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# I Would Rather Not Lie

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## I WOULD RATHER NOT LIE

*translated from the Basque & the Spanish*

The man shakes her hand. The woman takes a seat in front of him while placing her purse between her legs and leaving her heels exposed in her flat shoes. The man looks at her from over his glasses.

“Are you comfortable?”

“Yes.”

“Some water?”

“No.”

“Coffee, tea...”

“No.”

“Esther Salarrue Arrizabalaga.”

“Yes.”

“Are you comfortable, then?”

“I think so.”

“Excuse me for starting like this: Have you ever had an abortion?”

“No.”

“Nevertheless, you know the procedure.”

“No.”

“Two years ago abortion was illegal in Spain. For the law to authorize it, before having an abortion, it was necessary to sign a form declaring that you considered yourself unfit to take care of a child. You know, one has to take advantage of the loopholes in the law in order to avoid punishment.”

“So, we need to do something similar here?”

“Yes. For your family’s sake.”

“Of course.”

“Today’s session won’t be easy. You’ll need to answer a number of questions. It’s the only way.”

“OK.”

“Ready?”

“Go ahead.”

“You’ll need to prove through this questionnaire that there’s no other option.”

“I didn’t come here to lie.”

“But you can.”

“It won’t be necessary.”

“You shouldn’t worry about lying. Don’t forget, it will be for your family.”

“Let’s continue, please.”

“Married?”

“Yes.”

“Any children?”

“Two boys.”

“Ages?”

"Eleven and seven."

"Does your husband have a steady job?"

"Yes. He's the director of exports in a turbine factory."

"He travels a lot."

"Yes."

"That complicates things. Are your parents alive?"

"My mother is."

"And your husband's?"

"They both are."

"Do the grandparents have a good relationship with your children?"

"My mother moved to Málaga the year our youngest was born, so they hardly have a relationship. My husband's parents have the typical relationship between grandparents and grandchildren."

"And where do they live?"

"In town."

"Do you work?"

"I'm a high school teacher. I teach Basque."

"Beautiful subject."

"No one cares about it. Today's youth are dumb."

"There are many teachers among our clients."

"One of your former clients referred me to you. Julian Arozena. He taught Ethics and Philosophy."

"I remember him. An honest guy, smart."

"Now you must tell me about your property."

"The house where we live was my parents', and the deed is in my mother's name. A few years ago we bought a bungalow at Landes. That one is in my husband's and my name."

"I'll need those deeds. And for your parents' house too."

"No problem."

"How many square meters is the house you live in?"

"About a hundred and fifty."

"Any cars?"

"Two."

"What kind?"

"Mine is a Honda Civic, and my husband's is a Renault Espace."

"Any other property in your name?"

"I think the garage is in my name."

"You don't know?"

"No."

"Room for how many cars?"

"Two."

"Just the spaces or an enclosed garage?"

"Enclosed."

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“Good. Have you ever seen a psychologist?”

“Once, after I had my second child.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know for sure. I was always tired.”

“Did he prescribe anything?”

“Prozac.”

“Did it help?”

“Depends on how you look at it...”

“What do you mean?”

“It made it easier for me to get out of bed, to fix breakfast and lunch for my sons, and all that. To go to work, for example.”

“Any side effects?”

“I couldn’t have orgasms.”

“That’s good.”

“Excuse me?”

“Sorry—for the questionnaire, I meant. That’s why you stopped taking it?”

“Yes.”

“Any group therapy?”

“No.”

“Religion?”

“I’m not a believer.”

“Member of the neighborhood association?”

“No.”

“Politics?”

“My brother has been in prison since 2003, since December 24, 2003. He never made it to dinner.”

“So, you believe in politics?”

“Believe? He’s been in prison for nine years. *Believe* is not the right word.”

“The questionnaire says *believe*.”

“Then write down *yes*.”

“That you believe in politics?”

“That’s right.”

“Where’s your brother?”

“In Cadiz. That’s why our mother lives in Málaga.”

“Do you go to see him?”

“Less and less.”

“Go on. It can be interesting for the file.”

“The less I go, the less I miss him.”

“That can be good, it can be good. The more reasons, the better. What about crafts, aerobics, exercising, furniture restoring...?”

“No.”

“Walking, riding horses, biking, sports, mountaineering?”

“No.”

“Any hobbies?”

"Reading."

"That's not listed in the questionnaire."

"Then, nothing."

"Do you follow any of those trends known as 'alternative living?' Naturism, nudism, macrobiotic diet...?"

"I watch my diet carefully, and my husband and I practiced nudism while I was pregnant with our second son. But after the baby was born I wasn't able to feel comfortable in front of people. I had lost my beauty. That's when I realized that I wasn't a real nudist, that my nudism was part exhibitionism."

"You are still very beautiful."

"Please, put compliments aside."

"Are you familiar with Eastern disciplines?"

"Like yoga, tai chi and those things?"

"Right."

"At one point, before I began taking Prozac, a friend dragged me to yoga classes. I didn't finish the sessions. I used to fall asleep in class."

"We would need a certificate of some sort to show that you attended those classes or at the very least, the address of where you went to do yoga."

"I must have the phone number somewhere. I don't like those people."

"Why not?"

"Always talking on and on about energies, as if they lived on another planet, always checking their own navels to see if they're clean or dirty and ignoring the shit of those around them."

"Is that bad?"

"I don't like it."

"I recently had a yoga teacher as a client who admitted he had begun beating his wife. That's why he came to us."

"They never get angry, they can understand everything; I don't trust those people."

"Do you have a good relationship with your husband?"

"Yes."

"Any physical or psychological abuse?"

"No."

"Faithfulness?"

"As far as I know, yes."

"Are you faithful?"

"Yes."

"Do you love him?"

"I'm fond of him."

"Do you think he loves you?"

"Is that question listed in the questionnaire?"

"No, sorry. I was just curious. How's his relationship with your sons?"

"He gets along well with them. He's a regular father. Spends as little time as possible with them, not to get bored, but he loves them."

"Has he ever hit them?"

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"A spanking here and there."

"Psychological problems?"

"No, he's a balanced man, excessively."

"Excessively? There's no such a thing as excessively balanced."

"In his case, there is."

"Alcohol?"

"He likes drinking and looks for excuses to drink."

"But it isn't a problem, right?"

"It depends on how you look at it. Not currently, but it has affected our relationship."

"If you don't mind, we'll say that you don't believe in politics. OK?"

"I would rather not lie."

"I say it to make things easier with the insurance, so your children's future will be better. At least economically."

"I want to tell the truth."

"Sometimes telling the truth isn't the best way. I know how they interpret these answers in Madrid. Listen to me; say that you don't believe in politics."

"No. This is the last thing I'm doing; I want to be honest."

"As you wish. The more failed lifestyles and alternatives we list, the better off your family will be, at least economically."

"Don't change anything."

"Now read this, and if you agree, sign it."

"I don't agree."

"Why not?"

"I still want to proceed."

"Why don't you agree?"

"I don't see myself 'hurting my children and my husband or neglecting their care.'"

"Then why did you come to us?"

"The answer doesn't fit your questionnaire."

"Tell me something. If you didn't gather enough courage to come here today, don't you think you would've eventually acted irresponsibly toward your sons?"

"No."

"But if you want to continue, we'll need to say you agree."

"I don't like the statement."

"Leave being coherent for the big day. I told you before that we must use the law's loopholes for our advantage, like with abortions."

"When are we going to do it?"

"We need to check the calendar."

"I would like to do it during the children's vacation, otherwise it will be more complicated. The little one has music lessons and the other one plays team handball, and there are only two weeks left before September."

"Don't worry, we'll take care of that too. First we need to get this report accepted; we can't proceed without the seal of approval from Madrid's Ministry of Health."

Don't worry about your sons. Izaskun will go pick them up that day; she has a child psychology degree. But we'll talk about details later on."

"What day will work better?"

"A Friday afternoon. I'll show you the statistics later."

"And how are we going to do it?"

"The methods that fit your profile best are the following: about 80 codeine or 100 Valium capsules. Since these pills will make you nauseous, we'll give you pills for motion sickness; you'll need to take them 15 minutes before the overdose. In 10–15 minutes the codeine produces unconsciousness and 45 minutes later, death. It's very effective. It's best to take them on an empty stomach, with a plastic bag covering your head and, better yet, with alcohol."

"I don't drink."

"Well, it would be best if you took these pills with alcohol so you can get a better settlement with the insurance company, I mean."

"I would rather not take any chemicals."

"Well, then it'll be harder to find the right method for you. You can't use pipe cleaning corrosives, nitrogen, potassium chloride, oleander, rotenone or cyanide..."

"It would be fine with me if you found a method better suited for braver people."

"The method between discretion and spectacle is the jump. It's also the most effective. Maite is a psychologist, and she'll take you to the place of your choosing. Look, we have a great variety of scenic places from which to jump, including cranes."

"Is it true that it's 100 percent effective?"

"All who have jumped have died, and out of those who have chosen this method... just a moment, I'm going to check in the computer... out of those who have chosen this method, 72 percent have gone through with it."

"That's a lot."

"Yes, it is a lot."

"I don't have vertigo, but it seems a little violent. Let's say I don't die..."

"This method guarantees an option for a second jump. But so far no one has used it. It's a refined method. Elegant. Classic. Dignified. A method that allows you to stare at your own death; just a jump, alert, without nausea, sober, your arms open..."

"Yes."

"You'll be the one catching death and not the other way around."

"OK. I would like to look at the catalog again."

"There's another possibility too. You would need to make a payment off the books; of course, it's more expensive."

"Money's not a problem."

"It's much more expensive."

"Go on."

"We can make it look like an accident. Of course, this method is not listed in the catalog. The inspectors come once every six months, and you know..."

"No."

"No?"

"No."

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“It’s much more expensive for you, but your children will receive much more insurance money.”

“No.”

“It’s OK.”

“I want to make sure it looks like suicide.”

“OK.”

“That I’m capable of making a decision about my life.”

“The jumping method seems appropriate to me. You’ve chosen the best method, no question.”

“Anything else?”

“Before we continue, you need to answer a question. Would you like to have the option to change your mind? That’s important too, not only when it comes to the price but also to the effectiveness.”

“No, I’m not interested.”

“It makes it 20 percent more expensive.”

“It’s not a problem.”

“Then I would recommend the following: Maite, our psychologist, has studied coaching in the United States; she’s very good—excellent, I would say. Out of those who have chosen no option to back out, wait a minute, I’m going to check in the computer...out of those who have chosen no option to back out, 98 percent died. Out of those who have the back-out option, only 66 percent have died.”

“98 percent is a good percentage.”

“Very good.”

“And the 2 percent?”

“Excuse me?”

“How did the 2 percent of those who chose the no-back-out option survive?”

“It was Maite’s fault. She fell in love with the client, and she didn’t let him jump.”

“So, this is not a surefire method.”

“No, falling in love is a possibility. In your case it will be sure, though.”

“When you bring in the documents, we’ll send everything to Madrid along with a report that I’ll write myself. We won’t do anything until we receive permission to proceed.”

“How long are we talking about?”

“It depends on the case. They could find lack of motivation, and then we’ll need to look for extenuating circumstances; you haven’t made it easy.”

“How long?”

“About a month.”

“That’s not much.”

“Are you OK?”

“Sure, great.”

“I’m glad, Esther. I’ll call you. Meanwhile, enjoy the time you have left. You can still reconsider. At your next appointment, you’ll need to pay me 100 percent, and if for some reason you back out, the agency will return 85 percent.”



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“I won’t reconsider, rest assured.”

The woman takes her umbrella and goes out in the rain, the raindrops marking the pace of her steps. The man looks out to the street through the window. Nice ass, he thinks to himself, and lights a thin cigar.