

VOL.2



SHORT STORIES

MP3 • METRO • COFFEE

VICTOR
EL BIZARRO

SHORT STORIES VOL. 2

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MP3

My mum is worried, she says I have an “addiction”. On the sly, my older sister is trying to help me: she has recorded an audio of me. The treatment? Listening to it every day.

I switch on the tablet. I open the app and select *Antidote.mp3*. I press *play*: white noise...

“Hello little brother. First thing: turn off the Wi-Fi and activate the flight mode. Now, close your eyes. Welcome to your *digital downtime*. Give your index finger a rest from endless mindless *scrolling*: a pattern of interaction so addictive that it has been openly compared to the ‘magic white powder’ we talked about back in the day. It’s ‘pure dopamine’ at 500MB symmetrical... You’re still too young to know about these things, but, burn this into your heart: if you don’t pay for the services, *you’re* the product...

Yes, Saul. Social networks fight for your time, you are auctioned off to the highest bidder. They show you content that keeps you glued to the screen, ads in between, more and more transgressive material; more and more extreme and violent material filling in the ‘black holes’ of your profile as they please. Mmm... Yes, just so you understand: they do the same with you as when you model those plasticine figurines. You decide whether to give them a snub nose, curvy legs or sturdy forearms... and so you generate their personality, through their appearance. It’s the same thing, but in this case they pick your brain until they manipulate your identity.

Listen little one, *fake news* attracts 60% more attention than real news... it’s the perfect hook for your eyes. Remember this: your content is different from the rest. They offer you what you want to see, they drive a wedge with anyone who thinks differently... They deliberately polarise us by


showing us a limited spectrum of reality. It’s... as if they took away the green, blue and yellow from your marker box. Your drawings could never have those colours anymore, could they? Imagine, purple grass!

Saul, blank your mind... Do you remember the movie we saw the other day, *The Matrix*? How do you ‘wake up’ if you are not aware of its existence? Now... *you* are. But don’t jump off a skyscraper! Mummy’s pushing me behind! It’s just a metaphor... ask your teacher to explain it to you. Come on, let’s get down to business, I’m getting distracted.

Nowadays misinformation is the universal language of social networks. Don’t be fooled. They are capable of destabilising a country in exchange for a handful of Euros... They already do it with the self-esteem of millions of people in search of constant validation... Isn’t life hard enough without adding such a rate of stress and frustration to a little elf like you?

Remember: in a time when social media connects us all, we are more alone than ever.

And now, open your eyes. Get out of flight mode; turn on Wi-Fi; reconnect to the digital world. You know, first of all, access my profile on all the social networks I showed you. Don’t get distracted by trifles, and *like* all my new photos and videos. And at least write two comments!, the profile has to grow. Come on Saul! Do it for your favourite little sister”.



Sleepwalker, card in hand. The constant beeping of the turnstiles has become the *song of the sparrows* in this ecosystem of metal, plastic and glass. So recognisable, so identifiable... "Young/retired pass: two beeps; normal pass: long one." I hear two beeps to my right. The woman looks at me sideways, she has realised that I am aware of her trickery. She blushes. I bow to her with my hand: my respects. From the top of the escalators, the other passengers look like fleas scurrying about senselessly. "Welcome to underground Madrid!"

Rheums on my eyelashes, rows of fluorescent lights with cold light draw elusive gleams on the yellow tiles... "Is this how L. Frank Baum saw the world?"

"Curved station, be careful not to put your foot between the carriage and the platform when exiting." Three transfers, a pickpocket and a false prophet spewing his rehearsed spiel in front of the mirror later, two trains run away under my nose. I look at the screens: "Next train in 7 minutes." I look at my watch. I look at the screens: fade to black, red diamond. "Shit! Bad signal." I look at my watch. "Fuck...!" I lean against the condom vending machine, banging it with all my weight as an escape valve for my despair. "I can't afford to be another day late," I think to myself as I lean my forehead against its peeling blue surface. My fists clenched, hidden in the soft velvet lining of my pockets.

The loudspeaker system intermingles with the music in my headphones, overlapping the lyrics of *Never thought that I could die*: "For reasons beyond Metro's control, the service on line ten between Nuevos Ministerios and Gregorio Marañón stations is suspended for an estimated time of one hour. We apologise for any inconvenience." My brain deciphers the message as if it were an Enigma machine: "Another suicide..."

I take out my mobile phone and look for an alternative route as I mingle with a herd of people climbing stairs, walking up and down corridors and *bleating* expletives until I end up on the platform of the only line available. Hundreds of users waiting impatiently on the platform versus a throng anxious to leave the carriage. In my headphones? *Heavy is the crown* blaring.

The doors open, the *Normandy landing* takes place. Two opposing forces slamming into each other; the Yin Yang symbol cracking at the sides. Some are trying to get in, others to get out. The loudspeaker intercedes: "Let passengers off before boarding." I hold my composure, enduring a *tsunami* of flesh and bones. The *charge of the 300* at the Battle of Thermopylae is nothing compared to the epicness of the moment.

"Will you get off me," one verbally spits at me. Another slams her elbow into my side. Withering glances... A crowd of people enraged to leave the carriage surrounds me; another, desperate to get on, precedes me.

"I'm not going to lose another train. Let me through!"

The music clouds my thoughts: it emboldens me; the situation absorbs me: it's *me* against the world. I raise my fists until they cover my face. Suddenly, a *yank* pulls me completely out of my "catatonic state". My soul unravels: the warrior of the Greek epopee becomes a cracking shell, an envelope from which I am ejected backwards. Now, *only* I am left... "Someone grabbed my backpack and pulled me away from the door, allowing the crowd to disembark." I look at him angrily. I look at him confused. I look at him regretfully. Is it... Jorge?

From my perspective, accompanied by the music, the scene was legendary. In the eyes of the rest, I was *just another asshole* to deal with.

COFFEE



Tuesday morning. I release the clutch, accelerate. I brake, accelerate, brake, press the clutch: the infernal traffic of the M-30 makes no exceptions.

"Call Rachel uni — I order the virtual assistant as I honk the horn. — Call Rachel uni!" My baby, in her four hundred bucks approved car seat, cries.

Fifty minutes later, I finally manage to park four blocks from the café. "Yes, I know, it would have taken 15 minutes to walk. What can I do? I'm a slave to the heated seat".

"I'm so sorry, bird. Caravan, green zone, you know..."

"Don't worry about it. I've only just arrived," — she smiles as she rests a magazine on the table, — I've ordered you a Moka coffee, your favourite."

I park the trolley next to me. Rachel is making faces at the baby, giving it faces. I take a sip of coffee as a peekaboo echoes in my ears. "It's disgusting, it's cold!"

"It's been seven months since we last met."

"Yes pretty. Life, I can't get enough. — I say as I gesture to the waiter and point to the coffee — Another, please."

"How's being a mother? And the pregnancy? — She asks without looking at me, covering her face, only to show it again a moment later. — It must be a wonderful experience, right?"

I glance sideways at Jorge: he's kicking at the air, slapping his blanket off; I watch his little mouth: a toothless *nipple crusher*. Rachel covers him.

"Ugh! You see, 'marvellous'. — Suddenly, I'm in the mood for ham. — And a ham toast! With extra virgin olive oil! — I shout to the waiter. — Look at that, — I point to my hips — four sizes up, bird! And the tits? I'm a fucking milk dispenser with nipples like *country crackers*."

Rachel *laughs*. It's not fucking funny to me.

"Two mastitis. Two! — I emphasise with my fingers. — And the hair? That stuff about how you look radiant during pregnancy because of the estrogen 'shot'... Look. Look!" I pull at my hair, and a strand of it falls through my fingers.

Rachel nods dumbfounded. "And, what am I going to tell you about the pregnancy? Stretch marks on my legs that make me look like a zebra; the last few months I've had constant reflux, — and whispering, I comment — that... that they say it's because the baby comes with long hair... But look at him, baldy! The 'spitting image' of his father."

I put a piece of toast in my mouth while I laugh, shake the cart nervously — which I sense is going to start crying — and, after slurping up a trickle of veined that had been hanging from the corners of my mouth, I continue:

"Ah. Yes, bird, and a tooth fell out! — I open my mouth, pointing to the gap with my tongue. Rachel's pupils reflect the empty space between my teeth, along with half-chewed pieces of bread and ham. — Do you know why the windows in the maternity wing rooms don't have handles? — I stare at Rachel and wait a few seconds. — Because of the post-partum depression. Mothers used to throw themselves out with their babies in their arms!

I notice that she hasn't touched her coffee since we started talking. "She's going to be cold!"

"At least the 7 stitches from the episiotomy are no longer oozing, and my crotch barely smells like rotten fish. So not too bad!" I emphasise, smiling wryly.

I look at her saddened face: a tear runs down her cheek. I read the headline of the magazine: *Baby Special: 8 things to consider for their neurodevelopment*.

"Shit..."; cold sweats. "On time..."; I throat clear. I stretch my arm out to reach her hand and, squeezing it lightly, whisper softly: "Okay, honey. How far along are you?"



SHORT STORIES VOL. 2

Short Stories Volume 2 contains three stories of different kinds but with a common link: **interpersonal relationships**.

Let yourself be seduced by the imagination of the author of *Historia de un condón* (illustrated book), and get involved in these short stories with twists and turns, varied plots and unexpected endings by the writer and illustrator Víctor el Bizarro.

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