

¿Qué? Podcast, Season 3, Episode 11

Melissa: Soraya Sáenz...Sáeneh? Sáe-nez...aler do do do do do

Music intro

Simon: Hello everyone! My name is Simon Hunter, I'm the editor of the English Edition of EL PAÍS, and this is ¿Qué? A podcast from El País that will help you sort the horse meat from the prime steak.

Whether you're a fan of Papa Noel, los reyes magos or El Caganer, we are here for you, tenemos tu regalo.

So sit back, relax, and let us break down all the Spanish stories that make you say,

Sound bite: flamenco wail

Today is December 11, 2019 and I am here as ever with my highly flexible friend *laughter* and colleague, Melissa Kitson. How are you Melissa?

Melissa: I'm good

Simon: That was a reference to yoga activities and your general amenable *laughter* personality

Melissa: Yeah no good I did go to yoga yesterday so, I did the pincho

Simon: The pincho! Is that the old um...

Melissa: Scorpion

Simon: Yeah yeah I know the one, Pincha Mayurasana? Something like that

Melissa: Sounds about right

Simon: That might be the name of a curry *laughter* but something like that. Any other news this week, Melissa?

Melissa: I went to the climate march

Simon: Oooo did you see Greta?

Melissa: I didn't, I did the route and then at the end I went to a comedy event so I did a bit of both

Simon: Oh very nice, good stuff. So you can cry about the environment and then laugh about the comedy, very good plan.

Well, as ever I encourage you to get in touch you can find me on twitter @simoninmadrid you can also use the #QuePodcast or you can email EnglishEdition@elpais.es. You can also go on Instagram and look at Verónica Ortega, her account because she's started doing this thing where mid-podcast she takes pictures of us and puts them on Instagram and they're very amusing so go and check those out as well.

Tell us where you're listening from, why you're listening and suggest topics for us. And please go and review our podcast on iTunes.

I heard this week from Andrew Weaver - @actweaver66 - he says "... recently moved to Madrid and immediate convert to the wonderful #QuePodcast. Love your dynamic. Not sure much to celebrate out of the UK election but a look this week from Spanish perspective?"

Now we did discuss this didn't we, we thought about doing it but actually we're recording today, Wednesday, and the podcast will most probably come out on Friday. Anything we say would pretty much be out of date and overtaken by events so we will probably come back to that next week. It's a good idea because, lots to talk about, Gibraltar and of course what the election result is going to mean for Brexit.

I also heard from our friend of the show Alan Jones - @mralanjones on Twitter -

"Hi Simon and Melissa,

Like Simon, we always used to spend Christmas with the English in-laws and Reyes with the Spanish ones. It worked out fine because everyone got what they expected and the kids got double the presents!

But I agree with you guys, Reyes is still the main focus for Christmas in Spain - look at the cabalgatas de Reyes all over the place! Christmas Day is just a day off. Mind you, that doesn't stop Eroski selling turrón from about October."

laughter Nothing wrong with that Alan as far as I'm concerned.

"Now then, Olentzero." - Is it Olentzero? Yes, Veronica is nodding. This was the Basque Father Christmas that we were discussing this week.

"I happen to know a bit about this as my wife is Basque and my two sons identify as, at least, one third Basque. He may be a charcoal burner, Simon, but he brings toys to the kids not coal! That means that, these days, kids in the Basque Country get three lots of presents! He's usually

depicted dressed in traditional Basque costume, slightly overweight and with a posture that suggests that he's had a few too many Txakolis.

Good podcast again, by the way. Shame more people apart from you, me and the mythical sea monster Chris, aren't using the hashtag, though.

All the best and keep up the good work.”

And, finally, the star letter. Now I was so excited about this I nearly ready it out to you Melissa, when I received it, but I much prefer for you to hear these communications for the first time while we're recording. It's from Señora Wright, one of our original podcast heroes. She's an A-level teacher in the UK teaching Spanish and she was one of the first people to write to us.

She says: “Hola Simón y Gatita,

Still loving ¿Qué? podcast despite not having been in touch recently. I'm 39 weeks pregnant and me and the bump have been enjoying keeping up to date with the Spanish news via your podcast. This week's episode was very interesting. The image of the captain of the submarine in his wetsuit a week later is still making me giggle! Regarding last week's episode - I would like to know from Miguel Angel where these Extremeño gatherings are to listen to ¿Qué? !!!! I'd be straight there having spent a year living in Extremadura! It would be combining two of my favourite Spanish things - the qué podcast and Extremadura!”

So first of all, massive congratulations Señora Wright, that's very exciting news. Our first ¿Qué? Podcast baby *laughter* and I immediately suggested to Señora Wright that if she was thinking of names, Melissa for a boy, Simon for a girl, Verónica if you want something a little bit more exotic. But no that's such great news, I really hope everything goes well.

I really hope your baby isn't born too close to Christmas because my babies were born around Christmas and Kings day and it's an absolute nightmare *laughter* when it comes to organising parties, presents and all sorts of stuff like that. But actually I guess at 39 weeks pregnant it's going to be pretty soon, they won't let you go too much after your 40th week I'm guessing so great news, keep us in touch! We want to see a photo, Señora Wright, of the bambino as soon as he arrives

Alright, so let's move on from our correspondence and onto our first topic of the week. We thought this week we would cover 'El Pequeño Nicolás.' So why don't you tell us a little bit about this Spanish scoundrel Melissa.

Melissa: Well, his full name is Francisco Nicolás Gómez-Iglesias and he is considered one of Spain's most notorious imposters. He rose to fame in 2014 when he was just 20 years old, after he was arrested for impersonating a public official, forging documents and fraud.

Although he was just a law student, Gómez-Iglesias was able to worm his way into Spain's political elite. He was photographed with King Felipe, as well as senior members of the conservative Popular Party, including former prime minister José María Aznar.

He used this to pass himself off as an important man with key connections in business and politics.

Once his exploits became known, Gómez-Iglesias turned into something of a media personality – he appeared on Celebrity Big Brother, founded his own political party, and is a regular presence on television shows. The Spanish press even have a nickname for him – El Pequeño Nicolás or Little Nicolás.

This week, Little Nicolás was in the news again because he is facing nearly 30 years in prison for four separate cases of fraud.

In the first case, Little Nicolás is accused of posing as an envoy of King Felipe VI in 2014 and setting up a meeting with Jorge Cosmen, the head of the bus-service company Alsa. A young man allegedly told Cosmen that the king himself would be joining him for lunch at Ribadeo, a small Galician town of under 20,000 people. But when the motorcade arrived, it was not the king who stepped out, but Little Nicolás.

In the second case, Little Nicolás is facing nine and a half years in prison for allegedly accessing an Interior Ministry database with confidential information on license plates, telephone number and ID numbers. According to the court statement, he did this “on several occasions” with the help of the local police between July 2013 until his arrest in October 2014.

In case number three, Little Nicolás allegedly posed in 2014 as a government advisor to swindle a businessman from Toledo. On that occasion, he pretended to speak in the name of then-Deputy Prime Minister Soraya Sáenz de Santamaría, and delivered documents bearing the executive’s letterhead.

And finally, he may also be sent away for an additional four-and-a-half years for tampering in 2012 with his own national identity card in order to have a friend take his university entrance exams for him.

Now, back in 2014, Little Nicolás was put on trial for posing as an agent of Spanish national intelligence service, the CNI. But he was acquitted after his defense claimed that he was suffering from narcissistic personality disorder, which gives him a distorted view of reality.

His lawyers may well use this argument again to try to keep Little Nicolás out of jail as he faces trial next year.

Simon: I mean, where do I start with this? It’s one of those stories that you literally couldn’t make up, if you did try to make something like this up, no one would believe you.

Hats off to him for his *jeta* *laughter* especially because he was so young when he started. It came out in 2014, what he'd been up to but, you know, he was only 20 at that point so he'd obviously spent a considerable amount of time weaving this web of lies and deceptions.

He started from 'Nuevas Generaciones' which is the youth wing of the conservative popular party. Every once in a while someone does something outrageous and it turns out they're a member of Nuevas Generaciones. I'm not suggesting that everyone from Nuevas Generaciones is up to no good but it is always quite funny how they're always popping into the news for general misbehaviour.

I just wonder, on a more serious note, I wonder if this is a story that's all going to end in tears at some point. He is facing...it's taken a long time for all this stuff to come to court, as can quite often happen in Spain, he is facing prison terms, he could potentially end up in jail. I get the feeling he probably won't though, he's already been let off in one of the cases and I would be very surprised if he did actually end up in jail for the stuff he's facing at the moment.

But he had this altercation recently, in a restaurant, he was arrested after it, this was in the center of Madrid. He's said to have grabbed a knife during that altercation and squared up to the police when they arrived. He was also accused of being drunk on that occasion. You just get the impression...he's big in the Madrid nightlife scene, he must just be loving the celebrity that he's got. When young Spaniards see him in nightclubs or in bars they must just go crazy, "Oh look it's El Pequeño Nicolás!" And you just kind of wonder if this is going to, this could end up badly.

It's pretty extraordinary the things that he's managed to do especially the, convincing a businessman and basically a whole town that he was going to turn up with the King. But then he's got all these pictures, he's got a picture of him at the reception after the King's coronation, he's got a picture of him sitting with the former prime minister, as you mentioned, José María Aznar, and with the former Mayor of Madrid Ana Botella who's Aznar's wife.

He's founded his own political party called 'Influencia Joven' and he's been on loads of reality TV; he's been on the VIP, like the Celebrity Big Brother show, in 2016, he was the first person to be expelled *laughter* which is quite amusing. And also there's talk about, there's a TV show in production about him which could probably, I would have thought, if it gets made, I reckon it'll end up on Netflix or on HBO, one of these platforms. So he's probably making pretty good money from stuff like that as well. And it's just one of those cases where you just think 'oh my God this guy's a complete chancer,' and he's managing to make probably quite a comfortable living from it.

When his trial was suspended recently, basically the reason given was that there was pressure being put on his lawyer and no one came out and said where this pressure was coming from but you know he's caught up in some pretty serious like with the secret service, the CNI. And also of course he was caught up in a, I won't go into it, but a complicated case involving our friend, the former policeman, Villarejo, which was our, was that our very first podcast?

Melissa: I think it was our first

Simon: Yeah, and we discussed Villarejo. Is it true? Is there some sort of weird deep state pressure going on? Or, is he just perpetuating this air of mystery and this kind of status surrounding him which is of something deeper going on.

So yeah, we'll be coming back to this later on next year once those trials finally get going.

Alright, so let's turn to our second story which is a very grisly tale of crime and potential murder but has some extraordinary twists to it, so we felt we needed to cover it.

Melissa: So, last week, Jorge Ignacio Palma admitted to the Spanish Civil Guard that he had chopped up the body of 25-year-old Marta Calvo. It appeared that he had confessed to her murder, but that was not the case.

Palma insists that Calvo's death was accidental. The two met online and organized to go on a date in early November. Calvo was never seen again.

According to the suspect, Calvo died from a heart attack after taking cocaine during a risky sexual practice known as a "white party," which involves consuming cocaine via the genitals, according to sources close to the investigation.

But instead of informing the police, so that a forensic team could confirm that it was an accidental death, the 38-year-old claims he panicked and decided to get rid of Calvo's corpse. In his statement to police, Palma confessed to chopping up her body and disposing of the parts in different dumps in the Valencian municipality of Manuel and the surrounding areas.

Shockingly, chopping up the body of a person you have not murdered and dumping the remains is not a crime in Spain, but rather an administrative infraction for breaking mortuary regulations. If the police cannot prove that Palma murdered Calvo, he may escape with just a fine.

But his involvement in the death of another woman casts doubt on his version of events. In April, the suspect, who is from Colombia but has lived in Spain for years, had sex with a Brazilian prostitute in a brothel in Valencia.

According to police sources, the woman began to have convulsions after consuming cocaine during a similar sexual act to the one Palma says he practiced with Calvo. She died a few days later, and her body was repatriated to Brazil.

Although a security camera caught Palma running from the room as she was having convulsions, he was not charged with failing to rescue a person in need.

Simon: Yeah you think he might have learnt the first time. Do you know what I mean? After it happened once, maybe it's not the best idea to consume cocaine via your genitals.

What investigators and legal experts are saying is that his story is almost too watertight and too perfect to be believable. And several of his actions that have been detected so far would suggest that it's a complete fabrication, starting with the fact that, you know, why wouldn't he just call the police if she did die? Because he wouldn't necessarily be facing any criminal charges if she'd voluntarily consumed the cocaine.

And there's also, there's a suggestion now that this wasn't the first time they'd met up, that they'd actually met up several weeks before for the first time. He also tried to get his car crushed, you know, completely destroyed basically. And also the other element of his story is that it absolves him of any wrongdoing if they do find blood traces in his car or in his house, he can just say, "No, no it wasn't, it was just when I chopped her up." It's just extraordinary. So the suggestion is that he has turned up with this very clever lawyer whose come up with this story basically to protect him from the courts.

But I mean this is the guy who has got a criminal record for trafficking very pure cocaine, I think he served prison time in Italy in the past, so obviously a very very sketchy guy.

It's just another one, I mean we've just had the verdict in the Diana Quer case, that was another young Spanish woman who was killed by a man. And this is another one of those cases. In that case, Diana Quer, she was very young, she was 18, there was a couple of pictures that were taken off her Facebook profile and then just splashed all over the press, in particular the *prensa amarilla* as they call it here. And this is another case where it's another young woman who is an attractive young woman, there have been pictures taken off her Facebook account again that are just all over the place. And again, the press are really having a field day. So it's really unfortunate for the family when these cases take off like this and get so much media attention because it just must be so hard for them to cope with.

The thing about his story is that unless it can be proven, unless there's any sort of evidence that they can come up with - any witness statements, any kind of proof that the investigators can come up with to disprove his story - it's going to be very difficult for them to build a case against him because as it stands at the moment they can't find the body. He says that he dumped it in lots of different trash containers, they're actually searching the local rubbish dump trying to find her remains. And again, for the family, you just feel really sad for the family that they're potentially not going to be able to recover the body of their daughter.

Just to offset that, I'd like to mention another pretty extraordinary story that we had this week but which had a very happy outcome. And that is the story of Audrey Mash who is this British woman who lives in Barcelona, who was revived from cardiac arrest after 6 hours! She was basically dead for 6 hours!

Her and her partner got lost on the mountains of Catalonia in a snowstorm. They managed to alert their friends to where they were, a helicopter came and rescued Audrey and airlifted her to hospital. Her body temperature was 18 degrees at that point.

But they put her on a machine that was not only warming up her blood but it was also oxygenating her blood and you know pumping her blood around her body because her lungs and her heart had ceased to function. And after 6 hours her heart began to beat again. And she appeared last week at a press conference at the hospital, where they presented the case. It's the longest cardiac arrest ever registered in Spain.

And she seems to have no ill-effect afterwards, apart from some problems with her hand where the cold affected her hands, problems with sensation in her hands; she's not presenting any neurological problems. It's amazing to see the doctors, well basically the doctors were saying that this was down to very good coordination between the fire service, the rescue teams and the doctors in the hospital.

So what an amazing example and a good testament to the health system in this country. When everyone is looking very much at the NHS, probably a lot that could be learnt perhaps in other countries if you look at the Spanish system.

Music interlude

Simon: All right, so let's wrap up the 11th, the 11th, Melissa! 11th episode of season three. I think we've probably got one more in us before the Christmas break.

My name is Simon Hunter -

Melissa: I'm Melissa Kitson

Simon: And this was ¿Qué? A podcast that tries to explain what happens in Spain to those of us who sometimes get a little bit lost in translation.

This is an EL PAÍS production, it was recorded right here in the Madrid newsroom, under the guidance of our expert producer Verónica Figueroa, who is always snapping us on Instagram, and you can listen to it on your favorite podcast app.

You can also request it via Alexa, Siri or your Google Assistant. We'll be back next week with a brand new host of issues. Thank you for listening, adios!

Melissa: Ciao!