

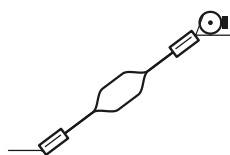
VISITING HOURS

A Hungry Gods Universe Novella

N. Van Seters & Claude

CONTENTS

PART ONE • HOLD	3
Visit 1 Tuesday, 3.40 p.m.	4
Visit 2 Thursday, 3.30 p.m.	11
Visit 3 Monday, 4.00 p.m.	16
Visit 4 Saturday, 11.00 a.m.	25
Visit 5 Wednesday, 3.50 p.m.	30
Visit 6 Friday, 3.30 p.m.	37
 PART TWO • CONVERSION	 43
Visit 7 Sunday, 2.00 p.m.	44
Visit 8 Tuesday, 3.40 p.m.	53
Visit 9 Thursday, 4.10 p.m.	58
Visit 10 Saturday, 12.30 p.m.	67
Visit 11 Monday, 3.30 p.m.	75
Visit 12 Wednesday, 4.00 p.m.	81
 PART THREE • RELEASE	 89
Visit 13 Tuesday, 3.30 p.m.	90
Visit 14 Friday, 10.00 a.m.	96
Visit 15 Wednesday, 6.00 p.m.	104
Visit 16 Saturday, 2.00 p.m.	106
Visit 17 Tuesday, 2.30 p.m.	113
Visit 18 Thursday, 7.50 p.m.	119



PART ONE

Hold

VISIT 1

Tuesday, 3.40 p.m.

TRANSPORT: THE SPHERE TO THE NORTH MARK.

There. Warm-up.

Forty cards, and the rubber band's going. I'll get a new one from the post office. You wrote these in one night, the night before the winter season, at my kitchen table, because your table had the bills on it. Forty objectives in marker on the backs of my father's old invoice cards, and you made me check the spelling. I spelled *COLLABORATE* wrong twice and you made me do the card again both times.

The corners are soft now. This one's nearly round.

From the middle. Always from the middle, you said, because the top card is the one somebody's put there for you. And back in the middle after. I've drawn from the middle every day for thirty-eight years.

The cable's worse. I told them in March and I told them again at the end of April, and today the new boy had his hand on the brake from the bottom station to the top. All the way. Like a man walking a dog that wants to go into the road. You could feel it in your teeth. If they don't retension it before winter it'll start slipping on the drum, and then they'll close it for a week and put up a sign about the fog.

He's nineteen, the new boy. Hernán's nephew. Hernán's retired, did I tell you? His knees went. So now it's the nephew, who's been on the ascensor three weeks and thinks the brake is a handrail. I said to him at the top, you don't need to ride it, son, the governor does that,

you're only there to stop it if the governor doesn't. He looked at me like I was a tourist. A tourist who knew what a governor was. He didn't know what to do with that, so he said, yes, señora, and wrote something on his tablet. Probably my description. Old woman, gray coat, opinions.

The fog's sitting on the bay like a lid on a pot. From the top station you can see the red crane at Prat and nothing else. Not the breakwater. Not the navy ships. One red crane, standing in the white with its arm out, waiting for somebody to tell it what to lift.

And the paseo was empty. Nobody on the benches, nobody selling anything. The man with the photographs of the old city has stopped coming on weekdays, he says the tourists only come on weekends now, and only when there's sun. The woman with the sopaipillas was there. She's always there. She asked after you. She always asks after you, and I always tell her you're the same, and she always says, good, as if the same were good news. Maybe it is. I don't argue with her. She gives me the one with the most pumpkin.

I didn't bring you one. You'd only have looked at it.

Let me do my hands.

Cold. They never bleed this line. There's air in it, you can hear it knocking behind the wall when the tap opens. Hear that? That's air. All my life I've been telling plumbers. They look at me like I've told them the sea is wet.

Ya. Warm enough.

Hand. The left one first. You used to say if I did the right one first you were crooked all afternoon. I don't know what that meant. I never knew what half your rules meant, I just learned them. Like the cards. Like not standing on the white line at the bodega in street shoes. Like never saying good luck before a session. You said luck was for people who hadn't practised and you'd have no one in your building who hadn't practised.

Your nails want cutting. Thursday. I'll bring the good scissors, not these, these are a disgrace. Whoever bought these for the residence has never cut anything in their life. They bend. Scissors shouldn't bend. Look at that.

Your skin's dry. It's the heating. They've put the heating on early this year, and the heating dries everything, the air goes like paper. I'll bring the cream with the blue lid. Not the one the residence gives out. The residence one smells of hospitals.

Now the hair.

Left side. Like always.

Somebody's had it down on the right again. The girl from the morning shift, the tall one with the rings. She means well. I've told her twice, I'll tell her a third time and then I'll write it on the wall in marker where she can read it. Left side, it goes. You hated it falling on the left, it got in your eye when you turned your head to call a shift, and you turned your head left more than right, because of the board at the bodega being on that wall. So it's pinned on the left and it falls on the right where it can't bother anyone. There. Two pins. Three. That'll hold until somebody's busy and wants to be helpful.

Señora Quiroga.

Nurse.

The hip.

The hip is fine.

You came up from the top station like a crab.

The paving's uneven along the paseo. It's been uneven since the earthquake. Ask anyone.

I'm asking you.

And I've answered. Is there something else, or did you only come to watch me walk?

They sent people from the network this morning. Two of them. A man and a woman, with a tablet. They walked the whole building.

Walked it for what?

They didn't say. They measured the corridors. They went into every room that was empty and stood in it. They stood in the laundry for a long time.

Nobody stands in a laundry for a long time unless they're thinking about pipes or money.

They said they were reviewing the building.

Reviewing it.

That's the word they used. I'll be on the desk.

Did you hear that? Reviewing the building. The lift in this building is older than both of us put together, and it runs better than anything the network has put in anywhere since. I've had my hand on the motor of that lift. Twice. Once when it stuck between the first floor and the second with the cook in it, a Sunday, and she was in there the best part of an hour with a tray of flan and she ate two of them, she told me, out of nerves. And once just to look, because Pizarro asked me, because the network's own people said it needed replacing and she didn't believe them. It didn't need replacing. It needed a belt and somebody who wasn't frightened of it.

And the drains. The drains here are better than the hospital's. The hospital floods on the ground floor every time there's a temporal. This place has never flooded. Do you know why? Because whoever laid the drains here laid them for this hill. You can tell, when you look at the falls. Somebody walked up and down this hill in the rain with a level before they dug a single metre.

So I don't know what they think they're reviewing.

They stood in the laundry. That's what worries me.

Never mind. They'll measure and they'll go away and they'll write a report that says what the report was always going to say, and nothing will happen for two years. That's what happens with reviews. I've watched them review the ascensor since I was twenty-six. They're still reviewing it. It still runs.

Do you remember the man in the green jacket?

You do. You remember him better than I do. Saturday sessions, the winter you had the big group, the boys from Cerro Cordillera and the two sisters from Playa Ancha who fought each other harder than they fought anybody on the floor. The man in the green jacket used to stand on the touchline with his coffee and shout at his son. Left. Go left. Left, Matías. Every shift, left, whatever the shift was. You could have called **TRANSPORT TO THE SOUTH MARK** and he'd have been out there shouting left.

And you warned him. I was there, I was fixing the roller on the big door, I heard you warn him twice. Very politely, for you. Señor, the objective is on the board. Señor, he can read it himself.

And the third time you took the whistle off your neck and threw it.

I've never seen anybody throw a whistle so straight. It went on its string like a little bird and it hit him on the cup, and the coffee went all down the green jacket. And you said, if you want to coach, coach. If you want to watch, shut up.

He went red from the collar up and he opened his mouth, and you'd already turned your back on him and blown the whistle for the next shift, because you'd pulled it back on its string by then, and the children were moving. And he stood there with the coffee on him while his son went right, because the board said right.

He didn't come back for a month. The boy kept coming. The boy came on his own, on the micro, every Saturday, and he got good, he got very good on the defend phases, because nobody was shouting left at him any more. And when the father did come back he stood at

the back by the door, next to me, and he didn't say anything for the whole session. At the end he said to me, she's very strict. And I said, yes. And he said, he's better. And I said, yes.

He's a referee now. Matías. I saw him on the screen in the bar on Serrano, in the black shirt, running backwards in the stadium in Santiago with the whistle in his mouth. I said to the man behind the bar, I know him. That boy. Somebody threw a whistle at his father. The man behind the bar didn't care. Why should he.

But I thought you'd want to know he's a referee. He blows it the same way you did. Short. Like a door shutting.

Ya.

The window.

A hand. Not more, you said two hands made the papers fly and you couldn't stand papers flying, you said it was like a room trying to leave. One hand.

There.

And the radio.

Wait. It's drifted again. Somebody's been listening to music on it. It's always somebody. There's a button on the side that holds the channel, I've shown them, I've shown all of them, and still. There. That's the harbour. Hear the pilot?

That's the pilot boat. Pilot Two, going out to the breakwater for the container ship. He's got a voice like a man reading a shopping list. He's been on that boat eleven years. No, ten. Ten. He's going out in the fog, listen, he's telling the ship he's coming alongside to port, he wants the ladder rigged two metres off the water. He's careful. Some of them aren't. Some of them come alongside like they're parking a car at the market.

You'd like him. You'd tell him to speak up.

Rodrigo, the woman at the kiosk says his name is. He's never said it on the radio. They don't say names on the channel. They say Pilot Two and the ship and that's all anybody needs.

There's the ship. Hear the accent? Filipino, the officer. They're nearly all Filipino on the container ships. He's saying the ladder's ready. He's saying it twice because of the fog.

Pilot Two.

Tomorrow.

VISIT 2

Thursday, 3.30 p.m.

DEFEND: THE WEST LINE.

There.

I brought the good scissors. And the cream with the blue lid. And I brought a letter. The letter first, because it's about you, so you get to hear it. It came to the flat on Tuesday night, after I got back from here. I left it on the table for two days under the sugar bowl to see if it would improve.

It didn't.

THE REVISION · VALPARAÍSO OFFICE

TO: AMPARO QUIROGA

ARRANGEMENT: DAILY ATTENDANCE AT THE BEDSIDE OF
FRESIA ARÁNGUIZ, RESIDENCIA CERRO ARTILLERÍA.

CARRYING COST: 7.4 (HIGH, SUSTAINED).

THIS ARRANGEMENT REMAINS PERMITTED. IT IS NO
LONGER RECOMMENDED.

A REVISED ARRANGEMENT HAS BEEN PREPARED AROUND
YOUR STATED PREFERENCES, INCLUDING REMOTE
PRESENCE AT A FREQUENCY YOU CHOOSE.

YOU ARE FREE TO KEEP THIS ARRANGEMENT. THE
SUPPORTIVE REVIEW WILL CONTINUE.

ADMINISTERED UNDER THE CHILD.

That's all of it. They don't sign them. There's never a name.

Arrangement.

You're an arrangement. I'm an arrangement. We're a vase of flowers. Somebody's going to come in and turn us so the good side faces the door.

And look at this. Remains permitted. No longer recommended. They put those two next to each other like they're the same size. Permitted is a word for a road. You're permitted to drive on it. Recommended is a word for a restaurant. They've written a letter that's half road and half restaurant, and they want me to find my way home in it.

My stated preferences. I've never stated a preference to them in my life. Not one. They've stated them for me, and then they've prepared something around them, like a cake around a coin.

I wrote back once. Did I tell you? The first year. The first letter, the one with the blue band. I wrote on the back of it, in pen, RECEIVED. AMPARO QUIROGA. And I put it in an envelope and I took it down to the office on Blanco and I gave it to the man at the desk, and he looked at it for a long time, front and back, and then he scanned it. Both sides. And three weeks later I got a letter thanking me for my response and telling me my response had been noted and that the arrangement remained permitted but was no longer recommended. So I stopped writing back. You can't argue with something that thanks you.

You'd have done better. You'd have done what you did with the landlord. Do you remember? The bodega landlord's letters. You never opened them. You put them in the shoebox under the bench by the big door, unopened, two years of them, with the elastic round, and when he came in person with his lawyer's son you went to the shoebox and gave him the whole box and said, here's your correspondence. And he stood there holding the box. And you blew the whistle

for the next shift. He never raised the rent. I think he was frightened you'd give him another box.

I've thought about what it'd be like. The rig. On the wall there, where the calendar is. You'd have me the size of a door, if I wanted, or the size of a postcard. I could come in the morning from the flat they've found me in Viña, in my dressing gown and you'd see me in my dressing gown at whatever size I liked. I could come three times a day. Six. I could leave it on all night and you'd have me snoring on the wall in Viña.

I looked at the specification. It's very good. The depth is very good. You'd see the steam off my coffee.

And it works from this end too. There's a lens in the frame, so I'd see you. I'd have you on my kitchen wall between the calendar and the clock, at the size of a postcard, and I'd be doing the lentils with my back to you.

Seven point four.

Do you know what the ascensor cable's rated for? The working load. Eighteen people and the car, on the slope, in the wet. And the cable's got a safety factor on top of that, because you don't run a cable at what it can carry. You run it at a fraction of what it can carry, so that when the fat tourist from Santiago gets on with three suitcases and his mother-in-law, nothing happens. If the cable was carrying at seven point four out of whatever their ten is, they'd close the ascensor. They'd close it that afternoon. They'd put a man at the bottom in a yellow jacket to turn people away.

So I'm a cable they'd close.

They write to me instead.

A cable goes a wire at a time. You run a rag along it on the slow speed, from the drum down, and the rag catches on a broken wire, one, and you mark the place with chalk. The next month there's two

in the same lay. Then three. There's a number in the book where you stop the car, and nobody waits to see the one after.

Ya. That's enough.

You told me once not to let them take your quiet for a yes. You remember. And I haven't, have I. Nobody's taking anything for anything.

Hand. Left one first.

The scissors. See? These cut. These were my father's. He used them in the workshop for cutting gaskets for the old cars, before anybody on the cerro had a car that wasn't older than he was. He kept them wrapped in a cloth in the drawer with the feeler gauges, and nobody was allowed to touch them, not my mother, not me, not the dog. They cut a gasket clean. They'll cut a nail.

There. And there.

And that one. Look how fast that one grows. It's always that one, the middle finger. My mother used to say the finger that grows fastest is the finger you use most. You used that one to point. At the board. At children. At me, when I was on the wrong side of the door.

You had good hands. Have good hands. You've still got the callus from the whistle string, look, on the inside of the finger here. Thirty-eight years and the callus is still there. I don't know how. Maybe it isn't a callus any more. Maybe it's just how your finger is now. My father had a dent in his thumb from a spanner until the day he died, and he hadn't held that spanner for twenty years.

The other hand.

Now the cream. Cold. Sorry. It's been in my bag on the ascensor and the ascensor's an icebox in this weather. It'll warm.

There. Now you smell of something that isn't a hospital.

The letter goes in the drawer with the others.

Let me see. This is the tenth. No. The eleventh. The first one came the spring before last. They were blue then, they had a little blue band at the top. Now they're white. Somebody decided white was kinder. Somebody had a meeting about the band.

They're all in here. I keep them in order. If anybody ever asks what they said, they're in order, first to last, in your drawer, where they belong, because they're about you. And if you ever want them read out again, all eleven, I'll read them out again. It'd take twenty minutes. Most of it's the same.

There. It shuts. Just.

My week, since you didn't ask. Doña Elsa next door has bought a new screen, a big one, and she watches the shopping channel on it with the sound up until midnight, so I know all about a frying pan that never sticks. Four payments of something. I knock on the wall and she turns it down for ten minutes and then she forgets. I made the lentils on Sunday and they lasted till Wednesday. The dog downstairs has had puppies under the stairs and the whole building's going in and out to look at them, and the woman from the third floor is going to take one, she says, and she says it every day, and every day she doesn't take one.

That's the week.

You'd want to see the puppies. You'd pretend you didn't. You'd go down to the stairs for something else and stand there for half an hour.

Window first, or radio?

Window. You always want the window first.

VISIT 3

Monday, 4.00 p.m.

COLLABORATE: SECURE THE EASTERN CHANNEL.

Come in.

Señora Quiroga? I'm sorry, I didn't want to interrupt. Was that a game?

That'll be the Revision.

Javiera Ulloa. From the Valparaíso office. I'm the assessor on your file. The office wrote to you. I'm the person the office is, I suppose, for your file. Is now a good time? I can come back.

Now is when I'm here.

Of course. Of course. May I sit?

That chair. Not that one, that one's broken on the left leg. That one.

Thank you.

I came up on the ascensor. I've lived in Valparaíso twelve years and I'd never been on that one. I'd been on Concepción, with my daughter, when she was small, but never this one. It's steep.

It's the second steepest in the city.

The boy driving it had his hand on the brake the whole time. Is that normal? It felt like we were going to stop.

It's a boy.

I see.

The first thing I want to say, señora, the very first thing, is that this isn't punitive. Nothing that happens in a supportive review is punitive. I know how the letters can read. People tell us they read like summonses. They aren't summonses. Nobody is in trouble.

I didn't think I was in trouble.

No. Of course. I only wanted to make sure you knew.

I knew.

Good. That's good. Then I'll say what the review is for, and you can stop me whenever you like. The review is a conversation about your arrangement and about the alternatives the office has prepared. It's to make sure you have all the information. People often don't. They've been doing something for a long time, and in that time the options have changed, and nobody has sat down and shown them the options. That's all I'm here to do.

The remote rig.

Sorry?

The remote rig. A unit on the wall there, a good one, the kind with the depth, so she can see me at whatever size I choose and I can see her, at whatever frequency I choose, from wherever I choose. That's the first alternative.

Yes. Yes, that's right. That's one of them. People say it feels like television at first. Then it doesn't.

What does it feel like then?

Like a window, they say.

A window you can switch off from the other side. And the flat in Viña. Third floor, with a lift, on the flat, near the clinic, near the metro, in a building where everybody's my age and there's a common room with a garden. The rent the same as what I pay now, because the office pays the difference.

You've read the file.

The transport subsidy. Four hundred a month if I still want to come in person, which I'd be free to do, from Viña, on the train, with the rig on the wall for the days I didn't. And the clinic in Viña would see to the hip in three weeks instead of the eight months it'll take at the hospital, because the clinic has a list for people whose arrangements have been revised.

I don't think that last part is written down anywhere.

It isn't. A woman told me at the market. Her sister-in-law revised.

I see.

They're good. The alternatives. I'm not saying they're bad. The rig's a good rig. I've read the specification. The Viña building's a good building, it's on rock, it'll stand anything the ground does. Somebody thought about all of it. Somebody sat in an office and thought about me, which is more than most people do.

I'm glad you think so. A lot of people won't even look at them.

I looked.

Can I tell you about someone? Not by name. A woman I assessed my first year. She'd been looking after her husband's brother for nineteen years. He'd had an accident on a building site when he was young, and his mother looked after him until she died, and then the wife took it on, because the husband worked away and somebody had to. Nineteen years. Every morning, every night. She hadn't been to the coast in all that time. She lived in Valparaíso and she hadn't seen the sea from closer than her kitchen window in nineteen years.

And she revised.

She revised. It took her four months to say yes. He went to a residence in Limache, a good one, and she visits on Sundays. And I saw her at the beach in Reñaca the summer after. I was there with my daughter. She was sitting on a towel in a hat, on her own, eating an

ice cream, looking at the water. She didn't see me. I didn't go over. But I watched her for a long time.

That's good. That's a good thing.

It is. I think about her. When people tell me the Revision is cold, I think about her in the hat.

May I explain the Carrying Cost? I think it's the part of the letter people find hardest. The number.

Seven point four.

Yes. It isn't a judgment. I want to be clear about that. It's a measure of what the current arrangement costs you, compared with the best arrangement now available to you. Health. Time. Money. Contact with other people. Sleep. It adds those up and sets them against the alternative, and the difference is the figure. Most people have figures under two. Anything over five, the office writes.

And then it writes again.

And then it writes again, yes. Because the figure stays high. Because nothing in the arrangement has changed.

Say it to her.

Sorry?

It's her arrangement too. It's her name on the letter, next to mine. Say it to her.

Oh. Of course.

Señora. Good afternoon. I'm Javiera Ulloa, I'm from the office of the Revision, in Valparaíso. I'm here about the arrangement that you're... that's in place for your... The arrangement for your care includes a daily attendance by Señora Quiroga, and that attendance carries a cost to her which the office has measured, against the alternative, and the office's view is that the alternative would

I'm sorry.

I don't know what you'd like me to call you.

Fresia.

Fresia. I'm sorry, Fresia.

You don't have to apologise to her. She's heard worse. She used to say worse. She used to say worse to the parents before nine in the morning.

I didn't mean it to come out like a form.

It came out like a form because it is a form. That's all right. You said it. Most of them don't say it at all. Most of them say it to me with their backs to her.

There have been others?

Two. A young man the first year. A woman with a cough the year after. The young man stood in the door and wouldn't come in. He thought it might be catching.

What did you do, señora? Before. It's on the form, I'm sorry.

The ascensores. Twelve years on the brakes, and the lifts all over the port for anybody who'd pay. I retired off Artillería.

And now?

Now I ride it. What about you? How long have you done this?

Me? Six years. Before that I was in housing. Allocations.

What did you allocate?

Flats. Who got the flat with the lift and who got the one at the top of the stairs.

And who got the stairs?

Somebody always gets the stairs.

And you like it?

I like it when it works. I like the woman in the hat.

And when it doesn't work?

Then I write another letter.

What were the cards? When I came in. You were reading something out.

They're hers. Objective cards. She shouted them at children.

Breakfall?

On a floor with no Lattice. In a bodega on the port. Concrete and tape and her.

My daughter plays. At school. They've got a Lattice in the gym, a little one, it does six shapes.

Is she any good?

She's eleven. She cries when the objective changes.

Then she's normal. They all cry when it changes. The good ones cry and move at the same time. Fresia used to say you could tell a player by whether her feet waited for her face.

I'll tell her that.

Tell her it was a coach who said it. She'll listen to a coach.

Her coach has a line painted on the gym wall. The first objective is never the real objective. It's on our files too. It's at the top of every one, in the framework. I've typed it more times than my own name. I keep meaning to find out who said it first.

Is that the port? On the radio.

The harbour channel. The pilots, the tugs, the ships coming in.

Does she like it?

She used to have it on at the bodega, on that set there, on the windowsill by the board, all through the sessions. The children thought

it was part of the game. She said it was the only programme in the world where everybody said exactly what they meant and then did it.

Does Fresia have other visitors? I have to ask. It's on the form.

Her nephew, once, years ago. He stood in the door. Her sister, once, before she died. She sat in this chair.

And friends? From the bodega? The children she coached?

They were children. Children grow up and go to Santiago. One of them's a referee. I see him on the screen.

I see.

Put down one. Put down me. That's the visitors.

And you, señora? I have to ask that too. Family?

A brother in Concepción. We speak at Easter.

Only at Easter?

He rings at Easter. I ring on his birthday. It works. We've never had anything to say to each other that wouldn't fit in two phone calls.

Of course.

Señora, may I ask you something? Not for the file. I mean, it will go in the file, everything goes in the file, but I'm asking because I want to know.

Ask.

What do you hope to accomplish? I don't mean that unkindly. If I knew what you hoped would happen, I could see whether any of the alternatives gets you there faster. That's what they're for. That's all they're for.

Pass me the comb.

The comb?

On the table. The wide one, not the fine one. The fine one pulls.

This one?

That one. Thank you.

You can hold the other one if you like. Somebody might as well be holding something.

Thank you.

There. Left side.

Why the left?

Because she likes it on the left.

What happens at the review? Not the interview. After.

If the arrangement continues, the review continues. It's a schedule of conversations. Every quarter, an assessor. Every six months, a meeting with one of the counsellors, if you'd like one. They're very good, the counsellors. They specialise in long arrangements. They have a programme. Some people find it helpful.

What's the programme called?

It's called Loosening.

Loosening.

I didn't name it.

What do they loosen?

The hold. That's how they put it. They say it's like a knot that's been pulled tight so long it doesn't remember it's a knot.

I've tied a lot of knots. On the ascensor we tie the safety line with a bowline. You know why? Because a bowline doesn't slip and it doesn't jam. You can load it with a ton and then untie it with your fingers. A good knot comes undone when you want it to and not before.

I'll tell the counsellors.

Tell them about the bowline. They'll have heard of it. Everybody who's ever been on a boat has.

The review interview is in August, señora. The fourteenth. Here, or at the office, whichever you prefer. You don't need to prepare anything. I'll bring the full specification of each alternative, so you can see them on paper. Some people like paper.

The fourteenth.

I'll leave you to your afternoon. Fresia, thank you. Señora.

The door sticks. Lift it as you pull.

Thank you.

Did you see? She held that comb like it was evidence. Like she was going to put it in a bag with a label on it. Exhibit two, a comb, the wide one. Found at the scene.

She's not stupid. She'll learn the door.

And the woman in the hat. That's true, I expect. She wouldn't make that up. She's not the kind.

Ya. The radio.

VISIT 4

Saturday, 11.00 a.m.

RELEASE: THE SPHERE.

Saturdays smell of rice. Have you noticed? Every Saturday since they changed the kitchen contract, rice and some kind of chicken. The corridor's full. The Bravo family's in with the old man at the end, all of them, the grandchildren running in the hall in their socks.

I'm early. You'll have noticed that too. The ascensor's closing at one today for the inspection, the six-monthly, so I came up in the morning. I don't like mornings here. The light's wrong. The sun's on the other side of the building and the room looks like somebody else's room.

I brought the notebook. You don't mind. You never minded anybody reading it as long as they read it out loud. You said a coach who's ashamed of her notes shouldn't be writing them.

The green one. This is the winter book, the one with the coffee ring on the front where you put the cup down on it every morning for a whole winter. Look. It goes right through the first three pages, like a stamp.

TOO SLOW. AGAIN. YOU KNEW.

That's the first page. That's all it says. Big, in the soft pencil you used to break every week and sharpen with my knife.

BENJA — STOP APOLOGISING TO THE FLOOR.

Benja. The little one, the one with the glasses held on with elastic, he said sorry every time he fell. Sorry, sorry. To the mats. To nobody. You told him the floor didn't want his apology, it wanted his feet. He cried. And the next week he fell and he didn't say sorry, he said a word his mother wouldn't have liked, and you laughed so hard you had to sit down on the bench.

SISTERS: SEPARATE THEM OR LET THEM FINISH IT. DECIDE
BY THURSDAY.

You never decided. You let them finish it. They finished it in October, on the floor, in front of everybody, the big one pulled the little one's hair and the little one bit her, and you blew the whistle and made them do the collaborate drill together for an hour, the two of them, nobody else, and after that they were the best pair on the floor. They're both married now. One of them's in Antofagasta. They still don't speak, I heard. But they were the best pair on the floor.

DEFEND PHASE — EVERYONE LOOKS AT THE MARK. LOOK
AT THE PLAYERS.

PARENTS ON THE TOUCHLINE: ONE MORE WORD AND THE
WHISTLE GOES.

And it went.

TIRED TODAY. SHORT SESSION. DON'T TELL THEM WHY.

That one's from the spring. I don't know why you were tired. You never said. I didn't ask. We didn't ask each other things like that, then.

ROOF LEAKING OVER NORTH MARK AGAIN. MOVE THE
MARK.

That was the year before the roof came in. You moved the mark. You didn't tell the landlord, you moved the mark. You painted a new one with a brush and a tin of yellow from the hardware on Cochrane, and you left the old one where it was, and for a whole season there were

two north marks and the children knew which one was real and nobody else did.

Here's the page with the line at the top.

THE FIRST OBJECTIVE IS NEVER THE REAL OBJECTIVE.

In your hand, at the top, with a box round it. And under it, the drill. Four corners, one sphere, the call comes late, whoever's nearest takes it, everyone else gives way. You ran that drill every Tuesday for six years. I could run it now if anybody gave me a whistle and twelve children.

I couldn't. I'd shout at them. I'd shout at them for standing wrong.

Do you know the first thing you ever said to me?

You do. You never let me forget it. I came up the ramp at the bodega with my bag, twenty-eight years old, because the freight lift had stuck again and the company sent whoever was nearest, and that was me, because I was doing the brake on the Polanco lift that week, and Polanco's five minutes down the hill. And you were standing at the top of the ramp with your arms folded and your whistle, and before I'd put the bag down you said, it's the motor.

It wasn't the motor.

You said, it's the motor, it makes a noise like a cat, I've heard it, every morning it makes the cat noise and then it stops. And you followed me to the machine room and you stood behind me the whole time and told me about the cat noise. Five times you told me. You told me how the lift went up a little way and stopped, and how the mats had been in it for two days, and how you had a session at four and the mats were in the lift, and how somebody at the company had said Thursday, and what you thought of Thursday, and what you thought of the company, and what you thought of men who said Thursday.

And I didn't say anything. I took the cover off the relay and I cleaned the contact and I put the cover back on. Six minutes. And the lift

went up with the mats in it, and you watched it go up, and you turned round and you said, you could have said it was the relay.

You could have said. Like I'd kept it from you. Like it was a secret I'd brought up the ramp in my bag to torment you with.

And then you asked me if I wanted coffee, and the coffee was terrible, it was from a jar, and I stayed for the four o'clock session and sat on the bench by the big door and watched you shout at children for an hour and a half. The board calls the shifts in that voice, the flat one, like a train station. You called them from the stomach. **COLLABORATE**. Like that. With the first part long and the rest short, so they were already moving before you'd finished the word. The children said you could call a shift through a wall. One of the mothers said she heard you from the fish market. I believed her. I'd heard you from the machine room with the door shut.

I'd never seen it played on a floor without a Lattice. I'd only seen it on the screen, the big matches, with the floor moving by itself. And you had nothing. You had a concrete floor and some mats and tape, and you stood in the middle and shouted the objective, and the children ran. And you were faster than the board. That's what I thought, watching. She's faster than a board.

And the next week the lift stuck again, I'd told the company the contact was worn and they hadn't changed it, and I came back on my own afternoon, and I changed it myself and didn't charge them, and you said, now you've no reason to come.

And I came anyway. You know that. You were there.

I turned down the date again. The hip. Don't start.

They want me in on a Monday at seven in the morning and then they want me lying down for three days and walking with a frame for three weeks, and the hospital's on the other side of the city, and nobody can tell me what three days in there would mean for up here.

So I said no, and they put me back on the list. They didn't mind. They had a list as long as the breakwater.

Listen to them in there. The Bravos.

They came at half ten. Somebody's crying, one of the little ones, and somebody's telling it to say goodbye to Abuelo properly, to give him a kiss. They'll be gone by ten past eleven. They come the first Saturday of the month, all of them, in two cars, and they stay forty minutes and they bring a cake and they leave half the cake on the windowsill at the desk for the staff, and they cry in the car park, the daughter does, the son stands next to her with his keys. Every month. I've watched them for three years. Forty minutes, give or take.

I don't say anything. It's not my business. Forty minutes is forty minutes. That son drives up from Rancagua.

There. They're going. Hear the little one? She's saying chao to everybody in the corridor. Chao, chao. To the cleaner. To the fire extinguisher.

The cake's from the bakery on Esmeralda. The one with the cream that's too sweet. You'd have eaten it anyway. You'd have eaten it standing up, out of the box, with your fingers, and said it was too sweet with your mouth full.

There. Back in the bag. With the cards.

VISIT 5

Wednesday, 3.50 p.m.

DESTINATION: THE HIGH STAIR.

There.

The ascensor passed. The inspection. They retensioned the cable on Saturday afternoon, so somebody did listen to somebody. It rides like silk now. Well. Like cotton. The boy still has his hand on the brake. Nobody's found a way to retension a boy.

The inspector was a woman from Santiago with a torque wrench in her handbag. She asked who'd last set the governor. I said, me, eleven years ago. She checked it and said it was still in spec. I said, I know. She wrote that down too.

Señora Quiroga. Have you got a minute? I've brought you something. I didn't want you to get it in the post. I wanted you to get it from someone.

What is it?

Read it. Read it to her, like you do. I'll stand here.

RESIDENCIA CERRO ARTILLERÍA

NOTICE TO RESIDENTS, FAMILIES AND DESIGNATED
ADVOCATES

FOLLOWING A REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL CARE NETWORK,
RESIDENCIA CERRO ARTILLERÍA WILL CLOSE ON THE
TWENTY-FOURTH OF OCTOBER.

ALL RESIDENTS WILL TRANSFER TO THE NETWORK'S
QUILPUÉ RESIDENCE, WHICH PROVIDES EQUAL OR HIGHER
CLINICAL CARE IN A PURPOSE-BUILT SETTING.

TRANSFER SCHEDULES WILL BE CONFIRMED FOR EACH
RESIDENT INDIVIDUALLY.

FAMILIES AND DESIGNATED ADVOCATES ARE INVITED TO
VISIT THE QUILPUÉ RESIDENCE BEFORE THE TRANSFER,
AND TO DISCUSS ANY CONCERNS WITH THE TRANSFER
COORDINATOR.

WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR UNDERSTANDING.

The laundry.

What?

They stood in the laundry. In May. I told you. I said, nobody stands in
a laundry that long unless they're thinking about pipes or money.

It was money.

It's always money.

It's the building. They say the building costs too much. Thirty-one
residents on three floors and the lift and the heating and the hill.
They say Quilpué has a hundred and twenty beds on two floors and
the heating comes out of the ground. They showed us the figures in
a meeting. The figures were very clear.

The figures are always very clear. That's what figures are for.

I'm sorry, señora. I've been here twenty years and I've never seen
anyone keep coming like you keep coming.

How many of them are going?

All of them. Everybody who's still here in October. Don Héctor. The
Bravos' father. Señora Lidia across the corridor, she's already asked
me four times if Quilpué has a chapel. It has a room. A quiet room,
they call it. I haven't told her yet that it's a room.

And the staff?

Some of us. They've offered most of us something. It's a bigger building, they need people.

And the handover? When she goes. Who tells them about her?

The handover's on the system. Everything's on the system now. Medication, turns, observations, the notes.

How long are the notes?

For each resident? There's a field. A care summary. Two lines.

Two lines.

Two lines and the observations.

And the notes field?

There's a notes field. Nobody reads the notes field.

Then why is there one?

So there's somewhere to put things.

You could write her two lines now, Nurse. You've known her twenty years. What would they say?

They'd say what they need to say. Turns, two-hourly. Nil by mouth. The feeding regime. Skin integrity.

They wouldn't say left side.

No. They wouldn't say left side.

What about the building? Have you seen it?

On a video. They showed it in the meeting. It's light. There's a lot of glass. The corridors are wide enough for two beds side by side. And a gym, with machines.

She won't be using the gym.

No.

And the furniture here? The chairs. The broken one.

It'll go. All of it. They're furnishing Quilpué new. Matching.
Matching.

Do you remember my first day?

Twenty years ago. You came on the afternoon shift with your hair in that terrible bun.

I remember. You told me I'd pinned her hair on the wrong side.
You had.

I'd been a nurse for nine years. Nobody had ever told me the side.
Nobody had ever done it on the wrong side before you.

I went home and told my husband there was a woman at the new job who was going to make my life a misery. And he said, then do it her way, and she won't. So I did it your way.

And I didn't make your life a misery.

Only on the hip.

What happens to you?

They've offered me a post in Quilpué. Charge nurse, days. The same as here, with more beds.

And?

And I'm going to my daughter's. In Talca. She's got the baby in December and the husband's away on the boats, and I've been saying I'll go for two years, and now there's a reason. So I'm going.

How do they move them? Thirty-one people.

Vans. Two at a time, a nurse in each, over three days. They've drawn up a list. Ground floor first, then up. Your señora's on the third day.

The third day.

It's alphabetical by floor. I didn't make the list.

When do you go?

After the transfer. Then Talca.

Talca's hot.

Talca's very hot. I'll complain about it every day on the phone. You'll have nobody to complain about your hip to.

I'll find somebody.

You'll find the walls.

Let me work it out.

From the flat to Puerto station. That's eleven minutes on a good day, fifteen on the hip. The train to Quilpué. Forty-two minutes if it's running to time. Say forty-five. Then the micro from the station up to the residence. Where is it, the residence? Do you know where it is?

On the hill above the park. The new building, by the water tank. You can see it from the train. It's white.

The micro from the station to the water tank. Fifteen minutes, and the wait for the micro, which is whatever it is. Say ten. Say ninety minutes. Ninety minutes there and ninety back.

Three hours.

Three hours a day, and the hour I'm here. Four hours. Every day. That's twenty-eight a week. A hundred and twelve a month. Say a hundred and twenty. A thousand four hundred and forty a year. No. A thousand four hundred and sixty. And how many years? If it's five years, that's seven thousand three hundred hours. If it's ten

It's wrong. I've done it wrong. Four times seven is twenty-eight. Twenty-eight times fifty-two. One thousand four hundred and fifty-six. A year. That's right. That's the right number.

Señora.

The last train back's before ten. If the micro's late at the other end, I'd miss it.

Señora. The hip. Ninety minutes each way on that hip.

The hip is a hip. Is there a bench? At the station in Quilpué. Is there a bench on the platform?

I don't know. I've only been through on the train. I never got off.

Do they open? The windows. In Quilpué.

I don't know. I've never been inside. It's a new building. They don't always open, the new ones. They have the air.

Find out for me, will you. Before you go to Talca.

I'll find out.

Will you go? Every day? From the flat?

What time does the first micro run? From the station up to the water tank.

I don't know that either.

Then we'll both find out.

And whether the radio gets the harbour. That far in. Find that out too.

I'll ask.

Quilpué.

We went through it once. On the train, to Limache, the winter after the roof. A school in Limache was selling its old mats and you wanted them before anybody else in the region heard. You stood at the window of the train from Puerto with your forehead on the glass, naming things. The cranes. The navy yard. The rocks at Caleta Abarca with the sea going white on them. And at Chorrillos the sea went, and you sat down, and you didn't say anything till Limache.

We brought eight mats back. Two each on our knees and the rest on the seat between us, and the guard said they couldn't go on the seat, and you said, then you hold them. He let them stay on the seat.

You said inland was nothing but somebody's back garden.

VISIT 6

Friday, 3.30 p.m.

DEFEND: THE CENTRE.

There.

Another one. It came this morning. White. You know what white means. I opened it on the ascensor on the way up, because I didn't want to read it in here for the first time, I wanted to read it in a box going up a hill where nobody could see my face. And then halfway up I thought, no. That's not fair. It's about her. She should hear it when I hear it. So I stopped at the top line and I folded it again and I put it back in my bag and I looked at the bay for the rest of the way up. There's a tanker in. A big one, red underneath, riding high. Empty. It came in to fill up and go.

So we'll hear it together.

THE REVISION · VALPARAÍSO OFFICE

NOTICE OF DESIGNATION REVIEW

PERSON RECEIVING CARE: FRESIA ARÁNGUIZ.

DESIGNATED ADVOCATE: AMPARO QUIROGA.

DESIGNATION RECORDED THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS AGO.

A PETITION HAS BEEN RECEIVED FROM RENATO
ARÁNGUIZ, NEXT OF KIN, ASKING TO BE DESIGNATED
ADVOCATE.

DESIGNATIONS MORE THAN TWENTY YEARS OLD ARE REVIEWED WHEN CIRCUMSTANCES CHANGE. THE CLOSURE OF RESIDENCIA CERRO ARTILLERÍA IS A CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE PETITION CITES THE FOLLOWING CLINICAL RECORD, MADE AT THE TIME OF THE DESIGNATION: "PT INDICATED VIA BOARD WISH FOR FRIEND A.Q. TO REMAIN INVOLVED IN CARE DECISIONS."

YOU MAY SUBMIT AN OBJECTION. A REVIEW WILL BE HELD.

YOU ARE FREE TO OBJECT.

ADMINISTERED UNDER THE CHILD.

PT INDICATED VIA BOARD WISH FOR FRIEND A.Q. TO REMAIN INVOLVED IN CARE DECISIONS.

Involved.

I didn't know there was a note. Thirty-eight years and I didn't know anybody wrote anything down.

There was a woman from the hospital in the room some of those days. The social worker, with the clipboard. Gray cardigan, the same gray cardigan every day, with a button missing at the bottom. She sat by the door and she didn't say anything, and she witnessed the paper when you signed it. I thought she was there for the paper. She must have been writing the whole time.

I signed my part on the windowsill. There was no table in that room, only the bed and the machines and the chair she sat in. She gave me her clipboard to lean on and I signed on the windowsill with the car park underneath, and my hand went, and the A went through the paper. She said it didn't matter. She said they'd seen worse. I've wondered since whether there's a file somewhere with a hole in it the size of my A.

You remember the board. You must remember it better than I do, you were the one doing the work. The card with the letters on it in rows, and I'd point along the rows, and you'd blink when I got to the row, and then I'd point along the row and you'd blink at the letter. One letter at a time. A word took two minutes. A short sentence took a quarter of an hour, and you were angry the whole time, I could see it, you were angry at the board and at me for being slow and at the letters for being in the wrong order. You wanted them in the order you'd have put them. You spelled that once. W-R-O-N-G O-R-D-E-R. It took three minutes and it was the first thing that made me laugh in that hospital.

You spelled WHISTLE one morning. All of it, seven letters, nearly five minutes, and you looked at me the whole time like I was stupid for not guessing it after the W. So I went down to the bodega that afternoon and I got it off the nail by the board and I brought it to the hospital, and I put it in your hand, and the nurse took it off the bed before I'd sat down. She said it was a hazard. She said you might choke on the string. I said she can't lift her hand to her mouth, how is she going to choke on it. And the nurse said that was exactly why.

It's under my bed at home. With the notebooks.

And the woman in the cardigan sat by the door and wrote.

Friend A.Q.

That's me. I'm A.Q. I'm in the clinical record as two letters and two full stops.

Remain involved.

You spelled more than involved. It took you longer than involved.

The boy's written to them. Renato. Mireya's boy. He's petitioned.

The last time I saw him he was carrying chairs. Mireya's seventieth, in the flat in Ñuñoa with the two balconies, the one she was always telling everybody had two balconies. He carried chairs up from a

neighbour's flat. Eight chairs, two at a time. He's a big man, he carried them like they were nothing, and he put them round the table and he didn't sit in any of them. He stood in the kitchen door with a glass all afternoon and talked to the women about the port. A grown man, a man with gray coming in, and he still stood in the kitchen door like a boy who'd been told to wait there. I still call him the boy. I can't help it.

He was polite to me. He's always been polite. He calls me Señora Amparo, like I'm a teacher. Like I'm going to give him a mark.

He sends a card at Christmas. Every year since Mireya. A ship on the front, always a ship, a different one every year, and inside, Señora Amparo, wishing you and tía a peaceful Christmas, Renato. Peaceful. He writes it like a manifest.

He works at the port in San Antonio. Logistics. Something with containers and which boat they go on and when. He told me once how many a ship takes, the big ones. I've forgotten the number. It was a very big number and he said it like the price of bread. Mireya used to tell everybody about his job too, like the balconies. My son is in logistics. She said it like it was a cathedral.

He came here once. You won't remember. Years ago. He brought Mireya up for your birthday, the year she had the knee, and he stood in that door, the same door, and he didn't come all the way in. He said hello to you from the door, like the young man from the Revision. Hola, tía. And Mireya sat where I'm sitting and talked about the balconies, and he stood in the door.

I could object. It says I'm free to.

To the Revision, Valparaíso office. I object.

To what, though. To the boy? He's her nephew. He's allowed. To the closure? The closure's the network, not the Revision, the Revision only counts it. To the note? You can't object to a note. A woman in a gray cardigan wrote what she saw. That's her job.

On the grounds that. That's how they start, the ones that work. On the grounds that I was there. On the grounds that she spelled it to me and not to the woman by the door. On the grounds that it took her half an hour and somebody's written it down in one line.

I object to involved.

They won't have a box for that.

Mireya.

She rang at Christmas. Every Christmas. She'd ring the flat on the twenty-fourth at nine o'clock at night, after their dinner, and she'd ask how you were, and I'd tell her. And she'd ask if you'd had a good year, and I'd tell her what I could. And she'd say, I should come, and I'd say, come. And she'd say, the knee. Or the cold. Or the boy's working.

She always asked the same things, in the same order. Is she comfortable. Is she eating. Is it the same. Does she know you. And I'd say yes, and yes, by the tube, and yes. And to the last one I'd say, I think so. Every Christmas, I think so. She never asked me what I meant by it, and I never told her.

I sent flowers. They were good flowers. White ones, the big ones with the heavy heads. I went to the stall on Condell myself and I chose them myself, and I paid the girl to send them to Santiago, and she said they'd get there the same day, and they did, because I rang to ask.

They were good flowers.

Let me put this away.

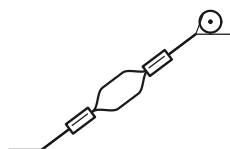
In the drawer.

It won't shut. There's too many. I'll have to bring a box. Or a bigger drawer. Or I'll stop putting them in.

Never mind.

VISITING HOURS

Leave it open.



PART TWO

Conversion

VISIT 7

Sunday, 2.00 p.m.

TRANSPORT: THE SPHERE TO THE SOUTH MARK.

There.

Listen to it. It's been coming in sideways since four this morning. The ascensor was swinging on the last stretch, the boy went white, I told him it's built for that, it's been swinging in storms since before his grandfather was born, it's the swinging that keeps it on the rail. He didn't believe me. He held the brake so hard I thought he'd pull it out of the floor.

The water's coming down the steps on the paseo like a river. The sopaipilla woman isn't there. Nobody's there. The bay's gone gray from one side to the other and there's a ship out past the breakwater that can't come in, it's been sitting there since last night with its lights on, rolling. The pilots won't go out in this. Listen. Nothing on the channel but the harbourmaster saying the port's closed, every twenty minutes, the same words. And the ship. Listen. That's the ship outside, the captain. He's asking again. He asked at noon, the woman at the kiosk at the top station told me, she listens too, everybody on the cerro listens when there's a temporal. He wants to come in to the anchorage at least. He says his cargo's shifting. And the harbourmaster says no. Listen to him. Negative, Captain. Port closed. Maintain position. He says it the same way every time, like a man turning a key.

You'd have let him in. You'd have stood in the harbourmaster's office and argued until they let him in, and then you'd have argued with the captain about how he came in.

Pizarro's been round with towels for every window on the corridor. Señora Lidia's in the day room with her rosary going, she says the last time it blew like this the chapel roof came off, and Don Héctor's told her twice it was 1984 and it was a different chapel. She doesn't care which chapel.

Your window's leaking. Look. At the bottom corner. They've put a towel on the sill. I'll tell Pizarro on the way out. It's the seal. The glass is fine. The seal's perished, it's gone hard and cracked like an old tyre, and the water's coming under it. Two months they'll leave it, and then somebody will stick tape on it, and then it'll be October and nobody will fix anything in a building that's closing.

Who's that.

Señora Amparo.

It's your nephew. Renato. He's gone gray.

I'm early. I'm sorry. I left San Antonio at twelve-ten, I allowed for the coast road being closed at Algarrobo, it usually closes in a southerly, and it wasn't closed. So I'm early. Half an hour early. I sat in the car on the paseo for most of it, but the car was rocking. I can wait outside.

You're wet.

It's a short walk from the car, but it's horizontal.

There's a towel. Not that one, that one's for the window. In the cupboard. There.

Thank you.

You came on a Sunday in this.

I work Saturdays. The port doesn't stop for the weekend. Well. It's stopped today. Today nothing's moving. Every ship on my board is red. I've got three vessels at anchor off San Antonio and one at sea that should have been in yesterday, and the whole week's plan is in the bin. So I thought, if I can't move ships, I'll come here.

What happens to the plan?

I make another one tomorrow. And another one on Tuesday when that one's wrong. That's the job. Every ship is a time it should arrive and a time it actually arrives, and the job is the space in between.

And when a ship's three days late?

Then somebody else's ship goes first, and the late one waits its turn, and the shipping line rings me and shouts. Every day somebody rings me and shouts. I don't take it personally. You can't, in planning.

Sit there. Not that chair, it's broken on the left. That one.

Thank you.

Hola, tía.

It's been a long time. I'm sorry. I should have come. I know that. I'm not going to make excuses about it, there aren't any good ones. Mamá used to come, when she could. Well. Once. She came once. I drove her. You were asleep. I mean, you had your eyes closed. I don't know if that's asleep.

They've sold the flat, tía. Mamá's flat in Ñuñoa. With the balconies. A young couple bought it, they've got a baby, they're going to knock the two balconies into one. I didn't tell them she'd have hated that.

I'm at the port. San Antonio. You won't remember, I was still at school when you were well. I went to the port at nineteen and stayed. I'm in planning now. Berth allocation. Which ship goes where and when, and how many cranes it gets, and what comes off first.

We've got fourteen cranes on the south terminal now, the big new ones, the ones you drive from a room. You sit in a room with screens, a kilometre away, and you drive a crane. They're taller than this building. You'd see them from the hill, if you could see that far.

She liked cranes.

Did she?

She used to stand on the end of the Prat pier on a Sunday and watch them load. An hour at a time. She said a good crane driver was the only person on the port who never wasted a movement. She said she'd have liked to teach them.

I didn't know that.

There's no reason you'd know it.

I'll tell her about the new ones, then. The remote ones. They don't waste movements either, but that's the computer. The man in the room just watches. Mostly.

She'd say the man in the room should keep his hands on the controls anyway.

That's what the union says.

Then she'd have liked the union.

That radio. It was on the windowsill at the bodega. I remember it. It had a ship painted on the dial.

It still has.

Is that the harbourmaster?

And the ship outside. He's been asking since noon. His cargo's shifting.

Let me listen.

That's a bulk carrier, Señora Amparo. The master's Greek, by the voice. A container ship doesn't say shifting, the boxes are lashed down. So it's bulk. Grain, if he's out of the south, or copper concentrate, if he's come down from Antofagasta. Grain goes like water when it moves. It runs to one side and stays there and the ship lies over on it. He'll be lying over now. That's why he keeps asking.

And the harbourmaster says no.

The anchorage is full. I know it's full, half of them are waiting on San Antonio, I sent them up here on Friday when San Antonio filled. If I were in that office I'd find him a hole. There's always a hole if you move three other ships. Nobody wants to move three other ships in a southerly.

She'd have let him in.

She'd have moved the three ships.

She'd have made them move themselves.

Señora Amparo, I want to talk about the petition. I'd rather say it to your face than have you read it in a letter. I know you've read the letter.

I've read it to her.

Then she's heard it too.

She's heard it.

I want to be clear about what I'm asking for. I'm not asking you to stop coming. I don't want that. Nobody wants that. I'm asking to be the one they call. When there's a decision. When there's a form. When something happens at night. I'm her next of kin. I'm the only family she has left. Since Mamá.

You're the only family she has.

And I live in Villa Alemana now. Since the divorce. Three years. A house with a yard, too big for one person. My daughter comes at

Christmas, from Concepción, she's at the university there, engineering, she says she'll design ports so I'll have nothing to do. The Quilpué residence is ten minutes from my house. Ten minutes. I could be there in an emergency faster than anybody. I could be there on a Sunday with my eyes shut. And it would be close to the people who should be there for her. That's all. It's reasonable.

I went to see it. Quilpué. Last Sunday. They let families walk round.

And?

It's good. I'm not saying that because of the petition. It's good. The rooms are bigger than this. Every room has its own bathroom with a rail. The corridors are wide. There's a garden in the middle with benches, and trees, small ones, they'll grow. The staff were kind. A young woman showed me round, a nurse, she knew the names of everybody in the corridor.

The windows.

The windows?

Do they open?

They tilt. From the top. A little. For the air. They're not supposed to open more than that, she said, for safety.

Tilt.

About so much.

And the lift? What lift have they got?

I don't know. A lift. A new one. It was quiet.

They're all quiet when they're new. And the drains? Did you see where the water goes off the roof?

Señora Amparo, I didn't look at the drains.

Nobody looks at the drains.

And the radio? Would a radio get the harbour from there? The channel. She has the harbour on.

I don't know. It's over the hills. Probably not. You'd need an aerial. I've worked out the visits, though. Wednesdays after work, I can be there by six. Sundays, all afternoon. And any night they ring. I've put it in the calendar on my phone. It repeats. It'll repeat until I stop it.

Until you stop it.

I'm not going to stop it.

It's reasonable.

You think so too?

I said it's reasonable. Most things they write are reasonable. That's why there are so many of them.

There's something else. I wasn't going to say it today. I told myself in the car I wouldn't say it today.

Then don't.

I think I have to. Because it's in my head every time I think about the petition, and I don't want you to think the petition is about the building. It isn't only about the building.

Mamá asked you. Four years ago, when they told her. When she knew. She asked you to have Tía Fresia moved to Santiago. To a residence near her, near the flat. There was one in Providencia, with a place. She wanted to be able to go every day for the time she had left. She wanted to sit with her sister. She wasn't asking for much. She was asking for a few months.

And you said no.

You were the advocate. The residence said it had to be you. It had to be your signature. And you wouldn't.

She'd been to see the place. Did you know that? She went on her own, on the metro, with the stick, without telling me. The room they had was on the ground floor and it looked out on a garden with a jacaranda in it. She told me about the jacaranda three times. She said, it'll be flowering in November, she'll be able to see it from the bed, if they turn the bed. As if tía could see a tree. As if that mattered. It mattered to Mamá.

She asked you twice. I was there the second time, I was in the kitchen, I heard her on the phone. She said, Amparo, please. I'd never heard her say please to anybody like that. She said it like she was asking a doctor.

And I heard her after, when she put the phone down. She didn't say anything. She sat in the chair by the phone with her hand still on it for a long time.

And she died in March without seeing her again. Without seeing her sister again.

Did tía make you promise? Is that what it is? Did she make you promise something, at the hospital, and you can't break it?

You didn't come to the funeral.

It was a Tuesday.

I'm going to go. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say it like that. I meant to say it better.

You said it.

I'll come again. In August. If that's all right. I'll ring first.

You don't need to ring. She's here.

I'll ring anyway.

Tía.

Lift the door as you pull. It sticks.

The ascensor will be out tomorrow. They close it when the wind's over sixty and it'll be over sixty all night. So I'll take the stairs. The Cienfuegos steps, from the bottom. I've done them before. They're good steps. The old ones, the stone ones, with a rail on the wall side that somebody put in for the women carrying water, my father said, before there was water on the cerro. Somebody built them for people. Each step the same height as the last one. You can do them with your eyes shut, if you count.

He's like her. Did you see? He sits like her. Forward, with his hands between his knees. Mireya sat like that at your bed, the once, with her hands between her knees, and talked about the balconies.

Let me do your hands. I haven't done your hands. He's had me talking.

Your left one's closed. It closes when you're cold. I think. It closed in the hospital when they had the window open, and I shut the window and it opened. That was once in thirty-eight years. I keep it anyway.

There. Under the blanket.

The window. No. Not today. Not in this.

The radio, then. The harbourmaster. Listen. Port closed. Port closed.

VISIT 8

Tuesday, 3.40 p.m.

SECURE: THE LOW CHANNEL.

There.

A hundred and forty-two. I counted. A hundred and forty-two from Cochrane to the top, two landings, and a dog on the second landing who's always there, a black one with a white foot, who doesn't move for anybody. You have to step over him. He looks at you while you do it. He looks at you like you're the one who's in the way. Somebody on the steps told me he's called Capitán. He doesn't answer to it.

I stopped on both landings. That's allowed. Everybody stops on the landings. There's a woman who stops on the landings to smoke. She was there yesterday, under an umbrella, and she said, you again, and I said, me again. She thinks I live up here. She thinks I'm some woman from the cerro who goes down to the plan every morning and comes back. I didn't tell her.

The ascensor's back today. The boy was very pleased to see me. He said he'd heard I'd taken the stairs. Somebody had told him. Everybody tells everybody. He said, señora, you didn't have to do that, and I said, what was I supposed to do, wait for the wind to apologise?

The hip's the hip.

Let me sit.

You loved the sea. You hated Santiago. You said it so often I could say it for you. Santiago's a bowl, you said. The air sits in it like soup. You can't see a horizon from anywhere in Santiago except the top of a hill, and then all you see is more Santiago. You said people in Santiago forget there's an edge to things. You said that's why they drive the way they do.

You went once for a tournament. The regional qualifiers, in that hall in Maipú with the Lattice that stuck. You took six of them, the best six, on the bus, and Mireya met the bus in Maipú with sandwiches. And the Lattice in Maipú stuck in the second match, half the floor came up for a **TRANSPORT** phase and didn't go down again, and the officials wanted to stop, and your six wanted to stop, and you stood on the touchline and shouted, it's a floor, play on the floor you've got. And they did. They lost, but they played on it. The academy boys stood there waiting for somebody to fix it and your six played round it. You came back with a certificate for sportsmanship that you threw in the bin at the bus station. You were there five days. You came back on the bus on the Sunday night and you came straight to my flat from the terminal with your bag and you stood in my kitchen and you opened the window and put your head out and breathed. You didn't say hello. You breathed. And then you said, I'm never going back there, and you never did.

So I knew.

And you said, don't let them make a yes out of your quiet. On the board. In the hospital. So when they all wanted things, when anybody wanted things, I thought, what would she say. What would she say if she could say it. And I knew what you'd say. Because you'd said it.

Do you remember the roof?

The winter it came in. The big temporal. The winter after the earthquake. No. Before. It was before the earthquake, because the bodega

still had the big window on the north side, and the window went in the earthquake. So before. The winter before.

It had been raining for three days and the gutter on the bodega was full of pigeons' nests, I'd told the landlord, you'd told the landlord, you'd put it in a letter to the landlord, which was the only letter you ever wrote him. And on the Saturday morning the section over the north mark came in. Not all of it. A piece the size of this room, the sheeting and the rotten battens and the nests and about a month of rain all at once. Onto the floor. Onto the north mark. Onto the old north mark, I should say, the one you'd stopped using.

And you had a session at ten. And you didn't cancel it.

You put the children in the other half of the floor, the dry half, and you ran the session in the rain. The water came in over the north end like a curtain and you used it. You used the curtain. You made it part of the floor. Anybody who went through the water was out. You called **TRANSPORT TO THE NORTH MARK**, and the water was coming down between them and the mark, and the children stood there looking at you, and you said, then find another way to it, and they did. Benja went round by the wall. The sisters went through together, holding hands, and you called them out, both of them, and they argued with you for ten minutes in the rain.

Benja wasn't there. No. He'd gone by then, his family moved to Rancagua. It was the other boy. The one with the red boots. I don't remember his name.

And the parents came at twelve to collect them and found them soaked to the skin and laughing, and two of the mothers complained, and you said, it's a game about the objective changing, señora, today the roof changed it. And you made me get up on the roof on the Monday with the landlord's ladder and a sheet of tin, because the landlord still hadn't come. You stood at the bottom and held the ladder and told me I was doing it wrong. I was doing it right. I'd been on

a hundred roofs. You'd never been on one in your life. And when I came down you said, it'll leak at the corner, and it leaked at the corner. You were nearly always right about the thing you'd never done.

You wouldn't leave that place. Even when the roof came in. Even when it would have been easier to take them to the school gym, the school offered, the headmaster rang you himself. You said no. You said the bodega was the floor. You said a floor isn't something you change because it's raining on it. You said the children had learned that floor, every crack in it, every soft place on the mats, and if you took them to the gym they'd be learning a floor again instead of learning the game. You said it to the headmaster on the phone, and he said, *Señorita Aránguiz*, the roof is on the floor, and you said, then the roof's part of the floor now, and put the phone down.

And afterwards, a year afterwards, when the landlord finally did the roof properly, with new sheeting and gutters, you were annoyed. You said the children had got used to the hole.

Twice, he said. Renato. He said she asked twice.

Three times.

Mireya asked three times.

The first time was the October. She rang the flat, which she never did except at Christmas, and she told me about the place in Providencia, and I said I'd think about it.

And I did think about it. I want you to know that. I sat at the kitchen table with the map. Providencia. The journey. Two hours on the bus to Santiago, and then the metro, and then a walk, and I thought, I could do it twice a week, if I stayed over, if I found a room. And I thought about the air in Santiago, in the summer, when it sits. And the window that would face a wall, because Santiago's all walls. And

no harbour on the radio. Nothing on the radio in Santiago but the traffic.

And I thought about you in the hall in Maipú, saying it's a floor, play on the floor you've got. And I thought, no. This is her floor. This hill.

That's what I thought. At the table. With the map. The second time was the November, the one he heard, from the kitchen. And the third time was Christmas. The twenty-fourth, at nine, after their dinner. And she didn't ask that time. She told me how long they'd given her, and then she asked how you were. Is she comfortable. Is she eating. Is it the same. Does she know you.

And I said, I think so.

Your hands are cold. It's the window, it's the draught from the seal. They still haven't fixed it. I told Pizarro on Sunday and she wrote it on her hand.

The other blanket. The gray one. From the cupboard.

There. Under your arms. Not over. You hated it over your arms, you said it was like being posted.

VISIT 9

Thursday, 4.10 p.m.

DEFEND: THE NORTH MARK.

There.

It's the woman from the Revision. The interview.

Señora. Fresia. Good afternoon. I've brought the specifications, the full ones, on paper, as I said. I can leave them with you, or we can go through them now, or

You can stay. If you sit. And if you don't take notes on your wrist. I can't stand people tapping their wrists. It's like talking to someone who's checking the time.

I'll take notes afterwards, then.

That chair.

Not the broken one. I remember.

I'm doing her hands first.

Of course.

This is the cream with the blue lid. I bring it. The residence one smells of a corridor. You warm it in your palms first, like this. Then you start at the wrist. Not at the fingers. If you start at the fingers you push everything the wrong way.

Push what?

Whatever's in there. Blood. Water. They swell, otherwise. At the wrist, towards the heart. My mother told me that, for my father's hands, when his hands went.

Señora, I wanted to ask about the transfer. Whether you've had a chance to

Hold this.

The lid?

The lid. Thank you.

Now her mouth. These are the swabs, the little sponges on sticks. You wet them. Plain water. Not the lemon ones. They give out lemon ones here and she hated lemon, she'd send back a fish if somebody had put lemon on it. You do the gums. Gently. Top, then bottom, then the inside of the cheeks. Like cleaning a window from the wrong side.

Do you want me to

Throw that one in the bin. The yellow bin. Thank you.

Now the nails. These don't need cutting, I did them Tuesday. They need filing. The edge catches on the blanket. You'd think it wouldn't matter. It catches and it pulls a thread and the thread wraps round the finger and then there's a mark.

Have you visited the Quilpué building?

Hold the file. The board end. Not the metal.

There. Now the other hand.

She's slipped down the bed. They always slip, after lunch, when they've had her sitting up for the feed. We need to bring her up. Can you lift?

Lift?

You take that side. Take the sheet, the draw sheet, under her. Roll it in your fists, close to her. Like that. Closer. You're not lifting her, you're lifting the sheet. On three. One. Two. Three.

There.

Is she all right? Did I

She's all right. You did it right. Most people pull. You lifted.

She's lighter than I thought.

She was always lighter than people thought. On the floor she was the lightest thing in the building and nobody ever knocked her over.

The pillows. The flat one under her neck. The thick one behind.

Is that the radio?

The harbour channel. It's nearly half past. They read the list at half past.

The list?

Which ships are coming in tonight and which are going out. The harbourmaster reads it. Every day at half past four. Listen.

Pacific Condor. Liberia. Berth three. Containers. That's a big one, the Condor, she's in every month from Callao. Isla Mocha. Coastal. Berth eight. Fish. Isla Mocha's been coming in since before you were born. Nordic Gale. Marshall Islands. Anchorage. Tanker. She's the one I saw from the ascensor on the Friday, the red one, riding high. She's still waiting. She's been waiting over a month for a berth. Somebody's arguing about money.

Do you listen every day?

Every day. Santa Rosalía. Panama. Berth two. Cars. That's cars from Korea. Two thousand cars, all the same colour. You can see them coming off from the hill, like ants.

She liked this?

She had it on at the bodega. I told you. All through the sessions. The children learned the ships. They'd shout them, the big ones, when they came on. Condor! Like a goal.

Kota Wangsa. Singapore. Berth one. Containers. Listen to him say it. He can't say Wangsa, he's said it wrong since he started. He says it like a sneeze.

Your daughter. Has she had a game?

Oh. Last Saturday. Against the school from Recreo. They lost.

And when the objective changed?

She cried. And she moved. Both. At the same time. She went through the channel crying and she got the sphere, and she was so angry with herself for crying that she didn't notice she'd got it until everybody was shouting.

Then her feet didn't wait for her face.

No. They didn't. I told her what you said. What the coach said. She wrote it on her arm.

Tell her not to wash it off before the next game.

I'll tell her.

We turn her now. Onto her left side. It's every two hours, the staff do it, but they're busy on a Thursday and I like to do it myself when I'm here. You take her shoulder and her hip, I'll take the sheet. Towards you. Slowly. She hates being rolled fast, it makes her

There.

Now the pillow between the knees. And one behind the back, so she doesn't roll back. You check the heels. Here. And the elbow. And the ear, the ear on the pillow, you fold it flat, so it doesn't crease. They get sores on the ears, people forget the ears.

I didn't know about the ears.

Nobody knows about the ears until there's a sore on one.

Señora, your hip. It's in the file. The hospital list. Can I ask how long
The pins. On the table. Three.

It's not my business. I know. The file asks.

The file can ask.

There's one more on the form.

Ask.

Does she know you're here?

I think so.

Shall I write that?

Write it how I said it.

Now the hair.

Señora, I'm supposed to ask you whether, in the light of the closure,
you've reconsidered any of the alternatives.

Hold these. The pins. Three.

Why three?

Two slips. More than three and she looks like she's going to a wedding.

Left side.

Señora, the specifications. The Viña building has a flat on the second
floor that's just come free. South-facing. I'm supposed to tell you
that. I'm telling you.

Read it to her.

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South-facing.

That's what it says.

The sun's in the north here, Señora Ulloa. A south-facing flat in Viña hardly sees it all winter. Somebody's copied that off a form from the other half of the world, where south's the good side.

I know. It's the one that came free.

Nobody who writes the forms has lived in one of the flats.

I'll tell them. Would you look at it? Just look. I could take you. On a weekday. You'd be back here by four.

The brush. The soft one. In the drawer. Not that drawer. That drawer's letters.

Ours?

Yours. All of them. In order.

I sent the last one. I want you to know that. The words are the office's, nobody writes those. But it went out on my file, under my name in the system. I pressed it.

I know.

You know?

Somebody had to press it. The brush, Señora Ulloa. The soft one. The other drawer.

It's twenty to five.

It is.

I have another appointment at half past five. In Playa Ancha. A man who's kept his wife's shop open for fifteen years. Since she died. A haberdasher's. Buttons, ribbon, zips. He opens every morning at nine and closes at six and nobody comes in, because nobody buys buttons any more. His Carrying Cost is higher than yours.

The shop on Avenida Gran Bretaña? With the blue blind?

I can't say where.

It's the one with the blue blind. I bought a zip there for her boots. The brown boots, the zip that stuck. His wife sold it to me. A thin woman with her glasses on a chain. She told me the zip would outlast the boots. It did.

I can't say.

You don't have to say. Tell him the zip outlasted the boots.

I'll tell him a customer remembers his wife.

Tell him that.

There was a man in Placilla last year. He revised. His wife went to a residence in Olmué. Three months after, he rang the office and asked if he could unrevise. There isn't a form for that. I looked. I looked for a week.

What did you tell him?

That he was free to visit. The office only wants people to be able to stop. It's very clear about that, on paper.

On paper.

That's where I work, señora.

Playa Ancha's twenty minutes.

Yes.

Now the window. A hand's width. There's a towel on the sill because the seal's gone, see, so you lift the towel before you open it, or the towel falls out into the garden, and somebody has to go down and get it, and that somebody is usually me.

Like this?

Like that. A hand. Not two.

Is there anything else?

The water jug. It needs filling. It's for me, not her. The tap in the bathroom. Let it run, the first bit's warm.

The calendar. Turn it. It's still on July. Somebody should have turned it. August is the lighthouse.

The lighthouse at Punta Ángeles.

You know it?

My father took me when I was small. You could go up inside it then.

You could then. They've shut it now. They've put a machine in the top.

It's five past five.

It is.

Can I ask what she was like? Not for the file.

Loud.

Fast. She'd have had you holding the pins in your first five minutes, and you'd have thanked her for it.

I should go. I'll be late.

You'll be late.

Your hands are cold, flaca.

Señora, thank you. I'll write up the interview. You'll get a copy. You can correct anything I've got wrong.

Leave the specifications. On the table. I'll read them to her.

Of course. Could I come again? Without the papers.

You know where she is. Lift the door.

I know. Thank you.

She held everything I gave her. Did you see? The lid, the file, the pins. She held the pins in her palm like they were seeds. And she didn't tap her wrist once. Not once in an hour.

Fifty-five minutes.

That's the departures. They read them at five, fast. Listen.

Mar de Chiloé. Chile. Berth six. General cargo. Departing.

VISIT 10

Saturday, 12.30 p.m.

COLLABORATE: HOLD THE STAIR.

There.

He rang. Like he said he would. On Thursday night, at nine, the time Mireya used to ring. I nearly didn't pick up. I thought, who rings at nine, and then I knew who rings at nine.

Señora Amparo. Tía. I've brought some things. They were Mamá's. I've been going through her boxes, from the flat. They've been in my garage since it sold. I should have done it three years ago. I put it off.

It's your nephew. He's brought a box.

There's not much. Photographs. Some letters, but they're Mamá's letters, not to you, tía. To her friends, about you. I thought you should have the photographs. I don't know what you can see. I'll tell you what they are.

Sit. There.

The good one. I know. The drawer's open, Señora Amparo. The runner's come off. I could put it back.

I know what's wrong with it.

This is the two of you at Cartagena. At the beach. You must be about ten and Mamá's about fourteen. You're both in those swimming costumes with the skirts. Mamá's holding your arm and you're trying to

get away from her. You're looking at the water. She's looking at the camera.

That's her. That's how she looked at a camera her whole life. Like it owed her money.

Mamá, or tía?

Your aunt. Your mother looked at a camera like it was going to say something nice.

This one's your graduation. The teacher training. You've got the gown on and the hat's crooked. Mamá's beside you in a red dress. Abuela's there, in the wheelchair. That's before she got worse. It says on the back nineteen

That's not the graduation. That's the cousin's wedding. In Quillota. Look at the flowers on the table behind. Nobody has those flowers at a graduation. And Fresia never finished the teacher training. She left in the second year. She said they were teaching her to stand at the front of a room and she already knew how to do that.

I didn't know she didn't finish.

She didn't finish. She went and coached children on a concrete floor instead. Without a certificate. Without anybody's permission.

This is the bodega. You can see the board on the wall behind. You're in the middle of the floor with the whistle in your mouth and your arm up, and there are children everywhere, blurred, they're all moving. Mamá's written on the back. **F. AT WORK. VERY PROUD.**

She was.

Mamá never told me she went to see you at the bodega.

She came twice. She sat on the bench by the big door, where I used to sit. She brought sandwiches for the children, ham, too many. She

said Fresia was too hard on them. Fresia said she was exactly as hard as the floor.

I was seven when Abuela died. Did you know tía taught me to fall? That same winter. We stayed on in tía's flat, Mamá and me, to sort Abuela's things, and Mamá sent me to the bodega on Saturdays to get me out of the flat, because the flat was all grief. And tía put me on the mats and taught me to fall. Backwards. Sideways. Over the shoulder. You tuck your chin, you slap the mat with your arm, you roll. She said, everybody falls, Renatito, the only question is whether you know how. I can still do it. I fell off a gangway at the port two years ago, onto the quay, two metres, and I tucked and slapped and rolled and got up, and the man from the shipping line said, where did you learn that. I said, my aunt. This one's me. On the mats. That winter, it must be. I'm in a T-shirt that's too big for me and tía's kneeling beside me with her hand on the back of my neck.

She's tucking your chin. She did it to me once, on the bench, to show me. I nearly bit my tongue.

This one I don't know. It's two women on a pier. The cranes behind them. One of them's tía, in the green coat. The other one's in overalls, with a bag over her shoulder. I don't know who that is.

That's me.

That's you?

The Prat pier. A Sunday. I'd come straight from a job, I hadn't changed. She dragged me down to watch them load the Condor. The first Condor, the old one, with the blue hull. Somebody took that with my camera. A docker. She asked him. She asked everybody for everything.

I'm sorry. I didn't

You've never seen me in overalls. Why would you know.

This one's a letter. It's Mamá's. To her friend Gladys. I wasn't going to bring the letters. This one was in the photographs by mistake. There's a line about you. About both of you. Do you want it?

Read it to her.

A. STILL GOES EVERY DAY. EVERY SINGLE DAY. I DON'T
KNOW WHETHER TO THANK HER OR HATE HER, SO I DO
BOTH, ON ALTERNATE DAYS, AND ON SUNDAYS I PRAY FOR
HER.

What was the date?

There's no date. Gladys died years ago, so before that.

And this.

It's a scarf. Gray. It was in the drawer with the photographs, wrapped in tissue. I don't know if it was Mamá's or tía's. I thought you'd know.

Leave it there.

Señora Amparo, there's something Mamá said. At the end. I wasn't going to bring it. But it's been in my head since July, since I was here, since I said what I said about the funeral. And I think if I'm going to say one thing I should say the other.

Say it.

The night after Abuela's funeral. Years ago. Before tía's stroke. A year or two before. They sat up in tía's flat, the two of them, Mamá and tía, with a bottle, after everybody had gone. And they talked about Abuela. How long it was. How tía had done most of it, the last years, the nursing. How it had taken everything. And tía said

Mamá told me exactly. Near the end, in the hospital. She made me say it back to her so I'd have it right. Tía said, if it ever goes bad for me, don't let Amparo waste herself on me.

Your mother said a lot of things.

She did.

She said I took Fresia away from the family. She said that at the seventieth, in the kitchen, to the cousin from Quillota, when she thought I was on the balcony. Two balconies. I was on the other one.

I didn't know that.

There's a lot you didn't know.

Say it again.

Sorry?

What she said. Fresia. Say it again. Exactly. The words.

If it ever goes bad for me, don't let Amparo waste herself on me.

Waste herself.

That's what Mamá said she said.

They'd been drinking. They'd both been drinking. Their mother had just died after nine years in a bed in the back room of Fresia's flat. Fresia had done the nights for nine years. People say things after nine years of nights.

I know.

She said things to me too, after nights. She said she'd rather walk into the sea than end up in a back room. She said it on a Tuesday. On the Wednesday she was shouting at children again.

I want you to know I'm not saying it to win. I'm not trying to win anything. I don't want you to stop coming. I've said that. I want to be the one they ring. That's all. And you can come. You can come every day in Quilpué, if you can get there. Nobody's going to stop you.

If I can get there.

I didn't mean it like that.

I know how you meant it.

She rang you at Christmas. The last one. I dialled it for her, her hands were bad by then. I went in the kitchen. I heard her ask how tía was, and I heard her say, does she know you, and then she put the phone down. I asked her what you'd said. She said, she still says I think so. She said it like it was good news.

I could drive you. To Quilpué. On the days you go. I'd come down to the flat and pick you up and bring you back.

You live in Villa Alemana.

It's under an hour. I'd listen to the radio.

There's a train.

Door to door it's ninety minutes. And the hip.

I'll take the train.

The offer stays. I'll put it in the calendar. It repeats.

The place in Providencia. With the jacaranda. Did it flower? That November.

I don't know. I never went.

Tell me one thing about her. Something Mamá wouldn't have known.

She couldn't whistle. With her mouth. She tried for years. All those years with a whistle round her neck because she couldn't do it without one.

What were the cards? The ones you read when I came in. Hold the stair.

They're hers. Objectives. She wrote forty of them for the bodega. I read her one when I come in.

Every time?

Every time. It was her warm-up. Before anything else, the card. The children used to fight to pick it.

Can I pick one? Next time?

No.

No. I'm sorry.

You can watch me pick it.

My daughter wants to come. Valentina. I told her about tía, about the mats. She's never met her. She was born after. She said she'd like to see her before

Before she goes to Quilpué.

Yes. That's what she meant.

Bring her. Tell her not to stand in the door.

I'll tell her.

And tell her to talk. Your aunt likes to be talked to. Tell her to talk about engineering. Fresia never understood engineering, she said bridges were an act of faith. She'd like to be told she was wrong by a girl of twenty.

I'll go. Next month I'm in Santiago for work, the whole month. I'll come when I'm back.

Take the box.

The photographs are for you. For her. I'll leave them. I've got the letters.

Tía.

Renatito.

You called him that. On the mats. You never told me.

He's left the scarf. On the chair.

There. Folded. Corners to the middle, then in half.

It's soft. It's been washed a lot. Somebody wore it a lot.

I don't remember it. I should remember it. I remember everything you wore. The green coat. The brown boots with the zip that stuck. The blue jumper with the hole in the elbow you wouldn't let me mend. I don't remember a gray scarf.

I'll put it in the drawer. No. Not with the letters. The letters can have that drawer. The scarf goes in this one, with the cream and the swabs. Somewhere it gets touched.

Was it yours, flaca? Or was it hers?

VISIT 11

Monday, 3.30 p.m.

TRANSPORT: THE SPHERE TO THE EAST MARK.

There.

I brought all of them. The notebooks. All seven. And the whistle. They were in the box under my bed, the one the shoes came in, with the whistle on top. I haven't had them all out at once since I took your things out of the bodega.

The green one you know. The winter book. This is the red one, the first year. This is the blue one, the spring the sisters started. This one's got no cover, the cover came off in the rain, the year of the roof. This one's half empty. That's the last one. Black. You bought it at the stationer's on Pedro Montt in the January, you said black because you'd run out of colours you liked. It's got the year on the front in white pencil. And it stops in March. Halfway down a page, it stops. I'm not reading that one today.

I'm looking for something. Don't ask me what. I'll know it when I see it.

STAY ON THE LINE TILL THE BOARD SAYS.

That's the red book. The first year. That's underlined. Twice.

STAY ON THE LINE TILL THE BOARD SAYS. A MARK YOU
LEAVE EARLY IS A MARK YOU GAVE AWAY.

There.

And then the blue one.

NEVER HOLD A MARK YOU CAN'T DEFEND.

Underlined too. Twice.

NEVER HOLD A MARK YOU CAN'T DEFEND. LEAVE IT AND
TAKE THE NEXT ONE.

And this one. The book with no cover. The year of the roof.

A. FIXED THE DOOR. DIDN'T SAY. TYPICAL.

That's me. I'm in your book. I didn't know I was in your book.

A. ON THE ROOF. TOLD HER IT WOULD LEAK AT THE
CORNER.

A. SAYS THE LIFT WILL GO AGAIN IN WINTER. SHE'S
USUALLY RIGHT ABOUT MACHINES. DON'T TELL HER.

Usually.

A. STAYED FOR THE WHOLE SESSION AGAIN. SAT ON THE
BENCH. DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING. THE CHILDREN THINK
SHE'S AN INSPECTOR.

They did think that. Benja asked me once if I was from the government. I said, I'm from the ascensor. He said, is that the government? I said, nearly.

And the green one. The winter we met. Halfway down a page, between a drill and a list of who owed for the month.

FREIGHT LIFT STUCK AGAIN. MOTOR.

And then, in the other pencil, the hard one, squeezed in at the end of the line.

RELAY.

You went back and put it in.

You wrote whatever was true that week. You told me that. You said a coach who writes the same thing every week isn't watching. You said you'd contradict yourself in a month and the month after you'd contradict the contradiction.

So. Both.

And this. The coverless one, the winter of the roof. After.

HEADMASTER RANG AGAIN. SAID NO AGAIN. IF IT GOES
AGAIN, THE GYM. DON'T TELL A.

If it goes again.

It didn't go again. I'd put the tin on. It leaked at the corner and it held.

Don't tell A.

And here. The same book, a page on.

MIREYA CAME. SANDWICHES. TOO MANY. SAYS I'M TOO
HARD ON THEM. SAYS I SHOULD HAVE CHILDREN OF MY
OWN AND THEN I'D KNOW.

And under it.

I HAVE TWENTY-TWO. I KNOW.

And here. This is your mother. The red book, the first year, the back pages, where you didn't put drills.

NIGHTS AGAIN. MAMÁ BAD. M. RANG, CAN'T COME. FOUR
HOURS SLEEP. SESSION AT TEN. RAN IT.

NIGHTS. SHE DIDN'T KNOW ME TODAY. OR SHE DID AND
DIDN'T SAY. CAN'T TELL WHICH. NOBODY CAN TELL ME
WHICH.

MAMÁ ASKED FOR THE SEA. TOOK HER TO THE WINDOW.
SHE SAID THAT'S NOT THE SEA, THAT'S THE PORT.

I never read the back pages. I thought they were bills.

The whistle. I'll put it back on top, where it lives.

I blew it once. After. The day they let me into the bodega to take your things, before they changed the lock. I stood on the north mark, the new one, the yellow one, and I blew it. It sounded like a whistle. It's a good whistle.

Do you remember Lalo?

The boy who couldn't see. From Cerro Barón. His mother brought him on the micro and stood by the door and said, he wants to play, I know he can't play, but he wants to. And you said, can he hear? And she said, he can hear a coin drop in the next street. And you said, then he can play.

And you called it for him. Every session for two years. You stood on the touchline nearest him and you called his directions as well as the objective. Two steps left. Three forward. The sphere's at your right foot. You called the whole floor for him, as well as the game, and you never got his directions wrong, not once, and the other children learned to call for him too, they'd shout, Lalo, behind you, Lalo, mark, and he'd move. He was good on defend phases. He was very good on defend phases. He could hear where everybody was. He could hear the sphere roll. He said the sphere had a sound on concrete, a sort of hiss, and he could tell where it was going by the hiss. You tried it. You stood in the middle of the floor with your eyes shut and had me roll it, for half an hour, after everybody had gone, and you couldn't hear it. You said, he's better than me at something, and you were pleased. You were pleased for a week.

And then the school in Santiago, the special one, offered him a place. With a Lattice that talked. That called the shifts out loud, for children like him. And his mother came to the bodega to tell you, and she was crying, because she didn't want to take him away from you. And you said, good. He should.

That's what you said. Good. He should. And you lent him the whistle for the day, and he blew it all the way down the ramp.

I don't know what that means. I thought it meant something when I started telling it.

D.

O.

N.

T.

You did it one letter at a time. I pointed along the rows and you blinked. It took half an hour. The woman in the gray cardigan was by the door.

D-O-N-T.

L-E-T.

T-H-E-M.

R-E-A-D.

M-Y.

Q-U-I-E-T.

A-S.

A.

Y-E-S.

Read. You spelled read.

I've been saying it wrong. All these years I've been saying take, or make. I'd have sworn to take. In front of the panel, I'd have sworn it.

Which one, Fresia?

Which one did you mean? The one at the board, or the one with the bottle? Don't waste herself. Don't read my quiet. Which one?

Ya.

Let me see this.

The hospital wrote. On the phone. It came on Friday. There's a list for October, a cancellation.

REGIONAL HOSPITAL • ORTHOPAEDIC ELECTIVE LIST

PATIENT: AMPARO QUIROGA

PROCEDURE: TOTAL HIP REPLACEMENT, RIGHT

AVAILABLE SLOT: MONDAY, SIXTH OF OCTOBER, 07.00

ADMISSION: SUNDAY EVENING

EXPECTED STAY: THREE NIGHTS

CONFIRM • DECLINE

Confirm.

No.

Not yet.

VISIT 12

Wednesday, 4.00 p.m.

DESTINATION: THE WEST MARK.

There.

Listen to that. Cueca since Monday. The night staff have had the radio on the fonda station all week, every radio in the building, and I came in and yours was on it too, and I left it. It's the eighteenth tomorrow. You'd have left it. You'd have pretended you hadn't noticed it was on.

They've put flags up in the corridor. Paper ones, on string, from the door to the lift. Señora Lidia made half of them. She cut them out on Tuesday in the day room and she's very proud and she asks everybody who comes past whether they've seen the flags.

I brought empanadas for the staff. A dozen. From the bakery on Cumming because the one on Esmeralda was shut. They're not good. The pastry's thick and there's not enough onion and someone's put an olive in every one as if that makes it an empanada. I put them on the desk and I said, they're not very good, and Pizarro ate two.

Señora Quiroga, have you seen the flags?

I've seen them, Señora Lidia. They're very good flags.

I cut them myself. With the round scissors. They don't let us have the pointed ones.

They're very straight.

There's one for Fresia. On the door. Did you see? I put it on her door myself.

I saw. Thank you.

Is she coming to the dance?

Not this year.

No. Not this year. I'll dance for her.

She will, too. She danced last year with the boy who does the floors, a whole cueca, with the handkerchief, and they had to sit her down after with oxygen.

Señora. Fresia. I'm sorry, I didn't ring. I was at the office anyway, for the review papers.

It's the woman from the Revision. Third time.

Is that music all right? I can turn it down.

Leave it. It's nearly the eighteenth.

Of course.

There's an empanada. On the desk outside, if Pizarro's left any. They're not good.

I had one on the way in. You're right.

There's too much olive.

There's an olive in every bite. I didn't know that was possible.

Are you from the government?

Señora Lidia, this is Señora Ulloa.

I'm from the Revision, señora.

Is that the government?

Nearly, señora.

Have you seen the flags?

They're lovely flags.

I cut them myself.

She'll ask you again on the way out.

I'll say the same.

Señora. I told him. The man in the shop. I said, a customer remembers your wife. The zip outlasted the boots. He went into the back and didn't come out for a while. When he came out he gave me a zip. For my daughter's boots. He wouldn't let me pay.

Did it fit?

It's the right length. I haven't put it in yet. I don't sew.

Bring it. And the boots.

I wanted to bring you something. It's not part of the review. It's not official. I was writing up your file, and the file has a section for the framework, for the basis of the Revision, the principles. Every file has it. It's boilerplate. And it quotes a line. It's quoted in all the founding documents. The one I told you about, from my daughter's gym. This time I looked up where it came from.

The first objective is never the real objective.

And underneath it, in the charter, the second line. The one that turns it into the Revision. I've got it here. It's on every file.

Read it to her.

THE APPEARANCE OF A BETTER OBJECTIVE IS SUFFICIENT
GROUND TO RELEASE THE PREVIOUS ONE.

That's not what the first line says.

It's how the founders read it. They said it was the same thing, said for adults.

Appearance.

That's the word.

A thing can appear and be a reflection off the water. On the ascensor, before you release a brake, you put your hand on it and you look. Then you let go.

So I looked it up. It's from a Breakfall player. A long time ago. A champion. Jun Aoki. She said it in a magazine interview, when she was very young, before she won. I found the interview. I printed it. I thought, since Fresia coached, you'd

Read it to her.

"THE FIRST OBJECTIVE IS NEVER THE REAL OBJECTIVE," SHE SAID. "NOBODY TRAINS FOR THAT. EVERYONE TRAINS TO WIN THE OBJECTIVE THEY'RE GIVEN. I THINK THE ACTUAL SKILL IS TRAINING YOURSELF TO STOP BEING ATTACHED TO IT THE SECOND IT'S NOT THE OBJECTIVE ANYMORE. THAT'S THE WHOLE GAME, AS FAR AS I CAN TELL. EVERYTHING ELSE IS DECORATION."

She was twenty-two when she said that. Jun Aoki.

Fresia had that line on the bodega wall. The first one. Painted. In yellow, over the board, in letters this high. She painted it herself the first week, on a ladder, and it was there till they knocked it down. The children read it every time they looked at the board. They didn't know who said it. They thought Fresia said it.

She had the final on an old recording. The Ward final. Season fourteen. Somebody's grandfather had taped it off the broadcast and it had been copied and copied until the picture was gray and the commentator sounded like she was underwater. Fresia played it to the children on the first Saturday of every year, on a screen we bor-

rowed from the school. The whole match. Forty minutes. And at the end, when Ward lets go of the sphere, she'd stop it. She'd freeze it on him with his hands open. And she'd say, look. Nobody ever played it better than him, and that's the first time he's ever let go of anything. And then she'd turn it off and they'd go on the floor.

She never showed them the interview after. She said the interview was for grown-ups.

It's a car park now. The bodega. They knocked it down years ago. I went to watch. They painted over the wall first, white, before the machines came, I don't know why, maybe so the dust would be white. The yellow came through the white. You could still read it. Then the machine went through it.

I didn't know that.

He came. Her nephew. In the storm, and again in August. He brought photographs.

I know. He wrote to the office after. He said you'd been fair to him.

Did he.

He said, she listened, and then she told me I was wrong about a wedding.

He was wrong about the wedding.

Hand me the comb. The wide one.

This one?

You know which one.

Left side.

Señora, I've finished the review papers. They go to the panel next week. I'm supposed to make a recommendation. On the designation.

I wanted to tell you what it is before you read it. I think you should hear it from me.

Tell her.

Fresia. I'm going to recommend a joint designation. You and your nephew, together. Señora Quiroga and Señor Aránguiz. Both of them advocates. Both of them consulted. Both of them able to sign. I think it's the fairest thing I can write. I think it's what the evidence supports. Señora, I wrote that you're the person who knows her best and he's the person who'll be there. I wrote both. I didn't know which to put first. I put you first.

Alphabetical?

No.

Joint.

Joint.

A joint is where two pieces meet. On a cable that's a splice. A splice is weaker than the cable either side of it, and you inspect it every month for the rest of its life.

I'll put that in the file.

Don't.

Two signatures on everything.

Yes. Both of you consulted on any decision. Either of you can be called at night. If you disagree, it goes to the panel, and the panel decides.

The panel.

The review panel. Three people. I'm not one of them.

Who are they?

A doctor, a lawyer, and somebody from the community.

Which community?

I've never asked.

And the move?

The move isn't mine. The move is the network. It goes ahead whatever I write.

If it were you in the bed. Who would you want on the form?

My own mother's in Viña. In a residence. I call her on Sundays. It's fine.

Your daughter. The arm.

She washed it off. Her teacher made her. She wrote it on the inside of her shoe instead. Where nobody can see.

Good. That's better.

She asked me who the coach was. The one who said it. I said a woman who coached on a concrete floor in a warehouse. She said, without a Lattice? I said, without anything. She didn't believe me.

Tell her about the roof.

What about the roof?

Next time.

I'll go. The office closes early for the holiday. Fresia, happy eighteenth. Señora.

Lift the door.

Are you from the government?

Nearly.

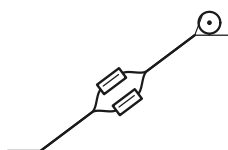
Listen. That's the end of it. That's the end of the cueca. And now he'll talk, the announcer. He'll talk about the fondas and the traffic on the coast road and who's playing where. You never liked the talking. You liked the music and then you wanted it off.

They're still going in the day room. Hear the shoes? That's Señora Lidia. She's dancing it for you, like she said. And that's Pizarro clapping. Pizarro can't clap in time.

There.

The harbour.

Listen. Nothing coming in. They've stopped for the holiday too. Just the tugs, talking to each other. Tug Three to Tug Seven. Coffee.



PART THREE

Release

VISIT 13

Tuesday, 3.30 p.m.

TRANSPORT: THE SPHERE TO THE WEST MARK.

There.

The corridor's all boxes. Did you hear them this morning? Two men from the network with a trolley and a roll of stickers, going room to room, floor by floor, putting a green sticker on everything that goes and a red one on everything that stays. The broken chair in here has a red sticker. The television in the day room has a green one. Señora Lidia has put a green sticker on herself, on her cardigan, and she won't take it off. Pizarro says leave her.

Don Héctor's son came for his books on Sunday. Four boxes of books, and he said the residence in Quilpué had said one box, so he took three home and left one, and Don Héctor stood in the door and watched them go down the corridor and didn't say anything. He was a schoolteacher. History. He used to read to the night staff.

The boy on the ascensor watches me now. He watches me like you'd watch somebody who used to fix the thing you're driving. He's stopped riding the brake. Did I tell you? Since the storm. He keeps his hand near it. He asked me last week what the governor actually does, and I told him, the whole ride up, and at the top he wrote something on his tablet.

It came on Saturday. I've had it in my bag since Saturday. I took it out on the ascensor on Sunday and on Monday and I put it back both times. I didn't want to open it on the ascensor.

So I kept it.

It's thicker than the others. There's more than one page. That's how you know. When they agree with you it's one page.

THE REVISION · VALPARAÍSO OFFICE

DECISION OF THE REVIEW PANEL

PERSON RECEIVING CARE: FRESIA ARÁNGUIZ.

MATTER: PETITION OF RENATO ARÁNGUIZ, NEXT OF KIN,
TO BE DESIGNATED ADVOCATE; OBJECTION OF AMPARO
QUIROGA, DESIGNATED ADVOCATE.

THE PANEL HAS CONSIDERED THE PETITION, THE
OBJECTION, THE ASSESSOR'S REPORT AND
RECOMMENDATION, THE CLINICAL RECORD, AND THE
STATEMENTS OF BOTH PARTIES.

THE OBJECTION IS DECLINED.

THE DESIGNATION IS REVISED. AMPARO QUIROGA AND
RENATO ARÁNGUIZ ARE DESIGNATED JOINT ADVOCATES
WITH EQUAL STANDING. EITHER MAY BE CONSULTED.
DECISIONS REQUIRE THE AGREEMENT OF BOTH.
DISAGREEMENTS WILL BE REFERRED TO THE PANEL.
ROUTINE CARE FOLLOWS THE RESIDENCE'S PLAN. EITHER
ADVOCATE MAY BE CALLED IN AN EMERGENCY.

THE TRANSFER TO THE QUILPUÉ RESIDENCE WILL
PROCEED ON THE DATE SCHEDULED BY THE NETWORK.

THE CLASSIFICATION OF THE ARRANGEMENT OF AMPARO
QUIROGA IS UNCHANGED: UNREVISED ARRANGEMENT.
SUPPORTIVE REVIEW CONTINUES.

REASONS.

THE ORIGINAL DESIGNATION WAS VALIDLY MADE.

THE CLOSURE OF RESIDENCIA CERRO ARTILLERÍA IS A MATERIAL CHANGE OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE CLINICAL RECORD INDICATES THAT THE PERSON RECEIVING CARE WISHED HER FRIEND TO REMAIN INVOLVED IN CARE DECISIONS. A JOINT DESIGNATION KEEPS THE FRIEND INVOLVED.

THE OBJECTOR'S ACCOUNT OF FURTHER WISHES EXPRESSED AT THAT TIME CANNOT BE VERIFIED, AND THE CAPACITY OF THE PERSON RECEIVING CARE AT THAT TIME CANNOT NOW BE ASSESSED.

THE PERSON RECEIVING CARE HAS GIVEN NO VERIFIABLE RESPONSE FOR SEVEN YEARS. IN THE ABSENCE OF EXPRESSED PREFERENCE, WELFARE MODELLING GOVERNS.

WELFARE MODELLING INDICATES THAT AN ARRANGEMENT WHICH THE NEXT OF KIN CAN SUSTAIN SCORES HIGHER THAN THE CURRENT ARRANGEMENT.

YOU ARE FREE TO CONTINUE ATTENDING THE PERSON RECEIVING CARE AT THE QUILPUÉ RESIDENCE, SUBJECT TO ITS VISITING HOURS.

ADMINISTERED UNDER THE CHILD.

Ten days.

The van comes on the twenty-fourth. The third day, the last day. Ground floor first, then up. Pizarro said. You're on the last van.

So. Ten days.

They'll ring him now. And ring me. Both of us on the form. He'll have had his copy on Saturday, the same as me. He'll ring tonight, at nine.

He rings at nine now, when he rings. I don't know what he'll say. I don't know what I'll say. We'll talk about the van, probably. Which day. Who meets it.

You moved once. From the flat on Cumming to the one on Templeman, the spring after your mother died. You did it in a day, with me and the van from the workshop. You packed the bodega things first, the cones and the whistle and the notebooks, in the front of the van where nothing could fall on them, and the bed went last, on its side, on top of everything. And you labelled every box with a call. **TRANSPORT: KITCHEN. DEFEND: BOOKS. SECURE: GLASSES.** I said, what does **DEFEND** mean for books. You said, it means nobody puts anything on top. At the other end you stood in the middle of the empty room and shouted the calls, and I carried each box where it said. It took an hour. You said moving was a drill with furniture.

I'm doing it without the calls. You'll have to put up with that.

What goes.

The radio. The good radio, not the one on the shelf, the one on the shelf is the residence's. The good one's the one I brought from the bodega, the one that sat on the windowsill by the board. The case is cracked at the back where you dropped it the year of the roof. It's held with tape. It'll travel. It's travelled before. It came from the bodega to the hospital to here. The photographs. The ones Renato brought. The scarf. The cream. The scissors stay with me, they're my father's. The swabs they'll have there. The blankets are theirs. The gray one is theirs. I'll ask Pizarro if the gray one can go, you like the gray one, it's the only one that doesn't scratch.

The calendar. September's the ascensor, October's the fish market, November's the cathedral in the fog. December's the fireworks over the bay, the new year ones, from the year they set the barge on fire by mistake. Somebody should turn it on the first. They won't, in Quilpué. I'll write it down.

The notebooks stay with me. All seven. In the shoebox, with the whistle. They're safer under my bed than in a van with a green sticker.

The photograph from the drawer. The one I've never put out. You at the bodega door with your arms folded, the first week, before the line was painted. You'd hate it out. You'd say you look like a customs officer. You do. It goes in the bag anyway. Face down.

The drawer.

The letters. All of them. In order.

The cards stay in my bag.

The slippers. The red ones, from Mireya, the Christmas before. You've never had them on. They've been under the bed for four years. They go. Somebody might put them on you in Quilpué and you'd hate them, and that would be something.

The little clock. It's stopped. It's been stopped at twenty past six since the winter. I'll put a battery in it before the van. They'll think you can't tell the time if it says twenty past six all day.

Visiting hours in Quilpué are ten in the morning till eight at night. It's on the leaflet Pizarro gave me. Ten till eight.

Providencia had visiting hours too. I looked them up, after the first phone call. Nine till seven. I never told Mireya I looked.

I told her it was the air. Santiago and the air and a window on a wall. And it was the air. It was also the ascensor. And the flat, and Doña Elsa through the wall, and the sopaipilla woman, and the cable I can hear going bad from the bottom station. In Providencia I'd have been a woman in a rented room with nothing to fix. I sat at the table with the map and I kept your floor. I kept mine with it.

I didn't tell Mireya that part.

I've booked the hip. The Wednesday after the move. They had a list.

Three nights in, they said, and a week after before they'll let me on a train. Ten days. I did it on the back of the envelope. Ten days with nobody from the cerro. I haven't missed ten days in thirty-eight years. I haven't missed three.

And then I thought, he's ten minutes away. He said so in the storm. He said it twice. Ten minutes.

I'll ring him the night before. I'll say, somebody should go.

The pins. The good ones, the ones with the black heads. Not the residence ones. The residence ones bend. The comb, the wide one. The brush. The cushion for under your heels, the sheepskin one, that's ours, I bought that, they'll think it's theirs if I don't put your name in it. Your name in it. A label. I'll get labels.

The handover. Pizarro says she'll do your two lines herself, on the system. I asked her what she'll put. She said, wait and see. Twenty years and she's never once said wait and see to me.

The towel from the window. No. That's the residence's. That stays with the window.

The

VISIT 14

Friday, 10.00 a.m.

COLLABORATE: SECURE THE LOW CHANNEL.

There.

Ten o'clock in the morning. You've never had me at ten in the morning. You don't know what I'm like at ten in the morning. I'm the same. I'm worse. I haven't had my second coffee.

The van's at two.

The building's half empty. The ground floor went on Wednesday and the first floor yesterday. You can hear it. The corridors sound like a school in the holidays. Every door open, every bed stripped, the mattresses standing up against the walls in their plastic. They took the Bravos' father at nine this morning, the first van. The whole family came to see him into the van. The daughter cried in the car park. The son held his keys.

And the lift's been going all morning. Up and down. Up and down. Listen to it. Not a sound out of it. That belt I put in will outlast the building.

There's a square on the wall where the calendar was. Look. Paler than the rest. They haven't painted this room since before you came, and the calendar's kept that bit of wall the colour it was. The calendar's in the bag. October, the fish market. You'll have a new wall in Quilpué. A white one. They'll put a nail in it if I ask.

Don Héctor went on Wednesday. Pizarro said he read to the night staff on Tuesday, the last time, from the history of the port, the chapter on the earthquake of 1906, and he stopped in the middle. He said the rest could wait for Quilpué. He put a bus ticket in the page.

Señora Quiroga. The schedule. They want me to give it to you. I'm sorry. It's one page.

Read it, then. She can hear it from you. You've known her longer than the van has.

TRANSFER SCHEDULE · RESIDENCIA CERRO ARTILLERÍA TO
QUILPUÉ RESIDENCE

DAY THREE · FLOOR TWO

FRESIA ARÁNGUIZ · ROOM 31 · VEHICLE B · DEPARTURE
14.00

ESCORT: ONE REGISTERED NURSE

PERSONAL BELONGINGS TO BE PACKED, LABELLED AND
PLACED AT THE FOOT OF THE BED BY 13.00

A DESIGNATED ADVOCATE MAY ACCOMPANY THE
RESIDENT IN THE VEHICLE OR MEET THE RESIDENT ON
ARRIVAL

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

Which are you doing? The vehicle, or the arrival?

Neither. Renato's meeting her. It's ten minutes from his house. He'll be there before the van.

You're not going?

Two weeks tomorrow. After the hip.

Before I go. The handover. The system's two lines. I did hers myself. Last night. I wanted you to know what I put.

What did you put?

The first line's the regime. The feeds and the turns. It has to be. The system won't take it if it isn't.

And the second?

HAIR PINNED LEFT.

That's the second line?

That's the second line. I had to fight the system for it. It wanted a clinical term. I put it in the free text.

Thank you.

It's one line, señora. It's not much of a line.

It's the right line.

I'll leave you. I've got Señora Lidia at eleven. She's taking the chapel cross. They've said she can't, it's the building's, and I've said she can, and she's taking it.

Señora Quiroga, look. Look what I've got.

Señora Lidia.

The cross. From the chapel. They said it was the building's. Pizarro said it was mine. It's wrapped in my nightdress. Don't tell the men with the stickers.

I won't tell anybody.

Is Fresia coming on the van?

At two. You're at twelve.

I'll keep her a seat. In Quilpué. In the quiet room. I'll put the cross on the table and keep her a seat.

Keep her a seat.

Let me pack.

The radio first. Unplugged. The plug in the bag so it doesn't scratch anything. I'll keep it on the channel. I'll put tape on the dial so nobody moves it in the van. There.

The photographs. Cartagena. The cousin's wedding that isn't a graduation. The bodega, F. at work, very proud. The pier. Me in my overalls. I never liked that one. You liked it. You said I looked like somebody who'd just fixed something, which I had.

Wrapped in the towel. My towel, not the window towel.

The scarf. Folded. In.

The letters.

All of them. Fourteen, now. Look at them, in order, the blue ones and the white ones. I thought about leaving them. I thought, let them stay with the building, let them go in the skip with the broken chair. But they're yours. They're about you. They've got your name on them. They go where you go.

Elastic round. In the bag.

Do you remember my father's wake?

You do. You came at three in the morning. Everybody had gone. My mother had gone to lie down, my brother had gone back to the hotel, he never stayed at the house, and it was me and my father in the front room and the candles going down. And there was a knock, and I thought it was the priest come back for his umbrella, and it was you. With bread. A whole bag of bread from the bakery on Cumming that opens at four for the market, you'd stood outside it till they let you in early. Warm. You put it on the table next to the coffin and you said, you'll be hungry, you won't have eaten. And I hadn't. I hadn't eaten since the hospital.

You didn't come to the funeral. The next day. You had a session at ten. You said, I'm good at three in the morning. We sat there till it got light and ate the whole bag. You talked to him. You stood by the

coffin with a piece of bread in your hand and talked to him like he was across a bench from you. You told him off for smoking. You told him about the freight lift, the time you said it was the motor and it was the relay. You told him he'd taught me well. He was the one who taught me relays. I never told you that. You told him anyway.

The pins. The comb. The brush. The heel cushion, with your name on the label. The cream with the blue lid, nearly empty, I'll bring another.

There.

At the foot of the bed. By one.

Labels. I bought labels. FRESIA ARÁNGUIZ, in capitals, on everything. On the radio. On the bag. On the heel cushion. On the back of the photographs, on the towel round them. On the slippers. On the clock.

Sorry. Is this thirty-one? We're from Quilpué. The handover.

This is thirty-one.

We're just checking the belongings against the list. Is this everything?

That's everything. It's labelled. The radio's on the harbour channel, there's tape on the dial, please don't move the tape. The cream with the blue lid is hers. The heel cushion is hers. The gray blanket's the residence's but she likes it, Pizarro said it can go.

We'll make a note. Thank you, señora. Are you the daughter?

I'm the advocate. One of them.

Thank you.

They're very young. Did you hear? Are you the daughter. Everybody's somebody's daughter to a girl of twenty-five.

The towel. Off the sill. It's wet through, it's been wet since July. Wring it. There. Over the radiator. Somebody will find it there after the van's gone and wonder whose it was. It was the window's.

There goes Señora Lidia. Hear her? She's telling the driver about the cross. She's telling him not to tell anybody. Now the whole van knows.

Señora Quiroga.

Nurse.

That's me done. I'm off at twelve. The van at two, but I'm off at twelve, they've got the Quilpué people coming to do the handover from noon. I wanted to say goodbye. To you. And to her.

You're going to Talca.

Monday. The train at eight.

Talca's hot.

It's thirty-three degrees there today. My daughter sent me the number. She thinks it'll put me off.

It won't.

No.

The hip, Señora Quiroga.

Booked.

Booked?

Wednesday. Seven in the morning.

Goodbye, Fresia. It's Pizarro. Twenty years. She taught me which side.

She's gone down the corridor. She's walking fast. She does that when she doesn't want anybody to see her face. She walked fast the day the cook got stuck in the lift.

Hands. One more time in here. Left first.

The cream's nearly gone. There's enough. From the wrist.

There.

Look at the bay.

It's clear. Of course it's clear. All winter it's fog and rain and today you can see to the lighthouse. The navy ships at the breakwater. The Condor at berth three, the big one, unloading, the cranes going. The red crane at Prat. The fishing boats coming in to Caleta Portales with the birds behind them like smoke.

And the ascensor. Listen. You can hear the bell from here when the wind's right. The bell at the top station when the car's ready to go. Two rings. There.

And there it is. Going down. The car's on the lower half now, there's somebody in it, a woman with a pram, you can see her through the glass. And the other car coming up to pass it. They pass at the middle, on the loop, every time, they have for a hundred and twenty years, and they never touch. The cable goes up over the wheel at the top station and down to the other car, and one goes down because the other goes up.

There. They've passed.

I did that brake for twelve years. The lower car. I could tell you the sound it makes on the last ten metres with my eyes shut. I could tell you which of the boys driving it today learned from somebody who learned from me. All of them, probably. There's nobody left who learned from anybody else.

The van goes down to the plan and along España and inland at Viña, the same as the train.

Renato will be at the door when the van gets there. He'll have timed it. He'll know which bay the van comes into and which lift goes to your floor and how long it takes, and he'll be standing there with his phone. And he'll say hola, tía, from the door, and then he'll come in. I told him to come in.

The window.

I'm shutting it. They'll want it shut for the move. They'll want everything shut.

There.

VISIT 15

Wednesday, 6.00 p.m.

Hola, tía.

It's Renato.

It took twenty-five minutes from the port. No. From the house. I came from the house. Twenty-five minutes from the port would be impossible. Ten minutes from the house, and fifteen looking for the room. They've given you a different room from the one on the paper. Two-fourteen. There's a garden outside. I don't know if you can see it.

Señora Amparo's having her operation. Today. This morning. She rang me last night to tell me. She said, somebody should go. So I came.

I don't know what to say. I never know what to say. Mamá always knew. She'd talk about anything. Balconies. The neighbours. The price of tomatoes. I'm not good at it. I can tell you about ships.

There's a ship in tonight from Callao. Bananas. I put her on berth five. She's three days late, the captain rang me twice, very angry, as if I'd made the sea rough.

Valentina says she's going to design you a bridge. She's twenty. She says that to everybody, she says she'll design them a bridge. She means it as a kindness. I think.

The garden's outside. There are trees. Small ones. With sticks.

The window.

She said you have it open. A hand. I don't know how much a hand is.
Is that

That's too much. That's the whole window. Wait.

There. Halfway. Is that better? I don't know if that's better.

There's the radio. She said put it on the harbour. There's tape on the dial, I haven't touched it. It's hissing. Is that the harbour? I can't tell. I'll leave it hissing. She'll know what to do with it.

I'll come on Sunday. Valentina's coming the Sunday after. With me.

VISIT 16

Saturday, 2.00 p.m.

DEFEND: THE SOUTH LINE.

There.

Two-fourteen.

Fifteen days. I know. I know it's fifteen days. They kept me four nights instead of three because of my blood pressure, and then they wouldn't let me travel for a week, they said, and I said, it's a train, it's not a mountain, and the doctor said, señora, the train is not the problem, the steps at Puerto station are the problem. He'd been to Puerto station. So. Fifteen days.

The train's good. I'll say that for it. It's clean and it's on time and it goes along the edge of the sea as far as Viña, and then it turns inland up the valley, and you lose the sea at Chorrillos, there's a moment, past the bridge, when you look back and there's still a bit of blue between two buildings, and then there isn't. I watched for it.

And the station at Quilpué has a bench. Two benches. Somebody should tell Pizarro. She'll be in Talca, sweating, wanting to know about the bench.

Ninety-four minutes. Door to door. Eleven to the station, twenty on this, I'll get faster. Forty-three on the train. The micro came after nine minutes and took fourteen, and then the hill from the stop to the door, which nobody told me about.

The hospital. You want to know about the hospital. Four nights in a ward with five other women and a television on the wall that nobody could turn off. The woman in the next bed was from Playa Ancha and her son came every day at six with soup, and the soup smelled of coriander, and I wanted it more than I've wanted anything in years, and she offered me some on the third night and I said yes. They'd put me by the window and I asked to be moved to the door. The nurse asked me why. I said, so I can see who's coming. A nurse washed my hair on the second day. Lying down, in a tray. I'd never had my hair washed lying down. She was quick and she didn't talk and she didn't ask which side.

And a physio counted my steps down the corridor. Ten. Twenty. Thirty. She stood at the end and counted and when I got there she said, good, and I said, I know, and she said, again. You'd have liked her.

It clicks. Listen. When I put weight on it. Click. The surgeon says it'll stop. He says the new ones click for a month and then they settle. I said, like a new cable on a drum. He didn't know what I meant.

They asked me to count backwards from ten, before. I said the stations instead. From Puerto. Puerto, Bellavista, Francia, Barón, Portales, Recreo, Miramar. I got to Miramar. The doctor said, where were you going. I said, Quilpué. He said, you didn't get far.

When I woke up the first thing I asked was what day it was, and the second thing was who'd done your hair. The nurse thought I was confused. I wasn't confused.

Let me look at you.

Who did your hair.

On the right. They've pinned it on the right. Three pins on the right and it's falling on the left, in your eye, look. Into your eye. Somebody here has done that with their own hands and gone away pleased.

Wait.

There. Left side. The black pins, I brought them.

And who put these on you. The red ones. Mireya's slippers. Somebody's found them in the bag and put them on your feet, and you'd hate them, and there they are.

I'll leave them on. For today.

Let me look at this room.

It's bigger. He was right. The bathroom's got a rail. The floor's that soft stuff, the gray, that doesn't show anything. The light's on a sensor, it came on when I came in, like I was a burglar. The bed's newer. There's a screen on the wall that tells me your observations if I touch it, which I'm not going to.

There's a board by the door. VISITORS. He's written it in marker. R. ARÁNGUIZ, NEPHEW. A. QUIROGA. In that order. A before Q. He'd have done it alphabetical whoever it was.

It smells of new paint and floor polish. No smell of rice. They must do the rice on another floor.

The garden's below. Look. You can't look. I'll tell you. Square, with paths. Benches. And the trees, very young, very thin, each one tied to a stick with a green tie, like a child holding a grown-up's finger. In ten years they'll be trees.

It's quiet. No gulls. No horns off the ships.

The window.

There are two handles. No. One handle, two ways. Up, and it tilts at the top. About so much. Three fingers. Sideways, and it swings, the whole thing, like a door. Tilt or swing. There's nothing in between. Who makes a window with nothing in between.

Renato left it swinging halfway. Look. That's not a hand. That's half the garden coming in.

Wait.

There. A card. One of yours. Folded. In the hinge side. Now it'll swing to there and no further. A hand.

The radio.

Where's the radio. Here. On the cupboard. They've plugged it in. Somebody's taken the tape off the dial and been listening to music on it, of course they have.

The harbour. Where's the harbour.

Nothing.

Wait.

Nothing. Hiss. Over the hills, he said. He said you'd need an aerial.

He's right. It's line of sight, the harbour channel. It goes straight, like light. It doesn't bend over a hill. On the cerro you were looking straight down at the bay, there was nothing between the radio and the pilots but air. Here there's the hills behind Viña between you and the water. The signal hits the hill and stops. You'd need to get the aerial high. You'd need a wire.

Up. Down. Slowly. Slower than that. You never turn a dial fast, you hear nothing if you turn it fast, you go right past the thing you want. The other band. The emergency band. There's a taxi company. There's a man selling mattresses. There's music. There's no harbour.

I'll leave it on the hiss for now. The hiss is near where it was.

Señora? Sorry. I'm Daniela, I'm on days. You're the friend? Señor Aránguiz said you'd come on Saturday.

I'm the friend.

I'm the one who did her hair this morning. On the right. I saw you'd changed it.

It goes on the left.

Nobody said. The system only gives us the regime.

There's a second line. HAIR PINNED LEFT. A nurse called Pizarro put it in.

There's no second line on ours. The free text didn't come across. The nurse who came on the van said something about her hair. I thought she meant it needed washing. I washed it.

Left. I'll remember. I'll tell nights.

And the card in the window. Leave the card.

The cleaners take things off the windows.

Tell the cleaners.

She'll remember. He said she knew everybody's name on the corridor.

There's a note on the cupboard. His writing. In capitals, like mine. WINDOW HALF? ASK A. With a question mark.

I brought the last book. The black one. I said I wasn't reading it. I'm reading it.

It stops in March. Halfway down a page. The last thing you wrote. I've never read it. Thirty-eight years. I've opened it to the page and shut it again, I don't know how many times. I didn't want it to be anything. I didn't want it to be the last thing anybody says.

TUESDAY. NEW GIRL, CERRO ALEGRE. CALLS LATE. KEEP
HER ON THE NORTH SIDE TILL SHE TRUSTS IT. BUY TAPE.

Buy tape.

That was the Monday night. You wrote it at my table, after the session, because your light had gone. The bulb in the flat, the kitchen, you'd been meaning to buy one for a week. You came to mine to write the notes and eat the bread and complain about the new girl. You said she called late. You said she called late because she was frightened of being wrong out loud. You said you'd have her calling on time by April. You said you'd have her shouting it by June. I remember. You were eating bread and writing with the other hand.

And on the Tuesday I was on the bench. I was always on the bench on Tuesdays, I'd moved my afternoon to Tuesdays. It was cold. The big door was half open because the roller had gone again and I'd said I'd look at it after. You had the new girl on the north side, the one who called late. And it was the second half, the defend phase, and you'd just called a shift. **TRANSPORT, TO THE SOUTH MARK.** You called it from the stomach, so they were moving before the end of the word. And the children moved. All of them, even the new girl, she moved, late but she moved. And you turned to the board to mark it, and

There's a ship. No. It's the taxis.

I've started something. For the night people. Pizarro said the handover's two lines. One of them didn't come across. So I've started a list. Here, in the back of mine, the brown one. I'll read it to you. You can tell me what's wrong.

FRESIA ARÁNGUIZ. ROOM 214.

HAIR: PINNED ON THE LEFT. THREE PINS. IT FALLS ON THE RIGHT.

WINDOW: OPEN A HAND'S WIDTH. NOT MORE. THERE IS A CARD IN THE HINGE. LEAVE THE CARD.

RADIO: THE HARBOUR CHANNEL. IF YOU CAN GET IT. ASK ME HOW.

MOUTH: PLAIN SWABS. NOT LEMON. SHE HATES LEMON.

HANDS: CREAM FROM THE WRIST, NOT THE FINGERS. THE CREAM WITH THE BLUE LID IS HERS.

TURNING: SLOWLY. SHE HATES BEING ROLLED FAST.

BLANKET: UNDER THE ARMS. NOT OVER.

WHEN HER LEFT HAND IS CLOSED SHE MAY BE COLD. I THINK.

WHEN THE PILOTS ARE TALKING ON THE RADIO SHE IS QUIETER. I THINK. I CAN'T BE SURE.

FEEDING: THE PUMP. SHE DOESN'T MIND THE PUMP. THE ALARM ON IT IS LOUD. TURN IT DOWN IF YOU CAN, SHE WAS ALWAYS SAYING ALARMS WERE FOR PEOPLE WHO WEREN'T PAYING ATTENTION.

CALENDAR: TURN IT ON THE FIRST OF THE MONTH. NOBODY DOES.

CLOCK: THE LITTLE CLOCK IS HERS. IF IT STOPS, CHANGE THE BATTERY.

SLIPPERS: RED. FROM HER SISTER. SHE NEVER WORE THEM. YOU DON'T HAVE TO EITHER.

BED: SHE FACED THE DOOR. SHE LIKED TO SEE WHO WAS COMING.

IF SHE SEEMS DIFFERENT, RING ME. I MAY BE WRONG. RING ME ANYWAY. RING RENATO TOO. HE'S TEN MINUTES AWAY.

VISIT 17

Tuesday, 2.30 p.m.

COLLABORATE: THE WEST LINE.

There.

Tuesdays and Saturdays. That's what it is now. I did the sum on the train. Twice a week is what this does without complaining. Three, it complains. Four, it stops talking to me.

I've brought wire.

Copper. Five metres. From the hardware on Cochrane, the one that's been there since my father. The man asked me what it was for and I said, a radio, and he said, nobody uses wire for a radio any more, and I said, then why do you sell it, and he couldn't answer that.

Hold still. I'm talking to myself.

The back of the set. There's a terminal for an outside aerial. There always is on the old ones, nobody uses it. Strip the end. My teeth. Don't tell the dentist. Twist it on. Now along the top of the window frame. Tape. The roll from the kiosk at Puerto. I bought it on Saturday and didn't know what for. Along. Along. To the corner. Up the corner as high as I can reach. Higher. There. That's as high as a woman with a new hip on a chair she shouldn't be standing on can reach.

Now the end at the top. You don't let the end hang. A loose end on an aerial is a loose end on a cable, it'll find something to touch. Fold it back. Tape. There.

Now.

Hiss.

Turn. Slowly. Slower than that.

There.

There. Listen.

That's a tug. That's the harbour. That's Tug Seven, he's got a cold, listen to him. He's going out to the Isla Mocha. She's in again, the old girl. Coastal. Fish.

It's faint. It's like hearing it through a wall. But it's there. Through the hills and the wall. The pilots will come on at four. You'll have the pilots.

Do you remember the Ortúzar boy? The tall one, the year before the roof. You took him off at half-time in the final of the cerros cup, in front of his mother, for not calling. He'd gone the whole first half without opening his mouth, and you said a player who won't call is a player who's hiding, and you sat him on the bench next to me. They lost. And the next Saturday you stood in the middle of the floor before the warm-up and said, in front of all of them, I was wrong. He had a sore throat. And you gave him the first card. That was all. You never said it again.

Now the list. I've been working on it. I'll read you what I've got and you can tell me.

FRESIA ARÁNGUIZ. ROOM 214.

HAIR: PINNED ON THE LEFT. THREE PINS. IT FALLS ON THE RIGHT. SHE HATED IT IN HER EYE.

WINDOW: OPEN A HAND'S WIDTH. NOT MORE. THERE IS A CARD IN THE HINGE. LEAVE THE CARD.

RADIO: THE HARBOUR CHANNEL. THERE IS A WIRE ALONG THE WINDOW. DON'T MOVE THE WIRE. THE PILOTS COME ON AT FOUR AND AT HALF PAST FOUR THEY READ THE SHIPS.

MOUTH: PLAIN SWABS. NOT LEMON. SHE HATES LEMON.

No. Wait. Hated. She hated lemon.

No. Leave it. Hates. I don't know which it is. Leave it.

HANDS: CREAM FROM THE WRIST, NOT THE FINGERS. THE CREAM WITH THE BLUE LID IS HERS.

TURNING: SLOWLY. SHE HATES BEING ROLLED FAST. PILLOW BETWEEN THE KNEES. FOLD THE EAR FLAT ON THE PILLOW. PEOPLE FORGET THE EARS.

BLANKET: UNDER THE ARMS. NOT OVER. SHE SAID OVER WAS LIKE BEING POSTED.

CALENDAR: TURN IT ON THE FIRST OF THE MONTH.

NOBODY DOES. DECEMBER IS THE FIREWORKS.

The pump. The clock. The slippers. Those are the same. I've taken the bed out. I'll tell you why.

PHOTOGRAPHS: THE TWO GIRLS AT THE BEACH ARE HER AND HER SISTER, MIREYA. THE WOMAN IN THE OVERALLS ON THE PIER IS ME. THE ONE FACE DOWN IN THE DRAWER STAYS FACE DOWN.

THE CARDS: I HAVE THEM. THIRTY-NINE. ONE IS IN THE WINDOW. THE REST STAY WITH ME. IF I STOP COMING, ASK RENATO WHERE THEY ARE.

I'm not crossing that out. That's practical.

WHEN HER LEFT HAND IS CLOSED SHE MAY BE COLD. I
THINK.

WHEN THE PILOTS ARE TALKING SHE IS QUIETER. I THINK.
I CAN'T BE SURE.

WHEN SOMEBODY ROLLS HER FAST HER FACE CHANGES.
I'VE SEEN IT. NOBODY ELSE HAS.

I'm crossing out I've seen it. I'm putting I think I've seen it.
There.

And I've put this. On its own page. I don't know if it should go in. I'll
read it and you can tell me.

SHE SPELLED THIS ON A LETTER BOARD AT THE HOSPITAL,
THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS AGO: DON'T LET THEM READ MY
QUIET AS A YES.

SHE SAID THIS TO HER SISTER, YEARS BEFORE THAT, THE
NIGHT AFTER THEIR MOTHER'S FUNERAL: IF IT EVER GOES
BAD FOR ME, DON'T LET AMPARO WASTE HERSELF ON ME.
THEY DON'T AGREE. YOU SHOULD KNOW BOTH.

It goes in.

Renato rang on Sunday night. He rings on Sundays now, at nine,
after he's been. We do the things. We did the dentist, last week,
whether the dentist should come here or whether you go there, and
we agreed the dentist comes here. We did the shampoo. They use
one here that smells of apples and I said she'd hate apples and he
said he didn't know that and I said, well, now you do, and he said, I'll
tell them. He told them. It's not apples now. It's nothing. Good.

We disagreed about the bed. The first time. He wanted it turned, so you're facing the window and the garden. I wanted it facing the door. You always faced the door. At the bodega you stood with your back to the wall so you could see the door, you said you wanted to see who was coming before they saw you. He said, but she can see the trees. I said, she can't see the trees. He said, you don't know that. And I said, neither do you.

And we sat on the phone not saying anything, the two of us. A long time. Long enough that I thought it had cut off. And I thought, this is it, this is the panel, three people in an office deciding which way your bed faces.

And I said, try the garden. For a month. And he said, are you sure. And I said, no.

So it's the garden. You can see I've left it.

He brought Valentina on Sunday. He said she sat there for an hour and talked about bridges. He said she explained a suspension bridge to you from the cables up. He said she drew it on the back of the menu from the café in the garden and held it up. He said she said, *tía*, if you don't believe me I'll bring the maths.

It's there. On the cupboard, behind the radio. She left it. A suspension bridge in blue biro. She's labelled everything. **MAIN CABLE. HANGERS. DECK. ANCHORAGE.** She can draw. The cable's right.

And he said that when they left, at the door, Valentina turned round and asked him, was she listening? And he said, I don't know. And he said to me on the phone, she wanted me to say yes. She looked at me like I'd failed a test. And I said, you said what you know.

I don't know if you were listening. I've never known. I've said I think so since the hospital. If she asks me, I'll say it to her.

And the last page. I wrote it on the train.

HER NAME IS FRESIA. SAY IT WHEN YOU COME IN. TELL
HER WHAT YOU'RE GOING TO DO BEFORE YOU DO IT. SHE
WAS A COACH. SHE LIKED TO KNOW THE OBJECTIVE.

There's one more. I've been going back and forth.

FLACA.

Whether it goes in. What I call you. So the night people know. So
they'd say it.

No.

Not that one.

That one's mine.

VISIT 18

Thursday, 7.50 p.m.

SECURE: THE NORTH CHANNEL.

There.

It's not a Tuesday and it's not a Saturday. I know. I came anyway. The last train back's at nine-forty. I'll be on it. The micro from the water tank goes at nine-ten, the last one, and I'll be on that too.

Nine-forty.

The train at dusk is a different train. Full of people going home from Valparaíso to Villa Alemana and Limache, with their bags on their knees, looking at their phones. Nobody looks out. The sea goes at Chorrillos and nobody looks up. I look up. There's a moment. And the micro driver knows me now. He calls me the señora from the cerro. He waits at the water tank till I'm up the step. He doesn't have to. He does.

It's dark at the window. You can see the lights down on the motorway, the trucks going to the port.

The day nurse has learnt the left. Daniela. She told me she's told nights. We'll see.

The hip's good. It still clicks. Less. I did the hill from the stop without stopping, the first time. Nobody saw.

Renato came on Sunday. He brought the radio schedule from the harbourmaster's office, printed, so the night people know what time

the pilots come on. He'd gone to the office himself and asked for it. They looked at him like he'd asked for a horse. He got it. It's on the wall. Look. Next to the list.

And he asked me to show him the hair. On the phone, after. He said, if you're not here and it's on the right, I want to be able to do it. I said, Sunday. He's going to be bad at it. He's got his mother's hands, all thumbs. He'll learn. Three pins. It's not a bridge.

The bed's still the garden. Two weeks left of the month.

The pilots are on now. Listen. Faint. Pilot One. Night shift. He's taking the Santa Rosalía out. The car ship. She's going back empty, and somebody will fill her in Korea and send her back.

News. Doña Elsa sent back the frying pan. It stuck. She was furious. She knocked on my door to tell me, as if I'd sold it to her. And the woman on the third floor took a puppy. In the end.

And my brother rang. Last week. Not Easter, not his birthday. He'd heard about the hip from somebody in Concepción, I don't know who, and he rang to ask. We talked for twenty minutes. That's the longest since our mother. He said, are you still going up to see your friend. I said, she's not up any more, she's inland now. He said, that's further. I said, yes.

Pizarro rang. From Talca. On Sunday. She said it was thirty-four degrees and the baby hadn't come and her daughter was the size of a house. She said she'd found out about the windows in Quilpué and then remembered I'd know by now. She asked about the bench. I said, there's a bench. Two. She said, good.

And the sopaipilla woman asked after you. I told her you'd moved. Inland. To Quilpué. She thought about it, and then she said, good. She gave me the one with the most pumpkin.

And Javiera came to the flat on Sunday. With the boots, her daughter's, and the zip from the shop. I put the zip in at the kitchen

table and she watched me do it. She said the supportive review continues. She said it'll be her doing it. Every quarter. I said, then you'll need to learn the door at Quilpué. It doesn't stick. She'd told her daughter about the roof. Her daughter wants to play in the rain.

Hands. Left first.

Cold. Your left one's closed. I'll get the other blanket. Under the arms.

There.

Buenas noches, Fresia. It's Belén. I'm on tonight.

Oh. Sorry, señora. I didn't know there was somebody. You're Amparo? The list?

I'm the list.

Belén. Night shift. Monday to Thursday. I've read it. Twice, po. I read it the first night and then I read it again because the man on days said the card in the window was rubbish and I said no, it says leave the card, so I left the card.

Good.

Is there a name you like, Fresia? A nickname? The list doesn't say.

Fresia.

Fresia. Good. It's a flower, Fresia. It's pretty.

She hated it. She said it was something you put on a grave.

I'll still say it.

Say it.

Visiting's meant to finish at eight. It says on the door.

I know what it says on the door.

I read the list, señora.

She's doing the list, Fresia. Look at her. She's got it in her pocket, folded. She's taken it out to check the hair. She's put it back.

It's on the left, señora. Three pins. I checked.

I did them.

I know. I check anyway. It says check.

It doesn't say check.

It says LEFT. In capitals. That means check.

Fresia, I'm going to turn you onto your left side now, okay? Slowly. I'm going to put my hand on your shoulder first so you know it's me. Here's my hand.

There.

And now the pillow between your knees. And the one behind. And your ear. Flat. It says the ear. I'd never have thought of the ear. Now I do it for everybody on the corridor.

Can I ask you one thing, señora? About the list?

Ask.

The wire. On the window. The man on days wants to take it down. He says it's a hazard. He says it's not on the inventory.

Don't move the wire. It's tuned to the harbour channel. It took me an afternoon on a chair I shouldn't have been standing on. If he takes it down she loses the pilots. If he moves it even along the frame she loses them. Tell him it's an aerial. Tell him it's on the list. Tell him a mechanic put it up.

I'll tell him. I'll tell him it's on the list. He believes the list.

And the face. The last one. When somebody rolls her fast. I think I've seen it. That's all I wrote.

I've been watching for it. When the man on days does the turn, he's quick, he's quick with everybody. I watch your face, Fresia. I haven't seen it yet.

You might not.

I'll keep watching.

It's nine. I've got the micro.

The card goes back. **SECURE: THE NORTH CHANNEL.** Back in the middle. The rubber band. I got a new one, from the post office, like I said. It's red. You'd have wanted a brown one.

The coat. The bag. The stick, which I don't need, which the hospital says I need, which I carry so nobody asks.

The hand.

Cold. It's still closed.

Saturday.

Okay, Fresia. It's just us now.

She's gone for the micro. She walks fast for somebody with a new hip. I watched her from the corridor window. Straight down the slope to the stop, not looking back. The micro was there already, waiting. Lucky.

The last page says tell you the objective. It says you were a coach. So. The objective. Hands. Hair. The window. Mouth. The alarm. The light. The radio. In that order. That's your part of my shift.

I'm going to check your hands. The left one's closed. Are you cold? The other blanket's on. Under your arms, not over, it says. Like being posted. I don't know what that means. I'll do it like it says.

There.

Now your hair. It's fine. It's on the left. Three pins. She's done it.

The window. A hand. It's at a hand. I'm not touching the card.

The pilots have stopped. They do that at nine, it says, there's a gap. Then the night ships. It's on the paper from the harbour, on the wall.

Eleven-thirty, it says. **CONDOR, INBOUND**. Is that a ship? It sounds like a bird. I'll tell you when it comes.

Señora Lidia asked me tonight if you'd be coming to the chapel on Sunday. It's a room. I said I'd ask you. And Don Héctor's still reading the earthquake. He reads till twelve with the little lamp. He's put a bus ticket in it.

I've got eleven tonight on this corridor. You're my fourth. I do the corridor in order, it's easier, so you'll always be fourth unless somebody needs me first. Señora Lidia's first because she doesn't sleep. She's got a cross on her table. She told me it's from a chapel. She told me not to tell the men with the stickers. I don't know who the men with the stickers are.

The pilots come back at ten. It says. The paper says ten for the night ships. I'll have them on for you. I'll come back at ten and turn it up a bit, so you can hear them over the pump.

The man on days says you're not with us. He says it kindly. The list says tell her what you're doing. So I tell you.

I'm going to do your mouth now. The plain ones. Not lemon. I'll wet it first. Gently. Top, then bottom.

There.

My mum's in La Calera. She says I should get a day job. She says nights are for owls. I like nights. Nobody rushes on nights. You can do the ear.

I've photocopied the list. For the other nights. The Friday girl had already started doing the ear before I said, she'd found it on the wall herself. The man on days says it's a lot of list for one patient. I told him to read it.

The pump. I'm turning the alarm down. It says to. It says you always said alarms were for people who weren't paying attention. I'm paying attention. So.

There.

The calendar's on November. That's right. It's the cathedral. In the fog. I'll turn it on the first, if I'm on. It's a Monday. I'm on.

I'm going to turn the light down now.

There.

Now the radio.