

Prologu

2016

Daniel Borg

“Bongu, Dott!”

“Bongu, bongu, Fred—” għidtlu bi tbissima jien u naħrab bil-ħeffa ta’ ħalliel tal-laned tal-preserve minn Strada Merkanti għan-nizla tal-Handkrafts, ngħidilha jien.

Ma nafx sew xi ż-żobb jismu; illum għajjattlu Fredu. Kultant iddoqqli ffit il-qanpiena tal-kuxjenza: x’misthija hux, ma tafx min huma n-nies li jsellmulek kuljum? U x’jimpurtani. Iddoqq, twerżaq kemm trid il-kuxjenza. Kieku ridt nagħmel xogħol ta’ kuxjenza, kont nidhol nurse jew immur volontarjat, noqgħod intaqqab lit-tfal il-Perù u nixrob it-te.

Dan-nies li jwaqqfuni jien u dieħel il-parlament sirt ma niflaħhomx.

“Dott, it-tifla għadha bla xogħol.” Aħjar għaliha. Ibgħatha titqaħħab, xejn xejn tkompli t-tradizzjoni ta’ talent fid-dinastija. “Nara x’nista’ nagħmel.”

“Dott, taf x’blokka se jtellgħu quddiemi? Tal-Ġermaniż—” Eh aħjar għalik. Tal-Ġermaniż jistednuni l-party tal-Milied lili; ikollhom il-canapes bil-fwied tal-fenek. “Il-MEPA x’qaltlek?” Malli ssemmilhom il-MEPA jissummaw, u jtuk il-ħarsa ta’ xi ħadd li għadhom kif qatlulu l-kelb.

“Dott, hemm ċans nirrangawha t-triq u dak iċ-ċint? Daqt iweggja’ xi ħadd.” Jalla jweggja’ xi ħadd u jeħodha għal isfel għal mewtu. Ksir is-sorm inqas ta’ kull filgħodu.

“Iva, ha nerga’ nagħfas ftit lis-sindku.”

L-istorja ta’ ħajti saret din — għid xi ħaġa li tinstema’ sabiħa, idher ħelu kemm tista’, tbissem il-ħin kollu, aħsel snienek tliet darbiet kuljum u ara teħillek xi farka mill-paté bejn snienek. Paranojja sħiħa din tal-frac tal-ikel. Iktar u iktar bħalissa, dieħel “mgħaġġel” għal-laqqha tal-Kumitat dwar l-Affarijiet Ambjentali tal-Parlament. Mejjet għal pastizz.

Hemm jien, rappreżentant tal-poplu Malti ma jistax iduq fil-pubbliku l-iktar ikel rappreżentattiv ta’ pajjiżu, u mingħajr tlaqliq, anke ta’ niesu. L-aħħar darba dik il-qaħba għamlet spettaklu bija b’dawk l-ittri kbar suwed fuq dak il-maqjel ta’ blog l’għandha: HE CAN’T EVEN HOLD HIS PASTIZZ. Kien hemm ritratt tiegħi nżarma pastizz barra l-Isphinx; l-irkotta ħarbitli u ċappast l-ingravata. Il-kummenti: Baxxter, pereżempju, li wiċċu barra qatt ma jurih, qal li bilfors norqod waqt is-seduti jekk kulma naf nagħmel huwa nithanzer fl-ikel żejtni. U oħrajn: “pastizz jiekol pastizz”, “imsaħha bro” u xi bravu/a (naħseb brava) li semmiet li jien qed immexxi kumitat tal-healthy eating fl-iskejjel tal-gvern. Iwa bilħaqq ... kont se ninsa, dak il-kumitat — aħjar illaqqgħu. Daqt jiġi Varist frisk minn xi mixja filgħodu u jsaqsin fiex waslet il-policy. “Waslet fl-aħħar,” ngħidlu, “eżatt bħall-karriera politika tiegħek.” Dil-bicċa tal-aħħar mhux se ngħidhielu, imma bejni u bejn ruħi naħsibha spiss. Iktar ma narah jitmaħhan dwar il-Panama, iktar nieħu gost; xi darba jsibulu żigg biex itajruh, imqar kużakk mhux magħluq sew. U bejni u

ministeru jifdal tassew ftit bogħod.

“Bonġu, Dott —”

“Bonġu, Fred.” Dak veru Fredu jismu, ara, l-għassies tal-parlament li jkun xift filgħodu. Dejjem l-istess ħarsa, iċ-ċintorin imbażwar jipprova jdur ma’ qaddu, qmis kuljum b’xi tebgħa differenti. Iħares lejja bl-apatija tas-soltu, hekk kif ngħaddi l-bagalja minn ġol-X-ray. Xi darba nagħmillu nejka: nitfa’ murtal fiha u nara jindunax bih. Din tal-X-ray żejda m’Alla naraha. Żewġ minuti biex jara għandix xi tuffieħa splussiva, jew imqar biro li taqsmek min-nofs bir-raġġi tal-laser bħal ta’ James Bond. “Orrajt,” jgħidli hekk kif iħares lil hinn mill-bagalja u lejn id-deputat li diehel warajja.

U min diehel warajja?

Marlene Farrugia hux. Illum x’inhu — it-Tlieta jew l-Erbgħa? Illum se tkun soċjalista mela. Għada se tkun liberali. Il-Ħamis se tkun konservattiva. Il-Ġimgħa se tkun anarkika. Konsistenza ħi. Ara terġax tiġi mal-Labour ... naf żgur li minn meta fetħet, is-surveys qed jgħidu li sejra lura bħal granc fis-sakra.

Il-grancijiet ibulu? Insaqsi lil — lil min se nsaqsi? Fil-bank ta’ wara żgur li hadd ma jaf. Triduni nsaqsi lil Silvio? Jew lil Etienne Grech? Dak jibgħat il-kartolini lin-nies meta jagħlqu *snienhom* jieħu gost, mela jaqra! Jew forsi naqşam waħda l-kamra u nsaqsi lil Toni Bezzina ... “Toni, int bewwiell?” L-aħħar darba konna qed nieħdu grokk wara xi seduta tal-Panama u trid tarahom, lilu u lil Pullicin, tellieqa min se jżarma l-ewwel sandwich niexef. Rebaħ

Pullicin, għax lil Toni staqsejtu waħda u ssomma: “Ha nara kemm int tajjeb, Ton ... x’inhu l-itqal, kilo ħadid jew kilo tiben?” Il-qaħba kif infaqa’ bid-dahq Cordina.

“Bongu, Daniel,” ħarġet friska bħal ħassa Mrs Bouquet. Ara ġiet bla pelli llum.

“Bongu,” gemgimt minn taħt, u tlajt it-taraġ tlieta tlieta biex: i) nasal qabilha u nsib post bogħod minnha, ii) ma nidhirx magħha — dik ġakbina, iii) noħroġ il-karti bil-lest għax illum ġejja l-media.

L-għaxra u nofs u s-seduta għadha ma bdiex. Lanqas biss naf x’hemm fl-aġenda, għax il-whip (Godfrey tagħha) ma bagħat xejn. Dik l-email tas-saġhtejn ta’ filgħodu li jibgħat bil-moħbi tagħha, dal-lejl ma waslitx. Joe Debono Grech sewwa jgħid: dik fil-cupboard tal-kċina traqqdu.

Il-Kumitat għall-Affarijiet Ambjentali. Xi jumejn qabel kull laqgħa jdoqq il-mobile. Izda ma tkunx Doris ta’ Ganga (għax f’kull raħal jidher li hemm xi ħadd minn ta’ Ganga) li ċċaqilqilha l-ilma ta’ widnejha, jew Marcelle li tibgħat lil binha l-iskola taż-Żokrija u kull tliet ġimgħat grizmejh jikbru daqs il-qanpiena tal-Barrakka ...

... Qed inparla wisq. Mhux se ngħidilkom min iċempel. Mhux xogħolkom tkunu tafu, intom isimgħu l-One jew allajeħliskomminnThake n-NET u komplu fi triqitkom. Tinkwetawx, hawn jien u sħabi ninkwetaw għalikom.

It-taqtig ta’ Marlene sakemm tibda s-seduta qed jaqtagħli nifsi. Ara min qed imexxi partit. Qed tparla ma’

xi hadd fuq il-mobile, taqleb mill-Ingliż għall-Malti għall-għoxxesk u lura. Naħseb min hemm fuq in-naħa l-oħra daqsha gwapp. “X’mar jgħid Marco lill-*MaltaToday*” ... Eh, mar jgħidilhom li l-partit tiegħek huwa karru bi tliet roti b’sewwieq fis-sakra niezel in-nizla tal-Mellieħa. Izda qisu kulhadd kien jafha dik.

Franco, iċ-chairman Alla jberikna, għadu ma tfaċċax. Bagħat SMS lil Godfrey biex jgħidlu li ġej tard. Godfrey iħares lejja, iħares lejn Marlene, u lura lejja. Jara xi haġa simili fit-tnejn li aħna. Telfa, demotivazzjoni, nonkuranza.

Wupppp ara min daħal. Ryan Callus u Marthese Portelli. Marthese ta’ Chernobyl, ħi. Darba mort programm tat-TV magħha. Ćjoè, suppost kont fuq il-panel jien imma fl-aħħar xi ras (naqta’ rasi li Kurt) iddeċieda jibgħat lil Owen Bonnici u allura qgħadt fil-control room nara x’qed jingħad. Insejt x’kien it-topic, imma faqagħha sew kien Owen eh. Insomma, hu ma qal xejn: għaffġet kollox hi. Ħin minnhom qbadt lil Reno Bugeja jgħolli għajnejh ’il fuq sakemm il-kamera ma kinitx fuqu. “X’essenza ta’ injoranza,” gemgimt waħdi fil-control room, u Lino d-direttur dar jidhaq. Kif semagħni bil-headphones?

Sakemm wasal Franco, id-diskursati kienu xi haġa hekk:

“Ma nafx għalfejn ma jdaħħalx difenser meta jkunu 1-o ...”

“Salvu Mallia jrebbaħhielna l-elezzjoni.” (Ija mela. U l-Irlanda se tieħu midalja tad-deheb fil-weightlifting).

“Mis-Saqqajja sa Ħ’Attard domt siegħa u kwart.”

“Ma tafx b’xi ufficcju Pender hux?”

Jasal Franco. “Skuzawni talli wasalt tard. Nifthu s-seduta numru—” widnejja ngħalqu, moħħi emigra. Tistaqsunix fuqieq tkellimna; naf li għamilt sforz biex ma norqodx. Ejja ngħidu li l-qawwa tal-ħsieb żammitni mqajjem.

Milli fhimt, iżda, mingħajr m’għamilt xejn ħlief sgħolt fil-microphone u merejt lil Callus fuq policy, tagħna għaddiet xorta waħda.



Mistoqsija Parlamentari Nru 587 tat-tnax-il legizlatura

L-Onorevoli DANIEL BORG (*jien!*) staqsa lil JOSÉ HERRERA (Ministru għall-Ambjent):

Jista’ l-Ministru jserraħ ras iċ-ċittadini ta’ Ғal Għaxaq li ma hemm ebda pjanijiet għal tibdil fil-local plans u fiż-żona mmarkata bħala UCA ...

Twegjiba:

(Herrera jtini ħarsa li kapaċi tbikki ’l Steven Seagal)

Onorevoli Borg, din il-kwistjoni taqa’ taħt ir-responsabbiltà tal-Ufficcju tal-Prim Ministru li huwa responsabbli mill-Planning Authority, għalhekk nitlobok tidderiegi l-mistoqsija tiegħek lill-OPM.

Heqq, għezież kostitwenti ta' Hal Għaxaq, jien xogħli fil-Parlament għamiltu. Naf li qridtuni tiġu l-uffiċċju għax ma tridux blokok ma' sormkom, imma dmiri għamiltu, le le. Xi ħadd deherlu li nqast — u ppruvaw aqtgħu min fetah ħalqu.

“U ajma, ma tafux li mmarkata digà!” għajjat Callus min-naħa l-oħra.

“Teatrini, tiżżuffettaw bil-Parlament!” jgħajjat Toni Bezzina.

Għamilt dak il-wiċċ *urtat ta' xi ħadd ingustament fil-mira ta' allegazzjonijiet mingħajr bażi* li tgħallimt il-Kulleġġ minn sħabi tal-klassi Nazzjonalisti.

“Jekk jogħġbok, Onorevoli Bezzina!” jgħajjat l-Ispeaker. Qam l-istorbju tas-soltu fil-kamra, dak li jqum ma' kull nofs tgħajjira.

Poġġejt bilqiegħda bi tbissima sarkastika u dik il-ħarsa condescending li wkoll tgħallimt min-Nazzjonalisti. Minn mal-ġenb tas-siġġu tiegħi fit-tarf, kemm kemm jarani hu u ħadd min-nies li hemm fil-gallerija, ħriġtlu sebgħi tan-nofs u b'xufftejja għidtlu “S O F F U!”

Robert Rutter Miceli

I'm telling you, you might think winning this appeal is going to be a tall order. Weak arguments from both lawyers but the policies aren't that clear either. I go through BEN 1 again, maybe there's ample wriggling room but, still, nothing to kill off the objectors' pleas. Case law seems to score a couple of points in our favour tho. I just need to practise the delivery, the face, the tonality.

Here he comes. Dr John.

“Bonġu, Rob!”

“Dr John, għaddi chief. Kif inti? Pogġi pogġi.”

“Mhux ħażin. Kellhom bżonn joħorguhulna—”

“Joħorguh, joħorguh, taqtax qalbek. Case law tgħinna sew ta; jien għalija diġà mirbuħ.”

“You seem confident. Bħall-papà ħriġt.”

“We learn from the best hux,” għidtlu. “Grokk? Għandi Japanese għadni nifthu.”

“U iva, aghmel wieħed malajr. Ma ndumux ta.”

“U le, pass hawn.”

I poured him a grokk and packed up all the paperwork in the suitcase. Planning Commission hearing at the PA: piece of cake. Only last week I was having lunch with one of them, the fat guy who wears his sunglasses indoors, a cross between John Belushi and John Candy.

“Tajjeb dal-whisky hux?”

“Iva, that's a 16 year old ta—”

“Mela taħt l-età.”

Vojta, but we both laugh heartily. This sort of play-acting gets me through most days. Even today, between colleagues, a lawyer representing another lawyer. Drama classes, Robert, drama: think of Charlie Sammut, English Literature, Form 3, *this essay is a 6 on 10 and you CAN do better*—think of his poise onstage in that Friggieri comedy. Clear, composed, head and shoulders above the rest. “You are, after all, a Rutter Miceli,” as my dad repeats every Sunday lunch. It bores Erja to death, this surname nonsense. She must think we think we’re Kennedys or something.

Not that I feel the pressure of a noble-bourgeois double barrel. Water off the swan’s back, it is.

Every Sunday, before we step into Villino Dingli, now in the shadow of the hideous Douglas Apartments right next door (*fuck you and your midget wife, Doug*), I squeeze her hand firmly and remind Erja she’s paid to be my girlfriend. Paid handsomely too.

Let’s put the cards on the table. I ain’t a fucking poof, no. Actually it’s the other way round: my WhatsApp is bulging with messages from all kinds of crumpet: tall, short, busty, lithe, fair, dark (not too dark eh), single, married, married to some of my mates. But I’m 31 now and the rising star needs to keep rising. And, well, I can’t be seen to be single anymore. It would dishonour the family name not to be married, 2.5 kids to fit snugly into the national statistic, not to go to mass, in English, every Sunday at 9 at Stella Maris. My father would be incensed

were I to turn up (late) for Sunday lunch without a jacket and tie, stained shirt, reeking of Jäger, hungover and slurring, without much appetite. My mother would be really “cross” at me and pucker her lips up, refuse to pass me the wine, and turn into the depressed nuisance of the days of yore (before the pills, I mean).

I miss my sister. Steffi, my hippie-with-a-PhD-in-economics sister. The rebel without a cause who provided the last ounce of sanity in this fucking madhouse. *Steffi, come back.* We could smoke pot on the roof and watch the towers rise around us. We could listen to Nirvana or that German seventies shit you enjoy so much. We could listen to your sex adventures in the Spanish caravan. We could pop a pill and you can kill Timmy again, a thousand times, in any way you choose. I almost did it myself a couple of years after you left, but Dad once told us to keep our enemies close.

Depressed, nuisance—two words that describe both parents nicely enough. It’s not nice eh, I mean they’re old and all that, but their mood swings have been getting worse, month after month. They’re not like any other couple I’ve ever seen, where, maybe, the mother’s a finicky pain in the arse and the dad a relaxed, Man United-supporting tea drinker. No, something in my parents’ marriage has clicked so well that they’re constantly angry or sad, but not at each other. There’s some sort of enemy somewhere, be it Labour, the Planning Authority (which Dad sometimes still calls the PAPB), be it Paul Borg

Olivier or be it, simply put, Robert.

The tipping point came five/six years ago, after I overdid it at some party in Madliena. I think we were at Froggy's? I drove home totally drunk and slept in Steffi's bedroom. Nothing new there. Problem was, I was so out of it I'd "parked" the car in front of Mrs Harris' garage. Well, that's not even the problem. I was parked in front of Mrs Harris' garage, with both number plates missing, scratches from a blue object (milk van? boh) on the side and a semi-naked Denise asleep in the passenger seat. Seatbelt on, tits out. Lucky thing my phone hadn't run out of charge when PC 241 phoned me up at 5.15, before sunrise, allowing me to make my way to the car, past shellshocked, dressing-gowned parents standing aghast in the hallway, and somehow drive off. Denise, thankfully, has no recollection of all this and doesn't know she slept with her rather generous right breast hanging out for the good part of three hours, as Sliema denizens walking their purebreed poodles peeked or gazed at her, no doubt preoccupied at the moral shambles our country finds itself in. (*Note to self: PC 241, now an inspector, a single malt for Christmas; Denise's husband is off to Dubai on Tuesday.*)

I decided to get my public act together. Well, the whole accident made it to the book of legends and for a couple of weeks, I was the biggest Swinging Dick at Froggy's FC. The immediate aftermath of the whole charade was rather troubling. Dad had a seizure, Mum was a total bitch to anyone in the radius of 5km. Worst off, of course, was the

Help. Poor old Rosie who 25 years of loyal service later, suffered the ignominy of another Sunday lunch alone in the kitchen. In tears. Like a proper Ma, that woman.

So, help from above has had me introduced to Katya, a €2,500/week graduate in laws from some grotty town on the border between Russia and Finland. We can't be seen to be dating a Ruskie, so Katya crosses the border and becomes Erja, an EU citizen with a (real) degree in laws, near perfect English, traditionally Finnish wit (i.e. none) and a very high level of tolerance to pain. We even found her a job in igaming, so she technically earns more than I do and has no idea what to do with her money outside of The Point.

As another little bonus, she sometimes gets to watch Chelski with Dad every Sunday afternoon, as I scour the Classifieds section of the *Times* for kills and thrills.



PC hearing, I told you, piece of cake. Dr John has his way; residents' jaws drop in a mix of disbelief and despair. One of them's in tears. Oh come on, I've seen arson victims behave with more dignity. It's only four storeys in a villa area.

“Prosit, Rob, very well done. Isma', pay you lunch?”

“Għal darb'oħra ta, għandi PAC illejla —”

Public Accounts Committee. Here I am, like a modern-day Superman, become Dr Robert Rutter Miceli MP,

PN, defender of values and morality in the fight against corruption. Even though this time our guys are in the firing line. Tell you what though. They, or maybe we, are all guilty. This oil scandal thing is a big circus for the media. Picks up speed and slows down on request. Put up some handbags for the masses and off we go. They're all guilty, but there won't be a single sentencing for a single hour of jail. I'll bet you a bollock on that.

"Isma'," says Dr John again with a slightly more worried tone. "I have something to tell you about that Paul guy, jekk ghandek cans dig up the facts by tonight—"

That's how we work. Digging up. Dr John did me a real favour, but I'm not sure whether I should tell Simon, or Daphne, about it. Or maybe, I should tell Glenn about it to make sure he doesn't go beyond the odd post about my parking on double lines.