

ENGLISH TITLE:

Get Dark

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ORIGINAL TITLE:

Ostantza

TRANSLATOR:

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Basque farmers say ‘ilunabarra’ for nightfall, but sailors returning to land talk about ‘ostantza’.

At that moment the man arrived in the port he had not seen for forty years. It was raining on that dark autumn afternoon, and the mother of the house, his daughter, was not in a good mood. When he rang the doorbell, the lady of house’s son, the man’s grandson, heard her whispered order.

Anamari: “Pello, go and open the door, quick!”

His grandfather was on the other side of the door, the head of the house who had long ago disappeared from the family’s life. Now he was older, and his hair was grey. But it was him, there was no doubt about that. And he had arrived by surprise.

Pello: “Grandad Teles...!!!”

His name was Telesphorus, but he did not like that name. Most people called him Beltza¹; people close to him, Teles. Hearing him, the mother slowly walked to the door.

Anamari: “You’ve come back!”

Teles: “No, but I’m arriving... Can I come in?”

Anamari: “Of course. You’ve been away so long and you’re going to stand there in the doorway? What’s happened, Dad?”

¹ In Basque, black or dark.

Teles: “I had to come back sometime, and here I am, you pretty thing. You never know what the perfect situation is going to be, but it’s always a bit of a risk when you take a decision.”

Anamari: “You don’t mean that you’re not totally sure about being here, do you?”

Teles: “Total certainty? How do you know if you ever get that.”

Anamari: “Dad, please, after being away from here for so long you must have learned something about that...”

Teles: “Well, that’s what I’ve learned, darling: there’s no such thing as absolute certainty. In fact, before I came here, I took certain measures. The lawyers say that there are no court cases open against me. They told me that the ones there were have prescribed.”

Anamari: “What does that mean?”

Teles: “As far as the law’s concerned, it’s hard to imagine what the police could do. They’ve always been willing to try anything, and that hasn’t changed.”

“How about you, Pello, how are you? You’ve grown up! How old are you now?”

Anamari: “Don’t you know even that?”

Teles: “Let me see... Seventeen?”

Anamari: “Well?”

Pello: “You guessed, Grandad!

Anamari: “Yes, your grandad has always been very smart; I’d say he’s too smart.”

Teles walked down the hill and went into the Town Bar, Inpernupe², which was completely new to him. While he had a drink and marshalled some old memories, he could not avoid imagining his old group of friends.

Seeing the man who might have been the traitor completely threw him; the man standing at the bar with a red mark on his face. Zarautz's hand trembled as he held it up to hide his face and tried to raise his glass to his lips. The forty years during which Teles had not seen him seemed to have wreaked much havoc on his body. At another time and place he might not have spoken to Zarautz, but in the end he did go up to his run-down one-time friend:

Zarautz: "How are you, Beltza?"

Teles: "Right now, I don't know."

Zarautz: "We were both taken in."

Teles: "What a bastard you are! Who took us in? It was you who reported me! You told them loads of crap about me! It was your fault they destroyed my life. Who took us in? You lied to me! I thought you were my friend, but you're too much of a coward to be anyone's friend."

In his corner, staring at something on the floor, Zarautz did not try to defend himself; he let the accusations pour down on him like warm rain.

Zarautz: "They deceived us both. What was I going to gain by telling a lie, by accusing you? Teles, just what was in it for me if they were going to put me in jail anyway? I didn't accuse you of anything. But they said that I'd told them, and you went and believed them. Them, not me! That's really something!"

Teles: "Where did you get all that crap from?"

Zarautz: “I know that from what they told me, damn it. Don’t you get it? They deceived us both. Teles, either they set us up, or someone accused me of what I did and what I knew, and that led them to you...”

Teles: “Stop making things up, Zarautz; you’re not going to convince me.”

Zarautz: “I will convince you.”

He went on saying that as if convincing Teles was his only mission in life.

Zarautz: “I will convince you.”

Something about what Zarautz said made Teles have doubts about what had thought throughout his exile. Contrary to what he had believed, his supposed betrayer had shown him the mistake of having made his escape. However, he replied:

Teles: “Of course not...”

Zarautz: “Look, Teles, someday I’ll tell you what happened when I was in prison... You can’t begin to imagine it. But I’ve had more than enough time to think, and now I know we were tricked because someone reported us.”

Outside Inpernupe there was a wooden bench by the window. Regina slumped back on the bench and smiled. She took out a packet of cigarettes and some matches from her dress pocket.

Regina: “Fantastic, Teles, here you are! I’ve often thought I’d die without seeing you again. So tell me about your life...”

Teles: “I’ve been through a lot... And nothing at all.”

Regina: “So you’ve come back to be with your family?”

Teles: “Yes, above all...”

Regina: “I’m glad to hear that. It means you haven’t been defeated. I thought you wouldn’t leave.”

Teles: “Well, there is it: I left and you’re still here.”

Regina: “And I’ll never forgive myself... I could have saved you.”

Teles: “How?”

Regina: “They played me a recording of you at the police station, and then showed me a report about you. They accused you of being a terrorist, of handing out propaganda at work, and of being a separatist activist, things that anyone with any criteria would have done back then. But they told me that didn’t matter. And at that time I did what I had to do: I warned you about everything and helped you leave, but I’m sure things weren’t that bad, I wasn’t strong enough, and it was my fault I lost you.”

Teles’ felt his throat had gone dry. So they had won the battle because of somebody’s confession and somebody else not taking a decision... Someone had reported him, but maybe he shouldn’t have gone into exile... Right now he thought the senselessness of fate was ridiculous.

Teles: “No, Regina, I think someone reported me and I had no choice. I told you straight out: “They’re not going to put me in jail.” I decided.”

Then Zarautz came up to them with a glass in his hand.

Regina: “You’re dying, Zarautz.”

Zarautz: “I told you I was dead a long time ago. What you’re seeing is pure inertia...”

Teles: “Why do you drink?”

Zarautz: “Because I want to, Beltza. Because I like it, and because I want to. Because I can do it by myself.”

Teles: “Do you like it that way?”

Zarautz: “Everyone dies. It’s a matter of when and how.”

Teles: “Are you as crazy as that?”

Zarautz: “I don’t know, but I think it’s been worth talking to you.”

Teles: “What about the traitor?”

Zarautz: “Why are you still talking about that?”

Teles: “If it’s not you, then there was no traitor.”

Zarautz: “Have you forgiven all the dead?”

Teles: “I think so.”

Zarautz: “You should know! And why do you think it was me?”

Teles: “Because you knew as much as everyone else... But it would hurt me a lot if it had been you.”

Zarautz: “But if you now think it wasn’t me, perhaps I...”

Teles: “Zarautz, I told you when I got here: let’s forget this.”

Zarautz: “You got so angry, and now you don’t want to talk... After forty years thinking that a friend of yours reported you, now you forgive everyone and we have to stay calm... Damn it, Beltza, what a fool you are!”

Teles: “Don’t go on, Zarautz.”

Zarautz: “I will go on because the best thing I have left in my life is my friends.”

Teles: “But stop drinking, damn it!”

Zarautz: “No! That’s the only thing I do voluntarily. And if I want to die tomorrow, that’s great! Maybe that way I won’t even realise.”

Teles: “The worst thing is that you won’t die tomorrow.”

Zarautz: “That’s true: I died yesterday or forty years ago. I don’t even remember when I died!”

NARRATOR: Teles watched him finish his drink and he felt sick inside.

Teles: “Now I know it wasn’t you...”

Zarautz: “Look, Beltza, I told you before: there was no one. And not because we are more pure than anyone else, far from it: if they’d put the pressure on, any of us could have said something, or accused anybody of anything. But it so happens we weren’t asked... But you have kepepsticking your finger into the wound and twisting it around. And if we go on like this, I won’t forgive you.”

Teles: “So now it’s me, you bastard... Well, forget it: you’re drunk.”

Zarautz: “Yes, but drunkards tell the truth. Want a drink now?”

Teles: “Ok; I’ll have a red wine.”