

Before it is forgotten . . .

Veronica Maldonado

Six in the morning

The light is made in a sky still stunned by the dawn. Electric power had not returned yet, and only half an hour ago that, since two in the afternoon of the previous day, I set foot inside my building. I am full of dust from head to toe, with a tousled face mask and sleepy dead... but, anyway, I do not fall asleep. I sit on the edge of my bed afraid to let myself fall on it.

It seems like a dream that, seventeen hours ago, shortly before I headed to my classes, the worst fear of my life would have materialized. But that is how it was. I heard the earthquake. I did not feel it immediately, first I heard it. It was like the tremor of the feet of a rabid giant jumping on top of the roof; for a hundredth of a second I thought that my neighbors were moving an impossible piece of furniture, but the terror that inhabits in me since 1985 made me go down the stairs in huge strides while I listened how some things fell apart and broke inside my apartment. I did not turn to look at anything, afraid that, the same as to the wife of Lot, terror would turn me to stone.

Again, as in other tremors, I was the first of all the neighbors to leave the apartment and go down the two floors agitated. Yes, I have been daunted by earthquakes for thirty-two years. But this time, as I was going down the stairs, I thought about beating it and, yet, the underground reptile, already freed, climbed quickly up the stairs... I jumped on its back, I do not know how, and I reached the floor below. The door was open. An employee of the dry cleaners which is in the ground floor opened the door to the street and was hardly holding himself on to the lintel. I walked to him, like someone who follows the light at the end of the tunnel.

THE ENDLESS SECONDS

There it was again, like a mockery, like a nightmare that wakes up just on the fateful date of its birthday, a beast called earthquake. As I could, I reached the doorframe of the door and my hand clung to the worker's arm; I almost crossed his face with an accidental slap, I apologized to him, but I did not let go of his arm. On the street, silence. Nobody ran nor shouted. A lady, retracted against the wall, remained serious throughout the quake, with her eyes downcast, as if

attending the funeral of a stranger. The seconds became endless, but once the underground serpent was still, we realized that there was a lot of dust around us. Unlike the now close 85, in which half the city never imagined the magnitude of the disaster, this time we had no doubt: something very serious had happened to the city, for sure. The memory of Tlatelolco... downtown... San Antonio Abad became present.

Endless seconds, as those of the previous week, the late seismic alert that sounded light years later, finally the earth stopped. After exchanging awkward comments, I go up to the apartment... bookshelves and shelves collapsed, fallen paintings, things on the floor, I wanted to accommodate them, but my mind was elsewhere. I did not try to go to school, being sure that the classes would be suspended while the building was inspected. I decided to wait for the electric power to return. The cell phone almost with no battery, with no credit, unusable at that time for an emergency. It was already four in the afternoon and the electricity was not back...minutes for calling... I needed minutes for my cell phone ... air time.... time and air. I decided then to go out and see how the world was beyond my small apartment.

THE WORLD BEYOND

A few houses away, a palm on the point of vomiting is leaning on the windows of a building; on the other side of the street, the remains of a fence have collapsed on the sidewalk. I walk aimlessly and, two streets away, I have to see an unusual picture, the most surreal of that day: in a building full of cracks, bricks all over, already leaning on its neighbor, a woman, as if the earthquake had only been an annoying pause, she mops her house and her terrace, on the sixth floor, all calmly. I am not the only one who has been stunned, several look at her from below without giving credit.

I am still walking, drunker of grief than that palm. On the other side of Tlalpan there are several buildings with monumental cracks. I do not know what else to do... without telephone, without electric power, I do not know in what conditions the rest of the city is... My family, my friends... a policeman who remains guarding a dental depot tries to help me and he dials from his cell phone, but nothing... there is no way.

I return to the apartment; I go upstairs with fear. The dry cleaner is closed and the rest of the neighbors have started the escape. I am alone. And suddenly I remember that on that night it is my turn to accompany my mother... and yes, I want to be with her, to embrace to the root that she is.

I put some things in a backpack and go out to the street. Tlalpan has turned itself in a torrent of people walking, cars and minibuses do not circulate, the metro moves with great slowness. I join the river of pilgrims calculating the hours it will take me to reach the east of the city. I start listening to the rumors of people who come walking in the opposite direction, some from Metro Mixhuca, others from San Antonio Abad. Everyone agrees that the picture is horrible: cars stranded in big streets, the metro stopped further ahead. The city almost immobile... and the assaults have begun in all the points of the city, taking advantage of the bewilderment. I can not believe it. Was it like that in 85? I repeat myself that no, that the humanitarian gesture preponderated, that those who stole were the delegates, the politicians of all times, that even the thieves helped... or I do not know if I want to convince myself that it was like this.

Disoriented, not knowing what to do, I go back over my steps, I return... I walk again towards my mother's house. Finally, I stop in front of a miraculous oasis: a small company that opened its doors to support the walkers. You can use the bathrooms, the internet connection, charge cell phones, drink water, communicate by phone, rest... and all are offered with infinite kindness and sensitivity. Not even a bad manner, not even a gesture of boredom despite of being overwhelmed by the number of people. They lend cables, search for electric outlets, they help dial the most nervous. At last, my family finds out that I am well and that it is a little less than impossible to get there. A little later, the small and generous company runs out of energy too, and with no line. At that moment the first rumors arrive that there, in Bretaña, two streets behind my house, a building collapsed and people are trapped. I come back on my steps...

THE OLD GHOST

I think... "Should I go to see what is needed or should I go home to prepare myself in order to help?" I know how it is, I also did a brigade in '85... better to prepare myself. But I change direction to where the rumors take me. A street away the bites of the beast start to be seen, before arriving to Bretaña 90: cracked walls, broken glass canopies on the floor and, when turning around, the vision filled me with terror... it was as if a time machine full of sadism was returning me thirty-two years back. The old ghost, the collapsed building with the same agonizing beast appearance as those which fell years ago, and – I would then know – the same miserable history shared with those buildings that, in a row, collapsed in San Antonio Abad.

Bretaña became a sad metonymy of that city that was no longer there, that did not belong to today, that could not be, that could not be...but it was.

The neighbors had already organized themselves. On two plastic tables, several people were frantically preparing sandwiches. In front of the building, men and women formed rows in order to be passing the buckets with which the rubble was removed.

I approached quickly to ask what was needed, what was missing, in order to go and get it. a small woman with enormous eyes and raspy ways, screamed to organize the neighbors, shouts that were too much, but which, for her, were a way of asserting a newly founded and imposed authority. The truth is that the situation was not such as to discuss horizontalities, so I restrained myself and followed her instructions. I ran out with the task of getting plastic bags and ropes.

I climb again the dreaded stairs to the lonely apartment. I look for a jacket, some tennis shoes, the bags... As I prepare myself, comes from the street, the melancholy, unexpected sound of an organ-player. I look out the window. The organ-player, in the middle of the street, moves the crank and from the soul of the apparatus springs an old waltz, a waltz that seems to caress the wounded streets, a waltz that does not wait for the little coin that nobody spares, but only, to sound...to sound and to accompany. I cry without more, just that, right at that moment, it is of no use to cry. I go out.

BRETAÑA 90

I arrive with the bags and some money before Esmeralda, that is the name of the person who has taken the task of organizing. She is a seller of the pedestrian crossing that crosses Tlalpan and lives four blocks from misfortune. She is the one who, in less than three hours, has managed to raise one thousand seven hundred pesos to buy the first roll of sandwiches and water for those who participated in the rescue crews.

Nothing was left out of her sight, she decided what movement had to be done, almost always shouting, shouting that was beginning to undermine the energy and desire of many of those present. It soon became evident that she was failing in her decisions, but finding her mode, and making her see a solution with subtlety, she became smooth like silk. To those of us who were beginning to integrate, she looked at us with distrust, thinking about everyone, without exception, that we were only going to peek out, to eat something and flee. After three hours, she began to trust and show respect.

I remember that, at a certain time of night, someone approached to ask about how the brigade had been formed. “I made an effort organizing it”, and with a smile I corrected her: “We all made an effort and we all organized everything” ... and she, finally, with a smile, assumed the plural fully. Five hours later, I was so completely of her reliability, that she even gave me for safe keeping seventy pesos that were left from collecting money.

Through the afternoon, I learned about the situation of the building, how and why it fell down. With scraps of rumors and talks from the neighbors who come by for a sandwich or a bottle of water, I go building a story that, I will later find out, it was not entirely true.

A tall, bearded neighbor, who devours a sandwich with three bites, tells how the rumble of the building was heard as it collapsed before the seismic alert sounded (so those were the footsteps of the giant and the dust that rose up to streets beyond), and how, a week before, he had been in that building to find out about the apartments that were for rent. And so, while we serve coffee cups and distribute food to our dusty heroes, we learn about the history of the building. It was an old house to which they added three more floors, but they did not bother to reinforce the structure, they just put nice coverings, and ready! For renting in twelve thousand pesos each apartment.

One of the people who got stuck was the cleaning woman who, exactly that day, she went to work with her baby. Another neighbor clarifies that they were two towers, the first one, the one built over the old house, was the one that collapsed. The new one, behind it, is the one we could still see standing, except for the metal stairs that were a twisted mess. Another neighbor, later, will tell us that, just a week before, a group of bricklayers were putting the finishing details to the building, and that only one apartment had been rented, at the back, in the new tower. Of the people trapped, in addition to the cleaning lady and her baby, there were two more who were in the front apartment, of demonstration, receiving potential customers. Long silence and low eyes in which we listened, especially when the baby was mentioned.

While a group of the Food Commission circulates among the lines of people who take out buckets of rubble, the fists held high start to happen, and the long silences that keep us with a knot in the throat... and the applause each time the sonar locates someone.

That afternoon they managed to take out alive a person who was in the apartment of demonstration, the applause resounds. The afternoon goes on its course, it does not take long to appear the second and even third-class politicians, waving their hands and trying to boss people around. Some only arrive at the food area, gobble something up, pat some backs and leave.

Several military vehicles surround the area, they are full of sleeping soldiers who only get up to the bathroom or for coffee and hot food, very few were into the removing of rubble that day. Less were those who ventured to enter through the tiny tunnels, caring themselves, dosing themselves, their slogan seemed to be: “Let the civilians get tired”. A deputy arrived breaking through. He claims to Esmeralda for having asked people for money, to not do it anymore, that he “would bring a spinning top of pastor-meat”, a real mockery.

After ten o'clock at night, I see a familiar face and I run to embrace Francisco, alumnus of the school where I work and whose huge heart will make him go there for more than ten days, from one zone zero to another, dispensing his help without rest, from Bretaña to Ermita, from Ermita to Zapata, from Zapata to Edimburgo, and from there to the block of flats of Taxqueña, from which he will not leave for several days, until we asked him to stop, to rest. A necessary hug, warm and full of comfort.

About five o'clock in the morning, my legs cramp me for a break, to go back to the building. I resist, still with fear gripping my ribs and crouching over my kidneys, but I can not stand it anymore, I have to rest. Almost everyone has gone to sleep, except those who take out rubble. I have to rest, although the sort of hysteria that embraced almost all of us the members of the Brigade, is resistant that I do it. I take a freezing sandwich and a bottle of water and I leave.

INSOMNIAC

At least I will not have to bath in the dark. I am still terrified and the fear reaches the paroxysm once I am under the shower, I breathe with difficulty, inhaling the air loudly, with an anxiety that surpasses me. My ears betray me, imaginary seismic alerts sound every five seconds that make me open the inner door, run off to the living room, naked, ready to run like this down the stairs. I go back under the water with the desire that someone, whoever, would be with me, hugging me under the water, comforting our mutual grief. I am filled with anger the feeling of helplessness and vulnerability, and about something that I had not felt before despite living without company for decades... the overwhelming sense of loneliness. I crouch in a corner of the bathroom, like a helpless girl, and I break to mourn with a disconsolate crying that did not shake me long ago.

I get into bed, but sleep does not come. Just a soft sleep that goes away at the slightest noise. I get into the social networks and I post about the events of the day, I revive the 85 without trying to set comparisons, but trying to invite to join the action to those who have not come out yet. I remember with special clarity what happened in San Antonio Abad thirty-two years ago: the

dressmakers trapped in a locked room, with no possibility of escape because, as they were exploited in the night shift, the boss feared that they would escape with his fabrics on the back while he was sleeping in his warm apartment of Polanco. I eat with rage the freezing sandwich and now chewy by the humidity. Finally, fatigue overcomes me and I sleep deeply.

Day two

On Wednesday we no longer had to prepare food. Buckets of stews by kilos, huge bags full of sandwiches, some even with labels encouraging lovingly those who were collaborating, started to arrive. The misfortune, indeed, highlights the best, the worst and even the most regular thing that inhabits us: the same we got several bags of baguettes prepared in a very expensive restaurant as well as leftover food that someone had left long ago in a refrigerator and now saw the opportunity to get rid of it. In the afternoon I began to stumble, and one of my neighbors with whom I shared a shift, sent me out... "You have to sleep". Yes, it was necessary, I knew that it was not going to last long assigning me strenuous days, but anyway I ignored myself. now I know it was wrong, that things do not work that way.

At about three in the morning, overtaken by the food, we decided to take it to other nearby points. The family of Tultitlan lent their van and we went to Balsas, a little street near Plutarco and Ermita, behind Sanborns. There, leaning forward, was a building that its first floor had collapsed... the roof was against the floor and a chill ran through us. The building next door was about to collapse, there is almost a meter between the walls that before were kissing. A knot of anguish is made every time the rescue workers bring stretchers over, but nothing. Nobody comes out. We took food to them, but the sad reality is that they needed fretsaws, shovels, picks... and many hands, because at that time they began to be scarce. The small journey in nearby areas astonished me, I realized that in all those days I had not left the small quadrant that surrounded Bretaña, and until that moment I could see other monsters in front of me... an intense light illuminated, near the subway Ermita, the building next to the Holiday Inn, a shell where before there were flats, windows, furniture, desires, looks, laughter, dreams, pending payments, a beer, children playing.

We returned to Bretaña. I had left my cell phone in a neighboring house that generously lent the toilet and donated energy. A military man decided that he had priority and disconnected mine, but in addition, he had hidden my cell phone under his and, when I asked where my device was, he said that he did not know, that a lady had taken it. I lifted his cell phone and said to him: "No, here

it is, thanks”. I better not express the contempt that inhabited me at that moment...

In the summary of the day, Esmeralda had been erased as a leader, but the generous woman organized one of the most beautiful actions in the entire camp: she sent the children – her children the first –, in small groups, with the instruction to recover the water bottles that were abandoned and half consumed. Once recovered, the water was emptied in buckets in order to utilize for the bath, since the water had not been reconnected and was scarce. Once the bottles were empty, the children crushed them and separated the lids to recover the pet. When that task was over, the children set about sweeping and picking up the pieces of unicef and other debris which did not put them at risk. It seemed to me a brave and intelligent way to integrate children into social action and to reduce their anguish, making them participants and not putting them in the bubble of “nothing happens”.

The other news was that they had managed to take out the second person and a “topo” out that had been trapped during one of the replicas. About three in the morning I retired, telling to myself that a person is not indispensable, but it may be necessary if he or she is in a position to be. I walk down the cold street because of the drizzle that has not forgiven the moment. The home phone already works. My younger sister listens to me, she contains me, she gives me her words. Listening to her calms me down. To sleep. Hopefully.

IN FRONT OF THE BEAST

At five in the morning the phone wakes me up. It was Christian, dear alumnus and now friend, who had approached to Bretaña to give his hands and his heart for that day. He was since dawn, he had dialed me, but I, who had fallen into a dream like stone, I did not hear him. I tell him that I would try to sleep a little.

My youngest sister arrives very early with food, naturopathic remedies, her love and her hugs. I sleep a little.

Almost at nine o'clock in the morning I am heading to Bretaña, passing a first filter, “the food girls”, that we already recognize each other and we salute. They are with the hot breakfast ready, but they look at me with a face of “there is no place here anymore”. After a call, Christian arrives in order to pick me up and I say goodbye to my neighbors. We continue to the second checkpoint, which, to my surprise, is no longer controlled by civilians, but by the military.

We walked until we reached the infamous building of Bretaña 90, to which up to this moment I had not managed to see straight ahead not even in daytime. Christian gives me a helmet and an orange vest. Now I belong to a

brigade to which I never imagined belonging: Tools, right in front of the collapsed building, facing the monster, the beast that still had at least one life between its teeth.

In a few hours, Christian had organized the tooling place with remarkable efficiency, and from that hour until three o'clock in the morning on Thursday, the words I heard the most were: marro, pick, picoleta, harness, emery disks, wrenches, shovels, gloves, mouth masks, pry-bar, jack ... The rigor, the order with which Christian carries on things and controls the flow of material, how he recovers the picks and the shovels when going after them among the debris, never ceases to amaze me. Raul, Pablo and Natalia, who are with him, do not rest even a minute. Little will last me the pleasure of order and efficiency.

Christian points me to a group of people, two men and two women who, sitting on some buckets, do not take their eyes off the building. "they are the parents of Rubi", he says to me, but he had heard wrong, then we would know that her name was actually Alitzy, and she was the girl trapped in the rubble. The cleaning lady with a baby did not exist, who was fighting to survive was Alitzy Judith, a nineteen-year-old girl.

After separating buckets and moving them closer to collect debris, pull pieces of roof, sweep the brutal snow from the unicef which formed the roofs of that building, we gave ourselves a break. Christian has to leave, it is too much the time he has been here and the stress that is generated by administering the tooling and firmly stopping those who claim, those who want to take shovels to pretend they are working, having to tell those who are working that the material that is needed does not exist, to tolerate a horrible little man who was walking around giving himself airs of influential and that, with great arrogance, he told Raul, an extraordinarily simple and cooperative man, to arrange a helmet for him, which would allow him to walk through the food area in order to stick the food in his throat, go by the tool area and shake a cardboard, talk with his hands and demand an inventory (really?) and try to treat us as if we were staff at his service.

Where do these characters come from? Could it be that the tremor removed the stones that covered the entrance to a low frequency dimension full of succubus and incubi?

Christian has to rest, it is necessary. As soon as he does, Osvaldo joins the group. Raul, who is a worker of an oil platform, all smiles and good humor, but also hard work and disposition, introduces him to me:

-He is the doctor – he says to me very smiling.

-What is your name? – I tell him.

Raul is surprised.

-And if you better call him "doctor"? because he is a doctor.

-I do not like titles, the truth, I prefer names. My name is Veronica.

I prove, with sorrow, that in Mexico we have total reverence towards titles, and that, as I will discover later, is a problem. Raul, the good and simple man, honest and hardworking man, had a problem: he was very easily imposed by anyone who came forward as “coordinator”, “organizer”, “graduate”, “wife of the president of all the scouts of the world and surrounding areas” ... He was left utterly perplexed by them, he gave them full authority, he did not hesitate to obey the owner of these titles in whatever order he was given.

When someone came asking who was in charge, and I answered that everyone – Osvaldo, Raul, a quiet but efficient man who never said his name, and another who arranged the shovels and prepared the ropes –, the person looked at me up and down and said: “No, a boss”, I thought: “Really? Do we really need bosses?” Now I do not know the answer, because Osvaldo, who was very nice and affable, turned out to be very inefficient as responsible: he changed places of things arbitrarily, he placed boxes of gloves on material that was necessary to have at hand. As soon as I protested because we had located the boxes and their contents, he said that it was fine, but that the order could be improved and, without waiting for consensus, he began to rearrange... As it happens when a new leader arrives every six years. And when looking up, that mass of concrete, half collapsed, becomes a symbol of the homeland.

Ten minutes later we seemed like peas in boxes. We did not respond efficiently to what was requested, we did not find what was urgent. I decided better to ask what was needed and not fight, because it was a silly and unnecessary exercise. Raul looked at me giving me the reason, but overwhelmed by years of learning that those who have a title are more important and have more capabilities than the rest of the mortals in whatever they have in front of them, he did not say anything either.

At our side, in their little corner, remains the family of Alitzy Judith, her parents, her uncles... waiting, immutable. Looking with suspicion (and they were doing right) to those who approached to comfort them. Her uncle helped us unclog buckets to get rid of debris. After a while, I approached, very ashamed, and I told them that maybe it was not the time, but that if later they needed help, I was in a position to appeal to the generosity of my acquaintances to send them to them. I scrawled them my phone number on a piece of cardboard, almost sure that they were going to throw it away. I tried to tell them that I was sorry about what was happening, but, how do you comfort some parents who have spent three days staring at a concrete beast that is sitting on their daughter?

A lady, armed with a basket full of sandwiches, insists that we accept her food. She introduces herself as the wife of the president of I do not know what,

and she swears that, as soon as I give her the list of things that are needed, her influential husband will bring them in half an hour. She gives me a piece of cardboard, a marker, and urges me to make the list. I, truthfully, do it reluctantly, knowing that it was a useless task, trying not to listen the little voice that was telling me “do not waste time, he will not bring anything”, because, from personal experience, those who boast the most about their titles and power of response are the most useless at the time of action. And so it was. The lady only got a place in the first row in order to star in her own soap-opera: she ran towards the parents of Alitzzy to embrace them with uncontrollable tears, who visibly uncomfortable, had to receive that hug. After, she ran amidst the building and the tools, shouting for a mallet or a pry bar, all of a sudden installing herself as the head of all the volunteers.

The response in social media to the minimum and maximum requests was surprising, I was very proud to know that I have generous and prompt friendships, that the networks are useful for more than uploading photos of unusual Milanese or beach vacations. Odet, with the nails that were needed, and Mane, Juan and Vero, arrived quickly with boxes full of helmets, marros and bands, and several more, even strangers, communicated and brought help. With discretion they arrived and with discretion they left after leaving what was necessary. My respect always to them and to the many who thus contributed.

The battery from the cell phone has run out and I return home to recharge it. The apartment is still dusty, with things stacked on the floor waiting to return to their routine. Christian communicates in order to know if something is needed, “your presence” I tell him. When I return to the place, he is already there, back, rearranging the chaos.

Wednesday of debris and dust, of long silences and raised fists. Some topos arrive to meet with the parents of Alitzzy and help them climb the mountain of rubble. “Posi, make an effort, daughter, we are waiting for you!” “Alitzzy, do not give up”, their tremulous screams vibrate over the silent crowd. Then, the pry-bars and the shovels, the voices hurrying the work. Finally, a few soldiers join the line of work.

A few hours later, sleepless and tired, I accept that I am no longer needed there and, again, through networks, I ask for a replacement. Claudia Yolanda arrives with the phrase: “I am ready” shining on her forehead. When I am telling her where the ropes are and how to put on the gloves, there is a rumor running that the rescue squad was already close to Alitzzy. A wave of joy gives us new energy. Her father, a gentle and simple man, with flat eyes, approaches to thank us, he embraces us, he tells us that he has seen the effort of all to rescue his daughter, he breaks into tears when he tells us that if God had decided to take his daughter, he would have to accept it, but what he had seen in those days

filled him with gratitude to everyone. He gave us another hug and I was not able anymore to move from there, I could not.

Until the end, I told myself, until the end.

With the passing of the hours, the rumor of the location of Alitzy went off as well as our enthusiasm. A fine, but stubborn rain dropped, crying from the sky anticipating the end of the story.

While we were struggling to improvise a canvas to protect the tools from the rain, the impertinent little man appears again, now accompanied by a young man who dazzled cleaning in the middle of our dirt. The little man gestures with his hands demanding gloves and a helmet, “of the greens”, he says with arrogance (that is, of the new ones, of those that are still shimmering).

Noble Raul passes it to him and, before being able to protest, I see how the gleaming boy puts it on, after which, both go towards the food place, an area to which many of the volunteers have not been able to get close to all day. Again, I can not help but think of this country, operating like this on other levels, that small abuse that represents others of monstrous dimensions.

A little later the Japanese brigade becomes present, that surprisingly, rather than gratitude, it aroused resentful comments from the subway brigadiers (who, we must say, they smoked near diesel and gasoline, even though we asked them not to do so).

The Japanese showed an example of discipline, willingness and total respect: they knew when to act, when to leave, how to help, when it was not feasible to do so. While they were maneuvering, there were signs of collapse, but they, nevertheless, entered into the tunnel. Long hours, the rain finally stops.

With the passage of time, dogs stop searching, soldiers with sonars come down from the concrete mountain. The black clouds advance slowly, like omens.

An older man approaches and asks us, in a muffled voice, for gloves. We give them a pair, he looks at them, he tries them on, he leaves them: “Let’s see if you have ones that go tighter”. We searched, but there were none. The man mutters: “it is that the blood...”.

And moves away, leaving a trail of uncertainty that is about to cease being it.

A woman, organizer and soul of that area, approaches to us asking for raincoats for those from Semefo, and the doubts dissipate. An immense frustration falls along with the second rain of the dawn. There is nothing left to do. The body of Alitzy Judith Carrillo Quintero comes out before the silence and impotence of all. We still have to witness a painful contrast: on the one hand, some soldiers and volunteers climb through the poles, they stretch their arms to see if the cameras of their cell phones can capture something of the

terrible moment; on the other, the Japanese brigadiers, with the helmets placed on their chests, their eyes low and their eyes closed, full of respect, they murmur prayers.

As soon as the ambulance of the Semefo departs, we take on the task of collecting the scattered tools in order to send them to other areas where they were needed. Done the task, I embrace my brigade companions and I leave. When passing through the food place, one of my neighbors, a companion of the first day, comes to hug me. And for the first time I am thinking that five days ago we were a couple of strangers living in adjoining streets and now we were there, hurt by the death of someone we did not know either. We hugged and said good bye. I walk towards my house, it is almost four in the morning and I discover that, although the fast-paced beast had just won another round, for the first time in a long time, I do not feel afraid to walk alone at dawn.

The lessons

On Thursday I am surprised again by sleeplessness, crossed by many emotions, by fatigue, by fury, by sadness. I think I am going to have to face that something is not right and find a solution. For now, I decide that in a few hours I will go to embrace my roots (that I really need to), and try to sleep, finally, in another place, because I know that, in one or two weeks, when the affected victims begin to be abandoned to their fate – because it will happen, as it happened with ABC, as happened with Ayotzinapa –, hands and energy will be needed to continue supporting them. Unless this shaking has served to dust off our consciences. For now, a long struggle will come that will surely last for months or years.

And also, at that time, I think that it is necessary to reflect on 85 and review what happened in 2017, with its remarkable similarities and its abysmal differences. Almost everyone knows or intuits what to do during the earthquake, but few know the instructions on how to prepare before and, more delicate still, nobody knows how to act later.

The story does not end here. Christian calls me, a few hours later, to find out about the sad, shameful climax: once the tools were organized, the most rested stayed to make delivery brigades. Was urgently needed to take them, above all, to Taxqueña and Edinburgo. There were already three trucks loaded and ready to go; while the people still were present, the military helped us to concentrate and accommodate them, but once all of them left and the brigadiers were the only ones left to distribute them, the “lieutenant” in charge (like that, anonymous), without the numerous presence of neighbors and volunteers (who probably would have lynched them), he said that nothing could be taken away,

that they would protect the material. There were no possible pleas nor urgency that would affect him, he did not want to let anything go. Finally, at six in the morning, after shouting, crying and getting angry, they had to leave the diesel, the gasoline and three power plants that the military did not allow to move it for anything in the world.

I get furious, I want to cry out of anger. The military were chatting on their cell phones and talking to their families while the civilians did all the work, they were not necessary. The deputy offering the taco al pastor top, was not necessary. Arriving and surrounding every building they saw with yellow tape, but without entering to them and verifying anything, is not responsive, it is rancid bureaucracy. And it was not necessary. Again, incompetent, clumsy, arbitrary, they were not necessary.

Surpassed, surpassed again as thirty-two years ago, again demonstrating that they are not of use to us at all, only to abuse, to steal, to control.

THE CALL

The following days I tried to join the brigade from Taxqueña, but 85 is not the same as thirty-two years later, and the fatigue forced me to work from the computer and the telephone, requesting for volunteers, materials, tools, place for shelter, clothes, consolation. Every morning, all week, as a ritual, I passed in front of Bretaña 90, now cordoned.

“Posi”, I think, and I keep on walking.

A week later, a call wakes me up. I am surprised to hear the father of Alitz; ashamed, he confesses that his family is in need of financial help, he tells me how a television station has offered him help in exchange of him crying live broadcast, and he, a brave man who remained almost four days sat on a bucket, without being able to take his eyes off the concrete mass in front of him, has a greater dignity than that collapse, which the whole Bretaña and Portales did not admit. “My girl was a warrior and she does not deserve it”, I hear him say, struggling to contain the crying and the fury. The government did not give him any support and he has debts emanated from his daughter’s funeral. He is an itinerant merchant who, in addition, with the burden of his pain on him, he still encouraged himself to go out to the streets to help others.

I tell him not to worry, that I will organize the promised collect and we agreed that I would communicate with him as soon as I had some money for them.

This earthquake has been the same movie with other miserable. During the week, thanks to the communication with the volunteers of Taxqueña,

Edimburgo, Chimalpopoca, I am finding out about the coincidences, about the worst, the best, the nauseating ones. How many times will we have to repeat this story? Is it necessary to do it? What to do so that, in the next earthquake, will not happen as in these.

BEFORE IT IS FORGOTTEN

Because yes, even if it seems a lie, this is going to be forgotten. The city will return to its routine and its “normality” very soon and, for the immense majority of its inhabitants, nothing will have happened. For others, sadly everything happened.

The earthquake placed me in front of the reality of a solitary building that filled me with fear, in freezing streets that I had to walk in solitude and at dawn. It revealed to me that, faced with the danger, there will be neighbors who will leave looking for a better port, but there are others who will remain without hesitation. The earthquake took away the peace for a long time: trying to sleep or having something similar to the sleep came to be an unattainable longing, especially every time a horn sounded or the apartment swayed at the passing of a truck. I still have to turn to see the things that hang, the curtains, a necklace, an ornament, to convince myself that everything is fine. For weeks, moving from my bedroom to the bathroom returned me to childhood, those days when going to pee at night put you at risk of falling into the hands of a monster that lurked in the darkness of the corridor or under the bed... and yes, this monster, from which I have been terrorized by for thirty-two-years, lives under the bed, far below.

But the earthquake also allowed me to realize the love that surrounds me, to receive so many messages from dear friends, from the family. The solidarity of distant people, the spirit, the cuddling. Love, as always, sprouting among the ruins.

With the collect, the anonymous love arrived for the family of Alitzy, generously. I speak with Don Fermin to arrange to meet and hand him over the money.

STARES

I do not know if it is a privilege or a curse. I want to think that it is the first thing, that life, for some reason, gave me those stares in order to do something with them, with their memory.

Stares from mother.

I remember, for example, the stare of the mother of Atzin, the student of La Esmeralda who one day decided to go to a march in support of the missing normal-school students and woke up in a high security prison treated as a high caliber criminal. His mother had a resolute look, of a combative lion, that Saturday in which we met with the representative of the INBA to ask him what were they going to do about it.

Another, a glazed stare, the stare of Estela, a mother that one dawn, a commando disappeared her son. A green stare that was made of water only to show the metal of her conviction: they were not going to make her sign for a corpse that was not of her son, to whom she would keep on looking for, no matter what the cost.

And the stare of the mothers of the normal-school students of Ayotzinapa, just a week after the events; those stares are the ones that have deeply embedded me. The most loaded stares of pain and dignity that I have seen. They no longer had tears; they were a bottomless pit. They held our hands and we were unable to say anything. They even apologized, to our shame, for not having anymore tears to cry.

I arrive to Xola subway. Christian and Pablo wait for me in the turnstiles: “they are already down – Christian tells me –, but we did not want to arrive alone”. We hugged and went down to the platform. Under the clock, the mother and aunt of Alitzy Judith await us. Don Fermin is not there. Later we will know the cause of his absence.

We entered a nearby café. I am in front of her. And again, the stare of another mother assails me.

Those women, a month ago were strangers, living on the other side of the city. We did not know about our mutual existences, and there we are, Chris, Pablo, the mother, the aunt, me. That is what I think while I look at her. Two weeks ago we did not care about each other, we never guessed that that day we were going to have coffee, and to talk and to remember and to get angry and to cry together. But that’s how it was.

Hopefully it had not been. Hopefully her baby, as she affectionately invokes her, would still be alive and that our paths would have never crossed.

But they crossed.

There we are, in that little Chinese café. One in front of the other, trying to start a conversation.

And her motherly stare, touches me, it is a stare that looks like a hummingbird, elusive, shy, modest. She blinks, her eyes tighten constantly trying to catch the tears, she lowers her eyes, still unable to resist the unbearable

light of the day that dared to be made by itself, to exist without the presence of her daughter...

It has been only eighteen days after the departure of Judith. We started talking, we asked about her husband. We found out that he is her father by adoption, but that, for her, "he was more of a father than the biological father of Judith". He was a dad for her, his beloved daughter, since she was four years old. He is devastated, still unable to face the threshold to join the world. After helping in other collapses for a week, he collapsed himself in an endless depression. Her husband, that man, all love and kindness, will call us later and listening to his voice, his words... I can not even describe it.

We ask him if he needs anything, if he needs more help, and little by little the conversation begins, the construction of Alitzy Judith over the rubble of pain: pretty, coquettish, innocent. She did not want to continue studying preparatory school and told her parents not to spend, that definitely she did not like to go to school. But she knew that the education was important, so she decided to start working to help her parents, to save and be able to send her younger siblings to private schools. "I am not going to get married nor have children", she said constantly.

And her words had an oracular echo that afternoon in Breña 90.

Judith, the one who got excited listening to band music and convinced to her dad to accompany her and dance with her as soon as she located some party. And there they went with her, her dad and her little sister, happy accomplices of the dazzling teenager.

Alitzy Judith... "Posi", as she was called fondly, who fantasized about the world of drug dealing, and made her parents move their heads when she expressed that she was going to become a mafia woman. "You are crazy!" they commented to her. Judith, who lost her biological father five years ago in a violent kidnapping and who now, finally, was buried next to him. Alitzy, the girl from the Texcoco who also had panic that one day, like happened to other girls and young women from the state of Mexico, destiny would reach her one night in the form of a van with tinted windows.

"Posi", the one who already had a job thanks to her neighbor, the engineer, who made an appointment with her in Portales, in the brand new apartment that he had just rented as an office, because the building site where he was working in was on the other side of Tlalpan. Judith, who arrived with fear, because she had never traveled before by subway and was afraid of getting lost in her labyrinthine transfers, but she managed to reach Portales and entered in the office of Breña 90 that September 19; Alitzy, who received instructions from the engineer, who left at eleven o'clock from Breña after leaving her so

she could arrange some things with the indication to reach him at one-thirty in the building site.

But half past one did not arrive for “Posi”.

Before that time, a superhuman force flipped over the brand new building to let everyone see its rotten heart from the root, as rotten as the real estate that rented tombstones, not apartments; as their representatives, who fluttered like vultures in the middle of the novena trying to convince them to sign a monetary agreement; to intimidate them saying that later would be less, taking advantage of the moment of greater emotional vulnerability that a mother can have: the funeral of her daughter. Disgust and rage invade us.

Judith’s mother sighs to the verge of the crying.

Her sister is next to me, who has been the strong tree that has supported her, who was with her those endless days and nights in Breña and she, whose name is Consuelo – never better named someone –, tells us in a low voice that her family is also being defeated under the pressure, that they suspect that two relatives, an uncle and another brother, have sold themselves to the real estate agency as mediators and harass them to sign the agreement, repeating to them that they will not give them more, trying to undermine their dignity.

The mother jumps, “it is not the money, I do not sell my daughter’s death, I will not sign anything, I do not want their money, what I want is to see the owner and ask her: if it had been her daughter, would she accept the six hundred thousand pesos? No, I will not sign anything, because it is like giving them permission to continue constructing buildings like that and letting more people die”.

Christian, eloquent, clear, generous, speaks. And his words are light and fill the two warriors with peace and comfort. I am dazzled by this kind man who was my student and I can only be proud of him, again.

We continue talking. At one point, the aunt of “Posi” tells me in a low voice: “I concentrated on the feet”. I do not understand. “I focused on the feet to recognize her, from the rest...” She stays silent. She moves her head; she closes her eyes. Silence.

She did not let the sister to see her, she preferred to sacrifice herself to that vision, to that last moment, to be the one that had to live forever with the nightmare of her beloved niece annihilated by the subsoil of negligence. But not the sister, not the mother.

Dealing with the acquaintances who on the day of the funeral questioned the color of the coffin and the size of the floral arrangements, confronting the vultures of the real estate agency who made themselves present in the middle of the prayers, with the family that worried her with the question of whether she was sure that she was really her daughter, because maybe they had given her

another body. The sister controlling her when she was about to open the coffin to be sure: “It is your daughter, believe me. Do not open. Trust me”.

The sister that holds, who is the strong tree who can be hugged when the memory of “Posi” is unbearable. Her room still remains as she left it, and she, her mother, has not been able to transpose that threshold either.

“Posi”, the one who was always willing to help everyone, the generous, the one who never kept a peso for herself. Her grandparents had a miscellany, and whenever they needed her, she would go there to assist. “My little warrior left”, sighs a distressed grandmother, surrounded by the photos of Alitzy.

The river of memories and indignation stops after almost three hours, after the call of Don Fermin that leaves our heart in suspense. Then, we hug and leave the café, we say goodbye. Pablo, Christian and I stay without knowing what to say to each other. We talk a little, almost in monosyllables, we cross the road, we speak again, we hug each other hard, we say goodbye.

Stares of mothers that stay sown in my soul, and how good! I will try to irrigate them daily, so they do not get lost, so that they are not forgotten.

Dedication

And so as the mother of Judith has in her sister a strong tree that holds and supports her, so do I. Someone who came to see me after the earthquake, who tried to convince me to move to her house, who held me emotionally, who ran to buy me naturopathic remedies, who searched for help for me, who embraced me and cried with me, but, above all, she encouraged me and helped me to get out of the distress. To her, my kind sister Ana Grisel, I dedicate this chronicle.

Thanks for so much, dear sister.