.

We were really at ease and it was worth carrying on chatting calmly. We decided to go to the old town. On the way there, however, I thought of Begoña. I told Julio that I had to phone her. He said yes, call her, he knew about couples' lifestyles, which was the reason why he hadn't got married, he hated being controlled by anybody.

She's pregnant, eight months, I told him trying to justify myself.

I called her from the restaurant. She didn't answer. I looked for a clock. I thought that she would be at her mother's or her sister's. I'd phone her later.

Julio asked me to tell him about my son when I came back from the phone. I insisted it would be a girl.

Have you seen the scan?

No. But I know it.

We read the menu and, once we'd chosen what we wanted to eat, Julio asked the waitress for wine.

Water too, please, I added.

As soon as he heard my order he frowned. Are you going to drink water with your steak? It's good to take care of your health but hey, don't go too far. Moderation's the key to it. Didn't they explain that to you at Proyecto hombre? Anyway, wine's natural; it isn't cocaine.

Julio's advice seemed reasonable, the prudent words of a man with a lot of experience and no doubts.

Besides, he continued, we have to celebrate the birth of your son or daughter, and we aren't going to celebrate with water, are we?

That was the decisive argument for me. All rules, even the most strict, have their exceptions. You only become a father once for the first time. Is there a better excuse than that?

Suddenly, I hear a piercing noise, it sounds like a phone. It's ringing and ringing, but I'm not moving. I try to push my dream in some other direction, towards an unwavering silence. I can't. Then I try to ignore it. No use. It keeps on ringing and ringing. It insists so angrily that I'm forced to open my eyes. I hardly open them, it's as if my eyelashes were made of lead. I feel pain, and I have a headache too. My mouth and tongue are dry. What time is it? Where am I? The alarm clock says that it's 8 a.m.; it's the alarm clock I've always had. So I am at home. Somehow I get up from the bed and, still asleep, start to stand up little by little. The telephone keeps ringing mercilessly, and it goes through my head right to my brain. It's painful, but I need water before anything else; otherwise, I won't be able to speak or to do anything. I go to the kitchen in a hurry.

Daylight hits me right in the face. I drink from the tap. That's the moment I feel that able to speak. I answer with a dark "Yes" from the bottom of my throat. I recognise Rafa's voice. He asks me where I've been and doesn't disguise the fact that he's angry. He had been calling me up to 2 a.m. He gives me no chance to answer and tells me that I have been a father since 21.50 p.m. the night before.

How is Begoña?

Begoña's quite well.

And the baby girl?

You've had a boy. They're waiting for you at Gurutzeta.

I have a shower, I get dressed and hurry out to look for a taxi. I'm lucky for once and get one fast. It's not easy to cross Bilbao at this time of year and, even though the driver tries to go as fast as I ask, the traffic forces him to go slowly. I look at the cars around us and at my watch from time to time, and I can't get it out of my head that I wasn't with her. When Begoña needed me most, I let her down.

I want to pay the taxi driver before we stop. He understands. There are lots of people at Gurutzeta. I ask somebody wearing white. She sends me to the reception where, apparently, they'll tell me where to find Begoña.

Are you the husband?

I think the receptionist is gently reprimanding me. But I've no time to think whether I'm right about that.

I find Rafa waiting for me by the door of the room. I want to open it, but he stops me: Begoña's had a tough time, she's very weak, and she needs rest. Let her sleep.

And the baby?

Look, he's starts, using the same voice he uses at the shop. The voice that he uses when he says something that I won't like.

Where is my son? Has something happened to him?

Calm down a bit, please. He's had problems. They've had to take him into a special room.

To a special room! I almost shout.

Shut up. That's all I know. Speak to the doctor.

I look from left to right for the doctor. He isn't anywhere. Unlike at the reception, there are few people in the hospital corridors, and most of them are patients' relatives. There's no trace of white uniforms, and I get nervous, more and more nervous. As I go along the corridors finally I find a nurse.

I scare her. She's seen someone coming over to her and she's got scared. I've seen it in her eyes.

My little son!

She's calms me down a bit, and I think that she's understood who I am. She tells me that she's going to look for the doctor so I should wait. That's when I couldn't bear it anymore: I shout that I've been looking for the doctor, it's our first son, he's ill, and I want to see him as soon as possible. It seems that she was scared about what I might do and tells me to follow her and that I've got to keep calm about what I'm going to see. These newborns are so fragile, and even the ones that look bad are going to recover over time. So that's what I do, I follow her as if I've got a weapon held to her back, so she can feel my breath on her neck. There's something I can't read when the frightened nurse opens the door. I see a long room with cradles on each side of the room, close together and almost dimly lit.

Suddenly, two words come to me: Death Row, that short film I made about Texas. I feel like a prisoner condemned to die in the electric chair, walking along the corridor that takes me to

death. My knees shaking, I can hardly walk. There are babies to the right and the left who would scare anybody. They're more like tiny monsters than babies. They're disfigured bodies. Some of them have heads bigger than their chests, and some are the opposite. Others are missing an arm or a leg; there are ones who have more than two. It is a terrible spectacle, a museum of monsters. I follow the nurse, but I want to run out of the room. I've seen too much, I don't even want to know what our baby is like, whether he has something extra or something missing. It is my fault he was born that way, to remind me every day of what a piece of shit I am. My wife giving birth in hospital while I was getting drunk. It's obvious: rubbish can only create rubbish.