

# María, Take Note

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Traduction: Elvira Edwards



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## IN SANTIAGO

“You have not used it for more than a year” - the man behind the glass where I recharge my metro card tells me.

“Yes?”

I arrive just in time to pick my dad up from his room before we go to the dining room. His room smells of a talcum powder he has used since I was a child. It is a sweet smell I do not like, but I have not told him, as he has not told me many things either.

“Good trip?” – he asks me as soon as he sees me enter.

I wait in silence for him to follow his routine to order before leaving the room. Every time I come the ritual is longer until I take him by the arm, and I let myself be led to the dining room. We go staggering a little down the corridor to which other rooms lead. He releases me before crossing the entrance to the dining room and goes to the small table by the window: his place. The other residents greet me with a bow of their heads, some smile at me as if we knew each other. We have lunch in silence; he has never liked to talk while eating. Dessert arrives, he enjoys chocolate pudding with caramel, and I comment to him that we only lack a bit of cream. He looks at me skeptically and tells me it's fine like that. Chocolate is his only temptation, as far as I know. Everything seems to be fine and to have been always fine for my dad. The other residents have gone to take a nap; I believe my time has come.

“We must talk...” - I say, and he tilts his head. I explain to him that I live in Limache, that I have not given my address to anyone.

“In Limache...?” – He asks me, inquiring if it is not his memory that is playing a bad trick on him.

“Yes, in Limache for the first time” – I clarify, look at him and shut up, it is impossible to explain what has happened to me, I just tell him about how peaceful Limache is,



of my new job as chronicler and of the people I've met thanks to the interviews. He listens with enthusiasm but says nothing. We stand up and go back to his room. I'm going to say goodbye when I remember that I've brought him a box of chocolates as a gift for his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. He observes that it's his favorite chocolate and closes his door carefully.

## AT THE FAIR OF THE SQUARE

It's Friday and I walk slowly along the fair; I like the color of the vegetables. I prowl between the stands and if things to taste are offered, I stop, I taste, I smell, I touch, I smile. Succulent plants grow within minuscule clay pots. Their bodies seem to have been molded as bonsais. Their forms are perfect; to touch, many of them are soft and docile, although with time they will reach another size, another texture, I'm told.

"Is it easy to take care of them?" – I ask the woman, to make conversation.

"Yes. They do not need more than a little water. They are heathy as you see, you can keep them in the same..."

The garbage truck parks behind the stands. The driver activates the hopper, and its content begins to be compacted by producing a deafening sound. I raise my shoulders, the succulent plants' woman nods, and I go to the center of the square. It's an autumn morning with warm sunshine. I'm delighted in the air, it is still cool. Without haste I look at the yellow leaves of the trees, others blown by the wind that begin to rise gently. I observe the thick peeled trunks, and I take a seat. How wonderful, I say to myself, I lean backwards, and I stretch my legs. Beyond, the leaf sweeper cleans with a long branch; she displaces them, she piles them up; she collects them with a shovel, she empties them into a large sack and then she drags the sack down the path. She works in a methodical way, unhurriedly she maintains the meadow clean, and she has a sweet face, her body is graceful and light, she wears a green overall, it's evident that she's not Chilean, perhaps Central American,

she must be about twenty years old, did she come to Chile alone or with her family?  
Shall she feel happy here?

I hear the engine of the garbage truck, I see a dust trail, plastic bags flying, and I return to the fair leaving the conversation with the sweeper for another opportunity. I take one lettuce and a bunch of cilantros. I drop the purchase at the bottom of my bag. You don't buy much for a person who lives alone as I, since I came to Limache, where I manage with my savings and the salary from the local newspaper. Some smooth and shiny Italian zucchini, along with some real Limache tomatoes, explains the black hat seller; he himself takes them from his vegetable garden, he adds, an advantage among many others I didn't have in the city where I lived with my two children and their father, I say to myself happy, and I return at a low pace to my house.

#### ON THE BENCH OF THE PERGOLA

I walk toward the center of Limache. I hear voices, I look up at the trees, a couple of clouds are not enough to overshadow another morning that seems wonderful to me. I know that I am in a dilemma, that I have left behind unfinished business, but this bench and these trees are a refuge. Why rush? Why get out of this state of transition? Everything turned out so naturally that I just accepted what was coming. From the hostel where I had arrived running away from home, I sent curricula in all directions. A few weeks later I got in my email the proposal to come to Limache. They needed someone who could live here, soak up its local flavor, write from the heart, said the missive. Something easy for me, who had good memories of train rides to Limache, of the square and of the Ferienheim, I answered quickly and in detail and I turned out to be the chosen.

In this moment I hear heel-clicking approaching from the west. Yellow heels and needle points hit the cement. I move my dark glasses toward my nose tip: below a pair of black pants that encircle two well-formed legs, two tattooed ankles advance.

A jacket, also yellow and fitted, covers the hips of a medium age woman who moves with grace and a cadence that I would like to have. A wave of cheap perfume remains in the air. I wonder what plans have gone through that head while she was grooming herself in front of the mirror. Her trace is lost to me at the bus station to the east of the square. Boss' mistress? Job interview, bus hostess ... secretary?

The singing of my cell phone brings me back. My daughter tells me that she's back from the university, that her professor is wonderful, that she likes all the courses, that she put my photo on her desk, that she misses me, that she must study hard, she sends me a kiss and she hangs up.

She's been talkative and impulsive since she was a child, when she ran like mad on her bicycle, showing me her little achievements.

Meanwhile, an old woman with an uneven step is approaching the bench next to the pergola where I am; she looks at it undecided, her body begins to swing back and forth, and finally from a major impulse she sits down, and she stares at some point in the square. I see her profile, with her long and sharp nose, sagging cheekbones and the side of her mouth half-open. She breathes at short intervals. Her calves are swollen, the shoes are too big for her, her hands with knotty fingers hold the handle of an old purse.

I hear the pounding on the pavement again, I turn my eyes: the woman with yellow heels is coming back. She passes in front of the bench where I and the old woman are, and we both turn our faces following the swaying figure that moves away.

"Who would have seen her and who sees her now" - pronounces the old woman with a loud voice.

## IN MY BED

I stretch the sheet to get comfortable again, I turn sideways, I bend my legs, and I laze about curled up on the pillow, I sigh, and I smile. I am forty-three years old; I have left behind the one I was during the last twenty years and I am well. I will only get up when my body gets tired of being here. The light of the room becomes brighter through the curtains I have not opened yet. The refrigerator starts its background moan and then shuts down. The silhouette of the few pieces of furniture surrounding me is pleasing to my eyes. I let the hours go by in this tranquility. I throw my head back and I review recent situations that have made me stop, I look at them, I feel them, and I say goodbye to them. I glimpse through sounds that fade out and others that start up the image of unknown people I've run into on these streets. I imagine that I follow them as if they were notifications of something and then I discard them thinking that they are simple randomness.

I remember the couple of gray hairs that have surfaced. It is to be expected at my forty-three years. I get comfortable again and - although I am not one to go back to the past – I go back to the times when my father washed my hair with a sponge in that warm water tub.

## BIENENSTICK

This windy evening, I have come to have a coffee with cream at the Ferienheim and I discover that the dining room and the terrace are being prepared for a wedding.

"If you don't mind this bustle" - tells me the waitress and I ask for a coffee. It has been years since I visited this place, I came as a child with my grandparents. I had a memory of tall trees, a grass meadow, and games I invented to entertain myself when pool time was over. I observe those same trees, the meadow and now, the bustle of tables being moved, of awnings being installed, speakers; a big screen that is being located on one of the terraces. Maybe I will peak up in the evening to look around, I live nearby, and I never get tired of snooping around at social gatherings



that don't concern me. In this moment, a woman begins to decorate the bride and groom's long table. She leads the way. She corrects the position of the decorations, she shines a shelf mirror, she puts cards on the tables, people come to consult her and at the same time she answers the phone. Now she takes a small vase, and she puts it in the middle of one of the tables, she observes it, and she approaches to modify it. It entertains me to watch her through this window with my coffee in hand, leafing through a magazine, and knowing that she does not even suspect me. The server passes by me.

"The lady of the flowers is very cheerful..." - she looks at me with suspicion, she smiles. I raise my eyes to her face to guess what she means.

"Tempted to laugh?" - I ask her, and she walks away without answering me. So, I put the magazine aside and I observe with more attention the woman who presides over the preparations. As I follow her movements, they begin to seem familiar to me. A young man approaches her and when he walks away, she turns her face, and I can see her profile. I do know her, but she was quite different, we were in fact different. We were friends from the neighborhood when we were married, about twenty years ago. Each one walked her baby, and we coincided in the schedules. There was so much to talk about: our deformed bodies despite the efforts to maintain weight, the breasts full of milk, the nipple cracks, the sleepless nights, the husbands absent or insensitive to our sufferings. How long did those days of breeding seem to us, marked by the hours of the feeding, the diaper changes, we commented on twists and slight variations that always ended in the same: we were exhausted. Our respective husbands told us that we looked like sisters: in fact, both of us had a frizzy, indomitable, and colorful mane. We have long legs and arms, a bit heavy. Our matrons' bodies, as we said, stunned a few and for others we fell into the category of 'well-made fat women'. I remember that she was the daughter of Irish parents and one of the things she regretted most about breastfeeding was not being able to drink alcohol. As we became more confident, her chatter increased and her endless monologues ended up tiring me, especially when she insisted on the long-awaited outings to drink. I haven't decided to say hello to her now, I'm afraid of her unstoppable conversation, and I like her to be part of what already was.

## IN THE MIRROR

Today I look at myself in front of the mirror. The room is warm. I leave the towel on my side, and I look at myself naked. It takes courage to do it! What does it matter? This is me. This is my amazon's body, as my singer friend says. I am my mother's height, and I have the thickness of my dad's torso. My clear skin has freckles, but I'm unsure which ancestors would have them. But there they are becoming part of me. I have them on the chest between my armpits and on my thighs. Many pale brown spots which don't bother me. I like to imagine them as traces of lived events: my son smiling (which he doesn't do often), the sound of the voice of my talkative daughter, some man I had near, those thousand layer cakes in tempting display cases, those shoes I finally bought and that fit me. Freckles appear also on the front of my hands and on the arms well above the elbow. I approach the mirror, my face is a pale oval, a truly white egg to which have grown a colorful mane and two big ears that are disguised behind the strident abundance of my hair. If I take it as I do now, they appear in all their magnitude standing out like two plates. They are the cause of not having been able to get those haircuts that are being worn nowadays and that leave one ear visible and the other covered by a flirty lock. Shall ear plastic surgery be done? If I had it done it would be the end of that round brotherhood between my ears and my eyes. It is strange that I have them so big. My father told me that they had begun to grow out of curiosity. Or out of sadness? Something as in order "to cry better". Because I was very weepy and capricious, an incredibly unique daughter of a spoiling dad and an irritable mother. My eyes of pale light blue seem prepared for shedding streams of tears, though I am not one to cry or tilt my face to one side in the Monalisa style. Now, when doing it, that complacency that I lack appears. I rehearse the gesture several times and I lower my gaze: my breasts are too far apart, and the size of two apricots make an appearance. If I had them a little closer, that sensual line would be formed when I squeezed them or bent down as I do now, but there is no case, my breasts were born divorced. Luckily the excess of sweets and cream does not make a dent in them. All the fat of the ice creams, cakes and tarts I eat are concentrated in my abdomen and in my thighs. My belly becomes

gelatinous. Instead of growing outwards, the thighs do it inwards, so that their touch provokes this annoying irritation that I have on the skin. Despite the somewhat overflowing abdomen and thighs, my waist is still narrow if you look at it from the front and from the back. I turn and glimpse the curve that is marked and increases with my buttocks good for grabbing. When I was a teenager, my friends did it in a bargain game that kept us alert.

## IN PORT LOVE

“You are a dreamer if you think that you will be able to have something better. You are not a girl anymore. My case was very different, your father was...” - my mom’s voice in the cell phone sounds acuter than it is. I activate the loudspeaker, and I continue eating the ice cream that I have just bought in this establishment.

“It’s about your children and your husband. Can you tell me what happens to you!” – she continues, and I remember that I would go to the library to look for information...

“You hear me!” – she shouts authoritarian, I throw my cellphone in my pocket and walk in the direction of the library. I go down Urmeneta Avenue and my mom’s voice is still being heard...

In the library, an affable woman receives me at the counter and lets me go through to check the shelves. I have turned the cellphone volume down to the minimum. The woman approaches and asks me specifically what I need, what I am looking for. I look at her in silence and try to remember in search of what I came to.

## AT THE KIOSK

I have gone out to pay my bills at the kiosk of Urmeneta with Prat, where I am in general attended by a woman who is around fifty. Sometimes one of her two children accompany her. He is serious, the daughter, unfriendly. With the woman we usually greet each other and talk something. She has an attitude between being protective and loving with me, the same as with her children. She and her daughter have long hair, use curved bangs, make-up to perfection, wear tight fitting and fashionable clothing. He, in turn, always wears jeans and a jacket. It seems that he doesn’t like to help in the kiosk, as if he said that he is for another type of work. The daughter,

on the contrary, takes her role in a very natural way, without opposing resistance. I like this family, perhaps because it resembles the one I left behind. Now that I arrive, there is a long row of people for being attended. Through a lady who speaks at the top of her voice on her cellphone I find out that her granddaughter accompanies her, that the girl has just entered classes, that all the ATMs (automatic teller machine) are without money and that she carries bread and drinks to the house. We advance slowly, I get distracted by the headlines of the newspapers: changing climates, global recession in the making; migration; violence in different parts of the country. Once I wanted to be a journalist of denunciation and not the cultural chronicler of a local newspaper that I am.

Finally, I arrive at the kiosk window; I came with the idea of asking the woman for some information about Limache, but today I see her rushing.

## PASSING THROUGH

The place where I live now is the attic of a house inhabited by an older couple, without children. He retired from the uniformed police; she retired from the railways and in these days devoted herself to watering the plants, cleaning and other domestic tasks.

The first day we talked (her husband was polishing the car, which invariably stays in the patio) I opted to tell her that I was single and that I would be doing work for a while. My being single is a lie, about my temporary stay, half-truth because I did not know then and I don't know yet what I will do later. For the moment I have settled in very well in this luminous space of windows on the four sides. I have a minuscule, though sufficient bathroom and balcony. The rest is only one wide room with an armoire occupying plenty of space, a table that serves to eat and work, and a sofa bed; I imagine they are the same furniture used by the previous tenants: a nurse and a writer. The landlady told me that the nurse was a good tenant. That the disappearance of the writer was very strange. When I asked why, she did not answer. Undoubtedly, he was also only passing through, perhaps he did not even decide to empty his suitcase like me.



## BROWSING

As if nothing had occurred (because it is so in reality: nothing new has happened, only that a while ago my cell phone rang and it was the father of my children, who asked how I was, for then telling me how sad he felt without me and how much he missed me. I prefer not to answer him. Why go back with the same? After some minutes of silence, he ended the call, and that is all.) As if nothing had occurred, I said, I walk along Prat sidewalk to the north. I observe that there are two men inside an establishment: one takes bags of candies from a box, the other stands behind the counter. I keep walking and I enter a fabric store, whose owner, an older man, is on the sidewalk watching the people. When he sees me entering his establishment, he shouts:

“Daughter, people!”

I hear the dragging of slippers approaching. I look up from the flowery cotton that I have in my hands. The dark, haggard look of a woman of my age looks at my face. “Are you looking for something special?” – asks me between coughs. She smells like cigarettes. She orders moody what I have disordered. Her close presence disturbs me. Her body is huge, she has trouble moving. I leave the fabric and go out. Cars and buses fight for space. At the end of a corridor, people rummage through clothes. I leave behind the glass screen of a hair salon with one seat that looks like one of a dentist; beyond the same street and in the sidewalk, I glimpse plants and vegetables in plastic trays. I enter the establishment that smells of withered flowers. Between buckets with flowers, aluminum color balloons, I find a journal chronicle close to the photos of the old florist:

“¿Relatives of the lady in the photo?”

Behind a ribbon and flower pile two women look at each other in surprise.

“It’s the mom”

“I’m a journalist, would you accept an interview?”

I go out on the street with the notes that I have just taken, and I hear the voice of Luis Miguel:

*If you did not know how to love / now you can go.*

From a detained bus a young Haitian with a red suitcase gets off. During which seems a lot of time to me I observe the face of the young man whose eyes are fixed in mine. I cannot help but feel enveloped by his placid face, by his kind look, by the helplessness that his presence radiates in me: What do I awaken in him that makes him continue to look at me that way when his bus has already left, the traffic light has changed and new pedestrians are moving along the sidewalk?

#### AT THE NEWSPAPER

I have come to work at the office for the hours per week that I must stay here in order that the secretary goes out to run errands. The newspaper is in the second floor, between the office of a photocopier and the one of a massage therapist and expert in feng shui, says the inscription. The secretary takes the handbag as soon as she sees me, she pulls out a mirror and while she applies make-up, she tells me:

“Are you a journalist or only fond of...?” – she makes a gesture with the fingers by typing. I don’t answer to her, and I approach the desk for ‘the flyers’ (we who cover sports, culture, police news...). Before she goes out, a cosmetic saleswoman enters, who observes me and asks who I am.

“No idea, any case, not professional – clarifies the secretary, who adds- did you bring me the cream?”

I’m about to continue the chronicle that I had begun when through the stool I hear noises as if two people were fighting. I stand up, knock on the door of the office, and wait. Total silence. I return to my chair to continue with my business and after some minutes, my cellphone rings: it is the secretary. With a confident voice (now she calls me ‘my pretty girl’) she warns me that the boss is in the office in a meeting, and that I don’t interrupt him for anything.

“I understand” - I answer, and I type at full speed...until the office door is opened, and I see going out the woman of yellow heels and tightened jacket whom I had seen in the square some days before. With her swaying walk and the same swinging, she disappears in the corridor. After a while, the secretary returns and asks me if there is any news.

“The meeting has just finished” – I tell her, heading for the door.

## SHOUTS IN THE SQUARE

“No, I do not want!”

Next to the screaming child I spot another person. Something happens to them about a blue bicycle.

I go down with my boots to a shoe shop that I saw as I passed by. I border the square by the sidewalk of the bus terminal and a black youth with a load of packages intercepts my path. Is he not the same youth I saw getting off a bus weeks ago, who stared at me? I look for his eyes, we exchange another glance and I recognize him. He is the young man with the kind look. I step aside to let him pass. Meanwhile the repeated ‘I don’t want’ of the boy are still heard. I wonder if anybody can shut him up and a phrase of my mother comes to my mind:

“You are spoiled... by your dad!” – She said that every time I disobeyed her orders, which was so many as my resistance. In one of my tantrums, I must have been about four or five years old, I was drawing, I got angry, threw the pencil away and began to cry in despair. My dad, who was sitting by my side, began to calm me, but the more he tried, the angrier it made me, and I escaped to scream elsewhere. I remember having gone out to sit at the front door and having seen another boy looking at me.

“Come inside” – my father asked me repeatedly. We spent a long time in the back and forth and I don’t know how it turned out. Why was my father always there, at my disposal?

## AT THE REPAIR SHOP

Finally, I go with my boots to have the heel caps changed. I cross the square diagonally, and I go through Urmeneta. I used to collect and use notebooks like the ones offered in that bookstore. I noted down each pending issue of the office, of my children and the house. I move to the next showcase. I liked the wall clocks; I see a good collection in this clock smith shop. There is a cuckoo behind the booth where an old man works with the magnifying lens placed on the eye. For curiosity I ask for the cuckoo's price.

"Tell her that it's not for sale!" – shouts the old man.

"I'm sorry...he is my father...he is older...and not very friendly" – I tighten my bag with the boots to be repaired and I arrive to the shoe repair shop when a funeral procession passes. The dark-aproned cobbler appears at the entrance. We look at the carriage that disappears about two blocks to the south. Then I ask him if he changes caps.

"Now that there are shoes up to the thousand pesos! – he grumbles, entering – here we are very busy"

I'm about to leave and an old man peek from inside the store.

"Just leave them, I can deal with him, he's my son" – he says and raises his eyebrows.



## AT THE PHARMACY

I'm going to buy propolis in capsules: my monthly bottle. A friend gave me the information years ago and each time I plan to interrupt it I tell myself that it does me good and I keep taking it.

From time to time, I watch the screen of the pharmacy until my turn comes. Today, the man attends me and not the lady that offers me different alternatives. This salesperson is laconic and serious, I ask him for propoleo, he answers me that there is no left.

I am going out in direction of another pharmacy (they exist every half block) and I glimpse the woman I met in the row of the roastery.

"Shopping again?" – she asks me with a smile that shows her beautiful teeth.

"I was looking for propolis and I come out with this cream"

"It's what happens to me...!" – she bursts into a laughter that she passes on to me, I can smell her lemon perfume, she talks to me about Limache, of how happy she is of living here since she came from Santiago.

"Are you from here...since ever" – she asks me.

"No, I'm from Viña. I'm passing through here for my work. I write chronicles for the local weekly paper, and you?"

"I'm a family constellatory"

"I'm sorry, I don't know what that is"

"It's a type of therapy that connects you with your ancestors" – she explains to me.

"Something like spiritism?"

She starts laughing heartedly.

Meanwhile, a woman with a blue turban approaches her from behind and tells her something to the ear. She opens large eyes; the woman moves away, and I keep looking at her turban.

"She is the one with the hens"- she blows on me mumbling. I turn my face intrigued.

"You must meet her. She has a hundred hens, each one with a different name, she raises them in the garden of her house. The birds rush off and she walks around looking for them. She rings the neighbors' doorbell at any time and, until she cannot

bring them all together, she doesn't give up. Sometimes she calls desperate saying that this or that are missing..." – It's her turn, and we say goodbye in a hurry.

## A COFFEE IN THE HOUSE

It's not easy to set myself to the task. No more circles or detours. Freshly showered and dressed, I bring the table closer to a window, I turn on the computer, I heat water for a coffee. All conducive to work, except for the open suitcase, which is still waiting to be located. The chronicle I will deliver is on the screen and I have fun shortening it, lengthening it: that game of pressing keys, and modifying until my entertainment lasts.

This time I will speak of the flower shop I visited. Is there something interesting? Partly yes and partly no. I believe it is simple, brief and authentic. The story is trivial, not to say trite. I move with my coffee to the sofa bed and while I drink it, I think that curious people like me will like the chronicle: at no time do I give names.

"Who don't bring flowers to their dead?" I remember the granddaughter of the florist told me. I would not do it, I say to myself, as I prepare another coffee.

## IN MYSELF

Everything began (or culminated, I do not want to inquire) the day of our daughter's graduation, during her class party. We were toasted for hours in the sun at the beach. Of course, most of the women had done the same, we realized as soon as we entered the assembly hall where, after the ceremony, the four of us, we, together with my son and my husband, would eat.

During the meal we made jokes, memories of holidays together, allusions to my son's previous graduation and how serious and solemn he had been; the grandparents, my daughter's first friends, her incessant chatter came to the fore, nothing that would predict what would occur. When the dance started, my children took me to the dance floor, and my husband and I did the same. After a pair of songs, I preferred to go in search of the dessert. I had seen a large table from which one could take what you wanted. The table overlooked an enormous window, and this overlooked the sea. Two spotlights illuminated it. A real exhibition, those waves and the white foam

shining in the middle of the night. For quite a while I was hypnotized by the train of waves while I spooned my dessert. I returned to the table to talk with my husband, and I found myself with another mother at the table. The two were talking animatedly. I attempted to include myself in the talk, but I got distracted seeing my children dancing. They did it pretty well. I saw them very happy, and I was so glad that I interrupted them to embrace them and the three of us did a couple of steps laughing. In that moment the mother who was talking with my husband approached me with laughter to tell me that she was going to dance.

“Sure!”- I answered uncaring, I have never been jealous; that they danced, of course. I went to the table of a couple we used to talk with. A while later my son came.

“How well dad dances!” – he tells me. Then I observe him too and for the first time I see him in a completely new way. His gestures are the same, nothing has changed in him, I can predict the movement he will do next, and he does it. I feel strange. Foreign, distant from that body I know so well. I am beset by a great annoyance when looking at his rather small and somehow stiff head, always wanting to rise itself a little more over those shoulders neither too thick nor lacking masculinity, which turn themselves in block. It is revealed to me that in his form, free of contortion to move, that contrasts so much with his agility in getting what he is looking for. In ascending without stopping until he reaches his ambitious objectives with that bird of prey look which is usually also marked in his nose.

“He is funny” – says my daughter.

I am restless. I feel bad. I go to the bathroom; I wash my face. In the mirror I appear pale, cold like a stone. Nothing moves inside me while refiguring my husband. I don't want or seek something different. I return to the room with the hope of having recovered, if not my fortitude, at least my regular adhesion to his person and I feel a terrifying indifference when looking at him. The man I see dancing is the father of my children and unavoidably I begin to call him so. I try to wake up, to return to the previous state, if not of admiration or falling in love, at least of affection, respect, and nothing! From that moment on, I feel that he ceased to be my husband.

“Mom, are you feeling bad?” – I hear my daughter's voice.

## IN THE WINDOW

Today I feel at ease here in the attic, curiosity leads me between window and window. What is this old couple doing where I live that keeps them moving? The smell of toasted bread and the sound of the kettle boiling arrives. Dishes and cutlery sound, it's eight thirty in the morning. She calls her husband to have breakfast, they turn on the news on the radio and afterwards the door that leads to the front courtyard is opened. She sweeps thoroughly and energetically the entire contour of the house, turns on the hose faucet and calls her husband again, who comes to dedust the car. Now she waters the bindweed on the ladder that climbs up to my attic, she throws water on the walls of the house and wets the patio splashing drops, so that he claims. I see her going out to the street with a pot of water and spreading it on the sidewalk to continue with the sweeping process. She does it while she has a loud conversation with the two dogs. Now she lights a kitchenette in the backyard: she cooks noodles, potatoes and some bones. She waits for the cooker to boil. She shakes blankets, sheets, carpets, cushions, which are supported or hanging from the frameworks, while the bubbling of the cooker persists. She puts out the fire of the kitchenette. The dogs cry and knock on the door.

From inside she calms them, grabs the groom again, sweeps the front door inwardly, stares at a house wren fluttering among the elms.

At midday I see her going out, she warns the dogs that now are going to relieve themselves away from the house and goes with them to return at one o'clock, moment in which – close to the front door – she talks with a tall and gawky man dressed in tie and jacket, whom she looks with certain mistrust.

"The writer came – I can hear she says in the kitchen – how strange that he has returned, having gone that way..."

It's past six thirty now, she goes out to lock the front door. When returning along the paving stones path she looks up and discovers me spying on her.



## IN THE WARDROBE DRAWER

After cooking a green bean and onion omelet and eating it with tomato salad, I look over at the sofa bed. I sleep for about five minutes, after which I pick up some clothes that have fallen from the open suitcase to the floor. I encourage myself and I open the wardrobe doors for the first time: I look at the shelves, I unfold a drawer and from the bottom a group of typed sheets appear. I read something about a roadside shrine ( Religious image, usually in some sort of small shelter, placed by a road, where a person has died) and a clock smith from Olmue. I leave the typed sheets over the table. I'm not interested in roadside shrines. My clothes are neatly arranged. I look at the sofa bed without them, and I fall asleep in no time at all. I awake with the memory of the nightmare I had before awakening: I opened the wardrobe and slept in one of its drawers. It was so hard and uncomfortable that I turned from one side to the other. In that turning and turning I discovered some sheets that served me as a pillow.

I take a vest and go down for a walk; I am arriving to Caupolicán Street and I glimpse the woman of the hens with her blue turban.

"Hello!" – she greets me, and I ask her where she is going.

"I'm going to Las Cruces Farm" – she answers me seriously.

"How are your hens?"

"Well, pooh!" – she tells me, walking away.

"May you do well in that farm!"

"I hope so, because in the cemetery you are not offered anything" - she shouts at me and burst into laughter.

## AT THE MIDDLE KIOSK

This time I stop before the headlines I haven't read for a couple of months; I'm moving as I go along between one newspaper and another, it is midday, the sun warms my head, I come across a gentleman who is also turning around, we look at each other, we smile, he lets me pass to the covers he has already reviewed. Suddenly, I see a headline about a fire in a bar in Valparaíso. I keep on reading ... the name of a friend is mentioned among the victims! I lean back my head thinking

that it must be another person with the same name and my cell phone rings. My mom assures me that it is my friend of the university who has died.

“But you were ... such friends!” - she adds, and she makes endless comments about my friendship with him. I’m paralyzed in the middle of the sidewalk, with my mom’s voice being heard through the cell phone speaker. Only a couple of weeks before we had met in the Murken. I was late and he was talking and laughing with the saleswomen as if he had known them since ever. With his way of mixing sayings in French and national television personalities, he maintained them entertained, all of them pending of his words. When seeing that the entrance swing door opens and seeing me, he shouted and cried out, he embraced me, he celebrated me:

“But how sensual you look with those boots and that loose skirt open to the knee! Look at this hair of the color of passion and this stamp!” – he exclaimed laughing and looking into my eyes.

We embraced each other. Once sitting by one of the tables, he followed with his exaggerations and fuss that made me laugh out loud until he asked me for the father of my children.

“So serious and balanced, though always sniffing his prey!” – he imitated a gesture of my husband that surprised me. I told him I was living alone, he remained silent, waited for me to explain and as I didn’t do it, he asked me about my children.

“They are already independent students” – I answered him, and we derived in our university students’ nights when we stayed in his parents’ house in Con-Con together with Dino Caruzo, a young man he was crazy about.

This morning, with the newspaper still in my hand, I advance clumsily, and I wait,,, Someone shall come to tell me that what occurred is a mistake?

It’s not, the dad of my children confirms me on my cell phone: an electric failure in the old bar, he tells me. The fire destroyed the construction and many of the people who were inside did not manage to get out. Meanwhile, I observe as everything continues its course in Limache, the terrace of Moneglia Coffee full of people, the buses playing their horns and the traffic lights in green and in red. I look at my hands and the memory of my friend’s voice saying goodbye in the Subway Station that day comes to me:

“Maria! Graaatiaa plena...” – he addressed me singing before getting merged with those who took the train.

## AT MY HOUSE

I preferred not to go to the funeral, and I stayed in my pajamas walking around the house. There is a furious sun outside, the one that stings the skin. The tops of the trees stand still behind the window frame and the sound of the water from the hose comes to me from the square. The soles of my feet rub against the cold roughness of the balcony cement to which the sun does not reach at this hour. I remember my friend, his songs, his jokes. I fix my gaze on the string of water wetting the meadows. There are spaces in which the water does not drain and form a water hole; then the young girl I have met sometimes sweeping, advances and takes care in order that the irrigation is spread in a uniform way. I get the urge to talk with her. I enter to make me a coffee before. I am on it when I rediscover the bunch of typed sheets of paper that were in the wardrobe's drawer. I do not feel like reading them and I don't want to throw them away. Less than giving them to the owner (of the house); that could lead to a conversation. Finally, with my curiosity on the prowl, I take them, I go out to the balcony, and I read them:

“I used to be a supermarket stocker, now I am municipal employee and would-be writer, the literary contest was opened at the municipality and since then, I am looking for a story to send it. I think that last Sunday, I found it.”

With the tale still in my hands, I feel displeasure. It is a hard, acid story, what is called a bitter pill I would have preferred to avoid. I leave the sheets of paper aside; shall the story of the abusive clock smith be true or pure invention of his author? I remember the figure of the lanky and dinky man I saw days ago and according to what I heard, he would be the author. I do not imagine him in passionate trances, but the curiosity bug spins around me like an enclosed botfly.

## IN THE PLAYGROUND

This slow and boring Sunday has transmitted to me its humor. I sit by the children's playground in the square, it is eleven in the morning and there is small public. Besides the swings, the climbing ropes, the sliders, and other devices for climbing, turning and rocking, a lady who disposes drawings adhered to little tables settles in. She gives the choice of three colors she drains into a pot and while she explains me that the children always want more paint, next to us a person stops. When I turn my eyes, I see it is the Haitian of the red suitcase. We exchange a glance, and I see him moving away. He slowly crosses the square until he disappears from my sight. Shall he remember the times we have met as I do?

Besides the tables to paint, cars and tricycles are rented. Toward the south side a couple of dancers are preparing to give cueca classes. They turn on the radio and begin without pupils.

A father and his son get out of a luxurious van. They come with a shiny calypso color skateboard. The boy, with a long blond mane, goes around the court twice, leaves the skateboard and runs to the ropes followed by the slow steps of his father. With his head shaved, of short stature and with fashionable clothing, he drags his feet to reach his son. After minutes, the little one goes down from the ropes and plays on the ground to make piles with his hands. Nothing makes him look up. The dad does not look at anyone either, only at his son and sometimes at his cell phone.

Behind the cueca dancers arrives a couple with a girl. The apathetic dad raises his hand to greet them. The children ignore each other, the three adults approach and talk while the little girl gets entangled between her mom's legs. Suddenly the dad of the boy who plays in the ground seems to remember the skateboard and begins to search for it. He comes to ask me if I have seen it, walks along the seats, goes to the rental cars, snoops in the paint tables, talks with the woman, seems desperate. His son doesn't realize the situation yet, now he is being swayed in one of the rockers. Finally, his dad, with an expression of wonder and defeat, comes to tell his casual acquaintance that the skateboard has been taken. I listen to him speaking a

Spanish crossed with another language. His casual acquaintance begins to laugh and to make jokes:

“And what did you imagine, Che, that it would be seen and left there...”

Without believing what has occurred to him, the man goes round again asking. He looks under the seats, on the ropes, where the dancers are. He returns with his shoulders low, approaches his son and talks to him while the boy looks at his hands without saying anything.

## IN MURKEN

“That is! -I say in front of the window of cakes and pastries.

“A thousand layer with sweetened milk (Chilean cake)?” – I am immediately asked.

“Yes, and a coffee... no, better make it two”

“Are you waiting for someone?”

“Mm... yes and no...”- I answer and the woman observes me intrigued.

“A coffee and a pastry!”- I go directly to the table where we sat with my dead friend. To my right there is a sideboard I didn't see the day I was here with him. I did not hear the high volume of the background music either, I do not either remember the light or if it was cold or warm. Were there another people? The coffee and the cake arrive: I do remember this. What were we talking about that day? Today the dough is crunchy and fresh. I try the coffee; it tastes more bitter than usual to me. If I would have known what would happen is the typical thought in these cases; but if it had happened that way, I would not keep only the hazy, vague memories I have.

I hear knocking on the entrance door. A woman touches my shoulder, she leaves a strong perfume wave, she seats at the next table and gives me a smile that I return to her. It's the woman I've seen delivering milk on Limache streets. She leaves the bicycle leaned, she rings the doorbell and talks without hasty with each one of her clients.

One day I proposed to interview her to make a chronicle with her story, but she does not like the interviews, so I dedicate myself to observing her when I meet her around. I was told that she has cows in the house, that she herself milks them in the mornings...

Another wave of her intense perfume arrives at me, I hear her sprawling in her seat, she sighs and now she greets animatedly a gentleman.

“Today is my fiftieth birthday, don’t you think I look forty?!” she says enthusiastically.

#### IN THE CLOCK SMITH SHOP

Curiosity prevailed. Days ago – after having overcome some reluctance on the part of the clock smith wears a toupee – we agreed to meet today in his store in Prat Street. He waits for me at the door. He makes me pass by casting furtive glances toward the sidewalk, he stands before the counter and an unexpected confidence pulls out phrases in clusters.

“Mmm... I would not know how to tell you when my dad began this. A long time ago... he was not from here; he was from Temuco and some aunts raised him there (he turns the eyes to the street); his mom was from La Calera, a family of farmers, numerous (serious); there are no clock smiths in the two families that I know; I... liked everything that is electricity, the four children have studies ... yes, we were four. I learnt here in High School, but I came to the store on weekends, and I was often sought out for the repairs... in the houses, although I began to like the quartz watch, don’t you see that from a bovine passes electrical energy; when the enamel of the bovine is reversed, the watch is finished because it grounds the ‘oxidizer’. That is how we dedicated ourselves to this, although my dad also had notions of electricity. They died young, bordering... over the seventy years, time ago. My father began in this... after working in the railways; there he learnt with his clock smith friends from Valparaíso, he started just retired. We didn’t have to throw away my father’s effort. Descent?... No. My sisters are single like me. The three of us live in my parents’ house in Olmué, in the same place...”

Two old women peek into the store, I see their severe faces, gesturing to him, the interviewed gets nervous and tells me that he has no more time to continue attending me. I put my note in the purse, and I go out to the street. There are coincidences with the tale of the writer who lived in my attic, I think. I have plenty of him, the writer, sure, but what I have in favor is enough to inquire more. I walk away on this sunny

day like someone who has received a prize a minute before, and I meet the garbage truck advancing at full speed dispersing plastic bags and empty containers through the street.

## IN MY BED

I frolic placidly while I leaf through a fashion magazine before turning the light off. My house is warm, and from the window I keep open I hear far sounds of this city at human scale with which I am becoming more and more familiar. The curtains transparent a dim light. My back rests on a pair of soft cushions. I review the clothes and spectacular bodies of the models in the magazine, I sigh with envy and the cell phone rings.

“Mommy! Hallow... how are you” – I hear the joyful voice of my daughter.

“Very well, in my bed with a magazine.”

“Ah! ... those models of ugly bodies” – she gives a long chuckle.

“Yes, I was in the same. How dare they!”

“You must be courageous...” - she tells me laughing.

“Did you notice that now they do not use anything straight, all flared?

We’re screwed then!”

“Well, everything is adaptable... to the own reality” – I say, and we laugh again.

“Mommy... how I miss you! – she sighs – Your friend who died! dad told me...”

“Yes, it’s been very sad!”

“Have you felt much pain?”

“The truth... yes, more than I would have imagined. We were classmates, we studied, we went everywhere together. Lately, we have seen each other a couple of times a year. We met the last time, days before... and when saying goodbye... he sang to me.”

“Did he sing to you?”

“Yes, he used to communicate that way.”

“And what was that he sang to you?”

“He gave me thanks.”

“Thanks... for what?”

"I don't know; I suppose that for our friendship" -I hear her sigh, and I ask her for her brother.

"Yesterday we talked long about our things... and we talked about you."

"And... how are your things going?"

"Hmm! To him... entangled, and I here waiting for them to be decided."

"You will have a lot to talk about then..."

"We talk almost every night. With respect to talk... do you not think that we went with the story to grandmother. It was bad luck, we met her at the weekend when she had come to Dad's, and she with her questions. She must have called you with the drama of her poor abandoned grandchildren..."

"Yes, there was something about that. While I licked a particularly good ice cream, I let her give me advice..."

"Is there a good ice cream parlor nearby?"

"More than one..."

"How tasty!...- but mommy, do not worry, we are well, and we love you much, whatever you do."

"I really do not worry, you are already big and you know much more than me" -I laugh again, and she gets a contagious laugh.

"That's not true, Mommy, you know it is not..."

"Do you remember that time of the churros we ate in Valparaíso Street?" - I ask her.

"Sure, your chin was full of flower sugar..."

"And your nose either... "

"And we returned for the second bag..."

"And if your dad doesn't arrive, I think we would have gone for the third one. "

"Yeeees."

## AT THE BEER BAR

From my balcony I rejoice in the sight of a beautiful sunset, the red clouds, leaves moving along the pavement and the warm air makes me want a beer. I cross the square that at that time also enchant, I stop at the corner with Riquelme, where I glimpse an open store. I pass through the tables of the terrace, and I go to the back



next to the street. Almost all empty buses cross by Urmeneta and disappear toward Palmira Romano. By the Urmeneta zebra crossing comes through the blacksmith and his two sisters, leaning on each other like trees about to fall off. Are they heading on their way home in Olmué? I will have to inquire more.

“Do you want the offer that includes the ‘complete’? (Chilean hotdog with many toppings)- asks the waiter. I smile remembering my mother’s phrase: ‘It is said hotdog, Maria’. I ask for the beer alone and I continue in my observation.

Riquelme’s kiosk is closed, without that swarm of people that normally surround it. The one in the middle, that I always will relate with my friend, is also closed. The wind has diminished, and the warmth of the air is such, that I take off my vest to wait for my beer. The place begins to be full; they have turned on a music of old romantic melodies of a Spanish group whose name I do not remember, although I can hum its lyrics.

*Take me or leave me / if I am not awake let me dream*

A taxi waits for the woman of the flower stand of the corner: she is a very little woman, very laborious and with a mouse face. The driver helps her to upload what she has not sold, she looks backwards, reviews that there is nothing left, gets into the cab and leave when I get the beer.

I taste its agreeable bittersweet flavor; I lean back on the chair. I overview the recent situations that have made me stop. I look at them, I feel them, and I say goodbye to them. I look at nothing in special. Without anybody knowing me I touch the surfaces of others’ lives, in this city/town where I move around.

*I neither spy on you nor take away your freedom, but if you have left the nest*

The music numbs me a little. The young woman of the side table warns me that my vest has fallen to the floor, I smile at her, and I pick it up. I ask for another beer, the liquid spreads through my body. Now I observe the lights on in the avenue, the shadows of the trees on the sidewalk. The roar of a motorcycle approaches and

moves away. The place is overflowing with customers. I think in the cliché phrase: we are like passengers in a boat, I smile, it is good for the situation. I like those phrases that fit like a tight sock to life.

From the cash the owner observes us when I recognize the Haitian that I have seen other times. He approaches her and makes gestures to her. The woman calls the waiter, he looks around the tables and raises the shoulders denying with the head. The Haitian turns around to go away with the same calm with which a moment ago I saw him arriving. I am closing my bag, and I perceive his gaze on my face. I raise my eyes. Is he telling me to invite him? I am indecisive like an adolescent, why not, I say to myself, and I invite him to sit with me. He extends his two long hands over the table. I feel the impulse to put mine over his and I remain quiet.

#### AT THE BANK

The secretary of the newspaper surprised me today telling me between docile and confident:

“I am sorry, I need a great favor, pretty girl... would you go to the bank?”

The door from where strange noises that I have heard at other times is closed, the office has a cigar smell, I will be much better outside.

“Sure” I answer, and I walk between the windows and the sellers of Milanese lettuce again; I smile to the Rastafarian young girl: today she wears a pink turban from which the dreadlocks appear, she offers me a piece of bread on a tray while she sings in Spanish along with Marley’s voice on the speaker:

*Can you help me sing / these freedom songs  
redemption songs / redemption songs...?*

I take a piece of bread, I observe as she balances her baby with the left arm, the little girl also wears a pink cloth on the head. I swallow my bread following the rhythm of the song, how could I not buy her a whole one? I make space in my bag and follow to the bank.

I settle in a seat with the sight put on the cashiers. Being here, waiting, makes me feel as when I waited in the car for my children to leave school. I hurried up the pace at work and left quickly to park along the door through which they would appear. It was a real delight to have that while for me. Many times, I could read an entire magazine. Suddenly it comes to my mind a memory I had completely forgotten. During one of those days the mother who danced with my ex-husband the night of my daughter's graduation came to my car. As soon as she recognized me, probably because of some meeting which we both had attended, she pounced on the car like someone who takes a life jacket.

"Do you mind if I get in?"- she asked, opening the door and dropping on the seat with a relief sigh.

"You cannot imagine..." - she said, took a breath and began with a dark story in front of which I became frozen, more than anything, because in what basis she made me a participant of her family intimacies. Finally, the doorbell rang, and the children came out. What a drama that was...!

I think: sure, when she addressed my ex-husband, she had not forgotten that conversation sustained in my car. Perhaps she thought that all that she had let me know gave her a certain power over him. How does my situation change having identified her? In nothing: they are the things one thinks about when waiting to be attended.

I get distracted seeing a woman come in (shall she be around 40 or 50?) . She wears jeans so tight that her butt almost burst under and a tight vest, she goes to search a deposit slip and she meets an acquaintance. By the outpouring of the greeting, I imagine they had not been together for a long time. They come to sit by my side.

"Tell me what has been of your life" -I can hear the one who is just at my right.

"My life? Three husbands in the body. Yes, three"- the one in jeans adds defying. I hear her laughter, she laughs with enthusiasm, sitting one space more to the right.

"So much so, that I had to go to constellate"- she adds.

"To constellate?" – asks the other.

"It is an incredible therapy. Look, I went to see a woman a couple of times. A psychologist or therapist, I do not know what is the difference, do you know? She

had a group, and she invited me. The point is that eight people got together, plus she who directed the matter.”

“It is like having therapy in public, then”- answers the one who is by my side.

“Mm... one in which rather the miracle is told but not the saint. I said that I needed a husband...without having to change him...from time to time.”

“A little weird what you said”

“Yes, it was the first thing that came to my mind. You know that I am extroverted type”- another laughter.

“It turns out that I said that and she, the therapist or constellator or psychologist, asked me for my family, how many we were, if men or women, the order from the oldest to the smallest; afterwards I had to remember my dad’s and mom’s family and make the same. Fortunately, we are few...”

“And if it is a numerous family?”

“I see it complicated. Ah! For that must serve the dolls”- she indicates convincing.

“The dolls?”

“Yes, instead of persons you can constellate with dolls.”

“Ah!”- she answers without much faith the one that is by my side.

“Well, the thing is that each one of the persons of the group puts in the place of one of my family and if you could see what happened...”

“I can’t imagine.”

“One cried, another was anguished, one woman moved happy and so...”

“Ah!... and...?”

“The therapist or constellator or ... was translating what it meant!”- she answers very seriously and the one by my side starts laughing.

“Don’t laugh! It is very serious. It has its bases... in some well-known authors. Look. At the end what I learnt (you know that with everything something is learnt) is that we the people repeat the bars of our ancestors.”

“Something like there was a devious man in your family group decades ago and you get the prize and are born devious”- answers my close.

“You will see when you go. I am going to invite you...”- she interrupts herself for answering her cell phone, but it turns out that is mine the one ringing.

It is my son of serious and muffled voice who has come to his dad's house for the day, and he tells me that there is nothing in the refrigerator. Neither in the pantry.

## AT THE OFFICE

The mysterious door of the boss' office remains open today and the sun's rays come in toward where I stretch my feet. I am alone with all the office for me, while I write my chronicle about a family of thirteen cobblers: some of which repair shoes and others make them. I came to them thanks to my acquaintance at the kiosk, whom I asked again for contacts for my chronicles, and she answered me

"Yes... - turning up her eyes – Do you have where to take note?"

The eleven children learned the trade from their parents and each one opened their own shoe repairer in Limache, others in Quillota, La Calera and so, eleven shoe repairers distributed in the surrounding villages. From the same matrix here in Limache. I thought the story was beautiful, only that the eleven children (they are all male) avoided to speak about the matter. Each one separately has told me: 'go to my brother, he knows the story...' I went at least to five and the same: 'why don't you ask my brother; he is good for these things of telling'. So that, with my warm feet by the sun ray, I ask myself what there will be behind that common silence. Meanwhile I observe my shoes: today I go with boots, every time I look at them, I find they fit better, they are made of light brown leather, they are comfortable and soft, they have a little thick heel, they combine well with all my clothing, that is why they were the only ones I took when I left home. They have been a good acquisition, of the right ones. I am or I rather was a good buyer. I knew how to choose, I took time, I gloated, I saw what was fashionable, I made an inventory of the closet, I gave away or threw away what I didn't need, and I threw myself into the shops in search of my future prey.

In this moment I throw my notes about the shoemaker family into the thrash when the woman in yellow heels enters the reception, today dressed in leggings, wearing slippers and her hair held by an elastic in a ponytail. I observe her thick lips:

"I am in a hurry, little girl, you understand me, yes?"- she turns her eyes toward the bathroom. I'm just staring at her without hitting anything. Sure, I understand, but I

distrust her. But why? The image of the old woman in the square comes to me, and her sour face upon seeing her passing by in heels: 'who would have seen her and who sees her now' the old woman had said.

Even so I don't understand my aversion. I won't leave this one, I say to myself angrily. Rage of what, what has she done to me?

"The bathroom is closed, and they didn't leave me the key"- I answer her. She looks at me with a face of hatred, I see how her nostrils open. I think: she is going to kill me and with dissimulation I take a pencil, but what stupidity, I say to myself immediately.

She observes my hand with the half-wielded pencil, she laughs, she approaches me; I am feeling her breath on my face, I tremble of fear. I am paralyzed.

"Sneaky beach..."- she whispers in my ear and goes out furious.

ON THE BUS  
My curiosity for inquiring more about the veracity of that story found in my wardrobe that speaks of a roadside shrine drives me this morning to take the bus in the direction of Olmué. I have already made the journey once to buy marmalade (I am able to eat a whole vial of that of vegetable marrow with nuts sold at Quinta Elisa), and I do not remember having seen any roadside shrine on the road. I don't look at roadside shrines! On the contrary, if any appears, I turn my eyes. The driver of this drives like a madman, he honks his horn, accelerates and we continue in an unbridled race by Urmeneta, Palmira Romano and now we take Estman Avenue. I glimpse the woman of the hens, she goes with her blue turban, she walks hurried in direction of the center of Limache. What will she do out of her house, in search of her hens, around here? Suddenly we break into the middle of the race, a passenger gets on and we follow. I go attentive to the right sidewalk, wastelands, a Quinta, a restaurant... and the roadside shrine appears. It is true, then, what the story tells. I quickly ask the driver to stop, and he breaks suddenly in a bad mood. I retreat along the berm back in the direction of the roadside shrine located some hundred meters behind. As soon as I walk, my pulse accelerates, these weeks I have gained a couple

of kilos, so it is hard for me to advance as fast as I wish. I go panting. I arrive in front of the great cement construction painted green. It must be one meter eighty tall, by the same width and length. I read the two inscriptions of the façade: a woman, died in the eighties and a man in two thousand. There are a couple of vases with wilted flowers. I stick my head inside; I turn toward two lateral cement trays attached to the walls with candles that have consumed their sperm. The interior corridor is swept, I go deeper to better see. They honk at me; it is the driver of the thrash truck passing. As if they had called me, I go out brusquely and hit my head against the hard cement roof. I wait for the pain to disappear, literally, I am seeing stars. I look back to Olmué and walk in that direction along the north berm, decided to find the house of the clock smith's daughters. The cars coming in the opposite direction honk, is it for my flower skirt that lifts with the wind or is it because I am advancing along the berm? I continue without paying attention, I want to arrive at the dirt road of the story I read, I don't care about the stitches in my head. The distance is much longer than I imagined, I am tired, I lean against the trunk of a tree and rest. I feel my forehead: there is the bump. I turn my eyes toward Limache, someone comes along the same berm, I see a figure I can barely distinguish. I gain strength and follow as propelled by a motor. The avenue makes a curve, continuous façade houses appear, one in perfect abandonment, with the windows boarded up. I go sheltering from the sun in the shadow of the trees, I think I distinguish a crossing about two hundred meters away, that's where I'm heading. I have arrived at the crossing; there is a little shop on the corner.

"Do you know a smith clock who lived or lives with his two daughters this way?"

"This way? Look, I really couldn't tell you. But down this same street, a little further on, there is a madame who you are going to see seated on the sidewalk, she knows everything here..."

The mineral water I have bought is warm, even so, it refreshes my throat. Before crossing the avenue, I look toward Limache, the figure that seemed so far away, is getting closer, walking faster than me. I cross and I go in search of the madame down this dirty street with adobe houses collapsing. None described as in the story of the roadside shrine, with a brown door in the middle and two windows at its sides.

I think the distances here are measured differently. I got so tired and heated that I sit on a great stone on the edge of the street. Without finishing my mineral water, I leave some drops to spread under the blouse, the sun is very strong, the boots that without paying attention to heat I have put on, annoy me. By taking them off I see that my feet are red because of the friction. I lift them, I rub them, I open my legs for air to enter through the skirt. I spot the shadow of a tree toward the south; will I be able to go barefoot up to there? A little stone is stuck in the sole of my left foot. I pull it out, balancing myself for not falling. I am looking for a place to lean myself to put my shoes back on. I finally arrive at the shadow of the tree, and I look back. Will it not be better to return? The figure of the person whom I saw coming, has also taken this street. Now I can recognize that it is a man. A certain fear does not impede following, I must inquire, inform myself. I want to get to the woman who “knows everything from here”. I advance slowly, I shelter myself in another shadow and just in that moment a little breeze picks up. I compose myself and about twenty meters ago I see a woman who goes out of a house and sits her big ass on a chair by her door. It is her! “Good afternoon, I am looking for the house of a clock smith and his two daughters...”- I ask while the woman looks at me. The heat has not declined, she fans herself with a leaf, the door of the house is open. I look at the long corridor: at the end there is a halo of light. There are two windows on the sides of the door in the façade, the shutters are closed, everything coincides with the story of the typed sheets. The walls facing the street still have the cracks of the last earthquake, from inside comes a mixture of food odors.

“And what would it be for? - she asks reluctantly, she spreads out her ass on the chair, she snorts and adds – so warm this autumn!”

“I am journalist of the local newspaper and... I make chronicles about Limache people. The family of the clock smith is from Limache from years ago, especially the father practiced the craft of watch repairing, I understand... and now, the son...”

“No, around these parts...no” – she answers me uninterested. She turns to the person who is approaching. I look inside again, the same as what I read. I look at the newcomer: for my perplexity it is the Haitian, the same with whom I was in that table in the shopper’s shop. The one of the kind smile, of the extended hands.



"I left you the electricity bill under the door – she says to him and then she directs herself to me. They do not understand anything, they do not speak Spanish" – she raises the shoulders, looking at me.

He makes a gesture of affirmation as if he has understood her, he turns to me, he rests his hand in my arm and invites me with the head to follow him. I tremble all over. I look at the woman who observes us with the mouth open. What difference does it make? I go after him, I follow his rhythmic gait, my eyes fixed on his back, in his well-formed head. I perceive the woman's look in my own back until we cross a disordered yard, half-swept garbage; at the back, in front of a little wooden construction he takes the padlock of the door, he opens it, and we enter to what must have been a store of the size of the bed that was put under pressure. From the wooden sky hangs a bulb. I see a tiny high window to whose glasses newspaper has been stuck and under it, a rickety cattail chair. He indicated that I take a seat. My hands are restless, I sit on the tip of the chair. He calmly puts his backpack under the bed, making gestures in order that I get off my boots. Was he who came behind me? He approaches and gets them off. He takes my red feet. His hands on the skin of my feet transport me, I close my eyes. He takes my hands; he caresses my arms... A couple of hours later I wake up without knowing where I am. I look around the room, I look to my side, and I find him. He sleeps peacefully while I imperatively need to go to the bathroom. I dress myself quickly, take the bag, open the door very carefully to not wake him up. I observe that outside the afternoon is almost over and that the fresh breeze has been transformed into wind, the wastes fly back and forth through the yard. When entering the dark corridor of the house I suddenly meet the woman in yellow heels. She goes out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around her head. She looks at me as trying to remember...

"The gossipy bitch around these parts, who would say that" – she surrounds me and disappears behind a door.

I go desperate into the bathroom. The penetrating smell of urine forces me to pee standing on the toilet. My stream of liquid sounds like the one of a man. To my horror, I see that drops of blood are added. It can't be such bad luck! I search in my bag; I take out a pack of disposable tissues and place them between the legs. I want to

wash my hands, my face, I approach the lavatory, and I remain ecstatic when seeing the dirt stuck everywhere, I go out running through the corridor toward the door. Three Haitians who enter in that moment interrupt my exit. The woman tells them about the electricity bill, indicating the bulb. They nod and finally give me the pass. "I bought them the house..." - tells me the woman when she sees me. "Whom?..." – I ask her without understanding. "To the two daughters of the clock smith...although apparently – she looks at me again from top to bottom – you have other interests over here."

## IN MY HOUSE

I am drinking a coffee next to the table, I have the computer open and occasionally I type a little. I needed to heal the blisters of my feet, since the least touch under the bandages bothers me. It is midday, and some children's shouts are heard in the square games; now I hear the barking of two dogs that live in the street. Behind the window, the sky is grey, completely covered by a uniform cloud layer. I have the feeling that it will rain, despite the heat that has occurred in the last days. If it rained, I would go out to get wet as we did with my father: we saw the rain coming, he took my hand and we ran to come back soaked, dripping, to change our clothes, our shoes and to turn on the stove.

Some days, with the hope that it would rain, he, when coming back from his work, added a kind of doughnut to the purchase of bread. If it did not rain, they remained there pending. If the downpour came, we prepared them. He let me stir the pot of the molasses with sugar while he stirred the dough. The kitchen was impregnated with the smell of boiling oil and then we sat to eat them by the window from where we looked at the rain. One day we went out to the courtyard with our dishes overflowing with molasses and Chilean doughnuts. We opened the garage doors, and we settled under its roof to look at the water flowing down the street. I remember the rain's blowing and the agreeable savor of the pumpkin dough on my palate. It was the day when I had obtained a seven in the math test. Only seven in my school career.

“You will be engineer” – he managed to tell me and suddenly we had to stand up and remove our chairs: the bumper of my mom’s car was coming in the garage...

In this moment, I hear the front door close, and I hear someone go up the ladder.

“Excuse me for bothering you. An ugly day this, no?”

I invite her to come in, but she refuses. She speaks to me standing on the lintel.

“Look, the former tenant, the writer I told you about, do you remember? has come several times. He tells me that he left some pages here, possibly in the wardrobe.

Have you found them by chance?”

‘You can be very bad if you want’, I remember hearing from my singing friend, my deceased friend: it is true. In this occasion I want to be bad. I want to hide that tenebrous, disagreeable story that I would have preferred not to read.

## IN THE SAME

In my bag I carry the notes just taken in the chapel of the old Saint Thomas Hospital in Baquedano Street. I had arranged to meet the woman who guides the visit. A Columbian about fifty years old, with nice features, small and well-done body, hair disheveled like her gestures and movements. Not without reason.

While we observed the tombs of the benefactors of the place, she told me between respectful whispers and nervous laughter that, as sociologist dedicated to coaching, in Colombia she went direct to the afterlife with an empty stomach.

“Not like Don José Tomás and Doña Carmen” – she added reading the plaques with evident irony.

I laughed; I liked the woman. I got curious to know her better. We were at closing time of the church:

“I invite you to a coffee or a beer” – I told her. Without answering me, she asked me to put my name and a comment in the guestbook. She adjusted her hairstyle; she took the keys.

“Look... in this moment I cannot, I must create income the twenty-four hours of the day. I work as correspondent of a Children’s Story Box: I monitor a thesis of master’s

in psychology. I am looking for any kind of job related to letters that will give me a few pesos. I am also correcting a novel..."

I was speechless. How could somebody do so many things simultaneously, I think now while I walk toward downtown with the notes of the interview, as I said, and my cellphone rings.

"We must talk" – I hear the irritated, imperious tone of the voice of my children's dad and puts me in a bad mood.

"We must...?"

"Yes, you and I must talk. It is not possible that you close this way twenty years of marriage, without a...credible... explanation, we have been a couple...we have children"

"We were" – I point out.

"Are you in a bad moment... do you prefer to speak later? – he changes the tone. This incertitude... of not knowing what is going to happen with us... you left your clothes..."

"It's all over between us... as I told you the first day, I have told you and I tell you again" – I cut the call, and I get a sigh.

I made efforts to recover my love for him, months trying and nothing, emptiness, there was nothing to do but go away and leave him.

I look up toward the almost deserted square at this hour, it's seven o'clock in the evening. Days ago, I noticed the sign 'happy hours' in La Candela of Serrano Street and I am on my way there. The luminaries are just being turned on, there are still colorful remnants of a warm sunset, I am dressed in a loose skirt reaching my ankles, I like feeling the air entering my legs every time I take a step. I'm not wearing stockings, only a pair of short socks inside a very comfortable pair of sneakers. I preferred to leave my boots, after that long walk through Olmué, whose memory stirs everything in me.

I sit at a table on the terrace, and I think: I am happy alone. I've gone to bed with a Haitian immigrant... without having crossed a word with him, I have had a good time, I do not want to speak, nor clarify anything with my children's father, I am in the

same, with the same need of living alone.

### SEATED UNDER A TREE

From here I can see the movements of the leaf sweeper and the pedestrians crossing the square. We agreed to talk with my son. He has already called me several times and for distinct reasons (I am in an interview, he has a test the next day, I am going out of the bank, his line is occupied...) our conversations didn't work out. This time, however, he tells me that it is for something special. I predispose myself to receive a sermon of him referring to my departure from the house. Since he was truly little he was judgmental and serious. Quite sullen too, contrary to her sister. With my daughter we used to laugh and imitate his sententious phrases, said with solemnity. During his university life the serious streak has left space for certain tenderness (for the animals, for us his family, for his friends, even for humanity in general). He may have taken his dad's side now and if it is not that special point to talk, I am fearing that he will announce to me that he enlisted in some crusade and my cellphone rings.

"Mom, I don't think you have been unveiled for me, you are not of those moms and that is why I tell you just like this that I got pregnant, and I want to have the baby."

"You got what...?" – I think I heard wrong.

"My couple of a few months ago got pregnant, I am sorry for the triviality, but it is so. The original, if the matter can have something of original, is that she does not want to continue with the pregnancy, and I do."

"Does she not...?"

"She is particularly good at what she studies, she is not willing to postpone courses and those things, so I have told her that she lends me her uterus and I take charge from the first day, what do you think?"

"What do I think about it? If you have already decided...!"

"Yes, I am so, so sure of wanting it, that..."

"You cannot even imagine that it can be any other way"

"That is right!"

"You know you can manage everything, the studies, the baby and... The maintenance of both."

"Just for curiosity, how would you do that...?"

"I spoke with my dad. After a couple of nags and sighs, you know him, he confirmed to me that he would maintain me until I finished the career, but without extras."

"And there will be an extra."

"Yes. But besides the childbirth (for which I have my holidays savings), the diapers, the feeding bottle and..."

"The caring, the medical consultations, not to mention the fact that he can get ill, and you might not to be able to study... go anywhere..."

"Yes, all that and maybe something else."

"Mm... I have the impression that nothing escapes you."

"It is so."

"It's not that you want my opinion... then."

"No. But I wanted to tell you, although I know you will hate me for making you a grandmother so young."

"That's true."

"You don't have to play 'grandmother' – he spells."

"You will not need it either..."

"No."

"Don't you think that you could be overestimating a little... your 'baby', as you say?"

"I don't understand you."

"You imagine that he will be a clone of your person, and it may not be so."

"Then I will see what I do."

"I guess it will have to be more like that."

"Were we very different to what you hoped?"

"You...? Not really. The distinct from what I imagined was me."

"After twenty years of being the one you hoped to be."

"Mm...it's true" – we both pause. I am stunned by the news; I only concentrate on not thinking in anything.

"I have talked about it a lot with my sister...we spoke about you, of the very pending you were when we were little, although you worked hard, the nonsense the three of us made, well, I less, I was the serious, the little old man" – he laughs a little.

"You are still the same."

"No!"

"If you say so..."

"Mom, I know that I leave you stuck with the news. I tell you because I had to do it. Thousands of children are born in the world each minute, and this will be one more..."

"Are you sure that..."

"You made me so: sure."

"Rather, you were born so. With a frown since you arrived."

"So much?"

"As it is."

"Mom, let us leave the issue of the baby just like that."

"Yes, better..." - I sigh somewhat relieved.

"Let's move on to something else, you don't want to give your address but tell me how the place is where you live. You work as journalist... and...?"

"I live in a small town...village. I am near a square and downtown. I move in between about three blocks. I have everything in this quadrant. "

"It sounds well!"

"I am fine. And... for when you expect...?"

"Eight more months."

"And what does her family say?"

"They do not know and won't know. They live in the south. It is usual that in holidays she does not visit them..."

"Mom do not get upset for my dad; I know that he calls you. He wants to bring you back or he wants that you give a more definitive cut for him, let us say...to know what to expect. But don't you worry if you don't want to worry...he will be fine."

"Thanks!"

"Why..."

“For your permission.”

“Without irony, he is fine and will become accustomed.”

“Have you been to Grandpa’s? How is he? Didn’t he say anything because you went away from, you know? I have thought that I’m a lot like him.”

## IN TRANSIT

Today, Monday I reserved an hour for waxing at ten o’clock. I have finished my cereals accompanied by fruit and natural yogurt, now I add to the rich breakfast some toast with butter and honey, besides a good coffee. With the savor of the honey still in my mouth, I go to the shower. The screen is a bit clogged with tartar pebbles, but I haven’t felt like opening it, so I turn and turn in search of the stream to let the soap drip off. I feel a shiver of pleasure when the warm water hits my skin and goes down my back and my breasts. I use a natural soap that smells of cinnamon that I bought in the fair installed at the pergola of the square last Sunday.

“The skin is something we must take care of...” - began his speech the young man who sold it to me. He was wearing a white apron, had his hair fashionably combed, disheveled at the nape and very short at the sides of his ears, in one of which he had a very little earring. He possessed a raspy voice that was a pleasure to hear: a wonderful seller, as I told him. He smiled with distrust; he was not the type who receives well a compliment, (if he) knew that now the soft smell of cinnamon that my body gives off when I dry it evokes his speech and his voice. I spray cologne on my neck, behind my ears, and only a pinch of cream in my legs and arms, pinch that will disappear with the wax. I wear my long and loose skirt; I do not like the contact of the skin against the trousers after waxing. I close the door and go out to a sky of restless and round-headed clouds. The dogs get agitated as if I were to invite them. I stop for a second, I take a deep breath of air this new day: I have three alternatives of route to arrive where I am going. I avoid that of the right: I would pass by the bus terminal, and I could meet him. The one on the left opens a little in another direction and drives me away. Once again, I cross the square diagonally in the middle of the trees. The young sweeper places a bag in a trash can and is about to do the same



with another, I wave my hand to her, although I don't know her. She raises her hand and smiles. Further on, the craft stalls are closed, I cross Riquelme and face the first kiosk followed by the familiar line of people on hold. I see the milkmaid passing over her light blue bicycle leaving a perfume aura. A cold wind comes from the west. I press the bag against my body. It is an embroidered cloth backpack that I have kept since my adolescence and that now I like to use. No more purses, I left them all behind.

I arrive to Serrano, the woman of the flowers, that who has squirrel face, is also not settled in yet. The man of the kiosk of the middle is in preparations to open, combining the newspapers taking them from the piles put over the cement of the sidewalk. I cross Urmeneta when the lady who sells fresh cheese gets off the bus in the middle of the street. I climb a narrow wooden ladder and enter the hair removal center, whose door is hermetically closed. Two people are also waiting, we look at each other. One of them, a woman about sixty years old, walks anxiously.

"It is the ultimate... why do they give appointments" – she claims and looks at the watch.

It's ten nails in mine, I think I will have to wait more than two hours for the two previous people to be attended, I better go down for a magazine or go for a walk. Meanwhile, it's already ten past fifteen, the young woman in charge arrives calmly. She looks at the clock on the wall, brings a stool closer and turns it back before the astonished look of the woman in her sixties, but the young woman follows undeterred her routine: she opens the padlock, unfolds the two doors, turns the radio on, hangs her bag from the back of the chair and raises an icy look toward us. I go calmly through Urmeneta in direction to Prat Street only to greet the woman of the kiosk (the mother of the couple of young people who help her), but before that, I go into a smelly and narrow passage where there are several stores. I raise my eyes to the second floor from where a song comes:

"Sa - ta – na má" – one, two, three and many times until I come back to Urmeneta sidewalk. I keep going and arrive to Condell to the Italian warehouse. Nobody had talked to me about an old man and his son attending this old place with long tables

of worn wood and peeling walls where shelves with items from who knows what era climb up.

“Were you looking for something special?” – I hear the voice of the old man, and the son shouts with a shrill voice:

“Can’t you see she’s just snooping, Dad?”

#### AT THE PIZZA RESTAURANT

This Sunday, not wanting to cook for me, I look in internet for a place where to have lunch and I discover that a few blocks from where I’m located there is a new pizza restaurant, the Wagner, of Ramón de la Cerda Street. Wagner, I do not remember, poet, painter, or musician? The point is that I am here looking at the walls illustrated with figures and landscapes, at the typical portrait of a girl with big eyes and a man in white apron approaches, tells me that the owner of the restaurant is the painter, while he turns on the music equipment.

*Why am I going to speak / if you are not going to listen / Why, if you do not want / even to give me that place*

“Who is singing?” – I ask him

“Kevin Johansen – he adds and shows me a cd – he has very good themes, didn’t you know him?”

I order a pizza with palm hearts, capers and go out with it to the terrace, I can’t resist, I chew a piece before sitting down. I savor and listen to the lyrics of that Johansen song. I google him between pizza bites, and he turns out to be a sweet-looking Argentinian or did they photoshop it for fools like me who succumb to strangers?

So as not to meet the Haitian this morning I took a long walk around, because a few days ago I had seen him from a distance and without approaching, I had become paralyzed until he disappeared behind the door of the post office. Then I had fled at a trot, telling myself that the exercise would be good for me and so it was.

I drink a sip of white wine, I savor it, I have my eyes put on the trees of the square, the waiter comes to ask me if everything is alright. I breathe in the cool breeze and toast to my work: I have been congratulated for my chronicles. I have my public, they say, so this afternoon I'm going to review the notes of Saint Thomas Church, in which I will tell something about the nice Colombian: she would do very well as a bio dancer, I suddenly say to myself, and I laugh of my recent incursion.

The woman of the kiosk told me of a friend of her who was going to give a bio dance class in her house on the road to Pelumpén, near the slope.

"I recommend it to you, María, take note!" – she told me.

The house is perched on a small hill. As we were so few, the mother and the husband of the instructor were added. We formed in pairs. Without noticing, I was in front of the teacher's husband, who turned out to have a resemblance to the dad of my children. As we got closer, we moved away, his breath mingled with mine. I began to feel disgust, then repulsion; each time we had to touch each other, I opposed more resistance, to such an extent that the guy whispered to me with his eyes closed:

"Let yourself go..."

As soon as I heard this sentence, I rushed out to the street as fast as my five extra kilos allowed me and luckily a collective cab appeared.

#### AT THE EXIT FROM YOGA

It's already the third time I attend yoga classes (another information of my friend from the kiosk), there are some exercises that I cannot continue, and I drop down on the mat. The teacher encourages me to continue, and I escape from her gaze until the best part comes: lying on my back for long twenty minutes, during which I feel like a bottle whose gas was released. In which part of my body would such a tension be stored? The bad thing (in addition to my exercise aversion) is that yoga makes me hungry and along with the muscle loosening I start to imagine devouring a piece of cake or pie.

Today, when I leave yoga, I am going for a coffee in Moneglia and my cell phone rings: it's the father of my children, who has made a habit of calling me every day. Does he think that because of his constancy I will be delighted with him again? Doesn't he know that it's just the opposite and that (I repeat to him again) everything between us is closed?

"Only a coffee? We have chocolate cake..." - tells me the young waitress.

"I would love it, thanks, but... I can't!"

I take out my computer. I review without interest the note about some potters who live near the cemetery, the park of the crosses as the woman of the hens calls it, but I'm not able to concentrate. To the calls of my ex have been added those of my mom to blame me, giving long explanations with recrimination that sound like the screeching of a poorly tuned radio.

I look up and I am distracted by seeing a man alone reading by a table in the back, I think it's the same man who was talking with my landlady a few days ago. All of him is like a sharp knife. Now he stands up and apparently goes to the bathroom. Looking at his whole body I confirm that it is the same person, the one who is looking for the sheets of paper forgotten in my closet, the probable author of the story of the side road shrine and the clock smith, who seems to be going to the bathroom.

The front door creaks, I turn my head: it is the Colombian, that of the church of Saint Thomas Hospital. She observes the tables, while I hurriedly take a newspaper from the chair by my side, and I cover my face. The figure of the writer peeks from the corridor and the Colombian walks toward him. I remember having heard her say that she was looking for work in any profession related to the letters. He does not look at the type who gives work. Rather, they must have met each other... I have a fit of laughter. I am behind the journal pages: they seem in a hurry, restless. Why? Who knows where they are going on this cold morning, now that they are going out of the place.

"Just bring me the piece of chocolate cake... and another coffee – I ask the waitress I am sorry, do you know the persons who have just gone out..."

"I couldn't tell you; do you know them?" – she asks me, leaving my order on the table.

## ON THE MARGIN

Cell phone in hand, I begin to review, this not, this neither, this one for what... so I can discard: erase, eliminate. From the cell phone: yes. From the chip... also. I do not want to keep anything. I take note of the numbers of my two children and that of my dad's residence. No photo, no document. Just the three of them. I explained to the employee that I need to change the number of my cell phone. When seeing only my children and my dad on the contact list I am overcome with an overflow of tenderness towards my three chosen ones. I go out of the place feeling all the lightness that my body allows me. No more calls that I do not expect and I don't want to receive.

The yellow leaves of the trees scatter on the roadway with one or two plastic bags. I arrive at Palmira Romano where the buses are competing for space to overtake the garbage truck stopping at one side of the road.

"Cutie!" - I hear a laborer voice.

"The carrot is so good" – shouts another one followed of laughs. The noise of children at recess is heard from Waldorf School.

"It seems that I want milk!" – shouts a laborer.

The milkmaid on her blue bicycle crosses Palmira Romano and disappears in the direction of the hill. I go in to look at the new store I see. Colorful banners like those of the yoga room, plants, pictures, books. On the second floor, consultations of child and adult therapists, workshops, Bach flowers...

"To reserve an appointment with the therapist?" - I ask the young man who brings me the coffee.

"You should go to the second floor... I..."

Again, to go up! I prefer to focus on my work a couple of hours: I reorder my notes of the potters... a woman goes down the ladder and goes out of the place. Is she the one with the Bach flowers? I observe her walking away. Long loose hair, calm walk, a bag like mine... Meanwhile, I see a mail of Quillota Newspaper appear on my screen. They are interested in my chronicles... I do not need and I don't want more work. Why would I return to my previous life?

The people talk relaxed at this hour in the square. As I walk across it, I hear a loudspeaker with the voice of Paloma Mami

*Go on like this, go on like this... I like to be called mom*

The rhythm catches up with me and I do a few dance steps. The lyrics stick to me, I keep repeating 'go on like this, go on like this...' until coinciding with my landlady at the door. She looks nervous, almost obfuscated. She unleashes the dogs and approaches me in a confident tone.

"I'm sorry, I have wanted to ask you for days. There is a black...man, Haitian I think, who has already come several times. He stands on the front sidewalk and looks this way as if he were waiting for someone"

I feel a twinge between my legs. I raise my shoulders in silence and while going up the ladder I hear her exclaim:

"Ah! I was already telling my husband that he was not known to you. What a relief. We do not like the immigrants who come to take jobs from Chileans and less the..."

## ON THE WAY TO THE OFFICE

This morning of splendid sun I make a detour through the surrounding streets on the way to the office. I go down to a passage; I go back by the side of the Ferienheim and an old hatch that appears in the middle of the sidewalk surprises me. Does it belong to an old canal of the city? At the bottom of the lock, I observe a beer can and a candy packaging. The gate wheel is stuck by a chain with padlock in which a yellow graffiti was painted. I hear a door opening, an older man takes out a hose and stretches it to the soil around a tree, becoming hypnotized looking at the water. An intermittent bump in the roadway forces me to look around: it is the woman of the hens, that of the blue turban. She comes with a branch as a cane and at every step she slashes it on the cement. I greet her with enthusiasm, and she follows looking ahead as if she had not heard me.

Who I suppose is the old man's wife peeks through a window and tells her:

"No irrigation outside today. Today the yellow ones are coming!" –

I stop with an accelerated heart: the woman in yellow heels could be at the office. I do not want; I cannot meet her. I take my cell phone, and I remember that I have erased the contacts. I have not downloaded my email application to the phone either. I hurry the pace; I go to the first bench I find in the square and from there I write to the chief editor that I will take the two weeks we had talked about, to cover more fieldwork. I explain that I will go to Lliu-Lliu and Alvarado Creek. I close the computer and breathe calmly whereas the garbage truck comes to empty the containers in front of me. The driver parks it, activates the hopper and the garbage begins to be compacted producing a deafening sound.

#### IN THERAPY

I return to the banners' place. My friend from the kiosk recommended me the therapist of the Bach flowers. By my side, a woman with a girl about three years old waits to be attended, while Adele sings:

*Sometimes it lasts in love but sometimes it hurts instead...*

Why have I not looked for the Haitian if I really like him, what am I waiting to go for him...

"Raspberry, cottage cheese; cranberries..." – offers me the waiter.

What I want is to lose weight, I explain the angelical therapist.

"Are there flowers for that?"

"The Bach flowers themselves do not help to lose weight– she answers me with a soft voice – many believe it works like this..." - she stares at me with the sweetest face I have seen in some time. I sit restlessly in my chair. Through the window an elm tree with few leaves left is visible... once again the breeze takes them off and they fall. What is she waiting for to talk to me?

“Look – she starts addressing me informally – why do you not speak a little about you before we pass to the flowers...”

“Ah!... I dedicate myself to making chronicles for the local newspaper. I work much in the field, making interviews and those things...” - I got nervous; the words come out in jerks as if I were in an exam.

“And something in special that has happened to you recently? – she stands up and goes to her shelf. She takes a book, sits down, and continues... - a hard time with a relative... do you have children? How do you get along with them...”

“Very well! – I say, regaining calm – they study at the university and get along great.

“And with their dad, are you married, separated?” She drops the question while leafing through the book.

Is it important for losing weight that I say this? She stands up again, always looking at me, waiting for my answer. She goes to the windows, waits another couple of minutes that feel like hours and tells me that she will read me a brief text. I begin to hear a sweet singsong in which I try to concentrate and her figure, illuminated by the light of the window, is like the stamp of an angel. Very tall, blond, ethereal. Over a dress of pale-colored fabric, she wears a kind of flowery and vaporous chiffon coat, something I would not have thought of wearing. She is wearing ballet slippers. Where does she buy them? Her unusually shiny hair is light, slightly wavy... How good she looks!

“And... does this story tell you something...?”

“Eh... I’m sorry, I was not listening, I was distracted with...” -

“Do you usually get distracted?” – she asks me with that kindness of hers that begins to exasperate me.

*I was wondering if after all these...*

I hear Adele’s voice with my little bottle of drops in my bag.

A HIGH SCHOOL FRIEND



We studied together since elementary school. We, her classmates, fought her, because she was very silent and serious, besides, we were annoyed by her good grades. We called her the philosopher the day that she opened her mouth for the first time. It was a warm afternoon, we were dazed with sleep waiting to rush out to the beach, we were in philosophy class and suddenly, we heard her opinions about a Greek of the antiquity whose name I don't remember. Afterwards, we discovered that she already had sex with her boyfriend and that she occasionally aspired rattles. Thus, we quickly integrated her into the beach group. I met her later at the faculty of letters, we got together to talk between classes. Now she lives in Santiago, she sent me an email, telling me that she comes to the region. We will meet in Quilpué.

I recognize from far away her mouse face and hands. Her movements as electric shocks. We embrace each other for a long time, looking at each other and laughing, in the middle of the mob. From a loudspeaker I can hear:

*I am not the one that you are imagining...*

We are hungry, so we order ravioli and a Malbec that I savor while she tells me of her work at the university.

"The other day I felt like a pupil and 'evaluated' again. How disagreeable it is!" – I comment to her.

"Yes, being pupil, what a theme! You, evaluated...in what situation?"

"I went to see a therapist of Bach flowers to lose weight. My clothes do not cross me" – I answer, and I mute, because the ravioli arrive.

"To lose weight... - she tells me between bites – I study the macho aesthetics..."

"Feminist?"-I ask to her.

"Rather fundamentalist – she starts laughing – In the background, from a theoretical point of view I study the traditional gender codes."

"I look at myself in the mirror, I don't like me; my clothes don't fit, I don't want to buy others and that would be all."

“Yes, sure, but behind... - she takes a sip of wine – there is an answer to unconscious impulses... are you working in local journalism now. The last time we saw each other... a year ago I think, you were fashion editor-in-chief, you had people in your charge, many hustle and bustle, mm... how is your work now?”

“I write chronicles for the weekly newspaper of a... city town.”

“You left the magazine, your position, you don’t want to buy clothes... What a change!”

“Yes”

“And have the changes worked for you?”

“Yes... except for the five kilos of surplus” – I smile and observe her in silence, some lines start to get marked in her elongated face.

“And you... still alone, single as always for that other theory of better not having children?”

“Single, without children... yes. Although not alone.”

“Tell me! I do not imagine two philosophers in bed...”

“Philosophers? No! Anything but a colleague. The truth, strangers who come and go. Nobody in special. Only encounters...” - she adds with a hint of nostalgia, and I remember that she was melancholic and used to hear Argentinian sambas, while we did not leave Michael Jackson.

“I hooked up with a Haitian... - I tell her unexpectedly... She looks at me with wide open eyes. – He is in his twenties and doesn’t speak Spanish.”

“How romantic!”

“That’s why I must lose weight!”

We are in the middle of some chestnuts in syrup. My friend asked me about my children and I hear myself telling her: - ‘everything okay’. She checks the time because she must go, we say goodbye, and I stay with the feeling of emptiness that lasts even after I arrive at my house.

## AT THE BAKERY

The drops of Bach flowers begin to provoke changes in me. The therapist explained to me that, if they have the desired effect, at the beginning the anxiety for eating

sweets will increase and then a balance will come. It sounded wonderful. But now I die for eating salty dough and under a fiery light blue sky I let myself be carried to Baeza Bakery, in Prat Street.

“Do you want them passed in cane syrup or dry; to serve or to take away?”

I sit down under the shadow of a bougainvillea with my packet of dry Chilean doughnuts. How I enjoy the crunch of the dough against my palate! I take my tablet out. Between chewing and chewing I review the last notes collected in Alvarado Creek but I am very uncomfortable, like in a yoga position. The teacher has told me that I must do the exercises, demanding more to my body, I feel that I demand it at maximum. Impossible to arrive with my hands or my feet where she asks me. During the last class I positioned myself by the door, as far as possible from her, but her look got there: - Stretch a little more, open, you can as much as possible... I close the computer and opt for savoring my crunching doughnut with the exact quantity of pumpkin...

I retain the last piece of dough in my mouth, and I go for a walk. A few days ago, I was told of the brewery. I take O'Higgins Street and arrive to San Martín, from where I see the enormous construction. Heavy and imponent, of faded green color, it embraces one block and more. It is magnificent, huge. A hundred years ago, its high chimneys must have been a reference point. Today they leave me speechless, and I choose to walk the streets of the neighborhood, constructed for its workers. I go through the narrow passages. I smell lunches in preparation and as I advance, I hear the radio programs, children voices, rumor of conversations.

Suddenly, a door opened half a block away, ahead of me. Is he, the Haitian, who goes out and begins to walk quickly, turning his back on me? I hurry up, try to call him. I don't know his name. I keep hurrying after his long strides. I take one of the lateral passages, I begin to run, the bag comes off my shoulder. His figure goes now toward a waste ground. Someone calls me from behind. I turn around: a boy waves at me with something in his hand.

I look ahead; I still can see him. I go back, the boy gives me my notebook and I'm back on track with my career. The Haitian is going to disappear among some bushes. Where is he going, what will he do there? Something makes him stop, he turns

around and looks toward where I am running... it's not him. I remain paralyzed, my heart about to burst, my eyes placed on the enormous factory with its peeling wall, broken and closed windows.

## AMONG KIOSKS

"I have another good information for you – glows me with a smile the now friend of the kiosk – in the other Limache, an expert in magnets. She tells me that the magnets align the chakras – she warns me looking at me sideways – Do you have where to take note?" I take note, It can be that the magnets help with the kilos besides I'm fed up with yoga classes and I forget to take the drops of Bach flowers.

"By the way, I was told that you escaped from bio dance... what happened to you?" "I got the... you know, in the middle of the session" – I lie and tell her to change the subject that I bought an old bicycle.

I found a blue Oxford in a garage sale. It even had the tires inflated and I pedaled back. My landlady looked at me in horror. It is impossible to leave it in the yard. So, I take it up to my attic and leave it lying against the closet.

I am going to the Ferienheim to work on my notes on Alvarado Creek bakery. I make a detour like the pair of clouds that in this moment seem to chase each other on the sky, I get to the hardware store to get some LED bulbs, I cross the avenue, I observe the line of persons by the kiosk of the square and walk under the shadow of the trees until I come across some little colored flags, like those of the flower therapy coffee. A manicure and nail salon has been opened: the owner, a Venezuelan woman explains to me that she can make me beautiful nails, painting on the enamel whatever I choose.

"The enamel I would put you lasts intact at least three months" – she takes some brochures out of the drawer; she shows me photos and we arrange an appointment. It is already midday when I get to the Ferienheim: I place myself next to the same table as the previous time when they were preparing a wedding, and I met my friend of the time when my son was a baby. Today the gardener cuts the meadow. Amidst the smell of grass, I spot a group of elderly women entering. They are all in their eighties. They come to sit at a long table next to me. They come from the same high

school class, tells one of them. For a few minutes, they lower their tone, their faces become serious, suddenly someone makes a joke, and the revelry continues in a loud voice. Meanwhile, I open my screen where there appears again an email from Quillota Newspaper and another from my boss remembering me of my presential work at the office. I avoid a direct answer and assure him that today I will send my new chronicle, set in Alvarado Creek.

“Shall I bring you a bee sting cake as well?” – asks me the waitress leaving my coffee. It whets my appetite, but I reject the proposal and review my notes.

The octogenarians here at the Ferienheim sing happy birthday to one of the attendants. The head of the table stands up and begins a speech interrupted by laughter and shouts. A general laughter comes.

*Because she is a good companion, and nobody can deny it...*

Some of them do not remember the letter of the song, look at their friends cluelessly and repeat afterwards. I concentrate on my notes, I describe the stand of the baker: her red and white apron, her old oven, the fan to keep the flies away.

“Mamy, you still do not know how to do the calculation” - tells her a daughter laughing when the baker asks her for help with an addition.

Meanwhile, in the Ferienheim, the octogenarians begin to say goodbye; lengthening the moment one of them stealthily takes the rest of a forgotten sandwich. She wraps it carefully with a napkin and puts it in her bag.

“While they don’ take us to the old people’s home...” - says the celebrated and they go out.

## AT THE EXIT OF THE MANICURE

I have just finally ended that chronicle of the baker. I am walking contemplating my enameled nails on which some autumn leaves were painted. I inherited them from my mom, because the ones of father are little and broad. In fact, everything in him is tight, thick and rather short. It’s difficult for me to understand how my mom, a woman of imponent body, fell in love with him. They formed an unequal couple, he

was chubby and dark like a potato and she a flowering bush. The young potato and corn strolling around as I walk now through this tree-lined street.

The evening is warm, there is a warm breeze, the lights have been turned on and I hear the distant murmur of a voice singing. A man passes by my side, from the square I see the writer coming, that lanky and stooped character, who I spotted at the Moneglia a few days ago and who got together with the Colombian of Saint Thomas Church. This time he approaches me. He cuts me off.

“I’m sorry, I’ve been wanting to talk to you for a few days... - he tells me with a very low tone of voice that surprises me— It turns out that I lived where you live now. I am a writer, and I am sure that I forgot in the wardrobe of that apartment some typewritten sheets... of which I did not save copies...”

In a second that horrible story about the clock smith and his daughter crosses my mind, then the image of the house in Olmué where I was with the Haitian...

“I’m sorry, I don’t know what you are talking about...” - I manage to answer, I step aside and quicken my step. But what has he thought, what a nasty guy, to cut me off!

## AT FAMILY REUNION

We agree to meet in Viña del Mar. It’s my forty-fourth birthday and I am having lunch with my children. While we consume a pisco sour and some clams with parmesan, a seafood quiche and two bottles of Syrah, my daughter talks about her progress in the university and my son about his future with the baby who will arrive next summer, at the beginning of his holidays...

“It arrives in the best moment” – he comments.

“Right from the start” – adds my daughter. She is sure that it will be a boy.

“You do not seem very enthusiastic – he tells me – You do not want to be grandmother, I am sorry.”

“No! I am getting used to the idea, although...”

“Mom! – you will go crazy when you see it – she interrupts me – remember how you like babies, I have seen it...” - she continues narrating with enthusiasm our encounters with any baby.

“Stop talking so much!” – he makes her shut up and I remember when they were children and the same happened: she talked non-stop until he gave her a shout or hit her in order that she would be silent. Now I look at them and it never ceases to make me proud that both are going to be journalists like me, even being so different.

I think: she probably will dedicate herself to fashion and he will be a journalist without frontiers, waving a flag in the fight to make visible the injustice of the world, as I have heard him saying more than once very serious. The waiter brings us the dessert and I come back to reality with my eyes over a tempting meringue cake with lucuma. With the ingested alcohol and sweets, we become very cheerful and communicative.

“Mom, have you felt alone?” – she suddenly asks me.

“I? No!” - My son looks at me with a doubtful face.

“Does work keep you so busy?” - he asks me.

“No, my work is noticeably light. I go to interviews, I gather material, I take notes, I pass a couple of hours per week in the office and anywhere, my fingers over the keyboard, lengthen, shorten, that which I like and entertains me, and the rest I’m lazy, enjoying my time.”

“¿Have you never been tempted to write a story or something like that?” - My son surprises me with his question.

“No, never. I would have no idea of how to do it, I don’ t have the will either, less the perseverance... I let things go as I wish.”

“But...” - he begins.

“Are you going to ask her why she doesn’t dedicate herself to something more serious? Mom is not like you. She doesn’t have conflict either with justice nor with poverty nor...”

“I’m very well as a chronist – I interrupt her, and I address him – are you tempted to write stories?” He does not take the hint, and she begins to talk to me about their father. She tells me that he remains in his same position in charge of the automotive company, that a new model arrived that has him very busy, according to what he tells her, appointments with the press, presentations...

“It is admirable how your dad being so demure can go out of his... shell, and show himself, what he does very well otherwise.”

“Dad demure” – answers my daughter and exchanges a glance with my son.

“Shall we tell her?” – they burst out laughing.

“Are you prepared to know about dad?” – asks me my daughter with an obvious desire to gossip. My son puts his hand in her arm and tells her that she better not. She answers that she is asking me and that she knows that I will be sincere. He raises his hands and his shoulders as a sign of disengagement.

“The headlines are: first we came across a gun of his – she opens her eyes with the novelty – then we knew about a detective – she tilts her head – and finally ‘she’ appeared.”

“She?” – I ask.

“She” – my son confirms me.

“I don’t understand the sequence, I need details” – I add following the game.

“Details- answers my son– he wanted to kill himself for you, for not being able to



see you; for not knowing where you were, if you would return or not and because life without you had ended for him.”

“No really suicidal person announces his suicide beforehand” - I interrupt.

“We thought so when he let us know, although we begged him to see a therapist. He obeyed us. The antidepressant he was taking... says my daughter.”

“Was... did he stop taking it?” – I ask.

“Let us finish – he adds – He was taking the antidepressant when he hired the detective who found you.”

“I do not like that detail”

“Then ‘she’ crossed his path and made him forget about everything” – adds my daughter quickly with a triumphant smile.

“Who would be ‘she’?” – I ask.

“The same who invited him to dance in my graduation, do you remember...”

“That harpy!” – it comes from my soul.

“That harpy” – confirms my son.

## ON BYCICLE

I put on my tracksuit and grab my bicycle. I look at both sides of the street, I decide to go in a south direction. A neighbor who sweeps the sidewalk stops to look at me while I avoid her broom. I cross Caupolicán, approach the brook and as I pedal more safely, I feel my legs full of energy. I breathe as I did as a child when my dad ran by my side, and I pedaled quickly for him not to reach me. I end up in a stretch of land

by the crook. My pedaling starts to wobble. I stop on the gravel road and walk throwing the bike over the handlebars. From among the bushes, I see appearing the woman of the hens with her blue turban, I pass by her side, we look at each other and now is she who recognizes me:

“Hollow! – she tells me- I am very sad; five hens went to Las Cruces farm.” I look at the bushes from where she has gone out...

“No, not there! – she protests. I took them to Las Cruces, I tell you. But there they do not give you anything...” - she goes again to the bushes. I ride the bicycle again, I pedal with strength, I go up to the pavement, I pass by the gate in whose lock I can see garbage, I am arriving to the corner, I pedal accelerated, the brakes do not answer me, I scratch the road with my sneakers. I fall to the ground: in front of me a red van passes at full speed.

I stand up, from which I was saved! I pedal toward the bicycle workshop of Urmeneta Avenue. I make a long detour for not to pass by the bus terminal where I could meet him. I go very slow and as I advance, I hear

*I feel your fever from miles around...*

The temperature has increased, I take off the tracksuit jacket. I'm wearing a loose T-shirt and no bra; I feel very comfortable:

*Just kiss me baby and tell me twice...*

“It doesn't break” – I explain the owner of the store, whose head peeks out from between tires and accessories hanging from a wire. He pronounces a phrase that I can't hear over Michael Jackson voice.

“You must leave it to me” - he repeats and throwing himself toward the back of the room, he shouts again:

“Hello!” - From inside the store, I see a figure coming. My heart starts to race. What

is he doing here? Indeed, it's him this time. But I thought he was in...! I feel my pelvis detaching from my hips. That an orifice enlarges between my legs, an orifice that sucks me my navel. He approaches, takes the bicycle, looks for my eyes.

"Check the brakes" – shouts him the owner indicating them, he nods and disappears with my bicycle through a dark corridor.

"Can I wait for it... see it, I mean, to see what they do to it?"

"To see it, what do you want to see" – shouts me the man and raises his shoulders. I raise mine and, in a hurry, I enter through the same corridor full of tens of bicycles piled up. There is barely any space to advance. The jacket I am wearing around my waist gets tangled with a pedal, I let it go, I stain my pants when I rub them in the oil from a chain, I smell humidity, dirt, my legs weaken when I reach a dark room. He turns his back on me, I clear my throat. He turns around, he's surprised, comes toward me with all his calm, he embraces me. His hands caress my hair while I hear:

*The way you make me feel, you really turn me on*

## BIOMAGNETISM

A woman of imperturbable face opens the door. Her lips barely move when speaking, the same as her eyes. She is short in stature, limps on the right leg, she tells me where to leave my bicycle among the construction materials we must sort out.

"My daughter is coming... this will be her house" – she explains me without looking at me.

We go into a waiting room and then we pass to an adjacent space, where there is a high stretcher to which I climb through a little wooden ladder. She prepares something that I cannot see, I look at the walls in which posters of landscapes with

much green and falling waters are hung.

“Pain in any part of your body?” - I hear her flat voice, without intonation.

“No.”

“Good. I will distribute the magnets. Sure, that there is nothing in special?”

“I don’t understand you” - I say raising my head and I look for her eyes that I do not find.

“What made you come?”

“I gained weight, and I want to low it.”

“You feel bad like this...”

“No.”

“You don’t like your body then.”

“The clothes don’t cross me.”

“Good, I understand” – she tells me in that neutral tone. She begins to put me the magnets very softly on the legs, the pelvis, the waist, the breast, the throat, the forehead...

“I will add a magnet to your right ear. If you need something call” - She covers me with a thin blanket, and I begin to hear:

*Sa-ta-na-má. Sa-ta-na-má. Sa-ta-na-má. Sa...*

Waves of heat run through my body, they come and go. I feel a slight pulse in the ear of the magnet. I move my head a little and the magnet hits the floor. The door is immediately opened

“You are restless. The magnets can’t damage you. Let yourself be cured” – she begs me. She picks up the magnet, puts it again by the ear and goes out silently.

I feel rather good. No restlessness, rather placidity. No case, the magnet of the ear falls to the floor again and she enters again. This time she stops by my side. She observes me.

“Close your eyes” – she whispers to me.

Her look disturbs me. The magnets increase their energy, and the waves of heat go and come with more celerity through all my body. I open an eye: she is still there observing me. I close it. I hear her exploring the stretcher and stopping in front of my right ear.

“It’s enough for this first time” - She begins to take off the magnets and, in all calm, she returns them to their individual cases.

“How do you feel? – she approaches me from the right side - did you know that your right ear moves, did you play as kid to move the ears...?”

“Yes” – I answer in surprise.

“With whom? “

“With my dad”. She remains silent while I observe the white sky of the room.

“Have you heard of family constellations? -Her eyes are lost on the wall– There are different forms. I recommend you constellate... search, there are very good constellators, do it. It will help you. You can sit.”

I touch my right ear, and I feel it warm. I touch the left, lukewarm. I return with my hand to the right and the image of my dad moving his ears at full speed comes to my memory. He laughs loudly. I must have four or five years.

“I suggest you return the next week, with six sessions will be enough.” I give her the

five thousand pesos banknote that she picks with her two extended hands as if she was praying and makes me a little reverence.

#### ON THE CELL PHONE WITH MY SON

I have come to sit on a bench in the square to talk with my son. I look for the young sweeper that I have seen other days, and I realize the time, it's after six o'clock; at this hour I've seen her moving toward Palmina Romano. Another immigrant who lives far and returns walking to her rented room? A couple of times we have crossed at the greengrocery. In both opportunities I have seen her digging in the lettuce pile. A lettuce, which was her purchase. Shall that be her lunch, shall she reserve her salary to send it to the family?

I answer my son's call. As always, he goes directly to the point. He asks me if I authorize him to use "my" story with his dad.

"Gun, detective, she" – he summarizes me.

"That invention of yours is not my story, but it sounds well, although not very original" – I answer him.

He explains to me that a story contest has been opened at the faculty and he wants to contest. He has been reading much Roberto Ampuero and believes to have learned from his way of writing. He tells me that his detective will be called Hidelfonso Pedigí instead of Cayetano Brulé, which is the name of that of Ampuero, he clarifies me.

"Hidelfonso Pedigí? I start laughing and my son gets angry. I hear him snorting, preparing for the attack. Are you going to copy that... Cayetano... Ampuero, then?"

"Pedigí, not Ampuero. I am going to do a remake" – he returns to the original serious tone.

"It does not matter to me that you use that invention of yours or any other related to me. It was not necessary that you asked me, but well, you are like that."

"Thanks, I see that you still think that it was an invention what we told you..."

"Let us see... I am curious. If it is a police story... there will be a murder, I suppose, who kills whom in your...?"

"I prefer not to tell you. I am going to win the contest; the story will be published and then you will know."

"It's fine... and only for – supposedly – being I part of the story, you put your dad as victim or as villain?"

"Both"

"And... her?"

I start laughing while he remains silent. I go on laughing, the image of the game of the ears comes to me. "Did you know that with my dad we played to move the ears?"

"With the grandfather? I don't imagine him in that."

"Yes, with him... We put ourselves one next to the other and the game consisted in hearing in your ear the movement of the other's ear."

"Very rare the game" – he answers with his usual seriousness.

"Your grandfather laughed loudly when I made it."

"The grandfather laughing... and... loudly: have you dreamed it?"

"No, I see him!"

"When you go to visit him, ask him; I am sure that you invented it."

"You're right, it's very weird. In fact, now that you say it, I think I've seen him laughing only when we played to the ear."

"But... how many years ago, mom?"

"I should have to take out the account... We were living in a two-story house; we sat on a tier of the stairs and began with the nonsense of the ears. I must have been at most five or six years old."

"You were a child" -he answers me in a doubtful tone.

"And how did you remember?"

"That's another story."

## AT THE BUS STOP

Since my children invented that my husband knows where I live, I am looking for another place. Nothing ties me the apartment where I live now. I asked my kiosk's friend for some housing information and she talked about some cabins in República Street. Shall it be true what she told me about their owner, that she is an interesting person? Anyway, she whetted my appetite for curiosity. I'm at the bus stop in Palmira

Romano waiting for the bus. I've been seated for ten minutes, and it has not come, but my cell phone rings: it's my daughter. Apparently, my children are back on my diary.

"Mommy, I have two significant news for you."

"Let's see."

"Guess..."

"Mm, you were appointed..."

"No, no. nothing...from the university."

"Your brother's baby is a girl."

"Neither."

"You are... I know, you are dating with..."

"Just that! I'm happy, mom. Happy"

"Tell me, tell me."

"First guess the second" - I hear her saying and the bus passes me by. I manage to stand up, extend my arm, the passengers look at me and the driver continues along.

"I have just lost a bus, tell me... better."

"Dad left the harpy... she is not so bad..."

"What do you mean is not?"

"I am getting to know her..."

"Are you getting to know her...? I don't understand anything!"

"It's the mom of my boyfriend! I'm sorry mommy, that's the way it is..."

"I will call you later. Another bus is coming, and I don't want to lose it."

My children seem determined to surprise me and sometimes (like now) they make me feel creeped out, I'm thinking when the garbage truck approaches the bus and the air is full of plastic bags that I see settle on the trees' branches.

By the gate and on the inside of the property where the interesting woman lives there is an enormous eucalyptus from which hangs a bell I ring.

"Come on, welcome!" – the afro mane of the interesting woman, graying, up to the waist. The wooden clogs on which her short hips and plump breasts are perched are not enough to raise her above one meter and fifty centimeters. I'm looking for what resembles her figure, and the image of the rhea comes to mind. Just so: she's like a



rhea with a woman's body, I laugh to myself. Construction enthusiast, pesos coming from outside, she tells me while we tour her farm, pesos she spends on new cabins. Each one of the six she possesses has a different and entertaining design for me. I like the transparent sky domo. We agree a monthly price and I leave to her chores (which I imagine interminable to maintain in order her terrain, as she calls it) when she invites me to a mate (south American tea).

We sit by a little round table at the exit of the domo. She runs to her house, hitting the clogs on the gravel trail, I fear more for what I would have to do in case she fell than for her integrity, but she returns fully intact with two mates made of pumpkin and their respective bulbs.

"I was some years living on the banks of the Paraná, what a wonderful river!"

"Really? How lucky to have been there, I answer to say something."

"Yes, I would be in my thirties, my husband was still alive. He was a good man, we were happy. Well, as happy as you can be as a couple..." -I'm silent with the bulb in my mouth.

"He left me a fortune. You know, I still remember him... in the nights... you understand me." I bow my head as a sign of understanding, her story makes me curious.

"We traveled a lot before the accident. I have pride in having been to five continents. Anyway, I think that you and I will get along well. You tell me that you work as a chronist? "

"Yes, local chronist."

"Well, I'm not here during the day, I go out early. I lead some foundations. I dedicate eight hours to each one. Environment: Monday; children's theater, Tuesday; neuroscience..."

"How interesting" – it comes out spontaneously and I laugh to myself.

"Yes, I couldn't be quiet. I know that others abuse my energy. I have plenty. As you see, you will be alone here. Occasionally you will meet Alfonso, my driver and how to say it... my... global assistant! He lives here around the corner. You will know him soon."

Under a grey sky, I return to Limache again, walking through República until Palmira Romano. It's a long walk. I'm enthusiastic about the change it will mean to me to live in this other Limache, the old, as it is called. I pass a little square, with a very high tree in the middle; on one side of it in an old house "A cardboard house", editorial, is read, I approach and discover another announcement: Lumbre Foundation

I arrive at the fire station, I pass the jail, I look at another bigger square with the usual fountain in the middle. In Palmira Romano I am so enthusiastic with my walk that I continue. I cross the bridge, take Caupolicán and remember to call my daughter.

"Now I can't," says her message. Then I remember the breaking news she has let me know: I don't suspect the cause of the breaking of her dad with the harpy. I imagined a relationship that could work rather well. The other aspect, that her boyfriend is her son, is that I leave it pending further information, although, what's the difference?

## IN TRANSIT

"Besides not letting me know on time you let me the bicycle..." - the landlady claims. Even though I'm paying her a month of grace for leaving the attic overnight, she does not understand. She insists that I should have notified her with thirty days of anticipation, as we had agreed.

"I leave the bicycle only until tomorrow" – I insist.

"That is what all say" – she adds contracting her lips.

I climb the scale. I feel urgency for leaving quickly this place. I take the suitcase, I take a last look at the games at the square, to the bus terminal, and to the trees. I'm saying goodbye to what? I enter, look at the papers over the table, I review them one by one, I go for the trash can, I throw most of it away and put the rest in my bag. I lay down on the bed.

They were good days of solitude. What new sound shall I find at the domo? I stand up, I comb, take the things from the bathroom, and close the suitcase. I am going to go out finally when I remember the damn story of the writer. I do not want to keep it. I do not want to leave it either in order that another finds it. I have put it somewhere,

I seek reluctant, I check the closet, the food shelf, turn over the garbage can. I move the sofa bed and behind the sheets of paper appear. I grab the bunch with the fingers, as if it were the tail of a dead mouse. I go to the dishwasher, light a match and approach it to it. While the sheets burn, I smile happily and the face of my friend who sang, telling me the wicked I can be, returns to my memory. Am I getting nostalgic? Is it the old age that's already coming? I never was of memories. What does it matter? The bicycle remains leaned against the wall. I close the door. A few drops start to fall.

### A COLD SUNDAY

The invitation arrived at the email: hike in Limache. Why not? It is a cold Sunday, good for hiking. We meet at the station. A journalist with a strange surname directs a group of about twenty people. She greets each person by his/her name. She is cheerly and lively like her blond hair. Her eyes flash affection and optimism. I am intrigued observing her: being a woman of my age, she retains a childlike manner, oscillating between innocence and game. She is a Rapunzel of Limache.

"There they are!" – she says suddenly in relief. The Colombian woman comes at a trot carrying the writer by the hand. They arrive out of breath, apologizing for the delay and Rapunzel begins her tour in the same train station, telling us that it was inaugurated in 1856, as a secondary station, although it had its own maintenance depot... Behind the other participants, my eyes feast on the beautiful hand-woven pink dress with broderie cuffs and collars that wears the Colombian, who seems very interested in observing what is showed to her. This time the writer is not wearing a tie; he wears his invariable and worn tweed jacket, to whose first button barely reaches the nape of her neck. You can see that she has a hold onto him. He doesn't stop looking at her and doesn't let go of her hand. We advance through Urmeneta, in front of "The Star" shoe store, we are informed of the Palestinian family that arrived to Limache in... and we direct ourselves toward Riquelme Street. Rapunzel stops in front of the building of Italian style, whose façade occupies a block

“Italian Masera family constructed...” between her phrases arrives José Luis Perales voice, I look for where it comes from, the waiter of the beer bar takes out tables and chairs to the terrace.

*Looking at your eyes I would swear...*

And I can't avoid remember him, the Haitian in red shirt, his hands over the table that day, the gesture he made for me to stay. Meanwhile Rapunzel invites us to visit the second floor of the Italian-style building. The members of the group climb the stairs one by one, from below I see their bodies in line. I am the last one. My turn comes to go up and my interest collapses, I do not want to know this old house anymore, nor continue alongside these people. I turn around and walk away, directing myself to the square pergola, which was my first operations center. I walk with new pretensions, as if I had taken off a thick jacket. Nothing ties me to anything. To confirm this certainty makes me move my arms as if I were flying. I feel full, happy. The cold wind strips the leaves of the trees. I cross with pedestrians who come warmly tucked up, while I am so comfortable with my thick jersey.

*Looking at your eyes I would swear...*

I take a seat on the bench, I stretch my legs, I breathe melancholy. A dog comes to smell my shoes, lifts its snout, looks at me waiting for a caress, moves the tail, opens its mouth and I sing to it: *it may be too late for tomorrow...*

The dog goes away when hearing a whistle, I follow it with my eyes, from the end of the trail, I see a couple coming. They walk slowly, casually, their bodies get closer, keeping the same cadence of movements. Both come dressed in black, although in his collar something red peeks, a simple colored spot within the dark tonality. I begin to see their faces. That of her is familiar to me, it could be the young woman who sweeps this square, I'm saying to myself, when I turn my eyes toward the face of the young man, and I recognize him. It is him. The Haitian in red shirt. They walk side by side, without touching, without talking, they pass in front of me cold and distant and they do not notice me. They go in their own world, their eyes looking at the front. I want to run, to embrace his back. To claim him... what? I stand up, it's very cold.

## AT THE DOLL'S HOUSE

With the arrival of winter, I have had a string of colds, I commented to my kiosk's friend.

"I have the solution... Maria, take note"

That's what I'm in now, here in Quilpué, in Blanco Encalada Street, next to the fence of this long and narrow site that ends in an old house. On my right, under a ruinous roof are hung dolls that look faded and dirty due to weather. One of them has a merry face; it's a black man who wears a red shirt, with checkered cuffs and collar, just like his pants. I go inside sorting through messy branches so as not to get them in my eyes. A group of hens cackle and peck the ground, two little and screaming dogs run toward me and behind them a stout woman, though agile, dressed in white and bare foot (we are in the middle of winter) peeks to see who is arriving.

"Come in!" she raises her head a little to greet me while with her big hands she cuts some branches, takes a chair, lifts it in the air and leans its back in a trunk.

"We will pass to the background" She indicates a doorway at the end of another room, from which a young man comes, with whom she talks about a music they search or play together, I cannot understand, he follows toward the grille door, and we go into the house.

"Wait for me here for a while"

I sit down in a rickety armchair covered with an old shawl. It is so dark that I'm slow to recognize the objects. On a table there is a turntable and, beyond, a radio of the fifties, of those with furniture of thin and open legs. The walls are upholstered with books that I imagine dusty and moth-eaten. I look up and other dolls appear before my eyes there, this time hanging from the ceiling beams.

The same woman returns ten minutes later and surprises me reading the spine of one of her books.

"My husband was a journalist; these were his books -she says seriously and indicates a door- that is the bathroom. The first session lasts 90 minutes" - she warns me.

When going out of the bathroom, I glimpse the kitchen: the pots held by hooks also hang from the ceiling. What shall she use to catch them from that height? I go into a

large room of two levels with a burning salamander. I have the feeling that the walls are of cardboard, that with the slightest friction will come crashing down.

“You can lie back over this carpet. I am going for the stones” – I watch the roof slabs about to fall.

“Stones” -I repeat .Nobody had told me about stones. Did she get confused?

“Yes – she answers me curtly – stones”

I sit cross-legged over the carpet. I’m ready for whatever comes, I say to myself, as long as the colds and other aches and pains pass. I observe that everything around me is worn, old. Over my head the loose vulcanite slab in the sky reveals a piece of the garret. I smell the blankets piled up by my side: clean smell. Is she who turns on music or is there someone else in the house?

*Ra ma da sa...sa se so...ang... Ra ma da sa*

As if she was carrying a feather cushion, she returns balancing an iron pot loaded with stones. She leaves it on the floor very softly and seats cross-legged by my side. “I have collected them from the mountain range. I’ll put them on after the massage, as a gift to give you energy” - she comments without fuss. She fills the pot with a boiling liquid that smells like eucalyptus leaves.

“The herbs I use are a mixture... - she settles in by bending her back forward – do you have pain in a specific part of your body...back, neck, limbs...?”

“I have colds lately” – I answer.

She presses her hands on my shoulders. The salamander snorts. A shiver runs through me. Shall I get another flu?

“You must take off your clothes, cover yourself with this and lie on your stomach”

I’m with my back uncovered; a white sheet covers me from my waist to my feet, which are still frozen.

“I have cold in my feet” – I say to her. She takes them, rubs them with energy, and covers them with a blanket.

“I will make you reiki another day”

I smell the vapor coming from the pot, a feeling of placidity comes to me. I could not be better, I sigh. Her hands perch now on my head. She presses and releases her open fingers over my braincase, her body moves together with her fingers, I hear her breath, her movements follow the rhythm of the air going in and out of her nose. Her hands pass behind my ears, they take them, and she goes down with her fingers up to my neck. She massages.

Her hands are a wonder of strength and exactitude. Suddenly I feel too tight oppression that is immediately relaxed. Her fingers arrive at my shoulders, run through my back. The glutes. What a shame to be with our cheeks in the air, but the placidity of my body is so much that I forget. Now she starts with my legs. How to avoid the tickles when she arrives to observe the side of my knees? She gently strokes my calves and hugs my feet.

“Turn around now.”

She applies her fingers to my forehead, brow, eyebrows. She stretches and picks up my cheeks, my nose, my lips, and my chin. Shall this work for the lines on my face that are starting to show? She descends to my neck. She breathes agitated, I perceive her effort by compressing and releasing, her arms and hands have an extraordinary strength. They could shatter me. We breathe in unison, I let myself be squashed, stretched, lifted, she plays with my arms, she leans against my waist, massaging my thighs up and down. As she descends, she leaves me with warm clothes that keep my body warm. She reaches my feet again and new movements agitate them, the heel, every finger.

I rest covered up to my nose. I feel my body descending and becoming lighter and lighter. Neither the collapsing roof nor the general ruin matters to me, only the feeling of my body. The first stone radiates heat on my nape. It's soft. Now her hands come to my forehead, they stretch and release, I get some knocks, and a stone is placed between my eyebrows.

“If you feel them very hot you let me know”

I am full of stones, one in each chakra as she says. Although she also adds others over my knots. Knots she has discovered in my body and that she will have to untie in the next sessions, she warns me.

“Now, rest. We will let the stones act for forty minutes; I’ll be right back”

I hear the creaking of the door through which I entered the room. The voice of the young man who was leaving when I arrived is heard again. Who is he, what role does he play in this house, is he a massagist too or a yogi? They start an animated conversation. The door seems to have been left open; they slam it shut, and the murmur of their voices is muffled.

*Ra ma da sa...sa se so...ang...ra ma da sa*

Before closing the grille door leading to the street, I touch the doll of black face and red shirt that I had seen upon arrival. The cord that holds it in place gives way and comes loose. I gently dust it off, to my surprise it doesn’t disintegrate, I carefully place it in the bottom of my bag and walk out.

## IN MY BED

With a piece of chocolate in my mouth, I frolic in my transparent sky dome bed. From here I look at my doll seating on the beam against the starry sky. Sometimes his smile gives me chills, others, joy. Today the moon illuminates his red shirt. On the back of the bed, I can operate a curtain that would cover the sky. An invention of Ñandú. This naming thing to people is the game we have always played with my children and the one my husband was angry about.

“How cruel!” – he told us furious but we with the desire to laugh, above all I and my daughter, said: ‘what’s the difference’.

The piece of chocolate disappeared in my palate together with the pleasure of squeezing its flavor. It had a hint of orange, a delight. In this domo everything is deluxe, very different to the attic. The new thick mattress, the sheets with thread count, a down made of real feathers. Light wood furniture constructed on site; each space designed to the millimeter. In thirty square meters I do not miss anything, it’s impossible not to be tidy with all the drawers and places to store that Ñandú showed me on the first day.



“This cover can be unfolded and can be used as a night table. I advise you to fold up the bed during the day, so you have all the space you need, look, it is very simple...”

To one side, next to the countertop and the tin and refrigerator, is the heater that gives off just enough heat to lull me comfortably to sleep. I like this domo, I am comfortable and happy, impregnating myself of that feeling of a refined comfort and to accompany it I introduce another chocolate in my mouth with my ears attentive to the sounds of this place. The other five cabins are unoccupied and Ñandú has not arrived yet, so the night will be silent. Double chocolate today, tomorrow I will walk more, and I do not plan to get my bicycle. I lost the desire to ride my bike. Sometimes I remember the possible repairs that would lead me to ‘him’, the Haitian, but I no longer see myself riding on it. Instead, I have gotten into the habit of walking from this old Limache to the new one. I try different routes. The square of this sector does not have the pergola nor the life, nor the movement of the other, but even so I am well on this side.

“May I?” – I hear soft knocks. Does Ñandú want to unburden herself to me again? I have just heard the sound of the car that came to leave her and now she must be behind my door. Why won’t she go home? I hear her moving restlessly and getting away. She supposed I was asleep. How lucky!

The last time she was with me until past midnight and if not for my yawns... This woman doesn’t sleep, she works during the day and laments at night: that such and such foundation has no funding, that they didn’t call her back, that the editorial is late with work, that the press doesn’t understand. That I am leaving all this for next year without fail. That she really had a great idea but... The first Friday that I spent here, she was especially lively and seeing me on foot, she invited me to dance. Docile, I let myself carried along by her enthusiasm. I like dancing. We went to the Happy Stone in Valparaíso, where a Cuban group was performing. There were already enough people when we arrived. We went to the bar and with a pisco sour in our bodies we started dancing while she continued shouting with her chatter:

“On Monday I go to Enap, I have an acquaintance... I think I can convince him about an important donation.”

“You don’t rest even when dancing” – I answered her to see if she would keep quiet. Only after the second pisco sour did she manage to put aside her work.

How we enjoyed moving to the sound of the Cuban band! We laughed out loud, we invented spins, steps, we encouraged the rest of the group with a round: she led the line, hopping one way, hopping the other. We arrived to order the third pisco sour at the bar and continued at the party until we crawled out to the car where Alfonso, her driver, was waiting for us.

The following Saturday I awoke at ten with the pounding of the clogs in the gravel. I supposed that she would be out there with all her energy pruning vines or carrying something to another place. I looked out and indeed. She carried a bundle of firewood in her arms. I closed the curtain before she saw me, I went to bed and slept until one.

Tonight, that I do not hear her anymore, I pull the curtain to cover the sky, I settle back on my pillow, my legs brush against the softness of the sheets, I stretch my arms, shall I eat the last chocolate before falling asleep? What is the difference, why not?

## ON THE WAY TO THE OFFICE

Before going out Ñandú tells me that she has the intention of writing her biography. “Don’t you think that I am of the type for that?” – she gropes me with a serious face. “Yes, you are an interesting woman” – I repeat what I have heard, without knowing where her comment goes.

“I’m sure that you as journalist will do it better than me – she continues with the persuasive serious tone. I mute- We could allocate a couple of hours...”

I imagine her knocking on my door every day...

“Mmm... - I answer her and not satisfied with my evasion she continues insisting- I was about to leave...” - I add, grab my bag and leave.

I walk calmly to Pelumpen Brook, I follow the dirt path that runs parallel to its shore, and I say to myself that Ñandú is like an extraterrestrial woman in this town and in my life too. I’m starting to get annoyed by her closeness. Nothing resembles my calm and devoted interviewees from Limache, some still call for the rain that does not

come, like the group that climbed Cerro Tres Puntas in Escobares Brook and spent the night beating their drums. I have taken the brook route. I cross what should be a course overflowing with water. Now it's no more than a dry sand spot. I approach the new village as if were from behind and my son calls me to tell me that he won the story contest at the university.

"Three hundred stories applied" – he tells me with pride.

"Now you will be able to tell me who killed who in your story..."

"Neither my dad nor the harpy"

"The detective then?"

"No!" – he answers me and laughs with malice. I burst out laughing.

"You put more energy in me than I have – I answer him with laughter – and... whom did I murder, him or her?" – I ask him in the moment that I glimpse the woman of the hens."

"I'll call you soon" – I cut.

Again, she peeks from the bushes with her blue turban.

"Hello – I shout at her with enthusiasm. - Have you seen your constellatory friend?"

"No! I get bored with her dolls"

"Do you know where I can locate her?" –

"Condell 67. But you do not get anything there" – she warns me.

"You are warm with that polar jacket" - I tell her when approaching.

"Not more than you with that parka" – she tells me and looks toward the bushes.

"Are you looking for your hens?"

"No, I'm looking for the thief" – she answers me, and she goes back into the branches.

I follow my slow walk, the morning is freezing, I feel the frozen air at the tip of my nose, and I do not like it. A shiver runs through my back, another cold on the way? I stopped liking the cold. Now I would like to run for shelter by a stove, but I'm on my way to the office. I take Riquelme Street, I pass by the small sluice and look at the garbage that has accumulated in the lock, there are also many jars, cookies containers and plastic bottles, waiting for the garbage truck to pass? Suddenly I hear

that somebody is calling me. It's the blond woman of the walks: Rapunzel. She is coming out of the house and beckons me to wait for her.

"What happened to you the other day?... you departed before!" – she tells me in her warm tone.

"Yes!"

" Why did you leave us?"

"I felt like following the walk alone" – I answer the truth.

"I understand, what a relief, I thought that something had annoyed you..."

"No!, all good"

"Then we wait for you another Sunday" – she tells me smiling with her childish tone.

" Sure!" – I answer her lively, we walk together a couple of blocks, and we separate in front of the bank.

I continue to my office, I smell the coffee of La Candela, I promise myself to return later, a couple of steps and I arrive at my destiny.

"Today there is no meeting, pretty girl – she whispers to me –apparently there will be no more – she closes an eye – of those meetings. I leave you in charge, then pretty girl"

I see her going out mounted on her stilettos. She leaves a trail of perfume; I'm sitting when she returns:

"If that woman comes... that who came to the meetings, that of the color heals, don't let her pass" – she tells me categoric.

From what I see, the story of my boss and that of the yellow heels has ended. And does this (I refer to the secretary) like the boss, does she want him for her? I open my computer, begin the game with my fingers, I lengthen, I shorten, I eliminate, I invent phrases in the story of the tomato growers. The chronicle will be called 'I'm not that'. It's the old song by Mary Trini that the tomato grower listened to while she made me see her crops in Los Laureles. Then the husband appeared to tell me that TV people had gone to interview them. She raised her look toward my eyes and then toward his face and let him talk at length.

“We are already famous! – he told me triumphant and added – although everything thanks to... - he looked at her with pride – she does everything here; she does not let me enter. I only deliver with the machine – he added showing me the truck”

“I came earlier, pretty girl – interrupts the secretary entering very agitated – I release you, my pretty girl. He warned me that he needed me – she smiles coquette – he’s about to arrive” She retraces the rouge of her lips. I take my computer and say goodbye.

## AT THE BAKERY

It is Sunday, I have come to taste the empanadas of this old bakery located at the end of República Street and when entering it occurs to me that I could write a chronicle about the founder family of the establishment. I speak with the cashier to arrange an interview with the owner. I explain to her that I am a local chronicler and that I would like to make a report on the bakery.

“Sure! – she answers me – it would be good, but you know, here the owner does not give interviews. They have already come other times, and she gets even angry when you announce the visit”

“Forget it, it does not matter. There are a lot of other places in Limache” – I answer, and I go to the counter.

The variety of empanadas that appear in the list makes me a couple of minutes indecisive. I discard those of meat, chicken, or shellfish. My mouth is watering.

“Two of cheese, basil and tomato”

“Two Napolitan - shouts the salesclerk inside – to take away or to serve?”

“One to serve and the other to take away”

I sit outside on what could be an agreeable terrace, however, I find a board too high surrounding the perimeter of the space and some sticky plastic chairs. I go back inside and walk around looking at the cake display, there are bread puddings, cakes, biscuits. I order a bread pudding, and I add it to my request. I’m very hungry, my belly aches from hunger while other clients begin to arrive, and a line is formed by the case. Each one with a little paper or voucher in hand until they pay and wait like me. One of the young women calls from the counter:

“Two Napolitan!” – I immediately chew the empanada that comes hot and go out with it, I am sitting when my cell phone rings.

“Mommy, where are you?”

“Mm... at a bakery , eating an empanada”

“Did you leave from where you were?”

“From where?”

“I do not know, you have not told us, but dad went to see you and he didn’t find you. He was so sad, that he didn’t tell me where it was... the lady who attended him was also unable to tell him where you had gone to live... ah! And he brought your bicycle”

“My bicycle...? But why?” - I ask without being able to simulate my anger.

“The lady was annoyed with it... What is the matter with you?”

“Why? – I recover – Look, daughter, it is my stuff. I have explained to your father...”

“That is the problem, mommy, you have not explained anything to dad”

“What”

“He needs to know why you left. He wants to hear something different to what you have said to him, that ‘it’s no longer the same’ is not enough for him. It is reasonable... after twenty years to want to know... or attempt to revert the situation with you, don’t you think mommy”

“It’s reasonable, yes, although I’m not obliged to give explanations to him”

We have a good time in silence. I feel sad. I only want that he lets me make my life. I have nothing against him. He is a good person, but he’s not my husband, I do not feel him as such, is it so difficult to understand that? I choke with the empanada. I leave it on the board together with the cellphone. A pickup truck passes by, kicking up loose dust from the roadway. A van parks and a family with three children get out. The parents go into the bakery. The mom asks me to please look at her children for a second. They refuse to leave my side.

“Mom?” – I hear in the cell phone, the smallest girl, about four years old, takes it from the board and flees with it in the hand. Her two older brothers pursue her. The mother of the children appears from the bakery.

“What happens here?” – I look at her desperately. My cell phone has ended up on the ground, a boy steps on it.

## A BEER AT MIDDAY

I just picked up my cell phone. I was without it for a week for the screen replacement. “You must charge it” – the woman in charge tells me when she passes it to me. I am going to La Candela in the middle of another sweltering day in midwinter. At this hour the store is full of people, jazz is heard in the speakers. From the bar the waiter salutes me with a friendly gesture, I sit on the sofa by the door. I plug my cell phone. I am amused leafing through a section of a newspaper about the British royalty and the waiter approaches me with my beer.

“Would you like a snack too...”

“What do you have to offer me?” I ask, forgetting my coffee for lunch routine. “Particularly good “capachitos” (small open stuffed dough) are coming out of the oven”

“Mm... capachitos, it has been years since I do not eat them, bring me a portion” The door is open, and I see that the Constellator I am searching for enters, she who works with dolls. She comes dressed in flowers in lilac and yellow tones this time. How cute her combination! I signal her and she sits by my side.

“Months since we last met...” - she tells me.

“But I’ve been in touch with your contact of the hens. The last time she clarified to me that she was bored from your dolls” – we started to laugh, my capachitos arrive, she is tempted, orders the same with a beer.

“And how are those chronicles going?”

“Well, very well. I am being offered another job in another newspaper in another city” We dispatched the hors d’oeuvre in an instant. The capachitos were stuffed with baby corn, goat cheese and paprika...

“I wanted to locate you...I need to talk with your dolls” – I test her.

“Come to see them whenever you want!” – She gives me a card with her telephone, and she tells me that she must go to the seed store.

“Do you accompany me?” – I look at her undoubtful, I have another plan since a while ago, I tell her, and we say goodbye. I order a second beer. Now Nina Simone sings: “*My baby just care for me*”. The piano notes echo in my head, the rhythm enters my body. I want to dance, I move my feet to the beat, my waist. How wonderful it is to feel my body awake; I need to move. I walk by Riquelme with the song still in my ears, I am happy and I want to embrace him, the Haitian who worries me since days or rather nights. Why not go right now, if he is so near, blocks away? How did I not do it before!

“I forgot a... of my bicycle... inside, can I come in?” – I ask the owner of the workshop. He raises his shoulders, and I go into the dark corridor. My clothes are tangled again in the pedals of the stacked bicycles. My heart beats accelerated. I struggle in the dark. The fabric gives way, I pull. I do not care; I want to arrive to his arms. I hear tango on the speakers. I hate tangos, I never learnt to dance them. A chain lying on the ground makes me stumble, I push it aside with my foot and I peer into the workshop. They have hired another person. One can see that they have many work. I go out to a little yard full of garbage and bicycle parts torn away, I return. The new employee has not noticed my presence, only when he hears me asking for the young Haitian who works there (I say) he turns around.

“He is gone; he does not work here anymore”

“He is gone? – I ask him stunned - do you know where?” – He looks at me up and down in silence and turns his back on me. I am going out desperate, stumble in the corridor again now with a tire tub lying on the floor. I move forward, hooking myself all over the place until I finally come out into the light. The crackling of the speakers stuns me, apparently the radio has gone bad. Once in the street I remember the sweeper. She must know of his whereabouts. They did not even brush against each other when walking that time, I saw them (the sweeper and the Haitian) coming down the path side by side, eyes fixed straight ahead, I remember and continue walking in direction of the square. The heat has passed, there is a frozen blizzard at this moment. I run along the same path, and I arrive at the pergola where I used to see the sweeper ordering the trash cans.

“Are you looking for someone?” – asks me an older woman.



“Yes, I’m looking for the young lady who works here, she must be Haitian or... “

“ Ah! Yes sure, look what a pity, she left this work... why were you looking for her, perhaps I can help you?”

“She was a friend or rather acquaintance I hesitate of... a Haitian...”

“ Look, they are so many, they come and go this way”

“Yes... you haven’t...?” I suddenly realize the absurdity of the situation. I back off. I’m numb. I feel such a little thing that I start to cry. The woman approaches and comforts me.

“But... what a great pity you have...!” I let myself be hugged and I cry for a long time in silence, with her by my side.

## IN TRANSIT

Since my daughter told me that her dad had gone to the attic, taking my bicycle, I look for another town to go to live in. Ñandú insists that I function as her biographer, something that does not interest me, rather something I would hate to do. This time I have taken the bus to return from the office to the old town, to the domo. It bored me walking. I am sitting by the window, we cross the bridge, the stream brings no water, a car passes at high speed by a road that runs parallel to the stream and leaves a trail of dust. The poplars covering the view of the soccer field have been cut down, the bus stops at the hospital bus stop. I observe the denim dresses hanging outside a sales booth, I’d get off to try one on, but the call light on my phone comes on.

“Have you gone to see grandfather?” -asks my son unexpectedly as he uses to do.

“I went some months ago... why?”

“ So that you go and tell him about my award” – he tells me.

“Do you want to go to... tell him?” – I ask surprised.

“Yes! I would like him to know...”

“I understand, you put him in the story of the tale as accomplice of mine” – I laugh aloud.

“You make fun of everything. There are also serious things, although you do not want to see them.”

“How... what is that I do not want to see?”

“Many situations... you go over, you maintain yourself indifferent and you should be concerned” – he tells me with annoyance. He is in a bad mood; I excuse myself with magnet therapy to which I will arrive in a few minutes. Behind the window this town seems sad and dull to me. This time no magnet will hit the floor. Apparently, my ear has been repressed or released. Who knows.

“You are better” - tells me the woman when she returns to remove them, and I feel the same as the first day I came.

“There is something that needs to be reinforced from another energy – she insists me very serious – It’s important” – she emphasizes brief and sparing, as she is.

“I have not gone to the dolls only for being lazy, because I have already located a constellatory” – I answer her. She looks at me with a grimace that doesn’t reach the smile. It’s true, for being lazy, I say to myself going out to the street... to walk! Day by day I’m more tired of doing it. The streets of this old Limache are not those of the other town, except perhaps for República Street and Independencia square, where I direct my steps.

When arriving in República the smell of just baked bread stops me. I go into La Chacra, an artisan bakery that I visit sometimes. I order only a coffee to go. I do not have lunch these days. I hold the hunger until past six. It’s torture that I impose myself for my clothes to fit me again. Now I’m six kilos overweight. I talk for a while with the owner, and I add a burlap bag with the bakery logo. I go out animated with my new purchase.

I’m going in front of the Penitentiary Center which is surrounded by a yellow painted wall. I see its white gate open, there is a cistern truck outside parked between the gate and the sidewalk. Why that open gate? There is no guard at the surveillance booth, neither is the truck driver. A young man dressed in a white jacket (is he a prisoner?) peeks his head into the street, looks at both sides and hurries down toward Palmira Romano. Nobody notices the young man in white jacket who disappears in a side street. Is it the talk with my son that has left me with a very sensitive imagination? I remember that a few years ago a prisoner who had one

month left to serve escaped. Is the same thing happening again in front of my eyes? It's none of my business, I conclude, and I continue my listless walk to the square. I sit in front of the fountain to see the pedestrian like me passing by. Suddenly I remember that I have received a new job offer in the town of Los Andes. I open my computer and answer the email to prove what they offer me. An old man comes to sit by my side in conversational attitude, I close the computer, and I prefer to leave. It's four o'clock on another warm day in the middle of winter. I look around, the glass house is closed, the pharmacy on the corner too, I'm not tempted by the hardware store. I am on my way to the supermarket. I don't have anything to buy but I am curious to see if there are new products, new brands.

As I look out, I understand my mistake, with difficulty I will find there something new in this supermarket. I take a cart half-heartedly and wander through the aisles of kitchen utensils. Nothing interesting as I supposed until I discover a cheerful checkered mantelpiece in green and red colors. I take it in my hands: good texture, good drape, it's of a firm fabric. I don't need it, but I like it. I look for the adequate measure to the domo's table, and no case, all the measures are there, except the one that works for me. I go with the mantelpiece in the hand to the saleswoman who arranges products.

"Good afternoon. Don't you have on the size...?"

"If you did not find there, there isn't" – she answers me without looking at me. I get furious.

"Of course I did not find "there", that's why I am asking"- Now she looks at me from top to bottom and walks away without telling me a word. I follow her.

"Miss! Would you be so kind to tell me if I wait for you?"

"Madame!" – she clarifies to me walking away in a hurry while I go to the cases to look for the chief. My heart beats wildly, I'm out of my mind. But what does she think she is...! I see the woman in charge turning on her key in one of the cases and I stop. I look at the mantelpiece hanging from my hand. How absurd, I burst out laughing and I see the saleswoman coming.

"I thought you had left – she tells me very calmly- I found the measure you were looking for."

## IN THE BUS

I'm at the bus stop, it's four afternoons of a cold day, I see the bus coming and I stop it.

"Where are you going?" – asks me the driver accelerating.

"I'm going... you better charge the complete journey for me" – I answer, and I notice with displeasure that I'm the only passenger. While he turns the radio on, accelerates, corrects the position of the rearview mirror, I see that he looks at me slyly.

"Round trip?"

"Yes" – I answer from my seat beside him. He turns his head toward me.

"Do you like music? – I raise my shoulders – the news then..."

As he sees that I don't answer him, he tunes in to an interviews program alternating with rancheras. I forgot the earphones and I'm obliged to listen until my cell phone turns on and begins to vibrate.

"Mom... I'm so in love! This is wonderful. I didn't think it would come so strong on me."

"No... ah" – I cover one ear because of the rancheras.

"We spend all day together. We talk a lot..."

"You both really talk, or you talk?"

"Both are the same. We are of the same sign..."-adds enthusiastic.

"Don't tell me..."

"Yes, mommy, two Geminis... Identical!"

"Yes... ah!" – The bus stops and a couple with a boy get on.

"Look at the coincidence..."

"Very big..." -I follow her.

"As I told you, I'm so much, but so much in love... - she sighs at full lung. You remember what happened to you with dad... I suppose – laughs – or do you have a

lover hidden somewhere refreshing your memory? – more laughs – With my brother we have commented that perhaps... and therefore then...!"

"Therefore, then what?" – I ask her stunned between the swings of the bus and her talk.

"You left dad." I remain silent.

I look up, we stop again, an old lady climbs with great difficulty onto the treadmill. The driver stands up, helps her, and asks me to leave space for the "old lady". Meanwhile, my daughter attacks again:

"Apropos, would you mind if this house ... you left ... was sold?" – I hear while I move down the aisle.

"It does not matter to me, why" – I answer, heading for one of the seats on the back.

"Because dad wants to sell it, and you will have to come and sign" – she answers laughing.

"I don't find it comic" – I have time to tell her before the driver accelerates the engine, we go off and I fall sitting down over a man carrying a bouquet of flowers.

"Oh, Mom... poor Dad! He wants to see you..." - I hear her telling me upset.

## AT THE DOMO

From my bed I look at the starry sky and think that I would like to have someone beside me, only tonight, someone to tell me the names of the stars. I content myself savoring alone my chocolate with rum raisins. A delight that doesn't last long, unfortunately, because I would be thus savoring one day and night. This domo of transparent ceiling has turned out to be a good shelter, without – of course – the presence of the owner. She's flitting around, I hear her steps over the gravel. I keep the light off in order that she doesn't come to talk to me. It was difficult for her to accept that I was leaving.

"I thought we were friends" – she told me with an offended face when I explained to her that I was moving to another newspaper.

"I thought we had plans together..." – she insisted.

“Sorry to disappoint you... but work, you know better than me” – I half lied to her, and she gave me a suspicious look in return. Now I lift the duvet cover, and I coat myself up to my neck, despite the warmth of the heating system, whose ingenious operation I will probably not have time to internalize. I did not have time either to see the roof repair of the house where I lived with my children. It had leaked for years, and last summer my husband said he would make a definite repair. He did it and this drought came. I laugh. What does it matter? I will not return to that house...

It was Sunday, the day I left. We were having lunch alone, without our children, and then the back-and-forth of the shared nap would begin. He could not accept that I did not want to embrace him, even kissing him less. We had maintained a normal sexual life, with its rites of pleasure like those of any couple that has been sleeping twenty years in the same bed. After seven years there were a couple of infidelities of both, but in family: he with my cousin and I with her husband; after fourteen again; that went out of the familiar sphere, and although it occurred with a pair of acquaintances of both, none of this escalated or gave rise to discussions. As if the episodes of mutual infidelity had not occurred, they were never talked about. I even doubt that my husband would have known about my couple of adventures. When I talked about it with the philosopher, she explained to me something relating to the important events each seven years, her words were enough to bury any concern and to tell me: what does it matter?

After seeing him dancing with the now-called harpy and feeling that ferocious indifference for the person of my husband, I began the hard task (because he was so tough-minded) of explaining him one and thousand times that my feelings toward him had absolutely changed, that I didn't see him as 'my husband' anymore.

“This is not a marriage then” – he had said several times threatening at the beginning of my denials to follow with him the game that took us to bed. That Sunday of my departure I remember that we had bought empanadas, some with flake dough I wanted to try. The dough had the exact quantity of fat and the beef an onion of humidity. We liked them very much. We were at dessert and his hints at toe-tapping under the table chilled me. Suddenly I stood up and told him

“I was leaving. I leave you.”

“Are you going to the kitchen...?” – he asked me.

“No, I’m leaving this house. I leave you” – I said, without having prepared it before. I simply didn’t want to go on with the explanation. He threw the dish away and stood up too.

“You... leave me, are you departing...?” – he asked furiously with a trembling voice. I think he had recognized my way of speaking when I take an option that nobody and nothing will change. So, in the middle of phrases of the type ‘I don’t deserve this’, ‘think in our family’, ‘after twenty years together you leave like this.,’, I went to the bedroom, opened the closet: my clothes ordered by color were there, I had recently made the semestral order and renovation I used to make. I look at them as you observe days that went by without a trace of glory, useless days in which I had been awake, I had worked, eaten, slept. I took the suitcase, I threw in the essentials, five outfits, I put on my boots so that they did not bulge, as the car was his present, I also left it, I said to myself looking at it parked, I threw away the keys and once in the street, I called my children.

They did not give it importance; they thought it was the predictable result of one more of the quarrels they had begun to witness between their parents. Both answered me the same. “Mom, go and rest from Dad for some days”

It must have been four o’clock that afternoon. I had been in a cab for about twenty minutes, without knowing where to stop and I spotted a handicraft fair. Why not, I said to myself. I asked the driver to stop. I went through the stalls calmly, touching textures, asking for details from the artisans, trying on clothes that I would not buy. I had no idea where I would sleep that night, my suitcase was not heavy. By the minutes, the years lived with the dad of my children took distance from me becoming more and more insignificant. I was perplexed in front of that sensation, after which emerged one of deep placidity that gradually began to overwhelm my senses.

Before accommodating my head on the pillow to fall asleep, I observe the black doll of cheerful face and red color shirt hanging from the beam. I sigh. Shall I leave it here? There is no hurry, I will see what I do.

IN THE FIFTIES

We have lunch together with my Kiosk's friend. She has just turned 50 years, and I invite her to celebrate. We are on our way to 'No me olvides' Restaurant in Quebrada Alvarado. She picks me up at the domo, Ñandú looks out to see who is coming for me and stays looking at us when I close the gate. We cross fast Lo Chaparro Bridge in her little car and follow by 18 de Septiembre Avenue. We don't stop talking and laughing. While she drives, she looks at me, gesticulates and laughs. She is of those people who drive jerkies. I guess she must have learned to drive late. At times the car pulls off the berm and with a jarring turn it returns to the pavement. I see with horror that the Stop signs are not there for her to respect them. However, we arrive safe and sound to the restaurant.

"You thought we would not arrive" – she tells me closing her door. As we walk, I notice her high-heeled boots, the black hoses that tighten her legs and a jacket that imitates leopard leather. The yellow scarf around her neck seems to go away as we walk through a blizzard coming from the nearby estuary and she ties it with grace on her chest. We locate ourselves by the window in one of the little tables of red and white checkered tablecloth. The branches of one of the hanging ferns reach her head.

"They are going to ruffle my bangs" – she tells me accommodating it and laughing. "My dear, I must go to the bathroom" – she adds as soon as she has sat down, pushes the chair back and disappears. I wait ten, fifteen minutes and she does not return. It is Sunday. The place is filled with large families. One of them comes with an elderly couple in a bad state. They are brought in wheelchairs. They are placed at the table; huge napkins are placed around their necks. Two of the children in the group amuse themselves by going under the table, they move the wheels of the grandparents' chairs a little, they open their eyes in fright and their mother pulls them out of one ear and reprimands them. I spot my friend staggering in on her high-heeled boots.

"There was a traffic accident in the bathroom, my dear" – I hear her whispering in my ear, and I smell her perfume. Her hairstyle looks perfectly composed. She takes off her leopard jacket and wears a black polo shirt crossed diagonally by a run of



gold buttons. She does not hesitate to order a Peruvian pisco sour with me. We review the menu and look at each other:

“Mm... I do not eat pork legs or loins. I have been eating grass for a long time. You know “– she touches the sides of her waist.

Finally, we order some shrimp and cheese empanadas with a Chilean salad. In addition to a house wine.

“You do not imagine what it is. The sledgehammer begins to be prepared in the middle of forty-nine. You lose your period little by little; you get downpours and with them your chemistry disappears. Not to mention how your hair, breasts, cheeks, everything falls. And you do not even want to see them. I do not know if it’s the same with a lover, but with a husband” – she raises her eyebrows.

“It is more than anything a physical sensation, then...”

“No, my dear, not only physical, of the other too. It takes every part of you. You get hot from above and cold from below” – she laughs.

“But you are not discouraged”

“But if I leave it like that, just as it dawns... in the mornings I wouldn’t stand up!”

“So much?”

“Just so. A friend doesn’t get out of bed. I say to myself every day that I’m not going to be like her. That gives me forces to lower the first feet at seven.”

“And you look so active and happy at the kiosk attending to all those people.”

“It’s part of my work, my dear, to smile at them, brighten their lives. So, they come back to be reassured.”

“It’s true, it happened to me. You were the first to tell me that we would see each other next month.”

“Sure! That is the good thing... to give and to receive. My mom told me: ‘All that is given is returned’. I teach the same to my daughter... but she is a little unsociable, she is a scorpion that stings hard.”

“Do you read horoscopes?”

“But my dear, sure! The stars teach us, they are there for a reason. Look, while I wait for the clients, in the evenings especially, I read a lot. And I can assure you that astrology is a millenary art as the bible... just that...”

“Are you catholic too?”

“The truth, I stopped having faith when I found out that the priests were a bunch of freshers; pure Gatica!”

“Gatica?”

“He preaches but does not practice” (word game in Spanish: Gatica rimes with predica (preaches) and practica (practices)).

“Ah!”

“Then I turned to astrology, but there are so many truths in which to believe, that help you, not only astrology, but there are also the twelve stones, for example...-she is going to tell me what it's about and I interrupt her.

- The massagist of Quilpué uses heat stones as part of the treatment, did you know?”

“Sure! That's why I sent you there. She's very wise. Although sometimes she gets a little, how would I tell you... rough?”

“Yes, that's it. She doesn't give rise to any other idea.”

“It's what happens to all of us.”

“To that of magnets not. She is very measured and serious. I think that the biomagnetism she does is for real. Did it work well for you?”

“She took away my elbow discomfort, but I am not married to any formula. I am very open-minded. I do not close myself to what one or another tells me. It is as in the kiosk: I must know how to receive all the payments!” – she raises the shoulders.

“Apropos of opening oneself... do you know something about constellate?”

“Constellate? You got me there, is it something new?”

“Take note -I tell her triumphant – Condell 67, Limache” – and while she takes notes, she asks me:

“Does it work for everything?”

## IN OLMUÉ

It is not that I am going to see him, the Haitian. Although I would not be unhappy to embrace him and succumb. Anyway, what is the difference. But it's a matter of work what brings me back to this place, I keep saying to myself as I walk down the dirty alley in Olmué. I need to finish the last chronicle about the clock smith of Limache. I

don't want to do it without first checking the history of the writer's story and what the current clock smith of Prat Street told me, that sunny day when his sisters made him interrupt our interview. Simple curiosity? Perhaps.

Today it is not hot as that day. On the contrary, it is the beginning of such a freezing spring that even though I am walking, I am dumb. The extra kilos do their part, I think, although I'm not desperate to lose them anymore. What's the difference? I continue slowly until arriving at the house whose façade is equal to that described in the story found in the wardrobe. The writer in tweed jacket has intercepted me again for his missing sheets; I've seen him a couple of times in Moneglia without the Colombian. According to what the waitress of the coffee has told me last week, she would have returned to her country for some months.

I should have brought my thermos. It's not that I like so much the savor of coffee. At the beginning yes, now I drink it only because it takes away my hunger, it's the greatest anorexigenic, but it adds nightmares to my dreams. I will try something else. I've arrived at the house. I see the plastic chair by the door. In this moment landlady takes out two trash bags and leaves them on the street.

"How are you?" – I tell her with all the friendliness I can show.

"If they could see you now" – she answers me listless taking a seat. Is she mistaking me?.

"I would like to follow our talk.... Do you remember? It is for the chronicle and the story of this house" – I add with a smile.

"You must have a good memory of this house!" – she tells me, and I pretend I have not heard.

"Yes, exactly, when I was leaving that evening, you told me that you had bought the house from the daughters... of the clock smith. Was it just the two of them or was there a son in the family too?"

"Son?... - she tries to remember - I saw no son, unless... - she is again suspicious – and why do you want to know so much detail?" – she looks at me sideways.

"For the chronicle of the local weekly publication."

"Look, for those questions, you better go to the library, that here we are to work..." - as I block her view from the street, she tilts her head until she can see who is coming.

“Here comes a new couple -she tells me indicating two Haitians who are approaching- the bad thing is that for the pay...” - she makes a gesture lowering her hand abruptly.

I step aside. She calls into the house and from the aisle appears a young man who acts as translator.

“Tell them I don’t lower my price and that it’s payable in advance.” The young man translates, the newcomers accept.

“Place them in the room of the woman who just left, there in front of the bathroom.”

“You have a lot of immigrant movement” I tell her once the trio disappears in the aisle.

“There are all kinds, the young woman who has just left was Chilean, she got dating, I had to take her out by force... but I don’t complain.”

“A Chilean woman... that woman who used colored heels?” – I ask curious thinking in the yellow heels woman.

“You are well informed!”

“It’s my job to inform myself – I tell her in a humble tone.

“Look, everything happens around here, one does not interfere while they pay – she touches her chin and raises her shoulders – but that one was a whore and besides, rude.”

“I understand.”

“She brought me the guys right here and I told her: ‘okay but the price is different’. She did not want to understand, so I called my nephew policeman and issue solved.”

“It is good to help relatives to help you...” - I try to empathize again.

“In case of emergency it’s good. I was taught since I was a little girl to do things by my own means (play on words: scratch myself with my own fingernails) – she shows her fingers of long and dirty nails – look – she gets excited – that story is a good one...”

While she tells me how she was treated as a child, I understand it will be difficult to bring her back to what I want to know. She comes from a poor and large family, without education; her father was a worker at the old broom factory of Limache. Many

quarrels among brothers, above all since she acquired the house of the clock smith sisters.

“Very good your story... I see that when you acquired the house, the quarrels with your brothers began... the clock smith had already died then?” – I make the last attempt to retake the interview for the chronicle.

“Look, my brother...” she tells me again the family trouble and stretches her head toward the house corridor. I do the same. I peek my face to the darkness, and I see them coming. He, the Haitian in red shirt and the sweeper woman. He has not seen me yet, ending up accommodating the backpack on his beautiful back. I tremble from head to toe.

“And is the baby waiting period going well?” - asks them with every gentleness the landlady, turning her face toward mine with a smile, that I perceive of outright cruelty. While we cross quick looks with him and I step aside to let them go out, she adds in the same tone addressing me:

“The couple in love move to Lliu-Lliu...” Her voice is interrupted by the sound of the garbage truck that reduces its speed in front of us.

“Hi! Aunt Mommy” – shouts the sweeper fastened to the footboard of the truck and she answers with a smile with two missing teeth.

## AN INCONCLUSIVE EMAIL TO THE PHILOSOPHER

I enjoyed reading your last email. I'm surprised. You leave the university, your pupils, the courses. That's called a change in the middle of life. Isn't there a pastry chef who tempted your palate? I didn't expect such a twist to your menu: no brainy books on your back. The hands in the balance, appraising now the precise quantity of sweets and its variations. You tell me that making with your hands, with your fingers, taking out rolls from the oven has provoked an incomparable sensorial enjoyment' that you never even noticed before. A cake was to be eaten and that was it...

## IN A NIGHTMARE

The bus takes the north road at this moment in the direction to Santiago. I start to nod off with the even hum of the engine. I surrender to the monotony of going without

stumbling comfortably seated. I woke up with an oppressive sensation when we enter Santiago. A sip of strong coffee from my thermos relieves my dry throat. These days I have nightmares. My kiosk's friend tells me that I drink a lot of coffee. It may be, but it takes my hunger away.

In the dream I accommodated myself sideways to fall asleep and when I did it, I realized that my body rested on one of the side shelves of the road shrine of Eastman Avenue. In front of me there were countless candlesticks dripping with sperm, withered flowers that had been left there. However, I knew that the constellating woman oversaw the place. I peeked my head at the entrance, and I saw her sweeping. We waved to each other. As soon as I perceived her gesture, it was no longer the shelf of the road shrine where my body rested, but the ground of my kiosk's friend. I felt very uncomfortable, I couldn't fall asleep, and I got distracted with the headlines and photos of the newspapers that hung suspended from a string. I lifted my neck to achieve it, but the posture produced me tiredness and pain, although I continued reading them as one who counts sheep. Suddenly my eyes stopped on one of the photos where Paloma Mamy appeared at the microphone and the dad of my children dancing with the woman in yellow heels. It is impossible, I told myself, and I sat to better see. There was no mistake, it was them. With my head turned upwards I felt that I was short of breath, I stretched my head toward the window of the kiosk, and I saw my son. He came to tell me that the baby had been born. We left running to get to know the baby, we took different buses and taxis, the distance was very long, it seemed that we would never arrive. My son warned me that the mom was not his girlfriend, whose parents lived in the south. Finally, we entered Limache Hospital and I did not understand why we needed to take so many buses and taxis. With a sense of strangeness, I walked with him through a long room with peeling walls and a collapsing ceiling. Everything was decrepit and foul smelling. My heart shrank at the thought of a baby being born there. We crossed about twenty beds in line until we stopped where the young girl who swept the square lay, with whom I wanted to talk a long time ago, that who was going with the Haitian to Lliu-Lliu, the Sweeper Girl. She had a black baby at her breast. My son took it smiling to show it to me, but I was distracted by listening to the growing sound of the Ñandú

clogs, who took my arm and pulled me to another room where magnets would be placed on us. I told her that I had already tried the magnets, and they had no effect. Indifferent to my words, she insisted on pushing me on the arm. In a back and forth we arrived at another room.

It was the old Parrish of Saint Thomas Hospital. I saw the figures of the Stations of the Cross, the mosaics of the windows and when seeing the Colombian who waited for us with a smile, I went out to the street. It was raining. I had a crazy desire to eat Chilean doughnuts, I looked for a nearby kiosk. Half a block away there was a used bookstand. Olmue's landlady sold them, she was sitting on a huge bench, resembling a king's throne and every now and then she made light nods to pedestrians. I took a book entitled 'The sad story of a Limache clock smith.' 'I'm going to know', I told myself, 'I'm going to know', I repeated myself and I escaped without paying her for it, while I heard her shouts: 'daughter of a bitch, lowborn, your mother's cunt...'

Suddenly I stopped: it was not me; it was the Philosopher who repeated 'I'm going to know'. I left her in the middle of the square and ran toward the square pergola where there was a bio dance public session. I sat and watched from a distance. The instructor and her husband swayed to the sound of Michael Jackson; then I got distracted and saw the writer sitting on a wheelchair coming. The chair was conducted by my ex od Limache's landlady followed by a flock of stray dogs. When arriving in front of me, he stood up and both disappeared walking arm in arm, although the dogs, lots of dogs stayed by my side. I got the feeling that I had to escape, but I didn't know where. I supposed the dogs would follow me. I didn't know what to do. I looked to the front, to the sides, to the back. I was turning my head for the second time toward Urmeneta, when my daughter arrived. She brought a magazine under the arm, and she showed me a dress that was sold around the corner. The dress looked like the one that the Bach flowers therapist wore and that I liked so much. My daughter and I were on our way to buy it. The store was located on the second floor of the Italian style building, that I had not wanted to visit that day of the walk. The ladder we climbed creaked with our weight, I was afraid it would collapse, and I held on to the handrail, which gave way as if it were an elastic band.

“It has failed me before” - I told my daughter. She looked at me strangely. I showed her that my bike’s handlebars had come loose from the tube (telescope), but cycling could be done rather well without the handlebars. We left both pedaling to be part of a caravan that would travel through Olmué. We crossed dirt roads with stones that made it difficult for us to pass, we went through a wide avenue dodging patch. The garbage truck came with the hopper turning over. With its passing we were covered with dust and with plastic bags. We took a bus every now and the driver extended his right hand to grab our butt. When arriving at the race location, I introduced my daughter to the people I was recognizing. The woman of the hens with her blue turban, Rapunzel, the Dairymaid, the massagist woman of Quilpué, the Bach flowers therapist woman were there; the harpy, introducing me her son; the secretary of the office with her friend of the cosmetics and my kiosk’s friend to the cry of:

“Unique experience, good for everything; unique experience, good for everything “ organized in that moment an ascent to La Campana hill. I did not know whether to go to the caravan or to the walk and finally I went for an ice cream. The ice cream parlor was really a public restroom from which was coming out the Haitian in red shirt with his eyes put on my body, full of dirt and plastic bags. He raised his shoulders and when I extended my dirty hands towards his, I awoke.

## WITH MY DAD

When the ticket holder returns the card in Pajaritos, I realize that twelve months have passed since the last time I came to see my dad. The subway is full of passengers, we accommodate ourselves in a back and forth of bodies moving as one. I tighten my bag; I raise my head of colored mane over the other heads, and I breathe rarefied air. When getting off at Manuel Montt, I prefer to take a taxi that leaves me at the door of the residence. I knock on his door. I listen to the shuffling of his slippers.

“You did not tell me!” – he tells me with a distorted face.

“I forgot to tell you, I am sorry” – I answer him pushing the door to enter. He steps aside and takes a seat again by the same shoeshine box from years ago. Without looking at me, he applies to broom his shoes. He has them spread on the carpet



without laces. There are black ones, brown ones, dark gray ones. I recognize some very old and I show them to him.

“Do you still use them?”

“No, but I like to keep them clean”

“I see you polishing them each night sitting on the stairs...”

“Do you remember that? It was a long time ago” – he tells me with a quizzical face.

“Yes, I remember some things, lately... of our ear game, for example “

“Yes... ah!” He answers without interest. I let him finish polishing while I approach the window. Spring is full. I spot a forked plum tree.

“You have a beautiful view” – I comment to him.

“It’s not bad, it’s true”

“Do you go out sometimes to the street or to that square...?”

“ Sometimes, each time less”

“Are you not interested, or do you get tired?”

“Mm... both.”

“Difficult stage old age” – I try him.

“Are you going to write a chronicle?” – I start laughing and he stays just like that. I watch him go to the closet, put away his shiner, put his shoes in order, fit them perfectly in a narrow space. He moves them, he turns them until he finds the proper manner. He closes the closet, goes to wash his hands and comes to sit in the armchair he has carried from house to house. It’s a Berger that was from his mother, the grandmother I didn’t meet.

“Are you going to have lunch here?” - he asks me suddenly, and as I tell him yes, he goes to the telephone and announces that he has a guest.

“You say ‘guest’ and you don’t say that it’s me, your daughter”

“To make one more dish of food it’s not necessary to know that is my daughter who is going to eat it” he answers me sitting again.

“I see that you were disturbed by my unannounced visit.”

“Yes. I like to know with anticipation.”

“I’m sorry. Is that I have been... with some details.”

“It’s not for you to tell me your ‘details’.

“Okay. Your grandson won a story contest with a police tale, and he asked me to come to tell you.” -He raises an immutable face toward me, and I realize that he has not shaved himself.

“You have not shaved yourself yet” - I tell him softly.

“Is your mom also coming?” - I laugh. This time he grimaces.

“Who else lived with us when I was little?” – Now he gives me a hard look. I got it wrong, I think, and I wait for his answer.

“Why do you ask me? Another chronicle?”

“It’s a long story that I am going to shorten to you. I had therapy with some dolls. You chose one for every member of your family when you were a child, and I do not know why I took four dolls instead of three.” He remains silent. I see him getting uncomfortable, he makes that gesture of disgust in his mouth. Then he begins pulling the fluff out of his wool sweater. He is determined not to leave any in sight. He takes them, he piles them up and goes to throw them in the bathroom. I hear the noise of the toilet flushing. He comes back, looks at the time and goes back to sit down on the Berger.

“Did someone else live with us, did some aunt or uncle come to spend seasons in the house?” – I insist.

“The truth, I do not know why I’m being interrogated” he answers me frankly angry.

“You never explained to me. One day I understood that you would not live together anymore and that was all” – I surprise myself telling him.

“Ask your mother. She will tell you all about it. I’m surprised that she has not already done it with details...”

“I don’t speak with my mom. She took the side of the children’s dad. I ask you.” This time he goes to the closet, opens the door, takes off his sweater, folds it, puts it over a group of sweaters of the same color and takes another.

To attract his attention, I sit on the Berger. When he returns and sees me, he goes to the window and looks out without talking to me. His wall clock announces 12.30.

“Let’s go to have lunch” – he tells me.

We walk down the hallway in silence. We position ourselves at the same table as the previous visit. There are two soup dishes served waiting for us. I hear him sip for

the first time. He savors every spoonful. A little liquid runs down his chin. He doesn't raise his head until the desert arrives, the famous chocolate flan he devours with relish. I offer him mine and he accepts it.

"Still in Limache?" - he asks me when he finishes.

"No, not anymore. I'm living in Los Andes now" – I answer.

"In Los Andes... how about that city? "

"I like it. I'm fine."

"Los Andes..." - he tries to remember.

"Yes, I'm one step away from Mendoza" -I help him.

"Your next destiny" – he tells me finally smiling.

"Why not."

When returning to his room I tell him about the existence of his great-grandson.

"They made you a grandmother very fast" – is his only comment.

"Remote grandmother... the same as you" – I'm surprised again about what I'm saying. Then I get the image of our ear game. I mention it to him again, he makes a couple of funny comments. I take him by his arm, and we arrive at his room. While he turns the television on to see the news, I go into the bathroom and when I go out, I see him standing by the window with lost sight. Is he waiting for me to go for following his life without difficulties? I look at the television screen, there is a football game being transmitted. He has never been interested in them. Now, is he? When saying goodbye and before closing the door, he tells me:

"There was a cousin of your mom with us, he was an airplane pilot, he used to come and stay for days or weeks, he and your mother ... - my cellphone rings.

"Maria, I have a tip for you, ¡take note!"