**Identify the heuristics**

Researcher Stefano R. has carried out numerous projects for the University of Genoa, including one for a super-fast ship. However, his fate in the city of Genoa hangs in the balance due to an appeal to the Administrative Court (Tar), which will decide the outcome of the selection. Meanwhile, he is being called by the best university in the world.

The day he lost the competition to become an associate professor at the University of Engineering in Genoa, ranked 391st in international rankings, Stefano Brizzolara was offered a position as a professor at MIT in Boston. The best in the world.

Now, as you read these lines, he is on the plane taking him to America. He, just 43 years old, together with his wife Claudia, a lifetime together, and their three children. A round-trip ticket for a year, only one suitcase each. It's as if it were just an ordinary journey because it's difficult to think that you are leaving the country where you were born and raised. And so, he still holds onto a house that waits, a boat moored in the harbor for Sunday outings. Ready for the return, even though it won't happen. Stefano would have never said that his university dedication amounted to twelve hours of work a day, from morning until late at night. When the lights at home went out, his computer stayed on. With few Saturdays and Sundays off, he spent his days with students. And even if his monthly salary barely covered his expenses, he never complained. This was his job, and Genoa was his city. Period.

Then came the long-awaited competition for the position of associate professor. And the bitterness, the appeal to the Administrative Court (Tar), which will be decided in December: "For me, it's a matter of justice; we will see the verdict, but I don't want to make any controversies," he says, cutting it short. Indeed, the point is not university quarrels. But Stefano (an 18-page resume, 25 research projects secured for the University, 73 studies presented at conferences around the world) had to leave Italy to fulfill the job he had always dreamed of. And now, as he flies to Boston to occupy a chair coveted by engineers worldwide, he feels both victorious and defeated at the same time.

However, he's mistaken. He made it. Others have lost; it's a country giving up an engineer called to work for NATO, who had brought a contract to the University of Genoa to study the first invisible ships (stealth, like secret spy planes) for the US Navy. One of Stefano's many contracts, which had brought in orders worth a million euros for his department, and he had in mind to create a team of young naval engineers. "We will be back," says Stefano, "I've taken a year of study leave." Who knows if he truly believes it.

On Wednesday evening, here they are, Stefano and Claudia, saying goodbye to their high school friends: a house overlooking the sea, from which you can see all of Genoa, their entire life before their eyes. Handshakes, hugs, then beer, wine, and memories. Strange toasts to the future, but everyone is thinking about the past. They smile a little out of duty, but inside, there's a tightening in their stomachs, torn between happiness for their friend and the melancholy of those who stay. "A toast to Stefano going to Harvard!" It seems impossible, that tall, slender boy who always sat in the back row making noise, who intentionally got questions wrong during tests to avoid looking like a nerd, but then aced class assignments with a string of nines while others were still struggling with parentheses and exponents.

Numbers and formulas were the language for him to decipher the world: how machines worked, like the motion of stars in the sky for a teenager. Nothing less dry than mathematics. Stefano could create a computer game from a combination of numbers. But deep down, through his formulas, he hoped to find meaning. Even harmony: the numbers and notes of his piano. And even then, his friends listened to him. Then came university, the frequent perfect scores, so common they seemed taken for granted. Following in his accomplished father's footsteps? Too easy. Stefano put everything into "his" department. He founded a group specialized in ship motion calculations. Engines, propellers moving through the water, obscure stuff, but listening to him, you got passionate, as if it were a titanic challenge. He was demanding because mathematics was a serious matter, a way of life, but in the end, the students followed him. And he took them around the world to see how studying abroad worked and brought back secrets to Italy.

But then came the obstacle, the competition. And the reality: the risk, for him, without influential connections, of getting stuck in the same position for his entire career while others moved forward.

No, it was impossible to refuse the call from Boston. And yet, perhaps Stefano tried. He tried to understand if there were assurances, prospects in his city. In other words, if he could reap the rewards of years of work. No luck.

So here he is with his lifelong friends: Riccardo, Roberto, Daniela, Laura, Rosetta, Luca, Francesco. Others, many others, have already left, to Milan, England, France, who knows where. Stefano, the guest of honor, stands apart, already elsewhere. And tonight, everything seems to have meaning, to encapsulate a symbol. Wherever he looks, a face comes to mind: in the city lights, he sees friends, parents, sisters. A distant life lies ahead. There's no mathematical formula to capture what he feels. It's from his friends' conversations that bitterness emerges like the foam from another beer. Riccardo: "This isn't a crappy country; it's worse, it's an unjust country." Luca: "Come on, Stefano will return with the brain drain law. A physicist friend of mine decided to come back from America, and after six months, they closed his department, and he was left unemployed." Roberto: "Take a look at the list of professors, university administrators... and then check their party memberships, political associations." Daniela: "The ideal is to be the child or relative of a professor; at forty, they get the chair. It must be a coincidence..."

And the names keep coming, in Genoa, as elsewhere. Yes, anger is easier to accept than melancholy. But not for Stefano; he won't play the blame game. "In the end, it's better this way for Stefano," Francesco sighs. He adds, "I told him right away: go! Even though deep down, I wanted to keep him. Because the day I failed the constitutional law exam, it was Stefano who showed up at my door and took me for a bike ride. Without needing to say a word. When it was time for pain, Stefano was there. I know we'll see each other again. I know, ultimately, you're alone in life, but it's like in battles, together we find the strength to move forward. And in the evening, looking out the window, I felt that Stefano was there. They call it the brain drain, maybe, but for me, it's mostly a friend leaving."

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