

## STORY 6

Of course, being the Son of God, He was perfect, and His husbandless mother, having had a strong suspicion of this, shuddered when ten year old Juancho Cristo (a small boy) declared for the first time one afternoon (screaming from the darkness of their windowless living room (for more than an hour He had been laying on the floor, quietly disentangling the passionate tensions of that Sunday's local *fútbol* match over the radio) into the kitchen (which despite the heavy afternoon rain was flooded with soft silvery light (where Juancho Cristo's mother sat reading the newspaper and drinking hot *maté*)), "*Mamá, yo quiero ser arbitro de fútbol. Quiero ser referee.*"

The rain outside did not stop at that exact moment, but at the sound of those words his mother felt the entire planet change course, almost as if the house had been taken from its foundation by flooding waters, and like a ship (swallowing its sails, holding its breath, spinning, exhaling, filling up like an air balloon again) was set (an unsuspecting vessel) on a previously unintended destination.

Immediately after turning eighteen, having completed a few courses, some physical training, and three exams, Juancho Cristo was licensed as an authorized referee for the *Asociación de Fútbol Argentino (AFA)*. In no time He was running the field like a dog, herding those wolves in sheeps' clothing with numbers on their backs. Looking very official in his ceremonial black *arbitro's* uni-

form, his eyes were everywhere, saw everything, and the barking of his whistle made clear, like a well-painted corral, the limits imposed upon the game. Nobody could get away with anything anymore, I mean: He *was* perfect and was aware of everything.

Every so often irony would shine brightest when Alejandro Millamar (or any other well-loved *fútbol* star) would shout: "*¡Pero no boludo! ¡Vos no sos dios!*" with his thick but soft, vulgar accent, angry that even after having pirouetted through the air several yards, tumbling seven or eight times (grass, limbs, dirt everywhere), coming to a stop after a long slide on his back on cool grass, (body writhing and wriggling in agony while holding several different parts of his body (real tears on his face inside the penalty area)), even after having convinced supporters of the opposing team, even after having convinced the guilt stricken defensive number 3 (who had unfortunately stuck his foot questionably close), even after having convinced you and I (those of us reading this), even after having convinced himself (even) that his ribs or femur or cranium must have suffered bruises and fractures, even after all that, Juancho Cristo (being the son of god) knew better, (omnipresent, omniscient). Not Alejandro Millamar, not anyone anymore, could deceive Juancho Cristo when He wore His black referee suit and whistle.

As Millamar lay there, still twisting like a dying snake, Juancho Cristo awarded the *goledor* a yellow card for feigning, holding it (golden into the sky) as if He were summoning His very Father from the heavens. That card quickly (magically) turned red as soon as Millamar, as if by miracle, instantly stood (physically intact (but who maybe was hurt in some other way because his face was by that point redder than the card being held over his head)), cursing and spitting at the Referee about what a sonofamotherfuckingpieceofheartlessshit He was and whydidn'thejustofuckhimselfandhisentirefamily; how He would befuckingsorryheeverwalkedtheearth, and lastly and most ironically: you'renotGodbutonlyafuckingpatheticfriendlessrefereewithn

of fuckingsoul or lifewhatsoever and whoneeded togethis fucking eyes either examined or better yet maybe he'd personally do him the favor of ripping them from his fucking worthless skull right then and there in front of ten's of thousands of people who all hated him any way.

Only months after Juancho Cristo de Nazaret had started His career as a referee, the game throughout the entire Argentine league became gears and springs. Slowly, like a syringe, He drained the game of its blood. *Fútbol* lost its dance. Everyone became afraid to risk; it was no use. Those who had tried to push against the boundaries of the game's law (like Millamar (like countless others)) had been expelled. One after the other they marched off *la cancha*, their heads hanging and surrounded by the absolute silence of half a nation of spectators, in that quiet, and under the blue *Buenos Aire's* sky, buzzards patiently circled overhead. Nobody booed, nobody cheered (not even crickets dared play their miniscule violin song) as each player walked off to his end. The game's popularity in Argentina waned (the impossible); supporters and fans stopped attending games (more impossible). Those players who still remained on teams did so out of fear, (or some other distorted sense of obligation (law-bound contracts)), never fun again.

He had made (all) their hearts (bang) a little slower, (replacing the sweet improvised metronomic thud of *el balón* that had once kept the *pueblo's* arteries awake (in desperate suspense) (flushing and flushing (tocking and ticking), blood back and forth through those little blue tubes (wiry veins) that tie through muscles and bones)) bringing to their lives the tranquility of (*death*) a little sooner than necessary.

El campeonato nacional del 65 began in Argentina at the peak of Juancho Cristo's reign. That is when He began to tell His story. Not with written or spoken words, but in His theater of mari-onettes (the game had stopped belonging to the players (with numbers on their *jerseys*), or the fans ((with hopes for victory) in their

hearts). They were all now just cautiously stepping (and very carefully) to the beat of the drumming of Juancho Cristo's whistle. While His story played out, the few people left in the stands (those too afraid to not show up) sat there politely (nervously tapping one foot and fumbling glances at their wristwatches for ninety minutes) and waited for the matches to come to their inevitable conclusion.

Juancho Cristo held His giant invisible hands (whistle) around the ball (*el balón*). (If the aforementioned metaphor was to be represented by the symbols at our typographer's disposal, it would be two parentheses enclosing a lower case o, perhaps like this: (o) . (Like a wolf in sheepdog's clothing surrounding the herd, directing their destiny.) Ever-present but almost unnoticed, He too, having grown bored of the game (how could anyone not?), began to entertain himself with His uncompromising control, scripting the direction of the story He was interested in telling.

The theatrical work that played out under the curtain of text of the actual games (one need only push those curtains open to read the text beneath), His unsuspecting cast of teams as actors (*titeres*), went like this:

(It was about an old man who was approaching death now) and you could call him Jorge Luis, but in Juancho Cristo's play this character had no name (his life was ending and he was losing his vision. The loss of his sight came gradually, slow like *Otoño*.) This is the story Juancho Cristo told through the sad movements of the *players* en la cancha. *Club Atlético Boca Juniors* played the protagonist's role. They (as a team) would act the part of the dilapidating old man who was slowly becoming blind. Weekend in and weekend out the story unfolded through the matches that were carefully choreographed by *el arbitro*.

During a flashback scene, *Club Atlético Boca Juniors*, in costume as the little boy that the old man on the roof once was, walked out onto the field near the beginning of the season with their lead-

ing goal scorer Alejandro “la ola” Millamar wearing the captain’s *armband*. (Daily, an hour before sunset, the old man would sit on his roof and *drink* maté alone. From that same roof he remembers how as a young child he had contemplated (on tiptoes over the concrete banister) a city whose rooftops full of chimneys and clotheslines and television antennas, stretched forever into the depths of the horizon. As a youth he painted with his imagination what might exist beyond that uncharted reach of rooftops. He imagined that perhaps what hid behind the distance were all the things his beautiful mother read to him at night before bed. The things out of books. Now however, as an old man who is becoming blind, the world beyond the end of his city is once again impossible to visit (even though he has been there before, to the other side) it is still his imagination painting what lays beyond. The more the city closes in on him (as his eyes shut from inside), the more his imagination has to quickly paint over the rising tide of darkness that is slowly swallowing *el pueblo*.)

As a child, what the boy saw on the other side of that obtrusive curtain (the horizon) as he squinted his eyes, were the things from those stories read by his mother’s beautiful voice: 1) the man who is always wearing gray suits (who had spent so much of his life looking for his twin,) 2) the castle of giant lobsters (claws blood-drenched from hunting humans,) 3) the small dog (forced to eat his owner’s ugly face after he died with the doors locked and no friends.) Or someday nearing dusk, when Boca Juniors (little boy age eight) stared hard enough into *el horizonte* he’d sometimes see another image from his favorite story: 5) the one about that immense flock of chickens, that he refused to dismiss as perhaps just a large white cloud far off, being pushed slowly away by the *breeze*.

Scenes later (few weeks before the tournament’s end) in Juancho Cristo’s work, from the tranquility of his childhood rooftop now, the aging man watches the edges of the city erasing, the calm sun humming new songs on his skin as he feels his world disappear. His friends have been losing their faces. Every street

corner could very well be any other. There are no more letters on the pages of books. The blindness is slow and painless. (On week 15 of the *campeonato nacional de mil novecientos sesenta y cinco* Boca Juniors once again walked onto the field, with Millamar wearing the number 10 jersey and the captain’s armband, to play the nation’s super clásico against *Club Atlético River Plate*. During the hot afternoon bout of fútbol, Boca remembers an ancient poem about Democritus, who tore his own eyes from his head in order to be able to think.) *Time is my Democritus*, he thinks to himself as he reclines on the roof with his face to the sky and drinks his *maté* to the sounds of flapping clothes and playful pirouetting birds, the sounds of the city from below (children, *las charlas de vecinos*, someone always sweeping somewhere) *se elevan hacia el cielo*.

All of this should terrify him, pero *es una dulzura, a return*. And he retraces the paths of his life back to himself (he is returning from the ventures of his life), back from the four cardinal points of the nautical star. From the south, the north, the east and west. Of all the generations of *written* text that exist on the *earth*, he has only read a few, the ones that he continues to read in his memory now, reading and *transforming*.

Siempre (en su vida) fueron demasiadas las cosas, *and now, (atop that roof) he can forget them*. (Boca Juniors would be the victors del 65. “La ola” Millamar would lead them (on the verge of blindness) on a victory lap around the *stadium*. As they ran, they felt their *botines* clip against the cobblestone paths that had made up their life, all *converging* together again.)

Returning on those roads of *footsteps and echoes, women, men, agonies, resurrections*, días y noches, entresueños y sueños, cada ínfimo instante de ayer y de los ayeres del mundo, *the sword of the Danes and the moon of Persia*, los actos de los muertos, el compartido amor, las palabras, *Emerson and the snow* y tantas cosas. *Now he can forget them. He has arrived at his center, his algebra, his key, su espejo.*) *Soon he will know who he is*.