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Simmering

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Nere Lete

Boise State University

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Su txikian

BY UXUE ALBERDI

–Eseri hor, mesedez. Baso bete ur?

–Ondo nago honela, eskerrik asko.

–Tira. Badakizu zertara ekarri zaitugun.

–Pena da.

–Zeri buruz ari zara?

–Erabat lehortua dago fikus hori. Gaizki sentitzen naiz landareak ihartzen uzten dituzten lekuetan. Bota egiozu niretzat atera duzun basokada ura. Hobeto sentituko naiz.

–Lizarralde anderea, zure senarraren heriotzaz hitz egin behar dugu.

–Gaizki atera da dena, kontu gehiago izan behar nuen.

–Zer da oker joan dena?

–Bakarrik utzi dut azken unean. Ez zen nire asmoa.

–Tori.

–Ez, ez dut negarrik egingo. Luzerako daukagu?

-Norabaiterako presa duzu?

-Tomas ikusi nahi nuke.

-Zure senarra gorputegian dago autopsiaren zain.

-Autopsia egingo diozue?

-Haren heriotza argitu behar dugu. Horretarako zaude hemen.

-Ez da autopsiarik behar. Oso sinplea da dena. Sinplea izan behar zuen.

-Amalia Ibarzabal ezagutzen duzu?

-Jakina, auzokoa dut betidanik.

-Zer harreman duzue?

-Ona, bizilagunen artekoa, landareak ureztatu izan dizkiot uda partean. Askotan utzi behar izaten du etxea semeagatik. Preso dago Arlesen. Batzuetan liburuak eta urdaiazpikoa ematen dizkiot harentzat. Badakit debekatuta dagoela kartzelara jatekoa sartzea, baina urdaiazpiko pixka batengatik... Uste dut Amaliak brusaren azpian gordetzen duela.

-Ibarzabal andereak deitu digu. Beranduegi, tamalez.

-Bai, nire errua da. Barkatuko ahal dit.

-Zer da Amalia Ibarzabalek barkatu behar dizuna?

-Amaliak ez. Tomasek. Zergatik ez ote dut...

-Lizarralde anderea, uste duzu zure senarra gai zela bere buruaz beste egiteko?

-Ez.

-Zergatik?

–Elbarria da.

–Pilulak har zitzakeen.

–Ez dugu botikarik hartzen.

–Tetraplejikoa zen, ezta?

–Paraplejikoa, gerritik behera.

–Nolatan?

–Kotxe batek harrapatu zuen.

–Pozoiren bat har zezakeen, bere buruari gaindosia eragin.

–Ez zuen halakorik nahi.

–Nola dakizu?

–Batak bestearen berri genuen, kontu guztietan.

–Orduan, zer motibo izan zezakeen? Depresioak jota zegoen? Arazo larriren bat zeukan? Diru-kontuak?

–Ondo zegoen; inoiz baino lasaiago, esango nuke. Ez dugu gastu handirik. Baina nolabait bukatu behar da, zaharrak gara, egin ditugu egitekoak. Zu gaztea zara oraindik; zer dituzu, berrogei urte?, berrogeita hamar?

–Beraz, seguru zaude bere buruaz beste egin duela.

–Bai.

–Bere asmoen berri eman zizun...

–Autoan egitea erabakita geneukan.

–Elkarrekin prestatu zenutela esaten ari zara? Bere buruaz beste egiten lagundu badiozu, hori erailketa litzateke. Zure senarra hil duzula aitortzen ari zara?

- Nola pentsa dezakezu halakorik? Ez, ez diot nik lagundu. Elkarrekin prestatu genuen, biok batera amaitzeko. Baina bakarrik utzi dut. Barkatuko ahal dit!
- Lizarralde anderea. Dena kontatu behar didazu.
- Ari naiz.
- Amalia Ibarzabalek goizeko hamaika eta erdietan deitu digu zure senarra autoan hilda topatu duela abisu emateko. Txirrinetik deitu omen dizue, baina zabaltzen ez zenutenez garajeko atetik sartu omen da, irekita izaten omen duzue.
- Tomasek han lan egiten du: itsasontzien maketak. Egun osoa ematen du garajea sartuta. Amerigo Vespucci fragata bukatu du asteon. Belaontzi ederra, Amerigo Vespucci. Benetakoak hiru mila eta berrehun metro koadro haize-oihal zituen. Asko da hori. Tomasek kontatzen dizkit halako gauzak: bidaiarien kontuak, hondoratzeenak, kortsarioenak. Nik ez dut abentura-libururik irakurtzen. Livornokoa omen zen Amerigo Vespucci, Toskanakoa.
- Zergatik ez diozu Amalia Ibarzabali atea ireki txirrina jo duenean?
- Belarriko aparatua jarri gabe neukan.
- Ez duzu aparatua egunero ipintzen?
- Jauna, esan dizut. Tomasek eta nik prestatuta genuen... eta ez, ez dut aparatua ipini, ez zait beharrezkoa iruditu gaur goizerako.
- Hiltzeko?
- Hala esatea nahiago baduzu...
- Eta elkarrekin buruaz beste egiteko asmoa bazenuten, zergatik ez zeunden zu autoan goizeko hamaika eta erdietan?
- Ez naiz etxekoandre ona. Ez naiz inoiz izan. Ez dakit nola moldatzen diren besteak, niri gogoia bestetaratzen zait beti. Horrek sutan jartzen du Tomas.
- Non zeunden goizeko hamaika eta erdietan, Lizarralde anderea?

–Goian, sukaldera igo naiz. Autotik irten eta sukaldera igo naiz. Tuntun halakoa.

–Damutu egin zara.

–Ez. Oso seguru nago. Baina dilistak sutan utzi ditudala gogoratu naiz. Su txikian utzi ditut goizean eta erabat ahaztu ditut gero.

–Inozoa naizela uste duzu, Lizarralde anderea?

–Ez, jauna.

–Zertara dator orduan dilisten kontu hori?

–Alaba bazkaritara etortzen da ostegunetan eta dena prest utzi nahi nion. Alabarekikoak ondo zaintzen saiatzen naiz. Erdi zorabiatuta nengoela gogoratu naiz dilistekin. Garunaren mekanismoren bat izan behar du, jauna. Narrazioetarako ideiarik onenak ere justu loak hartu aurretik bururatzen zaizkit beti. Eta gero jaiki beharra, kamisoi hutsean, hozteko ere...

–Idazlea zara?

–Idazle-idazlea... ez, baina argitaratu izan dizkidate istorio batzuk, ez oso txukunak hala ere. Alice Munro, hori bai amona distiratsua, eta gure adinean. Gu, zera, ikasketarik ere ez dugu-eta.

–Zure buruaz beste egitera zindoazela dilistekin akordatu eta asmoa bertan behera utzi duzula sinetsarazi nahi didazu.

–Halaxe izan da. Egosten utzi ditut eta alaba ez da ordu bi eta erdiak arte etortzen. Ez naiz moldatzen presio-eltzearekin, dena lehortzen zait. Etxea erre zitekeela pasatu zait burutik. Garretan ikusi dut. Gure betiko etxea. Nire ordenagailua, eskuizkribuak, Tomasen maketak. Ez dugu askoz gehiago oinordetzan uzteko. Familia xumea gara, jauna.

–Eta senarra hiltzen utzita atera zara autotik?

–Itzultzeko asmoa nuen. Amalia agertu ez balitz...

–Zuen alaba bisitan etortzen den egunean suizidatzea pentsatu zenuten.

–Badakit horrela esanda ankerra dirudiela, baina oso ondo pentsatuta geneukan. Dena gutun batean azalduta utzi diogu. Begira, ez da beste inor etortzen aste osoan eta, agian tontakeria irudituko zaizu, baina ez genuen nahi..., kiratsa eta deskonposizioa... Inoiz ikusi duzu ahaztutako hilotzik? Harrigarria da astebetean nola hondatzen den giza gorpua.

–Badakit, bai.

–Ahalkea izango da, baina, jauna, ez genuen egunetan egon nahi autoaren barrenean, nork, noiz eta zer egoeratan aurkituko gintuen jakin gabe. Alabak ezagutzen gaitu, uste dut gehiago harrituko litzatekeela eskailburuan behera amilduta absurdoki hilko bagina, edo aldaka hautsita. Erorikoetan hiltzen omen da zaharrik gehien.

–Eta Amalia Ibarzabal zertara joan da zuen etxera?

–Gure alabarentzat pakete bat ekartzera.

–Zergatik izan behar zuen berak zuen alabarentzako pakete bat?

–Zergatik konplikatatu ote da dena...

–Paketea. Zergatik zeukan Amalia Ibarzabalek zuen alabarentzako pakete bat?

–Banatzaile batek bere etxean utzi omen du. Ez nion entzungo hari ere. Gure alabak arropak erosten ditu Internetetik.

–Baina zuekin bizi da?

–Ez, esan dizut, ostegunetan etortzen da.

–Eta zergatik ez ditu paketeak bere etxean jasotzen?

–Lanean egoten delako. Ordu asko sartzen ditu. Dioenez, gauzak ez daude txantxetarako. Arkitektoa da. Zorionez, hark baditu ikasketak. Jauna, zenbat denboran egon beharko dut hemen?

–Nola izena du zuen alabak.

–Ane.

–Ane Agirre-Azaldegi?

–Bai, marratxorik gabe, dena batera, letra xehez.

–Ez du axola.

–Urduri jartzen naute ortografia-akatsek.

–Esadazu, gaur goizean esnatu zarenetik ertzainen patruila zuen etxera iritsi den arte zer egin duzu?

–Gosaldu. Egunkaria irakurri. Jantzi. Bazkaria prestatu.

–Xehetasun guztiak nahi ditut, Lizarralde anderea.

–Goizeko sei eta erdiak inguruan esnatu gara.

–Zure senarra ere bai?

–Ohe berean egiten dugu lo.

–Tira, jarraitu.

–Oraindik eguna argitu gabe zegoen. Ia beti esnatzen ginen egunsentia baino lehen. Zahardadea txarra da, badakizu?, lo egiten ere ez dizu uzten. Tomas pozik zegoen, eta ni ere bai. Esan nahi dut ez geneukala beldurrik eguna iritsi zelako. Maiatzaren 22a.

–Zerbaitegatik?

–Elkar ezagutu genuen eguna da gaur, eta Tomasen urtebetetzea.

–Gaur egiten zituen urteak?

–Laurogeita sei.

–Noiztik zeneukaten zeuen buruaz beste egiteko asmoa?

–Aspalditik, hilabeteak izango dira eguna hautatu genuenetik. Elkarrekin hiltzearen ideia ez da inoiz arrotza izan dena den, beti aipatzen genuen, baina txantxetan bezala, jolas erromantiko bat zen... Beti haserretzen nintzen Tomasek ni baino lehenago hilko zela esaten zidanean. Zaharragoa zela eta huraxe zela naturalena, zenbat aldiz kontu horrekin. Halakorik ez aipatzeko eskatzen nion, eta barre egiten zidan. Bandido arraioa. Gorpu hotz bat besarkarazten bazidan ez niola sekula barkatuko, halaxe esaten nion, halakorik egiten bazidan neuk akabatuko nuela bigarren aldiz. Eta begira. Sartre eta Beauvoir bezala, azkenean.

–Zer esan nahi duzu?

–Jean-Paul Sartre eta Simone de Beauvoir. Idazleak ziren. Bost hamarkada elkarrekin eman ostean (gorabeherekin, baina nork ez du gorabeherarik?), zahartzaroan elkarrengandik urrundu ziren. Sartre itsututa zegoen eta oso hondatuta; nire ustez horregatik apartatu zen. Ez da erraza norberaren dekadentzia inorekin konpartitzea. Tebistan oso polit aurkezten dute dena, baina gernu-jarioak, hortzordeak, orbanak. Zaila da maitasuna edo dena delakoa garbi mantentzea, jauna. Azken zazpi urteetan ez zuten kasik elkarren berririk izan. Baina Sartre biriketako edemak jota hil zenean Simonek bisita egin zion ospitalean, eta esan ohi da Sartrerekin, haren gorpuarekin, sartu zela ohean.

–Asko haserretzen zineten?

–A ze galdera. Zer da asko? Ez dakit, jauna. Beste guztiak bezala. Esan izan dizkiogu izugarrikeriak elkarri. Nik gehiago Tomasi berak niri baino, ez naiz tenple handiko pertsona. Horregatik idazten dudala uste dut, gauzei bere denbora emateko. Amorrua paperean etzateko. Oporretan haserretzen gara, batez ere. Etxean nork bere txokoa dauka, ez diogu elkarri traba handirik egiten. Afizio isilak ditugu biok, eta horrek ere laguntzen du. Italiara egin genuen bidaian egun oso bat eman genuen muturtuta. Uste dut egoista nazkagarri bat zela esan niola. Nazka-nazka egin ninduen, bai. Eskerrak gidak hitz egiten zuen! Fulvio izena zuen, estimatzen dira berbalapiko horiek halakoetan, ez pentsatzen laguntzen dute. Ponpeiako hondakinak erakutsi zizkigun, zita-etxea, vomitoriuma, anfiteatroa... Eta Tomas isilik. Ez dakizu nolako bekozkoa jartzen duen gontzetatik ateratzen denean. Ibilbidearekin jarraitu genuen turista saldoaren erdian. Sugarrek estalita elkar besarkatuta hil zen bikoteari begira geratu ginenean, eskua eman zidan.

–Jo al zintuen inoiz?

–Ez.

–Mehatxatu?

–Ezta ere. Gizon orekatua da, orekatuegia zenbaitentzat. Haserretzen denetan isildu egiten da, egun batzuetarako sarritan, baina gutxien espero duzunean hasten da hizketan berriz, garrantzirik gabeko kontuez beti. Esne-berriketari. Ez da batere oldarkorra. Gure amak esango luke ez dela gizon-gizona. Barkuen maketak egiten ditu. Esan dizut Amerigo Vespucci fragata bukatu duela asteon?

–Zer egin duzue gaur goizean esnatu ondoren?

–Sukaldean eseri gara. Ogia xigortu dut Tomasi gustatzen zaion moduan, ekonomikaren gainean. Egunkaria irakurri dugu elkarrekin, Tomasek izenburuak eta nik letra txikia. Bista hobea daukat. Kafea edan dugu eta irratia entzun dugu pixka batean, goizeko magazina. Gero dilistak prestatzeari ekin diot. Tomasek gurutzegramak egin du, osorik. Asko poztu da.

–Hiltzera bazindoazten, zertarako halako interesa notiziekiko?

–Goizero egiten dugu: jaiki eta irratia piztu. Oherakoan itzaltzen dugu, gaueko partea bukatu ondoren.

–Gaur, itzali duzu?

–Ez nuke jakingo esaten.

–Etxera itzultzeko asmorik ez bazenuen, normalena irratia itzaltzea izango da, ezta?

–Bai. Baliteke itzali izana. Gainera, begira, irratia piztu ez bagenu ez nuen jakingo Igor Cozari eman diotela Euskadi saria. Mezu bat bidali diot zorientzeko, asko lagundu izan dit nire ipuinekin. Inportanteak dira kolega batzuk ofizioan.

–Egiaztatuko dugu. Eta gero?

–Tomasi lagundu diot dutxatzen, eta bizarra egiten zuen bitartean bainua hartu dut nik. Kantatu egin du bizarra egiten ari zen bitartean; aspaldi ez nion aditzen.

–Zer abestu du?

–Garrantzitsua da?

–Ez. Oraingoz ez. Zergatik ezkutatu nahi duzu?

–Ez zen, nola esan, oso abesti aproposa okasiorako. Seminarioko kanta bat, apaizei buruzko trauksilkeria bat.

–Kantatu.

–Beharrezkoa da?

–Kantatu, Lizarralde anderea.

–*A la vera de un convento había un cura cagando...*

–Tira, nahikoa da.

–Esan dizut.

–Eta gero?

–Jantzi egin gara, arropa txukun samarrekin, bioi iruditzen zitzaigun egokiena. Tomasi zapata berriak erosi nizkion astelehenean. Elbarritu zenetik etxeko zapatilekin edo kirola egitekoekin ibiltzen da beti, ez zaizkio batere hondatzen beti geldirik egonda. Baina larru beltzezko batzuk erosi nizkion. Bitxia da, oina izugarri txikitu zaio. Betiko neurrikoak erosi nizkion, baina elbarritu zenetik uzkurtu egin zaio oina, bi taila bai. Estu lotu behar izan dizkiot.

–Noiz idatzi duzue alabarentzako gutuna?

–Duela bi aste.

–Bi aldiz izan da zuenean bazkaltzen gutun hori idatzi zenutenetik?

–Bai. Joan den astean Maddirekin etorri zen, bilobarekin. Aste hauetan ukitu batzuk egin dizkiot gutunari. Maniak, ezin testu bat bukatutzat eman.

–Uste duzu alabak bazuela zuen asmoen susmorik?

–Ez.

–Eta jantzi ondoren, zer egin duzue?

–Zaborra atera dut, sukaldea garbitu eta sua jaitsi diet dilistei. Hori izan da dilistekin akordatu naizen azken aldia. Gutuna mahai gainean utzi dut, tulipa batzuen ondoan. Ane jaio zenean ere tulipak izan nituen etxean. Gero garajera jaitsi gara.

–Eta nola egin duzu?

–Aurrena Tomasi lagundu diot autora sartzen.

–Gidariaren tokian?

–Ez, kopilotuarenean. Berak gidatzen ez duenez beti joaten da aldamenekoan. Gainera, berak ezingo luke arrankatzeko pedala zapaldu.

–Zergatik zapaldu behar zuen pedala? Ez al zen nahikoa autoa erralention jartzea?

–Bai, bai. Esan nahi dut nik gidatzen dudala beti. Ez zait burutik pasatu Tomas gidariaren aulkian eseraraztea.

–Jarraitu.

–Mangera hartu dut, ihes-hodiari lotu diot eta atzeko leihatilara eramanean dut beste muturra. Autoan sartu naiz. Motorra abiarazi aurretik musu eman diot Tomasi, eta eskerrak eman dizkiot denegatik. Berak irribarre egin du eta “Aurrera!” esan dit. Beti esaten du horixe autoz bidaiaren bat egitera goazenean. Arrankatu egin dut, erralention, eta eskua eman diot. Loak hartzen ninduela sentitu dut, ez tunelik eta halakorik, logure gozo bat baino ez. Eta bat-batean dilistekin akordatu naiz.

–Tomas hilik zegoen zu atera zarenerako?

–Ez dakit.

–Ez duzu begiratu?

- Gora ahalik eta azkarren igo, sua itzali eta segituan jaisteko asmoa nuen.
- Tomasek laguntza eskatuz gero, inork adituko al zion?
- Bozina jo izan balu, baietz uste dut.
- Zenbat denbora igaro da zu autotik atera eta Amalia Ibarzabal garajea sartu den arte?
- Minutu batzuk, ez dakit... Zorabiatuta nengoen eta eskaileretan eseri behar izan dut unetxo batez. Sukaldean nengoela sartu da espantuka, ez naiz ohartu gain-gainean izan dudana arte.
- Egiazta dezakezu Tomasek bere buruaz beste egin nahi zuela?
- Gutuna nik idatzi dut, baina biok sinatu dugu. Hitz gutxikoa da.
- Bere buruaren jabe zen?
- Guztiz.
- Egiazta dezakezu hori?
- Goizeko gurutzegrama sukaldean gelditu da. Ez luke edonork osorik egingo, lanak izango nituzke neuk ere. Hilabete osoko aleak egongo dira sarrerako komoda, egunero egiten zituen denbora-pasak, gurutzegramak eta sudokuak.
- Zaude. Une bat. Gisasola, autopsiaren berririk? Ados. Jauregi eta Gomez itzuli dira? Ongi. Froga dezatela gutuneko sinadura Tomas Agirreazaldegirena dela. Dena batera, bai. Eta ekar ditzatela etxean aurkitzen dituzten egunkari guztiak. Ongi. Bai. Amalia Ibarzabal hemen da? Oraintxe. Lizarralde anderea, bukatu dugu oraingo.
- Tomasen ondora itzul naiteke?
- Gorputegian dago, esan dizut. Laster egingo diote autopsia.
- Ikusi egin nahi dut.
- Agente batek lagundu beharko dizu.

–Ez naute une batez bakarrik utziko?

–Arauak dira. Sentitzen dut, Lizarralde anderea. Nire doluminak.

Idazleak azken hurrupa eman dio infusio epelduari. Old Towneko argi ahulak sartzen dira leihotik. Irakurtzeko betaurrekoak erantzi eta ohikoak jantzi ditu. Eserita egon da ordenagailua itzali zain. Igor Cozarri bidali dio ipuina; estimatuko dio iritzia, zalantzak ditu egiturarekin, traba egiten diote dialogoetako gidoiek, baina editoreak “zerbait freskoa” idazteko aholkatu zion bildumaren tonu orokorra konpentsatzeko. Komunean kendu du hortzordea eta ileko sarea kokatu du. Garbantzua beratzen jarri ditu ohera aurretik, biharamunean eskuz esku bazkalduko baitu alabarekin. Goizeko hegaldian iritsiko da. Aurpegiko krema eman eta kamisoia jantzi du argilunetan. Zabal etzan da ohean. Orain askoz hobeto egiten du lo.

Simmering

TRANSLATED FROM THE BASQUE BY NERE LETE

“Please, take a seat. A glass of water?”

“I’m fine, thank you.”

“Well, I think you know why we brought you in.”

“Oh, how sad!”

“Excuse me?”

“That poor plant is completely withered. I feel uncomfortable in places where they let plants just shrivel up like that. Please, pour my glass of water into the flowerpot. I’ll feel much better.”

“Mrs. Lizarralde, we need to talk about your husband’s death.”

“Everything went terribly wrong, I should’ve been more careful.”

“What do you mean, ‘everything went wrong’?”

“I abandoned him at the last minute. I didn’t mean to.”

“Here.”

“No. I’m not going to cry. Will this take long?”

“Are you in a hurry?”

“I’d like to see Tomas.”

“Your husband’s body is in the morgue awaiting autopsy.”

“Autopsy?”

“We’re trying to determine the cause of death. That’s why you’re here.”

“There’s no need for an autopsy. It’s very simple. That is, it was supposed to be simple.”

“Do you know Amalia Ibarzabal?”

“Why of course, she’s been my neighbor for years.”

“What kind of relationship do you have with her?”

“Oh, just fine. It’s a typical neighborly relationship. I water her plants in the summer when she’s away. She travels a lot because of her son. He’s in prison, you know, in Arles. Sometimes I give her books and cured ham to take to him. I know it’s forbidden to take food into prison and all that, but what harm can a little ham do? Amalia smuggles it in under her blouse, I think.”

“Mrs. Ibarzabal called us. Too late, unfortunately.”

“Yes, it’s all my fault! I hope I can be forgiven.”

“Why should Amalia Ibarzabal forgive you?”

“Not Amalia. Tomas. Why didn’t I—”

“Mrs. Lizarralde, do you believe that your husband could have done this on his own?”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“He’s crippled.”

“He could’ve ingested pills.”

“We don’t take any medicine.”

“He was a quadriplegic, is that correct?”

“Paraplegic. From the waist down.”

“How did that happen?”

“He was hit by a car.”

“He could’ve ingested some kind of poison to provoke an overdose.”

“He never would have done such a thing.”

“How do you know that?”

“We knew everything about each other, everything.”

“Then why did he do it? Was he depressed? Was he in trouble? Money issues, perhaps?”

“He was fine, more at peace than ever, I’d say. We don’t have many expenses. But we all must die sooner or later. We’re elderly and we’ve done what we were supposed to in life. You’re still young; how old are you? Forty? Fifty, maybe?”

“But you still believe it was suicide?”

“Yes.”

“He informed you of his plans?”

“We decided it would take place in the car.”

“Are you telling me that you planned it together? If you assisted him, that might be considered murder. Are you confessing to your husband’s murder?”

“How dare you suggest such a thing! No, I didn’t assist him. We planned it together...to die together. But I left him alone. Will he ever forgive me?”

“Mrs. Lizarralde. You have to tell me everything.”

“That’s what I’m trying to do.”

“Mrs. Ibarzabal called us this morning at eleven thirty to inform us that she’d found your husband dead in your car. Apparently, she rang your doorbell and when you didn’t answer, she entered by the garage door, since you keep it unlocked.”

“That’s where Tomas works. Model ships. He spends the whole day in the garage. This week he finished Amerigo Vespucci’s frigate. What a beautiful ship! The real one’s sails were made of three thousand, two hundred square meters of cloth. That’s a lot. Tomas tells me these things: stories about sailors, shipwrecks, and corsairs. I don’t read adventure books. Apparently Amerigo Vespucci was from Livorno, in Tuscany.”

“Why didn’t you open the door when Mrs. Ibarzabal rang the doorbell?”

“I wasn’t wearing my hearing aid.”

“You don’t wear it every day?”

“Sir, I told you. Tomas and I had it all planned out. And no, I didn’t have it in this morning, I didn’t think I would need it.”

“To die?”

“If that’s how you want to put it...”

“And given that you had agreed to kill yourselves together, why weren’t you in the car at eleven thirty this morning?”

“I’m a terrible housewife. I always have been. I’m not sure how others do it; I get distracted so easily. It infuriates Tomas.”

“Where were you at eleven thirty, Mrs. Lizarralde?”

“Upstairs, I’d gone up to the kitchen. I got out of the car and went up to the kitchen. So stupid.”

“You changed your mind.”

“No, absolutely not. But I remembered that I had left the lentil soup on the stove. It had been simmering all morning and I’d forgotten about it.”

“Mrs. Lizarralde, do you think I’m an idiot?”

“No, sir.”

“So what’s all this about lentil soup?”

“Our daughter comes for lunch on Thursdays and I wanted to leave everything ready for her. I like to take good care of my daughter. I was already feeling dizzy when I thought of the lentil soup. It must have been a reflex, sir. The best ideas for my stories always come to me just before I fall asleep. And then I have to get up, in my nightgown, risking a cold...”

“Are you a writer?”

“A writer-writer...? No. But I’ve published a few stories, though they’re not very good. Not like Alice Munro, who still shines at our age. We don’t have much education, you know.”

“You want me to believe that in the middle of killing yourself you remembered your lentil soup and interrupted your plan?”

“That’s exactly right! I left the pot simmering but our daughter doesn’t come home until two thirty. I’m no good at using the pressure cooker; everything comes out dry. I

thought that the house might catch fire. I pictured it in flames. Our longtime home. My computer, my manuscripts, Tomas' models. We don't have much else to leave her as an inheritance. We are a humble family, sir."

"So you got out of the car and left your husband to die alone?"

"I was planning on coming back. If Amalia hadn't shown up—"

"You decided to commit suicide on the day your daughter comes for lunch."

"When you say it like that, it sounds cruel, but we'd carefully planned it that way. We explained everything in a letter to her. Look, no one else comes to see us the rest of the week, and perhaps you'll think it nonsensical, but we didn't want... the stench and decomposition... Have you ever seen an abandoned corpse? You wouldn't believe how much the human body can deteriorate in just a week."

"Yes, I'm aware."

"It sounds shameful, but sir, we didn't want to be left in the car for days without knowing by whom, when, and in what state we would be found. Our daughter knows us. I think she would have been more surprised had we died in a mundane way, plummeting down the stairs or breaking a hip. Apparently, most elderly die as a result of a fall."

"And why did Mrs. Ibarzabal go to your house?"

"To drop off a package for our daughter."

"Why did she have a package for your daughter?"

"Why did everything have to get so complicated!"

"The package. Why did Amalia Ibarzabal have a package for your daughter?"

"I guess the mailman left it at her house. I must not have heard him ring either. Our daughter buys clothes online."

"Then she lives with you?"

“No, I told you already. She comes over on Thursdays.”

“And why doesn’t she get her packages delivered to her own house?”

“Because she works all day. She always reminds me that you can’t take work for granted these days. She’s an architect. Fortunately, she *does* have an education. Sir, how much longer do I need to be here?”

“What’s your daughter’s name?”

“Ane.”

“Ane Agirre-Azaldegi?”

“Yes, but no hyphen. Don’t capitalize the second part, it’s all one last name.”

“It doesn’t matter.”

“Spelling mistakes bother me.”

“Tell me what you did this morning from the time you woke up to the time when the Ertzaintza patrol came to your house.”

“I had breakfast. Read the newspaper. Got dressed. Fixed lunch.”

“I want all the details, Mrs. Lizarralde.”

“We woke up at about six thirty.”

“Your husband, too?”

“We sleep in the same bed.”

“Okay. Go on.”

“It was still dark. We usually wake up before sunrise. Old age is not gentle, you know. It doesn’t let you sleep. Tomas felt happy, as did I. I mean, we weren’t afraid because the day had arrived. May 22nd.”

“Any particular reason for the date?”

“Today is the anniversary of the day we met, and it’s Tomas’ birthday.”

“Today was his birthday?”

“Eighty-six.”

“When did you make plans to kill yourselves?”

“A long time ago, we’ve had the day picked for months. Nevertheless, the idea of dying together wasn’t strange for us; we joked about it all the time. It was kind of a game, a romantic one... I always got angry with Tomas when he said he would die before me. How many times did he say that he was older and it was only natural? I asked him a thousand times to stop saying that, but he would just laugh. What a mischievous man! I would tell him that if he made me wake up with my arms around a cold corpse, I would never forgive him. I used to tell him that if he did that to me, I would kill him a second time myself. And look. In the end, just like Sartre and Beauvoir.

“What do you mean?”

“Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. They were writers. After fifty years together (with ups and downs of course, but who doesn’t have ups and downs?), they separated in old age. Sartre had gone blind and his health had deteriorated; in my opinion, that’s why they separated. It’s not easy to share in someone else’s decline. They make it look easy on television, but incontinence, dentures, bruises... It’s difficult to still love, or whatever it is, sir. During the last seven years they were rarely in contact. But when Sartre died of a pulmonary edema, Simone visited him in the hospital. Apparently, she climbed into bed with him: with his corpse, that is.”

“Did you two fight a lot?”

“What a question! What’s a lot? I don’t know, sir. As much as everyone else, I suppose. We’ve said terrible things to each other. I more than he. I’m not an even-tempered person. I suppose that’s why I write, to give things time, to calm my rage. We mostly get mad at each other when we’re on vacation. When we’re at home, we have our own corners. We don’t get in each other’s way much. We both have quiet hobbies, which helps. On our vacation to Italy we spent one full day miffed at each other. I think I called him selfish. He was getting on my nerves. Thankfully, the tour guide kept talking!

His name was Fulvio. In situations like these chatterboxes like him are great; they help you not to dwell on things. He showed us the Pompeii ruins, the Lupanar, the Vomitorium, the Amphitheater... and Tomas remained silent through the whole thing. You should've seen his furrowed brow. We followed the group of tourists. But when we stopped to look at the embracing couple caught in flames, he held my hand."

"Did he ever hit you?"

"No."

"Threaten you?"

"No. He's a balanced man, too balanced, some might say. When he gets angry, he gets quiet, sometimes for days, but when you least expect it, he starts talking again, always about trivial things. Small talk. He's not an impulsive man at all. My mother would say he's not a real man. He builds model ships. Did I tell you he just finished Amerigo Vespucci's frigate this week?"

"What did you do this morning after waking up?"

"We sat in the kitchen. I toasted some bread on the stove the way Tomas likes it. We read the newspaper together: Tomas, the headlines and I, the smaller print. I have better eyesight. We had some coffee and listened to the radio for a while, the morning magazine show. Then I began fixing the lentil soup. Tomas did the crossword puzzle. He was ecstatic to have finished it."

"Why such an interest in the news if you were about to die?"

"It's our morning routine: we get up and turn on the radio. We turn it off when we go to bed, after the nightly news."

"Did you turn it off today?"

"I'm not sure."

"If you weren't planning on returning, the normal thing would have been to turn off the radio, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, I might have. In any case, if we hadn't turned on the radio in the morning, I

wouldn't have learned that Igor Cozar received the Euskadi Award. I sent him a message to congratulate him. He helped me a lot with my short stories. Some colleagues are very important to me in my profession."

"We'll verify it. And then?"

"I helped Tomas shower, and while he shaved, I took a bath. He sang while he shaved; I hadn't heard him sing in a long time."

"What did he sing?"

"Is it important?"

"No. Not for now. Why are you trying to conceal this information?"

"It wasn't—how can I put this—a very appropriate song for the occasion. It was a song from Tomas' Catholic school days, a crude song about priests."

"Sing it."

"Do I have to?"

"Sing it, Mrs. Lizarralde."

"Over by the convent a priest took a dump—"

"Ok. Enough."

"I warned you."

"And then?"

"We got dressed in smart clothes. We thought it was the right thing to do. I bought a new pair of shoes for Tomas on Monday. Since his paralysis all he wears are slippers and tennis shoes; he doesn't wear them out because he never moves. But I bought him a black pair. It's strange, but his feet have shrunk. I bought a pair in his old size, but since his paralysis, his feet have gotten smaller by at least two sizes. I had to lace them tightly."

"When did you write the letter to your daughter?"

“Two weeks ago.”

“So she had lunch twice in your house since you wrote the letter?”

“Yes. Last week she came with Maddi, our granddaughter. I revised the letter over these last weeks. It's a fixation of mine; I can never leave a text alone.”

“Do you believe your daughter suspected your intentions?”

“No.”

“And what did you do after getting dressed?”

“I took the garbage out, cleaned the kitchen and left the soup simmering. I forgot all about it after that. I placed the letter on the table, next to some tulips. I had tulips in the house when Ane was born, too. Then we went down to the garage.”

“And how did you do it?”

“First I helped Tomas into the car.”

“On the driver's side?”

“No, the passenger side. Since he doesn't drive, he always sits in the passenger seat. Besides, he wouldn't have been able to step on the accelerator.”

“Why would he need to step on the accelerator? Isn't it enough to put it in neutral?”

“Yes, yes. What I mean is that I always drive. I would never think of making him sit in the driver's seat.”

“Continue.”

“I took a hose, put it inside the exhaust pipe and pushed the other end of it through the back window. I got in the car. Before I started the car, I kissed Tomas and thanked him for everything. He smiled and said, 'Let's go!' He says that whenever we're about to drive somewhere. I started the car, put it in neutral, and held his hand. I felt like I was falling asleep. There was no light at the end of the tunnel or anything like that, just a

sweet, sleepy feeling. And suddenly I thought of the lentil soup.”

“Was Tomas already dead when you got out of the car?”

“I don’t know.”

“You didn’t check?”

“I meant to rush upstairs, turn off the stove and return as quickly as possible.”

“If Tomas had asked for help, would anyone have heard him?”

“I believe so. If he’d honked the horn.”

“How much time elapsed between the time you got out of the car and the time Amalia Ibarzabal came in through the garage?”

“A few minutes, I don’t know. I felt dizzy and had to sit down on the stairs for a moment. Then she came into the kitchen looking terrified. I didn’t even see her until she was right in front of me.”

“Can you prove Tomas wanted to kill himself?”

“I was the one who wrote the letter, but we both signed it. He was short on words.”

“Was he lucid?”

“Completely.”

“Can you prove it?”

“The morning crossword is still in the kitchen. Not just anyone would have been able to finish it; it would’ve been hard for me, too. There’s a month’s worth of newspapers stacked on the chest of drawers in the hallway. He did the crosswords and the Sudoku every day.”

“Hold on. Just a second. Gisasola, any results from the autopsy? Okay. Are Jauregi and Gomez back yet? Okay. Ask them to make sure Tomas Agirreazaldegí’s signature on the letter is really his. Yes, all one word. And have them bring all the newspapers they find in

the house. Very good. Yes. Is Amalia Ibarzabal here? Right now? Fine. Mrs. Lizarralde, we're done for now."

"Can I join Tomas?"

"I told you, he's in the morgue. They'll be done with the autopsy shortly."

"I want to see him."

"An officer will need to accompany you."

"Won't they let me be alone with him?"

"It's procedure. I'm sorry, Mrs. Lizarralde. My condolences."

The writer sips the last of the already lukewarm tea. The subtle lights from Old Town slip in through the window. She takes her reading glasses off and puts on her regular ones. She remains seated, waiting while the computer shuts down completely. She forwards the story to Igor Cozar. She will appreciate his comments; she's not sure about the structure, and the quotation marks in the dialogue bother her, but her editor had advised "something fresh" to balance the general tone of the collection. In the bathroom she takes out her dentures and puts on a hair net. She leaves the chickpeas soaking; tomorrow she'll have lunch with her daughter. She's coming on the morning flight. She rubs some lotion on her face and puts on her nightgown under the dim light of the room. She spreads out on the bed. She sleeps much better now.

Translator Notes

“Su txikian” [“Simmering”] by Uxue Alberdi was published in 2013 as one of the stories in her book *Euli Giro* [A Sense of Chagrin]. As Alberdi states, “The source of inspiration for this story was an article I had read about an eighty-year-old married couple from Pamplona who had been found in their car parked in the garage after having committed suicide. “Simmering” is a response to the shock the news provoked in me [...]. On the one hand, I wanted to hold onto the stereotype of the Basque grandmother. It is not typical to imagine an eighty-year-old Basque woman as a writer or someone engaged in intellectual discourse. Traditionally, our grandmothers have been portrayed as devoted caregivers, and we have emphasized their sweet character. On the other hand, I intended to write in a lively, ironic, and twisted way about an elderly woman who has her own interests and ambitions. It is also a humorous 'defense' of the mediocre housewife. After all, she escapes death because of her poor housewife skills: because she burnt her lentil soup. But at the end of the story, we realize that it all could have been just a scheme to get rid of her husband. There is a great deal of ambiguity in this story and it is within this ambiguity that I imagine a homicidal wife, an ambitious writer, a loving wife, a scatterbrained housewife...”

Additionally, it's important to note that when Mrs. Lizarralde explains her relationship with her neighbor, she mentions that the neighbor's son is in prison in Arles. Arles is the name of a maximum-security prison in the southeast of France, where members of the separatist ETA (Basque Homeland and Freedom) group are often incarcerated. Spain, France, and the United States, among other countries, all list the ETA as a terrorist organization. While a Basque reader makes this connection easily, a reader of the translation might miss this reference.

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