

kristalezko ontziak

KARMELE JAIO

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KARMELE JAIO

kristalezko ontziak

Ipuinak

Ipuinok lehenago bilduma hauetan argitaratu ziren:

'Zu bezain ahul'; 'Ez naiz ni'.

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HITZAURREA

Hiru bikote, adin ertainekoak. Hausnartzen ari diren pertsonaiak dira, bizi izan dutenaz, bizi dutenaz eta bizitzeko dutenaz. Bikote bakoitzak bi seme-alaba ditu, baina bakoitzarekin istorio desberdin batean murgilduko da irakurlea. Izan ere, era ederrean kontatzen ditu Karmele Jaiok *Azukrezko Madaritzuak*, *Kilkerra* eta *Txupa Beltza*, hiru narratzaile mota erabiliz.

Orri gutxiren bueltan, hiru familien bizimoduetan sartuko da irakurlea, eta zer pentsatua emango dio irakurritakoak. Ez da erraza haurrak heztea, ez da erraza bizitzako egoera berrietara ohitzea, ez da erraza urteek aurrera egin ahala bikote bateko txispa eta sexu grina mantentzea. Gezurrak esaten dituzte batzuek, egiak ezkututzen dituzte beste batzuek... ez dira pentsatzen dutena esatera ausartzen.

Estitxu Zabala Odriozola

TXUPA BELTZA

Raul arropa-dendetako poltsekin agertu da etxean, iluntzean. Martak ezin du sinistu:

–Arropa eroatera joan zara?... Zu bakarrik?

Emaztearen ahotsaren trufa doinuaz ohartuta, Raulek ez dio erantzun; burua mugitu du goitik behera, besterik ez, eta aurrera egin du pasillotik.

–Aber? –Martak logelaraino jarraitu dio senarrari, jakin minez, eta marrazki bizidunak ikusten zegoen Unai atzetik segitu die, ortozik, pijama jantzita. Egoitz bere gelan dago, atea itxita, ordenagailuaren aurrean ziurrenez.

Raulek Martarekin batera erosi izan ditu beti arropak, beherapenetan gehienetan, eta batzuetan Martak erosi dizkio, berak joan beharrik gabe, Egoitz eta Unairi erosten dizkien bezala. Sekula ez da joan bakarrik. Ez da, baina, azken urtean Rauli igarri dion aldaketa bakarra. Etxe eta auzo berrian bizi direnetik bere buruari ezohiko atentzioa eskaintzen hasi da: bere janzerari, orrazkerari... Ikasle garaian erabiltzen zuen zilarrezko uztai txikia jarri du ezkerreko belarrian, eta aspaldian ile-apaindegira joan gabe, adats modukoa hazi zaio atzealdean, nobioak zirenean zuenaren antzekoa.

Raulek poltsak ohe gainean utzi eta berehala, Marta hauetan arakatzen hasi da.

–Bi kamiseta eta bi praka erosi ditut. Hain harrigarria al da? –galdetu dio Raulek, haserre.

–Baina nola erosi duzu S? Zuk gutxienez M behar duzu –Martak kamiseta bat zabaldu du eta bazterretatik tenka egin dio—. Eta letra horiek paparrean? Honek nerabeentzako arropa ematen du, Raul. Baina ze erosketa egin duzu?

–Nahikoa da, Marta... Utz nazazu bakean.

Une batez, senarrarekin ala seme nerabearekin hitz egiten ari ote den, zalantza izan du Martak. Zenbat aldiz entzun duen Egoitzen ahotsean *utz nazazu bakean* esaldia. Nahiko buruhauste eman die azken bi urteetan Egoitzek, bereziki etxez aldatu aurretik, aldaketaren kontra izan baitzen lehen unetik, ez baitzuen auzoko lagunengandik urrundu nahi. Mila aldiz azaldu diote aitak etxean estudioa jartzeko gela bat gehiago behar zutela. Raul argazkilaria da eta lan egiten zuen egunkaria itxi zutenetik bere kontura ari da, *free-lance* moduan.

Egoitzek hamazazpi urte ditu eta bere anai gazteak, Unaik, bost. Marta nazkatuta dago betiko komentarioarekin: zelako alde handia, ezta? Denek begiratzen diote Unairi deskuidu bat balitz bezala. Hain justu, Egoitz jaioberriari begiratzen zioten modura, hogeita hiru urterekin izan baitzuen, eta errukiz begiratzen baitzieten orduan ere hain gazte guraso bihurtuta ikustean. Duda barik, deskuiduek markatu dute Raul eta Martaren familia planifikazioa.

Honek eragina izan du lagunekin izan duten harremanetan. Martak eta Raulek bizitza sozial eskasa dute. Egoitz izan zutenean, kuadrillakoek ez zuten oraindik umerik eta, poliki, haiengandik urrundu ziren. Egoitz hazi eta laguntxoekin geratzen hasi zenean, askatasun pixka bat izango zutela pentsatu zuten eta aurreko bizitza eta lagunak errekuperatu ahal izango zituztela, baina Marta haurdun geratu zen berriz, eta berriz bueltatu ziren haien bizitzara fardelak, pure orbanak, zabuak eta txirristak, eta larunbat arratsaldetan zortzietarako etxera itzultzea.

Baina Unaik bost urte bete eta etxez aldatzearekin batera, leiho bat ireki da, antza, Raulentzat, etxe barrura ez ezik, kanpoko bizitzari begiratzeko aukera ematen diona. Eta Raulek berreskuratu duen bizi-gogoia ikusita, Marta atzean gelditzeko arriskuaz ohartzen hasi da. Senarraren gazte sentitzeko saiakera bakoitzari barre egiten dio berak, ozen gainera, argi gera dadin bera ez dagoela

kezkatuta, argi gera dadin gazte bihurtzeko saiakera patetikoa iruditzen zaiola, baina barrearen azpian Raulek egun batean fosil bati legez begiratuko dion beldurra ezkutatzen da. Sentipen hau barruan izan du azken urtean, baina ez dio izen eta abizenik ipini bere lagun Silviarekin ostegunero bezala kafea hartzera geratu den arte.

–Adi, Marta –ohartarazi dio Silviak, begiak zabal-zabalik–. Nire senarra ere horrela hasi zen...

Raulen transformazioaz aritu zaionean, Silviak kontatu dio bere senarra paparra depilatzen hasi zela, eta handik urte batera, nerabe moderno baten moduan jantzita agertu zitzaiola dibortzioa eskatuz. Azkenean mesedea egin ziola ere esan dio Silviak, hari esker emakumeak gustatzen zaizkiola deskubritu baitzuen eta ordutik bera baino hamabost urte gazteagoa den neska batekin bizi baita, baina bere kasuan, senarra mantendu nahi badu, adi egoteko ohartarazi dio.

Silviaren hitzek aspaldian buruan zuen puzzlea osatu dute. Eta mamuak ikusi ditu edonon. Berak farmazian duen ordutegiagatik oso gutxitan joaten da Unairen bila eskolara, eta ordu gutxi egiten ditu, Raulekin konparatuta, umearekin parkean. Eta eskolako irteeran, eta baita parkean ere, ia gehienak amak dira, eta denak bere senarra baino gazteagoak. Ama gazte ederren bat ezagututa sortu ote zaio senarrari gazte itxura berreskuratzeko behar hori?

–Kosta egiten zaie –esan dio Silviak–. Konturatzea, diot; zahartu direla onartzea. Eta neska gazteak bilatzen dituzte, horrekin gaztetuko balira bezala... Gaztetan entzuten zuen musika entzuten hasi da berriz, ezta?

–Ba, bai.

–Eta oraindik orduko musika urratzailea dela uste dute... Nire senarrak, azken hilabeteetan, pena ematen zuen zer eta Scorpions entzuten. Ezer zaharragorik... *Still loving you* ta guzti hori, badakizu.

–Ez, Rauli ez zaio inoiz heavya gustatu, baina *God save the queen* politonoa jarri dio mugikorrari.

–Ez dira konturatzen gaur Sex Pistols dentistaren itxarongelan jarri dezaketela lasai-lasai... Guretzat gurasoek entzuten zuten Maria Dolores Pradera bezalakoa da Sex Pistols gaurko gazteentzat. Klasiko bat.

Adin batera helduta, gizon guztiak patetikoak bihurtzen direla ziurtatu dio Silviak, kafetegitik presaka irten baino lehen. Bere nobia campusean zain zeukan.

Umea lokartu ondoren, afaltzera eseri dira sukaldean Marta eta Raul. Egoitz bere gelan dago. Ogitarteko bat eraman du bertan afaltzeko.

–The Curek Bilbon jotzen du, BBK Live-n –esan dio Raulek gazta zati bat mozten dagoela.

–Bai... Eta? –galdetu dio Martak.

–Zergatik ez goaz?

–Gu? Kontzertura?

–Bai, garai batean bezala. Noiztik ez gara kontzertu batera joan?

–Lagunak genituenetik? –erantzun dio Martak ironiaz, jogurtaren azken aztarnak jan bitartean.

–Ez dugu inor behar.

–Eta Unai?

–Zure amaren etxean utzi dezakegu...

Barre egiten dio, baina barruan zauritxo bat sentitzen du senarra hainbesteko gogoz ikustean. Parkean bera baino gazteagoak diren emakumez inguratuta egon eta gero, etxera heltzean berari botika zaharretan dauden pitxarren antza

hartuko ziola pentsatu du. Agian berak ere arropa berriak erosi beharko lituzke, edo orrazkera aldatu, gazteago sentitzeko, erakargarriago egoteko, beti baitarama ilea motots batean bilduta, erosotasunaren mesedetan. Agian ez da ideia txarra kontzertu horretara joatea. Agian bataio moduko bat izango da, bere garaian guztiz disfrutatu ezin izan zuten gazte-bizimodua berreskuratzeko.

Larunbat goizean, neguko arropak gorde eta udakoak ateratzen aritu denean, ohe gainean zabaldua utzitako arropen begira geratu da une batez. Eta minutu batzuen ondoren, bere amak jantziko lituzkeen arropak direla ebatzi du. Argi dago. Berak ere berritzea behar du, kanpotik eta barrutik.

–Lagunduko al didazu ganbarara? –galdetu dio Rauli, arropaz bete dituen bi poltsa erraldoiei begira.

Ganbaran, neguko arropentzako lekua egiten ari dela, Martak maleta zahar bat atera du.

–Zerbait egin beharko dugu arropa zahar hauekin –esan du, maleta barruan dauden aspaldiko jantziei begira.

–Hori nire txupa al da?

Begiak piztu zaizkio Rauli. Maletan dauden arropen artetik larruzko jaka beltz bat atera du, kremlera ugarikoa, rocker itxurakoa.

–Ez duzu hori jarri nahiko, ezta?

–Londrestik ekarri zidaten... Joder, nire txupa... Galduta nuela uste nuen.

Marta, Raul eta hirugarren pertsona baten lekua hartzen duen larruzko jaka igogailuan doaz, ganbaratik seigarren pisurako bidean, eta Marta doministikuka ari da, hautsak alergia ematen baitio. Maleta ere hartu du, etxean errebisatzeko asmoz, baina alergia jota, ez da arropa ateratzen ausartu eta balkoian utzi du. Ikusi du, baina, garai batean erabiltzen zituen larruzko prakak daudela barruan,

eta une batez bere burua imajinatu du praka haiek jantzita, dantzan, The Cure-ren kontzertuaz gozaten. Etxera sartu eta berehala probatu nahi izan du Raulek jaka, baina Martak ez dio utzi. Jaka egun batzuetan balkoian aireztatzen jarri beharko dutela esan dio, duen hauts eta ganbara hatsa kentzeko. Kostatu zaio Raul konbentzitzea, baina azkenean han geratu da jaka, pertxa batean eskegita balkoiaren erdian, arropak sikatzeko sokatik zintzilik.

Egoitz kalera irten da, norbaitek mezua bidali dio mugikorrera eta ezer esan gabe joan da.

–Hamaiketarako hemen! –egin dio oihu Martak atea itxi aurretik, nahiz eta azken hilabetean ezarritako ordua baino lehenago etortzen hasi den. Neskaren bat ezagutu duen susmoa du Martak, eta Egoitzek baino goizago bueltatu beharko duela neskak etxera. Ez du beste arrazoi posiblerik aurkitzen.

Egoitzen gelara sartu eta lurrean dauden arropak jasotzen hasi da. Praka bakeroetan orban handia duela konturatuta, garbigailura eraman ditu. Sartu baino lehen, poltsikoetan zerbait dagoen begiratu du, eta halako batean harritxo bat atera du, bolatxo bat. Haxixari begira hasperen egin eta Raulengana joan da. Ordenagailuaren aurrean dago, BBK Liveko web guneari begira.

–Raul...

–Radiohead ere badator, badakizu? –esan dio ordenagailutik bista altxatu gabe.

–Raul, begira –eskua luzatu du, eta haxixa erakutsi dio.

–Marta! Non lortu duzu hori? Noiz hasi zara erretzen berriz?

–Ez esan tontakeriarik. Zure semearen poltsikoan aurkitu dut.

–Aber? –Raulek esku artean hartu du film gardenez bilduta dagoen haxix zatia eta usaintzen hasi da–. Arrautza da, Marokoko karamelu bat.

–Zer egingo dugu?

Raul pentsakor gelditu da haxix zatiari begira.

–Erretzeko paperik ba al dugu?

Ordu erdi beranduago, etxeko balkoian daude Raul eta Marta, semeari aurkitutako haxixarekin egindako kanutoa erretzen.

–Ezin dut sinistu hau egiten ari garenik... –esan dio Martak Rauli honek eskaintzen dion kanutoa eskuan hartu aurretik.

–Benga, Marta, nahikoa da. Erre azkar, Egoitz agertu aurretik.

–Baina...

–Agian nahiago duzu Egoitz datorrenean sofán esertzeko eskatu eta “hitz egin behar dugu” esatea...

–Ez, mesedez.

–Ba erre orduan.

Martak zupada sakon bat eman dio kanutoari, segundo batzuk itxaron ditu eta beste atxiki bat eman dio, Rauli berriz pasatu aurretik. Zenbat urte burmuinean halako ukabilkada sentitu gabe. Hitzik gabe geratu da, eta bere aurrean eskegita dagoen Raulen jaka beltzari begiratu dio. Jaka hori jantzita zuela ezagutu zuen Raul. Beti eramaten zuen jaka itxita, armari bat balitz bezala. Tipo gogorra zen Raul. Kontzertu batean gogoratu du, lehen lerroan, burua aurrera eta atzera. Aspaldi ahaztua zuen Raul gaztea berpiztu da Martaren irudimenean, eta erakargarri egin zaio. Haren gazetako irudia buruan, senarrari begiratu eta irribarre egin dio. Raulek begiak txikituta ditu, eta ezin izan dio barreari eutsi. Barrez lehertu dira biak, elkarri begira, aspaldiko partez. Halako batean, hego haize ufada batek dantzan jarri du haien buruen gainean zintzilik dagoen jaka

beltza. Martari, bat batean, gaztetxe bateko okupazio bandera iruditu zaio. Lurralde berria okupatu balu bezala sentitu da.

Hurrengo goizean, ibuprofeno pastilla uraren laguntzaz irensten duen une berean, Egoitzen gelako atea entzun du Martak. Galtzontzilotan eta Berri txarrak-en kamiseta jantzita agertu da semea. Estu dabil praka bakeroen bila, baina ez du ezer galdetu. Balkoira irten eta eskegita dauden arropen artean arakatzen ibili da. Gero, berriz bueltatu da gelara, gosalduta gabe.

–Zer egin duzu harriarekin? –galdetu dio senarrak, ahopeka, esnatu eta gutxira.

–Gordeta daukat. Buelatuko diogu? Gelako lurrera botako dezaket, hara jausi dela pentsa dezan.

–Buelatatu? Ezta pentsatu ere. Aspaldian ez dut halako haxixa erre.

Hurrengo egunetan, gauero, Unai lokartu ondoren eta Egoitz agertu aurretik, balkoira irten dira Marta eta Raul, eta han kanuto bat erre, oraindik eskegita jarraitzen duen jaka beltzaren ondoan. Eguneko momenturik onena da. Kezka guztiak hegan doaz eta bat-batean ardura bakarra plazera sentitzea da. Gazteago sentitzen da Marta, eta Raul ere gazteago ikusten du. Eta gustuko du sabelean sentitzen duen kili-kili hori, gaztetan bihurrikeriaren bat egitean sentitzen zuen berbera.

Zazpi egun iraun die karameluak. Eta bat-batean, haxix gehiago lortzea hil edo biziko kontua bihurtu da Raul eta Martarentzat.

Klasean dagoela aprobetxatuta, Egoitzen gela arakatu du Raulek.

–Zerbait aurkitu duzu? –galdetu dio Martak, urduri.

–Ez, garbi dago –erantzun dio Raulek, polizia baten antzera.

–Neska hori da.

–Zer?

–Uste dut zure semeak nahiko droga duela maiteminduta egotearekin.

–Ez da egia izango... Porroak utziko zituen? –galdetu du kezkatu Raulek.

–Ez dakit ba...

Martak Rauli sorpresa ematea erabaki du. Hurrengo astean hamazazpi urte beteko dira ezkondu zirenetik. Afari berezi bat prestatuko dio, eta egun horretarako haxixa lortuko du. Silviak lortuko dio, bere nobia gaztearen bitartez, badaki erretzen duela eta. Raulek urteurrena gogoratuko duen, ez dauka argi, baina susmoa du BBK Liverako sarrerak oparituko dizkiola aurten urteurrena ospatzeko.

Heldu da eguna, larunbata da. Goizean, esnatzean, ez diote elkarri ezer esan. Arratsaldean ezkondu ziren, eta urtero arratsaldera arte itxaroten dute elkar zoriontzeko. Beraz, Raul etxean agertu arte ezingo du jakin urteurrena gogoratu duen ala ez.

Gaurko gaua berezia izatea nahi du Martak, eta benetan izango da berezia, biak bakarrik izango baitira etxean. Unai amonaren etxean egingo du lo, eta Egoitzek lagun baten herrira doala esan die, jaietara, eta haren etxean egingo dutela lo. Martak badaki gezurra dela, ezagutu duen neskarekin igaroko duela nonbaiten gaua, baina sekulako lasaitua hartu du bakarrik egongo direla jakitean. Bai, gaur larruzko prakak jantziko ditu, eta gaurko egunak bere berpizkundearen hasiera suposatuko du. Prest dago praka horiekin Kobetamendira igotzeko eta beltzez jantzitako gazteen artean galtzeko.

Kostata jantzi ditu, orduan baino askoz estuago geratzen baitzaizkio, eta duten ganbara hatsa kentzeko, balkoira irten da, galtzak jantzita. Han, oraindik zintzilik dagoen jakari begira, nobioak zirenean Rauli larruzko praka haiek zenbat gustatzen zitzaizkion gogoratu du, zoro baten moduan jartzen zela. Gaur ere berotuko da, aspaldiko partez. Gainera, afaltzen daudenean, beti motots batean bilduta daraman ilea askatu egingo duela erabaki du. Gaur Raulek ez du 41 urteko farmazeutikoa ikusi behar bere begien aurrean, Marta gaztea baizik, Marta erakargarri eta sexya. Bi gazte izango dira gaur, haxixa erretzen, barrez lehertzen, elkarri laztan egiten, larrua jotzen...

Mahaia prest, afaria prest, larruzko praketako poltsiko batean sartu du haxixa Martak Raul etxera sartu baino minutu bat lehenago. Sartu eta berehala, Raulek muxua eman dio ezpainetan. Aspaldian ez zuen egiten.

–Zorionak –esan dio gero, eta Marta lasaitu da, Raulek urteurrena gogoratu du.

–Afari berezia prestatu dut –esan dio Martak, urduri.

Mahaia egongelan prestatuta ikustean berriz eman dio muxu Raulek. Oraindik ez dio ezer esan prakei buruz. Agian melena askatzen duenean...

–Sorpresa bat dut zuretzat –esan dio Martak afaldu bitartean.

Bere asmoa, postrera heltzean, aulkitik jaiki, melena askatu, eta poltsikoan duen haxixa ateratzea da.

–Neuk ere bai zuretzat –esan dio Raulek.

Ez dute Egoitzi buruz hitz egin, ezta Unairi buruz, eta une batez Martari iruditu zaio ez dutela jakingo zertaz hitz egin. Ganba brotxetak ezin hobeak zeudela esan dio Raulek eskuak zapiarekin garbitu bitartean, eta izokina labetik ateratzean *ohhhh* luze bat bota du. Lehenengo zitan baleude bezala, urduri daude, zer esan jakin gabe. Bukatzen daudela, postrea zerbitzatu du Martak, xanpainez egindako

bi sorbete. Eta berriz aulkian eseri beharreen, Raulen albora inguratu da. Gerria haren begien aurrean jarri du, metro eskasera, Raulek behingoz prakak ezagutu ditzan, Raulek behingoz erreakzionatu dezan. Eta lortu duela iruditu zaio, halako batean, Raulek praketara begiratu baitio eta gerturatzeko eskatu.

–Etorri hona –esan dio, eta Marta sentsualki gerturatu da harengana.

Raulengandik zentimetro gutxira dagoenean, besoak altxatu ditu melena askatzeko asmoarekin, eta une horretan, Raulek paperean bildutako opari bat eskaini dio.

–Tori.

Ilea askatzen hasia zegoen, baina berriz bildu du motots batean, eta besoak jaitsi ditu oparia irekitzeko. CD bat da. Portada, BBK Liveko kartelaren kolorezko fotokopia bat da. Barruan sarrera bat aurkituko duela pentsatu du, baina barruan CD bat dago.

–Zer iruditzen? Hor dituzu denak. BBK Livera aurten etorriko diren talde guztiak, grabatuta, etxean goxo-goxo gozatu ditzazun, inolako mendira igo beharrik gabe, zapatak lokatzez zikindu gabe eta hotzik pasatu gabe... Den denak grabatu dizkizut: The Cure, Radiohead, Keane....

Marta CDari begira dago, burua jaikitzeke ausardiarik ez balu bezala.

–Eta gainera gure garaiko beste batzuk ere grabatu dizkizut –eta, ume baten moduan emozioz beterik, CDan idatzitako taldeen izenak irakurtzen hasi da–. Fugazzi, Faith no more, Soundgarden, Living Colour, Red Hot Chilli Peppers, The Who, The Jam, Bad brains, Jingo de lunch...

Martak marmarra baino ez du entzuten, farmazia jendez betetzen denean entzuten duen zurrunbiloaren antzekoa, Raul kristalezko manpara baten bestaldetik hitz egiten balego bezala. Azkenean, burua altxatzea lortu du, eta

begiradak balkoira egin dio ihes: han dago, bere begien aurrean, Raulen txupa beltza zintzilik, alde batetik bestera kulunka, urkatutako gorpu baten antzera.

Astelehen goizean Egoitzek ezin izan du sinistu nola agertu zaion berriz haxixa praketako poltsikoan.

KILKERRA

Espero baino lehenago bukatu duzue bilera. Hotelera heldu eta lepoa estutzen zizun gorbata askatu ondoren, ohe gainean etzan zara, zapatak kendu barik. Bihar goizean hartu behar duzu abioia. Ordura arte ez duzu ezer egin behar.

Bero egiten du hirian. Kaletik gorbata eta trajea jantzita ibili zara, submarinista neoprenoa jantzita urpetik bezala, eta neskak ikusi dituzu, tirantezko kamiseta eta gona laburrekin, arrainak bezain biluzik ia. Ez da bidezkoa, pentsatu duzu, abuztua izanik traje eta gorbataz jantzita ibili beharra, baina lana lana da, horrelakoa da negozioa. *Bussiness is business*, gaurko bileran italiarrei gogoratu diezun bezala. Eta trajearen barruan botatako izerdiak ere dirua balio du. Eskerrak hotelera sartu eta aire egokitua sentitu duzula. Topean jarri duzu zure gelan.

Seiak dira. Honezkero Amaia eta haurrek egingo zuten hondartzatik apartamenturako bidea. Aurtengo abuztuan ere apartamentu bera hartu duzue, baina ez duzu oraindik bertan lo egiteko aukerarik izan gau bakar batean ere. Lanak galarazi dizu. *Bussiness is bussiness*, badakizu. Oraintxe helduko ziren apartamentura, zapatilak hareaz beteta. Mirenen behatz txikien artean hondarra ikusten duzu, itsatsita. Amari esaten ari zaio ez sartzeko behatz artean toaila, kili-kilia egiten diola eta. Zapatak kendu dituzu. Milanen eginak dira, zauden hiritik nahiko gertu. Hain urrun egonda ere, Gorka eta Mirenen oihuak entzun ditzakezu, ez dute apartamentuko dutxara sartu nahi, eta Amaia haien atzetik ari da. Eskerrak apartamentua txikia dela, bestela nork harrapatu haurrak eta urpean sartu. Izerditan dago Amaia seme-alaben atzetik. Uraren zarata entzuten duzu. Ez da dutxakoa ordea, hoteleko aire egokituaren zirkuitukoa baizik.

Trajeko poltsikoan duzun telefono mugikorra dardarka hasi da, eta salto batean jaiki zara. Nagusia da, Bilbotik. Bilera ondo joan dela esan diozu, egina dagoela

tratua italiarrekin, eta zu bezalakorik ez dagoela erantzun dizu, pozez gainezka. Hartzeko bere partez whisky bat, edo grappa bat, merezi duzula eta.

Telefonoa entzun duzunean Amaia izan zitekeela pentsatu duzu, baina azken boladan ez dizu lehen beste deitzen, egunero hiru edo lau aldiz. *Heldu zara? Non zaude orain, hotelean? Haurrak ohean daude.* Ez duzu lehen bezala ahalik eta azkarren eten nahi izaten elkarrizketa, ez baitago ia elkarrizketarik. Dutxan sartuta ikusi duzu Gorka, eguzkiak belztuta. Amak bezalako azala du.

Hoteleko leihotik begiratu eta orube handi bat ikusi duzu, lur tontorrez beteta. Haur bat dago urrunean, belauniko, lur azpian dagoen zerbaiten bila bezala. Eta bat-batean zeure burua gogoratu duzu, mutil koskorra zinela, lurreko zuloan adar bat sartzen, kilkerraren bila. Kir-kir entzun duzu. Kir-kir. Hamaika kilker harrapatu dituzu haurra zinela. Kilkerra ahal zenuen moduan etxera eramane eta kristalezko ontzi batean sartzen zenuen letxuga orri batekin, eta aitak ardoaz bustitako ogi zatitxoa jartzen zion kir-kir egin zezan.

–Zergatik kantatzen du ardoarekin, aita?

–Kristalezko ontzi baten barruan bakarrik dagoela ahazten duelako. Horregatik hasten da kantatzen. Itxaron, entzun, laster hasiko da eta...

Ama gogoratu duzu, albotik pasa eta *kilker gizajoa* esaten.

Gelako telefonoa da orain zarataka hasi dena. Emakume bat zain duzula esan dizu harrerakoak. Zita bat zeneukala. Isilik geratu zara une batez, ia ahaztuta baitzeneukan italiarren ohitura. Behin tratua eginda, ez dute bezeroa bakarrik sentitzerik nahi, bezero ona bada behintzat, eta tradizioa da konpainia bidaltzea. Telefonoa belarrian, gelari begirada bat bota eta zapatak ikusi dituzu lur gainean botata, gorbata ohe gainean zabaldua... Ez duzu gogo gehiegi, baina igotzeko esan diozu.

Emakume beltzarana da ate aurrean agertu zaizuna. Ederra. Ile beltz luzeak bularra estaltzen dio. *Buona sera*, esan dizu zetazko ahotsarekin eta bere takoiek aurrera egin dute *klik-klak klik-klak* zure gelako lurraren gainetik, perfume usainarekin batera. Eskuineko eskuarekin atzerantz eramanez du ilea eta agerian utzi du bular sendoa, alkandora fin baten azpian. Titi punta nabari zaio, aire egokituak gogortua. Eskua bertara eramateko gogoa sentitu duzu, titi punta hura laztandu eta musukatzekoa, baina ez duzu egin. Zerbait hartu nahi duen galdetu diozu, eta ezetz erantzun dizu, ez duela edaten.

Ohe gainean eseri da. Ezkerraldeko ile xerloa ere atzera bota du eta orain bi titiak ikusi dituzu, alkandoraren azpitik zuri begira. Titietara begiratu diozula konturatuta, alkandora irekitzen hasi da, bularretako beltza agerian utziz. Bertara hurreratzean mugikorra ikusi duzu ohearen gainean eta hartu egin duzu beste lekuren batean uzteko. Pantailari begiratu eta gogoratu duzu duela urtebete behin eta berriz agertzen zela pantaila hartan Amaiaren izena, deika. *Hotelean zaude? Zer moduz bilera? Noiz bueltatu behar zara?* Eta gogoratu duzu askotan Parisen, Bolonian, Frankfurten, zeunden tokian zeundela, ez zeniola haren deiari erantzuten, eta zarata eginez uzten zenuela telefonoa. Eta gaur bezala ohe gainean zegoen emakume batek galdetzen zizula zergatik ez zenuen hartzen telefonoa, eta zuk erantzuten zeniola ez zenuela nagusiarekin hitz egiteko gogorik. Eta barrez erantzuten zizun emakumeak, eta alkandoratik egiten zizun tenka eta ohe gainera bota. Baina Amaiak ez du jada ia deitzen. Apartamentuko dutxan imajinatu duzu. Orain bera da dutxa hartzen ari dena. Biluzik dago, gorputza xaboiz beteta.

Amaiaren irudiak berotu egin zaitu eta ohe gainean dagoen emakumearengana hurbildu zara berriz. Hasieratik desio bezala, eskuarekin heldu diozu haren titiari eta, ondoren, haren gainean etzan zara. Bularretakoa askatu duenean oilo-ipurdia nabaritu diozu azalean. Hotza duen galdetu eta jaiki egin zara, aire

egokituaren potentzia jaisteko. Eta ohera bueltan zoazela, Amaia imajinatu duzu berriz, dutxatik irteten. Bikiniaren marka du, beltz-beltza dago. Haren azalak txokolatzkoa dirudi.

–Barkatu. Dei urgente bat egin behar dut... –esan diozu bat-batean ohe gainean etzanda dagoen emakume beltzaranari, eta komunera sartu zara mugikorra eskuetan.

–Amaia...

–Ander... zer moduz? Goiz deitzen duzu... Dena ondo?

–Bai, dena ondo. Non zaude?

–Apartamentuan. Hondartzatik bueltan. Eta zu?

–Hotelean. Bukatu dut bilera.

–A, ondo.

Haurren oihuak entzuten dira atzetik.

–Dena ondo beraz? –galdetu diozu.

–Bai.

–Bihar Bilbora bueltatzen naiz.

–Bai, esan zenidan. Eta gero Gironara joan behar duzu, ezta?

–Bai. Gironara, etzi. Dena ondo hortik?

–Bai, Ander, dena ondo... Barkatu baina utzi egin behar zaitut. Behetik deika ditut Sagrario eta Iñaki. Terraza batera goaz afaltzera hurrekin. Hemen egiten duen beroa...

–Bai, hemen ere...

–Bueno, Ander, bihar hitz egingo dugu, bai? Deitu mesedez heltzen zarenean Bilbora. Mugikorra eramango dut hondartzara. Muxu bat.

–Muxu bat.

Ohitu egin da. Zu gabe bizitzen ohitu egin dela pentsatu duzu, eta gaur arte sentitu ez duzun hutsunea nabaritu duzu sabela baino pixka bat gorago. Sabelaren eta biriken artean. Hortxe duzu hutsune moduko bat, min egiten dizuna. Gaur arte ez duzuna sekula sentitu. Ez dizkizu seme-alabak telefonoan jarri ere, lehen egiten zuen bezala.

Gelara bueltatu, eta beltzaranarekin batera etzan zara ohean. Kuleroa kentzeko eskatu diozu eta larrutan egin duzue. Indarrez aritu zara, amaierara ahalik eta azkarren heldu nahiko bazenu bezala. Eta bukatzean ez duzu ezer esan. Etzanda geratu zara, sabaira begira. Beltzarana zure inguruan kuzkurtu da eta eskua jarri du zure sabelaren eta biriken artean, hain justu hutsunea eta mina sentitzen dituzun lekuan. Kendu egin diozu eskua gainetik eta dutxara abiatu zara. Ezer esan barik. Ur jauziaren azpian zaudela, pentsatu duzu beltzarana afaltzera gonbidatu zenezakeela, agian zakarregia izan zarela berarekin, baina toaila gerrian lotuta gelara bueltatu zareneko, ez duzu bertan aurkitu. Alde egin du jada, bere lana bukatuta. *Bussiness is bussiness*, badakizu.

Jantzi eta tabernara jaitsi zara. Barraren aurrean zaudela, nagusiaren ahotsa gogoratu duzu, whisky bat edo grappa bat hartzeko esanez, merezi duzula eta. Whiskia eskatu duzu, *on the rocks*, eta kalera begira geratu zara. Kalera ematen duen leiho erraldoiak horma oso bat hartzen du. Beste aldean jendea ikusten duzu, alde batetik bestera. Neskak tirantezko kamisetak eta gona motzak jantzita. Abuztua da. Iluntzen ari da. Bero egiten du kanpoan. Barruan, aldiz, ia hotza ere egiten du, aire egokitua dela eta. *On the rocks* dagoena zu zarela pentsatu duzu. Orduan gogoratu duzu gelako leihotik ikusi duzun haur hura, orube handian

zegoena, belauniko, lur barruan zerbaiten bila bezala. Egin duzu ahalegina orubea ikusteko baina, iluntzen ari denez, ez duzu ezer ikusten piztu berri diren kaleko argietatik haratago. Saiatu zara, ahalegina egin duzu berriz, eta halako batean, ikusi duzu zerbait. Gizon bat da, taberna bateko barran dago, eskuetan edalontzi bat duela. Zure isla da, leihoak itzuli dizuna.

Biriken eta sabelaren arteko hutsunea sentitu duzu berriz eta irudi bat etorri zaizu burura: kristalezko ontzia, letxuga zatia eta ardoaz bustitako ogia. Trago batean edan duzu whiskya eta zain geratu zara, kilkerra noiz hasiko den abesten.

AZUKREZKO MADARITXUAK

Erizainak esku artean hartu du nire bularra eta kristalezko bandeja baten gainera jaurti du, kilo erdiko okela zatia balantzara botatzen den moduan. Auzoko harakina etorri zait burura. Gero eskuarekin estutu du kristalaren kontra, eta lisatzeko saiakera egin du, nire mamiak gela zurian zehar barreiatu nahiko balitu bezala, gainean plantxa antzeko bat jarri aurretik. Entziklopediak eta liburu mardulak ere zailak izaten dira fotokopiatzen, eta tapa jarri aurretik ondo zabaldu behar zaie bizkarra.

Ez eragin bizkarrari, esan dit, bere lankidearekin hitz egiten duen bitartean. Laneko afari batez ari dira, norbaitek gehiegi edan omen zuen. Aparatua topera jaitsi denean, bularrean presioa sentitu dudanean, begiratu ala ez pentsatu dut. Proba egin zidaten aurreko bietan ez nuen begiratu eta honetan ere ez nuen nahi, baina azkenean begiek ihes egin didate, eta damutu naiz, han ikusi baitut behin Fernandok, lankide baten ezkontzaren ondoren, mozkortuta, *azukrezko madaritxua* deitu zion bular bera, plantxan egindako sepia bihurtuta. Auzoko arrain-denda etorri zait gogora.

–Minik sentitzen al duzu? –galdetu dit erizainak, ez dakit ziur niri ala neure duintasunari.

Ezetz erantzun diot. Nire harrotasunak erantzun dio. Nire bularra horrela ikusteak lekuz kanpo utzi nau, kostako zait irenstea bularrean barizeak eduki daitezkeela. Nire gorputza emandako galtzerdi baten antzera ikusi ondoren, metro karratu bateko gelara bidali naute berriz, 2 zenbakia duen kabinara, eta han, lixibak horitutako bularretakoak jantzi bitartean, nire bularrak berriz *azukrezko madaritxuak* direla sentitzeko urgentzia sentitu dut, eta pentsatu dut horretarako bularretako berriak beharko ditudala bederen.

Handik zuzenean abiatu naiz Corte Inglesera, larri igo ditut eskailera mekanikoak, geldoegi doazela iruditu zait, eta munduko emakumerik sinple, arin eta azalekoena sentitu naiz une batez. Barregarri. Gaztetan, unibertsitate garaian, eta gero argialetxean lan egiten hasi nintzenean ere, bularrik gabeko emakumea banintz bezala bizi nintzen, nire intelektualitatea bi madari gordin haien gainetik zegoen eta hori guztia, eta hara noiz eta biguntzen hasi zaizkidanean hasten naizen, antsietateak jota, bularretako salbatzaile batzuen bila, nire bularren salbazioa hil ala biziko gauza balitz bezala.

Hirugarren solairuan, aldagelako ispiluan nire bularrak argi zuriaren pean ikusi ditudanean, zinez erreanimazioa behar dutela pentsatu dut, ahoz ahokoa gutxienez. Horregatik erosi dut parpaila eta zulo txo gehien zuen bularretako beltz bat, garestiena, aldagelaren pareta batean itsatsitako posterrak erakusten duenaren antzekoena. Emakume gazte eta eder bat ageri da han, bularretako beltzak, praka bakeroak eta botak jantzita, zaldi baten gainean, garaiko Bo Dereken antzera. Haizeak orrazten du haren adats beltza. *Vive salvajemente*, dio leloak. Aspaldi dago nire bizitza otzandua, pentsatu dut, aspaldi daude nire sexu harremanak programatuta larunbat gauetarako soilik, nire senarrak prestatzen dituen aplikazio informatikoak balira bezala. Eta, halako batean, aldagelatik irtetean, basati hitzaren esanahia gogoratzeko garaia heldu zaidala sentitu dut, eta harekin konbinatzen duen tanga ere jartzeko eskatu diot saltzaileari, pixka bat lotsatuta, bista salmahaitik gehiegi altxatu gabe.

Orain dela lau urte, lehen mamografia egin zidatenean, urduri, zerbait aurkituko zidatela pentsatuta, ezin izan nituen nire seme-alabak burutik kendu. Zer egingo zuten bere amaren babesik gabe. Gaurkoa hirugarren mamografia izan da eta lehenengotik dena aldatu da. Ohiko zerbait egitera doanaren jarrerarekin joan naiz, ez bakarrik adin batetik aurrera emakume guztiei egiten zaigun prebentzio

proba dela barneratu dudalako, baizik eta jada nire seme-alabak ez liratekeelako babesik gabe geratuko. Nire habia hutsik dago.

Eider oraindik etxean bizi da, baina egongo ez balitz ez nuke gehiago faltan igarriko. Ihes egiten dit, korridorean aurrez aurrez topo egiten badugu saihestu egiten nau, sukaldean nik afaria noiz bukatuko zain egoten da berea prestatzen hasteko. Bere ama mastekatzen entzuteak nazka ematen diola sentiarazten dit. Eta, hala izanda ere, ziur naiz nirekin erakusten duen hoztasunaren azpian ez dagoela gorrotorik, nire begietan ikusten duen bere buruaren irudia da errefusatzen duena. Bera nirekin ezin da bera izan, nire begietan ume baten irudiaren isla ikusten baitu etengabe. Azken boladan gertuago sentitzen dut Asier, nahiz eta iaztik bere neskarekin bizi den. Bisitan datorrenean zelan nagoen galdetzen dit, edo zerbait interesgarriarik argitaratu dugun argitaletxean.

Argitaletxean lan egin dudan urte guztietan nire familiako inork ez dit ezer galdetu lanari buruz, argitaratzen ditugun liburuei buruz, ezta nik idatzitakoei buruz ere. Editore lanak egitearekin batera, umeentzako ipuinak idazten nituen garai batean eta gauetz irakurtzen nizkien seme-alabei, baina sekula ez nien esaten nireak zirenik. Ez dakit zergatik, ipuinak benetako ipuinak zirela sinistarazi nahian agian, eta ez euren amak asmatutako zerbait. Gezur bat azken finean. Umeentzako gezurtxoak. Hori ziren Fernandorentzat idazten nituen ipuinak, eta, noski, ez zituen inoiz irakurri.

Asierrek eta Eiderrek gozaten zuten bada nire ipuinekin, euren gustukoenak ziren, agian haiek irakurtzean jartzen nuen gogo bereziagatik. Orduan ama gustatzen zitzaien, ama behar zuten. Gogoratzen dut Asierrek, hamabi edo hamahiru urte bete arte, beti behar ninduela alboan. *Ama, eseri hemen* esaten zidan, eta lekua egiten zidan sofan, afalorduan berarekin batera telebista ikusteko. Ez zion esaten nionari jaramonik egiten, baina han nengoela sentitzea

gustatzen zitzaion. Burua nire belaunetan jartzen zuen, eta nik, sukaldeko trapua esku batean, belarri atzera orrazten nizkion ileak beste eskuko atzamarrekin. Oraindik nire umetxo zen. Aldaketa egun batetik bestera gertatu zen, edo, hobeto esateko, egun batetik bestera konturatu nintzen aldaketaz. Horrela gertatzen da: egun batean bazoaz haren bila egongelara, eta kaleko atearen hotsa entzuten duzu. Zein jertse jantzi duen ere ez dakizula joan da, lagunekin bokata bat jatera. Orduan lurrera jausten zaizu eskuetatik sukaldeko trapua, eta berarekin batera lurperatzen dira oraindik eman nahi dizkiozun laztanak, muxuak kopetan, kaletik eskutik hartuta joatea, elkarrekin bidaiatzea, belakiarekin haren sorbalda igurztea baineran, zure semea biluzik ikustea... Egun batean ez dizu biluzik ikusten utziko, bere gelako atea itxiko du, eta hamaika metro karratuko gela hura jada ez da zure etxea izango, nahiz eta notarioaren eskriturek hala esan. Urteak eta urteak egin ditut seme-alabei begira, zelatatzen ia, eta ez naiz konturatu hazi egin direla. Agian gertuegitik begiratu diet. Bular bat mamografiak egiteko aparatu baten azpian ikustean ere berdin gertatzen da: hain gertutik bular bat ez da bular bat, beste gauza bat baizik.

Bakarrik bazkaldu dut. Bakarrik bazkaltzen dut, Fernando eta Eider hirurak arte ez baitira irteten lanetik eta institututik. Beraz, lasai nengoen, sardexkan sastatutako azalore aleak garun baten antz itzela duela pentsatuz, giltzen soinua entzun dudanean: Eider agertu da. Klasean egon behar luke. Zer egiten duzu hemen? Nirekin hitz egin nahi duela esan dit, aita ez dagoela aprobetxatuz, horregatik irten dela klasetik lehenago.

—Ama, bihar ez nator lo egitera.

—Eta nora zoaz?

—Olaiaren etxera, Arrasatera, kontzertu bat dago...

—... ba zuk ikusi.

Zuk ikusi, erantzun diot. Zuk ikusi. Eta hitz horiek ahoskatu bezain pronto harrituta geratu naiz neure buruarekin. Duela urtebete, edo gutxiago, duela hilabete ez nion inondik inora ere erantzun hori emango. Galdeketa egingo niokeen, eta ziurrenez ez niokeen baimenik emango, baina bihotzetik atera zait: Zuk ikusi. Gaur ospitalean ia zapaldu didaten bihotzetik. Mamografiaren aparatuak egindako presioak atera dizkit hitzok, antza. Zerbait aldatu da nire bularra zapalduta ikusi dudanetik. *Salvajemente* bizitzen hasi ote naiz?

–Ez zaizu inporta? –galdetu dit Eiderrek harrituta.

Eider bere gelara joan denean, lasta bota dudala sentitu dut. Urteak burua kezka beteta, asteburuetakoa gauetan lorik egin ezinda, alabaren zauri bakoitza neurea balitz bezala sentitzen, zauria ireki aurretik ere, eta bat-batean, eman diodan erantzunarekin iraganeko kontuak dira denak. Lasta botatzean, gorantz egin du nire gorputzak, zerurantz gasez beteriko puxika baten antzera, eta han goitik neure burua ikusi dut, eta begira zer ikusi dudana: ikusi dut mendikate handi bat eta haren gailurrean nire seme-alabak daude, baina haren alboan orain arte sekula ikusi ez dudana zerbait ikusi dut, zulo bat. Zulo sakon bat, mendikatea eraikitzeko haztakatu behar izan dudana. Zulo hori haztakatzen hustu naiz.

Zuloaz pentsatzen ari nintzen Fernandorekin afaldu bitartean.

–Zer ari zara pentsatzen? –galdetu dit.

–Biharko bazkariaz. Ez dakit zer jarri...

–Barka, segi pentsatzen.

Nire senarra, hain da edukazio onekoa... Ohean ere halakoa izan da beti, mugimendu bakoitzarekin batera mesedez esatea falta zaio bakarrik. Gure harremanak kolorea galdu du azken urteetan, marrazkirik gabeko ume ipuin bat bezala geratu arte. Inoiz alkohola edan duenean, orduan soilik galdu du

zuzentasuna: afariren batean, ezkontzaren batean... Ez du ia inoiz edaten, nahiko du basoerdi iparra galtzeko. Bere lankide baten ezkontzan hartu zuen inoiz hartu duen handienetakoa. Eta gau hartan, gau zoro hartan, larrua sekula aurretik ez bezala jo bitartean, nire bular biluziak hartu zituen bi eskuekin, eta *azukrezko madaritsuak* deitu ondoren, betaurrekoak kendu, ohe azpira bota, eta nire titiburuak miazkatzen hasi zen. Ez du sekula berriro egin, eskuekin laztandu bai, baina sekula ez dizkit berriro bularrak mingainarekin miazkatu, eta ez du berriro errepikatu azukrezko madariena. Esku zuriak ditu, bigunak, funtzionario baten eskuak. Aplikazio informatikoak egiten ditu administrazioarentzat. Bere lana gustatzen zaio, munduaren kaosa ordenatzen duela sentitzen du egunero: taulak, formularioak, datu baseak... Mimos tratatzen ditu, mereziko balute bezala.

–Inporta zaizu kanala aldatzen badut? –galdetu dit.

Batzuetan gustatuko litzaidake pixka bat bat-batekoagoa balitz, pixka bat naturalagoa. Batzuetan amesten dut izerdi usain artean larrua jotzen gabiltzala, larru gorritan biok, eta ez pijamaren goiko zatiarekin, edo pijamaren praken hanka bat bakarrik erantzita izterrak zabaldu ahal izateko. Eta berriz titiburuak miazkatzen dizkidala egiten dut amets, bere lankidearen ezkontzaren ondoren egin zidan bezala. Imajinatzen dut betaurrekoak ohe azpira botatzen, nahiz eta gaur ez lituzkeen betaurrekoak kenduko, lentillak erabiltzen ditu eta.

Zenbat larru-jotze geratzen zaizkidan galdetzen diot neure buruari. Zenbat zulo estaltzeko. Eta erositako bularretako beltzak gogoratu ditut. Platereko tortilla bukatu gabe utzi eta komunera abiatu naiz.

–Nora zoaz?

–Oraintxe nator.

Komunean, bularretako eta kulero zaharrak erantzi ditut, eta erosi berriak jantzi. Haginekin kendu diet etiketaren plastikozko zinta. Sukalderako bidean tanga

ipurtzulotik sartzen zaidala sentitu dut praken azpian. Ez nago ohituta bizitza basatira.

Ardo botila bat atera dut armairutik. Pasa den gabonetatik han gordeta zegoena. Fernandok harrituta begiratu dit:

–Zerbait ospatu behar dugu ala?

Nola azaldu behin bada ere neurri gabe jokatzeko ikusi nahi dudala, basati, nire gorputza bi eskuekin hartu dezan desiratzen nagoela, nire tanga hauek eskuaren teinkada batekin kentzen ikusteko? Gaur garrasi egin dezaket nahi izanez gero, Eider kanpoan da. Nola azaldu etorkizuna deformatutako bular batean ikusi dudanetik geratzen zaidanaz disfrutatzekeo erabakia hartu dudala? Eta beste guztia berdin zaidala?

–Bakarrik gaudela –erantzun diot–. Bakarrik gaudela ospatuko dugu, aspaldiko partez.

Ez dago edatera ohituta, eta, hartu dituen ardo kopa bien ondoren, eguneko hogeita lau orduetan erakusten duen zurruntasuna desagertzen hasi zaio. Gure garaiko gauzak gogoratu ditugu. Barre eta guzti egin dugu. Bat-batean pastazko betaurrekoekin gogoratu dut. Orduan, erlaxatuta dagoela aprobetxatuz, alkandorako botoiak askatu eta erantzi egin dut, bistan utziz zulo bordatuzko bularretako beltza. Zaldi baten gainean imajinatu dut neure burua.

–Aiba.

Geldirik geratu da, aho zabalik, nire bular mozorrotuei begira; une batez pentsatu dut administrazioko informatikariaren izpiritua bueltatuko zaiola, eta zer ari zara edo halako zerbait esango didala, ea mozkortuta nagoen, ala zoratuta. Baina ez. Irribarre egin du, eta aulkitik altxatu eta niregana hurbildu da. Bere eskuineko eskua, bere esku fina, ordenagailuaren saguari heltzen dion xamurtasunez jarri

du nire bularraren gainean. Dardarka sumatu dut. Bere ahoa gerturatu du nire belarrira eta haginka hasi da. Aurre-aurrean dut haren brageta, ireki diot eta eskua sartu. Ahal duen modura kendu ditu gainetik pintzadun prakak, hankekin, eskuak lanpetuta ditu. Nire ahora inguratu du berea eta gure mingainak banandu gabe egin dugu logelarako bidea.

Ohearen gainean etzan gara, bera nire gainean. Poliki, ahoa inguratu du nire bularretara, eta hara non ezkerreko titiburua miazkatzen hasi zaidan. Azukrezko madarien punta gogorra jarri zaidala sentitu dut. Ezin sinistuta nago, Fernando nire titiburua miazkatzen, bere lankidearen ezkontzaren ondorengo gau zoro hartan bezala. Tangak ezin du irentsi nire hanka arteko hezetasuna.

Orduan, bat-batean zerbait burura etorri izan balitzaio bezala, Fernandoren mingaina gelditu egin da eta burua altxatu du. Begira geratu zait. Badakit zer esango didan. Badakit azukrezko madarien ateraldia gogoratu duela. Barre egingo dugu.

–Akordatu zara, ezta? –esan diot irribarrez.

–Bai, barkatu, ez naiz lehenago gogoratu. Mamografia izan duzu ezta? Zelan?

Madariak bigundu egin dira bat-batean.

–Dena ondo –erantzun diot, sabaira begira.

Burua jaitsi du berriro eta nire zuloen bila hasi da, azal fineko esku zuriekin.

KARMELE JAIO

glass containers

Short Stories

Translations: Sarah Turtle, Aritz Branton

These stories were originally published in the following collections:

‘Zu bezain ahul’; ‘Ez naiz ni’.

Booktegi would like to thank Elkar publishers for its kind permission to republish these works.

FOREWORD

Three middle-aged couples. Characters who reflect on their lives until now, right now and in the future. Each couple has two children, their stories are different and readers go deep into each couple's life. Karmele Jaio narrates *Little Glacé Pears*, *Grasshopper* and *Black Leather Jacket* in three different ways.

In just a few pages the reader sees three families' lifestyles, and cannot help thinking about the issues brought up. Bringing children up is no easy task, nor is adapting to new circumstances, or a couple holding onto its excitement and sexual spark over the years. Some characters tell lies, other hide the truth or may not dare to say what they are thinking.

Estitxu Zabala Odriozola

BLACK LEATHER JACKET

Raul comes back home in the evening with carrier bags full of clothes. Marta can't believe it:

"You've gone to buy clothes... all by yourself?"

Realising from her voice that his wife is mocking him, Raul makes no answer; he nods his head, nothing more, and makes his way down the corridor.

"Let's have a look." Marta follows her husband into the bedroom, full of curiosity, and Unai, who had been watching cartoons, comes after them barefoot in his pyjamas. Egoitz is in his room, the door closed, probably in front of his computer.

Marta has always helped Raul to choose his clothes, mostly during the sales, and sometimes Marta has just bought things for him without Raul even going to see them, just as she does for Egoitz and Unai. He has never gone by himself. But this is not the only change she has noticed in Raul in recent years. He has been taking more care of his appearance since they moved to their new house in the new part of town: his clothes, his hairstyle... the small silver earring he used to wear when they were students. It had been a long time since he had gone to get his hair cut, but now he has a short tuft of hair at the back, just like before they got married.

Raul puts the bags on the table and Marta starts looking into them.

"I've bought two T-shirts and two pairs of trousers, is that so amazing?" Raul asks, and he's annoyed.

"But why've you bought S? You need M at least." Marta opens a T-shirt and stretches it out. "And what are these letters on the front? It looks like teenagers' clothes, Raul. What have you gone and bought?"

"That's enough, Marta. Leave me alone."

For a moment Marta wonders whether she's talking with her husband or with her teenage son. How often has she heard Egoitz telling her to leave him alone? Egoitz has given her enough work over the last two years, especially before they moved; he'd been against the change from the start, not wanting to move away from his friends in their part of town. They'd told him hundreds of times that they needed another room for his dad to use as a studio. Raul's a photographer and he's been working freelance since they closed the newspaper down.

Egoitz is seventeen and his younger brother, Unai, is five. Marta's fed up with what people always say to her: "That's a big gap, isn't it?" Everyone looks at Unai as if he were a mistake. In fact, just the way they had when she had Egoitz, when she was twenty-three; they used to look at her with pity then, too, seeing her become a mother at such a young age. No doubt about it: mistakes had played a big role in Raul and Marta's family planning.

That had affected their relationships with their friends. Marta and Raul don't have much of a social life. Their friends didn't yet have children when they had Egoitz and, little by little, they drifted apart. They thought they would enjoy a bit more freedom when Egoitz grew up and started to meet up with his mates, and they would get their old life and friends back then. But Marta got pregnant again and nappies, baby-food stains, swings and slides came back into their lives, along with going back home at eight o'clock on Saturday evening.

But apparently when Unai turned five and they moved to the new house a window opened up for Raul, not just at home but also giving him the chance to look at life outside. And seeing Raul's renewed enthusiasm for life, Marta realises she's in danger of getting left behind. She laughs at each of her husband's attempts to feel young; laughs out loud, in fact, to make it clear she is not worried about it. She wants to make it plain that she finds his efforts to become young

again pathetic. But behind her laugh is the fear that one day Raul will see her as a fossil. She's had that feeling inside for the last few years, but she hadn't put a name to it until one Thursday when she met up with her friend Silvia for their weekly coffee.

"Watch out, Marta!" Silvia warned her, eyes staring wide open. "My husband started like that too..."

As Marta was telling her about Raul's transformation, Silvia said to her that her husband had started waxing his chest and, a year later, he turned up dressed like a modern teenager and asked for a divorce. Silvia said he'd done her a favour in the end: thanks to him she had found out that she liked women and, since then, she'd gone to live with a girl who was fifteen years younger than her. But if Marta wants to keep her husband, Silvia says she should watch out.

Silvia's words finish a puzzle she's had in her head for a long time. And she sees ghosts everywhere. Because of her timetable at the chemist's she seldom goes to pick Unai up from school and spends far less time in the park with him than Raul does. And at the school gates, and in the park too, most of the parents are mothers, and all of them are younger than their husbands. Has meeting some beautiful young mother made her husband want to get back his youthful looks?

"They find it hard", says Silvia. "Realising, I mean; accepting that they've grown old. And they look for young women, as if they were going to get younger thanks to them... He's started listening to the music from when he was young, hasn't he?"

"Yes, he has."

"And they think music from back then is still cutting-edge... Over the past few months my husband's been pathetic, he's been listening to Scorpions... There's nothing older than that, "Still loving you" and all that, you know."

"No, Raul doesn't like heavy metal, but he's made "God Save the Queen" his ringtone."

"They don't realise you could play the Sex Pistols in a dentist's waiting room without anybody raising an eyebrow... For young people today the Sex Pistols are like what Maria Dolores Pradera was for us when our parents listened to her. A classic."

Silvia tells her that all men are pathetic once they reach a certain age, and then hurries out of the café. Her girlfriend's waiting for her on campus.

After the boy falls asleep Marta and Raul sit down in the kitchen. Egoitz is in his room. He has taken a sandwich for supper in there.

"The Cure are playing in Bilbao, at BBK Live", Raul says as he cuts a piece of cheese.

"Yeah... And so?" Marta asks him.

"Why don't we go?"

"Us? To the concert?"

"Yes, like we used to. When was the last time we went to a concert?"

"When we still had friends?" Marta answers ironically as she finishes her yoghurt.

"We don't need anybody."

"What about Unai?"

"We can leave him at your mother's house."

She laughs, but deep down she feels hurt to see her husband so enthusiastic. After being surrounded by women younger than her in the park, Raul goes home and she looks prehistoric to him. Perhaps she, too, should buy some new clothes,

or change her hair to feel younger, to be more attractive; she always wears her hair in a short ponytail, which is comfortable. Perhaps going to that concert is no bad idea. Perhaps it will be like a rite of passage, a way of getting back the youth they were not able to enjoy fully back in their day.

On Saturday morning, as she is putting away their winter clothes and taking the summer ones out, she looks at them spread out on the bed for a moment. After a few minutes she decides that her mother would wear the same things. No doubt about it: she, too, has to update herself, inside and out.

"Can you come up to the attic with me?" she asks Raul, looking at two huge bags she's filled with clothes.

In the attic Marta comes across an old suitcase while she's making space for their winter clothes.

"We've got to do something with these old clothes", she says, looking at the stuff from ages ago in the suitcase.

"Is that my leather jacket?"

Raul's eyes light up. He pulls out a black leather jacket from amongst the clothes; there are a lot of zips on it, rocker-style.

"You're not going to wear that, are you?"

"They brought it for me from London ... Jesus, my leather jacket... I thought I'd lost it!"

As they take the lift down from the attic to the sixth floor – Marta, Raul and the leather jacket, which takes a third person's place – Marta starts sneezing; she's allergic to dust. She's brought the suitcase down to look through it at home, but her allergy has come on; she doesn't dare to open it and leaves it out on the balcony. But she's seen some leather trousers she used to wear at one time, and

for a moment imagines herself wearing them, dancing, enjoying herself at The Cure concert. Raul wants to try his jacket on as soon as they get into the house, but Marta doesn't let him. She says they have to air it on the balcony for a few days to get rid of the dust and smell from the attic. She has a job convincing Raul, but in the end the jacket goes out there, on a hanger in the middle of the clothes-line on the balcony.

Egoitz goes out; somebody has sent him a text message and he leaves without saying anything.

"Be back home by eleven!" Marta shouts before he closes the door, even though in recent months he has been coming home before the time they tell him. Marta suspects he has met a girl, and she has to get back home earlier than he does. She cannot think of any other reason.

She goes into Egoitz's room and starts picking clothes up. Seeing a big stain on some jeans, she takes them to the washing machine. Before putting them in she checks the pockets and comes across a small piece of hashish, a little ball. She sniffs at it and looks for Raul. He is sitting at the computer, looking at the BBK Live website.

"Raul..."

"Radiohead are playing too, you know," he says without looking up from the screen.

"Raul, look..." she holds out her hand and shows him the hashish.

"Marta! Where did you get that? When did you start smoking again?"

"Don't be silly. I found it in our Egoitz's pocket."

"Let's have a look." Raul takes the little piece of hashish wrapped in thin transparent film and smells it. "This is a great piece, it's Morocco candy."

"What are we going to do?"

Raul thinks for a moment and looks at the bit of hash.

"Have we got any rolling papers?"

Half an hour later Raul and Marta are out on the balcony smoking a joint they've made from their son's hashish.

"I can't believe we're doing this," Marta says to Raul as he offers her the joint.

"Come on, Marta, that's enough... Smoke up before Egoitz gets back."

"But..."

"Maybe you'd rather sit Egoitz down on the sofa when he gets back and say 'We have to have a chat'..."

"No, not that, please."

"Then smoke up."

Marta takes a deep drag on the spliff, waits a few seconds, takes another puff, and then passes it back to Raul. It's been many years since she last felt something like that in her head. She's speechless and gazes at Raul's jacket hanging up in front of her. He'd been wearing it when she met him. He had always had it done up, as if it were his coat-of-arms. Raul was a tough guy. She remembers him in the first row at a concert, his head going forwards and backwards. Marta imagines the young Raul she'd forgotten for so long, and she finds him attractive. With that image of him in his youth, she turns towards her husband and smiles at him. Raul's eyes are almost closed and he can't stop laughing. They both laugh out loud as they look at each other, something they haven't done for a long time. And then a gust of wind blows the jacket hanging over them back and forth. For

one moment, it looks like a flag over a squat youth centre to Marta. She feels as if they have taken over a new piece of territory.

The next morning, as she's washing down a painkiller with a glass of water, Marta hears the door of Egoitz's room. Her son comes out in underpants and a Berri txarrak T-shirt. He's looking for his jeans in a hurry, but he doesn't ask her anything. He goes out onto the balcony and looks amongst the clothes hanging up there. Then he goes back into his room without having breakfast.

"What are we going to do with the piece of hash?" her husband whispers to her shortly after he wakes up.

"I've put it somewhere safe. Are we going to give it back to him? I could put it on his bedroom floor, and he'll think he dropped it there."

"Give it back to him? No way. It's a long time since I last smoked hashish like that."

Every night over the next few days, after Unai's gone to sleep and before Egoitz gets in, Marta and Raul go out to the balcony and smoke a joint next to the jacket which is still hanging up there. It's the best moment of the day. All their worries fly away, and all of a sudden their only concern is feeling pleasure. Marta feels younger, and Raul looks younger to her as well. And she likes that tickling feeling she has in her stomach, the same thing she used to feel as a young woman whenever she did something naughty.

The candy lasts for seven days. And, suddenly, getting more hashish becomes a matter of life or death for Raul and Marta.

Taking advantage of him being in class, Raul searches Egoitz's room.

"Have you found anything?" Marta, nervous, asks him.

"No, it's clean", replies Raul like a police officer.

"It's down to that girl."

"What?"

"I think our son has enough drugs with being in love."

"You're joking... Has he given up smoking spliffs?" Raul asks with concern.

"Well, I don't know..."

Marta decides to give Raul a surprise. Next week it will be seventeen years since they got married. She's going to make him a special supper and get hold of some hashish for the occasion. Silvia will help her, her young girlfriend will be able to find some; Marta knows she smokes. She isn't sure whether Raul has remembered their anniversary, but she suspects he is going to give her their tickets for BBK Live to celebrate it.

The day arrives, a Saturday. They say nothing to each other when they wake up in the morning. They got married in the afternoon, and each year they wait until the afternoon before congratulating each other. So she has no way of knowing whether Raul's remembered their anniversary until she gets home.

Marta wants it to be a special evening and, with the two of them being alone at home, it really will be. Unai's going to sleep at Grandma's house, and Egoitz has told them that he's going to a friend's village and will sleep at his house. Marta knows it's a lie, he's going to spend the night somewhere with the girl he's met, but she really relaxes when she knows that she and Raul are going to be alone. Yes, tonight she will wear her leather trousers, and it'll be the start of their reawakening. She is ready to go to the festival and get lost amongst the young people dressed in black up there.

She had trouble putting them on as they are much tighter than they used to be, and she goes out onto the balcony to get rid of the attic-smell on them. And there, looking at the jacket still hanging up there, she remembers how much Raul had liked those leather trousers when they were going out together; they really used to turn him on. He'll get excited today, too; it has been a while. She also decides that during supper she's going to shake her hair out of the short ponytail she always wears. Today there's no need for Raul to see the 41-year-old chemist; he can see the young Marta, the attractive, sexy Marta. They will both be young today, split themselves laughing, caress each other, go to bed...

The table's laid, the supper's ready, and Marta puts the hashish into one of the pockets in her leather trousers a minute before Raul comes into the house. As soon as he comes in he gives her a kiss on the lips, something he hasn't done for a long time.

"Congratulations", he then says, and Marta relaxes: Raul's remembered their anniversary.

"I've made a special supper", Marta tells him, nervously.

When he sees the laid table in the living-room he gives her another kiss. He has not yet said anything to her about her trousers. Maybe when she shakes her hair loose...

"I've got a surprise for you", Marta tells him when they are having supper.

Her plan, when they get to the desserts, is to get off her chair, shake her hair free, and take out the hashish she has in her pocket.

"And I've got one for you", Raul tells her.

They don't talk about Egoitz, or about Unai, and for a moment Marta thinks that they won't know what to talk about. Raul says that the prawn-brochettes are

amazing as he cleans his hands with his napkin, and he lets out a long “Ohhhh!” when Marta takes the salmon out of the oven. They’re as nervous as if they were on their first date, and they don't know what to say to each other. Finally, Marta serves the dessert, two champagne sorbets. And instead of going back to her chair she moves up to Raul, for him to recognise the trousers he used to know, for him to react once and for all. Her waist is at his eye-level, about a metre away. And she thinks she has managed it when Raul looks at her trousers and asks her to move closer.

"Come here", he says to her, and Marta moves towards him sensually.

When she is just a few centimetres from him, she raises an arm to loosen her hair and, just at that moment, Raul holds out a wrapped-up present.

"Here you are."

She had started to loosen her hair, but she ties her ponytail once more and lowers her arm to open the present. It’s a CD. There is a colour photocopy of the BBK Live poster on the cover. She thinks the tickets will be inside, but it is actually a CD.

“What do you think? They're all there. All the groups who are coming to BBK Live are recorded on it so we can listen to them comfortably at home, no need to climb up any mountains, get our shoes covered in mud and get cold... I've recorded them all for you: The Cure, Radiohead, Keane....

Marta looks at the CD as if she doesn’t dare look up.

"And I've also recorded some groups from our times." Excited like a child, he starts to read the names of the groups written on the CD: "Fugazzi, Faith No More, Soundgarden, Living Colour, Red Hot Chilli Peppers, The Who, The Jam, Bad Brains, Jingo de Lunch..."

Marta just hears a buzzing noise, something like the confusion when the chemist's fills up, as if Raul were speaking to her from the other side of a glass partition. Eventually she manages to look up, and she looks away to the balcony. There it is, right in front of her, Raul's black leather jacket, swinging from one side to another, like hanged corpse.

On Monday morning Egoitz can't believe his eyes when the hashish turns up in his trouser pockets once more.

GRASSHOPPER

You finish your meeting sooner than you had expected. You get to the hotel, take off your tie, it's too tight, and lie down on the bed without taking your shoes off. You'll take the plane tomorrow. You don't have to do anything before then.

It's hot in the city. You've been walking around the streets in your suit and tie like a diver in a wetsuit under water, and you've seen girls in tight T-shirts and short skirts, almost as naked as fish. It's not fair, you think: it's August and you have to wear a suit and tie. But that's work; that's business. *Business is business*, as the Italians reminded you at today's meeting. And the sweat on your suit is also worth money. You were grateful to feel the air conditioning when you came into the hotel. You've turned it right up in your room.

It's six o'clock. By now Amaia and the children will have set off home from the beach. This August the family's rented the same apartment as last year, but you haven't been able to spend a single night there yet. Work's got in the way. *Business is business*, as you know. They'll be back at the apartment right now, their trainers full of sand. You can see sand stuck between Miren's little fingers. She asks her mother not to rub between her toes with the towel, she's ticklish there. You take your shoes off. They were made in Milan, quite close to the city you're in now. Even though you're so far away you can hear Gorka and Miren shouting: they don't want to get into the shower in the apartment, and Amaia's chasing after them. Good job it's a small place, otherwise she'd never catch them and get them under the shower. Amaia's sweating as she runs after the kids. You hear the sound of water. But it isn't the shower, it's the hotel's air conditioning pipes.

Your mobile starts vibrating in your suit pocket, and you jump up. It's your boss in Bilbao. You tell him the meeting went well, the deal with the Italians is done,

and he says you're the best; he's really pleased. He tells you to toast his health with a couple of whiskeys, or a grappa: you deserve it.

When you hear the phone ringing you think it could be Amaia, but she doesn't call you the way she used to, two or three times a day. "Have you got there? Where are you now, at the hotel? The children are in bed." You no longer want to cut the conversations off as quickly as possible; there are hardly conversations to cut off any more. You see Gorka getting into the shower; he's really suntanned. Skin like his mother's.

You look out of the hotel window and see a large building site full of mounds of soil. There's a child kneeling down in the distance who seems to be looking for something in the ground. And suddenly you remember yourself as a young kid sticking a branch into a hole in the ground and looking for grasshoppers. You hear them chirping. Chirp-chirp. You trapped loads of grasshoppers when you were a boy. You took them home as best you could and put them into jars along with a piece of lettuce, and your dad used to put in a piece of bread dipped in wine to get them chirping.

"Why does the wine make them sing, Dad?"

"It makes them forget they're alone in a glass container. That's why they sing. Hang on; listen; it'll start soon..."

You remember your mother saying "Poor grasshopper" as she walks past.

Now it's the phone in the room ringing. The receptionist tells you that there's a woman waiting for you. You have a date. You're quiet for a moment; you'd almost forgotten that Italian custom. After a deal's closed they don't like their customer to feel alone, not if it's a good customer, at least, and sending them some company is a tradition. The phone to your ear, you look around the room and see

your shoes kicked off onto the floor, your tie lying over the bed... You don't particularly fancy it, but you ask them to send her up.

A dark-haired, dark-skinned woman is there when you open the door. She's beautiful. Her long black hair falls over her chest. "Buona sera", she says to you in a silky voice, and her heels move forward into your room, "tack-tack, tack-tack", along with her perfume. She strokes her hair backwards with her right hand and reveals her firm chest under a thin shirt. You can see her nipples, stiffened by the air conditioning. You feel like putting your hand there, stroking and licking those nipples; but you don't. You ask her if she wants a drink, and she says no, she doesn't drink.

She sits on the bed. She tosses her hair backwards to the left as well, and you see both her breasts looking at you from under her shirt. Realising you've been looking at her breasts, she starts to open her shirt and shows she's wearing a black bra. You see your mobile on the bed as you move towards her and pick it up to put it somewhere else. You look at the screen and remember that a year ago Amaia's name used to come up on it time and again. "Are you at the hotel? How did the meeting go? When are you getting back?" And you remember that often when you were in Paris, Bologna, Frankfurt, wherever you were, you didn't take her call, you let the phone ring. And a woman like the one on the bed today would ask you why you didn't answer the phone, and you'd tell her you didn't fancy talking with your boss. And the woman would laugh, pull at your shirt and throw you down on the bed. But Amaia hardly calls any more. You imagine the shower in the apartment. The shower she's taking right now. She's naked, her body covered in gel.

Picturing Amaia gets you aroused, and you move towards the woman on the bed once more. As you'd wanted to at first, you take her breasts in your hands and

then lie down next to her. When she takes her bra off you notice she's got goose bumps. You ask if she's cold and get up to turn the air conditioning down. You imagine Amaia again as you go back to the bed; she's getting out of the shower. She has a bikini-mark, and she's really tanned. Her skin looks like chocolate.

"Sorry. I have to make an urgent call", you suddenly say to the dark-haired, dark skinned woman lying on the bed, and you take your mobile with you into the bathroom.

"Amaia..."

"Ander... How are you? You're calling early... Is everything ok?"

"Yeah, everything's fine. Where are you?"

"At the apartment. Back from the beach. What about you?"

"At the hotel. The meeting's over."

"Ah, good."

You hear the children shouting in the background.

"Everything ok then?" you ask her.

"Yes."

"I'll be back in Bilbao tomorrow."

"Yeah, you told me. And then you're off to Girona, aren't you?"

"Yes. Girona tomorrow. Everything ok there?"

"Yes, Ander, everything's fine... Sorry, I have to hang up. Sagrario and Iñaki are ringing from downstairs. We're going to have supper on a terrace with the children. It's so hot here..."

"Yes, it is here too."

"So we'll speak tomorrow, ok, Ander? Please call me when you get to Bilbao. I'll take my mobile to the beach. Kisses."

"Kisses."

She's got used to it. She's got used to living without you, you think, and you feel a vacuum just above your stomach you've never felt before today. Between your stomach and your lungs. You've got something like a vacuum there; it hurts you. You've never felt it before today. She hasn't even put the children on the phone the way she used to.

Back in the bedroom, you lie down next to the dark-haired woman once more. You ask her to take her knickers off, and you have sex. You go for it, as if you wanted to get it over with as quickly as possible. And you don't say anything when you do finish. You continue to lie there, looking at the ceiling. She curls around you and puts her hand between your stomach and your lungs, just where you feel the vacuum and the pain. You take her hand off you and head for the shower. Without saying anything. When you're under the shower you think about inviting her to supper, perhaps you've been too rough for her, but, when you go back into the bedroom with the towel around your waist, you don't see her there. She's already left, her work done. *Business is business*, as you know.

You get dressed and go downstairs to the hotel bar. You remember your boss's voice as you stand at the bar, telling you to have a whiskey or a grappa, you deserve it. You ask for a whiskey on the rocks and look out at the street. The enormous window that looks out at the street takes up a whole wall. You see people on the other side walking up and down. Girls in tight T-shirts and short skirts. It's August. It's getting dark. It's hot outside. Inside, on the other hand, it's almost cold due to the air conditioning. You're the one on the rocks, you think. Then you remember the child you saw from the bedroom window, out on the

huge building site, kneeling down as if looking for something in the ground. You try to see the building site but, as it's getting dark, you can't see anything beyond the street lights which have just come on. You've tried, you try again and, all of a sudden, you do see something. A man standing at a bar with a glass in his hand. It's your reflection; the window's sending it back to you.

You feel the vacuum between your stomach and your lungs once more, and a picture comes to mind: a glass container with a piece of lettuce and a piece of bread soaked in wine. You take a sip of your whiskey and wait for the grasshopper to start singing.

LITTLE GLACÉ PEARS

The nurse takes my breast in her hand and drops it onto a glass tray as if she were flinging half a kilo of meat onto some scales. I think of our local butcher. Then she presses it against the glass with her hand and tries to spread it out as if she wanted to spread my flesh around the white room, and puts something like an iron on top of it. Encyclopaedias and large books are difficult to photocopy: you have to open their spines fully before you put the lid down.

She tells me not to move my spine; meanwhile, she speaks to a colleague. They talk about a workmates' supper; apparently somebody had too much to drink. When the device goes all the way down I feel it pressing on my breast and I wonder whether to look or not. I didn't look during the previous two tests, and I don't want to this time either, but in the end my eyes get the better of me, and I regret it because once I saw Fernando down there after a workmate's wedding; he was drunk, and he called that same breast a *little glacé pear*. The same one which looks like a cuttlefish on a griddle right now. I think of our local fishmonger's.

"Any pain?" the nurse asks me, and I'm not sure if she's talking about me or about my dignity.

I say no. My pride has answered. Seeing my breast like that has made me feel out of place. I find it hard to accept that I can have varicose veins in my breast. After seeing my body looking like a laddered stocking they send me back to room measuring one square metre, a cabin with number 2 on it, and there, as I put on my bra yellowed by bleach, I feel an urgent need to see my breasts as *little glacé pears* once more, and I think to do that I'll need some new bras at the very least.

I went straight from there to the Corte Ingles department store, rushed up the escalators, which seemed to be moving too slowly, and I felt like the simplest,

least substantial and most superficial woman in the world. Pathetic. When I was young, at university, and when I started working at the publisher's too, I lived as if I were a woman without breasts, as if my intellect were on a higher level than those two raw pears, and now they're going soft on me I'm anxious and go looking for a bra-assistant as if saving my breasts were a matter of life or death.

On the third floor, when I see my breasts under the bright lights in the changing room, I think they need full resuscitation, mouth-to-mouth at the very least. And that's why I buy a black bra with as much lace and as many holes in it as possible, the most expensive one, similar to the one on the poster on the changing room wall. There's a beautiful young woman in the poster wearing a black bra, jeans and boots; she's riding a horse, like Bo Derek back in the day. Black hair combed to one side by the wind. *Vive salvajemente*¹, says the slogan. My life's been tame for a long time, I think. My sex life has been programmed for Saturday nights for a long time now, as if it were one of the IT programs my husband makes. And then, all of a sudden, as I leave the changing room, I get the feeling it's time to remember the meaning of the word 'wild', and I ask the saleswoman for the tanga which goes with the bra too. I'm a little embarrassed as I ask for it, and I don't look up much from the counter.

Four years ago, when I had my first mammogram, I was nervous. I thought they were going to find something, and I couldn't stop thinking about my children. What would they do without their mother to protect them? Today's my third mammogram, and everything has changed since the first one. I went there like somebody going to do something routine; not just because I've taken in the fact that it's a preventative test they do on all women over a certain age, but also because my children would no longer be unprotected. My nest is empty.

¹ In Spanish in the original: '*Run wild*'.

Eider still lives at home, but I wouldn't miss her more if she didn't. She avoids me; steps aside from me if we're going down the corridor at the same time; waits for me to finish my supper in the kitchen before she starts making hers. It makes me feel she finds hearing her mother chewing her food revolting. And, even so, I'm sure there's no hate beneath the coldness she shows me; the image she sees of herself in my eyes is what she rejects. She can't be herself with me; she keeps on seeing the image of herself as a little child in my eyes. Recently I've felt Asier closer to me, even though he's been living with his girlfriend since last year. He asks how I am when he comes to visit, or whether we've brought out anything interesting at the publisher's.

In all the years I've worked at the publisher's nobody's asked me about my work, about the books I publish, nor about the ones I write either. As well as editing books, I used to write children's books too, and at night I'd read them to my children, but I never told them that I'd written the stories. I don't know why, maybe I wanted to make them think they were real tales, not something their mum had made up. A lie, when it comes down to it. White lies for children. There were stories I wrote for Fernando too but, of course, he never read them.

But Asier and Eider enjoyed my tales, they liked them, perhaps because of the special attention I paid when I read them. They liked their mother back then; they needed their mother. I remember that Asier always needed me by his side until he was twelve or thirteen. "Mum, sit here" he used to say to me, and he would make space for me on the sofa so we could watch TV together after supper. He didn't pay attention to anything I said to him, but he liked to feel that I was there. He used to lay his head in my lap and, with a kitchen cloth in one hand, I tucked his hair behind one of his ears with the other. He was still my little boy. The change took place from one day to the next, or maybe I noticed the change from one day to the next. That's how it happens: one day you go to the living-room to

look for them and you hear the front door closing. They've gone out to have a sandwich with a friend and you don't even know which jersey they're wearing. You drop the kitchen cloth onto the floor and the caresses you'd still like to give them fall down with it: kisses on their foreheads, holding hands as you walk along the street, going on trips together, stroking their backs when they're in the bath, seeing your son naked... One day he won't let you see him naked, he'll close his bedroom door, and that room measuring eleven square metres is no longer part of your house whatever the deeds may say.

I spent years and years looking at my children, almost monitoring them, and I hadn't realised they'd grown up. Perhaps I watched them too closely. The same thing happened when I looked at one of my breasts under the mammogram device: from so close up a breast isn't a breast, it's something else.

I have lunch alone. I usually have lunch alone as Fernando and Eider don't come back from work and school until three. So I'm relaxed, thinking that the bit of cauliflower I've got on my fork really does look like a piece of brain, when I hear the sound of a key. Eider comes in. She should be in class. "What are you doing here?" She tells me she wants to speak with me now that Dad's not here, and that's why she's left class early.

"Mum, I'm not sleeping at home tomorrow."

"And where are you going?"

"To Olaia's house in Arrasate, there's a concert..."

"Well, that's up to you."

That's up to you, I say to her. Up to you. And as soon as I say those words I'm astonished at myself. A year ago, or less, just a few months ago there's no way I would have given her that answer. I would have interrogated her, and I probably

wouldn't have let her go, but it came out with complete conviction: Up to you. At the hospital this morning they nearly crushed my breast. Those words came out of the mammogram machine, I reckon. Something's changed since they crushed my breast. Have I started living *Salvajemente*?

"You don't mind?" Eider asks me incredulously.

When Eider goes to her room, I get the feeling I've released some ballast. Years with my head full of worries, unable to sleep at weekends, feeling each of my daughter's wounds as if it were my own even before the wounds are cut and then, all of a sudden, the answer I've given her makes it all seem in the past. Releasing ballast makes my body rise like a balloon full of gas going up into the sky, and I see myself up there, and just look what I see: I see a mountain range and my son and daughter are on top of it, but next to them there's something I've never seen before, a hole. A deep hole, one I had to touch to build the mountain range. I felt empty when I touched that hole.

I thought about that hole while I was having supper with Fernando.

"A penny for your thoughts", he says.

"Tomorrow's lunch. I don't know what to make..."

"Sorry; carry on thinking."

My husband is so polite... He's always been like that in bed, too; it was almost strange he didn't say please before making each movement. In recent years our relationship's lost its colour, it's become like a children's tale without drawings. He's only ever lost that correctness after a few drinks: at a supper party, a wedding... He hardly ever drinks, and a small glass is enough to put him in a spin. The biggest one was at a colleague's wedding. And that night, that crazy night, as we had sex as never before, he took my breasts in his hands and, after calling

them *little glacé pears*, took my bra off, threw it under the bed and started licking my nipples. He's never done it again; he's stroked them with his hands, but he's never stroked my breasts with his tongue again, and he's never called them pears again. He has white hands, the hands of a civil servant. He writes software programs for public authorities. He likes his work, he feels he's organizing the chaos of the world every day: tables, forms, databases... He handles them with care, as if they deserve to be looked after.

"Do you mind if I change channels?" he asks me.

Sometimes I'd like him to be more spontaneous, a bit more natural. Sometimes I dream we're having sex and sweating while we do so, both of us stark naked, or with our pyjama tops on, or with just one pyjama leg off so I can open my thighs. And I dream he's licking my nipples again as he did after his colleague's wedding. I imagine him throwing his glasses under the bed, although he wouldn't take his glasses off any more as he wears contact lenses.

I ask myself how many more times we're going to have sex. How many holes we're going to fill in. And I remember the black bra I've bought. I leave the omelette on my plate unfinished and head to the bathroom.

"Where are you going?"

"I'll be right back."

In the bathroom I take my old knickers and bra off and put the new ones on. I cut the plastic strip on the label off with my teeth. On my way back to the kitchen I can feel the tanga slipping up between my buttocks. I'm not used to living wild.

I take a bottle of wine from the cupboard. It's been there since last Christmas. Fernando looks at me in astonishment:

"Are we celebrating something?"

How can I explain that just for once I want to see him playing without any limits, wild; that my desire is to see him take my body in both hands, see him tear this tanga off me with his hands? I can scream if I want to tonight, Eider's not home. How can I explain that since I've seen the future in a deformed breast I've decided to enjoy what I've got left? And say that I couldn't care about anything else.

"We're alone", I answer. "We're going to celebrate being alone for the first time in a long while."

He isn't used to drinking and, after two glasses, his 24-hour-a-day rigidity starts to disappear. We remember things from back in the day. We even laugh. Suddenly I remember his horn-rimmed glasses. Then, seeing that he's relaxed, I undo my shirt-buttons and get undressed, showing my black bra with its embroidered holes. I imagine myself on horseback.

"Hey."

He remains still, his mouth open, looking at my disguised breasts; for a moment I think his public authority IT spirit has come back to him and he's going to ask me what I'm up to or something, ask whether I'm drunk or mad. But he doesn't. He smiles, gets off his chair and comes towards me. He puts his right hand, his fine hand, the one he gently holds the computer mouse with, to my chest. I notice he's trembling. He moves his mouth to my ear and nibbles me. His zip's right in front of me; I open it and put my hand in. He takes his ironed trousers off as well as he can using his legs: his hands are busy. His mouth moves towards mine and, without our tongues separating, we go to the bedroom.

We lie on the bed; he's on top of me. Slowly his mouth moves to my breasts and he starts to lick my left nipple. I can feel the tip of my glacé pear gone hard. I can't believe it: Fernando licking my nipple, just like he did that crazy night after his colleague's wedding. The tanga can't cover up the dampness between my legs.

Then, all of a sudden, as if he's just thought of something, Fernando's tongue stops and he lifts up his head. He's looking at me. I know what he's going to say to me. I know he's remembered calling them glacé pears. We'll have a laugh.

"You've remembered it, haven't you?" I say to him with a smile.

"Yes, sorry, sorry I didn't remember earlier. You've had that mammogram haven't you? How did it go?"

My pears go soft all of a sudden.

"Everything's fine", I answer looking at the ceiling.

He lowers his heads again and looks for my holes with those fine white hands of his.



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