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ADIÓS PRISIÓN

The story of the most spectacular escapes

Juan José Garfia

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Original title: *ADIÓS PRISIÓN. El relato de las fugas mas espectaculares*

First Spanish edition: Txalaparta ed., Tafalla, October 1995

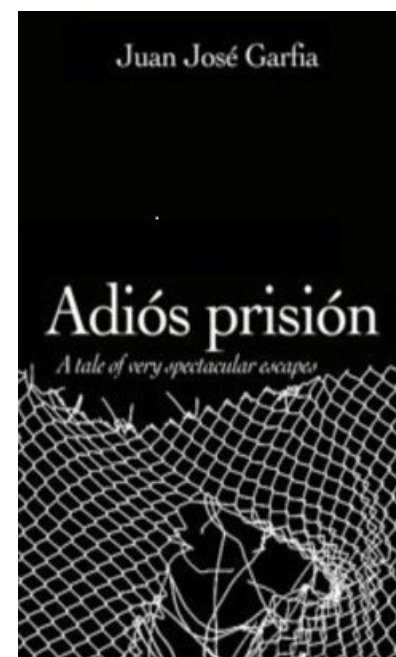
Italian Edition *ADIÓS PRISIÓN. Il racconto delle fughe più spettacolari* Biblioteca

Dell'Evasione, August 2008

Translated by Barbara Stefanelli and Jean Weir in collaboration with Antonia and
other accomplices

Cover design by Pirilampo

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I need to rest,
I need a hideout from where to look around.
I'm tired and can't make it any longer,
I want to let myself fall down,
I want to hand over,
I want to stop running.
I hear voices in the distance:
"We've got him, it's him!"
I spring up again
and my feet start to fly.
There are no chains, I'm the only runner,
I won't let myself be caught.
But again I get tired
I feel I'm not going to win.
It's a very long marathon
and I'll never make it
Since I started running
I haven't been able to rest,
always looking around
always looking behind.
With my heart in my mouth
and nerves tense,
almost without sleeping,
I'll always be an outcast,
in prison and in the street
always like a loser,
I'll only be free
for as long as my marathon continues.

Antonio Vázquez Vázquez

The great marathon

I run and the sun follows me
up hill, down dale,
my feet are cut and bleeding
my saliva dried up long ago.
I run night and day,
I no longer control my legs
lifting up my head
I see the horizon far away,
there are still many uphill slopes to go.
But I know I must continue,
that I can't wilt,
I must keep on running,
they can't catch me.
I am running to freedom,
I'm the best runner,
the first, there's no change,
this is my marathon.
I started by jumping from the wall
of what was my prison,
there I rose up,
but the road is long,
the marathon doesn't end.
Everybody is chasing me,
if someone overtakes me
my race ends.
My legs are giving up on me,

Introduction to the English edition

As soon as I finished reading *Adiós Prisión* in the Italian edition published in August 2008 I felt the urge to translate it. It is one of those books that you do not want to finish. You cannot get it out of your head, you want to delve deeper and deeper into it.

This book talks about freedom, the urgent need for freedom and the impossibility of living without it. This book says that freedom must be taken back at all costs and that is exactly what the protagonists of *Adiós Prisión*, Spanish prisoners under the infamous FIES regime, did: they took back their freedom using all means necessary, challenging the impossible, ready to kill for it if necessary. There is no room for political correctness or abstract morals concerning human life here: if the screws keep you locked up and your life, even in its most banal and insignificant aspects, is at the mercy of their caprice, violence and stupidity, your only choice is to eliminate them if they put themselves between you and your freedom.

The protagonists of this book are not passive subjects of the prison system, on the contrary they are well aware of the fact that prison is the absolute negation of human dignity. As FIES prisoners they are experiencing directly how human beings will never adapt to life in prison, and their most impelling need is to escape in order to put an end to a situation that is unendurable.

The FIES, *Ficheros de Internos de Especial Seguimiento* (record of prisoners under special observation) was inaugurated by the Spanish prison system in 1991 in order to further punish and control prisoners who had been carrying out revolts in the Spanish jails over the previous decades. Two amnesties were granted following the dictator Franco's death, one in 1976 and one in 1977, but they were systematically denied to a large number of prisoners, the 'social' prisoners, whereas many of those declared or considered 'political' were released. It was then that revolts started breaking out continuously, not only for the amnesty to be extended to all prisoners but also against the unbearable conditions inside the jails (torture, beatings, overcrowding, rotten food, no medical attention for prisoners affected by medical conditions, and so on). Prison infrastructures were smashed and destroyed as a result of the frequent riots that occurred in most Spanish prisons in the years following Franco's death. The FIES was created with the precise aim of keeping a record of the most rebellious prisoners of those years. However, it was not just an archive for gathering information about hot-headed prisoners: along with its inauguration special wings were being built inside prisons all over Spain to hold those considered

particularly dangerous by the prison system. In the special wings the cells were tiny, the walls were completely bare, the toilet was a hole in the floor, the bed was made of iron, and it was impossible to see out through the barred window. Prisoners spent days, months, years locked up in these dungeons and were allowed to keep nothing with them as their personal possessions were seized on entry to the wing. The screws were always ready to provoke, search and beat prisoners, knowing that they could count on total impunity and the complicity of the prison direction.

In spite of the appalling conditions that the FIES prisoners endured, they continued to struggle, gaining the support of comrades and organizations outside the prison. As the situation inside the Spanish jails came to be known outside, also thanks to the sustained action of anti-prison groups, the reputation of the Spanish democratic State was inevitably compromised. As a result, the FIES no longer exists in name, but it is now called PRIC (*Programa Recuperacion Internos Conflictivos*, Program of recuperation of turbulent prisoners). Needless to say the regime has not changed much in substance. Unfortunately, regardless of what it is called, it has brought about good results for the prison institution as the number of revolts and escapes has decreased considerably over the past few years.

In this sense the crude tales of *Adiós Prisión* are particularly important: not only do they offer a lurid picture of the FIES underworld, they also express the fervid determination of some of its captives to get out no matter what the cost, to run to freedom without looking back, knowing that escape is their only possible chance of life.

Another reason for publishing this book in English is to show once again what we have been repeating over and over: that the prison system cannot be reformed or made more humane, but must be destroyed along with the power that justifies its existence.

Barbara Stefanelli

would keep on doing so. They had made rebellion and escape their way of life, their philosophy. They would die for it. They would kill if necessary. But they would never give up. That, never.

Epilogue

And they carried on, as always, jumping from one subject to another, for hours and hours. Their conversations were usually frivolous and trivial, at least so they seemed to me, though sometimes they went into things a little more deeply and philosophised in their own way.

However, I was deeply moved by their escape stories. They were just a series of thrilling adventures, true, but they deserve to be told because I believe they reveal something more. Their protagonists all had an indomitable spirit of rebellion and a longing for freedom above everything else. And I must emphasize: above everything else.

As for me, nothing could take the place of freedom, other than death. I could not conceive of prison as anything other than synonymous with death. Before meeting these people I had never thought of the possibility of finding myself prisoner. Even afterwards it's still difficult, I can imagine being locked up in a cage but not much more than that. I'd have stopped eating, singing, skipping, in other words—living. Not them.

Later, with fragments of other conversations, I managed to find out how their stories ended.

Number two was recaptured in Córdoba two months and ten days after his escape. He went into a bar, a woman recognized him from the newspapers and alerted the police. He was surrounded by five or six policemen in plain clothes and when they saw he was trapped, they arrested him.

Number six enjoyed his freedom for seventy-one days. One of his accomplices grassed him up, and the house in Granada where he was in hiding was stormed by the GEOS.

Number four was arrested in Utrera on September 1 in the stupidest way. A traffic cop started to get suspicious of him and pointed a gun at him.

Number twelve was arrested as he was coming out of a shop fifteen days after his escape.

Number ten fell on August 28 during a control by undercover police at a bus station in Seville.

Number eight ended up like number six. On December 27 the GEOS stormed the building in Barcelona where he was hiding.

All of them ended up the same way, back in prison. But they didn't give up. They continued to struggle. Again and again. They had escaped many times and they

Introduction to the Italian edition

As *Adiós Prisión* was to be published in Italian I was asked to write an introduction, not to the book as such, given that it speaks for itself. Those who read it can dream of their 'escape'... from their walls, their worlds, their fears... The goals that were attained when the book first came out, that is to say to inform, denounce, make people aware, push them to protest, revolt, escape (not by chance it was forbidden in Spanish prisons because it encouraged escape) were all achieved. Although we didn't imagine that this booklet, made almost clandestinely by a few forgotten isolated prisoners, would reach beyond the next cell ... so small was our world.

As it is now to be published in Italy, fifteen years after it was written, thirteen after it was first published, we need to go over those years, which led to dramatic changes at all social levels.

Prison, a microcosm inserted into our world but that is denied the possibility to speak, is in its turn the mirror of these changes, which I'm going to try to talk about.

As concerns our story, which you will read in this book, I know that you would like to know what has happened to the protagonists of these tales, what changes have occurred in our lives after all these years, in the lives of those prisoners who had the courage to struggle and revolt against a death penalty that none of us deserved but that very few of us could avoid.

The FIES regime (*Fichero de Internos en Especial Seguimiento*, record of detainees under special surveillance) was introduced in 2001 by the Spanish Home Office and the Department of Prisons. It is nothing less than a special isolation regime inside some prisons, whose function is to control, isolate and annihilate the prisoners who tried to revolt against the inhumanity of imprisonment. Each time a prisoner attempted an escape, a revolt broke out in the prison and guards were taken hostage in order to denounce the appalling conditions the prisoners were condemned to, not so much by the courts as by the prison institution. At the time prisons were full of torturers from Franco's dictatorship, supported and protected by a number of judges with the same fascist mentality. The judges assigned to watch over respect for the law inside prison, the magistrates whose function was to control the prison system to ward off the corruption that affects miserable people when they gain power over others (this is exactly what the jailer-prisoner relation is), were all accomplice to the torture. They decided to totally isolate rebellious prisoners when they realized that by transferring them arbitrarily and in secret, transporting them as if they were cattle to be moved to another slaughterhouse, just made the revolt spread to other

prisons (dignity and the awareness of being individuals accompanied the bodies swollen with bruises and wounds: it was contagious).

They managed to silence us for a number of years: sometimes only temporarily, until we managed to overcome harsh isolation; other times definitively, when a comrade took his life in the cell... the latter was the most common situation.

What the FIES prisoners constantly did was to denounce the endless string of deaths that occurred in the Spanish prisons at the end of the 1980s. A huge number of ill prisoners, mostly with HIV or hepatitis, and lack of treatment, which was considered too expensive, led to prisoners dying like dogs. Many of them, already condemned by illness, would be happy to die with a bit of dignity in the struggle.

The FIES regime was inaugurated with the intention of exterminating us, quite an easy job given the approval of the law, the manipulation of information and the indifference of a society that only cared about its own survival. The macro-prisons that were built on a large scale in the 1990s were efficient instruments to disperse, isolate and silence us and at the same time offered huge economic profits (nowadays at least one or two macro-prisons are built every year, the most recent being Puerto Santa Maria III and Morón). Various levels of isolation sections, i.e. narrow spaces of total control inside which three or four prisoners struggled to survive, were introduced into each new prison.

Barrot was the first to die after he was moved to the FIES in Valladolid. He hanged himself.

Pedro Vázquez won an appeal at the constitutional court and was freed from the FIES regime but that did not last long, as he was soon back there with us. His sentence was finally reduced and he was released, but his health conditions were so bad¹ that he died of psoriasis.

As for Carlos, he obtained partial freedom and had the chance to enjoy his Barcelona before dying of HIV. That was not unusual, you needed to be very strong to resist the conditions you had to endure in prison. Those who had any illness whatsoever were condemned to death....

I found the necessary strength to survive my long stays in the dungeons of democracy without going mad by writing, studying, painting and exercising.

Tarrío endured more than 20 years in prison but the effort got the better of him and he died of a cerebral haemorrhage in 2005. He published an autobiographical book, *Huye hombre, huye*², whose heartbreaking tales led to various collectives giving him unconditional support so that he was released and could die a free man.

Redondo is the only one, besides me, who is still alive after passing through the dungeon of El Dueso. Like the others he kept his indomitable will to freedom. A year after the publication of this book he was wounded in the chest by a cop's shotgun

we got out of the car the man turned and calmly walked away. He didn't report us until he got back to Salou.

We settled in a house that belonged to my mother. We changed our clothes then jumped over a fence and broke into another house.

That night the GEOS stormed three houses in the area: my mother's, and the houses on either side. They were about to storm the house we were hiding in but in the end they didn't do it. The fact that it was locked from the outside with a padlock must have convinced them. Nevertheless they surrounded the whole area and all the men had to show their documents to come in and go out.

We feared they would repeat the raid again that night, so we decided to leave the area. Some people helped us to put makeup on and dress up as gypsy women. And with all the impudence in the world we walked right under their noses. After a while, when the police raid was far behind us, I started taking the piss out of Manolo and only stopped laughing to tell him that we had the faces of two great whores. Well, later we sorted ourselves out, but that's the story of the escape. What do you think?

Shit, what a fiend you are—said Six.—You talk about Xosé but you're also a devil at telling stories. One day you'll have to tell us something about when you were in Vietnam, eh?—

Piss off...

¹He had HIV. [TN]

²Flee man flee [TN]

were four undercover cars chasing us but Manolo started speeding up and distanced them. We deviated from the N240 towards the regional HU-864 and HU 872 at Fraga. Then we shook them off by taking country tracks. Much later, around 1.30am we dropped off the hostages in a place called Les Borges del Camp in Tarragona.

We tried to change cars at about 2.30am because we had a flat tyre and it was impossible to change the wheel as there was no crick or any tools in the car. I tried to nick a 127 outside a bar in Riudons, Reus, I forced the guy inside to get out by pointing the knife at his throat. The car didn't start and the guy came back with reinforcements. One of them hurled himself at me and I stabbed him in the chest making him fall the ground, stone dead. We escaped from there and shortly afterwards we abandoned the car in a gorge, hidden among the rushes.

We walked along the bank of a stream, moving away the branches that got in our way. I still had enough sense of humour to recall a scene of *Papillon* and for a moment we were in stitches. We went on for about 25 kilometres, walking through streams, marshes and fields. And it never stopped raining.

When we had to cross a road we did it with our hearts in our mouths, at high speed, throwing ourselves into the ditch as soon as we saw any car headlights.

We followed the railway track right to Cambrilis. We tried to find somebody there but it wasn't possible, so we went on our way.

Dawn took us by surprise near Salou. We needed to hide immediately. We spotted a little farm, forced open the door and went inside. We took off our clothes and shoes, which were disgusting, and ate some sultana grapes that were growing in the courtyard. I put on some blue overalls and Manolo some other clothes that we found there. We also found some spirit and some Paternina¹⁷, which we mixed together and drank in the hope that it would warm us up. I was exhausted and fell asleep. Manolo woke me up, shaking me,

'Carlos, wake up, the guy from the farm is coming.'

I took the knife and we went out to take the guy who was approaching. He was a pensioner who had come to feed the little dog that he kept on the farm. We put him in the house after threatening him with a knife. The man took it all very calmly and collaborated perfectly.

At first we wanted to leave him tied up but when he told us he had diabetes we decided to take him with us, which he himself had asked.

'Okay, we don't want to leave you tied up here and then get done for murder. You drive the car and do what we tell you, okay?' I suggested.

'Yes, yes, all right. Believe me, I don't want to give you any trouble,' he promised.

The guy kept his word.

Before setting off I cut Manolo's hair and beard. That way we looked like two farm labourers with their boss. We got into the car and reached Barcelona. When

while attempting to escape from a police station in Gijón. A cop was killed in the incident. Twenty-two years after entering prison following a minor sentence for theft, he finally left all this misery behind him. I just hope that all the cruelty he endured won't ruin his life and that we, the other comrades of this story, will also be able to celebrate his victory.

As I write these lines in memory of my comrades I'm still locked up and I don't know the date of my release, as the latter depends on the caprice of those against whom I have always struggled.

What is certain is that I'm not conquered and I will carry on on my feet.

Juan José Garfia Rodríguez

March 2008

¹⁷A kind of cider.

Introduction

*Why am I writing this? well, for this...
for the comrades, for them to see
that it is possible and take courage...
To my brother Carlos*

I would like to explain why I decided to write this little booklet so that the reader will understand it better. The place where it was written, El Dueso prison, at the end of 1991, was crucial. We, the six characters of the book, met in the FIES section which had been inaugurated in July of the same year and was notorious as the toughest prison regimen in Spain. I'm not going to tell you in detail what happened during that period, as that would add to the difficulties in writing this book. However, the reader should know that the *Asociacion Pro Derechos* along with *Salhaketa* put a great deal of pressure on the Basque parliament and other public bodies to close down the FIES before it was finally closed down in 1993.

The tension caused by such conditions, combined with the horrors suffered, had an immediate and implacable effect on prisoners, most of whom had Aids (four out of the six of this book). To ward off the alienation of prison, which was particularly hard under the FIES regime, we would talk to each other about any subject that came into our head, and we did so at the window (our means of communication). Sometimes we ended up arguing and adding to the tension, but we also got to know each other intimately. Being closer to each other helped us to cope with our situation as prisoners.

We also did other things, certainly not many: we played chess (with pieces made out of paper), read a lot of books and exercised. But one thing we rarely did was write. The reason being, even if we were finally allowed to have correspondence after many months of total isolation, we had to hand in our letters and write the destination address at the top of the page. The guards put the letters in an envelope and sent them to the *Direccion General de Instituciones Penitenciarias*³ in Madrid, where the letter was checked, approved and then sent back to the prison. With this procedure a letter took months to reach its destination. And it took the same length of time for us to receive letters from the outside. Indeed, it was extremely difficult to keep in contact with the outside.

³Head of Penitentiary Institutions. [TN]

'I get it, but let the invalids out first so that they can be taken to hospital,' he asked me.

'All right. We only need two hostages so as soon they let us know that everything is okay, we'll let the others come down in front of us. They will go with the doctor and the medical assistant. Get Sebas to come to the Centre,' I added.

Sebas came immediately.

'Everything is as you wanted, whenever you like.'

'Right, let's get rid of this lot,' I said to Manolo.

And that's what we did. After the screws went down and started to go out we went down. Going through the first door of the gate I remember a deluge of applause and shouting breaking out, wishing us good luck. A few metres before the wall I asked Manolo to stop there out of range until I got into the car and called him.

'My friend,' I remember saying, 'if they nab me give it to them before they get you too. I'm off.'

I went through the perimeter with the knife well planted on the hostage's throat. After the perimeter there was the last stretch. The car was there with the doors open. Near the car was the boss of the Centre. I saw the guardhouse with the lights off and the door half-open.

'That door!' I shouted. 'I want to see that door completely shut. Mata, stand in front of it.'

The guy did as he was told and went to close it. As I went forward towards the car I could see a police deployment to the right of the prison and opposite the boys of the press having fun like kids, climbing up on to the balconies. I sat on the back seat of the car, dragging the screw with me, and once I was well covered, I yelled to Manolo.

'All clear, partner, and mind the guards.'

'I'm off,' I heard him answer.

He was at the wheel of the car in a flash. He started the engine and we went out with the siren screaming, just to take the piss. It was raining slightly when we got through the gate. It was about ten o'clock in the evening. Five or six hundred metres on we came across a control with lots of dazzling lights and full of *picoletos*.

'Friend, I'm going to run them over,' Manolo said without hesitation.

'Go for it, my friend,' I encouraged him.

And as he was changing gear to drive into them, we realized that all the guards had their hands up, except one who was signalling us to go on. They were clearing the way for us! We passed Guardia Civil cars every 500 metres along the way.

We were driving along the N240 towards Lérida and after about eight or ten kilometres we realized they were following us. We expected it, of course. We recognized a Renault 21 and a Ford Sierra. The Renault passed us. It wanted to slow us down, but Manolo knew how to use a steering wheel and overtook them with a dangerous manoeuvre. They tried overtaking us again but we didn't let them pass. Now there

‘Ask them if they’ll let him go,’ I heard Mata asking. I took the walkie talkie and answered myself: ‘It’s not possible. No one will get out of here until the car is ready and all the doors are open. Time is running out for the deadline, so he can hold on. And if the deadline passes and we don’t have the car, there won’t be any need for medical assistance. Just the coroner for the autopsy. So, the *doble* had better hurry up.’

‘Esteve, don’t do anything stupid,’ Mata kept up. ‘The Commissioner will be here at any minute.’

‘I hope so and I hope you’re not getting up to something,’ I warned. ‘Don’t do anything to the car and don’t play with the gearbox, like they did in Huelva.’

They hadn’t finished talking when the boss of the section interrupted.

‘Just a moment Esteve. The director is here. Now you can speak.’

‘Is the car ready?’ I asked.

‘Yes,’ the *doble* answered firmly. ‘I’m just waiting for a communication from Asunción¹⁶ to get authorisation.’

Once again the guy was playing for time.

‘No waiting!’ I screamed into the walkie. ‘Either we go now or we’ll do what we said. I want you to put the car outside the main gate, facing away. At the same time you must open all the doors, from the first to the last. The nearest cop stays on the opposite pavement. No tricks, or we’ll act accordingly. And don’t forget, we’re not going to make things easy.’

‘All right,’ he finally agreed. ‘But you must let two agents in so that they can lock up your companions, the other prisoners. Otherwise I can’t open all doors you understand.’

‘All right,’ I conceded. ‘But close them between the gates and not in the cells. Let them come now.’

I asked everyone to go to the gates, which they did without any problem. I told Sebas to go to the main door and out to the car to check that everything was all right: doors open and no police around. I also asked him to be ready to open the way for us and to be ready to follow my instructions. ‘Okay,’ he said, and went down. As agreed with the *doble*, the two screws came in and locked the gates of the corridors with the prisoners inside. After finishing their task the screws went away.

At this point I must remind you that the whole thing had started with the ‘tool’ who had snitched on Manolo. During the kidnapping I asked him if he wanted to go and kill the snitch, but Manolo let it pass and told me that the most important thing was to get away. If our attempt failed then we’d consider it.

When I reckoned everything was ready I called the Warden.

‘Are you there Jesus Mata? We are about to come out with two hostages. Careful, because at the slightest move everything will go to the devil, get it.’

One day I found an advertisement for a literary contest in a newspaper. Applicants were required to write short stories and I thought it would be great if each of us had a try. I told the others and everyone, except Juan and Barrot, was enthusiastic. In the end only Vázquez and I wrote stories, even though we didn’t take part in the contest. Writing a story, however, gave me confidence in my creative abilities, which are obviously not literary abilities. It was then that I decided to write this book.

My project involved all of us. We had been labelled as very dangerous people, each of us having committed different kinds of crime; but the one thing that we had in common, and the reason we had been put in FIES, was that we all were *fuguistas*⁴. So why didn’t each of us tell the tale of his most spectacular escape? I thought that this was a good way to get out of our poisonous dull routine, and told my comrades about it to see who wanted to join in.

They liked the idea and we started working on it. As for the method, it was easy. Who knows better than its protagonists about an event? So Estevez, Vázquez, Tarrío and I wrote down our stories. Redondo didn’t because Tarrío’s story concerned an escape that they did together. As for Barrot, he had trouble writing. So I tried to piece his story together as though I were a journalist, asking him questions and jotting down his answers.

When one of us finished his piece of writing, he read it aloud and I wrote it down because we were not allowed to pass things from one cell to another. I made a few small corrections but basically I did not change the original author’s vocabulary and style.

Then I had the idea of linking the stories by introducing a starling as narrator. The fact that there was an external narrator put all of us at the same level. In other words, it made it impossible to differentiate the author’s identity and prevented him from getting into trouble.

Someone suggested that documents should be added at the end of the book in support of our stories, whose credibility might be affected by the presence of the starling narrator. I put together all the newspaper cuttings we had at our disposal and asked my comrades to give me their legal documents (court papers, requests of the prosecution, etc.) so that the truthfulness of our stories could be verified. Only Barrot’s documents were missing. His stay at El Dueso had been unbearable for him, and he hanged himself soon after being transferred to the prison in Valladolid. I tried to get his judicial documents from the court and the Guardia Civil⁵ in Elda but they refused.

As the book was completed and I was moved to Malaga in order to attend a trial I gave the manuscript to a friend, Tafalla, who later typed it out. I then made further

⁴Escapists. [TN]

⁵Civil Guards, Spanish gendarmerie. [TN]

¹⁶The general secretary of the prison system.

corrections and my friend had to type it out again. It was in Picassent prison that I finally finished the book.

I would like to point out that the research for and elaboration of *Adiós Prisión* was my doing but that the book was written by all of us. Each one did his share. The book is finally being published, but just completing it was a huge satisfaction to each and every one of us.

Juan José Garfia Rodríguez

‘One of the hostages is having a heart attack. Send us a doctor if you don’t want the guy to kick the bucket without us even having to stab him.’

A long, intense and seemingly interminable silence in the communication followed, until after a while I heard the voice of the boss of the Centre again.

‘Esteve, it’s Jesus Mata. Do you give us your word that you will respect the doctors?’

‘We give you our word,’ I answered. ‘Don’t worry as soon as they finish with the patient they’ll be allowed to go, no problem. But they’d better get a move on otherwise the guy will be dead.’

‘The doctor, the medical assistant and Sebas are coming now’, he answered.

A few minutes later two doctors, the ATS assistant and Sebas, along with Eduardo, the other prisoner who had come earlier, came up the stairs. When the door was opened the doctor, who was carrying the oxygen, came running. That same morning I had had an argument with him and coming face to face with me now he was shitting himself. He probably thought he was going to pay for it, the faggot. So we had to send Sebas back down to pick up the oxygen cylinder.

While the doctor and the assistant tended the man with the heart attack and another with tachycardia, I started speaking to Sebas, who always collaborated totally. He said he thought we’d won the game because he had seen the *doble* just go out to fill up the fuel tank of his car to put it outside for us. Our fellow prisoners said the same because they had seen the *doble* on television moving his car. The news was also broadcast on the radio. I put on the earphones and heard from a local radio station that they were clearing the road up to the prison to leave the way open.

‘Sebas, when they bring the car I want you to check the main door for us before we go out to avoid any unpleasant surprises. Will you?’ I asked him.

‘Yes,’ he answered categorically. ‘Don’t worry, if they are setting something up for you I’ll let you know.’

‘Anyway, if they shoot our heads off out there I’ll die in the street fighting for my freedom,’ I said full of pride.

‘Don’t worry my friend, you’re going to make it,’ he encouraged me.

At that moment the walkie talkie rang again. It was the boss of the Centre. ‘Esteve, it’s Jesus Mata. Let me speak to the doctor for a minute. Sebas must have told you that the Director has gone to fill up the tank of his car, no?’

‘Yes, he told me’, I answered, ‘I just hope he doesn’t go over the time limit, it’ll be up in ten minutes. Now the doctor is coming.’

I passed the doctor to him.

‘It’s Xavier,’ the doctor said.

‘How is the colleague?’ Mata inquired.

‘He’s had a heart attack and we are giving him oxygen. I’ve given him an injection but he’s in urgent need of medical assistance in hospital,’ Xavier warned.

a few screws hurled some obscenities at him. But the Commissioner kept his word and went away. We were disappointed because from the start we had counted on the Commissioner being the one to facilitate our exit with his authority. Things being the way they were, we decided to put the pressure on exclusively through the *doble*. And to up the ante we let the boss of the Centre go. We were banking on his word but, above all, we were banking on his colleagues who were still in our hands. We were sure he would try to seek the support of the squad in order to put pressure on the Commissioner.

Before he left I said to him clearly:

‘Remember that five of your colleagues are still with us. If we are refused a car we’ll kill them one by one.’

‘Sure, I promise you that you’ll get out of here with the car.’ Then, turning his colleagues, he tried to reassure them: ‘Don’t worry, I’ll get you out of this situation.’

‘We trust you, Jesus. Don’t let us down,’ some of them managed to whimper.

As soon as he was freed, he made contact with us through the walkie talkie. I asked him to send me Sebas and to let me speak with the *doble*.

‘Yes?’ asked the director again.

‘Listen to me, get a car ready for us if you don’t want this to end in a bloodbath,’ I threatened.

‘I’m waiting for permission from the Secretary General of the Prison System,’ he answered.

‘Look, I don’t give a shit about Asunción,’ I snapped. ‘We don’t want to wait any longer, get it?’

‘Mr Asunción is on his way,’ he insisted. ‘Please, wait for him to get here.’

‘We’ll see. Call Jesus Mata, the chief of the Centre,’ I said.

‘What’s up, Esteve,’ Mata answered immediately.

‘You know the situation better than anyone I said. So, sort out the car in half an hour or we’ll hand over another dead screw. We won’t give you any more time. Either you give us the car in half an hour or we’ll do a repeat of what happened to the head screw,’ I said.

‘Don’t worry Esteve. I’ll manage to get a car for you even if I have to mobilise the entire team of guards.’

‘Right then, we’re waiting,’ I replied impatiently.

I hadn’t even put down the walkie talkie, when Manolo called me. ‘This guy is collapsing on me,’ he said.

It was true. The screw that Manolo was pointing the knife at was losing consciousness in his arms, while his face was changing colour. From blue to purple. He was having a heart attack.

‘Gate, Gate,’ I called nervously through the walkie talkie.

‘Gate here, what do you want.’

The starling

I live in a building with some people. My nest is in a corner under the eaves against the wall. I know this place very well because I come here every year to have my children. It is quite safe as it overlooks a courtyard which only birds have access to and I’m not afraid if I sometimes need to leave my little ones alone.

This year when I reached the nest with my partner to lay the first eggs of the season I noticed that there were men at the windows opposite the wall. At first I was worried about settling there because it was the first time I had seen people behind those windows and they were so near I didn’t feel safe. Looking around me I realized that there had been a few changes since last year. There was a kind of mechanical eye in the wall opposite the windows, which I later heard people calling ‘the Inquisitor’. There was also barbed wire all around the walls of the courtyard and they had added another row of bars on to the windows where the men (six of them) were housed.

I saw metal plates the same colour as the bars between the windows and my partner pointed out the enormous spotlights positioned in every corner of the yard. While I was looking at all this I heard people speaking loudly and after observing them closely, I noticed something that indicated we could nest there safely like every other year: the people inside could put no more than their hands through the bars.

The yard was still inhabited by the usual birds: sparrows, seagulls, and of course ourselves, the starlings. So everything carried on like the years before and after sitting on the eggs, (I had two little ones) just when the people arrived, something happened. If it hadn’t happened I wouldn’t have this story to tell, because as soon as the little ones are born it is usually a race against time to find food. That means that my partner and I are flying from one place to another from dawn till dusk to find food for our insatiable creatures. But it was different this time. Twice a day the people threw all kinds of food out of the windows. Especially meat and fruit. The gulls fought for the meat shrieking and fighting but they always left something behind. We were the only ones that ate the fruit. My companion kept the other starlings at bay while I fed the children. We had to defend such an abundant patch.

My days were more relaxed thanks to these people. I could afford to stay in my nest with nothing to do but watch over my little ones, singing or cleaning my feathers. I wasn’t normally interested in what the people at the windows said or did but, having more free time, I paid more attention and spent entire afternoons watching and listening. I must say that what they were saying was very interesting. The

people called each other by different names, and over time I got to know who was who. They also had big numbers painted on the window. Number two was Barrot; number four was Juan, but they also called him Juanito, Redondo, Pepinillo and Burbujas; number six was Juanjo and they called him Garfia or Doctor; number eight was Carlos, Esteve, Carlitos or Simpson; ten was Xosé, Tarrío, Che-Che, or Norman. And twelve was Pedro, Vázquez or Cansado. In order not to get confused, I identified each of them by the number on their window...

They didn't seem to have much to do given that they stood at the window for hours, talking, laughing and shouting. I didn't normally pay much attention to their chatter but sometimes they told stories that fascinated me. One afternoon, while they were all chattering and explaining to one another why they were there, number four proposed that they each tell the story of their latest escape, one by one. That was how I came to know about some of their prodigious adventures, which I am going to relate here in turn, just as I heard them.

It turned out that when all the confusion started, one of our comrades named Sebas was having a visit. These visits took place in the perimeter area, so he was still outside. After consulting me on the matter, the Warden sent him to talk to us. That was before the stabbing. We talked. He told me about the massive mobilisation of cops at the Gate and said that he was sure that he hadn't seen the Commissioner outside, even though he had never seen him before. I asked Sebas to go out again and tell the cops that we wanted a car. When he got back I had already done in the head screw. He told us that they were waiting for Asunción¹⁵ to arrive and asked me to let him take away that rag doll of a stabbed screw.

'What for? He's already dead,' I said, astounded.

Then the boss of the Centre butted in,

'He's still alive, Esteve. I've just seen a spasm. Let Sebas take him away, please. If you do, I promise you I'll make sure you get a car even if I have to come to blows with the Commissioner, the prison Warden or his fucking mother.'

I saw that Manolo nodded in agreement so I also accepted the deal, 'All right, take him away Sebas. And tell them outside not to do anything stupid.'

'Don't worry friend,' he answered. 'I think you'll make it because they are really shitting themselves.'

Then, with the help of another prisoner, a Madrilian called Eduardo, they lifted up the head screw and carried him away. Of course, after massacring him I doubted whether he would be able to survive. I'd given him up for dead, otherwise I wouldn't have let them take him away.

I heard on the radio that when he arrived at the hospital he had a broken jaw, more than thirty stab wounds and a pulse of six beats per minute—number four intervened. He was tough, that son of a bitch—number ten commented.

Right, let me carry on with the story eight continued. As soon as he was pulled through the door they called me with the walkie talkie to tell me that the Commissioner was there and was about to come in. He came in, accompanied by another two personages who introduced themselves as a government envoy and a representative of the Popular Party, whose role in the event I didn't quite understand.

The dialogue with the Commissioner was a disaster. Faced with our resolution, instead of coming to an agreement the guy wanted to show off how tough he was, saying he refused to talk to us unless we calmed down. He told us he wouldn't authorize a car, at least not immediately.

Manolo jumped at his words and pointed the knife at the throat of a hostage. And as he pushed the blade against the throat he screamed at the Commissioner:

'If you won't see reason, I'll cut his throat.'

But the guy said that he didn't intend to carry on like that and that he was going to go. Manolo and I started insulting him. People started hissing at him and even

¹⁵The general secretary of the prison system.

No sooner said than done, I left the walkie talkie on the ground, picked up one of the short knives and went towards the head screw. He was following the succession of events, his face a picture of terror. Without a word I stabbed him first in the right side, just above the liver. With the blow he started screaming. The other hostages also exploded into screams and shouts all together. Most of them were crying in desperation. I had hit the head screw with such force that I cut my index finger with the steel point sticking out of the blade.

‘Ouch, you shit. Ouch, you’re killing me,’ the head screw screamed.

At that point I saw red. I stabbed him in the chest and neck 15 or 20 times. My thrust and force was so strong that the handle broke off the knife and the blade stayed inside his body. But that didn’t stop me. I took another knife the same size and kept on stabbing him. Finally, when I got tired of stabbing him with that knife I took a forty centimetre one that looked almost like a sword and struck him with the blade in the back of his neck and on his forehead various times, as if I was chopping him with an axe.

‘Die once and for all, motherfucker!’ I shouted at him.

The cop was biting the knife to try to stop it and he still had the courage to fight back, until he passed out.

‘You want to kill me? You shit, you want to kill me!’ he repeated.

In actual fact, when they realised we were going to kill them, the other screws started screaming louder than the one that was being stabbed. I don’t know if it was out of compassion for their colleague or just fear.

Once I finished the stabbing, I pushed him under the banister to throw him into the void. The other screws begged me hysterically not to do it. I was about to cut the rope that was keeping him tied to the banister by the neck so that he would fall because of his own weight as, having his feet on the ground he wasn’t hanging, when Manolo said, ‘Pull him up, Carlos. This guy,’ and he pointed to Jesus Mata, the boss of the Centre, ‘has promised to let us have the car if we don’t throw him down.’ I took the cop by the belt and lifted him up. When I let him go, he hit his head against the banister and must have broken his jaw because you could hear something breaking. He lay there with his head on the banister, like a rag doll.

I took the walkie talkie and called the gate.

‘Gate, you wanted a body? Well, you’ve got one now. I’ve just bumped off the head screw and if you don’t stop playing around with the communications and the Commissioner doesn’t get here right away, we’ll execute another hostage.’

‘Esteve, calm down,’ they said on the walkie talkie. ‘The Commissioner is almost here, he’ll come and talk to you soon’ The prisoners, for their part, got very excited at the sight of blood. While I was stabbing the head screw they were shouting all together: ‘Kill him! Kill him! Kill him!’ When it was over, there was a round of applause. I asked them to bring me some stuff to treat my wounds and a couple of prisoners went to the infirmary to fetch it.

A rope and a motorbike

I think we should go in chronological order, don’t you?—said number six—So, Pedro, you start, your story happened first. And try to give as many details as possible. So number twelve started talking.

There’s not much to say about my last escape, which was from a hospital: I just ran off as soon as I was taken there. The one before that, which was long ago, was also from a hospital and is much more interesting. It was in 1981 at Basurto hospital in Bilbao. I had been on remand for bank robbery since February and in July the judge still hadn’t decided about my case. So I decided to escape. I talked to my girlfriend, Romi, and asked her to get in touch with Cristobal and Popeye for help, a couple of friends I’d done some robberies with. My plan was that I would find the way to be taken to hospital and my friends would come over and get me out of there, holding the two or three escort guards at gunpoint. My friends agreed and we studied a plan. I started a hunger strike and fifteen days later the prison doctor ordered that I be taken to hospital to be examined. I called Romi as soon as I arrived and she came to visit me right away. She told me everything was all right and that my friends would be coming to get me.

Next morning a nurse tried to brainwash me and insisted that if I didn’t want to eat, at least I had to have some water with glucose. ‘All right,’ I said ‘but that’s all.’

After a while I saw my mate Cristobal go past, he was very pale. The door of my room was open all day and I could see everything and, of course, everybody could see me. In the afternoon my girlfriend came back and said that my friends had been there in the morning determined to get me out, but they got cold feet at the last minute. I was flaming mad. When I calmed down I told her to tell my friends to try again and not be scared. But next day Romi let me know that they were too scared to go into action.

They kept me in hospital for five days then discharged me. I obstinately carried on my hunger strike and was taken back to the same hospital, to a different ward. I complained about my kidney and they started doing tests and x-rays.

The toilet was outside the room and when I went I had to be escorted by two policemen. I noticed that the toilet window was nailed shut. Also, I had to leave the toilet door half open so they could see at least one of my legs. When I was in the room I had one wrist handcuffed to the bed and if the cop on duty was a real bastard he would handcuff both, like a crucifix. This is the level of control they had over me. I tried to behave like a good boy. Visits were the same as for the other patients,

and the cops didn't give too much trouble. My parents and my girlfriend visited me every day from half past four till half seven. My girlfriend already knew what was going on. I told her about the window so that she could tell José, a friend of mine—who was shot dead with a shotgun some time later—so that he would come with her. I wanted him to hide in the middle toilet (there were three), take the screws out of the window frame and cut them with pincers. That way I would be able to shut the window again without actually locking it, making it look as if it was locked by putting the screws back in the holes. My chick understood it perfectly and the next day they did as planned. They also left a ten-metre long cord on the outside window sill. José was to wait at home for my call, ready to come over with his motocross bike.

Some cops were more trusting than others. One day there was a cop who did something amazing. He had been on watch the day before and liked my parents and the story between my girlfriend and me. Suddenly he said, 'How long since is it since you made love to your girlfriend?'

'I haven't a clue, at least six months. They don't leave us alone in the room.'

'If you want to have a go with her on the bed that's no problem,' he said. 'My colleague and I will go into the corridor and close the door and that's it. Just call us when you you're done.'

I called my girlfriend and explained the situation. She was really shy and didn't want to. I finally convinced her and you bet we did it. Well, to be honest I did everything. She was very tense and just wanted to get it over with. So everything was over in five minutes, like the rabbits. Heh, heh, heh. I knocked on the door and the two apes⁶ came in. When Romi went away the cop who did me the favour, a guy with a moustache, about forty, remarked, 'Well, you're a fast one, aren't you? You only took a couple of minutes.'

I told him that it was because the girl was shy. The guy laughed. While I was alone with my girl I had checked the room window: it looked on to the hospital courtyard, but it was too high up to do it without a rope. As I'd already planned to escape from the toilet I just concentrated on fucking.

One night both of the cops on duty were drinkers. I usually kept some whisky or gin by my bed so I offered them some and they got completely pissed. I had started eating again, or rather drinking. The only reason I was being kept in hospital was to have my kidney checked. One of the drunkards, a lieutenant's son, asked me if I could find him some hashish.

'Sure, there's plenty of it in my neighbourhood,' I said.

'Come on, get dressed, and we'll go and get some,' he insisted, completely drunk.

I hesitated; I said I didn't want to, because although the other cop was calm you could see he was too straight for me to get away with just saying 'let's go'. It was

'For a captain of the *picos* you are quite stupid. You didn't fool anyone. Anyway, at least you'll have realized how difficult it is to attack us, haven't you?'

'I can't hear you very well,' he tried to feign.

It was from that moment that they started playing with the communication. They didn't realize that they were doing something stupid. They had relaxed on a psychological level because, in spite of our threats, nothing was happening that was any different to other cases in the past. So, when they found themselves faced with the inevitable all their ideas and hopes went to pot.

It was just past eight o'clock when, after various attempts to enter into communication and make the screws shout a bit, the Commissioner started speaking. He began by saying that the batteries of the walkie-talkies were going down and that the Commissioner of the region hadn't arrived yet, but he was nearly there.

'Listen,' I reminded him, 'we want you to put your dark green Peugeot 505 turbo-diesel with Madrid number plates outside the gate with a full tank.'

'I can't do that without authorisation from Madrid,' he tried to insist. 'Try to understand, I don't have the power to do that.'

'Stop making excuses and don't forget that the lives of seven of your screws are at stake. We don't give a shit if we die in the attempt; that said, we don't care about killing your screws either,' I poured out in one breathe.

Then I turned to Manolo, keeping the walkie-talkie on so that they could hear, I said, 'My friend, as expected it seems that we need at least one dead body.'

'All right, no problem. Let's send them a corpse to give them a shock,' my comrade answered.

The hostages looked freaked out when they heard us and they all asked me to let them talk to the *doble*. I let them speak one by one and beg their colleagues to save their life. They were cursing everybody, but the worst insults were aimed at the Commissioner for being late.

When they finished I started speaking again,

'If the Commissioner doesn't arrive in two minutes we'll deliver the first body. Understand?'

I didn't get any answer and repeated: 'Did you hear?'

Still not receiving an answer I turned to Manolo:

'These arseholes think we're joking. They still don't believe us, amigo. So there's no time left. The moment has come to send them a corpse.'

'Whenever you like,' Manolo answered.

'Well, this is it. The two minutes' deadline has well past.'

I switched on the walkie-talkie and shouted:

'Gate, motherfuckers. I know you can hear me. If the Commissioner is there he must come now or the party will begin.'

Still I got no answer, so I just added:

'Very well, you shits, you asked for it.'

⁶Common derogatory term for cops in uniform.

carrying out our threats.

Around half past seven we decided to show our indignance. We launched a series of insults through the walkie-talkie and let the hostages speak to implore them to get the Commissioner to come. That was when they told us that the Commissioner's secretary was going to talk to us.

'Listen, I'm the Commissioner's secretary,' a flat voice said.

'Well, what's your dear boss up to?' I answered.

'He's on his way. He was close by when we let him know,' he said as an explanation. 'He's late because of the traffic.'

What a nerve, listen to what he's saying! Traffic in Huesca! Then he suggested coming and talking to us.

'Okay, but you must come in alone and stay at the Centre. We can talk from there but I repeat, you must come alone,' I warned.

Not five minutes had passed when the guy turned up at the Centre. He must have been little more than forty and didn't look very like a secretary. Our discussion was very short. I was sure the Commissioner was not far away and both Manolo and I were beginning to tire of their game.

'I'm not swallowing that story about the traffic,' I greeted him.

'I can't give you any other explanation because there isn't one,' he answered without losing his composure. 'If you tell me what you want I can inform him with the telephone in the vehicle that is bringing him here.'

'You listen to me,' I said, pronouncing every syllable. 'The Commissioner had better get a move on because if we don't hear his voice in 15 minutes we will hand over the first corpse to you.'

'Keep calm, don't do anything rash,' the guy said.

'Go away and don't forget to report what you've seen,' I dismissed him. But before he went that guy had the chance to hear Manolo shouting, 'Your shit of a boss had better come soon,' my comrade growled.

The man claiming to be the secretary finally went and once he was out of sight a friend of ours told us that the guy was a captain of the Huesca *Guardia Civil*. I immediately called with the walkie-talkie.

'Gate,' they answered.

'It's the Gate here, what do you want?'

'Pass me the Commissioner's secretary,' I said, careful to stress the word 'secretary'.

'Wait a moment, he's just coming,' he answered.

'I want to ask you a question,' I said, recognizing his voice at the other end of the walkie talkie. 'When a captain of the Guardia Civil gets promotion, what grade is he promoted to?'

'I don't understand you,' he answered after a short silence.

two in the morning and my girlfriend was keeping me company. She had been there since five in the afternoon thanks to some nurses that she knew from when she used to work at the hospital; she laughed at the cops' proposal. The guard in charge said that if the captain came and saw the empty bed he'd go berserk. But the one with the moustache one was determined. 'Look, the girl can lie in the bed under the covers, so if the Capirulo (that's how they called the captain) comes round he won't notice anything strange.'

They discussed it for a while then the lieutenant's son said again, 'Come on get dressed, let's go.' He showed me a 7.65mm pistol, which must have been his own as the regulation one was a .38.

'Come on and don't do anything silly because I'll have a gun on you all the time,' the guy said.

The guard in charge was against it and eventually the one with the moustache got pissed off and taunted him: 'You're a coward. This wouldn't happen if I was with my own division. You're a wimp...' and he fell asleep in a drunken stupor.

The guard in charge took advantage of the situation to get into conversation with my girlfriend and me.

'He's just a trendy guy who's only in the police because of his father, but he's not really a cop or anything else. He doesn't care because he can work whenever and wherever he likes. But not me. I joined the police as a volunteer after finishing military service so that I could get a regular wage of over one hundred thousand pesetas. Because I have a family to feed. He doesn't.'

The next day two new guards arrived. When Romi came to see me, one of them handcuffed my hands to the sides of the bed like Jesus Christ. I was fucking furious.

'I'm gonna kill you, faggot,' I shouted at him.

My girlfriend started to cry. The bastard went out, taking the handle that served to raise and lower the bed with him. The other cop, who was from Seville, took off the handcuffs.

'Calm down girl,' he said to Romi cheerfully, 'we're not all the same. You can find bastards anywhere.'

And to me he said, 'Let's see if this sucker will say something to me.'

The twisted guard came back after a while but didn't dare say anything, clearly seeing that he'd fuck up if he got involved. Another guard came over in the afternoon and we started drinking beer. When my dad came to visit me he saw we were drunk and caused a scene. Especially with the cops.

'You should be ashamed of yourselves, getting a sick man to drink! And you're on duty!' he shouted. They stopped drinking immediately.

'Coca-cola from now on,' one of them said.

But as soon as my old man left they got out the beer cans and we carried on drinking.

—Listen Pedro, do you want to tell us about your escape or the story of your life in chapters?—number eight interrupted.

Okay. I'll carry on. What I was trying to do was to gain the screws' trust and I was sounding them out. The same cop, the one with the beer, came back the next night. He started telling me about his life, that he was from a suburb of Barcelona, that he liked spliffs and stuff like that. I got up and went into the bathroom so as not to disturb an old patient who was in the room with me. The ape and I started chatting and drinking and around two in the morning I took the plunge and asked him if I could make a call from the telephone box outside in the street 'so as not to disturb the old man'. He agreed but took his machine gun and joked, 'Watch it or I'll kill you.'

I walked along the stairs and corridors ahead of him and the guy kept aiming at me. So I just had to call my girlfriend and wish her goodnight. The cop didn't trust me one iota. He liked to joke but didn't want to take any risks.

In the morning the doctor came to see me.

'You're fine. The only thing is that your kidney has been damaged a little by the hunger strike. Just drink lots of water and it will be all right.'

'So?' I asked.

'So, nothing. I'm discharging you now,' he said.

I quickly told him that I didn't have any clothes with me and that it would be better if I went in the afternoon so that I could get my family to bring me some. He raised no objection.

It must have been about eleven in the morning. From that moment on I had to do everything in a rush as this was my last chance. I called Romi and told her that they had discharged me and to be at home at three in the afternoon, in contact with José, because I'd be calling back.

They changed shifts at around two o'clock. This time it was two cops that I'd never seen before. The one in charge said good afternoon etc. in a serious voice. I was thinking, 'Shit, this is going to be a right mess.' They changed into their uniforms and sat opposite me.

'They told me you're a good lad, but I don't believe what my colleagues say. I need to see things for myself; why were you arrested?' one of them asked.

I answered evasively, 'No, boss. I'm on remand, I'm expecting to get out any minute,' I assured him. Which was true in a sense, hehehe!

At that point we started getting on better, which I hadn't expected from my first impressions, and he started chatting. The cop said that he had just come from Rota. I told him I knew a lot of people there and mentioned a few names: do you know what's his name? Yes, and him? And this other one? Yes!! At one point he pulled out a carton of Winston's and gave me three or four packets. Later, without letting his colleague—whose name was Canario—hear him, he asked me if I knew Timoli, a prisoner who'd been on hunger strike before me. He happened to be a friend of

The same prisoners let us know that the lights in the yards, on the roofs and on the walls had all been switched off, and that a huge number of *picoletos* were positioning themselves on the roofs. It was now a quarter past six in the afternoon, so I called the main gate.

'Gate, can you hear me, Gate? Hurry up, answer somebody!'

'Yes? I'm the Vice-Commissioner.'

'Where is the Commissioner?' I asked.

'He's busy trying to get in touch with the Governor in Madrid.'

'Ah, right, are you taking me for an idiot or what? The Governor should have been contacted and informed about the situation by now. Don't try to play games with us if you want things to work out. Stop your tricks and put the lights on in the yards and on the roofs immediately. As for the cops positioning themselves on the roofs, they'd better not do any bullshit or we'll start slitting throats,' I threatened firmly.

'We're going to put the lights on', the Vice-Commissioner answered. 'But there aren't any policemen on the roofs.'

'Don't tell lies, because that's stupid. And remember that time is running out for the Commissioner to get here,' I said, laughing to myself. 'You have only five minutes left.'

I discussed it with Manolo and we both agreed to give them some more time. This time it was Manolo who said in a nasty voice: 'Listen son of a bitch, we've moved the deadline to a quarter past seven. But stop messing about. We're not putting it off again.'

Manolo was considered a dangerous crazy guy in Huesca because of the various fights he'd been involved in while he was in Category A there. This image was so fixed in the screws' minds that throughout the kidnapping both the hostages and their colleagues insisted through the walkie talkies that I try to keep him under control. He really got them into a panic. This was a great advantage because it made our threats more real.

But, let's get back to where we were: at seven they asked us for more time and we gave them until half past. We also freed a hostage. The teacher to be precise. We untied him and let him go to explain the situation. This would have a positive effect for us at a psychological level. The teacher jumped down the stairs three steps at a time, perhaps he was afraid that we might change our minds about what we'd just done.

Following this liberation they must have thought that it was just one of the usual kidnappings. That played in our favour, as you'll see in a bit. Meantime they were beginning to play with us. First, they didn't respect the second deadline and we let them feel satisfied with that. Or, at least, we let them stew in their own juice. The Commissioner didn't turn up, even though I was sure he wouldn't be far away. With every minute that passed they felt psychologically stronger seeing that we weren't

'Right, I'm cutting off all communication until the Warden gets here,' I said, putting an end to the conversation.

Then I turned to Manolo and asked how he was feeling. He said he was feeling great. He was actually a bit excited and every now and again would deal out a few slaps to the screws at random. All the same he didn't miss anything. I liked his coolness and was happy to have such a comrade for an undertaking like this.

'Esteve, can you hear me?' said a voice from the walkie-talkie.

'Yes. Is that the Warden?' I asked.

'No,' the voice replied. 'I'm the psychologist. Can we talk?'

'Very well, smart-arse,' I said pretending to be very angry. 'Look here, just think, between my comrade Manolo and myself we've done nearly 30 years' prison. Do you know what that means? What do you want, idiot? To psychoanalyse us? Or maybe you want to tell us a fairytale? Get lost, motherfucker, the Warden had better hurry up. Otherwise the party's about to begin.'

'The Warden's coming right away, Esteve,' the psychologist explained frantically. 'I just wanted to talk to you.'

There was a moment of silence, after which we heard a different voice.

'Esteve, Esteve, It's me the Warden. What is it that you want?'

'We want to make a scene out there,' I said.

'I assure you that I'm ready to authorise your transfer to hospital immediately,' said the Governor.

'I guess you didn't get it. We don't want to go to hospital. We want to go out. So, find us a helicopter.'

'No that is impossible,' he interrupted.

'Alright,' I said pretending to agree reluctantly. 'We'll take a car. But don't say no. We've already accepted your refusal of a helicopter and we won't accept any more. Do you get it?' I shouted.

'Yes, I understand Esteve. But I need to hear from the Justice Department first.'

'Alright,' I accepted. 'But meantime we want to talk to the Commissioner before half past six. Call us when you get news but don't forget the deadline.'

I cut the communication and started to analyze the situation with Manolo. We were still in a state of controlled euphoria. We were well aware of the danger we were running into, given that we had no intention of surrendering following a negotiation. It was clear that we'd either achieve our goal or we'd kill all our hostages one by one. And we had eight of them. Every time I think about these moments I'm always surprised by the lucidity, serenity and clarity of mind we had at that moment, when life was hanging by a thread. Also, our hearts were pumping hard and the adrenaline was producing a pleasant sensation.

We asked for water and some fellow prisoners brought us some bottles of it, coffee and cigarettes. They demonstrated their sympathy and solidarity with our action constantly. Cynicism was the order of the day.

mine and I told the cop about Timoli's wife, the shop she ran in the old part of the town, and other stuff. It was then that he came out with it: 'Do you have any hash?'

I didn't smoke hashish, so didn't normally have any on me. But, I assured him, I could easily get hold of some, only I'd have to make a phone call. He said okay and I did it immediately. It was about four o'clock.

I had to pay attention to Canario, who was a snitch according to his colleague. I called Romi and whispered, 'Get in touch with José and bring me five thousand pesetas of hash, a half of coke and another half of brown.' Then I turned to the cop, 'Fine, now we're going to get really hammered. Do you prefer coke or brown?'

'I like everything,' he answered, 'I didn't bring anything from Rota because I didn't have time to wind something up that I had on the go.'

An hour later my girlfriend and José came over and came up to my bed.

'Hey, did you bring everything I asked for?'

José nodded and I made a sign to the ape to send Canario off on some errand. He went to the café to buy I don't know what. I told José to take everything out but my friend got cold feet. He pulled some strange faces looking at the cop out of the corner of his eye.

'Don't worry, we can trust him,' I said loudly.

José gave me a piece of hash and the two little bags. I threw the hash at the ape.

'Here, that's for you.' It must have been about 25 grams and the cop blushed.

'No, come on, a piece of it is enough,' he made as if to refuse it.

'Come on buddy, I don't even smoke, this is for you,' I said.

I opened the little bags and using a small knife took some coke and some brown and put it on a piece of cardboard.

'Do you do smack?' I asked.

'Yes, yes!'

'Go on then,' I said, knowing perfectly well that he didn't.

'Well, not now, it's for when I want to take some girl out and get her into bed.'

I gave him the card.

'Look, when your friend Canario comes back I won't be able to speak openly. That's why I want you to know I inject smack otherwise it does nothing to me,' I said, showing him a syringe. 'I'll give you a signal later that I want to go to the toilet to shoot up, all right?'

Well, everything was ready, the rope in place, the window unscrewed, José ready with his motorbike and the cop willing to take me to the toilet alone with him. I told my girlfriend I was about to do it, and to stay in the room because the apes would go to her house later and bother her family and the neighbours would know everything. I also asked her to tell José that as soon as I sent him to buy some cakes he was to be ready with his Butalco motocross at the entrance. And that's how it went.

‘José, why don’t you do something useful and go and buy some cakes?’ This was the signal. ‘Bring us a dozen and a half and some fruit juice and plastic tumblers.’

As soon as he went and I said to Romi, ‘Oh! I forgot to ask him to buy some dark tobacco. Can you go and tell him?’

She rushed out and gave him the message in the corridor. Five minutes later I asked the guard to take me to the toilet. I squeezed his knee meaningfully as I got out of bed. He stood up and so did Canario, but as he was about to go out the cop from Rota stopped him, ‘Stay here with the girl, I’ll take him.’

He took up his automatic machine gun and, pointing it at my back and said in a serious voice, ‘Let’s go, and go straight to the toilet.’

When we got to the toilet I told him that I was going to shoot up, and I’d close the door so that I wouldn’t get a fright if someone turned up.

‘What’s up my friend? I can’t believe it, you don’t need to give any explanations,’ he surprised me, ‘But, be careful.’

I closed the door, climbed on to the toilet, opened the window and put out my hand to feel for the rope. I touched it and felt like laughing. I started to feel something strange going from my stomach straight to my brain. It was pure adrenaline. I grabbed the rope and tied it to the radiator that was solidly attached to the wall. Already outside, I clung to the sill and, supporting myself with the rope, made to go down. But my hands were slipping. The rope was very thin. I thought of tying some knots in it but there was no time, even though nobody could see me from where I was hanging because it looked on to a back garden and was hidden by the wall of the hospital. I rolled the rope around my right hand and let myself fall, holding tight with my left. I slipped and burned both hands. I gripped tightly to break my fall. I slackened my hold again and slid down to the window of the first floor. I stopped for a moment and, as my hands were grazed to the flesh, almost to the bone, I decided to jump down into the garden five or six metres below. I fell to the ground without hurting myself and ran to the main door just as I was, in slippers and pyjamas. I walked close to the wall because I thought the cop might be at the window to get some air, as it was very hot. When I got to the door I was furious because there was no sign of the motorbike, or José, or anything else. Also, I was exhausted by the whole escapade because I was still weak from the hunger strike. I was fazed at first, but thought he would be starting the bike. I went out to the street and saw him about forty metres away pushing the bike and trying to start the engine. I reached him and pushed him away from the bike, which was giving off a terrible stink of petrol. It was completely flooded. Luckily I know about motorbikes and managed to fix the problem.

‘Push,’ I screamed to José as he stopped the petrol.

We both pushed the bike as fast as we could, then when it gathered speed I pressed down the clutch, put it into second and threw myself on to the seat as I let the clutch up. The bike started to roar, burning the petrol in the cylinder, until it roared loudly

forgot the string. We decided to ask a mate to throw some down from the first floor. I noticed that a group of screws were watching the whole scene through a small window in the gate. So, with a threatening look I forced them to close the spyhole.

Once the situation was under control again we ordered the screws to tie themselves to each other. They complied, not having any choice, and we only had to tie the last one. After making sure they were completely blocked Manolo took one of them to the point where we had decided to position ourselves. It was on the third floor of the Centre. Before going any further we should point out that there were no cells or internal corridors on this level, only a couple of small storerooms and a corridor that went round the Centre. In the middle there was a drop of ten or twelve metres. It was an impregnable position, which couldn’t be stormed without us first liquidating all our hostages.

Manolo went up to this lookout point with a screw and after tying a piece of string round his neck, attached him to the bannister. He forced him to cross his feet, and after tying them together, he doubled the knot at his hands. As soon as he’d finished with the first screw he asked me to send him another one, and repeated the whole tying-up ceremony. And so on, to the last one, with whom I also went up. I had got hold of two walkie-talkies and once we’d done tying them up, we called the main gate. It must have been about five in the afternoon. From that moment the psychological battle had begun.

Our first contact was with another head screw, nicknamed El Pistolero. I was in charge of negotiations. Manolo just butted in at times to call them sons of bitches and other stuff like that.

‘Who am I talking to?’ El Pistolero asked.

‘It doesn’t matter who you are talking to,’ I answered. ‘What matters is that you listen carefully and, more important, that you do as we say.’

‘What are you trying to achieve?’

‘For the moment I’m putting you on to one of your colleagues so that he can explain the situation to you. But you can start contacting the County Commissioner. Here is the guard in charge, José Sanz.’

I then passed the walkie-talkie to the guy but before pressing the button I warned him, ‘Tell him what’s going on and watch it.’ He nodded.

‘I’m José Sanz. Listen, they have eight of us up here, all tied up. It’s a very tricky situation. I’m wounded, even if it doesn’t seem to be too serious. They are two inmates and they are armed with kitchen knives.’

‘Are you sure you are alright?’ El Pistolero asked.

I answered, ‘Yes, he’s fine. As soon as the Commissioner arrives, get him to contact us. As for the Governor, he’d better hurry up. Things will get very dangerous if we lose our temper, get it?’

‘The Warden has been alerted and he’s on his way. We are trying to contact the Commissioner,’ he tried to calm me down.

'There's nothing to talk about. You can see for yourself what's happening. Behave, so that blood won't be shed unnecessarily,' I said point-blank, without any respect. Then I turned to Manolo and told him to keep a eye on them while I went to the kitchen to get the big knives.

'Yes, but be quick,' he said nervously.

I assured him I would be back immediately then, addressing the screw, said 'Come on, give me the key to the kitchen.' In the twinkling of an eye I'd reached my objective and had the knife at the throat of the boss of the kitchen¹⁴.

'Quick, bitch, where are the knives?' Pale and speechless the boss pointed to a drawer. I rushed to open it and chose five knives. Three of them had a blade fifteen to twenty centimetres long and the other two were forty to forty-five centimetres. They looked like swords. I came back to the Centre with the knives. I gave a small and a large one to Manolo. He went to get the screw in the yard and take him to the Centre, then he went to get the teacher. The Centre was getting crowded with newcomers and my comrade didn't stop recruiting new hostages.

'I'm going to get the screw we tied up in the workshop,' he said.

'Okay, go and bring some football string to tie this lot up with when you're at it.'

But while Manolo was in the workshop the gate opened and the screw in charge came walking towards the Centre. I was watching over the screws inside and was looking out to avoid trouble as they were not tied up yet. The door of the gate was behind me and when I heard it opening I turned towards the screw in charge. Unfortunately for him he wasn't looking ahead but at some papers he was carrying. So he didn't realise what was going on until he was past me.

'Start moving towards the Centre,' I surprised him, making sure that the knife was well visible.

'But what's...?' he seemed about to ask, gesticulating as if to protest.

I stabbed him slightly in the chest, two centimetres above his right nipple. As soon as he realised he had been struck he looked incredulously and ran to hide behind the Central. I didn't run after him so as not to leave the entrance to the Centre unattended, and he ended up hiding in the kitchen. At that point Manolo came down, because somebody had told him what was going on. I explained the situation to him and he went to get the head screw. The guy had locked himself in the kitchen but came out when he heard the pathetic wailing of a screw on whose throat Castillo was holding a 40 centimetre long knife. 'José, open up, they're killing me!' the screw moaned.

Finally the head screw put his head round the door and we put him in the Centre too. We already had seven hostages there but Manolo went out again to get the screw from the workshop. Having had to rush down because of the way things were going, he hadn't been able to take him last time. This time he took him but

and the engine started.

'Jump on!' I screamed to him.

At that moment I felt as though my heart was pumping joy through my whole body.

'They won't catch us now, my friend' I said sure and happy.

We shot off. I took the Txurdinaga address and went to a friend's house.

That's the story. Now it's someone else's turn.

¹⁴A trusted prisoner in charge of the kitchen.

By knife

It's Barrot's turn—said number four.

Well, it happened on October 16, 1990. I did it with a knife. I had been taken to court for assaulting two traffic cops...

When did the traffic cop shit happen? asked number eight.

Listen guys—number four interrupted—it would be better if nobody talked because we already know that if we start asking questions and butting in all the time, we'll end up just talking about anything. All right? Come on, give it to 'em Barrot.

Well, I'll go on. The shit with the traffic cops happened in 1981 or 82. The trial was due to take place at 11 o'clock in Court number 3 in Elda. I left the cell around 9 o'clock without any breakfast or anything. We kicked up a stink so that they would bring us some coffee, but nothing. First I was searched in the section, then passed through a metal detector, and they made me undress at the entrance. Even the *picoletos*⁷ searched me.

—And how did you manage to get the knife through, man? several asked all at once.

I already had an agreement with the prisoner who was the 'orderly' for the new arrivals that he would leave it for me behind the toilet bowl in the room they put you in to wait for the Guardia Civil. That way, nobody saw anything. I put it in my shoe and the *picoletos* didn't notice. Also, the screws told them that they had already searched me thoroughly. There were another three guys in that room going to Elda with me but I was called first. Four *picoletos* were waiting for me outside the room. They handcuffed me behind my back and led me to the van. It was one of those green ones, a DKW I think, very old, with leather seats. I stayed there alone and quickly passed the handcuffs under my legs and opened one with a key that I had. I took the knife out of my shoe and put it up my left sleeve. Well, it was more a blade than a knife.

—You should have waited a little, shouldn't you—number six said.

Well, I did it like that because the *picoletos* had gone to get the other three prisoners and I didn't want any of them to see I had the key, because they'd ask me for it and I didn't want to show my cards. Later they brought these three guys from Elda, that I happened to know. We finally left the prison. We had no escort, only four *picos* came with us, two in the front of the van and two at the back.

⁷Derogative for civil guards.

After the El Pirla kidnapping we had to put up with the screws boasting about their good work for an entire week. And it was exactly ten days after the kidnapping that we learned as we were leaving the workshop that a guy who had once snitched on Manolo about an escape plan in this very prison had been transferred back. Logically, he wanted to kill him.

'Carlos,' he said with a strange light in his eyes, 'that tyke is here.'

'What do you want to do?' I asked.

'Well,' he said, 'we made a pact, so if you ask me not to take any notice of him I won't. But what I really want to do is go to that wimp and kill him.'

I didn't think much about it. Basically I was impatient, I wanted to act for fucking once and it seemed to me that this was a good excuse.

'I'm not going to ask you not to do him in, but you know the situation. We should stake everything on our freedom and try to get it at all costs. If things go wrong we must kill as many of them as possible before we fall, right?' I put to my comrade.

'Alright,' Castillo agreed. 'Tonight we'll start the party in the workshop.'

And that's how we reached the decision. We didn't need to say much in order to understand each other, nor did we need to make many arrangements for our action. We had already discussed everything. But it was a shame that the arrival of the snitch pushed us to act on the spur of the moment, renouncing our beautiful escape plan: calmly, in the silence of the night and with a bit of luck, we'd have been gone before roll call without them noticing. In that case they wouldn't have chased us with as much fury as they actually did. But the situation was urgent and we had to make a decision one way or the other. And we did. We'd talked a lot about what we'd do, if necessary, to avoid making the mistakes of other kidnappings. We'd got to the point that when we got into the workshop that night, it just took one look.

'Are you ready?' I asked him while we were having a coffee.

'Yes, and you?' he questioned me.

'Of course, let's go for that one,' I answered eagerly, pointing to the screw.

Without thinking twice we went up to the screw who was walking around the workshop. We grabbed him, put the knife to his throat and took him into his office where we tied him on the floor with the string used for sewing the footballs. His feet tied to his neck and his hands behind his back. He stayed there, unable to move an inch—out cold. Then we went down to the Centre and neutralised the head screw and three others. We surprised the four of them while they were chattering away. When we stood in front of them armed with knives they were aghast, with idiotic smiles on their faces.

'If anyone makes a move I start cutting,' I warned them, 'So sit down nice and calm.'

'What's up Carlos?' the head of the Centre says. He was called Jesus and I knew him from Daroca. 'Come on, let's talk.'

‘What are you talking about?’ I asked, starting to get irritated. ‘I don’t know what you’re getting at.’

‘I’ve known El Gorreto a long time,’ he continued, ‘we’re from the same village. I happened to ask him a favour and when I mentioned it he said I was the second person to ask him. That’s when he pointed you out to me.’

By then I was really angry, even if I tried to hide it. So, as naturally as possible, I said, ‘I still don’t understand what favour you’re talking about. You’re not being very clear...’

Seeing my reticence, Castillo, whose first name was Manolo, decided to get to the point and told me the favour I had asked of El Gorreto. It was exactly that.

‘But don’t worry, Carlos,’ Manolo Castillo reassured me. ‘When I realized what a loud-mouth that guy was I made sure he was never away from me, so I took care to see that he didn’t tell anyone else. I kept an eye on him until he was released.’

At that point Manolo put his cards on the table. He told me how his ideas were similar to mine and added that we would reach our goals more easily if we joined forces. From that moment on Manolo and I grew closer day by day. We both had very clear ideas and we got on perfectly.

By mid-October we had sorted out all the problems, especially concerning the mechanical and human material. We just had to wait for the right moment, which we reckoned would be the end of December or the beginning of January.

But in November there was a kidnapping in Huesca prison. El Pirla, El Gorreto’s brother-in-law was the protagonist. He had been arrested a few weeks earlier for killing a retired cop during a robbery. El Pirla worked in the football workshop next to the ‘Miscellaneous’ workshop, where I kept my easel and oil paints. He started off by kidnapping the screw in the football workshop, then taking the instructor screw he came to our workshop and stayed locked in there alone asking for ten grams of heroin, ten of cocaine and a syringe. But he was recaptured in the space of a couple of hours and was severely beaten. The press was full of congratulations and praise for the Governor and his screws. Praise poured down from all sides: the County Commissioner, the prison Directorate-General, anonymous honest citizens, and so on... Everybody pointed to the jailers’ decisive action in overcoming the kidnapper without the help of the police.

I was disgusted by all this of course. All kinds of comments were being made in the yard. Manolo and I also talked about the episode and once again we had the same ideas. We both agreed that, if necessary, we would do a kidnapping to escape, or die, taking them with us. We discussed a recent case in Germany where four prisoners had escaped after showing that they were prepared to kill. It is obvious that those who show that they are prepared to use violence to the full are the ones that reach freedom. Another point is that, once outside, they blew their heads off. I’m of the opinion that you have to do things well and then have a bit of luck for them to succeed.

During the journey I put my hands in front of me and told the others to keep quiet. They asked me if I had the key but even though I knew them, as I told you, I didn’t trust them so I said I’d managed to jerk one of the handcuffs open. We started talking about this and that: who was tough, who was here, who was there, the usual stories. One of them told me that there at Elda there was a great chance to escape very quickly. You know how shady these guys are. I told them I’d changed a lot and that after seven years in jail I wanted to get out for good behaviour, you know mate?

As we were reaching the town, which I hadn’t been to for years, the others were explaining how things had changed to me. They said that there were more police, that the cops went around in a Patrol 4 x 4, that the prostitutes had moved to another area, rubbish...Well, we were reaching the court. It was new and as I looked around the streets I noticed some of them had changed. The van went into a kind of little square above the court; behind it and on the opposite side there was a church which also has a rear entrance...

Hold on. Hold on—number six interrupted—wait. It seems to me that, from the way you’re describing it, you’ll continue to be the only one who knows what you’re talking about.

All right, all right. I’m just trying to say that from the upper area, which was where I could run and escape from, I saw a cop leaning on a 092 (municipal police car) with a 38-calibre in his belt as we passed. Finally the van stopped right opposite the main entrance to the court. We were about to get out so I put both hands behind my back, with the locked handcuff over the unlocked one. One of the other prisoners got out first and we were left there locked in, waiting. I looked through the bars of the van to check if the municipal guard was still behind, and there he was, still leaning on the car. I was too tense to act at that moment.

The mate who got out first was back quickly because they had put off his trial. They called me next. I got out. I was escorted by three of the *picoletos* and the other stayed in the van. I spotted another cop at the beginning of the road. In passing I saw that there was another municipal guard on the other side of the road. That is, there was one at the beginning of the road and another at the end of it. I went up the stairs and on the landing there was a *picoletto* armed with an automatic machine gun, one of those small ones with a long magazine.

—A ‘Zeta’—somebody pointed out.

—It might have been a ‘Zeta’ what do I know?

So, I saw all this and realised that it would be very difficult to run off. I didn’t want to end up as someone’s prey. The room was at the end of a straight corridor, from here to the wall. The sergeant held on tight to me by the handcuffs behind my back and the *picoletos* had an arm each. I wasn’t worried about the handcuff opening in the *pico*’s hand because you had to push hard for it to open.

Once in the courtroom I observed the scene in front of me: the Public Prosecutor, a woman, was on the left, the three judges were in the middle and my lawyer was

on the right. The trial went very quickly and I was acquitted. When it was over I had to sign the act, and that creep... what do you call him...

—The usher—suggested number four.

Him, the usher, brought the documents to me to the partitioned counter in front of me. The sergeant ordered me to stand up, but I refused. ‘No, no. He has to read it to me before I sign. I can’t read.’ The usher started reading. It was then that I hit him on the chest with my forearm, jumped over the partition and, jumping on to her table, grabbed the Public Prosecutor. Everything was very fast. Showing the knife I said I’d kill all of them if they dared to move, and told the police to throw down their weapons and get out. I saw that the traffic cops, the ones that had accused me in the trial were out like a shot. They took their uniforms and everything else. The sergeant was in a state of shock and obviously didn’t know what to do. As for the cop behind, he froze. They both left but didn’t throw down their weapons. I looked around, there was only the public prosecutor and myself left, as well as the judge and two lawyers. All the others had flown, some through the front door and others out the back.

The judge was pale and couldn’t move. They had closed the exit door. The usher was still lying on the ground senseless, foaming at the mouth.

I turned to the judge and said, ‘Look, I just want to get away. I’m doing a 30 years’ sentence and I’d rather die than go back to jail. I don’t even care about my own life, you see?’ The judge answered nervously: ‘Calm down, Barrot, of course you will get away, you’ll get away, for sure.’ The Prosecutor, who was shaking, pleaded with him: ‘Please Pepe, please.’ I motioned to the judge to open the way for me. I knew that the Guardia Civil would be outside the door, so I wanted someone to cover me. I told the judge to hurry up and see to it with the Guardia Civil that they’d let me past, otherwise I would kill the public prosecutor. The guy left the room to talk to the *picoletos*. The judge wanted to give me the green light, apparently the *picos* wouldn’t listen to him. In the end, quite exasperated, he shouted at them: ‘Go away!’ and they went. The judge came in and told me that the way was clear. But instead of going out through the main door, I said to one of the lawyers standing there: ‘Get up, open the door and look and see who’s there.’ I used him as bait, just in case. I put myself behind the door while the lawyer opened it. I got into the corridor with the public prosecutor and saw that it was empty. The judge also went out into the corridor, but through a different door. I tried to reach the street and saw through a window that it was full of people. When I got closer, everybody suddenly ran away. I opened the door on to the street and the people appeared again. I turned round and said if anyone moved I’d come back and kill them. The judge had already gone outside. You could see the whole of the street opposite from the window, I leaned out and saw that there was not a soul in sight. When I started to open the door the judge warned me that it was full of people on the left side. I could hear the whispering of the personnel, but as soon as I opened the door there was a deathly silence. This

previous year. He had wandered in Cataluña and Aragón, between the house of some relatives in Zaragoza and that of his girlfriend’s mother in Huesca. As soon as I heard this last bit a spark lit up in my brain and I asked him nonchalantly if that meant he had been living in Huesca.

‘Yes,’ he said. ‘My girlfriend is the sister of El Pirla. Their parents welcome me in their house no problem. Their mother is a well known lawyer in that town.’

El Gorreto also told me that he and his girlfriend were mixed up with shit but both were determined to come off it. Well, being ‘determined to come off it’ is, as you know, what 95 per cent of junkies always say. So I stored all this information and changed the subject.

‘Carlos, do you know a guy called Castillo?’ he asked.

‘No,’ I answered. ‘At least, I don’t know anyone of that name. But I’ve only been here for a short time and don’t know everybody.’

‘I’m asking you because I think a guy from my town with that surname is here,’ he explained. ‘But I’m not sure if it’s Manolo or his brother Enrique. Anyway, I’ll find out.’

‘If I find out any more I’ll let you know. Ok?’ I said, without any intention of looking for this Castillo.

El Gorreto was on remand and had to go to his wing, so we said goodbye. The next day we met again and he told me he had met the Castillo guy. He was in the canteen area and he pointed him out to me. He was in his thirties, with long hair and a beard that looked as if he had never cut it in his life. He was dark-skinned and I reckoned about one seventy metres tall. Gradually I told El Gorreto my idea, without going into details, but leaving it so that he could guess what it was about.

El Gorreto was released ten or twelve days after his arrival. He left without saying goodbye and as I needed his address, I went to speak to this Castillo, who was the one he’d hung out with while he was inside. This was the first time I’d spoken to Castillo, so I introduced myself and asked him if El Gorreto had left any message for me.

‘No,’ he said, observing me carefully. ‘He came to say goodbye but didn’t leave any message.’

‘Have you got his Huesca address?’ I asked directly. ‘I need to get in touch with him.’

‘No, he didn’t give it to me, but we agreed that he’d write to me,’ Castillo said, more relaxed. ‘By the way, how about a coffee and a chat?’ ‘Ok,’ I agreed, wondering what he was going to say.

We went over to the counter, asked for a couple of doubles, then we took our plastic cups and started walking. ‘What I’m about to say might upset you, but that El Gorreto talks too much,’ Castillo caught me by surprise. ‘He told me about the favour you asked of him.’

From Huesca, with hostages

I'm going to try to give you as many details as possible so that you can get the picture—number eight began. Right, the prison in Huesca was used as a point of transit for prisoners being transferred from Barcelona to Madrid and Madrid to Barcelona. I knew it as soon as they told me in Zamora that I was going to be moved there: I sensed that I would have many chances to get out of there immediately because it is a very old building.

I arrived at Huesca at the beginning of April 1991. But I was transferred to Logroño fifteen days later and returned to Huesca in July, just in time for my 28th birthday. It was the twelfth birthday I'd spent in prison and I'd got used to it, it didn't upset me any more. I numbed my brain with a load of spliffs and the day passed without joy or sadness, just like the last 11 years.

The way I would have to escape from Huesca was so obvious and simple that I didn't bother to think about it. So, I put all my energy into getting hold of everything I needed to prepare the escape. To start with, I gave myself a deadline of five months within which to carry it out. The 31st of December was the deadline for attempting to regain freedom.

When I came back to Huesca in July I shared a cell with Pepe, an old acquaintance from my area. Pepe is a great guy. Back in 1981, he escaped from the Modelo prison armed with a gun and when he was recaptured six months later, he tried it again the same way, and fell outside seriously wounded by two shots from a *Cetme*. So as not to get him into trouble I didn't mention the escape, which I imagine must have caught him completely by surprise. I sincerely hope that my escape didn't give him any problems.

The months passed and I still hadn't found the way to resolve the material problem of preparing my escape. I spoke to people, I sounded out willingness and possibilities but nothing. People talk a lot, they take things on, but when the time comes to put their words into action they melt like butter in the sun.

—Listen to the poet!—number ten joked.

Shut up and don't interrupt. I'll go on. These people I was talking about are to be avoided at all cost.

That's how things were when, in the month of August, they bring El Gorreto, a junkie with a broken arm, to Huesca. I had met this guy in the prison of Logroño so I went to look for him when I heard his name through the loudspeakers. I asked him about some mutual friends and he told me how he had gained freedom the

made me nervous. I had the public prosecutor as a shield and the judge opened the way ahead of me, but that silence made me hide and cover myself even more.

Then that idiot of a Public Prosecutor wanted to take off her gown before going into the street. I told her to get out there with her gown on or I'd belt her one and she got scared. As for the judge, he was downstairs waiting for me. But there was an area that was out of my field of vision, even with the door open. On top of that, by moving forward a little, I managed to see through the woman's hair, that the Guardia Civil sergeant was aiming at me ready to blow my head off. 'If that son of a bitch doesn't move from there I'll kill him,' I shouted at the top of my voice. The judge seemed really terrified because he hadn't noticed and shouted at the cop: 'Get away from there!' The sergeant backed down when he realized that the judge was taking full responsibility for the situation. I realised that as well and went back in with the Public Prosecutor. I placed myself in a corner behind the door. To the side there was a staircase and two elevators. Then I saw that a lift was coming up to where I was standing. I used the Public Prosecutor as a shield and waited, but it didn't stop. I knew it was a trap. There was a door opposite the lift. I looked out and saw two national and two municipal guard patrol cars outside.

While I was waiting for something to happen I noticed a municipal guard coming down on tiptoe, pistol in hand, to grab me from behind. I turned to face him and shouted, 'Guard, if you take one step further I'll put the knife right through this woman's skull.' The cop didn't say a word. He turned and went away. Two or three seconds later I saw the lift coming down again, but it went past my floor and stopped in the basement. I took the public prosecutor and stood opposite the glass door. There were municipal guards, civil guards, an ambulance with its lights flashing, plain clothes cops and pigs of every kind outside.

I was furious and said to the Prosecutor: 'Look, this is the situation: I don't want to kill you but be well aware: if they don't clear the way you and me will both die. I just want freedom.' She was crying, 'Oh! I'm fainting.' 'If you faint I'll put the knife right through you. If you faint you'll never wake up,' I told her. Do you know what the woman said? She said: 'No, no, I won't faint, I won't faint.' And she stood as straight as a poker. I was starting to see everything on the black side. But at that moment the judge, the Chief Commissioner and the Commander of the Guardia Civil came through the door. The cop's name was Benito. I turned to him with a face like a sadist shouting: 'Not one step more, Benito, or I'll kill her.' At which time Benito stopped and turned to me: 'No, no. Relax, we're just coming to talk to you, look I'm not armed. We only want to hear your requests, ok.' The cop of the Guardia Civil asked me if I wanted a car, I said a car was waiting for me two blocks down with two friends with a .38 in it. The guys wanted to negotiate and this was my last chance. I grabbed the Public Prosecutor by the hair and pressed the knife to her throat. 'Ouch, ouch,' she complained. And I threatened them, 'One minute more and if I still see a cop near the back door I'll kill her.' They went out and at that moment

the judge came back. He whined, 'Please, don't hurt her. Please, the police are going away. I swear it. Don't do anything, you'll go, you'll go. I'm even coming with you.' I turned and looked out of the window and saw that all the police cars were going. I moved near to the judge and saw that all the guards really were leaving, including the ones in plain clothes, I'd recognised them all anyway. Then I decided to go out. I moved very carefully, holding the woman tight against me. I lifted her up so that I could move more easily. I put the judge to cover the dangerous area of the stairs and went down. I started walking in the street and there were at least 300 people there. The judge stayed ahead of me. I went past the people, not through them, but on the other side of the street. But the people followed me. I heard a voice saying: 'Hey Barrot,' and this made me nervous. I clung to a car, expecting something to happen. But when the voice said, 'you've got some balls!', I realized it was somebody I knew. I kept on walking along the road towards a traffic light about 100 metres away from the court. I saw a traffic light that looked on to two blocks, it was red with four cars waiting. I shouted to the judge: 'tell the people to get back'. I was obviously referring to the people that were following me. When the judge turned round to talk to these people I took the chance to run off towards the last car in the queue with the Prosecutor over my shoulder. There was a woman inside listening to music, she hadn't noticed anything. The car window was open and I pointed the knife at her throat and said: 'Get out or I'll kill you. And leave the key in.' The woman got out of the car and ran away fast. I got into the car without the Public Prosecutor that I was holding on to by the neck with one hand, while with the other I tried the gears because I didn't know that model of car. It was a model that I wasn't familiar with. After getting it into first gear all right, I let the Public Prosecutor go and said: 'Now you see I'm a man of his word'. The truth is the woman had asked me many times to let her go. I closed the door and squealed off. I remember the woman shouting 'good luck' just as I was leaving.

I drove around in the car for six or seven blocks then abandoned it. I suspected the *picoletos* would be blocking all the town's exit roads. That was sure. As I knew the town from top to bottom, I walked through the streets and quickly got them to lose my tracks. I left the town by the mountain and reached a hideout about three hundred metres away where I stayed until dark. Then I went to Sax. I knew people there, they helped me with money and from there I went to Alicante. And then to Cordoba...

Okay, that's another story—said number four. We agreed to talk about our last escape only. Now it's Juanjo's turn, right?

on my bag with a piece of chalk, and gives it back to me with a polite 'Thank you, sir.' I don't recoil from being polite and answer: 'You're welcome.' I then take my bag and without hesitating turn towards the street, towards the exit, towards freedom...

End of story.

Fuck, you're a right storyteller—number eight says. It was like I was living it myself.

You told it well—number four appraised—I didn't need to add anything to it.

Yeah, I think that by him narrating the story alone it loosens up an important part, your personal feelings sensations and impressions—interrupted number six.—I don't know if you guys noticed but each time we tell a story we go into more detail and each consecutive story gets longer and longer. We'll leave here as great orators. We'll need that when we get out in order to convince people! Right now, it's your turn, Carlitos, go for it.

I go to the toilet and shave calmly while Juan has a shower. I put on a pair of blue velvet trousers, a black-and-white-checked shirt and a sailor's beret tilted military style. I also put on the young guard's shoes, which suit my man-of-the-sea outfit. Juan also dresses up: green jeans, with a strip of bed sheet as a belt, a long-sleeved blue shirt, white trainers and a baseball hat to cover his shaved head. We decide not to force the cabin and take the guns because it is too risky.

At half past nine we feel the boat give a bump. We are in Cadiz, the boat is docking. I take a small sports bag and put in a pair of trousers, a roadmap, and other bits and pieces that a young sailor on leave would carry. That is my intention. Juan doesn't take any luggage. He wants to travel light.

We go out of the cabin and up the stairs. I feel very strange: it is as if it is the first time I can move around without restrictions, as if I'd never been free before. But we go calmly. We end up in the garage and upon contact with people I feel myself shaking like a jelly. All kinds of sensations are going through us in gusts. We ask a couple where the exit is and they point to a staircase. We go up, mingling with the passengers, and reach the disembarkation area with a beautiful blonde at the reception. The tension is now excruciating. I feel as if everybody is looking at me. Opposite me, among a group of passengers, Juan is waiting for things to happen with the same impatience. I watch him and see him asking a girl next to him for a sip from a bottle of water.

Finally the gangway is lowered. It is linked to a bridge that leads directly to customs. A voice through a loudspeaker warns that it is not possible to go out yet. Then a group of five or six guards suddenly appear and walk quickly towards us. I don't move an inch, nor do I make any sign to Juan, who I guess is feeling the same as me. The guards come on board, walk right past us and go to the reception. Now the loudspeakers tell us it is possible to disembark. Together we head towards the bridge, at the end of which a guard is searching a suitcase while another is asking a couple of passengers for their documents. We keep an eye on them. If they ask us for our documents, Juan will put the knife to his throat, I will disarm him and we'll force our way out with a hostage.

The port is full of *picoletos*. I count six getting on the boat, another three down in the garage, presumably to pick us up from the cells, and the two cops at the end of the bridge still searching suitcases. We pass them and, to our relief, nobody says anything to us. We go through the area and down a staircase that ends up in a huge hall with a big table where the passengers put their bags and suitcases for the guards to control them. Juan goes ahead of me. As he doesn't have any luggage nobody stops him and he heads for the exit. I am about to follow him when a guard calls me back and says politely: 'Your bag, please.' I see Juan has stopped and put himself behind him on the other side of the table, ready to go into action if need be.

'Oh, I apologise,' I say 'Sorry.' I put the bag on the table and the guard gives it a quick search. When he sees that I'm not carrying anything illegal he marks a cross

An escape in Valladolid

All right then, wait till I sit down with a bottle of water next to me like all orators do—number six said—and I'll tell you my tale. First of all I'm going to tell you how I ended up being in a certain transfer, because that's what led to a series of strange circumstances.

After the events in Alicante⁸ I was held in Daroca for a month on special regime. Everything was pretty much the same but, I was in Number Five (isolation unit). From there I was taken to a trial in Malaga by normal transfer. They took me in a van that was going to Barcelona. A friend of mine and I were on trial for possession of weapons, the ones we had on us when they arrested us in Valladolid.

They were paranoid about me in Malaga and used oppressive tactics on me. In the end, well, it was like this: I had to wear prison uniform, I had no mattress, nothing at all in the cell. So, as soon as I was allowed to go into the yard, I got up on to the roof and smashed everything in reach, tiles, glass... The *picoletos* were running around like mad. They gave me my things and I came down off the roof, almost straight into the van taking me to Almeria.

I was in the 'dangerous' ward⁹ for 10 days, and as they didn't even want me there, I was transferred to Granada. I was there for another 10 days. It was freezing cold, with snow and everything. I caught something incredible, I don't know, pneumonia or something like that. It was tough, real tough. The thing was, there was no pane in the window and the toilet was next to it. To give you an idea: one night I got up to piss, you know, when you're nice and warm in bed but are dying to piss, and I collapsed in two minutes flat.

Well, when I got ill and in a really bad state they moved me back to transfers in Meco, with the intention to take me on to Daroca. They kept me in Meco for three or four days and, by chance, Tapia was there, I hadn't seen him for ages. We had been together in the Canary Islands for nearly a year.

I felt lousy, really shit, I could hardly breathe, especially when I lay down. I had to sleep almost sitting up and breathe very slowly and I was put in transfer in these conditions. I thought I'd be moved to Daroca on Tuesday, in the Barcelona van, but early on Monday they told me that I had to go to Pamplona for a trial. In the cells outside I saw the Frenchman and Campillo, who were the only ones I knew. And

⁸Reference to a prison riot at Foncalent, Alicante in 1990, which lasted three days.

⁹In Spanish prisons a section called 'dangerous' is to be found both in the regular prison and in the FIES regime. [TN]

only by sight as they say. I went to a trial in Daroca once with the Frenchman. That's all. All the others were category C prisoners going to Burgos or Nanclares. I left my rucksack in the boot and got into the cage¹⁰ with a boy, I don't even remember who he was. They put us on the left side in about the fourth cell from the front. As soon as I sat down, while I was arranging my bag with water and a sandwich, I looked down and noticed there was a ray of sunlight on the floor, going from the door to the wall. The boot was open, so you could see the light perfectly. I soon worked it out: 'Either this is the join between two bars and what I can see is the space between them, or there's no welding here.' I stamped my feet on the floor a few times in different spots, pushing hard in the centre, and it gave slightly, bending about two or three centimetres. 'Good' I said to myself and started chatting with my cell mate. I could see the strip of light on the floor right until they closed the boot just before we left so I supposed there weren't many rucksacks in that spot. In fact, as we found out later, the left half of the van was empty. That was strange, as I knew it was usually packed and the rucksacks had to be kicked in.

So, we set off from Meca. None of us had handcuffs on because the *picoletos* had taken them off when we got into the van. We hadn't even left Madrid when I heard the Frenchman, who was a couple of cages behind me, pulling the leg of the seat off. It was the back leg, to be exact, and he was smashing the floor with it. I think he was with Campillo. I called him and said to stop, go into the corridor and come up to my cell. He carried on working. I insisted, and when they opened the doors, I spoke to him.

'Look, there's no welding here,' I said, 'so this is already done right across. If the door part is all right, we'll only need to do about a foot. And look, it's rusted. If we have to saw it we won't make it. I've tried during other transfers and it's impossible to cut through the plate.'

It was true, the patch next to the door was worn by water dropping from the bottles. At first you couldn't see it very well because you needed to remove the panel made of wood or formica, like bus seats, that covered the floor. The Frenchman told me that he had come from Daroca in the same van and that they had had an argument with the cops because they'd tried to work on the floor of the corridor. They had taken off a piece of panelling in the rear but the *picos* went mad and they couldn't carry on because they'd been caught right in the middle of the job. The cops were angry because three or four cages were open and the people in the corridor were blocking their view. That's why they stuck to the back grate. As it was impossible to work in these conditions, I did this: I left the Frenchman alone to work in my cell and told everybody to go back into the cells and close the doors to leave the corridor free. I went to the back to the toilet area, and started looking at

¹⁰The cage is a cell inside the armoured van used to move prisoners. There are 20 cells in a van, with two seats each, and a corridor between them. The baggage is placed under the floor.

him about where the weapons are kept and he tells us they are in another cabin that they have upstairs.

Well, I go to the other prisoners and propose that they escape with us. The Frenchman says he doesn't have much time left to serve and the Colombian guy said something similar. I give them some cigarettes and a lighter and go back to my prisoner of war. It's around six in the afternoon. We find our dossiers¹³ and amuse ourselves reading all the bullshit they have written about us. While we are at it, we tear up the dossiers and all the photographs that are in them too. We lie in wait, waiting for the other *picoletos* to arrive to immobilise him. I can't wait to see the bastard face to face, but time is ticking away. It's already 8 o'clock and I've smoked nearly a whole packet of cigarettes in two hours. It is only another couple of hours till we reach Cadiz.

As the other guard still hasn't arrived we assume that they have realised something is up and are waiting to get into the port before acting. We are considering all this when the door opens, the shit appears and without hesitating for a second we hurl ourselves on our prey like wolves: I grab his hands to prevent him from using the pistol and Juan grabs his throat. The guy hardly resists. I search him and this one isn't armed either. We handcuff him and I put him in the cell I had been in, after moving the Colombian guy in with the Frenchman. I want to kill the guard, but obviously he is nothing but a poor cowardly devil who has lost all his arrogance all of a sudden. But he is still able to show enough effrontery to say to us, 'I've got a proposal. Look, if you untie me I'll put you back in your cells and that will be the end of it.' It is Juan who answers drily, 'Shut up asshole, or we'll do you in.'

Then we put the young *pico* in the cell and handcuff him along with his boss, who has a face like a fallen hero. Now he is our prisoner and we understand how easy it is to abuse a guy in handcuffs when he's defenceless. They are beginning to realize the same thing, for the first time I think. Their lives are in our hands and, under such circumstances, it is far more difficult to not abuse them than it is to do so. Instead, we leave them alone.

Juan questions the pig of a chief about the weapons and he tells us they are up on the second floor in cabin 77 and that they don't have the key, the girl at the reception is in charge of all the keys. We also take the beast's money. We now have a total of 30,000 pesetas. The young guy asks us to leave him some money for his journey back. We give him 5,000 pesetas as he'd got the Coca Cola for us. To the other guy, nothing, not even water. We split the money, because you never know, 13,000 pesetas to Juan and 12,000 to me. The boat would soon dock so we start to study a strategy: we will go out on the gangway mingling with the passengers and pass through customs. Just like that. The simpler the better.

¹³The dossiers travel along with prisoners on transfer.

The plan goes better than we had expected. Juan takes a long piece of wire from the mattress and shows it to me through the spyhole, laughing with a wicked look on his face. He warms the point of the knife and starts to make the hole. The Colombian guy has grown pale because of the frenetic activity going on around him, pieces of metal being cut everywhere. The Frenchman, who is more realistic, keeps an eye on the cabin of the Guardia Civil where all is quiet.

We set to work. I pass the crowbar to Juan and kick the door. In fact, there's nobody in the cabin. They must have gone up on deck. This is our chance and we move into action. Juan has already opened the passage in the spyhole and I'm confident he'll manage to open the bolt, even if it isn't easy. I see the wire sliding out of the hole and as it gets closer to the door my happiness and excitement grows. The wire touches the bolt and hooks on to it. From the spyhole I see it moving, and I motion to him. The wire slips from the bolt, he tries again and for a while goes on like that, it catches and slips—until he finally gets it.

We each go to the door. Juan puts his hand through the crack and opens my small window, then he puts the crowbar into the padlock of his door and, finally, grabbing an edge of the crowbar each, we force the lock. We stop for a moment and I go to the spyhole in the bog and see that the lock is bent, which means that it will break at any moment. The door opposite could open and the *picoletos* could appear at any moment. We are drenched in sweat and the tension and excitement is growing with every minute that passes.

We get back to work. We push on the crowbar as hard as we possibly can from our uncomfortable positions. We try again a few times and finally we make it and the lock breaks. Juan gets rid of it, and after taking out the bar, kicks the door open. He gets in front of my door and breaks the padlock first try. I get out and we go towards the Guardia Civil's cabin to make sure there is nobody inside. We take up a strategic position and crouch down to wait for the guards to come back. I am armed with the crowbar and Juan has the knife, our only one, because we couldn't get the other through the bars. While we are waiting we decide upon and practice a tactic of attack. Meantime our Colombian friend has gone from pale to ashen. He decides to close his cell and that of the Frenchman.

Meanwhile, Juan turns the cabin upside down looking for weapons which, unfortunately, are nowhere to be found. We reach the conclusion that the guards are armed and prepare to jump them as soon as they arrive. The door is half open and only a few seconds have passed since we got behind it. When it opens wide, it is a sure sign that the *picos* are back: we throw ourselves on to the guard coming in. Seeing us, he screams in terror, 'Aaahhhh', just like in a horror movie. He tries to free himself but we pin him to the floor and point the knife at his throat. As soon as he is immobilised, I search him but he is unarmed. We put the handcuffs on him and make him sit on a chair, tying him to it hand and foot. He can't move an inch. We give him back his wallet after stealing all the money out of it. Juan questions

the view through the grate of the door. I told the cops I was feeling sick. As they could see me and saw that the corridor was empty, the *picos* relaxed and sat down.

All this time the Frenchman was working like a beast. He only had the leg of the seat, but when he pulled it out by moving it back and forward it had got thin and flat at one end, like a crowbar. The base of the seat was made of plywood so it was not very hard, but he made a huge din all the same when he pulled the pieces out. There were a few spliffs going around and we asked the gypsies and other *flamenco aficionados* to sing a bit to hide the noise. Everything was going fine because you should have seen how this Frenchman worked! He looked like he was fighting with the van.

After a bit I went to see how things were going, and our friend had almost removed the whole panel. People went into the corridor again to cover us because the area we were working on was near the door and the Frenchman was over one metre ninety and hardly fitted inside the cage. So, I had to stand in the corridor. When we came to the metal sheet and took all the shit off it—there was a layer of mud and grease— we saw that there was no welding at all from the door to the wall, and that in the door area of about thirty centimetres, it was rusty.

So, we stood up and started stamping in the corner with all our might, the Frenchman on the plate and me with one foot in the corridor. Suddenly the Frenchman went through, grabbing hold of me and the seats. The floor had opened like a tin of sardines. We folded the corner down and a perfect hole resulted in the form of a triangle, so wide that the Frenchman went through down to his waist and bent to check the depth of the cavity.

If there had been any rucksacks there it would have been a problem to fold the plate down. We'd have had to move them all out and put them in one of the cages. But, as I had imagined, that part was completely empty. Everything was going great. We saw that it was easy to open the door of the boot from the inside. All we had to do was relax and wait for the right moment to jump. We'd done the job in record time as we must have been near Guadarrama, more or less.

Now we had to decide about the right place to jump out and, obviously, who was going to come with the Frenchman and me. Campillo had volunteered from the start, you might say. And another guy came and asked me if he could come with us. I didn't know him. He was about thirty years old and had a beard. I asked him his name and he said Vázquez. He was from Huelva. I also wanted to know why he was inside. He said he'd robbed some banks and got nicked. Good, or rather great, one more. Later Vázquez asked everybody in the van, cell by cell, if anybody wanted to jump. We wanted as many people as possible to jump, that way we'd have a better chance. Nothing, nobody else wanted to join us.

Well, as you know, the van was going to Burgos and stopped first in Segovia, then in Valladolid and every now and again in Palencia. We had to find out if it was going to stop in Segovia because in that case we'd have to jump there or never.

I didn't like the idea because Segovia is a small town with very few exit roads. I preferred Valladolid, which was bigger, and also it was my territory. So I went up and down the van asking them all if anybody was getting off at Segovia. It seemed like nobody was. Then we wondered if it might be stopping to pick someone up, and it was impossible to guess that. A guy, one of the prisoners, solved the problem. He was great; he went to the door at the front and said to the *picoletto*: 'Hey boss. We're stopping in Segovia to pick up my brother-in-law who's coming with me to the trial in Burgos, right?'

The *picoletto* told him we wouldn't be stopping in Segovia. Our friend insisted, 'Yes we are, boss, my brother-in-law has to come with me.'

The *pico* got annoyed and said, 'I know better than you where we're stopping.' The guy was magnificent, he did a great job.

Now we knew what we needed to know. Okay, direct to Pucela. Well, you know Villanubla is on the way to León, about 15 or 20 kilometres from Valladolid, so the van would enter from the south and go through the town centre. That would be our chance.

As we still had plenty of time I imagine each one spent it thinking about what he would do next. I mean, the moves needed to escape the siege if everything went according to plan. Now I remember that spliffs were being passed around the van. I didn't smoke because I was fucked and anyway we needed all our strength to succeed. The Frenchman didn't seem to care much about that as he had more than one spliff.

I did a round to try to get some money, you can't imagine how tense I was. They passed me two thousand pesetas, just enough for immediate necessities. Then I talked a little with Vázquez. He said he would try to quickly nick a car and get out of Valladolid full speed ahead. I warned them how I'd be going: 'I'm well known here, as soon as everything kicks off there'll be a right stir.' I also suggested meeting up again later. A group of two or three had more resources than one man alone. And then, I knew these places and they didn't. And, most important of all, I knew people who could give us shelter.

Vázquez carried on with his idea of taking a car and shooting off. The Frenchman and I agreed to meet in a big store, in the sports department to be precise. It was clear that first we'd have to run in different directions at top speed. Our only problem was the escort behind us, a Citroen or Peugeot with two cops inside. The Frenchman even had the nerve to go down into the boot, find his rucksack and put on a leather jacket. I gave him a telephone number he could reach me at if he had any problems and he wrote it on the label of his jacket.

Our great moment was near and as we were approaching Pucela we got ready and went down into the boot. We formed a row of three behind the door, the Frenchman, Vázquez and myself. The Frenchman grabbed a handle on one side and I grabbed the one on the other. All we had to do to open the door was to pull both handles at

sawing metal for nothing, and now I can't go on because I can't even close my hand.

They take the trays away and I talk to Juan through the hole. We agree that we will only have a chance to go when they open the door. It's a serious problem. Neither of us wants to miss this opportunity, but with something more concrete than what we've got at the moment to go about it. We consider taking them with our knives when they open the door. The handcuffs won't be a problem, we can open them with a hook. The real problem is that when we get to the port there will be more Guardia Civil units at the harbour awaiting the transfer, and to leave the boat like that would be quite a spectacle. Let alone impossible. We'd have to force our way out arms in hand, with a 90 per cent probability that they'd kill us. As for getting out of the harbour, it would be a devil of a job to leave the province of Cadice with all the Guardia Civil and the Policia Nacional on our tail. In the end we don't reach any conclusion. I lie down and smoke a cigarette and try to relax.

All our illusions shattered. A proper mess because in the end that shit of a *picoletto* will dump me in the next prison like a sack of potatoes. The thought of that makes me fume. I spend most of the night awake, going over of imaginary vendettas and suffering a feeling of powerlessness. It is August 25th, the last day on the boat. We will reach Cadice during the night and a cold dungeon awaits us in the port of Santa Maria.

Today Juan has a temperature, and stays in bed. It must be flu. I tell the escort and that pig of a beast refuses him the medicine Juan has brought in his luggage from Tenerife. Maybe he thinks it's drugs and asks the ship doctor to check it.

As for the Colombian, he is euphoric. He sees our escape plan has failed and he's not scared any more.

However, as soon as the guard goes, I take the knife and start breaking the ceiling. I open a small hole and pull off the metal sheet. Square intertwined rafters can be seen. They are quite thick. The problem is still the same: the saw is too small to cut them quickly and well. I hide the cut pieces of steel in the toilet and tell Juan about the beams.

They've brought the food and Juan's medicine. I enjoy my meal and think fast, hoping some brilliant idea will come into my mind. Juan wants to burn the plastic of the spyhole with a lighter and this gives me the idea I'm looking for.

They take away the trays and I note that the *picoletos* have relaxed, calmed by the fact that we will soon be arriving at the port. I ask Juan if he has a spiral notebook in his rucksack, and he says yes, he has one in the cell. So I explain my plan to him: it's about warming up the knife and making a small hole in the spyhole of the bog then passing a wire through to try to open the bolt of the door by hooking it up with the end of the wire. We also need a crowbar, so I cut a piece off the hollow ladder in the cabin. I cut our two knives into four pieces and put three of them into the empty tube to make it stronger. I pass the fourth piece to Juan.

In the morning of August 24 the South American wakes me up for breakfast which he'd been good enough to take for both of us. It's nine o'clock and I start eating after saying good morning to the ones in the next cell. Later on I make a hole in the door to try to push the bar out from the end where it locks with the padlock. Juan had given me the idea after breakfast. It is a question of sawing from the inside at the point where the iron pin is, sawing round it so that it gives way and opens. The idea is good but the thickness of the lock means that we don't have time. We are below sea level close to the engine room so the noise of the sawing is drowned by that of the engines and the guards can't hear it. I start cutting and get the South American guy to look out for us. If I'm not mistaken he is shitting himself in fear, he has guessed what we're up to and now realises what I want a knife for. I can tell from his face that he's not very happy about it. For his part, Juan needs to crack the ceiling of his cell to try to open up a hole wide enough to let him pass through and get out into the corridor. I feel euphoric and radiant and smile to the Colombian who looks very upset. I keep on working, *zic, zac, zic, zac*. Around one o'clock I call Juan because the lunch is about to arrive. He's made a small hole, which confirms what we suspected: the ceiling is empty.

I call a *picoletto* who turns out to be the young one and say, 'Listen, we've run out of cigarettes. See if you can do us the favour of buying us a few packets?'

'Okay, give me the money,' he complies. Do you want something to drink? But you know you're not allowed any alcohol.'

I give him a tenner and ask for four Coca-Colas. They bring us the food and drinks. Also the cigarettes, which I share out. After lunch the *picoletos* take the trays away and shut themselves in the cabin.

While I'm having a cigarette I look at what I've cut in three and a half hours. I do a quick calculation and realise it will be impossible to finish the job in time. I let Juan know. He tells me the same about the cell ceiling. We don't have any tools and the only saw we have is old and very small. I pass him my knife and he gives me the other plate so that I can cut it to a point, so I get the Colombian guy to look out again. Juan does the same with the Frenchman. He is happy to collaborate with us. At least, that's what it looks like.

Yes, he was a good guy—added number four.

—It's true. Because, as far as the South American guy was concerned he helped me more out of fear than conviction—number ten continued. But let's get back to where I was: I cut a point on the other plate and hide it under the mattress, then carry on doing the door, *zic, zac, zic, zac...* We go on working until eight o'clock to try to go reach our goal. I get blisters and so does Juan. We are only half way to completing the job, so we'll obviously never be finished in time.

When they bring us dinner my whole hand and arm are aching. I can hardly hold the spoon. I have to hold it where I don't have any blisters as I'd burst them and they're burning like hell. If only we had a good hacksaw. I'd spent the whole day

the same time. We agreed to jump as soon as the van stopped at a traffic light. As we'd have to get out of the left side if the escort drew up alongside the van, the most logical thing at traffic lights, we'd be able to quietly walk away without them seeing us. The only person who would be able to see us was the driver, but he should be watching the traffic of the intersection. With this in mind we put a guy above us to look through the holes of the window for us and let us know the direction we were heading in. As I knew the way into the town through Laguna de Duero perfectly, I asked him if he could see a lake, a petrol station, a river, factories and so on. That way I always had a picture of where we were. We were all very tense. The guy above said we were going over a bridge: it was the entrance to the town. The van stopped at a traffic light right by the bridge. It was a shit of a place to jump because on one side there was just an industrial area, with big empty roads and on the other there were the barracks of the Guardia Civil a few blocks along. A fucking big barracks, the General Command of Vallaloid, absolutely chock full of cops.

Without asking me, the Frenchman opened the door and said: 'Let's go, let's go now!' I stopped him, holding him back, explaining that it was full of cops there. I just made it to stop him from jumping. But we couldn't close the door now and had to hold on to it. I kept looking out through a tiny crack. The main problem was that we were going along a straight road that cuts right through the town and the van just slowed down at the three or four traffic lights it passed. And as you know, if you go through a green light on a main road, the rest will all be green too. And, son of a bitch, we got green lights all the way and were really furious. It was very dark and we couldn't see each other's faces, I can imagine what idiotic expressions we all had. Me for sure, because I knew that we'd be out of the town in no time.

We crossed Zorilla Boulevard and took García Morato bridge. There were only two possibilities left: one, that the bus would turn right towards the road to Salamanca, where we'd have more chance to escape; and the other, that it would go straight and take the new ring road to Leon.

As I continued to check where we were headed for through the grate, the Frenchman was making suggestions about the best position for jumping out of the moving van. The best thing in his opinion was to do it huddled up in fetal position. 'This guy's off his head,' fled through my mind.

Finally, as we were about to take the road to Salamanca the van took the slip-road and slowed right down. We were doing about 50 kilometres an hour, and without thinking twice I shouted: 'Now!' We opened the door wide and jumped.

I landed on my feet and as soon as I touched the ground I fled, running. Out of the corner of my eye I saw someone on my right rolling on the ground. Thank goodness the road curved to the right and as we jumped left the van catapulted us out, otherwise it would have driven right over us. I headed in the opposite direction to the van. The area where we jumped out was not a very good spot, it was a residential suburb with many gardens and porches, so there was wide visibility. But anyway, I

knew it well. The escort car came at me and when I started running I had to jump over the railing to avoid being hit. I ran like hell. The one who had been driving the car started running after me. About 150 metres on I looked back and saw that the guy was still on my tracks. He was young, about 25 or 26 years old and taller than me. How he ran, the bastard! I looked at him a couple of times and noticed he wasn't carrying his piece. As you know the cops usually take their holster off and leave it on the dashboard on long journeys to be more comfortable. And as he'd set off at full speed, he'd left it there. So, the cop was still on my tracks when I started to feel a pain in my chest and could hardly breathe, so I put my brain into action. First, as always, to avoid being shot you run towards people, and I was running like mad on the pavement of a wide road. But when I saw the cop wasn't armed and that my strength was about to give up, I went in the direction of an area that is usually more or less deserted. If I was among people I'd run the risk of somebody jumping on me or a police car appearing on the scene, so I decided to grapple him alone before getting completely out of breath.

I headed towards the river behind the sports centre. There was a yard there and no one in sight. I started to slow down, pretending I was tired, and the cop came closer. When we were next to a parked truck he put a hand on my shoulder. For a second I could see his triumphant expression as if he was saying: 'I've got you.' I stopped suddenly and pushed my right elbow back with all my might. I hit him in the pit of the stomach and the air that came out of the *picoletto* passed by my ear in a flash. It went guasssssh like a fire cracker. I mean, my elbow nearly came out through his back. I turned and punched him a left and a right in the face and he fell *reventacus y esparramacus*, [a Legion expression: exhausted and in pieces]. As he fell he shouted: 'Help! Help me!' I saw two guys get out of the lorry. They were construction workers in overalls and quite old, about 45 or 50. The cop was lying face down on the ground. I punched him hard on the nape of the neck twice and the guy stayed on the ground bending and stretching his leg, like epileptics do when they're having a fit. The workers just went back into the truck and shut the door.

I ran fast towards the river. I was so tired that when I got to a stone wall that was up to my waist I couldn't even jump over it, I just lent over it and let myself fall on the other side. I rolled down the small bank and got back up on my feet on a little dirt track that runs along the river bank. Sporty people use it for jogging. I started running. I mean trotting rather, I couldn't fucking make it, but I had to go along a little path bordering the river. I had no strength left but I had to shift from there. Also, it was a beautiful day and I was wearing a tracksuit with a thick lining, a mountaineering jacket and basketball trainers. I was suffocating.

I reached the bridge, I think it's called Isabel la Católica, and under it two boys, schoolboys aged about 16 or 17 were rolling a spliff. I joined them and they sneaked a look at me. I started talking to them: 'It's hot.' 'Yes, it's a good day today.' 'Look at that, I go running with all this gear on and now I'm boiling.' 'Have you run far?'

medieval times. That way, the bar is pushed into the protrusion and secured with the padlock. How I'm explaining, eh? A real genius! So, like I said, the cells have two bunk beds, a toilet and a kind of ventilator on the ceiling covered by a grating. This tiny space, about two metres by three, was to be my universe for two long days. Think, the cell cabin was so small we could hardly move, when one of us stood up the other had to lie down.

The *picoletos* have just taken the seats from Juan's cell and haven't noticed they've been cut, so I feel euphoric. When they go Juan passes me one of the plates we'd cut through the hole between the cells, and I hide it under the mattress. Soon they go and open my neighbours' to take back the cleaning kit. They escort us to the luggage room one by one and we take what we need for the journey. When it's our turn, I go first. The two guards stand opposite to check the operation while I take what I need. I have handcuffs on, like the others.

'Listen you, I hope we're going to have a peaceful journey, get it?' the beast says in a provocative tone of voice.

I turn round and look him up and down with contempt. I am convinced more than ever that he's a smart-ass. That's it, exactly, a braggart one metre eighty-five, about 100 kilos, who is not only armed but has me in his power. The most intelligent thing for me to do is to ignore him. He realizes this and tries it on again.

'Don't look at me like that. I've met many of your kind and worse.'

As I am supposed to be a dangerous prisoner the beast is boasting in front of his young colleague, showing off how macho he is. I gather up my things and go back to my cell. 'Keep cool Xosé,' I say to myself. But I can't stop thinking about that pig and I tell Juan through the hole in the wall what happened to me with that arrogant *picoletto*.

Around 8pm they open the hole to give us the trays with the evening meal. We eat in silence. I have hardly spoken to the boy in the cell with me, but I observe him while I'm eating and I have to say I don't like the look of him. After dinner the guards come back to pick up the trays. I'm watching them through the bull's eye when I notice a pistol sticking out of the back of the belt of my hated temporary guardian. I warn Juan immediately saying, 'That's mine.' He looks through the spyhole and sees it and we quickly agree: one each. I talk with Juan for a couple of hours, until ten o'clock. Among other things I tell him that I want to kill that guard, but he ends up convincing me that it's not the right moment.

When we go to bed I tell the South American to keep a lookout and see if anybody is coming. I pull the iron bar out from under the mattress and take the saw from its hiding-place and set to work, cutting a point at the end of one bar. After seeing the guard's piece I want to have a good knife on me. Within a couple of hours I have a magnificent rudimental weapon, its effectiveness guaranteed by its sharp point. I hide the knife and saw and get ready to sleep, tomorrow is another day and we'll see. Juan and I are ready to try something, but we don't know exactly what yet.

do some sawing, then he does. While one of us is sawing the other keeps a lookout so that he can work in peace. We work until we manage to cut through two of the three bars. Now we just have to hope that the guards don't notice anything when they come to take the chairs back. There are three flat plates about 35 centimetres long and three centimetres wide. This job takes us about an hour. It's risky but we don't have any choice. My comrade Juan gets annoyed. He calls me to the toilet and says he doesn't trust the two guys that are with us. He's afraid they might freak out and tell the cops at any moment. This typical lack of trust among us prisoners is shit, thanks to the many snitches who sow discord by grassing up other prisoners, getting some benefit or reward in return. Also, the prison management encourages this attitude so it can reach where its long arms and guard dog's eyes can't. It's sad, but it's the reality of prison, as we all know. But, in the end... let's get back to the story.

—Yes, said number six—let's get back to the story then they'll give you the chair of prison philosopher ... don't you see how you go on and on...?

See—number four butts in—he talks like a telegram: I arrive, I take, I saw, I see—don't you think?

Everybody tells his story as he likes, number 10 took up again. I'm doing it this way. It is as if I'm living these moments all over again, and I'm telling you what happens as we go along. Now I'll carry on. And don't interrupt me because I let the others talk. Well, I was at the point where there is an uneasy atmosphere in the cabin but I'm sure everything will be ok. In fact, we get to Las Palmas and a group of local *picoletos* come to take the prisoners in the next cell who wish us a good journey before leaving. 'Good luck,' they say. We say the same. After a while we leave the port and head towards Cadiz. We are out at sea again and the two guards come to move us into the empty cell. Before doing so they put the handcuffs on us through the hole in the cell door. They open the door and I try to get put in with Juan, but the beast won't have it.

'You're going in this one, I give the orders here,' he says.

We couldn't do anything about it. I have to stay in the cell with the South American and Juan with the Frenchman. We are split up by adversity. No doubt about it.

The two cabins are identical. There's only one new thing compared to the one I was in before, in this one there are small ladders in the couchette. They are made of thin hollow metal, so don't look much at first sight. The bog of this cabin was identical to the other. Both had a spyhole at eye level made of hard thick plastic. The bogs are in the corridor of the cabins and you can see the one from the other. Between the cell doors and the cabin of the *picoletos* there is an empty room. Through the spyhole we see that the cell doors are locked with a wide iron bar that, thanks to a slat at one end, goes right through the door and is secured with padlocks to pieces of metal with holes in them at each side. They must have used the same method in

'I've come from the División Azul bridge.' 'Shit, then you have run a lot.' In all that, here one of them passes me the spliff. I said no, I did smoke but I was doing sport that day.

I got my breathe back a little sitting there with them and after a bit asked them where I could find a taxi stop. They said there weren't any, but that a lot go over the bridge. They got up to go off and I tagged along with them on the way up to get lost in the crowd more than anything. As soon as I got to the road a taxi appeared. Look, if you'd seen how I hurled myself towards it, you wouldn't believe it. It took me to Plaza Mayor and I went into a bar. I had a beer and made a couple of calls. They came in a car to get me and brought me sunglasses and a different colour of jacket. They left me in a house with some food, out of danger. I heard on the radio that three of us had managed to escape: Campillo, Vázquez and me. The Frenchman was caught by the other *picoletos* of the escort about two hundred metres from the van. The guy had really bad luck, after doing nearly all the work himself. Anyway, then during the night they nicked Campillo wandering around an industrial area in the outskirts. I don't know what he was doing there but I suppose it was because he didn't know the area. Vázquez made it. He went into a neighbourhood and managed to meet some people who left him outside the town a couple of days later. It's not so easy to find such great people, is it? As for me, I left Valladolid the following night, and they kept on looking for me there, even in the sewers.

Well, that's all. Now it's your turn, Juan and Norman.

A cruise from Tenerife

We won't tell it together—said number four—. So, it's better if you tell it Xosé, okay? If you forget something, I'll make a note of it.

All right, uhm. I'll tell the story—number ten began—but don't interrupt me.

You'll give it your usual theatrical touch—number six joked.

The important thing is to tell it, no? Well, it all started when we were in Tenerife II. It was August 23, 1991. After lunchtime, at about 3 o'clock, a bunch of screws come into the cell, handcuff me and take me to the entrance. I am obviously being transferred. They don't take the handcuffs off and I throw my clothes into rucksacks. Then I have a fag, walking around there drenched in sweat because of the heat.

A screw arrives and says, 'Listen Tarrío, you can only take two bags. And as for the money, just 1,000 pesetas. These are the orders.'

'Whose orders?' I ask.

'It's all the same to me, but the Guardia Civil won't let you take any more bags. And the *doble*¹¹ said not to give you any more money than I told you,' answers the jailer visibly, annoyed.

'Right,' I say, 'it's all right for the two bags. But I'm taking the money with me because I'll need it to buy food and cigarettes.'

The guy doesn't know what to say and goes off clicking his heels on the floor in a really effeminate way.

The Guardia Civil arrive immediately afterward, I see only two of them. Just looking at him the one in command makes a bad impression on me. He shouts too much. Maybe to scare me. I don't know, but if that's what he wants he'll be disappointed. Two prisoners I'd never seen before pass through the fingerprints room. They are also being transferred. After taking their fingerprints they put handcuffs on them and take them to the van that I imagine will take us to the port to get the ferry. Then it is Juan's and my turn. One of the guards comes swaggering towards us. This particular *pico* confirms all my suspicions about him: he really does want to scare us. He is one metre eighty and thinks he is Romay¹². At last we are all in the van, four prisoners and three *picos*: the beast and a young one that looks like a little posh dog, although it seems he doesn't like the way his colleague is treating the prisoners. This young guy is about my age, 23. It's only them and the van driver, the eldest of

the three.

We drive out of the prison perimetre. The two prisoners I'd seen in the fingerprint room are sitting next to me. Juanito is sitting opposite me calmly reading a letter. We reach the port and I can just see the huge hull of the boat opposite us through the metal window of the van, it is the J. J. Sister. The access for vehicles is a mobile bridge that links the road to the boat garage. The vehicles go in one by one in single file. The area is watched over by five or six *picoletos* armed with automatic machine guns. I suppose they are there to direct the traffic and, at the same time, to prevent anyone from escaping. When we reach the port in Cadiz there will be the same number of *picoletos* waiting for us. That was how the the outward journey went, so I assume it will be the same for the return one.

The Guardia Civil let us go first and we are on the boat in a flash. They open the van doors and we get out two at a time. First the guys travelling with us, then, once they've been locked up in the cell-cabin, it's our turn. We go down some steps so narrow that we only just fit, and leave our rucksacks at the end of the passage. When we get down they put us in the same cell as the other two. We notice that there are two cabin cells, but the other is occupied by two other prisoners who say they have come from Puerto de Santa María and are on their way to Salto del Negro prison on Gran Canaria. They put two chairs in our cell until they move us to the one that will become vacant when we reach Las Palmas.

The other two mates in the cell are foreigners on their way to Carabanchel. One, a Frenchman, is to be extradited at his country's request and the other, a Colombian, is going to do time for drug-trafficking.

Juan is chatting through a hole in the wall with the two prisoners going to Las Palmas. In the meantime I'm checking out the cabin cell and note that one of the seats has iron bars between the legs.

Soon after, as we're heading towards Las Palmas, the cops take our handcuffs off. We are already out at sea and we note that there are only two guards escorting us: the young guy and the beast.

There are slits in the cell doors to pass the food trays through. They look like letterboxes, but deeper and wider, and have a little door on the outside that is normally bolted shut. It was through this hole that they took the handcuffs off us.

After a bit the *picos* tell us that we'll get out later to take our wash kit. They also warn us that after Las Palmas the cells will not be opened again for the rest of the journey. It is strictly forbidden by the Captain of the boat. While my mates are talking I turn the chair upside down in a corner of the cell and start sawing at the bar between the legs with a tiny saw. I'd managed to get it through the search they did when we left the prison by hiding it inside one of my trainers. I can see the foreigners with us look alarmed but they don't say anything. Juan, however, understands what I'm trying to do and keeps an eye on the cabin of the Guardia Civil through the spyhole in the door. To get it done we take it in turns in absolute complicity. First I

¹¹Slang for prison director.

¹²A famous rugby player. [TN]