

### Note 3

*Tepito, Mexico City, Wednesday, June 14, 2017.*

I got to the corner to look for Ivan. It was close to 10 a.m. On that day, neither he nor Beto were at the graffiti covered corner, nor in front of the metal stall, but to the side of the small row of stores in which Ivan said he usually lived. He was sitting on the folding metal chair and wore a cherry color shirt. Beto, standing in front of him, was wearing his classic rapper outfit. Ivan saw me and straight away excused himself. He said he had to go before midday, maybe at 11.30 a.m., since they had asked him to do a delivery and he could not turn it down.

He told me that he had in any case gone to Doña Tere's for breakfast. I told him what had happened the day before, that I had sat down to eat a *gordita* and had waited for him. Since Ivan did not take me strictly as a native of the neighborhood, the detail was sufficiently convincing for him because he nodded his head and confirmed that it was what the lady sold:

—And you didn't ask where I was?

—Yeah I did.

—And what did she say?

—That you don't go out Tuesdays.

—That woman's a fucking asshole! She owes me an explanation!

Someone called Beto from the other side of the street and he went over quickly. I took the opportunity to tell Ivan that I had “done my task” and I showed him the notepad. He left his chair and took a few steps towards the row of small stores, he sat on the edge of a ramp for people with disabilities and I sat on the other side, just in front of him. I began to read the questions and he gave me some of his impressions. I asked him how he had started his activities and he replied that because of the trust he was held in, he had earned his work in two ways: 1) by being known and recognized publicly, having lived at the row of stores where we met up, and 2) because of his time in prison, where he had got to know some of the personalities who he later worked with.

I guessed that Ivan could continue talking, so I decided to switch the recorder on and keep it in my pocket. Ivan read out a question from the notebook:

—What work are you currently doing? —and he immediately replied—  
okay, well I look after cars and I'm still running errands for people.

I asked him if it had always been like that; in other words had he done the same thing before being sent to prison. Ivan said that despite appearances his life had been very normal before going to prison. He always thought of himself as a “homebody” and that this was the most radical change, maybe above all because he had spent very many years (15) behind bars.

I asked Ivan about the incident which led him to jail and he replied that it had been for “giving himself the luxury” of killing someone, which was part of a grudge with a so-called “godmother” of the then DIPD.<sup>5</sup> The man was known for extorting former convicts and young criminals in the neighborhood, and one of the latest targets had been one of Ivan’s family members, who he beat up a few times. He stated that after the beatings he decided to kill the man and he simply took his chance. Some months later he found him in a bar close to the neighborhood, passing time, or as he put it rather more punchily: “There he was, being a cool asshole with his little girlfriends.” Nobody even saw Ivan, who went up and removed his pistol from his belt and emptied the whole cartridge into him.

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<sup>5</sup> The defunct DIPD was the Investigation Division for the Prevention of Crime, still remembered on the streets as *Negro Durazo’s* police. “Godmothers” are police agents or former agents who supposedly mediate between the police agencies and criminal groups, permitting their administration and control. For years they were controversial personalities whose existence was even questionable.

Ivan told me that he was tackled by the rest of the men who were present at the event and that they handed him over to the DIPD. Since these were not good times for transparency, accountability or human rights, the legal processes were not followed in the slightest. He told me that he spent six days kidnapped, constantly being beaten and tortured. They only stopped when they transferred him to a different place.

—They did what they liked with me... apart from raping me; that was cool. —He said he felt calmer once he arrived in prison because the torture had at least finished, and despite it happening—. I got over what he had done to my relative: the dog was dead and the rage was over.

Although clearly prison is not an easy place, and even less so when you come from the neighborhood. There is a chance that some street conflicts can break out again in the institutional environment. Ivan explained that one of the inmates was the brother-in-law of the “godmother” he killed (another sign of the thin line between criminality and the law) and that they had to smooth things over afterwards. Ivan interrupted his story because someone told him they needed him. He asked me to come back and look for him in the afternoon, say at 6 p.m. and that I did not need to worry about leaving the neighborhood because he would accompany me to a safe place after our conversation had ended. I promised to return.

At 6.10 p.m. I was on my way back to the neighborhood to see Ivan. It had been raining heavily and I was worried about getting to the corner at night and finding nobody there. However I did not want to break my word or lose the opportunity to make observations at a different time of day, to look for variations or new details to describe the context. I took an umbrella and I followed the same route as the previous occasions to reach our meeting point. The street market was practically empty as a result of the weather, although there were still some traders collecting their things. There were police agents in the Module and in front on permanent guard, and although I knew they were not much use they still made me feel a bit safer.

I carried on walking past several blocks until I reached the corner. I was surprised that not only was it not empty, but there were many more people than I had seen in the mornings. Beto was talking to three youths, all very much of the same appearance as himself, and just over to his right was Ivan, who arrived in a red sweatshirt with a cap, which he was wearing. He sat in his folding seat as if it was a throne, flanked by two men of about the same age as him, around 50. The man to his left had a thick and dark mustache; and the one on his right had his head shaved. The rest of the men on the corner were wearing jackets or sweatshirts, and all were in some sort of horizontal line, sheltering from the rain on the graffitied corner thanks to a flimsy roof.

Just like the day I worked with the recorder open, it was hard for me to determine the border between the corner as an amusement space and as negotiation space. Meanwhile on Beto's side the mood was more festive and the youths were smoking marijuana, on Ivan's side the discussion appeared to be much more serious. I could not hear what they were saying, they were practically speaking in secret. Ivan's appearance was much more somber; there was something about his gaze and gestures which made me think he had been using drugs. I decided to close my umbrella and to join the end of the horizontal line, stopping a couple of paces from the man with the shaven head.

Ivan rested against more than one chair, to be able keep an eye on the back of the man with the shaved head, and he spoke to me rather rudely:

—Hey neighborhood! I think this shit can't be dealt with now, better come back later tomorrow night!

—Okay —I replied.

Ivan's tone left no room for doubt, he wanted me away from the corner and quick, so I opened my umbrella and started on my way back. As it was night by this time I quickened my step and tried not to make eye contact with anyone, until I found myself with two police who were on guard in the rain next to a motorbike, taking shelter with some thin police department waterproofs.

What struck me about the situation was not just Ivan's tough tone, but also the use of euphemisms that had appeared at other times on the corner (such as the question of his work "running errands," or when he decided he had to go for "something"). Ivan also spoke to me as if we had some business or other type of transaction, and it seemed as if his gestures in some way protected him and me too. He protected me in the sense of not revealing my identity, which in any case could endanger me from the other players on the corner, and he was protecting himself by not being taken as someone who revealed the secrets of what was going on there, with all the implications that could have. This time he did not stick to his promise of accompanying me out of the neighborhood, but you take what you can.