

It Snows in Hell

Daniel Lucindo

I

“Oh, I just remembered: Azul, tell Inês how you pissed off that guy from the plane!”

«Azul», Portuguese for «blue», was both the nickname and artistic name of André Correia: The wheat-blonde haired man, as well as the bulkiest member sitting at that table on the outside of the Safira Bar. He takes a couple of seconds to think before replying.

“What guy? From what plane?”

“Come on, man! The one from that flight to Monaco, about four years ago! The guy with the gun...”

“Oh yeah! Yeah!”

“To whom you said *that* thing!”

“Yeah, I remember now! Oh, fuck...” He tears up with a short, dry laugh as he turns to Inês. Inês was the artist, the most *zen* member of the group and, ultimately, the only girl: Slim, dark-copper haired, with a pierced nose. “So, like, the guy was there, he had his gun, was threatening everyone, saying that he was in charge of the whole thing and such... And since everyone already knew that the guy was full of shit, because as long as the other guy was pointing his gun at him he wouldn’t do a thing, I start laughing, turn to Lourenço and go: «Man, this is better than going to the movies». The guy hears that and says to me: «What the fuck do you mean?», and I tell him: «Nothing, it’s just that you don’t see stories like this in Hollywood anymore. This flight is so ridiculous, it’ll go to the list of the worst hijacking cases ever.» Then the guy goes: «Hey, I’d shut up if I were you!», and I’m like: «Do you think I’m afraid of you? Look at you! You know what you are?»”

He struggles to contain the laughter the upcoming sentence tried to force upon him, increasing his tone so as to make it more emphatic:

“«You’re a pussy!»”

Inês is left baffled, a smile trying to grow some strength. At the same time, the rest of the table’s members burst themselves with laughter, even though that was not the fifteenth time they had heard him telling that story.

“Azul, you didn’t say that... He didn’t say that!” – She looks for Lourenço to confirm her statement.

“He did, Inês. It’s true.” Another element at the table confirms it, rather than Lourenço.

“Tomás, do you expect me to believe that Azul said to the terrorist that he was a pussy?”

“Hey! What else do you want me to tell you?” Tomás shouts, absorbed by how funny were both Azul’s story and Inês’ reaction to it.

“It’s true, Inês.” Lourenço continues. “Garção was already a part of the band when that happened and he was there with us. Go ask him if that’s not true, if you want.”

Baffled once again, Inês stares at that table's occupants in a mix of shock and disbelief. Tomás laughs silently.

"So, wait a sec... You told him he was a pussy because you thought he wouldn't do anything...?"

"Yeah." Azul replies, taking a cigarette out of a pack, with the biggest ease in the world. "And as soon as he heard that, he pointed his gun to my face."

"You're shitting me..."

Azul lights up his cigarette, forcing Inês and the remaining group to wait. Their smiles were now erased.

"I'm serious" he says, looking into her eyes, burning some time as he expels the smoke. "The guy saw that he was losing control of the situation, even more so with me making fun of him... So he snapped. Fortunately, the plane's engines *bricked* right at that time. Otherwise, he could have gone out of control."

"Man..." Lourenço was planning to downgrade the situation as he brought the attention to himself. "But then again, I mean... If the guy didn't do anything up until then because the other guy was also armed, then I don't think it was you who he was gonna shoot at either."

"Yeah, but maybe, since he hadn't pointed the gun at anyone else and all of a sudden he points it at me, maybe that was because he was starting to go out of control. And maybe that could have made him shoot without thinking twice."

Lourenço nods for an instant.

"Good point..."

They reflect upon that three-second silence until Azul sobs a smile.

"You think I could have died?"

"*NÁH!*" Lourenço reacts exaggeratedly between laughs, bringing awareness to the sarcasm in which they would often ask and answer each other. "Neither you nor anyone else on that plane!"

"Yeah. It's not like it could have crashed at any second, or anything!"

"No... What? You think so?"

They wait for the air to cool off. The lighter side of the topic seemed to have nowhere else to go.

"That guy got the maximum sentence, you know..." Tomás informs as if asking; implying that the said individual was sentenced to 25 years in prison (Portugal has neither death nor life sentence, therefore twenty-five years is the most a convicted criminal can be sentenced to).

"Who?" Azul asks.

"That Norwegian guy."

"No, who asked?"

Tomás rolls his eyes, facing a wall so as to avoid looking at him.

“He was Norwegian?” Inês inquires, calm yet attentive.

“Yeah. And it was a time when Norway was producing quite the number of terrorists.”

“Yeah, I was just thinking about that. Wasn’t that sort of the same time some psychopath shot a handful of kids on some island?”

“Yes, yes, exactly! Anders Breivik, his name was.”

“Yeah, him.”

“I mean, I don’t know for sure if it was the same time. Uh... Remember when it was, Johnny?”

Lourenço’s given name was João – to whom Tomás called Johnny. His first and last names corresponded to his initials “JLC”, by which he was known in the music world. What the letter “C” corresponded to was, however, unknown to the public.

“Dunno, maybe like... What, four years or so?”

“It’s been four years now.” Azul assures. “The first Monaco Festival was in 2010, which was when we were all there.”

“Oh yeah.”

“And we were almost pulled out of it, thanks to that cunt! Thankfully, Madness Cells were huge *bros* and switched dates with us.”

“Who else played on your day?” Inês asks, turning the remaining three incredulous faces towards her.

“*Fuuuuuuuh...*” Lourenço sighs, turning his eyes away from the table. His face reflecting disdain.

“Way to support the bros” Azul states, sarcastically. “She says she’s gonna see us play and then doesn’t even know who was there...”

“I told you a thousand times, Azul! I couldn’t go that day ‘cause I had my exhibit! If it was the first day, I would have gone!”

“So what? You could have ditched the exhibit!” Lourenço suggests, making Tomás and Azul laugh for a second. “You had your exhibit every day!”

Inês turns her sight towards nowhere, her eyes condescendingly glazed.

“But to answer your question,” Tomás continues, “we were scheduled to play with Apocalyptica, Trivium and Iron Maiden, and ended up playing the same day as Kvelertak, Insomnium and Megadeth.”

“Oh, really? Was it cool?”

“*NÁÁH!*” Azul and Lourenço shout in unison.

“Let’s see...” Tomás prepares to resort to irony. “You’re asking if sharing the stage with Megadeth was cool? Hm... Let me think...”

A blond-haired young man, still in his mid-twenties – like most of the group – wearing a black shirt with its sleeves rolled up, approaches the table and points to the empty coffee cups.

“May I take this away?”

“Yes, please,” Inês nods, then turning to Azul. “How about your band, Azul? Are you guys gonna work or not?”

As he lifts his glass of muscatel wine whilst hearing the question, he keeps his mouth shut, shaking his head as if saying “no”.

“No? Come on! I haven’t seen you doing anything for months!”

Azul swallows his sip, putting his cup down and gazing at her.

“Out last show was in January, so about six months ago. And we’d been doing nothing for six months before that. Thanks for reminding me.”

The rest of the table laughs, making Inês feel (even more) embarrassed.

“No, but it’s a good thing that you mention it. It was quite fitting of you to ask.”

“How come?”

He simultaneously shrugs his shoulders and blinks, looking at her for a couple of seconds and turning his eyes to Lourenço right afterwards. Couldn’t resist to laugh silently for an instant.

“Well?” Lourenço laughs. “Have you got something to tell us or not?”

“I do, man!”

“Well, get on with it, Azul!” Inês asks.

“Man...”

He goes back to keeping them waiting. His eyes set on his glass, this time; not thinking about how to say it, but rather what to say at all.

Up to the point that he thinks «Well, fuck it...»

“I’m leaving the band.”

“What?!”

“You’re leaving the band?!”

“Well, it’s not exactly *leaving*,” Azul immediately replies, baring their reactions in mind. “I’m taking a break, so to speak...”

“I thought that’s what you guys were doing already!” Lourenço mocks.

“Hey...” He points his finger at him. “You’re joking, but that’s just why I want to leave for a while.”

“Why?”

“The band is always doing nothing, that’s why! Once in a while, someone remembers: «Hey, let’s make an album», or «Hey, let’s schedule some gigs», but then when they find themselves with nothing to do, they keep scratching their balls for centuries!”

“Well, you’re not really helping either! I mean... When you say the band’s doing nothing, it’s not like you’re doing much yourself!”

“Oh, okay, yeah, that may be true. The thing is, when you’re stuck in situations like these for too long... This is how it works: When someone has a cool idea, the rest of us go with it. But then, when it’s time to go to work, the one who came up with the idea gives everything he’s got and the rest of the guys do one of two things: Either they work at half speed, or just plain don’t give a shit.”

“Yeah, that’s shitty...”

“Other than that, we gather every now and then to do some jams and work on some new shit out of improv, but it’s just not that... You know? It just doesn’t feel the same as when everyone is a hundred percent into it, or when there’s some more serious goal ahead... As a matter of fact, if it wasn’t for the stuff I do aside, like touring with Exhaustive and such, then maybe I’d have gone insane from staying still for so long.”

“That’s true,” Tomás agrees. “I can’t stop for too long either. It’s cool to take a break to come to come home and all, chilling with the guys, but after a while it gets dull...”

“But wait...” Lourenço reflected on Azul’s plans. “If you’re leaving the band, you won’t be doing anything for even longer a period!”

“No, ‘cause I already have some plans for the near future.”

“What plans?”

“Well...” He leans backwards, exhaling with his mouth closed. “I might go to London to study.”

“You’re going to study in London?!” Inês asks, nearly shocked. The remainder of the group either lets an «Ah!» out with the surprise or just stares staggered.

“Maybe. I mean... I’ve already scheduled the flight, I just need to take care of where I’ll be staying in.”

“Oh, nice!!!” Tomás shouts.

“Then it’s just «maybe», then! Having the flight scheduled and all...!” Lourenço mocks.

“Man, I’m saying «maybe» because I don’t know yet if the university I applied to will accept me.”

“You really are a copycat bitch!” Lourenço insults, jokingly. “You had to go to the same place Daniel went to.”

Azul grabs his glass, ready to drink another sip.

“He was the one who advised me to go, actually.”

“Oh, was he?”

“Yeah, I’m applying to the same *uni* he went to. He said it was cool, that he had a great experience and all... And I thought: «Well, it’s always a nice recommendation.»”

“And what course will you be taking?”

“It’s called «Musical Performance and Production», so it must have something to do with playing music and producing songs, or some shit...”

“Okay! Sounds cool!” Tomás compliments.

“Yeah, it should help me bring a more professional approach to it. At least that’s what I think... And if I do get enrolled, I might be living on their campus; which is also cool, or so he says. And it’s a few steps away from lectures, which is nice.”

“Yeah, but Daniel said that it costs like three times more than here,” Lourenço counter-argues. “Can you afford it?”

As if offended by the question, Azul shrugs his shoulders, turning his eyes away for a while, trying to give back some of the lack of consideration he was being given.

“Shit, it’s not like I’m *that* strapped for cash! I’ve booked the flight ahead ‘cause I wanted to save some, yeah, but I *do* have enough to hold on!”

“Oh yeah?”

“Of course! Come on... What good would it do me to go there without a safety net?”

“Well... It wouldn’t do any good, of course not; but you leaving the band to study abroad is not exactly productive either!”

“What? You’re joking, right? The guys in the band have always been studying something and it later turned out to be productive!”

“Yeah, but you were always close to one another!”

“Not *always*! What about Saca? He’s been in London for years now!”

“That’s different, man! Saca is just a singer! It’s not like he plays something essential! So much so that when he doesn’t sing, you do!”

“So what? Can’t there be one less guitar? The band only needs a drummer, a guitarist and a bassist!”

“And don’t you think it’ll sound different with one less guitar? One other thing: Who’s gonna sing, then?”

Not knowing what to reply, Azul relaxes, his half-full glass asking to become half-empty.

“Good point...” He drinks until the glass goes nearly empty. “Man, if the band decides to do something else then we’ll figure it out later. I can catch a plane and meet them, if I have to.”

“What about the university?”

Azul wags with his hand.

“I’ll think about it then, man. I don’t know... Right now, I just want them to reply me. That way I’ll know if it’s any use to start packing.”

“Not that I want to change subjects...” Inês interrupts. “But what about Ana? How are things, by the way?”

He breathes deeply, slowly rubbing the back of his neck. His face intricate.

“Ana and I... It’s a bit complicated...”

“What do you mean, it’s a bit complicated?”

“Like, Ana thinks it’s a good idea for me to go, but to her it’s like when I’m on tour. She says she doesn’t wanna go for the same reasons she doesn’t wanna go along with the band: That she prefers to stay in Portugal and do her thing and that it’s enough for her to deal with the shit she has to deal with when I’m around.”

“No... She actually said that?” Lourenço asks.

“Yeah...”

“Shit! Didn’t you get pissed?”

“No! I just had to contain myself not to tell her to fuck off and went for a stroll,” he replies, sarcastically. “It’s like I don’t have to deal with *her* shit too...”

“And didn’t you explain to her that it’s a different situation?” Inês suggests. “I mean, it’s one thing to go on tour and not hanging around the same place for long; but *you* going abroad to study is a completely different thing. In London, no less! Which is just a whole different world of opportunities!”

“Yeah, I...”

“And an amazing place too.”

“I told her that, ‘cause it’d be cool for us to share a place. The thing is, she still doesn’t think that’s what she wants. And since I grew tired of insisting, I stopped giving a shit...”

“But you’ll still be together, right?”

“Well, if you ask me... I don’t see any reason for us to break up. We’re still into each other. It’s just the distance that makes it hard for us to see each other, since we haven’t had many opportunities to be together, lately. But it’s nothing a flight every now and then can’t solve.

“Yeah, that’s true...”

With all the basic questions cleared, the table closed itself in a silence whose authors accompanied by a vague, unfocused stare. The news of Azul’s departure was undoubtedly the night’s main topic, as well as a turning point in their own lives – even if a small one. After all, despite not being a permanent member of the band, Lourenço and Tomás couldn’t count on him joining Exhaustive anymore in case they wanted to play in Portugal. There was only one ultimate question left to be made, coming out of Lourenço’s mouth:

“When are you leaving?”

Azul pulls out his pack of cigarettes.

“My flight’s scheduled for the 15th of September.” He pauses to light up another cigarette. “But that’s the thing, I don’t know for sure if they’ll take me.”

“Then why did you book the flight already?”

“Man...” He exhales through his nose, some smoke becoming noticeable in the air. “It’s just so that I don’t have to rush anything, in case they do take me. I mean, it might not seem like it, but it’s a difference of at least a hundred euros if I keep waiting for them to tell me if I’m in or not. But I’m nearly sure I’ll be...”

“Okay, but what if you won’t?”

“If I don’t, fuck it. I’ll find some other shit to do there. I won’t be doing shit here, that’s for sure. At least I’ll have more opportunities there, I think. And it’s like, if you don’t work to make things happen, they won’t happen by themselves either. I’m done with going stale. So yeah, I’ll go and if it goes well, good; and if it doesn’t... Well, at least I won’t regret not taking the chance.

Lourenço giggles due to Azul’s pronunciation, even without him even realizing it.

“What?” Azul asks.

“Azul’s gonna take the *«chénce»!*”

The personal joke cheers him up, as well as the rest of the table. That had always been the source of his strength. He knew that, no matter how many times he’d mess something up, no matter how many times he’d get into trouble, no matter how many lows he’d have to go through, he could always count on that group to rise above as if it were nothing. It would be more complicated to do so away from everyone, but he was willing to move forward, fearless. He asks no questions. It’s just one more bridge to cross.