

¿Y AHORA? SO NOW?

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A night of heavy snow storm. Old kitchen of an isolated Basque countryside house. In the middle, a table with a chair. On one side, a hospital bed. On it, a woman in a coma. A middle age man, still looking young, talks on the phone.

GORKA

... will lose you again and I can't hear you. Have dinner and go to bed...

GORKA realizes communication is lost. He dials again.

GORKA

... will lose you again and I can't hear you. Have dinner and go to bed. Listen, if I lose you... If there's a phone in the village, I'll call you before leaving for Vitoria. The woman who takes care of her at night still hasn't arrived, I'm alone. The one who takes care of her during the day left as soon as I got here, she expected it. I can't even see the car anymore. Listen, I can't hear you and...

Battery is over. Useless to try again, he reluctantly puts the phone into his opened bag. Then he sees a phone on little table, in the corner. Goes to it. Dials. It's not working. Tries again... and finally leaves it. He sees then a radio on a microwaves, goes to it. Turns it on and searches for a broadcasting station. Finally one is found.

RADIO

... due to the strong winds in Navarre, a territory which hasn't seen so much snow in twenty years. Gipuzkoa, Bizkaia and, above all, Alava, are majorly affected by the snow falling on Basque Country. You'll have updated information about road conditions at ten o'clock...

CARMEN (*coming in*)

Nekane! My son is waiting for you in...

CARMEN sees GORKA, already iced in front of her. She doesn't react, either. After a tense silence, she calls, by inertia.

CARMEN

Nekane?

GORKA takes his bag and coat, which were on the table, and leaves without looking at her. After a moment of shock, she hears GORKA's car starting. She quickly opens her bag, looks nervously for something. She takes out a paper and runs to the door, as if trying to catch him. But she stops, unable to go on. Slowly, she comes back to the table. Keeps the paper into her bag, takes out her mobile and dials. Her voice sounds tired and sad.

CARMEN

My son... go calmly down to the village. Nekane has already left. The doctor was here. What? No... it's nothing. The hill. The snow... I can't breathe. Drive carefully. Bye, my dear...

CARMEN slightly, always like by inertia, starts preparing a chamomile on the old firewood kitchen. She sees the stove is not hot. She searches for a piece of firewood to throw in, and then sees there is none. At that moment, the door opens. GORKA comes in, mechanically, talking without ever looking at her, the door opened behind him, the cold wind coming in.

GORKA
A phone, please?

CARMEN
Excuse me?

GORKA
A phone. I need someone to come... I can't start my car.

CARMEN GORKA
Come in... Is there...?

CARMEN
Excuse me?

GORKA
Is there a phone in the house?

CARMEN
The house... Yes.

GORKA
It's not working.

CARMEN
The snow. Sometimes... Take a seat.

GORKA
Do you have a shovel?

CARMEN
Sorry?

GORKA
A shovel.

CARMEN
The house is getting cold.

GORKA
Where can I find a shovel?

CARMEN
I will bring some firewood.

GORKA
I need a shovel.

CARMEN
There's one right there.

GORKA
Where?

CARMEN
By the firewood.

GORKA (*going towards the door*)
I'm coming with you.

CARMEN (*suddenly sounding slightly firm*)
There's...

GORKA stops.

CARMEN
... too much snow... It will take time. Stay, please. I'll bring it.

GORKA (*inaudible*)
This can't be happening...

GORKA looks at the kitchen with detail now, in refrained desperation, not able to believe it is happening. After a while, CARMEN enters.

CARMEN
It's impossible... It's all covered.

GORKA
Walking...?

CARMEN
To the village? It's more than four kilometers...

GORKA
You could see the houses. You could see them from here, the houses!

CARMEN
Through the firebreak. But you must know the path, and on a night like this...

GORKA goes to exit, decided.

CARMEN (*really firm*)
You can't walk!

GORKA stops.

CARMEN (*calmer*)

Not even with the all-terrain car have we been able to...

A thunder is heard. GORKA assumes it is not possible.

CARMEN

If you want to make it dry...

CARMEN leaves a towel on the table. GORKA takes his coat off and puts it by the little heater she has pointed out. Reluctantly, he goes to the table, and takes the towel to dry his hair.

GORKA

Are there any houses...?

CARMEN

For me...

Tense pause as GORKA seems bothered by the two of them talking at the same time.

GORKA

Is there another house around here that...?

CARMEN

I'm sorry...

GORKA

What?

CARMEN

You were saying...?

GORKA

What did you just say?

CARMEN

... whether there's any other house here around ...?

GORKA

No, no, no. What did you just say? You are sorry about *what?* (*Sharply*)

CARMEN is not able to answer. He slowly goes towards her. Then he points out the chair by the table.

GORKA

Do you mind?

He sits.

GORKA

I'm sorry, too. More than anyone else.

CARMEN goes slowly to the firewood kitchen on which the infusion was being heated. She pours it and serves a cup to him, leaving it on the edge of the little table. GORKA doesn't understand.

CARMEN

The infusion. It was just warm, but it won't get hotter, without fire.

GORKA seems bothered. CARMEN goes on, as following inertia.

CARMEN

They say you shouldn't have drinks too hot...

GORKA doesn't react.

CARMEN

Take it, it will make you feel better.

GORKA (increasing his rage)

God!... Listen, I don't know whether I will have to stay for the whole night, but it doesn't mean that we have to...

He stops talking, without finishing the sentence. Though sharp, he softens his tone.

GORKA

We don't need to be kind.

CARMEN (quick, reacting)

Nor we do need to be...

She stops. She also softens her tone.

CARMEN

This is as hard for me as it is for you.

GORKA

No...

CARMEN

If you're going to drink that infusion, drink it. If it gets completely cold it won't do you any good.

GORKA doesn't react. She talks with sadness, as for herself.

CARMEN

I wondered more than once what I would say if, one day, in a trial, on the street... I met one of the people to whom my son... I don't know what I...

GORKA (sharp)

I do know what I would say. I try not to pass, any Friday, nearby your demonstrations supporting your heroes, because I do happen to know what I would say! So let's stop talking... This is like passing by the picture of your son, firmly held high... How can you...? Such shamelessness!...

CARMEN

What would you do...?

GORKA

Look... I've already told you that I don't want to speak! Where is the nearest house?

CARMEN

Wouldn't you do the same?

GORKA

Isn't there any house nearby on the way to the village?! When will the machines come?!!!

CARMEN

You're not answering me, are you?...

No answer from GORKA.

CARMEN

Not until tomorrow.

GORKA

There must be something they do when it snows! They surely won't leave us...

A strong thunder, closer than before.

GORKA

I can't believe it...

CARMEN

Lie back if you want and rest. Not until tomorrow will they...

GORKA

I'm not staying until tomorrow!...

Suddenly, noises are heard on the floor above.

CARMEN

The windows...

GORKA

What? Wait!

CARMEN

The shutters are slamming.

GORKA

I'll come with you.

CARMEN looks back at him. He feels uncomfortable as if having gone too far showing his fear and steps back. CARMEN leaves. GORKA tries to see through the dark corridor and to listen what's going on upstairs. Useless. After a while, CARMEN comes back and sees how GORKA notices she's using a handkerchief to cover one of her fingers.

CARMEN
Some glass broke.

GORKA (*coldly professional*)
Let me see.

CARMEN
It's nothing. Can you close the door to the stairs, please? This gets cold really quickly.

He slowly goes to the door and closes it. He comes back, looking at the monitors connected to the girl, then looking at CARMEN, seated by her.

GORKA (*taking a blanket on an old armchair by the phone he tried to use before*)
Is it yours?

CARMEN
No, I have mine here...

GORKA seats on the armchair and covers himself with the blanket. He looks at the infusion. He finally takes the cup. But it is no longer warm

GORKA
Does the microwave work?

CARMEN
Oh, yes. It's true.

GORKA goes to it.

CARMEN
I never... It's not a normal microwave. It's got an oven and... The clock first... And then... I don't know.

GORKA
Mode, power and time. Easier.

CARMEN
Always the easiest, in the end...

GORKA looks sharply at her, like bitten by a snake. She doesn't move. He finishes by bitterly smile.

GORKA
Forced night duty...Are you still bleeding?

CARMEN
No. It's nothing.

Suddenly, lights go off. The electricity generator of the stretcher starts. GORKA goes quickly to check that the monitors are working correctly. CARMEN doesn't react.

GORKA
A fuse blew...

CARMEN
Yes, it might be that.

She goes to the fuses, out of the kitchen. She calls from there.

CARMEN
Can you see enough to come here?

She enters the kitchen. GORKA, on his way to the fuses, steps back to avoid any proximity with her. When she gives her room enough, he goes.

GORKA *(from outside, then he comes in)*
Everything's fine...

CARMEN *(alarmed)*
It's a power outage. If it gets too cold in the house... There is no firewood.

GORKA *(understands her concern about the girl's temperature and goes to the door)*
I'll go to the car.

CARMEN
You can't possibly be leaving now?

GORKA
I've got some thermal blankets for immobilizations.

CARMEN
Take an umbrella!...

He leaves with no answer. CARMEN goes to the girl. After a while, GORKA comes in, quickly, carrying his bag.

GORKA *(in a rush, getting the thermal blanket and covering the girl)*
Help me with it. We've got to place them like this... This side... Let me see... Yes. This side up. This one. Be careful with it.

CARMEN
This side up, yes?

GORKA
Let me see... Yes. Always that one. Place it carefully, together with the sheets.

CARMEN
Yes.

After covering the girl, GORKA checks the monitors again and calms down.

GORKA
Well...

CARMEN
What a coincidence...

GORKA
Her temperature hasn't gone down. She'll be fine now. Isn't there any way to heat some water?

CARMEN
How could we? We are...

GORKA
I don't understand how it can be like this.

GORKA sees a candle. He takes it and checks whether there is any match in the box by it. Then he lights it.

GORKA
Do you have another candle?

CARMEN
This has never happened before. Sorry? Oh, yes, there, in the drawer...

GORKA, puts the candle on the table.

CARMEN
Thank you.

GORKA
Forced night duty...

GORKA goes to the microwaves and takes the cup.

GORKA
I'll drink it, because otherwise...

CARMEN
Did you have some dinner? There is nothing hot, you know that, but...

GORKA
No, thank you...

CARMEN

You surely can't spend the night without...

GORKA

Look! The fact that we're stuck here due to this situation won't us get us further. Both of us know it, don't we? And leave me alone, please. I already did what I could do. It's already too much, to have to spend the night together. For me and for you, too.

CARMEN

I don't know...

GORKA

Well, I do know. I do know!

CARMEN

You know more than I do, then. So perhaps you might give me an answer.

GORKA

An answer to what?

CARMEN

You already know.

GORKA

Well, well, well...

CARMEN

You already know!

GORKA

How easy it is, to talk!

CARMEN

And how difficult it is to understand each other...

GORKA

If there was something which should be understood...

CARMEN

No, of course, there is nothing.

GORKA

No. There is nothing. Nothing!

CARMEN

The easiest. Always the easiest.

GORKA

But how could you know what is it the easiest to me?

CARMEN

And you? How could you know?

GORKA

No; I guess it won't be easy for you, either, of course. Look. Up to that point I understand you. But just up to that point.

CARMEN

And what does it mean, to understand "up to that point"?

GORKA

To understand that there is a huge difference between a cemetery and a prison!

CARMEN

Ah, of course...

GORKA

I wish, yes, I wish those who sleep in the cemetery could sleep in prison... no matter how far it can be!

CARMEN

How easy it is to say big sentences. That's how you poison...

GORKA

To poison? Me?!

CARMEN

No, I wasn't talking about you. It's other people who...

GORKA

Who direct us! I am being manipulated! Used! Brainwashed! I am repeating other peoples' opinion... I'm not capable or adult, I don't have a brain or any judgment... What I might say is worth nothing.

CARMEN

I didn't say that.

GORKA

No...

CARMEN

It would be really precious, to me, what you might say. The light is not back... The peace for a lifetime. As precious as that can be what you might say to me.

GORKA

No, I don't know what you are talking about.

CARMEN

No? You really don't know?

GORKA

I don't think I want to know. I don't want to know.

CARMEN

We can talk.

GORKA

What about? You and me...

After a tense silence, GORKA drinks his infusion. CARMEN goes to him and extends her hand towards him. It takes a while for him to understand she is asking him to give her the empty cup.

GORKA (*giving it to her*)

Thank you.

CARMEN takes the cup to the sink.

GORKA

There is a turning point, after which things can no longer be solved.

GORKA gives her the little dish and the spoon.

GORKA

Take it. Thank you.

CARMEN

You're welcome.

GORKA

Why should I make the smallest effort to cross this barrier between us? Tell me, if you can. What could make me try... whatever it might be with the mother of the man who killed my husband? There is no reason, except... except allowing myself to tell you everything that's inside, which I prefer to hide. I lost everything thanks to you. Thanks to your son. And I go on losing, today... What could make me try to break this barrier between us?

CARMEN

Admitting that, by now, my son is just the alleged killer of your husband...

GORKA

Please...

CARMEN

Even when he was...

GORKA

Your son was condemned!

CARMEN

Yes, that's what I was about to say. He is in prison, yes. Condemned, yes, that's right. Condemned. Precisely. Condemned with no proof. With no proof that could...

GORKA

His statement!

CARMEN

... make sure he was guilty. Yes, he testified. It's true. But you know how they can oblige a boy.

GORKA (*abruptly standing up*)

A boy!

CARMEN

A boy, yes! My son! That is why I need to talk to you. And you need to talk too.

GORKA

Me...

GORKA calms down. He looks at the woman, seated by the girl on the stretcher.

GORKA

What's your relationship with the girl? Is she a relative or...?

CARMEN

No... no.

GORKA

How long...?

CARMEN

I take care of her at night. Her brother lives in the village and he or his wife come to visit. They didn't want to have her in Vitoria. They wanted her here, close to them, in the family's house.

GORKA

And who allowed this? Doesn't she have any other relatives?

CARMEN

No, no one else.

GORKA

I mean... It's not only the girl. It's you. Nights and...

CARMEN

I don't sleep much. I sleep the same here or home. It's good for me... it's good for me. Mikel is not a murderer.

GORKA
What? But what are we talking about?

CARMEN
My son...

GORKA
Shut up, please.

CARMEN
Is it so difficult for you to...?

GORKA
I told you to shut up!

CARMEN
Can't you listen to me...

GORKA
What do you want from me?

CARMEN
... and then, if I'm not right...?

GORKA
Enough! Enough!

CARMEN
Let me explain to you...

GORKA
Explain to me what? What do you have to explain? And to whom? Let your son explain to whoever he has to. What are you going to...? Enough, it's more than enough. I don't even want... Why didn't I leave? If I must spend the rest of the night outside, I will. I promise you I will sleep in the car, even when they might find me frozen to death in the morning. I... I don't know whether I should take two...

GORKA goes to the sink, takes a glass of water and takes a pill.

GORKA
How could you get to the house, if the road was so bad?

CARMEN
I had to come.

GORKA
Me too, I had to leave.

CARMEN

My youngest son brought me, with the all-terrain car, as close as he could. I walked the rest.

GORKA

Why didn't I leave while I could?... Aren't you afraid, here, in the night, alone?

CARMEN

I'm not alone.

GORKA looks up, towards the ceiling, fearing there might be someone else upstairs. Then he realizes CARMEN means she is not alone because of the girl in a coma.

CARMEN

She doesn't hear us. I don't think she does. Do you think they can hear us? Hear what we say?

GORKA

No one knows. I couldn't... What is there on the upper floor?

CARMEN

In the winter it's closed. Why do you say you couldn't...? Rooms, and the attic. But it's really cold, now, up there. It's not conditioned like this.

GORKA

I couldn't sleep with these noises... I...

CARMEN

It's an old house.

GORKA takes one more pill. He notices CARMEN look at him and feels uncomfortable.

GORKA

To control the anxiety. Don't you feel guilty. Because of your son, I mean.

CARMEN

Guilty because of my son... Are you sure that he's guilty?

GORKA

I took them before it happened...(then, as if unable to believe what he just heard) Did you ask me whether I am certain that he is guilty?

CARMEN

Yes. Are you sure?

GORKA

I don't understand why I go on talking. This is a nightmare. You are able to stand in front of me and ask me... This is incredible.

CARMEN

You talk to me because you are not convinced that my son's trial was fair...

GORKA

It was fair!

CARMEN... The trial to decide about your husband's death.

GORKA

No "death"! Murder! It was a fair trial.

CARMEN

You're not sure whether the verdict was based on the truth or whether an innocent man was condemned.

GORKA

Innocent! Not at all, madam! Not at all! Equipment, phones, lists... It might not have been him; but he isn't innocent.

CARMEN

It might not have been him?

GORKA

I mean that perhaps even if there was no proof, he confessed, which is enough! But many other things were found too. No way he could be innocent.

CARMEN

You don't know that.

GORKA

I told you that his confession is enough to me! And the judge thinks so too.

CARMEN

You don't know that. No matter what they found, or what they said. You don't know it.

GORKA

We all lie! Except for you, we all lie!

CARMEN

A bad person is not loved by everybody the way my son was. The way my son IS loved. In the village, in Vitoria, everywhere... In my whole life I haven't ever heard anyone, not even one single person, talking badly about him, nor have I seen anyone pleased about what happened to him.

GORKA

About "what happened to him"? About what he DID!!!

CARMEN

No one will ever tell you that Mikel could possibly hit anyone. On the contrary. He always was... I mean, he IS ready to help, always keen, happy... Everyone here loves him.

GORKA

Take the girl's temperature, please.

CARMEN

There wasn't a single piece of evidence against him.

GORKA

Take the girl's temperature!!! I'll do it myself...

CARMEN

Related to your husband's death, I mean.

GORKA

Don't say "death". Murder! It was a murder! He confessed!

CARMEN

They tortured him!

GORKA

My God...

CARMEN

They tortured him!!!!!!

Great silence. GORKA seems demolished, by the stretcher, showing CARMEN his back. CARMEN painfully calms down and goes on.

CARMEN

And you know that. There wasn't any proof and you know that, too. What proof did they find against him? Related to your husband death...

GORKA *(hardly able to speak)*

Murder!

CARMEN

A confession under torture...

GORKA

A confession.

CARMEN

... and a phone call.

GORKA

A phone call.

CARMEN

A phone call, yes. That was it. A phone call...

GORKA

A phone call. Do you want to know something about that call? About the call that reported the boy everybody loved to the police? I'll tell you something you don't know. The judge didn't want to make it public, he didn't want to lose a future lead ... I guess it doesn't matter anymore. I don't even trust that they keep on investigating... That call was made from his own circle. They denounced him. He was denounced by someone who really knew a lot, someone who must be close to him. Really close to him. So you see how much your son was loved. You see how much he is loved.

CARMEN

He is.

GORKA (*ironically*)

I don't doubt it.

CARMEN

You don't know how much.

GORKA

No...

CARMEN

You can't know it, but it's so.

GORKA

All I know is that, thanks to... Justice exists.

CARMEN

Do you have any idea about who made that call?

GORKA

No, I don't.

CARMEN

Didn't they ever say it?

GORKA

Do you really think I would tell you if I knew? Do you really think so? What a weird way to thank the person who helped punish my husband's killer.

CARMEN

The person who reported the alleged killer of your husband, who was judged guilty without proof or ...

GORKA

And who was really beloved in his circle...

CARMEN

Really beloved, yes.

GORKA

Don't say any more nonsense! He wasn't loved so much by the person who reported him to the police. Unless you think we can love the one we turn in to the police. You see. Justice exists even in your circle. And it's the only support left for us.

CARMEN

Do you want to know something else? Because I know the truth.

GORKA

What truth? You would dare to say your son is innocent? Is that your truth? Because...

CARMEN

No. The truth.

GORKA

... I'm not at all interested.

CARMEN

A terrible truth.

GORKA

What really is much more terrible is...

CARMEN

I know something about that call.

GORKA

Tell the police about it, then, and leave me alone! I don't know what you want, what you want from me, what you want me to say?!!!

CARMEN (*humbly*)

My son is imprisoned, one thousand kilometers from here.

GORKA

I could say that my husband is much further, but you would call that an easy sentence, empty words. Even if it's true. And he didn't do anything to deserve it.

CARMEN

My son...

GORKA

Your son did. He did something to deserve being where he is.

CARMEN

Listen to me, please.

GORKA

"Listen to me, please"...

CARMEN

Listen to me. My son still has to face many years in prison. Many. I won't see him free again.

GORKA

Don't you worry. You will have him home quite soon. Sentences are cut short so often...

CARMEN

I will never have the joy of... I can't travel. It's really hard for me, at my age. And you don't know what...

GORKA

How can you possibly...?

CARMEN

... it means for a mother... I will not ask you for anything for him.

GORKA

How can you possibly say that I don't know...?

CARMEN

I'm going to ask you for... I need your help.

GORKA

You are asking me for what?

CARMEN

I'm asking for your help.

GORKA

My help?

CARMEN

Mikel has not been brought up in hatred. He's not a murderer.

GORKA

Do I have to remind you...?

CARMEN

He might have been under bad influences... he might have been brought into something, without knowing it. He never upset us when he was at home. His father and I came here when we were very young, to earn our daily bread. We searched a land of water, not a land of blood. We brought up our sons to love this land, and we taught them how to love the land of their grandparents. Their father never allowed them to misbehave, to insult, to hate...

GORKA

I didn't say parents are the ones to blame.

CARMEN

Boys aren't, either.

GORKA

Oh, no. I will not go into that.

CARMEN

Something falls through. Believe me. That's how it is. Something... influences them, blinds them... Something.

GORKA

Themselves. They are the responsible ones. Like you, like me, like everybody who has to carry the weight of their decisions on their shoulders.

CARMEN

Those decisions are not free.

GORKA

Totally free. And they must pay for them!!!

CARMEN

And me?!!! What should I pay for?!

GORKA has been touched. No way he can answer to the woman's question. CARMEN goes on, painfully.

CARMEN

I am not paying for any decision of mine, am I? And I keep on paying everyday with my own life. I only find some consolation in the thought that his father didn't live long enough to see this all, because... Oh, mother... I'm alone, and I can't go on... I know you've got a son. Can you imagine what it's like, waking up every morning, knowing that you will never see your son free again? Seeing the time pass by and...? Sometimes I think that I wish... Help me, please.

GORKA (*demolished*)

How can I help you?

CARMEN

Help me bring him here.

GORKA

What?

CARMEN

Bring him here. Closer to me.

GORKA

Never, even if I could...

CARMEN

You can. Your word would be worth more than a thousand signatures.

GORKA

Do you realize what you are telling me?

CARMEN

I understand that, for you, this is...

GORKA

Nevermind that! Do you think that, just because I might... *(makes a vague gesture of signing)?*

CARMEN

I know what I'm talking about.

GORKA

And do you think you can ask me for that? Do you think I can be obliged this way?

CARMEN

Obliged?

GORKA

Yes, obliged! When we ask for something that's fair... When, taking into account only what suits us, we ask for something fair, something moral, something noble... there is no difference between asking for it and demanding it, is there? Because one must always forgive. We must forgive. I must forgive. Forgive you. Forgive you for daring. And forgive your son for...

CARMEN

I'm not demanding anything of you. I beseech you...

GORKA

Very moral. A very moral attitude. Really. So is your church and your shepherds, and so are their sermons. But it's always the same lambs that are sacrificed! And it's always the same parishioners who must forgive!!!

CARMEN

I'm sorry.

GORKA

I could never help you bring your son closer. It would mean I forgive them. It would mean I forgive him. And that can't happen. It can't. Let your prudish parishioners forgive, when the same is done to them.

GORKA realizes he's gone too far hurting the woman. He goes to the sink, ashamed and fills a glass of water.

GORKA

Some water? I am a tough nut to crack. Hard. That's what they say, isn't it? Tough, hard, resentful... I wish I could... (he drinks)

CARMEN

That glass is broken. The rim... take another one.

GORKA

Some years before Alejandro was killed, I had to undergo surgery. I have never been afraid of the operating room, but I don't know... I started feeling an irrational fear I couldn't control. It overcame me. But I didn't let anyone see it, to prevent them from suffering.

The light comes back.

GORKA

The light!

The light goes off again.

GORKA

... It'll be back. The day I had to be operated, my family was there, one of the very rare occasions, all together with Alejandro. The moment to take me to the operating room came. I said goodbye, showed no fear or emotion. Seemingly brave, while I could feel my body paralyzed with dread. Alejandro walked next to the stretcher to the door of the room, and said goodbye there. But I didn't look back, not even the smallest glance, while he could see me. The corridor turned, and the color of the walls suddenly changed, I clearly remember that. And then, at that point, I couldn't resist it anymore and started to cry, out of my mind, because in my irrationality I thought I could die without saying all I should have said before leaving the room. I hadn't told my parents and Alejandro that I loved them... What little value my life had in that moment! What really tortured me was not dying, but the idea of doing it without saying good-bye, without saying all I had to say to those I loved. How important the time suddenly became for me, on that stretcher. One moment to express all I had to express before leaving... My husband was robbed of his time. He was robbed of that opportunity forever. He couldn't talk, he will never be able to talk again. That's why I cannot forgive. Because I can't forgive on his behalf. I don't have the right to do it, even when they insist I must do it, double torment... Who can forgive on behalf of one who has been robbed of not just the opportunity to talk but of life itself? Who assumes that forgiveness, so easy to give when you aren't the murdered victim, and when everyone around puts pressure on you, demanding you to make a gesture of generosity "for the coexistence" or "for peace" or for whatever it might be... I make myself not forgive. I oblige myself, listen to me, even when my personal feeling might be different, even when forgiving would surely be the easiest thing to do. I oblige myself not to do it. And I repeat it to myself, constantly, to help not forget. If I forgave, I would end up forgetting. And I don't want to forget. How ignoble! Isn't it? What a role I was assigned. Even if there might be a reasonable doubt - and in this case there isn't any - about your son's guilt, I would never speak in his favor.

CARMEN

I'm not asking you to talk in his favor.

GORKA

I wouldn't talk in favor of any of them, not even if they weren't my husband's killers. It would be like forgiving them. You don't need to say anything. I can hear myself, too. And this isn't what I... Anyway. I won't be able to sleep...

CARMEN (*offering him her own blanket*)

If you want...

GORKA

No, thank you. Everyday I think of what my son could become in life. If one day I was told that he's a terrorist, if I was told that he is so dead, himself, to be able to kill other people, I couldn't look into his eyes.

CARMEN

I assure you that you could.

GORKA

I don't blame you for what your son did. But I do for supporting him now.

CARMEN

And does it surprise you? Do you find it surprising that a mother...?

GORKA

... the mother of the man who killed my husband goes out every Friday, holding a picture of her son, asking for privileges for him? Yes, I find it really surprising. And I want it to surprise me. I don't want to get used to...

CARMEN

Privileges? What privileges? My God, how they poison you...

GORKA

Oh, yes, it's true. They poison us. They poison us.

CARMEN

Or it's you who poisons the others.

GORKA

We poison, yes...

CARMEN

I'm not asking for any privilege for my son. I'm not asking you for anything for him. Me, I'm asking you for something. Here or there, nothing will change for my son while in prison. It's for me that I'm asking. Because I'm losing my life in other people's battle.

GORKA (*touched, sincere, with a certain kindness*)

I understand you. Even when it might seem I don't... I understand. That's just why I don't want to listen to you. I don't want to understand you. I prefer to continue looking at you as a stranger.

CARMEN

But tonight we are, both of us, here. And you, too, have got a son.

GORKA

We've already talked enough.

CARMEN

And I understand you.

GORKA

No, you don't understand me! Because if you did, you'd change your mind! You prefer "humanity" to "justice" because humanity is much easier. But sometimes the most difficult path must be chosen. It's a radical duty. You've got yours, which is defending you son...

CARMEN

Taking care of him!

GORKA

Defending him!

CARMEN

No, I don't defend him.

GORKA

... And I've got mine, which is the one you know. And both of us have been assigned our duties thanks to the acts of others. I don't even know why I'm talking to you...

CARMEN

You talk to me because, deep down, you're not sure. Neither you nor any of those who took part in an unfair trial.

GORKA

Which reached a truthful conclusion.

CARMEN

Which reached some type of conclusion. A useful conclusion, perhaps. But not a truthful one...

GORKA

This discussion is pointless...

CARMEN

I did accept that name for my son... terrorist... a name I wouldn't want to repeat. Nothing strange happened. I didn't see anything, but I don't know why. I had a feeling

that he might... perhaps kind of a certainty... I thought it could be possible. Possible. And not long after that... Oh, I spent so many afternoons, home, passing by the door of his room, not daring to go in... I don't know what I was saying...

GORKA

You said that after your suspicions, you spent many afternoons...

CARMEN

Not long after that... No, that's not what I wanted to say.

GORKA

You said that you spent many afternoons home, not daring to go into your son's room...

CARMEN

No, I never went in... But that's not what... Yes, I remember. After my suspicion started, everything happened very fast. The police invading my house, their vans surrounding it, my son leaving with his face covered, the shouting on the street... How could I? In an act of pure survival, I assumed my son was guilty before anyone did. Because if I had thought, just for a brief moment, that my son was being arrested to pay with his life and with the life of all of us for something he hadn't done... If I had thought so, I would have gone crazy... So I decided to accept... his own mother... But I also kept on loving him, all the same. Is it too hard for you? Put the sign of "guilty" on your son. I couldn't do anything but stay by mine. That was my duty. And that was, also, what my heart... We know, although I would have preferred to ignore it, how my son's confession was obtained. The trial...

GORKA

The trial was fair.

CARMEN

The trial wasn't fair, nothing was fair from the very moment he was arrested.

GORKA

The conclusions of...

CARMEN

Yes, the conclusions of that trial were reasonable. And useful, I already told you. But, ethically, you've got doubts. Real doubts. You seriously doubt that the one who is paying with his life in prison is the real murderer of your husband.

GORKA

I don't have any doubt.

CARMEN

You do. Just like I didn't want to have any doubts, you have them. And the satisfaction I guess you felt because someone were condemned and paid for...

GORKA

Not just "someone"! My husband's murderer!

CARMEN

You can't leave your doubts behind, that painful margin of doubt...

GORKA

They found documents, agendas, all kinds of...

CARMEN

Nothing that could prove my son's involvement in your husband's death.

GORKA

He confessed!

CARMEN

Under torture!

GORKA

Enough!!!... Enough...

CARMEN

You don't want to hear it. I understand you. Neither do I, believe me. Neither do I. The doubt is unbearable. That's why, so cowardly, I assumed my son was guilty. Right or wrong, before anyone did, I condemned him. Because it was the easiest.

GORKA

His involvement was clear.

CARMEN

I'm not discussing his guilt, believe me. I suppose it's better like this. For you and... for both of us. I only ask you for one thing.

GORKA

Which I can't give you. It wouldn't even be useful or...

CARMEN

And I can offer you something in exchange. But I would ask you for it even if I didn't have anything to give you in exchange. But I happen to have it, and I'm offering it to you. It's not a payment or... Please, help me. And I'll tell you what I know, so that you know the truth and can rest.

GORKA

What do you know? Really, I'd rather... Let's leave it, please.

CARMEN

Did you really find peace thanks to a confession under torture?

GORKA

I found peace thanks to a very fair judgment, based on a confession that provided the necessary proof.

CARMEN
Like the gun?!

Silence. GORKA cannot answer, immobile, powerless.

CARMEN
The gun that was never found, even when the person who phoned said it was in my son's room? Thanks to that gun, my son faced interrogations and suffering for days, just because he couldn't say anything about it. He confessed in the end, yes, and he said whatever they wanted him to say, under such pressures... But the gun wasn't there. There was no proof. Just a confession. That seems to be enough for Justice, when it's convenient. Who made that call? What did that person say? Do you know it?

GORKA
No, madam. But I know that that person denounced the murderer. And, for years, every morning I have thanked that person for doing it.

CARMEN
A confession is worthy of nothing, when it's obtained that way. I can't even imagine how they treated him. How they hit him. They asphyxiate them, they... Can you sleep in calm, doubting...?

GORKA
No, I can't sleep! I haven't been able to sleep in calm since then. But not because of any doubt about your son's guilt. And I don't need to know anything else now. I don't want to go back there. I don't want to know whether your son left your house earlier or later than usual that day, whether you heard him talking or whether you saw... I don't care. You already said enough. If you had the smallest proof of his innocence, you would have gone to present them right away. If you didn't...

CARMEN
I don't have any proof. I've got my word.

GORKA
If he were guilty, would you tell me?

CARMEN
Nothing I can say could possibly help or harm my son. He is already serving the maximum sentence. But you, I can...

GORKA
Me? You can't do anything for me. You're not going to tell me your son's innocent. Do you really think I'll play that game with you? If you knew that much, why didn't you tell the police while you could? What you can say might not help or hurt your son, but hiding information from the police is a crime, madam. You know who... you know... and you have kept it for yourself until now? This... this blackmail is... I can't stay any longer. This is the dirtiest thing I've ever... And I have to talk about this with a stranger who is heartlessly blackmailing me.

CARMEN

I told you this is not about a price.

GORKA

If it's not about a price, say what you know. Say it! No, you better shut up!

CARMEN

I'm begging for your help.

GORKA

For a murderer.

CARMEN

No. For me. For a mother, like you.

GORKA

A mother! Go and tell such a thing to my husband's mother!!! Go and tell that woman, who has never got back on her feet, that a mother like her asks her... asks her for the compassion no one had towards her son!!!!!! Tell her all you told me, and ask her whether she has also paid with her life, and whether she agrees...

He suddenly stops, realizing that he is not only shouting but showing himself almost physically aggressive. He abruptly goes to the stretcher and tries to hide his face from the woman, trying to control and calm down his breathing. Then pays some attention, by inertia and still out of his mind, to the monitors. CARMEN slowly goes to the chair on which she had left her bag. She opens it and takes the paper again. She looks at the doctor extending her hand towards him. It takes a while for him to see her. When he does, he doesn't understand. She extends her arm more towards him, offering him the paper. Finally, he reluctantly goes to her and, after a moment of tense doubt, he takes it, deeply disturbed. He unfolds it and reads it. Suddenly, he abruptly gives it back, almost with despise, to CARMEN, without even looking at her.

CARMEN (*humbly taking the paper back*)

Please...

GORKA

I will do nothing with that paper.

CARMEN

I wish I could...

GORKA

You can't do anything and neither can anyone else. Everything is already done. It was done eleven years ago. Your son did it. I feel sorry for you. Really.

CARMEN

I need to see my son!

GORKA

And I need to see my husband!!! And nothing will bring him back to me.

CARMEN

And is there anything I could do?

GORKA

To have sense of decency, and to respect the law.

CARMEN

That law says my son should be serving his sentence near his house!

GORKA

I can't. For Alejandro. I can't.

CARMEN

Would he like this punishment for a woman whose heart was broken when she found out that her son...?

GORKA

I could sign totally calm, knowing it would be useless. One or the other wouldn't do anything, supposing that my signature -which I doubt- would be taken into account. Bringing your son closer would be like... like politics.

CARMEN

Fulfilling the law is practicing politics?

GORKA

Nothing escapes. We got what we wanted.

An electronic device sounds. GORKA, assuming it is an indicator of the girl's state, goes to the stretcher and checks the monitors, without finding anything. CARMEN goes to her bag, opens it and takes her mobile. She disconnects the alarm.

CARMEN

It's time, already... It was off... Now I understand how her brother didn't call to ask me about her, with this snow. I didn't even remember I had turned it off.

GORKA

You had a telephone...

CARMEN

Sorry?

GORKA

I asked you whether you had a telephone. And you told me there wasn't one.

CARMEN

What?

GORKA, like waking up from a nightmare, runs to the door, opens it and desperately shouts.

GORKA

Help! Help! Can anybody hear me! Help! Let go of me!

CARMEN goes to the door and catches him, trying to make him stop.

CARMEN

Don't shout! Don't shout!

GORKA

Leave me alone!!!

With an impulse, GORKA pushes the woman against the table. She stays there. He slowly closes the door and comes in, in refrained rage, smiling, cynical.

GORKA

I found it strange, that you could carry that paper on you, so... ready just in time...

CARMEN

I always carry it on... I always collect signatures.

GORKA

Yes. And it's always a new one, a new paper with no signature on it, yet... Everything has been prepared... That woman left so quickly, leaving me alone before you arrived...

CARMEN

Nekane?

GORKA

And in the hospital, the fact that they assigned me this substitution today, suddenly, in this site, this very house, just today, knowing what the state of the roads would be like with the snow...

CARMEN

Can you possibly be thinking...?

GORKA

Everything has been prepared. The precipice, the firebreak... Intimidating... Intimidating me. Or would you really feel guilty in case something happened to me?

CARMEN

I will tell you what feeling guilty is. Turing in your own son is feeling guilty. Other mothers find out what their sons are the very day they are arrested. In my case... I already told you I suspected as much before the arrest. And I have another son, do you know? I have another son, much younger, who was a child at the time. And I felt afraid for him, and for the life of Mikel, who I turned in myself. And for the life of those people that he... I don't know whether I made any decision because I didn't even think of it- to call the police. And -- shame on me! I denounced and turned in my own son, to prevent him from... to protect him, to protect both of my sons. I made that call to the police, do you know? I turned in my own son. To prevent him from going any deeper into it, thinking that what he might have done until that moment wasn't too big, given

he was still a child. But then, he confessed to something else! And he confessed things that aren't... You don't know what it's like to see your son, the son you have wanted to protect, leaving home, tied up... You can't imagine what it's like to see him, the first day you're allowed to visit him, with his face still swollen, bloody, black eyes, his lip sliced...

GORKA

I saw my husband dead.

CARMEN

And do you think that justifies...?

GORKA

How can you possibly ask me that?

CARMEN

I made that call to the police, without identifying myself. No one knew it. My son doesn't know that the person who turned him in is his own mother... only you know it. No one else, in all these years, has ever known. But since that policeman answered me on the phone, I live with that anguish of having betrayed my son. I wanted to do what I thought would be best for him and... the night they came to arrest him... And you say there is no torture!

GORKA is silent. She goes on talking.

CARMEN

I remember once... he was twelve or thirteen years old... it was summertime, I remember... he arrived home running, breathless, crying, calling me from the path "Mom! Mom!"... I was scared hearing his voice, I didn't even have the time to wash my hands. Before I could go to the door, he entered the house, the poor thing: "Mom, help me, help me!"... He came distorted, showing me something he carried in his hands. A bird. He brought a bird in his hands, a little country bird... He brought it in a handkerchief. And he gave that little bird to me, with despair I had never seen in him before. "Mom, help me!"... That little bird didn't move, dying. "It's going to die, mom, it's going to die! Help me!". The poor animal had both legs broken, like two cut canes. Some children had taken the nest, they broke both legs of the mother, and put the baby into a cage. My child, watching that, took the poor animal and ran to bring it to me. Running, from the other side of the village, the poor thing, so that I could save it... I realized then that your son always sees in you... And the night they arrested him I couldn't help thinking of that day. I couldn't help thinking of my son giving me that little bird, blindly trusting his mother. And I had denounced him, with that call... I trusted the Justice that no one respects, and my son is now in prison, hundreds of kilometers away... Silly me! I would never have acted that way, once I saw how the law is twisted. You see, my story isn't what would be expected, either. Is it?

GORKA

You should talk to the police and tell them you're the person who...

CARMEN

... denounced my son? To lose him forever?

GORKA

To get your secrecy guaranteed and your confession taken into account, so that...

CARMEN

... so that I win a privilege for betraying my son? No... I want them to bring him here because that's the law. That is my fight for my son, and for me. I asked you, before, what would you do in my place, as a mother of a son who is in prison hundreds of kilometers away. Now I ask you what you would have done that day, when I had to choose between picking up the phone or not, between speaking when they answered on the other side or hanging up on them, between reporting my own son or... And you talk to me about duty! I ask you what you would have done when facing that duty. I wanted to act for the good of everyone. And I will die with this grief and this guilt. Would you have done so much? Now I'm only asking you to sign, so that they bring him closer.

GORKA

I can't do anything about it, I told you. Even when I wanted to, my signature isn't worth anything... Don't you understand it?

CARMEN

Would you understand that a mother, even when hope is over, won't stop searching for the smallest possibility to help her son? Would you stop trying? At what point, when would you surrender, leaving your son to his fate? When?

GORKA

All this was prepared, wasn't it? I'm sure.

CARMEN

Would it be wrong?... Do you really think I knew you were coming to this house tonight?

GORKA

Yes.

CARMEN

You think I knew you were the substitute for tonight...

GORKA

I have my suspicions.

CARMEN

You think anyone could possibly know that it would snow this way and...?

GORKA

I don't care... I don't care.

GORKA goes to the armchair, takes the blanket and covers himself totally, even his face, in order to sleep. CARMEN takes her blanket, too, and falls asleep on her chair. The night goes by. The light comes back. Voices and a snowplow are heard outside.

MAN (*outside*)

“It cannot be removed”? What do you mean, “it cannot be removed?”. C’mon! Stronger! Stronger! Go, go, go! OK. Ready!

The snowplow leaves. GORKA wakes up, bothered. He notices the light is back and the daylight comes through the window. He turns off the little lamp by the phone and blows out the candle. He carefully goes to see the girl, checks the monitors, then, without a noise, he goes to his bag, opens it, always checking CARMEN is not woken up by his movements, and takes a packet he heats in the microwaves. While it is heated, he goes to see the girl again. The microwaves alarm sounds. He quickly opens it with great care, not wanting to wake CARMEN up. He takes the little packet in his hands and goes back towards the stretcher. CARMEN has woken up and dully greets him “good morning”.

CARMEN

Egun on.

GORKA (*also dully*)

Egun on. Please, don’t you wake up because of me.

CARMEN

No...

GORKA (*putting the packet on the girls’ feet, under the thermal blanket*)

Just a little heat for her feet. Leave it there until it gets cold and then keep it. It can be used again.

CARMEN (*standing up while folding her blanket*)

Yes... What do you want? Coffee, milk...?

GORKA

I’m not used to having breakfast so early...

CARMEN

Yes... It cleared up at last...

GORKA

Yes. They took away the...

CARMEN

Yes, I heard. I’m not used to it, either, but a coffee...

GORKA

No, thanks.

GORKA ties the belt of his coat, takes his bag and starts exiting. CARMEN quickly takes the paper out of her pocket and slightly, humbly extends it towards him, begging with refrained pain. GORKA sees it. He seems, also, in refrained pain and compassion.

GORKA (*always dully, like her*)

You prepared this encounter with me, didn’t you?

CARMEN

Would it matter what I said? Would it be so important, if I had done it to get us to understand each other?

GORKA

The gun...? It was in your son's room, wasn't it?

CARMEN says nothing. She looks down, unable to deny, unable to avoid tears that she tries to conceal. GORKA slightly smiles, in great pain, but in certain peace. He compassionately but yet relieved goes to the door and opens it. He breathes the pristine cold air of the early morning while light comes into the kitchen through the opened door. He inhales and leaves, softly closing the door behind him. CARMEN stays, immobile. She hears the car starting, then leaving. The car is heard departing. Slowly, CARMEN goes back to the girl, then she pours some remaining infusion in her cup. She sits at table in complete silence. A new day starts. Light slowly fades out.

THE END