

We Are Here

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Translated by
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8:35

I turn on the lights. At the end of the long hallway, there is a room with an open door. A splash of light from the hallway reaches the foot of the bed. I leave my jacket on the arm of the chair by the telephone table.

“Who’s there?”

I am about to take off my hat. “Hello...”

A cat peeks out from behind the door of the bedroom. The walls are covered with old photos in old frames.

“Who are you?”

I turn towards the voice. She is sitting in an armchair; the window is behind her. The cat is on her lap, his head hidden in the folds of her dress.

“Good day.”

She looks up and peers at my chest. She’s wearing a red knit hat. Her gray, withered hair falls to her chest, on old blue dress. Tiny creases crawl from her eyes down towards her neck.

“You...haven’t been here before, have you?”

She lifts her hand off the cat and smooths the folds of her dress. A black bra strap has slipped off her shoulder blade.

I say, “No. It’s my first time here.”

She turns her face quickly away. The cat jumps down, stands by my feet, looks at my shoes a bit, then runs in to the hall.

I say, “I should fix your breakfast.”

“Breakfast...” She grabs her walking stick and stands up with effort. She moves the tip of the cane forward, lifts her right foot a little and puts it down beside the cane. She lifts her left foot and brings it down beside the right one. Again, she lifts the cane and moves it forward.

I look up at the photographs: A young couple, in work clothes, stand by a truck. Their hands are empty, and they’re smiling. The old woman takes two steps, and I, two steps after her. A woman, standing by a piano, flashes her calf out of the slit

of her long black gown. She is looking at the camera.

“Let’s fix breakfast.”

She opens the door to the kitchen. “Door to the balcony must always be open a little.”

I pass by a row of small photos and open the door to the balcony. Save for a thin layer of mist blanketing the water, the view is crisp and clear. It stretches all the way to the other end of the lake where the evergreens are brown and ringed with halos of fog.

I turn back.

She is sitting on a chair near a table littered with dirty cups and packets of pills.

“I don’t want anything. Don’t need help, either.”

She picks up a cup and tries to find a place for it

on the table. Failing, she puts it back down. By the sink, stands a small flowerpot of withered flowers.

“Shall we throw this away?”

She stretches her arm to the old radio on the windowsill.

“What do you want for breakfast?”

With her back to me, she shakes her head. “Don’t eat nothing. Don’t want anything.”

Her arm shakes. Her fingers turn the dial, searching for a voice in the buzzing airwaves.

The cat comes in from the hallway, jumps on the chair, then the table, and pauses there. She looks at the cat, then turns back to the radio. A man’s voice says something, but it’s lost in the static. A young woman speaks; her laughter can be heard

over the radio's hiss. The man says something again. The woman laughs again.

The old woman takes her hand off the radio, picks up the cat, and lays him on her lap. The cat turns and hides his head in the folds of her dress.

“Are they speaking Russian?”

She looks at me and turns quickly towards the radio—a woman, as if in the wind, sings with a scratchy voice. The old woman pushes the cat aside with her right hand. She stares with narrowed eyes at a dirty cup she has picked off the table; her nose wrinkles. She puts it down.

“No. It must be Polish.” I fold my arms on my chest. “Yes...it's Polish!”

She says nothing.

The cat peeks out from under the table and peers at my shoes. The woman still sings in the wind, her scratchy voice fades in and out.

She stretches her hand toward the radio. Turns it down. Looks at my beret.

“Polish... it’s Polish.” She turns it off.

I say, “That’s what I guessed...”

She takes the glasses that hang from a string round her neck, and puts them on. Her grey eyes are larger now.

I say, “I was there.”

She puts her hand to her chest, pulls the hem of her dress up a bit. “Where?”

“Warsaw!”

“What year?”

“Ninety.”

She looks me up and down. “Ninety years ago?”

“No, the year 1990.”

She looks under the table.

I say, “It’s a beautiful place.”

She turns to the window. The lake. The thin mist on its surface, the row of brown evergreens, the halo of fog.

“Warsaw was beautiful...” She blinks facing the radio.

The cat waits in the doorway of the kitchen. I sit in a chair.

The woman scratches her back. “So, you’ve been in Warsaw?”

I lie, “I was there for twenty days.”

And then, so she her questions don't uncover my deceit, I laugh and say, "Look, if I say something in Polish, would you tell me what it means?"

She looks at me, wearily.

"I've asked many people, they don't tell me or..."

She scratches the back of her hand. "What?"

I say, "Kurka wodna"

"Say it again..."

I say, "Kur-ka wod-na"

She widens the eyes she'd narrowed only ago; this lessens the creases on her face. With closed mouth, she laughs and shakes her head.

Looking at my scarf, she asks, "Was it a woman?"

"Who?"

She looks at me, shakes her head and laughs.

I ask, “What does it mean?”

She laughs again. Then she bends and looks under the table.

“It’s something a woman only...I mean mostly...I think...says to a man. It has no...” she shrugs her shoulders, “special meaning.”

“What do you mean?”

She just looks at me.

“Why would women say something, that has no meaning, no special meaning, only to men?”

She grabs her cane. Folds her hands round the handle and rests her chin on her fist. “Coffee would be good now... yes?”

She looks at the cat. He rests his head on his paws and shuts his eyes. I hang my scarf over the

arm of the chair. Take the coffee pot from the pile of dirty dishes. Roll up my sleeves.

I position myself so I don't turn my back to her, and drizzle detergent on the sponge. "Wash only that one. I hate the sound of water." She laughs.

"Word by word, it means *soggy hen*. No particular meaning. But...women say it to men...I think."

I turn the tap. "Why only women?"

She hangs her cane on the arm of the chair.

"Don't know. Or maybe it's not so...I..." She laughs, "I haven't heard it for ages." She shakes her head.

I hold the coffee pot under water. Froth comes quickly down. I fill it halfway and put it on the gas stove, turn around and dry my hands on my

pants. The cat is toying with the dangling edge of my scarf. I bend and scratch him on the back. He perks up, then rolls onto his back and lifts his paws up to my wrist.

“How old is this beauty?”

“Kazek? When I took him in he was very small; this big.” She shows the palm of her hand. “And how long have you been in this country?”

“Ten years.”

“Ten?”

“Yes,” I sit down. “Ten years.”

She wipes her glasses with the hem of her dress.

Her thin, anaemic thighs show. I avert my eyes.

Her breasts are too small for her black bra.

“But I came here during the war.” She puts on her glasses again and peers at the stove –the perking of boiling water can be heard. I get up. “There are cups in that cupboard. On the left.” The cups are arranged neatly and tastefully in single rows.

“How many spoons?”

“Two. No. Three. Sugar, two spoons.”

That’s what I give her: two spoonfuls of sugar, three spoonfuls of coffee.

I place her cup in front of her. Then I begin to clear the table, picking up dirty cups.

“No. Not now.” She lifts the spoon. “You’ll bring lunch, too?”

“Maybe... I don’t know.”

“So leave the cups for later.” She slurps her coffee.

“Watch it. It’s hot.”

“But it’s good. I love coffee.”

“Okay. What do you want for lunch?”

“What? Don’t know...whatever...no, choose whatever you want.”

I pick up my scarf. Kazek lunges at its fringe. I bend. Again, he rolls over and paws at my wrist.

I get up, saying my goodbye in Polish. “So then...Do Widzanio.”

She looks at me.

I say, “Do Widzanio!”

She stretches her hand up to my head. I bend a little. She grabs the lip of my hat with two fingers and, careening, pulls my hat sideways. She hits

me in the chest with her fist and turns towards the
evergreens, their brown colour now obscured by
the fog.

9:20

I turn on the light. Her mouth is agape; her
skinny, blue-veined legs peek out of the blanket.

I lean against the doorframe. “Good morning,
Madam!”

I can hear the drip of the leaking faucet in the
kitchen. Her mouth shuts. Her throat strains,
swallowing, and her mouth falls open again.

I almost yell, “Good morning, Madam!”

She lifts her head. Looks at the window. Her
gaze stretches along the wall, slides over my
face, reaches the wardrobe on the corner.

Suddenly it returns and fixes on my face. She

pulls the hem of the blanket up to her chest.

“Who are you?” She smiles with panic.

Again, I say, “Good morning, Madam!”

“Yeah...” She pulls herself up a little, and lets go of the blanket she was gripping. “Yeah,” her face lights up, “you’re the one who calls me Madam?”

“Yes, Madam. I’m the one who calls you Madam.”

She lifts her hand up to check the temperature.

“It’s chilly, but it’s okay. No, it’s not okay. My feet’s not under the blanket.” She looks at me.

“It’s okay, isn’t it? But, you say it’s very cold, right? You’re going to make coffee, right?”

I take off my winter jacket. “Yes. With bread, cheese and butter.”

“Cheese, and butter. But it’s cold. It’s raining, isn’t it?” She looks out the window.

Beyond the window, the tree branches are covered with frost.

“No, Madam, it’s snow. It’s going to snow.” I hang my jacket carefully on the arm of the chair. She turns her head. “Don’t like snow. Now that it’s cold I don’t like snow a bit.”

She hides her face in her hands and begins to cry.

“What about coffee? Don’t you like coffee?”

She pulls her hand away from her mouth.

“Coffee, yes, I like coffee, but it’s very cold again.” She is about to cry again when my cell phone rings.

“Hello.”

“It’s me. Where are you?”

“Madam’s place.”

“Gonna be long?”

“She’s not out of bed yet.”

“Her pill...”

“I know.”

“You know where it is?”

“Yes.”

She inhales.

“Where are you?”

“I’ll go on with my coffee, then.”

“Anything wrong?”

“No.”

“I’ll see you then.”

“Bye.”

She says, “Yes? Was it for me?”

“It was Larissa; she told me to make you coffee.”

“It rings too much.”

“What?”

“This.” She points at the phone on the table.

“Rings all night. When I wake up, it doesn’t ring.

Why, you think?”

“Maybe someone’s calling you.”

“Who’d call? Besides, when I pick it up, no one talks.”

Water keeps plinking in the sink.

I pick up the phone. The wire has been cut. It dangles. “Your daughter, maybe it’s your daughter calling.” I put the phone back on the table.

“Did I have a daughter?” She looks at the window. “Is it going to be lots of snow?”

“Aren’t you going to get up?”

She grabs the blanket. “Yes! But it’s cold, isn’t it?” She pulls the blanket up. “Can I stay in a bit longer?”

I see the veins of her hands. “Ok... I’ll go make coffee. I’ll call you when it’s ready.”

She curls under the blanket. “Thank you for coming here later. Thank you for coming here today. Lock the front door.”

“I’m not going. I’m going to make coffee.”

She closes her eyes. “With butter and cheese?”

“Yes, with butter and cheese.”

I turn off the light.

I go to the kitchen. Open the window an inch.

The lake is frozen. The wind whips up whorls of snow. I turn the tap on, fill the coffee pot half full

and put it on the stove. I turn off the tap and open the fridge door.

The faucet leaks.

“I was talking to you! Hear me?”

I go down the hall, to her door. I turn the light on.

“Yes, Madam? Did you say something?”

“The phone... did you hear it?”

“No. No one called.”

“So, why is the light on?”

The faucet drips.

I turn the light off. Go back to the kitchen. Turn the tap tightly. The fridge door is still open. I spread butter on two slices of bread and put a slice of cheese on each. The buzzing of the kettle grows louder and louder, then subsides. When it boils, I turn the burner off and pour boiling water

in a yellowed white cup. I add two spoonfuls of instant coffee and three of sugar, and stir. Foam gathers. I pull the spoon out. A disk of foam whirls and whirls and shrinks, and shrinks. Bubbles skate slowly around. I close the window, go back into the hall and open the door to the bedroom.

Her mouth is open and the blue veins of her legs poke out of the blanket.

“Madam, breakfast is ready.”

The faucet leaks.

Louder: “Coffee’s ready!”

Her head teeters a little. Her mouth shuts. She swallows, and her mouth falls open again.

I am almost shouting: “Coffee is ready!”

She lifts her head. “Who are you?” She keeps looking at me.

“Coffee’s ready.”

“Yeah...you’re the one who calls me Madam?”

“Yes, Madam. I’m the one who calls you Madam. Coffee is ready.”

“Coffee is good. And you’re good too when you make good coffee and call me Madam...” She blinks her grey eyes wide open. “Didn’t it ring?”

“No, get up, your coffee will get cold.”

“Cold coffee is not good. Cold coffee is not good at all!”

“Yes, it’s not good. So get up and drink it before it cools off.”

She touches her cheek with her hand. “It’s cold, and you say the phone didn’t ring either.”

“No it didn’t. This phone doesn’t ring.” I start to lift the phone for her to see the cut cable, but I change my mind, and turn around. “Do you want me to bring your breakfast here? So you can have your breakfast in bed?”

She lifts her hand from her face. “Coffee is not good if it’s cold. How many times should I say this?”

“Yes, it’s not good, but it’s not cold yet. Get up!”

She weeps, “But when I sleep it rings...I know.”

“You must get up now...I gotta change your diaper, too.”

“I know I gotta get up.” She grabs at the bar above her head. “But because you’re here it doesn’t ring.” She tries, “No, today I can’t.” and

lets go of the bar. “Who do you think is the caller, huh?” She opens her eyes wide.

I stand by her side. “I don’t know.”

She grabs hard at my hand. “And then, sometimes they don’t just call, they come here,”

She points with her chin to the hall. “They walk over there. Walk to the kitchen over and over, I don’t know why.” She makes a frightened face so I can feel the fear too. “You know what I mean?”

The faucet leaks.

“Give me your hand.” I hold her hand. “Now we count: one, two...”

She says, “Three! But it’s not happening.”

I grab her under the arms and lift her up in one move.

She sits up. “E...it did.”

I exhale, “Okay?”

She looks at me. “That’s so good. Coffee is so good.” She hugs herself “You’re good too, to come and make good coffee.”

I bend. I push her calloused feet into her slippers and pull the wheelchair closer. Put her hands on the arm of the chair. She looks at her slippers.

“No. It’s very cold.”

“Do you want me to bring your breakfast here?”

She lowers her face onto her palm.”

“Yes? Do you want to have breakfast here?”

“But what should I eat?”

Coffee. With bread and butter and cheese.”

“With bread and butter and cheese? But it’s too chilly. You said it’s raining? Yes?”

Outside the window, the tree branches are covered with frost.

“No, Madam, snow. It’s snowing.”

10:10

“Anybody home?” I turn on the light.

“Turn it off!”

I turn it off and, in the weak light that streams through the windows, I walk into the bedroom.

“Good morning.”

In the dark, she says, “Get out...all of you!”

I wait until my eyes adjust to the gloom. “It’s only me, no one else.”

Her outline takes shape when she moves. “I mean all of you who come here.” She’s trying to pull up her pillow. She can’t.

I lean forward.

“Get out!”

I pull my hand back. “I’ll get you water to take with your pill.”

“I don’t take pills.” She pauses, “I said that a hundred times.”

I turn on the light as I leave the room. It yellows behind my back.

“Turn it off!”

I go to the kitchen and turn the tap. Her voice disappears behind the hiss of running water. I hold a glass under the stream and turn the tap off when it’s full. Silence. I return to the bedroom and place the glass on the night table. She pulls the blanket up over her withered breasts. “I said, turn it off!”

I study the photograph on the nightstand; a young woman sits on the fence of a garden, smiling.

“What a beautiful woman.”

“Don’t talk about that picture at all! And turn the light off, it’s blinding me.”

“You have such pretty hair. Did you know that?”

“And you’ve said that a hundred times. And I’ve told all of you, it’s my daughter’s photo, and she’s gone somewhere.”

“But she’s pretty, with that shawl over her shoulders, look.”

She doesn’t look. “So what.”

She lifts her hand from her forehead, and rubs a finger over her bruised cheek.

“When did you get that bruise?”

“Bruise?”

“Here...on your cheek...it’s bruised.”

She looks at my finger. “Does it hurt?”

I look at her.

“So where is my pill? Don’t I take a pill?”

“Yes, you should take your pill...” I pick up the packet of pills.

“You charge lots and do nothing. Can’t you turn the light off?”

“No, I’ve got to see what I’m doing.”

“So now that you can see, give me the pill.”

I drop the pills in her palm.

“Five?”

“Yes, five.”

She turns and looks at the photo. “She didn’t send a letter. Never.” And drops the pills in her toothless mouth.

I say, “She must be very busy.”

The woman picks up the glass. “Must be. How much do you charge to do nothing, and write no letters to anyone?”

She takes five mouthfuls of water. I extend my hand. She hands me the glass and pulls the blanket up again.

“What do you want to eat?”

“What day is it?”

“Wednesday.”

“What day is Wednesday?”

“And it’s 10:30 in the morning.”

“What day is 10:30?”

“Wednesday. Now, what would you like to eat?”

“Don’t mix up things on the table.” She raises her voice: “I’ve told you a hundred times. All you

know is how to charge money.” Panting, she sinks her fingers into her grey hair. “How much do you charge?”

“How much did you charge when you worked?”

“I never worked. Besides, my son...” She puts her finger over the bruise on her cheek. “Did you say it’s wounded?”

“Yes. It’s wounded.”

“Did I have a son?”

“No. You had a daughter.”

“So who was the one who was injured?” She takes her hand away. “No. It was my mother who had a daughter. And my husband had a factory.”

She ponders for a bit. “But...I had a husband...didn’t I?”

I don’t say anything.

“Didn’t I?”

“Yes...you did.”

“He must be out drinking beer, again.”

“No. He’s at work.”

“Did you see him? On your way here?”

“Yes. He was going to work. What do you want for breakfast?”

“Turn off the light. I told you a hundred times but you don’t listen!”

“It’ll be dark soon and hard to see a thing.” I look at my watch.

She looks at the worn, filthy floor.

I ask, “What time does your husband come home?”

“I never know time.” She looks at me. “Did you see him today? I mean when you were coming here?”

“Yes, he told me to come over and fix your breakfast. He’ll be home later.”

She looks at me.

“Do you want milk in your coffee?”

“Did I want coffee?”

“Yes, you did.”

“Then I don’t want milk.” She looks at me with dismay.

I pull her walker closer. “Better change your diaper.”

She looks at me.

I pull the plastic gloves over my hands. Walk down the hall. Fill the washing tub with warm

water, and go back to the bedroom. She is still looking at me. I place the tub at her feet, put her hands on the walker and grab her under the arms. She opens her mouth but I don't give her a chance "We don't talk now. You must get up." I hold her hands tight over the walker.

"One...two...three!" She gets up. I pull her soiled underwear down to her shaking knees, pull out the shitty diaper, and eye the room for the wastebasket.

"Did I shit too much?"

"Yes, not bad."

"Can I see?"

I show her.

"Yes, not bad."

I crumple the diaper and throw it in the basket. I draw back the curtains and open the window; the wind blows in.

“It’ll be cold.”

“I’ll shut it in a bit.”

I soak the cloth in warm water. Pull a handful of toilet paper and clean between her legs. I rub the wet cloth over her wrinkly thighs.

“I’m getting tired.”

I put a fresh diaper between her legs.

“Alrighty...” I pull up her underwear “done!”

“I must sit.”

I hold her under the arms. Her muscles twitch underneath my hands: “Sit.”

She lets go of the walker. “It’s cold.”

She sits down. “What day is it?”

“Wednesday. I must check on someone else, too.” I shut the window.

“Are you in a hurry?”

“Yes.”

“When people are in a hurry, can’t they write?”

“Write what?”

“Letters. Can’t they write letters?”

“No, when they’re busy, and in a hurry, they can’t write.”

“But I didn’t work. Did I?”

“No. You said you didn’t.”

“But I had a husband, right?”

“Yes, and your husband had a factory. Now, what do you want for breakfast?”

“What about photos? Can’t they send photos?”

I pull off my gloves. “Look at this. Didn’t she send this?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Ok.”

She pulls the blanket up to her chest. “But I wanted to.”

“Now I should get your breakfast.”

“I don’t want it!”

“What about coffee?”

She draws her feet under the blanket. “Turn it off!”

I tie up the edges of the garbage bag.

“Turn it off!”

I pick up the tub.

“I said turn the light off!”

11:30

“Good day Captain!”

He scratches behind his ear. “You...or me?”

I extend my hand. “You, Captain.”

He wipes his hand on his worn bathrobe, smiles
and shakes my hand. “Yeah...I must not forget.”

I give his hand a light squeeze. “No, Captain, you
mustn’t forget.”

He looks at himself. “Okay?”

I say, “May I?”

“Do what?”

“Come in?”

He takes his hand from mine. “Yes, I must not forget.”

He turns towards the mirror. The kitchen window is reflected in the corner.

I switch on the light. “Don’t you want to take a shower, Captain?”

He frowns in the mirror. “Maybe...”

“Maybe what, Captain?”

He sticks his nose closer to the mirror. “Maybe today is Tuesday.”

I take off my jacket.

He points at the bathroom. “Here?”

I hang my hat on the doorknob. “That’s right Captain, there.”

“But, are we...I mean, am I...going somewhere?”

“Captain, they have a great menu today.”

“Good food is very good.” He thinks for a bit. “I like good food very much.” He checks his teeth in the mirror. “Maybe I brush my teeth, too.”

He turns around and stares about my chest.

“But...”

“But what Captain?”

He pulls open the drawer of the vanity and looks, unsuccessfully, for something.

“Did you lose something?”

He pushes the drawer closed. Pulls it out again.

Looks inside. Can’t find what he’s looking for.

He pushes it back in. “If, maybe...Maria is going to be there, too?” He looks at me.

I open the bathroom door. “Maybe... but, where, Captain?”

He pulls the drawer out. “There, where they’ve got... maybe... good food.”

“Yes, maybe she’ll be there, too.”

He pushes the drawer back in and starts towards the kitchen, stops midway, and goes towards the bathroom. “But... should we pick up some flowers?”

“Yes, we’ll get some flowers, too.”

He stops at the doorway, thinks for a bit, and starts again. Holds on to the sink in the bathroom with one hand and takes off his robe with the other. Bends and holds on to the tub with one hand. Takes off his shirt and holds it towards me. I hang the shirt and the robe on the hanger. He raises his left foot and steps in the tub. “Shave my beard too... yeah?” He lifts his right foot. I

hold on to his fat upper arm. He sits down on the stool and looks at me. “Maybe? Yeah?”

“Sure, Captain. Sure.”

I reach for the shower hose.

“But see that it’s not cold...”

I adjust the water temperature. “Is it okay?”

He holds the back of his hand under water. “A little warm a little cold is always good.”

He takes the hose from me. I put on my plastic gown. He looks at me, his face dripping. I point at the shampoo, and he bends his head. I take the hose from him, drizzle a little shampoo onto his thin hair.

“Lather it up.”

He rubs his head.

“Lather it.”

He smears the foam on his face. “I did. Now pour water.” He lifts his face and looks at me through slit eyes. I raise the showerhead to his face. He turns his head around. “It’s enough... maybe.” I run water over his body. He wants to get up.

“Wait...” I shut the water off “Don’t you want to wash your body?”

He rubs his eyes with his palm. “I say... maybe it’s enough...”

I give him his towel. “Dry yourself.”

He rubs it over his face and his hair “*Captain!*”

He laughs gingerly.

I grab his wet arm and he pulls himself up, lifting his right leg out of the tub. “But...” He lifts his left leg out. “Do we... I... have money?”

“Money for what?”

He sits on the toilet seat “If we maybe invite a lady to have coffee with us?”

“A lady?”

He looks at me. “Maria... well, always had money.” He pauses, “Right?”

“Right.” I squeeze shaving foam from a tube into his hand.

He rubs it on his face. “Maybe today they have pastries, too... right?”

The head of the razor blade is caked with dried foam. I rinse it under water. “But, Captain, sweets are not good for you.” I knock the razor against the side of the sink a couple of times.

“You, a doctor?”

“No, I’m not.” I bend over his face.

“So maybe the other one was a doctor.”

“Lift your head.”

He does. “The one who was tall.”

“We don’t talk now Captain. I am shaving you.”

“If she is not there... then maybe she’s gone to the hospital, right?”

I turn his face. “Yeah...”

“But... maybe she shouldn’t have gone to the hospital.”

I slide the razor over his chubby cheeks.

“Right?”

“Captain, no talking!”

“I’d never go.”

I hold his chin lightly.

“I don’t like. I mean I didn’t. Did you know that?”

“Captain! Didn’t I say no talking? I am shaving your face.”

He gets up and rubs his face with the towel. A trail of foam remains by the side of his nose.

“What did you say?”

“I said, they have good food today.”

“But hospital food...Maria too didn’t like.”

“Today they have the New Year’s special. You should shave...”

“We’ll get a bouquet, too, right?”

“Yes. We must shave! And we’ll get a bouquet, too.”

“But it was nice of them to bring flowers, right?”

“Yes, Captain. It was. I must shave you. We have no time.”

“It had slipped my mind. Maybe because I was in a hurry, right?”

“We won’t forget Captain. I promise.”

“So then maybe we must hurry up.”

He picks up his toothbrush and looks at it, then drops it the sink.

“Don’t you want to brush your teeth?” I pick up the toothbrush.

“I say if we must hurry up...” He takes the robe.

“You should wear a suit.”

He walks into the hallway.

I say “Captain!” and drop the toothbrush in to the sink.

He turns right and the light turns off in the hall.

I follow him up the hall. “Captain!”

Everywhere is dark. Only a corner of the kitchen
shows in the mirror.

11:40

“Let me be.”

I push aside the empty plate.

“You know why I’m asking. Like, when you opened the door...?”

She pulls the ashtray closer to her hand. “You can say, for example, I saw her cat, or...”

She pushes aside her untouched plate. “Her slipper was left by the door...” She turns to face the window. Outside, snows falls on the train station.

“I saw nothing.” She looks at the empty ashtray.

“Maybe I didn’t want to see.”

“When you opened the door?”

She watches as an old woman with a walker passes by, then turns to look at the clock on the wall behind us.

Ten minutes left of her lunch break.

She trails her finger on the table. “You know...in a house with a dead woman in it, with all the doors and windows shut...there is a weird hush...isn’t there”

I ask, “Was she on the floor?”

She picks up her cigarette. “She was in her bed. I called her a couple of times. Then...I noticed the silence. I thought she was moving, then I looked again...” She stares at me.

“Yes?”

She shrugs her thin shoulders a little, and lowers her head. Her hair spreads out on the table. Two old men, bent over their walkers, pass us by.

She lifts her head. “I touched her hand, it was ice cold!”

She fishes the lighter out of her jacket pocket and peers at it. “I called here. They told me to come in and call the hospital from the centre.” She lights her cigarette and exhales in the direction of the window. “Should I say more?” Looks at me.

I say. “Even talking to someone...”

With her finger, she dabs away an imaginary speck from the corner of her eye. “I don’t know. But...” she touches the corner of her eye again, “look...” laughs, “if you want to write it...” picks

a teardrop with the tip of her finger. “Should I tell you more?”

“...”

“I called the hospital from here. They said I must be back at her home in ten minutes.”

“You went there alone, again?”

“They had stretchers. Three people. When I opened the door, her neighbor from across the street... you know her, don’t you?”

“...”

“She stuck her head out of the door.”

“Did you tell her?”

“She brought a candle. Her hand couldn’t hold the matches; she dropped them a few times. Then she cried.”

“They didn’t like each other, did you know?”

“Then she threw the matchbox on the table.”

“Did you light it?”

“Me?” She butts her half-burnt cigarette. “You know, when my grandmother was in the hospital, I was young, very young, six or seven. One day when we went to visit...” she pulls another cigarette from the pack. “There was a lake down there. We were sitting on the balcony in the hospital. I saw her looking only at her coffee cup, and I felt her dying. Believe me? It scared me so much I couldn’t look at her again.”

She looks at me. “Do you believe me?”

I nod.

“I wanted to, but I couldn’t. Do you understand?”

Do you understand when I speak Swedish?”

I keep looking at her.

“The next day, when mother turned off the TV and hastily put on my clothes, I asked nothing” She picks up her lighter. “Believe me?” She smiles but only the corners of her lips turn up. “Don’t write these, you see, you can’t explain things like this even by telling them.”

I look at the clock on the wall behind her. It’s a bit past twelve.

I say, “Larissa...if I write these same words, should I use your real name?”

She picks an imaginary speck from the corner of her eye. “Don’t write...”

She lights her cigarette again. “Don’t...”

12:20

She pulls out her false teeth; mimicking someone who looks older, and laughs louder: “The one who used to laugh like this.”

She puts her dentures back in, looks like herself again.

I say, “Don’t remember, I mean, I don’t know.”

She bends her face to cry into her cupped hands.

I say, “Hello!”

She drops her hands from her face. “But you don’t understand...I laughed just the way she used to.”

“Wait, maybe I’ll remember in a little while.” I place a dish on the table. “Fish... still warm.”

She pushes the dish aside. “As if now you understand...”

“It was Anita, wasn’t it?”

“The one who laughed like that?”

I take a seat. “The fat one?”

“Yes, the fat one with huge... legs.”

“The one who came to the restaurant with her walker?”

She pauses, “So it was that one, not the other one.”

She picks up her empty glass and shakes it in my direction. I take it from her hand and go to the kitchen. The windowpane is fogged over. I use my finger to draw in the condensation. Outside, at the bus stop, a woman with a pram is shifting restlessly on her feet.

“She used to have lots of chocolate.”

I come back into the room with a glass of water.

“Yes, too much chocolate is not good.”

“Now they’re sitting at that damn table, playing cards.”

I put the glass down on the table. She picks it up.

“Who could you trust?”

“Didn’t they call you?”

She takes a sip. “I haven’t been there for three days, have I?”

“Where?”

“To the restaurant. I’ve been sick, right?”

“Yes.”

“So?”

I point at the glass. “Don’t you want to finish it?”

“I will. What’s the rush?”

“Do you want your lunch now?”

“I paid more than the others.”

I walk to the kitchen.

“Do you understand? I paid more!”

I come back. “No. Paid for what, I mean...chocolate?”

“Chocolate?”

I put down the plate and a fork on the table.

“Money... you said you paid more than the others.”

She looks at her shoes. “I paid more than the others. Twenty kronor more than all of them. Now, they’re all sitting at that shitty table, playing cards. And no one ever knows who wins...or who loses. And then, they didn’t call me. How would I know? Now, you don’t have to lie here, you must’ve seen it. Don’t pretend you haven’t! If you do, I won’t believe you for a minute. Because, I gave more money than all the others. There, in that long room by the lunchroom. You’ve seen it. Of course you have!”

“Maybe... but I never look.”

She picks up the knife. “Cards were hers. They weren’t new, but anyway, her cards. Only here, in the corner, there is a rip.”

I put more fish and chips onto her plate. She sinks the fork into a piece of fish. “Do I have to eat?”

“Aren’t you hungry?”

She puts the fork down. “And you must be in a hurry.”

“Look...” I search for words: “I’m not in a hurry. I just have to deliver lunch for a couple more people. Look...” and I point to the bag by the kitchen door.

“So why didn’t they wait for me? Was it my fault to get sick? They get together in that eatery that doesn’t even serve decent food, and pretend they don’t know. Well, people don’t get sick intentionally... and no one likes to die either.

They could've called me. They could've phoned.

And she... what was her name again?"

"Who?"

"The one who..." She opens her arms wide.

"Anita?"

"Yeah... who cares what's her name. She wouldn't like it. I mean she wouldn't like it if she knew they left me out. Especially if she knew I'm sick, you understand?"

"Yeah... but you should eat. And I've got to go."

She skewers a piece of potato with her fork.

"How would I know if they've actually bought flowers?" She drops her fork; it bounces off the lip of her plate and falls under the table. "Of course they haven't bought flowers. And even if they have, they haven't taken it there."

She ducks her head under the table. “Who would take it? Huh?” She looks at me. “It was only I who could still walk.” She pulls her feet away.

I retrieve the fork from under the table. “Yes, but you must eat now...”

“Eat?” She pushes her plate away. “No, what we have to do is to collect money again for the next one. I mean everyone should get together and pitch in. But I don’t trust them anymore. And if I do, this time I will not give more than the others.”

“That’s wise. But you should eat.”

“How do I eat with no fork?”

“I’ll get you one.”

“Would you trust them? And don’t think you’re obliged to lie.”

I go to the kitchen.

There is no one at the bus stop.

13:05

“I’m coming.”

I fidget about in the foyer. I know he is switching his walking stick from one to the other hand; he mumbles while steadying his weight on his other foot.

“Who are you?”

“I’m from the Seniors Care Centre.”

“What?”

“I have your lunch.”

Now he has steadied himself, he tries to open the door. His cane clacks against the door “Where?”

I say it again.

The door opens.

I say, “Hello.”

His jaw quivers.

I wait while he sizes me up. He passes his cane to his other hand and stands aside.

“I should change your diaper, too.”

He backs up against the wall. “Toilet?”

“Yes.”

“Yes.” Leaning on the cane, he turns and walks to the washroom. He brushes against a picture on the wall. The frame teeters and I reach out to steady it. A man in a military uniform frowns. I pull my hand away. It stays askew. The smell of decay, of piss and shit and something unidentifiable sours the air.

An old woman peeks at us from the kitchen table.

I walk to the end of the hall. She looks at me.

“Hello.”

“Hello.”

I place the food on the table. “Are you alright?”

She creases her nose. “I am...” She points her chin at the bathroom. “But...” she raises an eyebrow, “he is not!”

I nod.

She lowers her voice, “So, what’s going on?”

“It’ll be fixed.”

“What?”

I put my jacket on the arm of the chair. “I’ll be back.”

I go to the bedroom, get a diaper from under the bed, put on my gloves, and go back into the hall.

“I’m in here!” He holds onto the sink bowl to support himself.

“Ready?”

He wheezes. I put the diaper on the toilet seat, and pull down his dirty, wrinkled sweatpants and his shorts. Without looking, I remove the diaper out from between his legs. I try not to breathe while I clean him with a handful of toilet paper. I wipe him a few times, each time checking the paper before I dump it in the bin, as they get paler and paler. I push the fresh diaper through his legs and tell him, “Hold this.” He does. I pull up the hem of the diaper, pull up his shorts and his sweat pants. I lean back, breathless. Then I turn the tap. In the mirror, I see him looking at the ceiling.

“Comfy?”

“Guess so.”

I throw the gloves in the bin and plunge my
sweaty hands under the water.

“I brought lunch.”

He looks at me.

I turn off the tap and go to the kitchen.

The old woman crushes her cigarette in the
ashtray. “What was it again?”

I pick up my jacket. “I said, it’ll be fixed.”

“What will be fixed?” Her eyebrows arch.

“He’ll go.”

She lowers her voice, “Really?” And whispers,

“Where?”

I bend and whisper in her ear. “You know
where.”

She careens into the hall. “When?” and looks at me again.

I hold two fingers of my right hand up to her face.

“What are you saying?” She pushes the food containers away.

The click-clack of the cane sounds from the hallway. I pick up a pen and write on the corner of the newspaper crossword puzzle “In two days he’ll be transferred to the hospital.”

She takes the newspaper to her chin. “Where are my glasses?”

They’re on the table. I hand them to her, and she puts them on. Her lips tremble.

She lifts her head. “For good?”

The click-clack nears the kitchen. I scratch out my words. Her face lights up, and suddenly her nose wrinkles. With a raised eyebrow, she points to the door behind me. I step aside.

“Anything else?”

The old man hangs his walking stick on the back of the chair. He turns and holds onto the edge of the table. “No...but...” he slowly lowers himself into the chair: “I’ve lost my walking stick.”

“Your walking stick?”

“I lost it here in this house.”

I point at the back of the chair “Here it is.”

“This...” he swallows, “is not mine. I mean...”

He coughs, “my hand was used to the other one.”

I shake my head.

13:55

She lies back and stares at the ceiling.

“One... two...” I squeeze one drop into her left eye, “three!”

I smooth the edge of the tablecloth and carefully set the eyedropper beside the tiny blossoms embroidered so perfectly on the fabric.

She tries to get up. I hold her hand. She sits at the edge of the bed and looks this way, then that.

“Where is Fredrick?”

“Fredrick?”

She laughs, “Yes. He was right here. See if he is under the bed.”

“Under the bed?”

I bend over and pull the bed skirt up. It’s dark.

“Not here, I mean I can’t see.”

“Look again!” She points at the table lamp: “Use this.” She points at the side of the bed touching the wall. “Maybe he’s fallen from that side.”

I turn on the lamp, put it on the floor and draw back the sheets. My hand moves under the bed and comes back with the cane. “This?” I show her the cane.

“Yes, that’s Fredrick. Give it to me!” She takes it.

I put the lamp back on the table.

“Better leave it on.”

“Do you want me to warm up your food?”

“I’ve eaten. Half hour ago.”

“Do you want coffee?”

“I’ve had my coffee...half hour ago.” She looks at me. “Have you seen today’s paper?”

“Today? No.”

“It’s there. No! Go get it and then sit down.” She plants the tip of her cane on the ground, “Would you?” She wraps her white, blue-veined hand around the curve of the cane.

I go to the kitchen. Small flowerpots line the windowsill. Red, three leaf flowers. I pick up the newspaper from the tabletop. Behind the flowers lies the forest; branches of trees are bent under the weight of the snow.

I go back to her. “This one?”

She takes the paper. “Was it on the table?” She puts her cane down on the bed.

“Yes.”

She leafs through the newspaper.

The room is warm and bright. On the night table, there sits a picture of a woman with beautiful lips, smiling.

“Is that you?”

She doesn't look up. “No, it's my daughter...”

She extends the paper. “You find it.” She changes her mind, pulls the newspaper back, and thumbs through it again. “Aha, right here!” She opens the page all the way, and holds it out for me to look, “Have you read this?”

“No.”

“Read it!”

I take the paper. Big headline: “Love has nothing to do with age.” Beside the article, there is a photo of a man in a tie and glasses.

“It’s an article?”

“Yes.”

I pretend to read.

“No rush. You can read it later.” She puts the cane on her lap. “For your own sake. I’ve read it. You read it too, later.”

I fold it. “Okay. Do you need it anything?”

“No! I’ve had my coffee.” She points at the wardrobe with her cane. “Could you open that?”

I open it.

“Down at the bottom. Under the newspaper.”

I lift the paper.

“There is an envelope...down at the bottom.”

“Okay?” I see the envelope.

“Give it to me.” She hangs the cane on the bed rail and takes the envelope. “My money...” She opens the envelope and shows it to me.

“Okay?”

She puts the money back and closes the envelope. “Now, put it back.” She extends her hand.

I take it.

“And close the wardrobe door.”

I do that.

“Now only I and you know.”

I laugh, “We know what?”

“Where my money is...”

“Why should I know?”

She laughs, “Fredrick knows it too...”

“So what?”

“So we have someone we trust.” She runs an eye over the bed. “Where is it?”

“Where is what?”

“Fredrick!”

I say, “Right there. You hung it there yourself!”

She says, “Leave it there.” And smiles.

14:15

I ring the bell.

“Don’t ring!”

I open the door.

“I have to tell you everyday not to ring the bell.”

I say, “Hello.”

She frowns.

“How are you faring?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Shouldn’t I?”

Facing the window, she blinks. “What time is it?”

I check my watch.

“You don’t have to say a word! I eat at 1:00 o’clock, not at this hour!” She picks up the remote control, “I’m watching TV” and presses a button.

“Here’s the paper.” I pull the newspaper out of my bag.

She doesn’t look at it.

“I’ll leave your food in the kitchen.” As I walk out of the room, I put the paper on the table.

“Where’re you going?”

I turn around.

She’s put her hands on the arms of her chair, her fingers wrinkled and tensed.

“Shouldn’t I leave the food on the table?”

She frowns, “And you also should take the garbage out. Two bags. Everyday, I have to tell

you, there are two bags. And then, I've been waiting for three hours...and then, you must make the bed too. And then, if I don't tell you, you won't do it. And then, you wanna tell me what time is it? What time is it?"

"Would you turn the TV down?"

"No! And then, all of you, bring the food whenever you feel like it, and put it on the kitchen table whenever you want to." Her voice rises with every phrase. "Then, one gets impatient of course, and you, all of you, instead of doing your job and being on time, you hover over my head and command. "Turn it off! Turn it down! What's this?! What's that?! No sir, I can't!" But she turns the sound off completely. "Why are you yelling? I hear you fine."

“No you don’t! I yell if want to. I stop yelling when I want to. You can’t choose when I’m not supposed to yell...” Out of breath: “I ask what time is it, and then...” Coughs: “The chamber pot is under the bed. You should make the bed, too. I haven’t had my coffee yet. Arriving at four...” She covers her legs with the blanket and looks at the TV

I go to the kitchen and leave the food on the table. I watch her from the kitchen. Her chest heaves as she watches the TV, on which a woman in her nightgown turns her finger in the dial of a phone. The actress lifts her head and tucks her hair behind her ear. She sits down on the table edge and moves her lips soundlessly. At the other end of the cord, a man clutches the

receiver between chin and shoulder while
pouring himself a drink.

The old woman turns and stares at me. “Why are
you looking at me?”

I smile.

“Why’re you laughing?”

I go back inside. “Is it a good show?”

“How would I know?” She turns back, “I only
watch!” and yells, “And you, instead of coming
to work three hours late, at 4:30, and standing
idle looking at me and the TV, go about your
chores. It’s 4:30 and you’re still...”

I say, “No! No! No! You’re wrong. You’ll get an
omelet tomorrow, not today!”

She looks at me. “Really? No omelet today? It
wasn’t you the other time...It was the girl...”

What's her name? The one..." she shakes her finger towards the window, "who delivered the food late. All of you come late! All you know is to arrive at 4:30. All of you deliver food late."

I pull up my sleeves.

She looks at my wrist. "What's today's lunch?"

"Look. It's only twenty past two."

"The clock is there." She points at the TV with her chin.

There is an old manual clock on top of the TV.

The second hand is lost and the face is cracked at the corner. The hour hand is on four, and the minute hand is on the six.

I pick it up. "This one is not working. It's broken."

“You’re not working.” She swallows. “All you know is not working. None of you know how to work. I called a few people today. I even called my sister...They all said it only happens in this neighborhood... It’s only you guys who don’t know how to do your job...”

I put the clock back.

She turns the sound up.

“It’s a good music, isn’t it? You wanna dance?” I extend my hand. She puts her hand on her chest.

“Me? With you? Never! I’ve had three boyfriends, and I married one but...”

“You don’t know how to dance?” I haven’t yet pulled back my hand.

“Don’t know how? I’ll never dance with you! Besides...my legs...” She fixes her hair with her

fingers and gestures for me to draw my hand back.

I point at the picture on the cupboard. A man, with a fishing rod, smiles at the camera. “Did you marry him?”

“Him?” she points at the picture. “Yes, I mean I don’t know, this one. Or, it was the other one. You know. Maybe I’ve told you. No, I haven’t told the other one. These things are private. I shouldn’t tell. And you...I mean you should only do your job around here, instead of arriving at four while I’m watching TV, starving. But, I believe it was him, yeah! He liked only men...” she looks at the TV, “I found out later...”

On the screen, a young woman in a blue suit is standing by a map. With a stick, she points up and down on the map and smiles.

“Did she say minus fifteen?”

I haven’t been listening. “Yes, very cold.”

“Is it? So where is my food? You don’t do your job right. Did you take the milk out of the fridge?

No! Did you make the bed? No! Did you leave the food on the table? How many times do I tell you? You should put it on the table. With a glass.

It’s 4:30 again, and you’re still talking.”

“Alright. It’s not the one you married.”

She looks at the photo. “Marriage? I guess it was him. But he wore the ring for one day only. He’d go only with men. But he was nice, too, because he died young. Maybe it was him. Isn’t that

Philip? I don't know. Anyway, his ring is right there," she points with her cane at the cupboard, "in the bottom drawer..." She pulls the blanket up on her legs again. "And he didn't work. None of you work. The African guy doesn't work at all. Did you empty the pot? Don't you come here to work? And you don't work. Why you keep looking at me?"

"I'll empty it right away."

"And don't forget the milk. Did you make the bed? You should take the garbage out." She turns the sound up and watches as a fat Santa Claus, with white beard and hair, a red costume and a fur-trimmed hat, walks towards a house on a snowy night. A light from the house spills out from the window and onto the snow.

I walk past the hall and open the door to the
bedroom. The chamber pot is upside down and
there is shit all over the floor.

15:10

“And here is your spoon.”

With her left hand, she holds the edge of the plate. “Isn’t it cold?”

“No!”

She mounds the rice in a corner of her plate. She plunges the spoon in and lifts her head. “Is the light on?”

I nod.

She looks at the whole of my face. “Is it?”

“Yes, it’s on.”

“What time is it?” She lifts a spoonful up to her mouth.

I pull up my sleeve, “Ten past three.”

She puts down the spoon. While chewing, she lifts her left hand and pulls her worn sleeve up a little. She presses her finger to the black surface wrapped around her wrist.

“It’s fifteen, and twelve minutes, and twenty three seconds. Fifteen, and twelve minutes, and ...”

She pulls the sleeve down. “Are you looking at me?”

I shrug.

She stares at my face. “Are you?”

“No.”

I turn around. The light on the balcony is on.

Candles blink in the neighbor’s apartment. I turn back.

Her hand fumbles on the table.

I move the glass of milk closer to her hand. She picks it up. “Did you say the light is on?”

“Yes, it’s on.”

“Are you the one who’s got a Latin American wife?” She sips her milk.

“No, he’s away on holiday.”

“Don’t you go away on holiday?” She wipes her mouth.

I get up. “Not for a while.”

An old clock in the shape of a wardrobe is on the windowsill. Its face was once white, long ago.

The hour hand sits a bit past eleven; the other hand is frozen on four. The second hand stumbles forward. Every time, it lingers back, stutters, starts, as if it can’t...and then lurches forth.

“Are you in a hurry?”

I turn around.

A whitish patch dots her wrinkled cheek.

“No...” I am searching for words, “no, not in a hurry...”

“I thought you were.”

“No.”

“Did you put it by the bed?”

“Put what... by the bed?”

“Did you hear what I asked?”

“Yes, but what?”

“My pills...”

“Yes. I did.”

“And a glass of water?”

“I’ll do that now.”

I put a glass under the tap, fill it to the rim, and walk into the hall. It's cold, and white, without any photos on the walls. I turn the light on in the bedroom. A bra with worn bands has been thrown on the bed. I put the glass of water beside the pills on the night table. I lift the lead of the pot. It smells of shit, but it's empty. I go back and lean against the doorframe of the kitchen.

“Did you?”

“Yes.”

I press my back to the wall. It's getting dark everywhere. I hear the sound of a spoon scraping against a plate. I turn around to switch the light, but I change my mind and stay where I am. Specks of snow hit the windowpane. She is sitting with her back to the blinking candles. I

hear panting... and the sound of chewing and swallowing.

“Did you say you were in a hurry?”

My voice must not tremble. “No.”

“Where are you?”

“Here.” I switch the light on. “Want some milk?”

She scrapes her plate rapidly. “Is it gone?”

I look at her glass. “Yes.”

I take milk out of the fridge and fill up the glass.

She picks it up. I put the carton back in the fridge.

“Did you say the lights were on?”

“Yes, they are.”

I sit down at the table.

“Are you looking at me?”

“No.”

I sit down, lean forward and press against the table edge. I fondle the leg of the table. It's attached to the top with a nut and bolt.

I grab the bolt between index and thumb and try to turn it towards myself. It doesn't turn. I press harder. It turns a little. The old woman chews and swallows and pants heavily. It turns. It unscrews easily, is about to fall off. Now I turn it the other way. It tightens. I turn it again, loosen it; before it falls I turn it again, the other way.

“Are you in a hurry?”

I say, “No.”

16:05

Across the street, a fat dark figure searches his pockets. By the time I get to the light, he's turned around a couple of times. I cross the street.

He turns and looks at me.

“What are you doing here?”

He steps back. “Me?”

“Shouldn't you be home?”

He lifts his trembling finger up. “I...”

“Want me to take you home?”

“I...I should confess...”

“Let's go.”

Headlights gleam in the distance.

“Don’t you have mittens?”

The car passes us by and our shadows run up the walls.

I grab his hands. “Put them in your pockets!”

He pushes my hand away, asks, “I confessed, didn’t I?” and looks defensive.

“Confessed what?”

“That I don’t know where it is?”

“You should be home.”

“Do you know where it is?”

“What?”

“My home... do you know where it is?”

The wind blows.

“Yeah... I know.”

“Do you live around here?”

I start ahead.

“You’ve got a car?”

I grab his arm. “I don’t. This way.”

“He had one.” He pulls away. “Didn’t you have one before?”

“Let’s go.”

“Didn’t you?” Looks at me. “Did I know where I lived?”

The wind lashes my forehead. I lower my head.

“Yes, you did.”

“And do you know where you live?” He searches his pockets. “Does he know where he lives?”

We walk side by side.

“My paper?”

I pull at his sleeve. “At home. You’ve got many at home.”

If we take a shortcut, we'll have to walk uphill,
and up a short flight of steps.

“Really? So why do you say it wasn't in the
papers?”

“Let's go. The newspaper is at your place.”

“Instead of stairs upwards, they should've made
stairs downwards.”

We have no more than ten stairs to go.

“And there shouldn't have been any snow, or it
should've been much less...”

We reach a dark and narrow street. The lights of
a car stretch our shadows out. We pull aside. Our
shadows fall in the gutter, then move on.

He searches his pocket.

I say, “You have one... you have one at home?”

“But there wasn’t anything in it. I mean my neighbor said there wasn’t anything in it.”

I turn right, and pull on his sleeve.

“But I waited too long, right?”

“I don’t know.”

“I didn’t see... right?”

I don’t respond.

“They must’ve printed a newspaper, if they say so. And I say I haven’t seen it, because I haven’t, right?”

My feet are frozen.

“Did I know where my home was?”

“You did. Yes...” I pull on his sleeve. “This way!”

“The time that I knew where it was, it also turned this way?”

“Yes. It did.”

We walk towards the old building. Candles and fake stars illuminate the windows.

“Did you see his car?”

“It’s late. Let’s go.”

“Late for what?”

“For bed.”

“Yeah...but you’re rushing...maybe because you know where it is.”

I shrink my neck inside my collar. “Maybe. Let’s go.”

“Did I have one of those, too?” He points at the windows.

“Yeah... you did...”

“Are you sure I had those?”

“I am.”

“Do you know how to make those?”

The lights blink on and off every few minutes.

“No. I don’t”

“So how do you know where I live?”

“Let’s go. I know your house.”

“Is it far?”

“No. We’re almost there.”

“Did you go?”

“Where?”

Covers his mouth, “There...” coughs, “I didn’t go. They told me afterwards that I couldn’t make it. And they said it was in the paper...” pauses,

“Did you say I had one?”

I stand by the steps. “Yes. You have.”

“Do we have keys?”

“It’s open. You don’t need the keys.” I hold the door for him.

He turns around and looks at me.

I press the button for the elevator.

“It’s not too long since he didn’t come that time, right?”

I press the third floor button.

He looks at me in the mirror and turns around.

“Do you know me?”

I step out of the elevator. The lamp at the end of the hall is half dead. It blinks.

“If they said *accident* in the paper... then it’s right...right?”

I turn the doorknob.

He walks in, in the dark.

I turn on the light.

He is searching in his pockets. “I don’t have it! I knew it.”

I go to the kitchen. “It’s here...”

He walks in.

I turn the light on. “Look.” A pile of newspaper is on the kitchen table.

He stands beside me. “It’s written in these?”

I nod.

“Even a photo will do. His car was red. I recognize it.”

I look at my watch.

He sits at the table. “Do you want to take a look?”

I forgot what time it was, or maybe I didn’t even check my watch. I look again. “No. I’ve got to go.”

“Where?”

“Home...my home.”

“Do you know where it is?”

16:35

“Where...