

# **From the Beginning to the End**

## **The Beginning: Celebrating Life**

The definition of the trip to Portugal was a celebration of life. Carlos Hurtado (aka Charlie or Carlitos) organized the trip to replace another one that was postponed in May 2020 for obvious reasons. Charlie always called Phillip Scholz (aka el mono) on February 20 for his birthday; that Monday, February 20, 2023, was no exception. Charlie had a work trip that ended in Portugal, and he had invited his friend Natalia Criado (aka Nats) to join him for the Lisbon part of the journey. After talking to Phillip on his birthday, they decided that the group of three friends would make the trip.

Phillip went to Berlin to celebrate his birthday and returned feeling unwell. He was diagnosed with meningitis; it was unclear if the illness was viral or bacterial. The disease kept him in the hospital for several weeks, and there were even discussions about canceling the trip to Portugal. He was tested until April 20, and he went to Colombia to visit his family by mid-May. It wasn't until the end of May that they finally decided that the trip of a lifetime would take place in the last days of June and the first days of July.

Carlos had a proposed itinerary for each day, almost down to the minute. However, the other members of the terrific trio, Phillip and Natalia, being artists, preferred a more flexible itinerary. They agreed to divide the trip into three planned and three adventurous days. On Tuesday, June 27, they would travel to Lisbon, and they had three scheduled days from June 28 to June 30, followed by a fluid part from July 1 to July 3.

## **The Journey**

The first two full days were spent in Lisbon, Portugal. Carlos was finishing a work trip and was already in Lisbon. Nats came from Milan and almost missed her flight; she almost didn't wake up that morning to catch the plane. On the morning of Tuesday, June 27, Phillip signed a contract with the Salzburg Theater, and in the afternoon, he flew to Lisbon with plenty of time; he would arrive at 10 PM in Lisbon. The excitement was boundless! Natalia and Carlos were eagerly waiting for Phillip to celebrate. They made a reservation at the Trindade brewery for the three of them to have dinner when Phillip arrived. When they got there, they noticed they were the only ones in a restaurant with over fifty tables. When all three were finally together, they laughed a lot about the situation. The journey began and was filled with laughter. At one point during dinner, Carlos raised his glass of sparkling water and said, "I'm thrilled to be able to take this trip with my first two loves in life." Remember to tell the people you love how much you love them. After dinner, they went to a bar, had a gin (and sparkling water), and went to bed early (1:30 AM).

**The first full day was Wednesday, June 28.** On that day, they did everything they could; the excitement was off the charts. The morning started with Carlos going for a 10K run (he's a little obsessed with exercise). Nats and Phillip woke up a few minutes before Charlie returned. They connected Nats' phone to the hotel's TV, and the party began. The first compromising video: Carlos shirtless, Phillip in pajamas, and Natalia lying on the bed. A lot of laughter, photos and videos that were immediately posted on IG. "Get ready because we're having breakfast at Neighborhood," Natalia's first order. Then came an essential question

from Phillip: "What are we going to do if someone needs to use the bathroom for number two? Do we have a code?" The first of many important questions. "Let's use the name of a fruit as a keyword so that we all run away when someone says it," Carlos said. From the brainstorming, "cacahuate" (peanut in Spanish) emerged as the signal (even though it's not a fruit, it makes a lot of sense – in Spanish). The first of many inside jokes. It was only 10 AM on the first day, and they already had the first of many experiences that would repeat throughout the trip: jokes, essential questions, videos, photos, brainstorming, and lots of laughter. Remember to enjoy every moment, no matter how simple it may seem.

They arrived in Neighborhood, and Phillip immediately connected with the lovely cashier. Photos, laughter, videos, delicious coffee. They could hardly leave for Urban Revolution, a street art exhibition. When they finally arrived at the show, they did what they always do; photos, laughter, videos, lots of art. It was 2 PM, and the temperature was 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit). They crossed a bridge to see the MAAT building, and while on the rooftop, they decided to go inside; photos, laughter, videos, essential questions, lots of modern art. Phillip wanted to go to a restaurant he had seen the day before with a giant octopus on the roof. To get there, they rented electric scooters. Photos, laughter, videos, riding with style. They went to "A cevichería," and as always, photos, laughter, videos, singing, delicious octopus. Charlie reserved a rooftop called Carmo at 7 PM; laughter, photos, videos, good view, and good drinks. Natalia had a reservation at 10 PM for Trick's, a €75 dinner with three small dishes; that's what happens when you hang out with Natalia Criado. Laughter, photos, videos. During dinner, they had to decide the next step, and Phillip and Natalia had recommendations from friends pointing to the bar VAGO, so that's where they went.

The bar VAGO marked the first night of partying. Incredible music, amazing cocktails, perfect ginger beer, beautiful people. They met one of the owners (the Portuguese), who told them that the other three owners were Colombians. When one of the Colombian owners arrived, it turned out that Nats knew him; what a small world! In the end, they closed the bar at 2 AM, but the terrific trio, Phillip, Nats, and Carlitos, stayed with the owner and his friends. Phillip and Carlitos gave salsa lessons to the girls who stayed after closing time. The night ended with them dancing the lambada on the street at 4 AM. The first day was so exciting that it felt like three days in one. Remember to live life with jokes, essential questions, videos, photos, brainstorming, lots of laughter, and happy moments. You have to live each moment to the fullest.

**Every day had its different essence.** Carlitos signed up at the gym next to the hotel and had been working out since 9 AM on Thursday, June 29 (he is a little bit obsessed with exercise). Meanwhile, Natalia scolded Phillip because he made some noise while waking up, and she needed a bit more sleep; el mono called Carlitos to come and rescue him. At 10 AM, Nats was working from bed, Charlie arrived with eggs, ham, cheese, and fruits, and Phillip made breakfast. Nats had to finish an interview, so el mono and Charlie went to Neighborhood to talk about life and meet the lovely cashier. Eventually, they agreed to have some drinks with her later that night (clearly el mono's proposal). Natalia joined them at 2 PM, but it seemed like only three minutes had passed since they arrived at 11 AM. That's how things were with el mono. As soon as Nats arrived, they went to have lunch at the healthy organic market; that's what happens when you're with Natalia Criado.

They decided they wanted to see the Reservatório da Mãe d'Água das Amoreiras after lunch. They arrived at 3:30 PM, but the next show was an hour later. They went for a walk around the park next to the Reservatório. Natalia insisted that everything was just like Bogotá, and nothing irritated Phillip more than that. From then on, Nats and Charlie kept saying that everything was just like something in Colombia. After all, how could they resist teasing the king of teasing? While walking, Charlie said, "we should hold hands." Without any reason, the three of them started walking hand in hand. People looked at them like aliens, but people didn't understand; only the terrific trio understood. Of course, they stopped to make a video of their hand-holding walk. And sure enough, that hour passed like a minute. Remember, time flies when you're having fun. They entered the show, daydreamed, and left around 5 PM for the next plan. Charlie had looked it up and knew that the Museu do Azulejo would appeal to his artist friends.

A car took them quickly to the Museu do Azulejo, and they arrived at the ticket counter at 5:33 PM. "I'm sorry, the entry is until 5:30 PM," said the not-so-friendly cashier. "This can't be; we traveled for 45 minutes in a taxi, and the museum closes at 6 PM," said el mono. The lady took them to the manager, who decided to let them in for free. Sometimes, instead of fighting, the right words and a smile would open your doors. "Don't miss the church or the observatory," said the manager. They toured the museum in seconds, saw everything, took photos, and by 6:30 PM, they were on their way back to the hotel. "Oh, let's go shopping," Nats said in the car on the way. Instead of going to the hotel, they went to Latte Lisbon; that's what happens when you're with Natalia Criado.

Nats decided not to go out that night because she had to work so it would be a boys' night. Carlitos and Phillip met Katerina, the lovely cashier, at 7 PM on the rooftop of Selina Secret Garden. The place was fantastic, the music was good, and the people were friendly, but it wasn't as interesting as VAGO, so they went to the bar owned by the Colombians. They had some quiet drinks until Katerina had to leave. Thursday night at VAGO was very different from Wednesday night. Firstly, it was only the dynamic duo. Additionally, the gender balance was four beautiful women for every man. Between ginger beer, cocktails, good music, dancing, and good vibes, the dynamic duo caused a stir. "We've got a lot of game together," el mono said to Carlitos. And yes, soulmates communicate without words, which works perfectly in the game of life. The night ended around 3:30 AM, and the dynamic duo returned home to complete the terrific trio. On the way, el mono said to Charlie, "you need to focus more on one girl! It can't be that you're doing well with the Dutch girl, she leaves for a bit, and when she comes back and asks about you, you're flirting with the Argentinian girls!" Those words left Charlie pondering for the rest of the trip. Just focus!

**On the third day, Friday, June 30**, they rented a car and planned to drive to Sintra in the morning and head south in the afternoon. That plan didn't quite happen, as from that day onwards, the trip entered "fluid mode," letting Portugal show them what it had to offer. Everything they did that day felt like a week's worth of adventures. Natalia and Carlitos woke up at 9 AM to attend a yoga class. After that, Nats wanted to go shopping, so Charlie accompanied her. El mono (Phillip) woke up around 10:30 AM, showered, got ready, packed his suitcase, and arrived at the store House of Curated, where they were. The clothes were divine! Phillip picked up a crocheted shirt, saw the price of €450, and said, "That's what Carlitos gets for being with Natalia Criado." Then they went to Ementa SB, a

stylish store. El mono was delighted with the clothes, bought two T-shirts and a cap, but wanted to buy the whole store. It was nearly noon when they checked their watches, and Charlie and Nats hadn't packed their bags! They had to rush to get ready and head out to pick up the rental car.

They picked up the car, a Ford PUMA, at around 1 PM. The road to Sintra was on the highway, nothing particularly special. The beauty began when they started climbing up to the Pena Palace. The road was very narrow, one-way, with beautiful houses on both sides. They arrived at what they thought was the entrance around 3 PM and bought tickets to enter the palace at 4:30 PM. They had an hour and a half to explore the gardens. The organization of the place was strange; there wasn't much information, and the little information available was very confusing. It seemed like a vortex of chaos. Somehow, they tried to see the exterior gardens, but they couldn't find anything the map showed. For the first time, they felt a bit desperate on the trip; they couldn't reach where they wanted because the map only indicated two dimensions, but the palace locates on a cliff, and the height information was missing on the map. At one point, Phillip lost his patience and gave the map to some tourists asking for directions. After that, el mono said, "we have to let the place show us the way." And indeed, they started finding all the landmarks they wanted to see.

At 4:30 PM, they finally entered the palace. The photos were spectacular! Each corner looked better than the other. Around 6 PM, after seeing every nook and cranny of the castle, they went down to a lake they had seen near the parking lot. That place was magical, with its calmness, light, and beauty; they took a thousand more photos. From there, they went

to the village and were mesmerized by a tile shop attended by the artist who designed them. Unknowingly, it was already 7 PM, they hadn't had lunch, didn't know the name of the hotel they were supposed to travel to and hadn't followed the initial plan. "No worries, let's go to that restaurant, order some food, look for the reservation, and let Sintra show us the rest of the way," said Phillip. At the restaurant, Carlitos started looking for the reservation in Aljezur, but couldn't find it. Poor Carlitos was in total despair because he couldn't believe it. He searched in every possible way. He even knew the day he made the reservation and the price he "paid." The booking didn't appear in his credit card transactions, his cellphone had no signal, and his laptop had no battery. The universe made them think that the credit card hadn't gone through, and therefore, the reservation hadn't been made. The group decided to go for an adventure, looking for a place to sleep upon arrival in Aljezur.

At the end of dinner, the only other "customer" in the restaurant approached them; it turned out to be a waitress who was having her dinner. She greeted them and asked, "How's your trip going? Where are you heading now?" To which the marvelous trio responded in unison, "Aljezur!" The local woman exclaimed, "It's my favorite place in the whole world! You can't miss Monte Clérigo Beach, and you have to try Medronho! With five of those, you'll be seeing stars." Phillip was happy about that interaction because he always wanted the place to show him the way. At the end of that dinner, they had already resolved the plan for the next day; only the hotel was missing.

They set off for Aljezur from Sintra, and the GPS indicated a 3-hour journey on the highway; if everything went according to plan, they would arrive in Aljezur at 11 PM. In the first hour of the trip, Nats searched for



last-minute hotels, but she realized that Aljezur was a small village with very few houses, and almost everything was hostels that didn't allow reservations for the same day at that late hour. Charlie's original plan was to go along the coastal route instead of taking the highway, so he proposed, "let's stay in a 'larger' village on the coastal route, in a hotel with a counter, and tomorrow we can look for a hostel in Aljezur." It was a good plan, so they deviated from the highway to take the coastal route towards Vila Nova de Milfontes. The detour along the coast made the new ETA midnight.

The journey was long. Carlitos was always the driver. Twenty-five years had passed since the first time Phillip asked his dad to borrow him the car for his friend Charlie to drive to a party. They were now on their way to Vila Nova; Phillip was the co-pilot, and in the back seat was Princess Natalia, capturing some of the conversations on video. The beginning of that leg of the trip was marked by music. Phillip played songs by Bob Marley, classic Sublime tunes, and his latest favorite Salsa songs, among others. An hour of music was enough for Natalia to propose a game: "Let's name a color, a country, and a fruit that we think describes each other." Charlie already knew Phillip's color since he was 15 years old; "el mono is blue." That was known since their trips to Villa de Leyva. Phillip's country was obviously Germany, but the fruit? After some thought, Carlitos exclaimed, "Phillip has to be the cape gooseberry (uchuva), because it's an indescribable fruit! It's sweet but astringent; it's tropical but from the mountains. It's very mysterious. If you don't know it, you won't know where that fruit comes from!" Lots of laughs about it. They agreed that it was el mono's fruit, after all.

The second round of games was based on one by Esther Perel called "Where Should We Begin." Charlie had that game at home and got a simplified version with only 36 questions. The idea is that each player answers the same question. This game inspired profound answers and intimate connections because it allowed them to talk about life and death. Here are the 12 questions they managed to answer before getting to the hotel:

1. Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?
2. Would you like to be famous? In what way?
3. Before making a telephone call, do you ever rehearse what you are going to say? Why?
4. What would constitute a "perfect" day for you?
5. If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you want?
6. *Do you have a secret hunch about how you will die?*
7. Name three things this group appears to have in common.
8. *For what in your life do you feel most grateful?*
9. *If you could change anything about the way you were raised, what would it be?*
10. Take a couple of minutes and tell the group your life story in as much detail as possible.
11. *If you could wake up tomorrow having gained any one quality or ability, what would it be?*

*12. If a crystal ball could tell you the truth about yourself, your life, the future, or anything else, what would you want to know?*

Indeed, they arrived at the hotel, checked in quickly, and went to the only open bar. Carlitos ended up dancing salsa with Natalia because the bartender decided to pay tribute to the Colombians visiting. It was 2 AM, and they went to bed. The planned day that went off-script turned out a success. Remember, not everything has to be planned; sometimes, you must let the place show you the way.

They had to take two rooms because they booked the hotel last minute. Phillip and Charlie stayed in one, and Natalia in another room. Carlitos had nightmares and could hardly sleep that night; he moved a lot in bed and was very restless. Poor Phillip hardly slept due to Carlitos' wild dreams. What was troubling Charlie? We will never know for sure; perhaps going off-plan and not finding the reservation made him lose his composure. The exact detail remains unknown, but it's possible that his soul was unhappy about something unexpected coming his way.

**The next day was the fourth day of adventures.** On Saturday, July 1, Phillip and Charlie woke up at 9 AM and went to wake up Natalia; the goal was to head to Aljezur early. The hotel had a family vibe and a pet rabbit. Phillip melted with so much cuteness, given his deep love for animals. After that, they had breakfast at a restaurant with three tables and three waiters, young people who seemed unable to understand what the fantastic trio wanted. "They are not the sharpest knife in the kitchen," said el mono. They took the opportunity to search for a hotel in the area they were heading to, and Natalia found one called Aljezur Villas, which

turned out to be located not in Aljezur but in Vale da Telha, an even smaller group of houses, about 10 minutes away from the real Aljezur. The fantastic trio finally left Vila Nova de Milfontes a little after 10:45 AM after taking forever to bring them breakfast. The drive was only an hour and a half, so they just played music and managed to discuss their personalities. Natalia described Phillip's personality as "playful strictness." Totally true! El mono was spontaneous, unpredictable, and playful but simultaneously highly organized and systematic.

The travelers arrived at the hotel at 12:30 PM, checked in, and by 12:50 PM, they were at Monte Clérigo Beach, having their first Medronho. At 1 PM, they sat down to have lunch at a six-person table with only three diners. Everyone wanted a sea view, so they all sat in a line, facing the ocean. They ordered octopus and other delicacies. Phillip started asking about the location of some rocks falling into the sea. He had a picture he had taken of something he had seen online but couldn't remember the location's name. He asked the waitress, the person at the door, and the chef's assistant passing the dishes through a window near the table. No one could explain the whereabouts of those blessed rocks. "No worries, we'll find them eventually," said el mono. After all, they had a couple more days ahead. They had a peaceful lunch, and Phillip connected with a baby sitting at the neighboring table, as he had a special bond with children. After all, deep down, he had a child's soul.

At 2:30 PM, they went down to the beach. It was a soft sand beach with choppy waves. The waves were dangerous enough to have a sign indicating that it was better not to go into the sea. At that moment, they talked about Lucas's death, Dayan's husband, while they were vacationing on some paradise beaches in Asia. Phillip said something very

true, "the problem is not for the one who dies; the problem is for those who stay behind."

They walked a bit further and found some cliff-like rocks that provided shade. They took many pictures in that spot and later sunbathed. Nats and Charlie were happy, but Phillip disliked the heat. He lasted no more than 10 minutes and got up to explore the beach. For the next two hours, Phillip played soccer, talked to people, went into the sea, splashed water on Charlie to wake him up, spoke to the neighboring sunbathers, and had a few more Medronhos at the beach bar.

Meanwhile, Nats and Charlie stayed in the same place, almost in the same position. At 4:30 PM, el mono sent a photo from a restaurant. In the picture, there was melon with ham, a beer, and some olives. "Round two," said the message. Nats and Charlie arrived at the place and ordered more food. Until that moment, the day had been all about traveling, eating delicious food, exploring, and having some good drinks. It was a great day if you put it all in balance.

At 5 PM, they had enough of the beach. They returned to the hotel but stopped at a local restaurant to buy water and other things for breakfast. Additionally, Phillip ordered another Medronho and asked the waitress, "where's the party tonight?" To which the waitress replied, "You definitely have to go to Hugo's bar! It's the only place around here, and the party goes on until 6 AM." Great! They had a plan for the night. The place was showing them the next step, as Phillip always wanted.

They arrived at the hotel, jumped into the pool, relaxed, and talked about life; they even took a short nap. Natalia had a reference from a friend who had told her about a bar with a skateboarding pool. They started looking for it, and when they saw the pictures, Carlitos exclaimed, "that's the hotel I booked!" He couldn't find the reservation because he was searching for Aljezur, but they were actually in Vale da Telha. Besides, the autocorrect had caused the email to be sent to another account, and the reservation was charged only after the stay, according to the email he finally found. Things could have been different if they had seen the reservation email, and Carlitos apologized to the group. Phillip bluntly told him, "that doesn't matter anymore; it's in the past. If they charge you, we'll pay for it. We've had a great adventure. You have to stop feeling bad about it." And yes, it had been an adventure! You have to learn to stop suffering from past mistakes.

They took turns showering and getting ready for the party. Natalia was the first to enter the shower at 8 PM; then Phillip went in, and finally, Carlitos. When Phillip got out of the shower, he started deciding what to wear and found one of the new t-shirts he had bought at Ementa SB; he chose to wear it for the first time. Carlitos put on his white t-shirt with a big red heart, and Natalia wore an all-black dress. Unintentionally, they were all dressed in black and white. While Charlie was showering and getting ready, Phillip and Natalia decided they wouldn't use the PUMA that night. "We're not in the United States; we don't need to drive everywhere, Charlie," Natalia said. It was a 14-minute walk, but the weather was perfect. Charlie thought these Europeans had different customs and walking would be fine.

On the way to the Skate bar, they saw the almost full moon. Natalia said, "I get a bit crazy when the moon is full." Phillip asked, "when is it a full moon?" After a quick search, Natalia replied, "July 3." The trip was scheduled for each member of the marvelous trio to return home on Tuesday, July 3, so they wouldn't see that supermoon together. Half-jokingly but half-seriously, Phillip exclaimed, "We should extend the trip and stay a few more days!" To which Carlitos said, "most definitely, we should do it!" They stopped to take photos of the moon, but it's well known that it doesn't allow to be photographed. They continued and arrived at the Skate bar at 9 PM.

The Skate bar had instruments for anyone to take the stage; the bar offered a variety of cocktails and grilled pizzas. Charlie ordered two pizzas to share, and Nats and Phillip got mojitos. While the pizzas were getting prepared, Phillip "went to the bathroom," but he was actually exploring while looking for the restroom. That was the nature of el mono; he never wanted to stay in one place. Phillip returned after a while and told them in full detail what the hotel was like. They ate the pizzas, and Phillip felt like having more, so he went to the bar to order two more. From the table, Nats and Charlie watched him. He ordered a Medronho and started a conversation with a couple waiting in line when he was at the bar. On his way back to the table, he chatted with one of the skaters who had been doing tricks; he was always talking to everyone. Then he sat at the table and said, "if the line to get up and play wasn't so long, I'd already be playing the bass with the band."

After a while of chatting, Charlie said, "I would love to try the skate pool," to which Phillip responded, "they have boards they'll surely lend you at the hotel." Sure enough, Carlitos went to the hotel and borrowed a

skateboard; they immediately moved to the edge of the skate pool to see him make a fool of himself. In the meantime, Natalia and Phillip talked with the skater Phillip had interacted with earlier. When Charlie got tired of trying and failing, he climbed onto the edge of the skate pool to see that Nats and Phillip were now talking to the couple Phillip had met in the line. They were two Argentines living in Malaga, Spain. Her name was Noelia, and his name was Mariano. When they started talking, it was around 10:30 PM, and the Skate bar closed at 11 PM; after all, guests had to sleep.

Phillip told Noelia and Mariano that the party continued at Hugo's bar based on the recommendation they had received from the waitress a few hours earlier. The Argentines immediately liked the plan! It was Saturday night, and, after all, they were all on a well-deserved vacation. Mariano said, "let's go in our car; all five of us just fit fine." Of course, the marvelous trio had decided to go out without the PUMA by chance. The 5 Latinos got in the car, and in 3 minutes, they were in the entrance line. "It's €3 per person, including a beer," said the bouncer. Phillip took out a €10 bill and said, "I'll pay for this group of 3 people." They gave him €1 back and let the 5 Latinos in. The math didn't add up; the Argentines entered for free. In return, they bought a round of mojitos for those drinking alcohol and sparkling water for Carlitos, who hadn't had an alcoholic drink in 21 years.

The music at Hugo's bar was eclectic. At first, there was a lot of reggaeton and songs in Portuguese. At one point, they played "Papi Chulo," and Phillip took Carlitos to dance. **At 1 AM on Sunday, July 2, el mono and Charlie were dancing "papi papi, papi chulo, papi papi ven a mí, ven a mí,"** while Natalia filmed the ridiculous show—lots of laughter from the



group of 5 Latinos. Meanwhile, Noelia was very concerned about the group's wallets and bags and suggested leaving everything in the car. Indeed, they went out to leave all their belongings in the Argentines' car; "don't worry; we'll take you back to the hotel," said the friendly Mariano.

At 1:30 AM, a Brazilian Zouk song came on, a dance that Charlie had been learning since February. On the dance floor, there was a lady and a younger woman. The lady started talking to Phillip as if she had met an old friend when she saw him. The younger woman grabbed Carlitos, who looked at her with a "do you want to dance?" look, while Phillip and the lady were outside. Phillip wrote in the group chat: "Carvoeiro, Benagil" at 1:39 AM. Shortly after, Phillip entered the bar laughing and telling them the whole story. The lady who had taken him outside was the chef of the restaurant where they had lunch, and she had overheard him asking about the stones falling into the sea. She knew about those, but Phillip didn't hear her because she was deep in the kitchen. The message he sent was the location of where they wanted to go the next day! "That's life; one day we're here, asking a question, and the next day we accidentally find the answer," said el mono with great joy over the pleasant surprise.

The dance continued, but the music changed to a more electronic tone around 2 AM. It might have been because of the music or accumulated fatigue, but everyone went out to sit on the bar's patio. Natalia, Carlitos, and Noelia were talking in a subgroup, while Phillip and Mariano started talking to a guy dressed as Donald Trump carrying a Mexican charro (yes, I know, what?). While Noelia and Charlie were chatting, Natalia fell asleep on Charlie's shoulder around 2:45 AM. Phillip noticed and gently approached to wake her up; he asked, "Nats, do you want to leave now?"

She woke up and nodded. The new Argentine friends said, "All right, let's take you to your hotel." The 5 Latinos left, and the 3 Colombians took their belongings from the trunk, and got ready to get into the backseat. Nats got in first; Carlitos told Phillip, "you go next," to which el mono responded jokingly, "oh no, I won't sit next to Natalia because she stinks." Carlitos got in the middle, and Phillip sat in the back seat on the passenger side.

As soon as Phillip closed the door, he started making snoring sounds. Everyone thought he was making fun of Natalia because she had fallen asleep at the bar. The drive from Hugo's bar to the hotel took less than 30 seconds as it was less than two blocks away. They arrived in front of the hotel at 3 AM, Natalia got out, but Phillip was still "pretending to be asleep." Charlie gave him a couple of nudges to signal that they had arrived and the joke was over. Looking closely at him, he noticed Phillip was covered in sweat. At that moment, Mariano and Noelia got out of the car to see what was happening. "He must have been too drunk and isn't responding," said Mariano. Charlie opened the door, pulled out Phillip's feet, and with Mariano's help, got him out of the car.

As they tried to stand him up, he collapsed on his knees. Charlie held him in his arms and said, "mono, you are okay! Get up." At that moment, Phillip raised his head, opened his eyes, and had dilated pupils. It was evident that he was having trouble breathing. Natalia started screaming and ran to the hotel to seek help, but that was the problem with Aljezur's hotels: they didn't have receptionists, and there was no one to assist. "We have to take him to the hospital NOW," Noelia shouted. Somehow, Charlie lifted Phillip and, like a beast, embraced him, squeezing him into the car. Phillip ended up on top of Carlitos; Charlie held his head with his

left hand while holding his hand with his right. "It's okay, mono; we're going to the hospital." El mono held Charlie's hand tightly and made efforts to breathe. He was unconscious, but he felt present.

Mariano drove quickly to the Aljezur health center, which was 10 minutes away, but they found it closed. Noelia found another health center in another nearby village. In another 10 minutes, they arrived at another closed place. Noelia shouted from the co-pilot seat, "I found an open hospital in Lagos, 35 KM away; it's a 40-minute drive; go, go, go!" El mono was still struggling to breathe, unconscious but holding Charlie's hand firmly, perhaps as a reflex. "Don't worry, mono, we're almost there," Carlitos said; Phillip didn't respond. Mariano accelerated to the maximum. He took the curves at 100 km/h and the straights at 140 km/h, shouting, "Is he alive? Is he alive?" As the minutes passed, it seemed like they were losing Phillip.

Natalia and Noelia searched for the emergency number, which wasn't 911. Meanwhile, Carlitos was hitting el mono's chest, intuitively thinking it would keep his heart beating. At one point, Natalia tried to perform mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on Phillip. It was all desperate efforts because neither Natalia nor Carlitos were paramedics. Somehow, they managed to contact Emergency Medical Services, which asked, "Does he have a pulse?" The truth was that Carlitos couldn't feel it. "I have no idea! How do I confirm?" Charlie shouted into the phone. "Lift his shirt and see if his stomach moves or his chest pumps," they responded from the other side. Carlitos did the maneuver and realized that both things were happening. "He's alive! He's alive!" he cried out. "Could you please announce to the hospital in Lagos that we're coming with a medical emergency from Aljezur?" he added desperately. "They'll be waiting for

you!" they responded from the other side of the phone. Charlie's soul was at peace because his friend was alive.

Charlie held Phillip's head with his left hand and used his right hand to hit his chest or hold his hand. The GPS map showed 13 minutes left to arrive, and at that moment, Phillip stopped squeezing Charlie's hand. He thought the worst but didn't tell anyone in the car because he still held onto the hope of being wrong.

They arrived at the hospital around 4 AM, and Carlitos took Phillip out of the car without knowing how. He lifted him and put him in a wheelchair waiting for them. They rushed to a stretcher where paramedics were waiting for them. They put Phillip on the stretcher and immediately checked his vital signs. "He has a pulse!" they shouted. "Fuck; he's alive!" Charlie shouted. Carlitos' soul was restored. At that moment, there was finally some calm. It had been the most intense hour of their lives, but ultimately, it was now a bad memory because el mono had arrived alive, and the doctors clearly had everything they needed to save him, Carlitos thought. Charlie was so sure everything was okay that he thanked the Argentines and told them they were free to go to their hotel, that he would stay with his friend, and they would take a taxi back when he left the hospital the next day. "Forget it; we're staying until the end," they replied.

Thirty minutes passed, and at 4:30 AM on Sunday, July 2, 2023, the doctor came out to find the companions. "I'm sorry to inform you that your friend has passed away."

**The End**