

Newcomers Scene

The roar of a huge and incredibly strident engine was heard across the valley. It was nothing similar to the noises all were used to hear, except everybody knew a big vehicle was coming.

It was one of those dry and hot months so typical of the area in which the town was. The place was as quiet as it could possibly be. Not even birds were visiting on those days, if anything; there would be some notorious activity on evenings, when the wind would suddenly appear to please our desire for lower temperatures. The chirping of insects at night was also diminished: either there were less critters, or the same number of them suffered the same way all did, and they did not want to waste any energy knowing they would be thirsty too, if there is such a need for an grasshopper or frog.

Everybody stopped doing whatever they were doing once it came in sight ahead and below the dust cloud on top of it, as the noise increased. A big bluish truck with more tires than what all knew could possibly exist appeared, as if it wasn't enough there was an extra-long cart being pulled by the same long truck. Looked as if a mini-train was coming. Logs, wood and plastic panels, big boxes, bricks, long and thin iron bars, cables, small wooden boxes, and plenty of other materials were transported to an empty lot only a block away from the Peres family house. Everybody –mainly the driver, apparently- were happy when the thing finally came to a complete stop and the engine was shut off. Suddenly, a short silence was welcome again, only to be interrupted by the yelling of two men that came on the cabin with the driver. At first people thought they were losing their mind not understanding a single word the strangers were shouting to each other. They also yelled something that should have been a greeting to everybody; for

they did it four times each, looking in every direction where people were coming, amazed at such a sight. It was likely they became deaf with so much noise on such a long trip. Nobody knew for how long they'd had rode in there, but even if they came from the closest big city, it was certainly a long journey. It was somehow obvious that they came from yonder.

All started making sense when the driver, somebody who apparently was not a real driver, slowly approached mom on numb and stiff legs. The look in his eyes along with a few reassuring words from mom made all realize he needed help more than representing any kind of threat to anybody. He introduced himself and explained that the guy in the red shirt -Phil- came from a different country; the other guy was here to help him build a house in the empty lot Phil had purchased a few months ago. The plan was to erect the house in a couple of months and then bring the family in to complete the move and inhabit it.

“¿In this weather?” Asked mom.

“Well... yes.” Said Marcelo, and added more before gratefully and shyly taking the tray with a pint of lemonade and already filled glasses mom was holding for them: “Apparently they were in a rush to move,” he took a sip, “although Phil was not clear to me whether it was because of the school year for his kids or anything related to work.” Another couple of gulps and a pause. “I think this is the real matter. He’s a little bit weird and the fact that he still does not talk fluently makes things complicated. I’m helping because I understand the language a little bit, so I’m the translator turned assistant... and driver. Thanks.”

So most went back to their favourite and shadowy places or anywhere under a shadow, watching the unloading, listening to the shouts and noises they were making; and watching the multitude grow as kids and grown-ups from every part of town came to watch the free spectacle.

Among the boys that came running and crashing was Jaime of course. Jaime did not have any problems establishing a conversation with Phil and asking all kind of questions mainly to him, but also trying a few broken sentences and strange sounding words to the other sweaty newcomer. Jaime had that amazing capability of trying anything and everything: nobody else would dare to venture into a language you only meagrely acquire in school and through movies, magazines and books. So Jaime was the central point for the amazed crowd that was then listening to his translation and explanations as to why so much and strange material, where they came from, how long would it be for the rest of the family to arrive and so on.

It was not long before the men realized the futility of their impetus. Shirts were drenched and long streaks of dirt and sweat on their faces showed behind a mixed surprise and regret for trying to unload so much material in not even an hour. Mom was coming again with more lemonade, the glasses contained more ice than before, and Jaime was finally convincing them to rest and continue in the evening, when the wind would be an ally.

They, reluctantly at first, quickly agreed. Only Marcelo was not happy about it: he wanted to return with the truck as soon as he could, explaining that the rest of the stuff would take another week or so to be transported; and that every hour late could make things worse in terms of time and price.

So all the clattering, huffing and yelling stopped, turning instead into more social, geographical, weatherly and non-transcendental conversation. People learnt that day that in some languages *Jaime* is the way people call drivers, and that *Phil* meant love, according to him. People also understood that his two boys and wife were coming “soon”. Which was a mixed blessing for the

Kundust boys: always wanting to learn and play new games but also in need of more female faces around. However, women were beaming with the news, hopping the kids were as handsome as their dad. What they did not know at that time due to problems in the interpretation was that the boys had just left the toddler years.

There was lots of chatting but most of the meat of the conversation was lost in translation; between Marcelo's struggles to translate as good as possible, Jaime's pauses and repetitions when asking something; Phil's limited lexicon and the mental tiredness of the three after an hour or so, all settled calmly, happy to be around newcomers. The third guy introduced himself when Jaime did, but the general impression was that nobody really understood his real name; and although Phil would try to introduce him to the conversation calling him by his name; the appellative sounded so weird that nobody referred to him directly. Besides, he seemed to be content with listening only, answering in monosyllables or grunts, and only smiling each time Jaime and Marcelo said anything using his language.

By then there was plenty of food around brought by the neighbouring kid's moms. Jaime had the grandiose idea of referring to the other man as Big Guy, which seemed to please him. So at that moment he learnt that all would be calling him "Big" from then on. Some of Phil's answers and explanations were vague: Marcelo had a real hard time translating because he sincerely felt lost after long, low and rapidly fired sentences by Phil. It gave the impression that Phil was hiding something, but his sincere smiles and sparkling eyes sent mixed messages.

Time had flown when suddenly all realized it was already evening, because the men of town were coming back –or out- as they finished their labours; some had already heard about the commotion and others were gathering the news while having dinner, directly heard from their

wives and kids. With them came the wind too, most kids were sent home or simply away because the newcomers would have to repeat to the adults much of what they had told before; Marcelo would have to explain and translate again, and surely the conversation would be more serious and mature than the previous one.

Logs, tools, gloves, ropes and many more items were carried by some of the men. They were ready to help and some offered not only a sincere handshake, but also cheap alcohol; as well as plenty of information about the weather and advice on how to proceed with the construction. Some managed to brokenly and awkwardly speak directly to Phil and Big in their language; which was a nice surprise for the rest of Kundust. Some others offered a place for the night for the first days, before there were any shelters built. However, some were visibly uncomfortable with the newcomers: Phil was really attractive, while Big was surely capable of beating anybody in town easily; perhaps two men would not be a fighting match for the guy.

The plan was simple although in a way strange: they would build a house with mostly pre-built material. That explained the many big crates that came with easy to assemble walls and all. However, the first concern from people around was the strangeness of the material. For these climates, adobe, bricks and cooler materials were mandatory. The unloading showed some cement bags, bricks, mosaic and everything known that maintains rooms cool; but the amounts were small. Yet there was a lot of wood, plastics and assemblages foreign to our surroundings. Phil assured everybody that the rest of the material was already bought and coming on a second blue truck trip. Marcelo nodded indicating he was eager to leave early morning in order to be back in a few days with it.