



The Metro Station

A Novel

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By Mystique Macomber

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For my younger self, who didn't believe she would ever write a book.

Table of Contents

[Chapter 1](#)

[Chapter 2](#)

[Chapter 3](#)

[Chapter 4](#)

[Chapter 5](#)

[Chapter 6](#)

[Chapter 7](#)

[Chapter 8](#)

[Chapter 9](#)

[Chapter 10](#)

[Chapter 11](#)

[Chapter 12](#)

[Chapter 13](#)

[Chapter 14](#)

[Chapter 15](#)

[Chapter 16](#)

[Chapter 17](#)

[Chapter 18](#)

[Chapter 19](#)

[Chapter 20](#)

Chapter 1

Fernao

Under his fingertips, the tile edged easily into place. Like thousands of others, it settled against the wall, kindred in this cool place.

Fernao bent, grasped the next tile and reached for the trowel. In one motion, he swiped the mortar across its surface. The trowel slid from his hand, as he turned the tile toward the wall. Fingers grasped the edges, slipped it into place. Gentle pressure, and it was done.

The work was repetitious, yet precise. He found he could think about entirely different things – or nothing at all. Yet, at the end of the day, whole walls were covered in tile – tangible proof of his labor.

He liked the work. It was back-breaking, hauling stacks of heavy tiles and buckets of mortar and grout, not to mention the stooping, bending and reaching. But Fernao was a man who appreciated hard work – a laborer like his father before him.

It made him wonder what his own son would be like.

He also liked the precision of the tiles, the smooth coolness under his calloused fingertips. Despite the dirtiness of the work, when it was done, the finished walls would gleam. He liked that.

As he bent for the next tile, Silvio drew near with his bucket swinging, finally empty of its mortar. Silvio passed close by. Fernao could feel the air current of the pail as he passed.

“*Vamos* – let’s go,” Silvio said quietly as he passed. Another tiler, Silvio also liked the solitariness and silence of the work. He spoke softly so as to not break the stillness. There was no need for excessive noise. Neither man was boisterous, which suited them both fine.

Fernao nodded, although Silvio already was past.

“*Sim, sim, sim,*” Fernao sighed. “I only have a little left. I’ll follow in a minute or two.”

Silvio passed down the tunnel and out of sight.

Fernao scooped up another tile and placed it carefully. As he predicted, his bucket was empty in just a couple of minutes. He let his trowel drop and notched the last tile into its place on the wall. Light pressure, then he leaned back, tilted his head up and closed his eyes.

He gently rolled his head from side to side, feeling the muscles and joints in his neck pop and shift. He opened his eyes, and the wall came into focus in the dim light. Instinctively, he stepped back to get a better view of his work.

His boot heel caught on something. In the split second it took him to realize it was the rail, he had fallen full length backward, the tile wall giving to the arc of the tile ceiling – also his handiwork. In the way time slows down during a crash, he noticed how smooth the tiles looked – perfectly aligned.

Fernao's head thumped against the steel rail. The shooting stars were obliterated by darkness – immediate and full.

The tunnel was quiet and empty except for the man stretched across the track, his boots and head turned to the ceiling. A trickle of blood dripped from the welt on the back of his skull. He didn't move.

The work lights flickered and went out, plunging the metro tunnel into darkness.

Sol

Working quickly, the spray can darted up, down, over. Streaks of paint dashed on white-washed concrete. Even in the semi-dark, it was possible to see the details pop from the broad blasts.

“Shit,” someone whispered.

“What?” another voice demanded.

The sound of a metal can hitting the pavement. It clinked as it was kicked out of the way, across the uneven paving stones.

“Another fucking shit nozzle,” the first voice spat back.

The silence was filled with metal balls shaken in spray cans and the hiss of compressed air escaping. Overspray hung like a fine mist in the air.

They wore ball caps, tugged down and bandanas across their faces – blue, purple, black – like the bad guys in old American westerns.

Working in concert, they pulled cans from messenger bags hung on their hips like gunslingers. Empty cans were discarded, pitched on the pavement.

It wasn't often they had so much time to work. Usually, they were worried about being discovered by a pedestrian or the police. But tonight, the stars had seemed to align.

The metro station was closed for maintenance, and workers had started to set up barricades around the entrance. Standing over two meters high and solid enough to block the view, the teens discovered they were easy enough to move around, and they kept out prying eyes.

At this time of night, in this mainly residential neighborhood, there weren't too many people up. Still, in a city this size, there were the oddballs who came out at night.

Perhaps the barricades made them feel safer, but they weren't as careful as usual. They were noisier with their cans, although they kept their chatter to a minimum out of habit.

The trio had created graffiti together so many times, perfecting it on every surface of a big enough size, they knew who went where. It was more like a dance than a painting. They joked that they could get a government grant if they called it installation art instead of graffiti. Their art

improved with each piece – the depth increased, the 3-D effects more striking, the details more precise.

They were childhood friends who went from playing video games and D&D to petty vandals. Despite the artistic talent that went into each of their works, they were not sanctioned by the city, and their work seen as detrimental to the buildings and walls they decorated. Often, their murals were painted over immediately.

But sometimes, in places that were hard to reach, they stayed.

They smiled when they saw their artwork – on overpasses, retaining walls, roofs and metro stations.

Their one caveat was they avoided spray painting on tiles, which seriously limited their places to paint in *Lisboa*. So much of the city was covered in decorative tiles.

Instead, they scouted locations in daylight, planned the best times, watched a site for nights on end leading up to the chosen date to ensure it would be “safe” to paint without the likelihood of getting caught.

They were surprised at the metro closing. It had happened suddenly, and they weren’t sure why. But when the barricades started going up, they knew they had to act quickly if they wanted to paint there.

Shaking the can to get the metal ball flowing fluidly through the white paint, Sol hit the highlights on their tags.

A voice startled them, and the paint can jerked up, causing a jagged streak where it should have been smooth.

“What the hell do you think you’re doing?”

The teens bolted in different directions. Two split off, opposite each other. Sol dropped the can and vaulted easily over the wall, dropping to the stairs below. It was a longer drop than expected, but Sol landed it and took the steps down two at a time.

The man watched them disappear into the night. They hadn’t even taken the time to look to see who had confronted them. Their instinct was to flee, separately, and regroup later when there was no chance they would be caught.

He shook his head. “Damn kids,” he muttered. He disliked the graffiti that covered everything in his city. Even when it was good – and this was pretty good, he had to admit – it wasn’t right to mar public or private property. He felt strongly that what a person owned or what was for all of the public should be treated with respect.

He stepped closer. The paint was applied carefully, all except the highlight on the final name. “Sol.” *Sun*.

He had seen that name before. Same with the others. They were like kids who had just learned to write their names and had to write them on *everything*.

He shook his head again and turned away. *I hope you learn your lesson*, he thought.

He never considered giving chase or even looking down the stairs where one teen had dropped out of sight. He slipped past the barricades that sat in a half-moon around the metro entrance and walked down the limestone-paved sidewalk.

Almiro

He peered at and through the tinted window of the metro train car, letting his eyes jump from reflection to the darkness beyond and back again. He shivered.

It was cold, colder than it had been in a long time. It had been the topic of conversation on the metro today, which was saying something, since people usually didn't say anything on the metro.

The temperature was dropping, and it hadn't been warm to start. While Portugal usually experienced mild winters, this cold snap was making everyone uncomfortable. It was going to get to zero tonight, even in the capital city. Businessmen, housewives, students – nearly everyone seemed to comment on the cold. Bundled up, they looked more Icelandic than Portuguese.

Almiro loved this about the metro – the silence and the voices. He spent so much time alone that he rarely spoke. The silence was everywhere. Yet he also was drawn to the voices outside of his head, the ones who talked, laughed and even argued on the metro.

Most riders were alone. They peered at their cellphones or wore headphones to listen to music. They paid him little attention. Even the ones who didn't tune out weren't likely to connect. The Portuguese don't make eye contact – not on the sidewalk and certainly not on the metro. Unless you knew someone, you pretended they didn't exist.

That suited Almiro fine, most of the time.

There were times, though, when it would have been nice to feel a little like he was part of someone's life. It had been so long.

The closest he had come was with the little dog.

He closed his eyes, and in his mind, he turned the corner into the alley, looking for a shortcut to the park he knew lay in that direction. He could smell the garbage emanating from the big bins, wedged to the wall. As he walked past, he glanced down, and noticed something odd stuck between them – something that looked like fur.

As newly homeless, he was learning what to do. A normal person would have kept walking, but Almiro was learning that it was important to check out every nook and cranny. He'd found coins, food and clothing that way. He paused in his passing.

Squatting down, he peered into the dark. A pair of eyes stared back, the light glinting off them a little, although the animal was hidden in darkness and dirt. He guessed, correctly, that it was a dog – maybe seven kilos at most. Almiro smiled. He didn't need a dog, and yet he wasn't sure he should leave the dog there. Maybe it was hurt or hungry.

The dog cocked its head to the side. He got a glimpse of an ear.

He extended his hand slowly, fingers curled under, in case the dog wasn't friendly. He needn't have worried. As soon as his hand reached the dog's snout, it began to lick him and whimper. He turned his hand and scratched it under the chin and then on the head, all while the dog tried to keep licking him.

"Come on out, here," Almiro said, and reached his other hand in to pick up the dog. But the animal seemed stuck. It was far enough back that he couldn't reach behind the dog to really pull.

Almiro glanced around. There was no one else in the alley as far as he could see.

He tried to shove the bin aside, but it was huge and heavy.

Turning sideways, he slid his way in, until his shoulder and chest halted his progress. He grasped the dog by the scruff, and tried to turn it. He could feel something give, and the dog slid forward toward him. Almiro paused, pushed himself back, then reached in again for the dog.

His hands came out holding a bundle of black and brown fur that wriggled and whined. He could see the trouble that had caught the little guy under the bin. His back foot was embedded in a sticky trap, designed to catch mice or rats. The trap had gotten wedged under the bin, maybe when the dog tried to get something from the crevasse between them.

The wiggling dog was trying desperately to lick him – any part of him it could reach. He grinned, and pulled the dog close, tucking it into the corner of his arm. The dog strained to lick his face. Almiro held the dog with one hand and tried to pull the trap off with the other, but it was stuck tight.

"OK, OK," he said, as the dog licked him. "We'll get that off in a bit."

He couldn't help but smile at the dog as it settled into the crook of his arm – as if that's where he was meant to be. He really was a cute little dog, Almiro thought. And so, he was dubbed Fofo – "cute."

Almiro wasn't sure of the dog's age or breed. He was a mutt, but his ears were perky and his eyes still sharp. Even after he got rid of the trap and the sticky glue, the dog still limped. The colder it got, the harder it was for Fofo to hobble up and down the metro stairs. So Almiro carried him, tucked the little dog in the crook of his arm, and was thanked with a wet kiss.

Fofo made Almiro visible. When he carried the dog people would look his way. The dog seemed to say, "Yes, I am cute!" People would glance at the dog and smile. It was hard not to smile at Fofo.

Sometimes, people would give Almiro something for the dog – a bit of bread or meat or a coin or two. He was grateful for Fofo, for the companionship and for the sympathy he was able to gain from others without the focus being on himself.

He opened his eyes and caught his reflection in the window again. His hair was gray, his face creased and weathered. He had been homeless for a relatively short time – a few months short of

a year. Yet he felt like he'd lived a lifetime. It had aged him. The few times he was able to get a shower, he always was amazed at the whiteness of his skin compared to his face, neck, hands and arms, which tanned in the summer sun.

But now it was winter – Almiro's first winter homeless.

He shivered again. *First winter homeless*. He hoped it was his only winter as a homeless person. Yet he had no idea how to change his existence.

The metro train pulled into the station, more people got off, and only a couple got on. The train seemed to be emptying faster tonight, maybe because of the weather. People were hurrying home before the real cold settled in.

Julinha

Her head snapped, and the back of her skull thumped loudly against the wall. White light filled her vision momentarily. She held her eyes shut for a moment longer, willing it to stop, for it all to stop.

It didn't work.

"Open your goddamn eyes!"

She felt his grip tighten where he pinned her shoulder to the wall. She could feel his muscles tense even further. She willed her eyes open, and her eyelids fluttered.

She had nowhere to look except into his eyes.

His right fist was cocked, ready to hit her again. She flinched, instinctively.

"That's right, bitch," he spat. "You better be afraid. This is what you get when you don't listen, when you don't do as I say."

Her eyes flicked between his fist and his bloodshot eyes. The brown irises were so dark they looked almost black. *Like the devil*, she thought, and the thought sent a chill up her spine. Oh, that was so accurate. She was living with the devil himself.

He narrowed his eyes as he felt the quiver sweep through her body. He tilted his head to the side, saw the welt rising on her cheek and grinned. Suddenly, he released her, and she slumped.

"Get my dinner, now."

He turned and jerked the chair out from the table as she hurried to the stove to turn down the food that was cooking. He slumped into the chair, crossed his arms and watched her work. After a minute, he cleared his throat. She instantly stiffened. He grinned again.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" he asked quietly.

At the stove, she forced herself to answer calmly.

“What am I forgetting?” she asked.

His lip curled. Damn, the bitch just doesn’t have a brain, he thought.

Banging his hand on the table, he shouted. “My beer! My goddamn beer! The one thing I asked you for, and you had to backtalk. ‘I can’t get a beer right now!’” He raised his voice in mimicry of a female’s. “The reason you needed that smack, you cunt!”

As soon as he said beer she had hastened to the refrigerator. Swiftly, she opened the door, pulled one out and grabbed the bottle opener to pop the top. Shaking, she set it down before he’d even finished chastising her. She kept her eyes averted and hurried back to the stove.

Please God, she thought, don’t let the food burn. He might kill me. Really kill me. That’s the only reason she hadn’t gotten him a beer when he first demanded one – she was browning the meat and had just dumped in flour to make a gravy. She didn’t want it to burn.

Behind her, he grinned again, a sly, self-assured grin. He was doing it for her own good. When he was done with her, the stupid cow would be the perfect woman. She’d know exactly what he wanted and give it to him before he even had to speak. He was teaching her, testing her. He liked that. He liked being in control, being the teacher, the master.

He took a swig of his beer. She poked the potatoes with a fork for doneness.

He loved the power he had over her. If he said “jump,” she jumped. And when she didn’t, or if she was too slow, she got her punishment. And next time, she’d be quicker. Sometimes, though, he thought it was taking too long for her to learn. She was so goddamn stupid.

He took another long pull of his beer. She took out plates and serving dishes, arranging them on the counter so she wouldn’t have to face him yet.

A well-trained woman. That’s what he wanted. A well-trained, perfect woman. His dad hadn’t managed that, but, by God, he would. He would keep at it until she knew what he wanted without him ever opening his mouth. Then, she’d be perfect.

She was a good-looking woman, curvy, with a small waist. Her dark hair hung a little below her shoulders in waves. He eyed her, suddenly horny, watching the curve of her hips, how her backside filled her pants.

“Hey,” he said, huskily. “Come ‘ere.”

She forced herself not to stiffen. Like the well-trained woman he wanted, she knew where this was going. If she didn’t turn him off, dinner would burn, and there’d be more than a welt on her face. He’d break bones over a spoiled meal. She turned her head just slightly toward him.

“I’ve got the dinner you wanted,” she said softly, as she quickly dumped vegetables into a dish. Grabbing bowls of meat and potatoes, she turned and set them on the table, not stepping any closer than she had to. Just as quickly, she turned back to the stove and grabbed the other dishes and slid them onto the table.

Finally, she took the plates and silverware, set hers at her spot and carefully placed his in front of him.

Before she could withdraw her hands, he grabbed her wrist.

“You know I love you,” he said. His eyes bored into her.

She glanced at him, then back down at the table. She nodded.

She wasn’t sure if she should speak. She wasn’t sure always what he wanted. And when she got it wrong, she got a smack or worse. Right now, she just wanted to get through dinner and hope that he fell asleep in front of the TV with another beer.

He seemed satisfied with her response and released her hand. He jutted his chin at her spot, indicating she should sit.

She breathed an internal sigh of relief and quickly sat. She started dishing up the food, first for him, then for herself.

He grabbed his fork and knife and started shoveling food into his mouth, not looking up or pausing.

She kept her eyes on her plate, carefully picked up her silverware and started to eat. Thankfully, it wasn’t burned. She was safe, for a few minutes, anyway.

Dores

Tomás clung tightly to his mother’s hand as they were jostled down the stairs. He held the railing with his other hand, and she tried to shield him from the people who were coming from and going to the platform.

He looked at her with wide eyes, rimmed with long dark lashes. Dores could see the flecks of gold in his light brown pupils. She smiled at him, reassuring.

“Come on, buddy,” she said. “Just a few more big steps. Or do you want me to carry you?”

She knew that would get him moving. He had just turned 4 the week before, and Tomás considered himself a “big boy” now.

“No, I can do it,” he said as he turned his gaze back to the steps in front of him.

Below them on the platform, Dores heard the alarm as the doors closed on the train. The steps were empty now, and Tomás had plenty of room and time to get to the bottom. The train whooshed out of the station, and Tomás grinned.

“It whooshed, Momma!” he cried.

“Yes, it did,” she agreed.

“Whoosh!” he exclaimed as he jumped down the last step.

Dores steadied him as he landed somewhat awkwardly, his arm over his head, clinging to her hand.

Tomás surged ahead as soon as his feet touched down.

“Hold on, Tomo,” she gently pulled him back around to her side. “You need to stay by mom.”

He wobbled his head from side to side. His brown curls bounced gently. She hadn’t had the heart to cut them off yet. Maybe when he went to school. Maybe when he was just a little older. The curls made him look so young, but he was young, she told herself. *He’s just a little boy*, she thought. *My little boy*.

Tomás stamped his feet in time to music in his head. He hummed a tune sporadically as they made their way down the platform to the far end. Does didn’t really care which car they rode in, but it was better to keep Tomás moving or he’d find something to catch his attention. More people had joined them on the platform to wait for the next train. She guessed it was going to get busy again since it was the end of the work day.

“What are you singing, buddy?” she asked.

Tomás mumbled a bit of song, but she didn’t recognize the words or melody. Sometimes, he made up songs of his own. She guessed this was one of those.

He started swinging his arms in time to his music. She glanced up as they passed under the sign for the next train. Still four and a half minutes. Does slowed her pace. At this rate, they would lap the platform multiple times before the train got there.

She wished she had timed it better, but she never was sure exactly when the metro trains arrived and departed – at least not until she was on the platform and could see the arrival time for the next train. It would have been better to get here right before the next train so they wouldn’t have to wait.

As they neared the stairs at the far end, a wave of people descended, heading their way. Does tried to turn Tomás before they were enveloped in the crowd, but it was too late. Mom and son were like a rock in midstream, stuck in place as the sea of people split around them. When the “wave” had passed, Does looked down at Tomás. They grinned at each other. She turned them around, spinning him out so his arm extended, and his little feet did a dance.

Now the crowd had filled in dramatically. It would be hard to find a way through, but Tomás was pulling her ahead. His free arm churned like a windmill, and he chugged ahead, feet marching. Does let him lead, and he started to weave his way through the crowd.

“*Desculpe*,” she said over and over, as she tried to avoid bumping or jostling anyone. Tomás, at such a short height, could see a path where she saw none. Near the far end of the platform, he ducked between two legs, and she came up short against a big man’s back. She hit him hard enough, full body, that he rocked forward on his feet. He turned slowly to see who had so rudely hit him.

“Desculpe,” Does gulped. He was a huge man with bulging muscles and tattooed arms. He glared at her. She averted her eyes. *“Pardon. I’m trying to get past.”*

And that’s when she realized Tomás was no longer holding her hand.

Nuno

Glancing around, he slipped closer to the edge of the platform. An old woman sat on a bench, her head down, eyes closed. She straddled two full shopping bags between her legs clad in support hose, which looked swollen, like she’d been standing all day.

At the far end of the platform, a middle-aged man in a suit coat with his tie loosened waited, his hands jammed in his pockets. He stared out at the tracks.

Behind the suit, on another bench, a woman sat reading a magazine. She flipped the pages impatiently and paused to look up often.

The far side was deserted.

Nuno had purposely waited until the end of the day. He was disappointed there were several riders still waiting for the train.

He was pretty sure this was going to be the last train for the night. Nuno silently cursed his bad luck.

Even his suicide wasn’t turning out like he wanted. Maybe if he hadn’t had the whiskey, he could think clearer. But the alcohol was the only thing keeping him going at this point. Without it, he’d be a puddle on the pavement.

Nuno blinked at the people on the platform. He could try and get onto the tracks without anyone seeing him. However, the woman with the magazine might catch him slipping over the edge and raise the alarm. If he didn’t have a good explanation, he’d be sent to the hospital or police station, and either way he’d fail at what he wanted to do.

He swayed slightly. Nuno could wait for one more train. If he waited for the train to leave, he could get onto the tracks without anyone seeing. That would be his plan, he thought. He leaned back against the station wall near the edge of the platform and tried to look nonchalant. Now that he had a plan again, he didn’t want to blow it by looking guilty. Luckily, he thought, he just looked drunk, which was accurate, too.

Leonor

She breathed out.

Warm in the chill air, her breath clouded before her and dissipated as she plowed ahead. She buried her face deeper into her scarf, shrugging her shoulders higher. The wind pushed her from behind, and she ducked gratefully down the stairs. Below, she heard a train arrive at the station.

Her boots tapped a staccato as she hurried down. Partly, she wanted out of the cold, and partly, she hoped to catch the train so she could depart quickly. She dug in her purse for her metro card, hampered by her winter gloves. Biting one fingertip, she jerked it off and shoved her now-free hand back into her bag. Immediately, she felt the card and pulled it out, just as she reached the gate.

Barely pausing, she swiped her pass at the sensor and nearly galloped through.

Another flight of stairs down, she hurried as fast as she could, but the train was pulling away. Dismayed, she slowed, taking the last two steps at a snail's pace. Her hands dropped to her sides, and she stood, awkwardly, watching the train disappear.

The platform was empty.

Across the tracks, a couple stood holding hands, close, whispering – no kissing – she guessed.

She glanced up at the display to see when the next train would arrive. Eleven minutes.

Leonor remained rooted to the spot.

It's only 11 minutes, she told herself. You can do 11 minutes.

She forced herself to turn her head, look at the benches.

It's no good, she thought. I can't sit down. I have to keep moving.

As if on cue, her feet lurched her forward, and she paced to the end of the platform. Part of her wanted to keep going, up the stairs and back into the night. But it was cold, and she was so many stops from home. Then, too, she had worn her boots with heels today. She didn't want to walk four kilometers in high heels.

I could take the bus, she thought. But she knew she might need to wait longer and ride longer. Buses were notoriously slow. At least the metro was closer to on time.

She turned on her heel, and headed for the other end of the platform. She calculated the time until the next train. Nine minutes. *Good, good.* Her feet took her to the stairs where she'd entered. She turned back to traverse the platform again.

Several more turns ticked away several more minutes. She had read all of the posters, watched the clock, counted the number of steps between one end and the other. Three more passengers had arrived on her platform and four more on the opposite. One older woman sat on a bench with her eyes closed, hands clasped over her worn purse. Leonor thought about sketching her, capturing her worn features in charcoal or ink. She glanced at her again.

Hands jammed in her pockets, Leonor started to turn at the base of the stairs, when she stumbled. Her forward momentum tipped her toward the stairs, and before she could pull her hands out of her pockets, she had tumbled forward, hitting her shoulder, hip, thigh and knee before she slid down. Finally, at rest, she was able to wrestle her arms from her pockets and push herself up. She glanced around. The couple on the far platform was watching her. No one her side had seemed to notice. The woman still had her eyes closed, and her mouth was slightly open now, too.

Leonor struggled to her feet. Her bag had shifted, and it threw her balance off as she got to her feet. The heels didn't help. She held onto the wall and assessed the damage. Nothing broken, but she knew she'd have bruises. Instinctively, she cocked her head to the side and cracked her neck, closing her eyes as she heard the pop.

It went instantly cold, and Leonor's eyes flew open. Her breath came in a short burst, a white cloud imposed on where the tile wall had been. Her eyes dilated, and she whimpered. *No!*

The silence enveloped her. Only her pounding heart and shallow breath greeted her ears, making her own sounds seem all the more desperately loud. Her hands shook. Slowly, she reached out to touch the wall that should be there. Her fingers brushed icy air.

Leonor tried closing her eyes. Sometimes it worked. But the cold remained, and she blinked them open again. She swallowed, hard.

Turn, she told herself. Count to three and turn.

She paused. It will be OK, she told herself. It will be OK this time.

One, two, three.

Leonor felt her head turn, felt her feet shuffle below her.

It was dark, as if someone had turned off the lights but left Leonor in a spotlight. The air around her shimmered in the cold, turning to crystal as her breath and the heat of her touched it.

She looked down, but the bubble didn't extend to her feet. They seemed lost in the darkness beneath her knees.

She blinked at the darkness. It was total. No, that wasn't quite right, she realized. There was a faint glow in the distance. She tried to guess how far it was. It was hard to tell without some sort of perspective.

Moving her feet, she slid through the darkness, her bubble of light encompassing her. She was grateful she wasn't left to plunge into that inky blackness.

Across the void she moved. It seemed to take forever and no time at all. The faint glow grew slightly in size and intensity. Leonor never took her eyes off of it, straining against the dark. If she lost sight of it, and the darkness enfolded her, what then? She didn't know, and she didn't want to find out.

Her feet halted. The glow was near, but it wasn't very big or bright. It seemed to pulse. Leonor reached out her fingers toward it. She hesitated, then touched what appeared to be the edge of the lesser light.

A flash of white light, brighter than any she could imagine, blinded her. But in that moment, she had seen him. His features were chiseled on her brain.

She sucked in air instinctively, and it was warm, the stale air of the metro swirled over her tongue and into her lungs. The sound of the train roared in her ears. She slumped forward; her

hands propped on her knees. Licking her lips, she let her breath out shakily. Her eyes opened. Her boots were beneath her, ordinary brown leather in the fluorescent lights that bathed the platform in sickly light.

She heard the doors slide open, and her feet pulled her toward the train, her body following as if in a dream. There was no one to jostle her as she entered. She grabbed the seatback and swung around into the molded plastic covered in blue patterned fabric.

During her entrance, she had kept her eyes firmly on the ground. Leonor wasn't sure if anyone had seen her spell, but it was better if people thought she was crazy.

Ha, she thought ruefully. *If only I was*.

The alarm sounded and the doors slid shut. She pressed her hands to her temples as the train pulled out of the station.

Chapter 2

Fernao

Fernao woke to utter blackness. He had no idea where he was. He blinked. Yes, his eyes were open, but he could see absolutely nothing.

As he tried to sit up, he winced in pain and reached instinctively to his head. The pain stabbed deeper when he grazed his scalp with his fingertips. He jerked his hand away, then gingerly put his fingers back but off to the side. He slid them gently toward the lump.

He was remembering all at once where he was and what had happened.

He was in the metro tunnel. He had fallen, he remembered that much. *Why is it dark?* he wondered. The work lights should still be on. Unless he had been out for a long time.

What time is it? he thought. He wore no watch, and even if he did, he wouldn't be able to see it in the pitch black.

His fingers probed his head. There was a significant lump and some sort of cut. He could feel sticky blood – or he assumed that's what it was. He pulled his fingers away and looked at them, but of course he could see nothing. The darkness was total.

Fernao wondered if he had other injuries. Carefully, he moved his arms and legs. Everything seemed all right, if a little stiff.

How long had he been out? It couldn't have been that long, he thought. But the blood was sticky, not wet, and he was chilled – as if he'd been lying there for quite some time.

He wondered about the lights. He could picture the workers leaving for the day, and he must have been overlooked. Marco might have assumed he'd already left when he turned the lights out. Even his hanging jacket wouldn't have meant anything. The workers often forgot their jackets, caps and lunch pails – like schoolboys rushing outside at the end of the day.

Fernao swung himself forward as if to turn to his hands and knees, but he crumpled instead, as stars filled his vision and a wave of pain washed over him. Lying on his side, he dropped his head onto his fist. He closed his eyes and caught his breath.

He forced himself to slow his breathing. After a minute or so, the pain subsided from its peak, and he slowly raised his head. This time, he moved to a seated position on his left hip, pushing himself up.

Slowly, Fernao, he thought. You don't want to pass out again.

He realized his head injury might be worse than he originally thought. If he blacked out, he might not wake up.

He remembered his grandmother admonishing his brother to stay awake after he'd taken a blow to the head during a fight. Fernao wasn't sure why, but his grandmother seemed frightened that if Erasmo fell asleep, he might not wake up.

He didn't want that to happen to him.

Erasmio had been fine, even if he didn't have the sense to stay out pubs or keep his mouth shut. Fernao couldn't remember if he'd actually fallen asleep. Probably, Vó filled him with hot coffee and her homemade pastries – and no one could sleep after that.

He grinned to himself despite the pain and his predicament. Memories of Vó made him smile. A small wiry woman with gray hair pulled back in a bun, she looked severe – until she smiled. Her whole face smiled – from her eyes to her ears – she used to joke with young Fernao. He always wanted to know how ears could smile. But with her, it was true.

He put his other hand on the ground. Enough thoughts of dead grandmothers, he told himself. You need to get up and get out of here.

Slowly, he turned, pushing and pulling himself onto his hands and knees. He felt the hard rail ties beneath him, uneven. He shifted, trying to gauge his ability to stand up. His head hung down. Despite the pounding, he didn't feel like he could hold it up. It felt like it weighed as much as a stack of tiles.

You have to get up, he thought. He realized his breath was coming in short spurts.

Roughly, he hauled one knee up to his chest, tried to square his boot under him. Had the lights been on and anyone watching, he would have looked like a drunken sprinter trying to take his mark.

Why is this so hard? he wondered.

He forced himself to push upward with arms and legs, pulling his other boot under him to try and get upright. He stumbled and nearly fell again, but he was able to keep his balance, if somewhat off kilter.

Hands on knees, he panted in the dark, squeezing his eyes shut against the pain. Now his head throbbed not only in the back but through his temples, too. Every beat of his pulse sent another wave of pain rocketing through his skull.

Slowly, the worst subsided. He exhaled through puffed cheeks and reached up one hand to wipe at his mouth. Instinctively, he reached to his head and smoothed his forehead, as if applying pressure there would negate the pain he felt everywhere else in his skull. It didn't work.

He swallowed and straightened up. The woozy shooting pain came again, but he was ready for it, and he held still. Only after a minute did he realize he was holding his breath. He let it out, slowly, afraid any sudden movement might send him tumbling again.

He worried that if he fell again, he might not be able to get up. He'd never felt this way in his life, and he'd had his share of scrapes, bumps and bruises.

Neves would have to bandage him up, and she'd cluck about it, Fernao knew.

She really didn't worry about him working in the underground train tunnels. In fact, the new metropolitan train system was a point of pride in the city – or it would be once it was operational.

It was nearly complete, thanks to the work of many laborers like him and Silvio. But after this, she wouldn't want him alone in the metro.

Still, he knew he would have to tell her the truth. If it meant she worried, well, then she would worry.

It suddenly occurred to him he had no idea which way to go. He wasn't sure where he was in the tunnel. He knew where he had fallen, but since he'd struggled to get up, he was no longer certain of his place in the pitch black.

The bucket and tiles, he thought. Feel around for them.

Tentatively, he put out his boot in front of him. Nothing. He stretched a little to the side. Still nothing.

I must have moved further than I thought, he thought.

He turned slightly and put his right boot out again. Still nothing there except the rails and ties underfoot. Surely his tools were in that direction? He hadn't gotten that turned around, had he?

He took another step to the right and again put out his foot, this time in a little sweeping motion. He expected to connect with the bucket or tiles or something, but there was nothing.

He repeated the step and sweep. Nothing.

He furrowed his brow. He knew he hadn't moved that far. When he fell, it had been straight back. Sure, he had moved when he was getting up, but not this far. Where was he?

Had he felt better, he would have gotten down and swung his arms around, crawling until he found his tools. As it was, he wasn't sure his head would handle another change in elevation – even a small one.

Instead, he changed his tack. Instead of stepping to the side, he stepped straight ahead. He held out his hands, elbows bent, in case the wall somehow was there. He took several more steps that way until he finally came into contact with the cool tile wall.

He pressed his forehead to it, like a long-lost lover. The smoothness calmed him. He felt the sting of tears in his eyes.

He blinked. What the hell?

Crying wasn't like him. He hadn't cried, even in pain, since he was a kid. Nothing frightened him. Not even death, which he knew was inevitable, would cause him to cry. But getting knocked out cold in a metro tunnel made him weep.

He wanted to shake his head, but he worried what sort of pain he might have to endure. Instead, he turned so his left shoulder was at the wall and started walking carefully toward the station where they stored their tools and supplies.

It wasn't until later that he remembered the bucket and trowel. He didn't stumble across them as he left his workstation.

If the lights had been on, he would have seen that they were gone.

Sol

Sol didn't stop at the bottom of the stairs. It was their mode of operation to run and never look back until they were sure they were safely away.

Plunging down into the metro station, past the turnstiles, illuminated only by the glowing green exit lights, Sol still didn't stop. Instead of heading toward the stairs that would exit a block away, autopilot took over: *Run!*

Sol slid to the edge of the platform like a soccer player on a pitch, swung legs over the side and dropped into blackness.

Boots hit the rails unevenly, and a quiet curse erupted. Arms pumping, heart pounding, Sol flew down the track, stumbling in the dark until finally feeling the rhythm of the placement of the ties.

Several hundred meters down the tracks, Sol slowed. It was pitch black. She staggered back against the tunnel wall. Leaning heavily, she pulled the ball cap and bandana away, struggling to get it free from the long hair that tumbled from underneath the cap. She dropped them on the ground.

Hands on knees, her breath raked in. Sol realized she was trembling all over, and not just a little, but big, heaving shakes.

That's weird, she thought. Yes, she always got keyed up when someone startled them during an outing, but she'd been chased before. She wasn't even sure the man – it was a man's voice – had followed her. Sol hadn't heard anyone coming down the stairs either outside or inside. And surely, she would hear someone stumbling along the tracks in the dark.

Or would she?

Suddenly panicked, she held her breath. The seconds ticked by.

Sol heard her heart pounding in her ears, but no other sound reached her.

She let it out as she slid to the floor, sitting with her back against the wall.

Her hands dangled between her knees, and her head drooped to her chest. Sol felt washed out, like she could sleep for a week.

Yeah, she was stressed, and she never got enough sleep, but she was young – she didn't need sleep, she reasoned.

But sitting there, she thought maybe she'd close her eyes for just a minute. It was dark, after all. Just a quick rest, and then she'd retrace her steps and find Wube and Jazz. She hoped they had

gotten away, too. Both bigger and stronger than her, they weren't always as fast, but so far, none had ever been caught. Their flight reflexes were strong.

Sol felt herself drifting, remembering the paint from the cans streaking the canvas, the spray filling the night sky. She heard the familiar hiss and clink, like the sounds of old friends talking. The wet paint looked like satin, shiny even in the darkness.

She jerked her head up. *No!* She couldn't sleep in the metro tunnel. It wouldn't run for several hours at least, but she couldn't take a chance.

Pushing away from the wall, she struggled to her feet. Suddenly, she felt woozy, like she'd stood up too fast, but she hadn't. She steadied herself against the wall with one hand.

Carefully, she leaned down and felt around for her hat and bandana. They weren't there. She crouched and used both hands to feel around her. Nothing.

Sol checked her messenger bag, although she was sure she had dropped them. The bag contained a couple of spray cans, her wallet and a can of soda.

She felt the pockets of her jeans and plaid shirt. Nothing.

She felt again, like a smoker looking for a last cigarette, a bit desperately. *They have to be here, right?* she thought. Still nothing.

What the hell? Sol wondered. *This is just freaky.* She thought again of Jazz and Wube. They would never believe this. They probably would tell her she was on some of the drugs her mom's boyfriend left lying around the house.

But Sol didn't do drugs or smoke cigarettes. Despite being a vandal, she mainly followed the rules. She didn't skip school or steal. She'd drink occasionally with friends, but that wasn't illegal. Staying out late wasn't really a crime, she thought, and it kept her away from her mom's boyfriend, Emilio. The less she was at home, the better.

She was biding her time until she graduated, and then she wanted to go to university – to art school. Emilio told her hell would freeze over before they'd put any money toward continuing her education. Sol said that was fine, she'd get there herself.

And she would, too. She wanted to be an artist – and not just a graffiti artist – but a real painter. Or maybe a sculptor. Or someone who made beautiful tiles.

Her mom had nothing to say about it. She never had anything to say.

Sol shook her head to clear it from her thoughts and the fuzziness she was feeling. She got to her feet again, and with one hand on the cool metro tiles, she headed back the way she came, toward the platform.

In the pitch black behind her, nothing remained.

Almiro

Almiro spent most of his days riding the metro or wandering the streets near the stations. He knew most of them well. When the weather was nice, he preferred the sky above him, day and night. But the bitter cold weather had forced him and most other homeless people underground.

It was easy in rush hours to slip through the turnstiles behind a worker running for the platform. Trying to follow a tourist was a bad idea. They took too much time. They weren't familiar with how it worked, and they didn't move fast enough to allow two people to squeeze through.

Almiro would hold an empty *Viva Viagem* card and make the motion of swiping it while moving quickly through the gates before they closed after the person in front of him. He'd gotten quite good at it. The trick was to follow the right person and to look like you weren't doing anything wrong. Once through, he would keep moving, not looking anyone in the eye, but not looking guilty, either. Just like he was on his way to work on the train.

Almiro also didn't want to look like a homeless person. He washed up as often as he could and splurged on deodorant. He knew which public restrooms had soap and paper towels and where he'd be mostly undisturbed if he needed to shave or clean up.

He caught sight of his reflection in the glass. His hair was getting too long again, curling over the collar of his coat. His beard was stubbly, but he'd decided to let it grow, both for warmth and to not have to shave. Stubble could make him look homeless, and he didn't want that.

He wasn't sure why, but he wanted people to think better of him. So, he kept his clothes as clean as he could, and his backpack didn't bulge. He carried no shopping bags. Looking at some of the other passengers, he was no worse dressed than they were. His coat was getting a little worn at the cuffs, but it wasn't torn or patched. And it had pockets inside where he could tuck the things he wanted to keep safe.

Right now, those pockets contained his cash (9€ and some change), his driver's license, Fofo's little studded dog collar and a picture of him with his parents when he was 8. They were standing under a big cork oak tree, the dappled sun on their faces. He was squinting a bit and grinning shyly, but his dad smiled broadly, and his mother's bright smile beamed. They looked happy. *We were happy*, he thought. It was the only photograph he'd kept when he cleaned out his mother's possessions. There was no way to keep more.

The train pulled into another stop, and the woman sitting next to him jostled him as she got up with her shopping bags. He instinctively reached for his backpack, wedged between his knees. He couldn't lose that, either. It contained a few shirts and underwear, his toiletries, a rolled towel that could double as a pillow, a small blanket, and half a sandwich he'd rescued from the top of a trash can. It was going to be dinner when he finally bedded down for the night.

The trains stopped running at 1 a.m. He could keep hopping trains and stations until then, but he'd need to find a place to hide if he hoped to camp out in a metro station overnight. Staff would evict anyone – homeless or not – by 1:30 a.m. He'd been kicked out several times, but he tried not to be known by the staff. He usually feigned that he was drunk or ill and that's why he hadn't bothered to leave the station.

The alarm sounded and the doors slid shut. A young woman dropped into the seat next to him. She had earbuds in, and he was surprised he could hear music pulsing. He didn't look at her directly, but by looking ahead, he could watch her from his peripheral vision. She stabbed at the screen of her phone with a manicured finger nail.

She reached up and grabbed the hat off her head, stuffing the multi-colored stocking cap onto the seat between them before brushing her hair out of her face. The hat had a pom-pom on top. *Cute*, he thought. That made him think sadly of Fofo.

He looked out the window at the blackness beyond and blinked back tears. No, it wouldn't do to cry on the metro. Not while sitting next to a young woman wearing stylish leather boots and carrying a designer bag. He shivered instead.

The woman jumped, and Almiro wondered if she knew what he'd been thinking. Then she started talking rapid-fire into her phone, which she still held out in front of her so she could see the screen. She paused, then spoke again, and Almiro realized she must have gotten a call. He didn't recognize the language, though. It wasn't Portuguese or English. *Russian?* he wondered.

The train slid into the next station. The doors opened, and the woman suddenly jerked her head around and focused on the station platform outside. "Shit!" she said in Portuguese. She was up and out of the train car. Obviously, it was her stop, and the call had distracted her.

Her multi-colored hat still was wedged between him and the space where she had been. Without looking at it, he picked it up and slipped it into his jacket pocket. *It's not really my style*, he thought, *but it will keep my head warm*. No one watched him take the hat. The train was emptying as it neared its last stop. Almiro stood up as the train neared the station, mimicking those around him who were headed home.

He wasn't sure where he was headed – but it wasn't home.

Julinha

Julinha met Moisés at university. She was a student, and she assumed he was, too. Everything about him screamed psychopath. She saw that now, but then, well, then she was foolish. She thought he was handsome, and she thought they were in love.

Stupid, so stupid, she thought.

Julinha was sitting at a picnic table at the park in the late afternoon sun, reading a book for world religions studies, when a shadow crossed the page. It was a sign, she saw now, an omen, but at the time, she thought neither. She looked up, expecting to see a friend. Her eyes met those of a stranger, a ruggedly handsome man about her age.

Startled, she held his gaze for a moment, before she looked away. He had dark brown eyes, so dark they were almost black. He grinned and sat down across from her. She was surprised when he spoke in locally accented Portuguese. She was sure he was a foreigner from how he acted.

Portuguese never made eye contact with strangers. Portuguese men never came up to or talked to women they didn't know!

Yet, here he was, sitting and talking to her as if they were friends. Or more. He had a look in those dark eyes that she guessed was desire.

Too stunned to answer, she sat, almost gaping at him, as he introduced himself and explained that he had seen her and had to meet her. He chatted away, commenting on the weather, the park, the ducks in the pond, her book, the government and her beauty.

Moisés told her he knew he would regret it if he didn't immediately stop and introduce himself to her.

"What is your name?" he finally asked and for the first time paused long enough to allow her to answer.

"Julinha," she said, too confused to think of anything else.

"Not Júlia?" he asked.

She shook her head.

He mulled this over, then, as if it met with his approval, he continued. "All right then, Julinha. Let's have dinner. What time shall I pick you up?"

Julinha still stared. Had he just asked her on a date? She had said just one word to him – her name. She shook her head as if to clear it, and he quickly interrupted.

"You can't say no. We must go to dinner, to get to know one another better," he added quickly. He smiled, a genuine smile, and her heart skipped a little beat.

He was handsome, and it would be nice to finally have a date. Even at uni it was hard to meet people, most of the men were so focused on their studies. The Carnation Revolution had freed young people from the threat of military service, but those at the university still seemed bent on getting an education and getting out.

Julinha finally managed a little nod and found herself writing her address on a slip of paper that she handed to Moisés. Their fingertips touched as she passed it to him, and she felt a little jolt. He held her eyes with his as he lifted the paper to his lips and kissed it. Then, he tucked it in his pocket, stood quickly and turned. Over his shoulder he said, "See you at half past 8."

Tomás

Tomás climbed through the tunnel of legs like it was an obstacle course at the playground. As people shifted, the openings changed. He darted this way and that, intent on his game. Then suddenly, the legs ended, and he came out at the corner of the platform nearest where the train would arrive at the station. He peered down the tracks into the darkness.

His mom never let him get this close to the edge. He counted the rails – 1, 2, 3 on this side and 1, 2, 3 on that side. He could count higher, all the way to 20 or even 30. He was 4, a big boy, not a baby.

And now here he was, standing on the edge of the platform, a big boy by himself.

Tomás knew his mom was close by, and he wasn't worried about her. No, he wanted to get a closer look at the train tracks. He wanted to know where they went in the dark. When they rode the train, he would see lights outside the windows sometimes and not just at other stations. There were lights in the tunnels. His mom said they were for the workers.

Were there workers down there now? He thought he could hear the train coming, but he couldn't see it. Tomás leaned out further, to peer around the corner, when the train on the other track whooshed into the station. It caught him off guard, the noise and rumble, and he lost his balance.

Tomás tipped over the edge of the platform. Fortunately, he was rough and tumble, and the drop wasn't too far. It startled him, but he didn't cry out – more out of amazement that he was on the tracks! He scrambled to his feet and scampered into the tunnel before he knew what he was doing. He was sure that someone would see him and make him climb back up. This was his chance, though, to see the lights and the workers and where the trains lived.

He was pretty sure the trains lived in the tunnels. At night, when they went to bed, they must sleep there, in the dark tunnels. *Maybe the lights were for the trains*, Tomás thought. *Maybe they kept the lights on so they could see.*

The press of people missed the little boy who wedged between them to the edge of the platform. The nearest paid him no mind – lost in their own thoughts, craning their necks to see the sign for the incoming train time, or to gaze around at the crush of people. They measured their chances of making it on the next train before it filled up. No one looked down to see Tomás lean out or fall off. When the other train pulled in, the sound blocked any noise he made falling. No one witnessed the fall or even knew a little boy had been there.

Nuno

Nuno had failed at everything – everything he tried.

School. Job. Relationship.

Hell, he couldn't even keep a pet safe. The cat had slipped out when he was bringing in the mail, distracted by a letter from his landlady. By the time he realized Princesa was loose, she had bolted for the street and was gone.

Nuno left the door open a few inches, enough for the dainty cat to get back in. He sat on a wooden chair a few feet from the door, waiting – hoping – she would return.

When he awoke stiff and hunched the next morning, Princesa had not come back. Dejected, he pushed the door shut, one final look at the corner where he'd last seen her running, tail held high.

Nuno was sure she was dead, run over by a car or bus. She wasn't an outside cat and didn't know how to find food or fend for herself. Although she wore a collar, it only had a tiny tinkling bell on it – no name or number to call.

Which was just as well, Nuno thought as he returned the chair to his tiny kitchen. The phone had been disconnected three weeks before. Whoever might find Princesa and call wouldn't reach him anyway.

Still, he mourned for the cat. Princesa had been a reminder of Érica.

Nuno pushed open the bathroom door, flipped on the light and turned on the water. He leaned on the sink as he waited for it to warm up enough to wash his face. Leaning in closer to the mirror, he saw how red and puffy his eyes were. His mouth turned down. There was no way he could smile – none at all. Even if someone had told him the funniest joke, he would not have been able to laugh. His joy was gone.

Had it ever been there? he thought. *With Érica, perhaps.*

Nuno closed his eyes and dipped his head toward the running water. He sluiced it over his hands and splashed his face and neck, running his wet hands through his tangled hair. It was too long, but he didn't care how it looked. He didn't care about anything. Especially now that the cat was gone. What else did he have to live for?

He turned off the taps, and lifted his head to look once more in the mirror. Water dripped from his scruffy beard onto his T-shirt, darkening it into an abstract design. He pulled the towel from the rack and wiped at his face one-handed.

He met his own eyes again in the mirror.

"What are you looking at?" he whispered.

Tears welled up, and he swiped at them with the towel before pitching it onto the floor and snapping off the light.

Nuno kicked off his shoes as he toppled onto the bed. With one motion he grabbed the blanket and rolled over, covering himself head to toe. The sunlight streamed in between the slats of the window shade, but even the sunlight couldn't touch him now.

Leonor

It was always dark and cold. Darker than any blackness she had encountered in real life and colder by far. While she was chilled afterward, the cold never seemed to do any lasting damage, even though she was sure it was far colder than the deepest reaches of the Antarctic.

The cold was the darkness, while her heat gave her light. That she had puzzled out, anyway. The light moved with her, but it wasn't complete. When she thought of it later, she wondered if her light would fade if she got too cold. But she didn't like to think about that, so she counted instead – steps, breaths, trees, buildings – or recited poetry she had memorized.

Despite revisiting every instance and aspect, she never was sure what triggered it.

Hell, she wasn't even sure what it was.

Haunting, her mind whispered.

But who is haunting me? she demanded. And why?

It wasn't always a light she sought. Sometimes, it was a sound, seeping into her silent bubble, mingling with her breathing and pumping heart, which sluiced through her ears. Other times, it was a feeling, a pulling that would draw her to a location. Once there, the darkness and cold would vanish, leaving her startled and blinking.

Leonor shivered as she remembered the crying – the whimpering. Once it was definitely a woman weeping. Another time, it was a man's voice sobbing, its timbre giving away the deepness of what likely was a beautiful bass. Children crying – babies with their too-young almost raw sound, toddlers in full melt-down mode, older ones quiet or loud – were the worst somehow. She couldn't see them and didn't know what they needed or wanted. But when she found the source – followed the sound to its origin – the darkness, cold and sound would cease instantaneously.

Then sometimes, a light would draw her, faint as this one had been. Those were easier to follow through the dark, she simply had to see it and set a straight course – like sailing a boat. The feelings and sounds sometimes were circuitous, doubling her back – or at least giving that impression to her as she stumbled through dark out of time and place.

The face was new.

That hadn't happened before. She had never seen anyone during her spells – only the light that dissipated when she touched it and jolted her back to reality.

Who was this man, with gaunt features, dark hair over dark eyes?

He was in sepia tone, she now recalled – like an old-time photograph. Not silvered like an old movie, but burnished with bronze. Yet he had somehow resembled a portrait. There was no background – no train station tiles behind him, nor anything else for that matter – trees, houses, walls, furniture. Just a white background like a photograph from a studio.

And like a portrait, he did not move.

That's not quite true, she thought. His eyes moved just a little.

Like they saw me.

Like he saw me.

Leonor fidgeted with the clasp on her bag. She had been latching and unlatching it over and over again. She forced her hands to drop it. She shoved them into her pockets and stared out the window at the darkness. The lights of the train car reflected on the windows. Her own reflection stared back.

I look like I've seen a ghost, she thought.

It is true, she thought. I finally have seen a ghost.

And he saw me.

Chapter 3

Fernao

Fernao could feel the air change. He was coming to the station platform. In the dark, he was sure he'd stumble over the stairs. He could picture them in his mind. Wide, wooden and sturdy, they allowed the workers to get up and down easily from the platform to work in the tunnels.

He put a hand out in front of him and walked slower, taking small steps and trying to feel with each boot before him.

Where are the lights? he wondered.

He felt rather than saw the open platform next to him. The openness was palpable, even in the dark. But now, he noticed it wasn't completely dark. Burning at the far end of the platform was an illuminated sign with green lettering: Saída.

Exit.

He paused. He didn't know they had installed signs. That must have happened this afternoon. At least it was some light. He tried to use it to see if he could spot the stairs. No luck.

He walked the length of the platform and but didn't find the stairs. When he reached the far end, he turned back, puzzled. He couldn't have missed them, could he?

Now that his eyes were accustomed to the dark, he could see by the light of the exit sign that there weren't any steps.

What? He didn't even know what to think. Why would they take down the steps? They still had to grout the tile and do final touches in the tunnels. Removing the stairs would make it much more difficult to get tools and materials down to the train bed.

He resisted the urge to shake his head. It still hurt too much. *But my God*, he thought, *what were they thinking?*

Then, he realized he would need to scale the half wall to the platform. Sighing heavily, he leaned forward and scrambled with his boots, struggling to gain purchase with his elbows. Finally, he got one elbow wedged in his chest and was able to lever himself up. He kicked one leg up to the side, then rolled and pushed himself onto the platform. Not his most graceful act, he knew, but there was no one there to see in the dark. He would tell Neves about it, and she would think it was funny. Well, after she got over being upset about his head injury.

He lay on the platform for a minute, letting his body go still. He was very weak. He wondered if he'd lost more blood in the fall.

He rolled onto his side and slowly pushed himself to a seated position. He'd learned his lesson the first time in the tunnel. The dizziness passed more quickly, and he was able to push himself to his knees and finally stand.

Stumbling a bit, he groped along the back wall. He couldn't find the cubbies that held their jackets, lunch boxes and personal items. Giving up, he headed toward the stairs that would take him outside and home. He'd get his jacket later, he thought.

The night was crisp as he exited onto the sidewalk. Fernao shivered and thought dejectedly about his missing jacket. He shoved his hands in his pants pockets and turned toward home.

That's when he realized the light was wrong. The street lights were different – not the bulb style he was used to. Instead, they were flat and more white than yellow. He blinked, trying to look at them to see what might be making them look different. But the brightness only burned his vision, and he turned his head to see bright spots superimposed on the darkness.

He kept his head down and looked at the sidewalk pavers instead. At least those were normal.

After a block, his vision had cleared, and he glanced up. The shop at the corner was still open, and he thought about popping in for an aspirin. His head was still pounding.

Fernao pushed through the open door and stopped dead in his tracks. Where he expected to see fruits and vegetables stacked up, there were racks of magazines and books. The walls were lined with shelves, filled with slim packages of varying sizes. Each had a picture on it, but he didn't know what they were – seeming a jumble of colors, shapes and letters. He turned around slowly, trying to take it in. Had he stumbled into the wrong shop?

Behind the counter, a tall thin man with brown skin eyed him. “*Boa noite,*” the man said in accented Portuguese. Fernao guessed he was Indian. More of them were living here now. But this shop was owned by a local man, and Fernao had gone to school with him. Maybe he had hired the man to work the night-time hours, part of his brain reasoned.

But where is the grocery store?

He realized the man was staring at him even as he stared. He knew this shop, but he didn't know what had happened to it. With every tilt of his head, he noticed something different. Only the smooth tiled walls and the ceiling looked the same. The grid soothed him. He stood, staring at the ceiling.

“Can I help you?” the man asked. Fernao jerked back to reality and stared at the man. This was real, but how?

His mouth hung open. He tried to close it, tried to form words, but nothing came out. He shook his head. Turning, he stumbled toward the door. His sleeve caught on a rack, which spun around. The cover of a magazine – a comic, he realized – stared at him. It was Bat-Man, but it looked odd, too. The colors were wrong and it looked like someone else had tried to draw it.

Disentangling himself, he hurried out the door. He didn't look back but turned and walked quickly down the side street toward home.

Jazz and Wube

Jazz bounced on the balls of his feet, his hands jammed into the pocket of his hoodie. The jacket ties bounced in time, swinging with each movement.

“Will you stop?” demanded Wube. He took a drag off his cigarette and stared sideways at Jazz.

“I’m nervous,” Jazz said, not slowing his bouncing.

“No kidding,” Wube replied. “You look like that fucking kiddie tiger, bouncing like that.”

“What? Like Tigger?” Jazz asked.

Wube didn’t answer. He flicked the butt away and started down the sidewalk toward the apartment entrance.

A few paces later, he turned back. “Come on.”

Jazz broke into a trot toward him.

“What are we gonna do if she’s not home?” Jazz asked.

“Don’t know,” Wube said, honestly. “I guess keep looking for her.”

They didn’t want to buzz her apartment, but Wube finally pressed his thumb onto the button. A few moments later, the door buzzed in return, and he pulled it open.

They took the stairs. The elevator had been out of order as long as they had known Sol. They hadn’t visited often. Both of them desperately wished they didn’t need to be there now.

The hall was dimly lit – the ceiling bulbs spaced out too far – but even in the gloom, they could see the dust along the ceiling edge, the scuff marks on the walls, the dirt ground into the floor.

Standing outside her door, they looked at each other before Wube raised his hand to knock.

After a long pause, her mother opened the door.

Wube and Jazz had met her once, early in their friendship with Sol. Sol had been careful to not have them visit when her mom was home and especially not her mom’s boyfriend. They heard just enough about him to know he was trouble for anyone who crossed paths.

Tércia looked at them blankly. Her long hair hung limp. A bony hip jutted against the edge of the door.

“We, uh, we’re friends of Sol – uh, Luzia,” Wube began. Tércia continued to stare blankly.

“Um, is she home?” Jazz asked.

Tércia looked from one to the other. Behind her a voice barked, and Tércia flinched. “Who the fuck is it?”

Wube and Jazz flinched, too.

Tércia shook her head. She leaned her head back slightly and called back: “It’s friends of Lu’s.”

“What the fuck do they want?” the voice demanded. Wube and Jazz knew it was the boyfriend, Emilio. They shifted nervously.

“She’s not home,” Tércia said, starting to close the door.

Wube put out his hand to stop it.

“When did you last see her?” he asked.

Tércia paused and looked at him, like she was really thinking about her answer – like it would make a difference.

“Bitch!” the voice barked again from behind her. She jumped but ignored it.

“Two days ago,” she said quietly, so only they could hear. “Before I left for work. She hasn’t been here since.”

Then without another word, she closed the door. The man’s voice, muffled now, shouted again, but there was no reply that they could hear.

Wube and Jazz looked at each other. They had been searching for Sol since the night of the tagging. Her mother had seen her that morning, many hours before she disappeared. Coming here had been no help.

Just as they turned to leave, the door slid open a crack.

“Tell her I love her and ... I’m sorry,” Tércia whispered. “She’s better off wherever she is.”

The door clicked closed.

Wube and Jazz knew they would get no more help from Sol’s mom. They only hoped she was right about where Sol was.

Almiro

He followed the crowd that was exiting, but instead of going out into the cold, he crossed over and descended the stairs to the station platform to wait for the next train going in the opposite direction. He kept an eye out for any of the other homeless. Like him, they weren’t all obvious.

There was an older woman who carried a bulging shopping bag. She looked like someone’s mother or someone’s wife, and he guessed that she probably had been both at one time. She still wore a slim band on her ring finger, but he guessed it wasn’t real gold. One time, when they passed, and he had glanced into her shopping bag, and it was filled with smaller bags and parcels, concealing what possessions she carried.

It wasn’t likely that another homeless person would steal from you, but there were plenty of pickpockets, particularly in the tourist areas, who would take any opportunity they could. They moved around a lot, so they wouldn’t recognize a homeless person who wasn’t sitting on a street corner begging or pushing a shopping cart.

Almiro had gotten quite good at recognizing them on the streets and even on the metro. Most people would be surprised at how many pickpockets were women. He'd even seen a girl about 13 reach into a woman's open purse and remove a wallet while the girl's "mother" engaged the mark in conversation. He hadn't said anything, but it still bothered him. It wasn't his way of doing things. Even if he were starving, he didn't think he could steal from someone outright.

While there had been days and nights when he was hungry, he'd always found enough food to live on. Even when he had Fofo to feed, too, they made do. He always made sure the dog had fresh water and something to eat. Fofo stayed clean, too. He brushed him and bathed him in bathroom sinks when he needed it. The little dog tolerated it as if he knew he was going to be cuter if he was clean.

As Almiro waited on the platform, he considered if he should try to go to a shelter. A couple had opened up in the city, but he also knew they would be in high demand tonight. At 45, Almiro wasn't as old as some of the homeless. He'd rather have someone who really needed it have the bed inside tonight. He'd take his chances in the metro.

If he was ejected, he knew of a few places where he could at least get shelter from the wind. And he'd try to keep moving and stay warm. He didn't want to get frostbite. Almiro had no idea what would happen if he fell asleep when it was below freezing. He'd never slept outside in temperatures that low.

The train pulled into the station, and the doors slid open. It was a small crowd spread out on the platform, so they had their choice of train cars and seats. Almiro chose a train car near the back – farther from a driver who might recognize him. Almiro thought he was probably being paranoid. How many thousands of people rode the metro every day, sometimes multiple times a day, to and from work, school, shopping, eating out and every other activity? Why would he stand out when he tried so hard to blend in?

He sank into a seat next to the window on the far side of the train. The alarm chimed, and the doors slid shut. The train started its forward motion, and the florescent lights of the station flickered behind it. Almiro closed his eyes.

He knew all of the stations in order on all of the lines. He knew how long it would take to get to any other station. It was useful information to have if you wanted to time your last exit at the station where you wanted to spend the night. You couldn't get there too early, or you'd be hanging around trying to kill time. It was better to get off the last train, take your time and head to the restroom or ticket machine to look busy. It was good to get away from the cameras, too.

The stations were designed so there weren't really places to hide, exactly, but one could sometimes find a quiet nook. If you held very still, you wouldn't be seen. By 1:45 a.m., the lights would go out overhead, leaving the platforms and stations illuminated by exit lights, glowing eerily green.

Almiro didn't think they had night vision cameras, or if they did, they didn't monitor them. He'd never had anyone come back after the lights went out.

He considered his options for stations. The bigger ones had stores and shops, multiple levels and more nooks. They also had more staff on the lookout for homeless or other stragglers.

The smaller stations usually didn't offer much protection from prying eyes, but they didn't have staff, either. If you could avoid the cameras and the train drivers, you'd be alright. That's what he'd do, he decided.

He ran through the stations on each line. Two stood out, mainly because they were the smallest stations. On the green line, they each had platforms built for a train engine and three cars. All of the other stations had been built or renovated to allow for six-car trains. When the metro was built, the demand wasn't there for as many train cars. But more people meant more metro use, and most of the trains operated with six cars.

Almiro had heard talk that the last two stations would be renovated, too, when the city had the money for it.

They were near each other. He'd ride and aim to end up there, at whichever one was timed the best for his final destination.

Julinha

Their relationship was a whirlwind. They were always together after that first date. Her friends barely saw her.

He had pressed her for sex, even on their first date, but she had put him off. When he showed up at her apartment the next day, he wouldn't take no for an answer.

Julinha moved in with him almost immediately, but he lived several kilometers from the university, and she started missing class when she couldn't get catch a bus or metro. At least that's what she told the couple of girlfriends who asked about it when they saw her on campus.

Truthfully, she couldn't get to class when she had a black eye or broken teeth. Moisés hit her everywhere, leaving bruises and marks, but he especially liked to slap or punch her face. Maybe because that was the hardest to hide, so she didn't leave the house. He trapped her with his abuse and her own self-consciousness.

Eventually, she quit going to school, and she never saw her friends again. Her family lived away from the city, and she only called occasionally. She didn't tell them the truth about school or Moisés.

How could she tell anyone the truth? That she stayed with a man who beat her for infractions that were only in his own head? She was so stupid, and there was no way she could get out. Nothing she could do, except try and figure out how to appease him and stay away from those goddamn hands and eyes.

She was living with the devil, and she had no one to blame but herself.

Dores

Dores tried to push past the man with the big arms and bad attitude.

“I’m sorry,” she repeated. “I need to get past. I’m looking for my son.”

He turned the little bit he could, and she squeezed around him. She hoped Tomás would be right there on the other side of the man, but he wasn’t. She ducked her head to see if he was on the ground nearby. When she couldn’t see him, she stood on tiptoe to try and see over the crowd. She looked for movement that might show where he might be.

“Tomás,” she said. Then a little louder: “Tomás.”

There was no answer, and although the crowd wasn’t loud, it wasn’t quiet on the platform, either. She heard many conversations, snippets around her. “... said that she looked awful in that dress. Can you ...” “... potatoes. That’s right, that’s what ...” “... of course not, but why would ...”

Dores wanted to block them out, to tell them to stop talking. She wanted to shout, but she didn’t want to panic. She wanted to find Tomás. Surely, he was just ahead. She pushed forward, elbowing her way through the crowd, repeating “Sorry, I’m looking for my son.”

It was packed with people. She had never seen this many here before, but then she rarely traveled to this station or at this time. They’d visited a friend and were on their way home. Then, she remembered the new office building nearby, where hundreds of people were employed. That must be it, she thought. Hundreds of people trying to get home from a small metro station. This was one of the smaller stations on the line, as she recalled.

The train whooshed into the station on the other track. The rising sound drowned out the conversations around her. The sound echoed, wheels screeched slightly on the tracks. The puff of air covered them, and the sound returned.

Dores reached the wall. She glanced toward the stairs, but Tomás wasn’t there. She whipped her head around to the edge of the platform, but she couldn’t see him there, either. Still, he was fascinated by the train tracks and tunnels. He wanted to know if that’s where the trains lived.

Instinct pushed her to the edge of the platform. Wiggling along next to the wall, she came up on the edge. Tomás was not there.

The alarm sounded, and the train on the far tracks eased out of the station.

“Excuse me,” she said to the man standing closest to her when the sound died down. “Have you seen a little boy?” she asked.

The man who looked to be about 50 in a business suit shook his head. He held a newspaper and peered at it through reading glasses. She wondered if he even knew what a little boy looked like.

Leaning past him, Dores tapped the next person on the shoulder. He was a younger man who was fiddling with a Walkman. She must have startled him, because he jumped and turned. She repeated her question. He reached up and lifted the earphone from one ear. She repeated her

question again, this time desperation creeping into her voice. He shook his head and snapped the earphone back into place.

She felt the panic rising. Tomás had to be here. He didn't just disappear. Maybe he was playing hide and seek with her, and she just couldn't see him with all the people.

"Tomás!" she called, ducking down to his level. "Tomás!"

The lights flickered, and everyone glanced up.

She heard and felt the train near the station at the same moment. It rushed in. The doors opened, and the crowd pressed ahead. Bodies shoved into the train cars, before the alarm sounded and the doors closed.

Dores thought maybe she'd have a chance now to find Tomás. *There's no way he'd get on the train without me, right?*

Frantically, she scanned the platform. The crowd had thinned, but there still were people.

"Tomás!" Dores nearly shouted now. "Tomás, answer me!" Then: "Have you seen a little boy? I can't find my little boy!"

The anguish rose in her chest. She felt her throat tightening and tears prick her eyes. What if she couldn't find him! *Oh my God*, she thought. *What if he's gone?*

Nuno

Nuno dreamed of Érica.

They were on a beach, the wind blowing her long hair around her face. She was walking away from him, but she kept turning back. Her dark eyes sought him, then she'd turn and almost start to run before looking back again. Try as he might, Nuno couldn't quite reach her. She was always a few steps ahead.

Her navy dress billowed, puffing up around her, then pushing flat against her. He could see her bare feet, the impressions they made in the damp sand.

He could hear the ocean. In fact, it was the only thing he could hear. Érica didn't seem to say anything to him, and he didn't hear any words – just the sea rushing in and out.

When he awoke, he realized he'd been crying. His pillow was wet, his face streaked with tears.

From the slant of light, Nuno knew it was afternoon, although he wasn't sure how late in the day.

He didn't care. He had nowhere to be, nowhere to go.

He did, however, have to piss. Reluctantly, he pushed the blanket aside and swung his legs over the side of the bed.

This time, he didn't turn on the bathroom light. He intended to keep his head down, too, but he glanced up out of habit, and caught his breath. In the dark, he thought he had seen her over his shoulder. So often she had come up behind him, slid her hands around his waist and pressed her lips to his shoulder, peering at him with dark eyes in the mirror. Nuno stared at the spot where her head should be.

She wasn't there.

She wasn't there, and she wasn't coming back.

He knew that, now. The dream told him that, too. She was always just out of reach. He'd never have her back in his arms or held in hers, as she hugged him from behind.

The tears rolled down his cheeks again, and he sobbed. He let them run down and off his face, splashing into the sink.

Damn it, he thought. How many tears do I have to cry for her?

He didn't know. He thought he'd be cried out by now. It had been months since she'd gone. Two months, he remembered. Six months since he'd lost his job.

His savings was gone. He was being evicted at the end of the month, which was just a few days away.

And now the cat was gone, too. Princesa.

Érica had named her and bought the tiny collar with sparkly stones and a tiny silver bell. The calico had been given to them from a friend's litter. She was tiny and never got very big. The name fit her well.

Thinking of the cat sent him into another wail of tears. He slid down the bathroom wall. He crossed his arms on his knees, put his head down and sobbed.

Nuno tried to reason with himself. Crying like this surely wasn't good. It didn't help anything, and it certainly didn't help him feel better. Yet he felt like he couldn't stop even if he tried. And right now, he was too sad to even try.

His shoulders quaked, and he bawled like a baby.

Get yourself together, he hissed at himself. It was as if he was watching from above, like seeing a movie of someone crying. He had somehow detached, and yet he knew he was right there, still weeping for everything he'd lost.

There was no one, he thought, no one who could help. He could think of no one he could call – even if he still had a phone. His parents were dead. An only child, he had no siblings and only a few cousins, aunts and uncles with whom he wasn't close. He hadn't seen most of them since his mother's funeral when he was 10.

His friends had been Érica's friends, and there was no way to stay in touch with them after she left.

Even the neighbors turned away. He wasn't close to anyone at work, and then his job was downsized.

And what would he say if he could think of someone to talk to? No one wanted to sit and listen to him cry, and that seemed to be all he could do these days.

His job search had been fruitless, even before Érica left. He'd tried every office, but no one was hiring. The recession was full-blown, and even socialist-leaning countries were feeling the pinch. He wasn't even able to get a job waiting tables. Restaurants and cafes had scaled back drastically or closed their doors as people stopped going out. Everyone was struggling, it seemed.

Nuno knew he wasn't unique in that sense, but it felt terrible not being able to provide for himself and Érica. She was a teacher, a favorite teacher at a nearby primary school, so they still had her salary. He was old-school enough that it bothered him, but she didn't seem to mind.

"You'll have your turn," she would tell him. "Let me take care of us for a little while. And then you can take care of us."

Reluctantly, Nuno agreed. What choice did he have? He had tried every avenue for a job that wasn't illegal.

He spiraled down, turning to drink as the recession wore on and his patience wore thin. Despite all of her efforts to buoy him, Nuno was adrift.

At last, Érica saved herself. She moved in with a fellow teacher who had a spare room. Nuno imagined her in a blissful life, with a new boyfriend – one who had a job, money and an education. His despair depended, and she couldn't even talk to him on the phone without it devolving into sullen name-calling. She stopped calling and stopped trying. Nuno's grief was complete.

Leonor

Leonor sat cross-legged on her bed, sketchbook grasped in her left hand, pencil in her right, poised over the paper.

She took a deep breath and squeezed her eyes shut. Closing her eyes could trigger a spell – or so it seemed. Dark, light; cold, heat; sight, hearing, touch. They all were wrapped up in her experiences.

The room stayed warm, and no other light illuminated her.

In her mind, Leonor could see him. Moving her hand over the paper, she drew with eyes closed, seeming to trace the contours and shapes. From random lines, his face emerged, gazing out of the paper.

Finally, Leonor paused her pencil and opened her eyes. She expected a mess of scribbles but was surprised that his face was so clear. He stared at her out of the paper. She had nearly captured his likeness precisely.

It's the eyes, she thought. They don't have the spark.

Leonor dropped the paper and pencil. He still watched her, with seemingly dead eyes. She shivered, grasped the corner of the sketchbook and flipped it over shut. She grabbed the pencil and pushed the book off the edge of the bed where it landed with a smack. Leonor didn't lean over the bed to look.

Chapter 4

Fernao

Eight blocks away, Fernao had given up on looking at anything other than his feet on the sidewalk pavers. Too many things had changed. Shops were different, signs changed, landmarks altered. He now suspected he might have brain damage from the fall, although he'd never heard of such a thing. *What else could it be?* he wondered. *Losing my mind?*

That was an even scarier thought. Without his mind, what did he have?

I'll get home to Neves. She'll know what to do, he thought. His sweet wife would fix him up, explain what had happened and why things seemed so odd. Surely, they would laugh about this later. *"Remember the time Daddy fell down and lost his mind?"*

He turned another corner and came up short. He had noticed the cars parked on the street. He knew they were cars, but he couldn't identify any of them. They were smaller, sleeker. Gone were the rounded corners and big bumpers. These looked more like sharp boxes than the models he was used to seeing.

Edging down the street, he passed the parked vehicles, turning to the side to see them fully as he passed. In many, little red lights blinked in the front windows. Even the license plates were different, with letters and numbers jumbled up.

At last, he arrived home. His apartment building seemed normal – one of the first things to be that way. He climbed the stairs to the entrance. The light inside the window was warm and welcoming. But the door was locked. Feeling his pockets, he couldn't remember where his keys were. Had he lost them? He had no memory of dropping them, but they probably were laying in the metro tunnel next to his tools.

He reached out to the buzzer to ring Neves. She would be livid but happy, he knew. But he also must look a sight. He wondered if he should try to clean up before he went in, but he didn't know where or how.

He pressed the buzzer instead and waited. *Why doesn't Neves buzz me in?* he wondered.

He pressed the buzzer again and waited. Still, she didn't answer.

Now, it was his turn to worry. It was late, he knew. She should be home. Where was she if not in their apartment with Guilherme?

Was something wrong? Was she OK? Was Gui OK? His mind started running through scenarios. Maybe she had gone looking for him when he didn't come home. Maybe she was at the work site now. Or maybe they had passed on different blocks.

He considered ringing the neighbors to let him in, but without a house key, he'd only sit in the hallway until she came home.

If she comes home.

What? he thought. Where did that come from?

He and Neves had a great marriage. She was a bit quiet, but so was he. They didn't talk a lot, but when they did, it was meaningful. He treated her like his equal. They still enjoyed simply holding hands over coffee and goodnight kisses that sometimes turned into more. He blushed a little at the fleeting thought.

Why would he think she might not come home?

He pushed the thought away. Of course, she would come home, and he'd be here waiting for her, waiting with open arms and the biggest smile he could manage.

He slid down until he was sitting on the top step. He leaned against the brick railing, and turned his eyes to the heavens. It was much brighter than he remembered. Only a couple of the brightest stars were visible. The rest of the sky was an orangish hue. Crossing his arms on his knees, he laid his head down and closed his eyes.

Neves would be home soon. He had to believe that. He dropped into a fitful sleep filled with odd lights and alien vehicles blinking in the skies.

Jazz and Wube

The teens moved quickly down the alley, nearly jogging.

"We could go to the police," Jazz started, but Wube cut him off.

"No, we are not going to the police, idiot. They would fucking arrest us."

"For tagging?" Jazz asked.

"No, not for tagging," Wube said. "For Sol. For making her ... disappear." He didn't want to say the words he hoped weren't true.

"But we didn't do anything," Jazz began.

"I know that, and you know that, but a teen-ager goes missing while committing a crime. No one knows where she is, and then what? Who knows something? What about those *two guys* she was with. Bet they aren't telling the *whole truth*." He emphasized the words.

Jazz was silent as they walked.

"They would really think we hurt her? She's our friend – our best friend. She's our, our glue!" Jazz spit out, suddenly furious.

Wube stopped and turned to Jazz.

"Now don't get all bent out of shape," he said. "I'm the one who gets mad, and you're the one who makes everything better." He attempted a smile. It was more of a grimace. Neither one felt like smiling. But Jazz appreciated the effort. He gave a small smile in return.

"Come on," Wube said, jostling Jazz's shoulder with his own. "Maybe someone's seen something or heard from her. Let's go visit our friends, shall we?"

No one had seen Sol. They asked everyone they knew who knew her – even store clerks who might not know her name but would recognize her mop of hair and bright smile. Even the clerk at the store where they frequently bought paint hadn't seen her – not for more than two days, anyway.

They checked, re-checked and triple checked all of their secret spots – their hideaways and safe areas. Sol wasn't there, and it didn't look like she had been, either.

"Let's call the police," Jazz suggested for the millionth time.

"We can't," Wube said coolly.

"But what if she's been kidnapped or ..." his voice trailed off. Both were thinking it, but neither wanted to say it.

"We can't," Wube repeated.

"But they should know she's missing," Jazz countered. "We could make it anonymous. We don't have to tell them it's us. Use a payphone to make the call."

"And what would they do? Talk to her mom? Her mom's boyfriend? Call the school? We know what they'll find – nothing. And it only will get her into more trouble if she just decided to, you know, take a break, or something."

The boys huddled inside the doorway of an abandoned building. Plastic flapped in the windows. Wube smoked a cigarette, and Jazz ate a candy bar methodically, peeling the wrapper bit by bit, biting, chewing – but not tasting it.

They drifted into silence. They had been over and over it, how they were scared and split up. Wube and Jazz made it back to the rendezvous in short time and waited for Sol, but she never came. Both thought she had followed the other one when they were startled by the stranger. They were surprised and had no idea where she had gone.

"Could he have taken her?" Jazz asked. He meant the stranger.

Wube shrugged. "I don't think so, but I don't know. I didn't look at him. I just ... ran." He finished.

"Yeah, me too," Jazz said quietly.

"Did he sound big to you?" Jazz asked.

"How does big sound?" asked Wube.

"I don't know. Um, like big? I thought he sounded kind of big," Jazz said.

Wube shook his head. "You are incredible," he said. "I don't know if he sounded big. He sounded like a man, but maybe he was big or tall or old or young. I'd guess not too old, not like a grandpa or anything. And not a kid like us or younger than us."

Jazz nodded in agreement. "Yeah, yeah. Like a guy a little older or like a dad."

“We could look for him,” Wube suggested.

“What do you mean?” Jazz asked.

“Go to the station, hang around, the way we do, and see if we see anyone.”

“Like go back to the scene of the crime?” Jazz asked.

“Well, yeah, I guess so,” Wube said. “But not our crime. His crime.”

Jazz considered this. “But is he tall? How will we know it’s him?”

“We can look for anyone suspicious, then follow him and see where he goes,” Wube said.

And because they had nothing better they could think to do, they agreed to look for the man, starting that evening.

Almiro

The train bucked around a curve, and Almiro rocked in his seat. He wondered about how the metro had been built. He thought about the workers. That was work he could have done, he thought. He was a hard worker, tenacious. When he started something, he finished it. And hard work didn’t frighten him. He’d hauled heavy bags of produce when he worked at the canning factory. It was loud and hot in the summer, and loud and cold in the winter.

He missed work. Not the factory work, for that was mindless, but he missed having a purpose. Now his sole purpose was to stay alive each day. To find food, a place to sleep, an occasional shower or hot meal, a smile from a stranger and maybe a coin or two to buy meat or cheese.

He knew where to find fruit and vegetables, thanks to the many fresh markets in the city. Sellers would toss items that were starting to rot, but often they could be salvaged. Bruised fruit was still good, it just wasn’t pretty.

He thought of peeling apples for an apple pie. He’d never been much for cooking or baking, but then he’d had to learn. He remembered his mom’s hands peeling the apples, and he copied her technique. He followed her recipe, even making the crust from scratch. His first pie burned. The second was lop-sided with rough chopped apples. But the third and subsequent ones were passable. He remembered his mom’s bright smile when she tasted it.

“It’s Mama’s pie!” she exclaimed. “Did Mama give it to you?”

He nodded and smiled. He was pleased that she was pleased.

She wanted another piece. He cut her a tiny one and put it on a clean plate next to her empty plate. She dug into it, then looked at the dirty plate.

“Did I already have pie?” she asked.

“You tasted it,” he said.

She took a bite, and that smile spread across her face again.

“It’s Mama’s pie!” she said brightly.

“Yes, it is,” he agreed.

She took another bite.

“My Mama makes the best pie! Where is Mama?”

“Your mama makes the best pie,” he agreed. “What kind of pies does she make?”

She paused to take a bite, and her question was lost. She ate her pie, and he gently wiped her mouth with a napkin.

He would make her apple pie every day if he could, if only to see that smile.

Almiro came out of his reverie. A young couple had gotten on the train, and they stood by the door, leaning against each other. They swayed together as the train started. The young man whispered something to her, and she giggled.

He looked at the window instead, where he could see them reflected. It was a trick everyone used on the metro, to watch someone without looking directly at them. No one knew if you were looking at a reflection of yourself, or through the window outside the train, or at someone else reflected in the safety glass. It was especially easy when the cars were full.

Tonight, though, it was sparse. He closed his eyes instead.

Moisés

Moisés had chosen Julinha mostly because she was there. He had decided he wanted a girlfriend, and he wasn’t taking no for an answer. He thought the park might be a good place to find a woman alone on a sunny afternoon, and he was right. He saw her sitting at a picnic table, with no one else around. Her dark hair fell over her shoulders. She was pretty and slim.

Julinha was the first girl he had approached. His nervousness kept him talking at their first meeting, but he knew he had her when she agreed to go to dinner.

It really was just a matter of taking charge, stating what you want and taking it. He’d learned that early on. Women were weaker. They needed leadership and guidance. They needed someone with a firm hand to keep them in line, and by God, he had a firm hand. She would come in line, and then he’d have it so easy.

Until then, it was fun to see her squirm. He tested her often, just to see if she really was getting it or if she was trying to be smarter than him. Of course, she wasn’t. She was the stupid one. But under his *tutelage* – he chuckled at that – she would learn to be exactly the woman he wanted. Obedient, only speaking when spoken to, always answering correctly, always doing the right thing – always doing exactly what he wanted, even before he knew he wanted it. The perfect woman.

Why, she'll be a fucking mind-reader! he thought, with glee. *A goddamned fucking mind-reader instead of a worthless, stupid cunt!*

Had Julinha been able to read his mind, she would have agreed. She knew she was worthless and stupid. But if she could read his mind, she'd also realize she would never reach his idea of perfection, and that she'd die trying.

Tomás

Tomás trotted down the train track, as best his little legs could carry him. The noise of the people talking changed, and it echoed above him. Then, it got quiet.

He looked back. The station was a bright light, an oasis in the darkness. He expected to see his mom following, to hear her voice calling him back. But he didn't want to go back yet. He wanted to see where the trains lived.

Tomás hummed a tune only he knew and turned back to the dark tunnel. He wasn't afraid, just curious.

The train throbbed on the other track as it departed the station. Tomás dropped into a crouch, balling himself up as the wave of air and sound passed overhead.

The train's lights didn't pick up on the small dark lump off to the side of the tracks. The driver never noticed anything out of the ordinary, and that's what he would tell police when they asked him. "No, officer. I didn't see anyone on the tracks. Not even a little boy."

Tomás squinted his eyes shut until the train passed and the sound died down. He carefully opened his eyes and lifted his head to see where the train had gone.

I'm not afraid, he thought. But he was. The train had frightened him. It was big. Very big. And he suddenly felt very small.

He looked back over his shoulder at the station behind him. *Mom*, he thought. *Mom will find me.*

Content in that knowledge, he gathered himself up and looked down the dark tunnel. A light flickered in the distance. Tomás tilted his head to one side, his curls brushing his shoulder. A puzzled look spread over his face, and then he understood. It was a train, another train coming to the station.

The light grew larger, quickly, and he stood, stock still, watching it come. He was fascinated and frightened in equal measures, but he couldn't run. The light neared the boy. He registered the sound, the pull of the wind before it, the power pulsing through the tracks. Tomás sucked in his breath, and the lights flickered, just as the edge of the light reached him.

"No, I didn't see a boy," the driver would report. "The tracks were clear coming into and going out of the station. I would have seen a boy on the tracks. Even a little boy."

Both drivers were correct. One didn't see a little boy because he wasn't looking for him in the dark on the far tracks. The other didn't see him, because the boy no longer was there to be seen.

Nuno

The rap at the door pulled him up, jerking his head from where it lolled on his knees. Of course, his first thought was of her, but he pushed it down. The knock came again, sharp and quick. He rolled onto hands and knees and struggled to his feet. He was bleary-eyed when he pulled the door open. His hair stuck up at angles in between the mats.

The neighbor took a step back involuntarily, just a small one, but she was visibly shocked by his appearance.

Nuno glanced down and realized he was wearing a dirty T-shirt and boxer shorts. He opened his mouth to speak, but she beat him to it, being sober and sound.

"Érica called. She wants to pick up her last things and ..." Her voice trailed off. She hesitated.

Nuno nodded. "She doesn't want me here," he finished.

The neighbor nodded, relieved. She remembered when they had moved in, such a lovely young couple – so in love it seemed. Pity it had come to this.

"What time?" Nuno asked.

"Half past seven," she answered. Then, more quietly, "I'm sorry."

"Me too," Nuno said, and he closed the door.

The clock told him he'd better get a move on if he planned to be gone by the time she arrived.

Nuno went back into the bathroom and ran wet hands through his hair. It would have to be good enough, there wasn't time for a shower. He splashed water across his face and cupped water over the back of his neck, letting it run down the sink.

He stripped off the T-shirt and started to pull one from the pile on the floor when he noticed the dresser drawer ajar. Jerking it open, he found a shirt folded at the bottom, a last vestige of Érica – clean, folded laundry. With a grim smile, he pulled it over his head. He slid on the jeans that puddled by the bed, baggy around the waist despite the belt. He slipped his feet into his shoes sans socks.

Heading for the door, he felt his pockets for his keys. Nothing. He glanced back at the bedroom floor, then shook his head. Where he was going, he didn't need keys. He wasn't coming back.

His jacket was a jumble by the door, and he put it on. Still no keys. One hand on the knob, he hesitated.

If he stayed ...

It would end badly, again, he told himself. Just go and get it over with.

He jerked the door open with his left hand, and grabbed a half bottle of whiskey with his right as he swung out of their flat for the last time.

Leonor

The first time it happened, she thought she was dreaming. Sprawled in the sun at the park, the picnic blanket warm beneath her, Leonor squinted at the blue sky and scudding white clouds. After sprinting for what seemed like hours, playing tag with her cousins and some other children, she had collapsed on the blanket. She could hear them giggling, calling her to return.

Her mother noticed her flushed cheeks and felt her head.

“Here,” she said, holding out a cup of water. “Drink something.”

Leonor guzzled it, then sank back on the blanket, panting.

Her mother propped an umbrella to shade her face and torso. Leonor’s long, thin legs still rested in the sun, but they didn’t seem to be too warm.

She watched Leonor, wondering if she should take her home, get her out of the sun and heat. It wasn’t that hot of a day, but the children had been running almost since they arrived, barely pausing to eat or drink anything. That was nearly three hours ago. She shook her head in wonder. *Oh, to have that energy*, she thought.

Leonor turned her head away from the sun and let her eyes drift shut. Almost immediately, she stepped into the frozen dark. She shivered and jerked her arms to herself.

Watching, her mother saw her shiver and withdraw. Leonor’s face puckered. Then, she seemed to relax. Her hands fell to her sides, and her head lolled. Her mother noticed small twitches, like she already was dreaming.

“Running even in her dreams,” her mother murmured.

“What’s that?” asked Leonor’s aunt.

Her mother smiled. “Oh, nothing really. Leonor looks like she’s running even in her sleep.”

They laughed, and turned their attention to the children racing around the playground.

Leonor had plunged into a silent dreamworld. It was freezing and dark, yet she stood in a sort of light. She tilted her head up to look, but she couldn’t see a source. It wasn’t the sun – it wasn’t warm like the sun. Looking at her feet, she realized she couldn’t see them. The darkness crept up her legs to just below the knee. Gingerly, she picked up one foot and pulled it up into the light. Her foot was still there, her shoe intact. She let out a sigh of relief. She had felt that maybe her feet were gone in the black.

The sigh crystalized before her, creating a cloud of warm breath. She tested it, blowing out again, watching it steam from her into the frosty air. It wasn’t often cold enough in Portugal to see your breath. Only on the coldest days and nights did it happen, and she thought it was magical. Leonor

thought it was like breathing smoke – not from smoking, but like a dragon’s breath. *Maybe I am a dragon!* she thought, like the boy from the Chronicles of Narnia book. But looking down, she could see her own arms, body and legs.

Leonor shivered again and realized her teeth were chattering. She could hear their quick rattle in her head, and that’s when she noticed all other outside sounds had ceased. There was a rushing sound and a pounding. She frowned. It was too close. It was ... it was coming from her. She put her hand to her chest and felt her heart pounding. The rushing was the blood in her veins, the pounding her heart in her chest. With all other sound gone, she could hear the faintest noises from her own body.

That’s when she heard the cry.

It was a child, she was sure. Younger than her or even her youngest cousin. There had been a young mother at the park with a toddler, and this sounded like him. Chubby faced, with stumpy legs, he cried when he plopped down on a diapered bottom, frustrated that he couldn’t climb the jungle gym.

But this crying was different. This wasn’t just a child at play or even a fussy child. This sounded like a baby sobbing, but it was faint, as if it were far away.

Leonor was an only child. She had no younger siblings, and her cousins were close enough in age to her that she hadn’t been around babies. Once a few years before, a friend of her mother’s had let her hold a baby. She had sat on a sofa while the baby was laid across her lap. The little girl had been asleep and barely moved. Leonor felt like she was holding a warm doll.

The cry continued. Leonor turned her head, trying to see it – see anything – in the dark. Something was wrong with the baby. *Where is its mother? Why doesn’t she help the baby?*

She turned a full circle – or she thought she did. Without anything to mark her direction, she wasn’t sure where she was. The crying seemed to be coming from her right. She turned toward it and took a step. She cocked her head to the side to try and hear better, to pinpoint the direction. A few more steps, and she thought the crying was getting louder.

Leonor glanced over her shoulder. She wanted to mark her starting point in some way, in case she needed to come back. But the darkness was so complete, she didn’t know where she had come from.

The crying continued, a sobbing wail. Leonor turned back toward it and took a few more steps. She felt drawn to it, but she also just wanted it to stop. It was the only sound she could hear now. The cry drowned out her own breathing and heartbeat. It filled her ears and her head. Leonor wasn’t sure what she would do when she found the baby. She didn’t know how to take care of a baby, especially one crying like this.

Maybe he’s lost his mother, she thought. Maybe that’s why he’s crying. I can help him find his mother.

Leonor still pictured the chubby toddler in the park. It was the only explanation she could think of.

The cry tapered off into a hiccupping whimper. Leonor felt tears spark her own eyes. She remembered crying so hard she got the hiccups. When her grandma had died, she cried and cried, and then was surprised when she continued to jerk and hiccup for a long time – until she fell asleep. Her mother had held her, trying to comfort her.

Leonor hurried toward the whimper. Now, she tried to speak: “It’s OK. Don’t cry. I’m coming.”

Her voice sounded hollow and far away, like if she’d heard a TV coming from another room – maybe the bathroom, she thought.

The words did nothing to reassure the baby. But Leonor knew the baby probably didn’t understand. He was pretty little, she reasoned.

A few more steps, and Leonor was sure the baby was right there, but she couldn’t see him. She dropped to her knees and felt in the blackness in front of her, plunging her hands into the cold.

At once, everything stopped: the baby crying, the cold, the dark, the dream.

Leonor jolted awake with a yelp, jerked into a seated position. Her teeth chattered, and her hands shook.

Her mother was startled as well. She had only been asleep for a few minutes – maybe five at the most. Yet Leonor was pale, shaking and cold.

“Leonor, what’s wrong?” she asked.

Leonor’s eyes were wide, her lips looked blue. She looked at her mother but also almost seemed to look through her.

Her mother reached out and took her shoulders. She felt cool. Her hand flew up to her head. The heat was gone, replaced with a clammy coldness. With her other hand, she touched Leonor’s legs, still lying in the sun. They were cold, too.

“Oh, Leonor! What’s wrong? What’s happened to you?” she asked.

Leonor burst into tears. Her mother cradled her and soothed her. She gave quiet instructions to her sister to bring her picnic things, explaining that Leonor was sick from the heat. Then she picked up Leonor and carried her to the car, something she hadn’t done in years.

The little girl was limp in her arms, but her eyes were open and full of fear.

“You’ll be OK,” her mother soothed. “I’ll get you home, and it will be OK. You’ll feel better soon.” She kept up a steady stream all the way to the car.

As she settled her in the car, Leonor looked at her.

“Is the baby OK?”

Her mother was startled.

“What baby?” she asked.

“The baby who was crying,” Leonor said.

“There wasn’t a baby crying,” Mom said. “Your cousins were laughing and playing, but no one was crying.”

“I heard a baby crying really hard,” Leonor said. “I thought it was the little boy, and he couldn’t find his mom.”

Mom shook her head. “No, the lady with the little boy left earlier. It was just you and your cousins and a couple of older kids. No babies.”

Leonor looked like she wanted to cry again.

“It’s OK,” Mom said. “It was just a dream. Dreams can seem very real.”

Leonor nodded her head.

Only she wasn’t sure it had been a dream. She knew she was freezing, but she had been asleep in the sun. The other place had felt real, sounded real, seemed real. Unlike other dreams where she drifted in and out right before waking up, this had been sudden and jarring.

“It was just a bad dream,” Mom said. She smiled a little sad smile at Leonor. “Let’s get you home.”

Mom patted Leonor’s leg and was surprised at how cold it still felt. She let her fingers rest there for a moment, feeling the cold that seemed to emanate from her daughter’s thin skin.

How could she be so cold? she wondered. She had been burning up just a few minutes before. Could it be heat stroke?

That threw her into action, and she slammed the car door shut and pulled open her own door. She put the key in the ignition and caught Leonor’s eye in the rearview mirror. She smiled reassuringly. “Let’s go get a bath. That will warm you up.”

Leonor didn’t smile. She just watched her mother for a moment, then turned to look out the window. She didn’t know what had happened, but she knew her mom was upset.

At home, after a warm bath, dry towel, clean pajamas and two glasses of water and juice, Leonor was snuggled into bed.

“It’s not bedtime,” she complained.

“I know,” her mother said. “But you need a good rest. You’re not feeling good, and rest is the best thing for you.”

She sat next to Leonor and smoothed her hair on her forehead. “You don’t need to sleep, if you don’t want to. But maybe close your eyes and –”

“No!” Leonor almost shouted.

“What’s wrong?” Her mother was startled now, jittery. She reached for Leonor’s hands.

“No,” Leonor said more quietly. “I don’t want to close my eyes.”

“But why not?”

“I don’t want to have that dream again.”

“Oh, honey,” her mother said. “You can think about something else and have a different dream. But you probably won’t sleep anyway. Just rest. Like you said, it’s not time for bed – just a little rest. Maybe a nap –”

“No nap,” Leonor snapped. She pushed out her lip, like a pouty child, which she wasn’t.

The face made her mother soften and smile.

“OK, no nap,” she said. “Can you just lay here? You don’t need to close your eyes. Just snuggle under the blankets?”

Leonor looked at her with big eyes. She nodded.

Her mother smiled and leaned over to kiss her forehead.

“It will be OK, sweetie,” she said. “You get some rest.”

Leonor didn’t answer.

She left the door open. Leonor stared at the ceiling. She kept her eyes wide open, barely daring to blink. After a long time, she slept, but no dreams – or visions – came.

Chapter 5

Fernao

“Go on,” she said. “Get out of here.”

Fernao felt a shove and opened his eyes. It was early, based on the light. An old woman stood in front of him, holding a broom, which she pushed toward him again. “Go,” she said.

He got up slowly, tired and sore. He turned and looked at the building behind him.

“You don’t belong here,” the woman said and swiped at his legs with the brush end.

“I live here,” he said.

She peered at him, piercing eyes behind large glasses. It gave her a sort of cartoonish look. Satisfied, she shook her head. “No, I’ve lived here for 15 years, and I’ve never seen you before.”

“That’s impossible,” he said. “I’ve lived here for six years, and I’ve never seen you before.”

“If you live here, why are you sleeping on the steps? Go put your key in the door,” she said.

He sighed. “I lost my key. But my wife should be home soon.”

“Your wife?” she scoffed. “You have a wife? Who?”

“Neves,” Fernao said. “Neves Rodrigues.”

“Never heard of her,” the woman said. “Now get, or I’ll call the police.”

He knew it was useless to argue. And he was remembering how he might be the one who was losing his mind. Maybe this woman really did live here. She reminded him a little of his Vó, but he guessed that was just her age and small size.

“*Desculpe*,” he said, and he started down the stairs. The woman stood back, her broom clasped to her like a shield.

“And don’t come back,” she ordered as he shuffled down the sidewalk.

Jazz and Wube

Wube slouched against the wall and watched. He was hidden in shadow. Only when he smoked did the red glow of his lit cigarette give him away. Kitty-corner across the street, he knew Jazz was keeping watch, too. He’d found a perch on a balcony, which he’d shimmied to from a drain pipe. Wube was impressed. Jazz was kind of like a cat when it came to balance and climbing.

They had been in place for a couple of hours and watched normal people go about their business. While they saw men in the right age range, none seemed suspicious nor even gave the boarded-up metro stop a second glance. They obviously lived here and were used to the construction barriers.

Wube sighed and dropped his cigarette butt. He ground it with the toe of his knock-off Nike and headed toward the corner where he gave the signal to Jazz. A few minutes later, Jazz bounced up beside him.

“Did you see him?” Jazz asked.

“Nah,” Wube said. “They all look like they belong here and haven’t done anything wrong.” He paused. “And we’ve got school.”

Jazz was surprised. Usually, Wube did anything to get out of school. Playing hooky was his specialty. They had, however, missed a lot lately, cutting classes and skipping entirely. While he desperately wanted to find his friend, Jazz also longed for the normalcy of school and life.

“OK,” he said.

They started to cross the street.

“Can we look at it?” Jazz asked suddenly.

“What?” Wube asked.

Jazz nodded toward the barricades.

Glancing around, Wube shrugged.

“Maybe just a peek.”

They casually sauntered toward the construction walls, looking for a gap between them where they might see the artwork they created. Wube angled his head. “There.”

Jazz stepped up and peered through while Wube kept an eye out for anyone coming down the street.

“It’s our best one yet,” Jazz said as he stepped aside to give Wube a look.

It’s our last one, Wube thought as he looked, but he wouldn’t say that out loud.

He nodded at Jazz and they scurried down the sidewalk toward home.

Almiro

When Almiro had come to the city, he rented a room in a four-story walkup. When his flatmate whose name was on the lease moved out, government-controlled rent no longer applied, and the landlord raised the price three-fold. He’d barely been hanging on. His low-paying janitorial job couldn’t cover the rent of even a room, let alone an apartment. At the end of the month, he moved out, packing his meager possessions in his backpack.

Antónia was waiting by her door as he stepped into the hallway. He guessed she was a little younger than him. She always said hello when she saw him.

“Where will you go?” she asked, without greeting.

Almiro shrugged.

“Do you have friends or family?” she pressed.

He shook his head. Almiro didn’t want to look at her. He was embarrassed that he couldn’t afford the rent.

“It’s crazy how they can charge so much,” she said, as if reading his mind. “They shouldn’t be allowed to do that. We don’t make enough money to pay so much for a place to live!”

Almiro nodded, then sighed. “But that’s how it is,” he said slowly.

“*Sim*,” she agreed. “I have other friends who are losing their places. My grandmother had to move out of her home when my grandfather died.”

Almiro started to leave, and she put a hand on his arm.

“Stay here tonight,” she said. She dropped her hand, then added: “You can sleep on my sofa. I don’t want you to be alone.”

He was touched that someone cared about him. He’d had very little of that since he’d come to the city. Almiro wasn’t sure how to respond.

Antónia took his silence for acceptance. She stepped back and pushed the door open for him. He hesitated, then stepped inside. He didn’t know how to say no.

That night, as Almiro laid awake on Antónia’s sofa, he knew he couldn’t stay. She had been kind, but he didn’t understand why.

He’d never had girlfriends. In school, they went after the boys who were handsome and athletic. Then, he’d gotten a job and never met any women his age – or any age, for that matter. And then he became a full-time caregiver for his mother, and he never met anyone outside the doctor’s clinic or the pharmacy.

Almiro didn’t know if Antónia liked him or if she was just being nice. He didn’t have any way to judge her offer except at face value. But staring up at her ceiling, he knew he couldn’t stay to find out. He couldn’t take up residence on her sofa, come home after work, cook dinner and watch TV.

When he left for work the next day, he thanked her and said he’d see her later. Antónia smiled at him, and he saw real warmth in her eyes. “*Deja*,” she said. “*Tchau*,” he replied.

But he never went back. That was the day he became homeless.

It didn’t take long for his job to disappear, too. He struggled to get to work on time, and it was obvious he wasn’t showering or shaving regularly.

“I want you to be honest,” his boss said. “Are you on drugs?”

Almiro looked bewildered. *On drugs*? He’d never used drugs in his life. Even now that they were legal to use, Almiro hadn’t tried them. He’d never smoked cigarettes, and he didn’t drink

more than an occasional beer or a glass of wine at a birthday celebration. He couldn't remember the last time he'd celebrated anything, let alone had a glass of wine.

"Well?" his boss demanded.

"N-no," Almiro stammered. He shook his head. "No."

There was a pause. His boss pushed his hand through his hair, then put both hands on his hips.

"Almiro," he began. And suddenly Almiro knew where it was headed. He was being fired for using drugs, except he didn't use drugs.

The rest of the conversation was a blur. Almiro received his wages for the week, but his job was done "effective immediately." He didn't even fight it. He knew his boss had his mind made up, and nothing he said would sway him. Telling him that he was homeless? No, Almiro couldn't do that. And it wouldn't make a difference anyway.

In just a few weeks, Almiro went from the working poor to homeless without a job. His existence became his daily quest to find food and shelter in a city that he'd only recently made his home. He spent several dark months wandering, lost in many ways.

And then he found Fofo, and the world was lit by a little sunshine again, the first he'd had since his mom died.

Julinha and Moisés

Moisés sprawled on the sofa. One arm cradled his head, the other a beer. His face was turned to the TV when Julinha tried to slip by in the hall. He saw her reflected in the screen.

"Where the fuck do you think you're going?"

Julinha paused at the door and gave a half smile toward the TV. "Bed," she said quietly. "I have, uh, bit of a headache."

I bet you do, he thought, remembering the sound her skull made hitting the wall. He got an instant erection. That made him grin. He raised his beer.

"Get me another," he demanded, then gulped it down and smacked the bottle on the coffee table.

Julinha hurried back to the kitchen. She grabbed another beer from the fridge and popped the cap. God, she wanted a drink, but she was forbidden from drinking his beer. But to get drunk and forget? That would be sublime.

She snapped back to reality. That also would be deadly. Who knew what he'd do to her if she was drunk?

She double timed it back to the living room with the beer, holding it gingerly. Stepping around the sofa, she slid it on the coffee table, replacing the empty one.

Moisés watched her out of the corner of his eye. He sniffed, and she stiffened. *Good girl*, he thought. *She's learning*.

"You know what I want?" he asked huskily. His words slurred a little, but he didn't seem to notice. Julinha did, though. She also knew what was coming. Thankfully, she knew this one. She closed her eyes.

"Yes, baby," she whispered.

She dropped to her knees by the sofa, letting the bottle slide from her grasp onto the floor next to her. Her right hand slid over the denim of his jeans. Leaning forward, she scraped her teeth along the fabric, then turned her head to look at him. Those black, bloodshot eyes stared back.

He grabbed her by the hair and pushed her face hard against his crotch as he thrust up toward her. Her bruised cheek stung, but he thought her moan was for pleasure. He closed his eyes, and felt the tingle of sexual energy flow through him. He felt her reaching to undo the button and zipper, and he released his grip on her.

Moisés raised his hips as she yanked down his pants and underwear. She plunged her mouth onto him while grasping him with one hand. The shock made him gasp.

"Slow!" he commanded, and pulled her back by her hair. He stared into her eyes until she closed them and licked her lips.

"Sorry, baby," she whispered. "I just want you so bad."

He pulled her head forward until her lips were touching him.

"Slow," he said again, but he kept his hand on her head, to make sure she did it right.

Julinha tried not to think, just to act. This was no different than any other household chore, she told herself. Just like she had to clean the toilet or scrub the floor, she had to give head to the devil when he was drunk.

Every motion made her want to choke, and his hand pressing down on her head made it impossible to pause for a breath. She tried to breathe through her nose. It sounded guttural.

"What are you doing?" She could hear the anger creeping into his voice. She stretched back against his hand so she could speak.

"Just hard to breathe, baby." She gasped for air.

Moisés twisted her head around sharply. "How the fuck is that? Can you breathe now?"

Julinha winced. That made him smile. "Now finish me off, I'm getting fucking tired of this." He shoved her head roughly back.

Julinha considered biting him, but she couldn't do it. No matter how much she hated him, she couldn't hurt him, not like he hurt her. So, she continued instead, and he held her head so tightly that she started to black out.

When he finally released her, she collapsed, choking and vomiting on the floor by the sofa.

Moisés jerked upright.

“You fucking bitch! You don’t spit! How dare you puke?!”

Julinha scuttled backward as quickly as she could to get out of his reach. He was struggling to sit up. His eyes flared.

“I will kill you,” he said simply. And she knew it was true.

She leaped to her feet and ran for the door, struggling with the bolt and chain. She heard him behind her, trying to get up. Julinha willed the door to open, for it not to be too late. She couldn’t die here like this, with his cum and puke on her face and in her hair.

Moisés was hampered by the pants around his knees. He swung up to a seated position and tried to stand to pull up his pants, but his feet slipped on the vomit.

“Fuck!” he roared, as he slid back down on the sofa, twisting so the edge of it caught his hip sharply. “Mother fucker!”

Julinha got the chain off, her hands were shaking. She jerked the door open and plunged into the dark hall, headed for the stairs.

Moisés rolled off the sofa onto his hands and knees, now completely covered in slime. He was able to stand and yank up his pants. Turning toward the door as he tried to button them, his foot found the empty beer bottle, and he went down, sprawling face first onto the hard wood floor. His jaw and temple cracked hard, and he felt the skin split on his chin.

In a fury, he pushed himself up, spewing curses in a language only he understood.

It was only then that he realized the door was standing open, and Julinha was gone.

Tomás

Tomás awoke with a start. He was having a bad dream. A monster was coming for him, with one bright eye and a metallic scream.

“Momma!” he cried out, but he was startled by his surroundings. He was on a metro platform, with a crowd of people. All around him were legs, briefcases, bags.

“Mom!” he called again, and he dove into the press of people, moving away from the edge of the platform.

He had to find his mom. She would give him a hug, tousle his hair and maybe be a little angry that he hadn’t stayed by her.

Maybe she is really mad that I went where the trains live, he thought. Tomás thought maybe he wouldn’t tell her that, if she was mad.

His little arms pushed and his legs propelled him forward. Most people paid little attention to the small boy working his way through the crowd.

Tomás reached the benches along the wall. Four people were sitting there: one was reading a book; one had her eyes closed; one sat with his arms crossed, staring straight ahead; one dug around in a market shopping bag on her lap, head buried in it as she looked for something that must have gotten lost in the bottom.

He pressed himself into a nearby corner to wait. He didn't really want to sit down, but he thought his mom might find him if he waited for her.

The train pulled into the station, and the people pressed forward.

Now my mom can find me, Tomás thought. He smiled.

People filled the cars, the alarm sounded, and the doors slid shut. Just a few people remained on the platform.

Tomás' mom was not among them.

Tomás started to cry.

Nuno

The liquor had gone quickly, and he had several hours to kill before he planned to kill himself. He grinned a little ruefully at that grim joke. Because he'd left the house with only the clothes on his back – and the alcohol – he had no money to buy more and nothing to do. He had walked, perched on a park bench for a while and tried to stay awake.

Finally, he'd found his way to the metro station. On and off, he'd been thinking about suicide. The metro seemed like a quick way to go. He also thought it would be a final show for Érica, a nod to her that she deserved something as grand as a subway suicide. He hadn't left a note. Instead, he figured she would understand this last, feeble attempt as his way of explaining everything he could never say or do.

It was hot, he realized suddenly. Nuno shrugged off his jacket. He considered just dropping it, but he decided that might look suspicious. He held it, slung from one hand while the other dangled at his side.

He caught the rumble from the tunnel, and the faint shift in the air. The train was coming. Nuno straightened a little.

It breezed in past him, headed the other direction. He nodded to himself, as it screeched to a halt. The few passengers on the platform stepped in to cars near the front. No one even looked his way. The doors closed, and the train pulsed out of the station. Nuno was alone.

Dropping his coat, he nearly dove for the edge of the platform, scrambled down to the tracks and ducked into the darkness of the tunnel. He glanced back over his shoulder toward the light, but he could see no one.

He picked his way along the tracks, the light fading behind him. At last, he was in total darkness. Nuno stopped and breathed in deeply. The air was cool but humid. He shoved his hands in his pockets and shivered. Then he waited for the train.

Leonor

It was nearly three years later when it happened again.

Leonor slid onto the bench seat next to her best friend, Rita. The chapel was filling with students, noisy and boisterous. There was so much energy for being so early in the day, she thought. Rita smiled at her, and Leonor smiled back.

“Did you see him?” Rita whispered.

Leonor’s smile broke into a grin and her eyes crinkled at the corners. She nodded and glanced conspiratorially across the aisle where a group of boys jostled for spots on a bench. One boy among them was calm. He leaned forward and locked eyes with Leonor.

Leonor squealed, jerked back and stared straight ahead.

Rita laughed. “Oh, Leonor! See, he likes you, too!”

Leonor flushed a shade of crimson and closed her eyes. The room fell away into cold silence. She flicked her eyes open instantly, but the chapel was gone. Darkness surrounded her outside her small bubble of light.

No, no, no! she thought desperately. It was a dream. Just a bad dream!

That’s what she had told herself, anyway. But in the days, weeks and months following it, it hadn’t faded. Not like the other dreams she had when she slept. They were fuzzy and lost mostly by morning. But the dream – the vision – stuck crystal clear in her memory.

And yet, she didn’t think of it often. The memory of it had faded, even if the experience was still sharp. She didn’t know what it was or why it had happened, but Leonor had been able to leave it mostly behind.

Now, it was happening again. And she knew she wasn’t sleeping. She was sitting in the chapel next to Rita, among her classmates. Could they see her? Could João see her?

Leonor froze in place. What was happening to her in the chapel? Was she there, too, or just here? Had she disappeared? Suddenly, she was filled with thoughts and questions as she realized this wasn’t just a dream.

Where was she? How did she get back? Why was she here?

Frantically, she turned circles, looking for something – anything – to show her a way out. The silence pressed down on her, and her breathing quickened. Nothing. Only the cold and dark outside her small bubble.

She took a tentative step forward. She strained her ears for a sound, like the baby crying. But there was nothing. She took another step and felt a wave of nausea. It pulled her down, hands on her knees. She broke into a cold sweat and panted out hot breath. It crystalized in the frigid air. Leonor swallowed and pushed herself back upright.

She took a step to the right, angling away and felt better. Turning her head, she scanned the darkness, but it was complete around her.

Maybe this is what space is like, she thought. Cold and dark. So dark.

They had been learning about space, galaxies and stars in science class. Her teacher had explained it was cold and dark, but the stars in distant galaxies pinpricked the dark. Here there were no friendly stars, just blackness.

Maybe it's a black hole, she thought, remembering those sucked up everything – even the light. But she had her light bubble, so it couldn't be that.

Another step forward, and she felt suddenly like she had to move – like a force was pulling her. She angled off to the right, another step, and another, across what she felt was smooth ground.

If she still was in the chapel, she would have gotten up and moved. She would have bumped into benches, walls, other people. But nothing broke her footsteps here. Was she still there? Was this a dream?

One more step and she came up short. She felt the presence although she could see nothing. It was like a sharpness in the darkness. Leonor reached out her fingers toward the edge of her light bubble, afraid to reach into the black. She thought she might touch sharp glass or metal, something that would cut her. Yet she didn't want to step forward to move her bubble to reveal what might be lurking there.

Leonor was afraid. More afraid than she ever had been. Frozen to the spot, her fingers extended, a silent scream welled up in her. Her fingers dipped beyond the light, and the chapel returned. Noise and confusion, warmth and light.

Rita was clutching her arm. Leonor sat with her head down, staring at her hands, limp in her lap.

“Are you OK?” Rita hissed in her ear.

Leonor shook her head.

“You didn't answer me. I thought maybe you were pretending or that maybe then you were sick.”

Leonor shook her head. “Sorry,” she mumbled.

“Are you sick?” Rita asked.

Leonor shook her head. Then nodded instead. “I ... I.”

Rita grabbed her hand. “Oh, you’re freezing!” she cried. “Come on.”

Her friend’s warm hands were on her then, pulling her up, feet moving them toward the back entrance. Other students watched them go. From the front of the room, the head master attempted to bring the students into line. His voice sounded far away to Leonor’s ears.

At the door, a teacher called to them. “What’s wrong?”

“She’s sick,” Rita said, pulling Leonor ahead. “We’re going to the nurse.”

Leonor kept her head down, and she felt rather than saw or heard the teacher’s consent. Rita pulled her into the quiet hall.

After a few steps, Rita asked: “What happened? You’re not really sick, are you?”

Leonor stared at her feet, now visible on the smooth tile floor. How could she explain what had happened? She didn’t know what an out-of-body experience was or she might have tried to explain it that way. Mostly, she didn’t want Rita to think she was crazy, and she thought she might be crazy. This hadn’t been a dream; she knew that much.

She shrugged in answer. “I don’t feel too well,” she said. “I’m tired and feel cold.”

“That’s true,” Rita said, bundling her down the hall. “Come on.”

The nurse sent her home early. Her mother was at work, so Leonor let herself in the flat with her key. She took a hot shower, drank two big glasses of water and climbed into bed. Like the first time, when she was 10, she stared at the ceiling, afraid to close her eyes. It took much longer this time, but eventually, she slept.

When her mother arrived home that evening, she found Leonor still soundly asleep, the light faded from the sky. She let her sleep, and the next day, Leonor seemed herself.

“I got sick at school,” she explained. And that was that. Her mother never knew about the dream, the nightmare, the waking nightmare. Leonor kept it to herself.

Chapter 6

Fernao

In the daylight, the city was even stranger. More people were out, and Fernao was surprised at the clothing they wore, the cars they drove, how they hurried.

He was convinced he had totally lost his mind. Each strange thing he saw solidified the belief. He wandered aimlessly but tried to keep a low profile. What would happen if the police found him? Would he be sent to an institution? Perhaps it would be for the best, but he'd heard horror stories about them. People went in and never came out. He shuddered.

Around the next corner, tables and chairs were arranged in an outdoor seating area. Several people sat with coffee, pastries and breakfast foods. His stomach grumbled. He was hungry, but he had no money. He had no plan. Mid-step, he paused. A man sitting at the table closest to the street eyed him, and he looked back. The man looked familiar, but Fernao wasn't sure. He had gray hair and a big belly that pushed against the table. He didn't know anyone who looked like him, and yet ...

The man shook his head and closed his eyes briefly. When he opened them, Fernao could see he was surprised.

"Fernao?" the man asked. Fernao slowly nodded, and the man smacked his hands down on the tabletop, making them both jump. Their eyes locked again.

"Are you dead?" the man asked.

Fernao shook his head no. "I don't think so," he said. He wanted to add that he might be losing his mind, but here was someone who knew him and maybe could help him.

"Am I dead?" the man asked.

Fernao frowned. "Why would you be dead?"

"Because I'm seeing a ghost," he said. "God, Fernao, you look just like you did ..." His voice trailed off.

"How else would I look?" Fernao asked.

"Older, at least," the man said. "It's like you just stepped out of the past." He looked Fernao up and down. "You're even wearing your work boots!"

"Of course, I am," Fernao said. "But how do you know me? Who are you?" He was starting to get agitated, despite all of the strange things he'd witnessed.

"It's me, Silvio," the man said, and now it was Fernao's turn to jump. He could see it now, could see that this old man was somehow his co-worker.

"But what happened to you?" he said. "You're an old man!" He realized his mistake too late, but Silvio chuckled.

“It’s OK. I am an old man. Many years and two wives will do this to you,” he said. “But I want to know where you’ve been and how you still look so young!” Silvio was waving one hand toward the restaurant to attract staff and one hand toward the chair across from him. “Sit and have breakfast with me.”

He sank into the chair, overwhelmed and famished. Silvio ordered from across the space, calling out for coffee and a hearty breakfast. He turned to Fernao.

“God, it’s good to see you. But you must tell me where you’ve been.”

He shrugged as a waiter brought coffee and silverware.

“I’ve been walking, mostly,” he said. “I couldn’t get Neves to answer the door, so I slept on the stoop.”

Silvio gave him an odd look. “Neves didn’t answer. ... What do you mean you’ve been walking?”

He nodded toward the street. “Just walking.” He leaned in toward Silvio, conspiratorially. “I think I’m losing my mind.”

Silvio nodded. “Me too,” he whispered.

Fernao looked at him, horror coming over his face.

“No, no,” Silvio quickly corrected. “I think *I* am losing *my* mind.”

“Why do you think that?” Fernao asked.

Silvio looked into his old friend’s young face and spoke quietly. “Because you haven’t aged a day since 1959.”

Fernao gave him a puzzled look as the waiter slid a plate in front of him. Attracted by the food, he grabbed the warm bread and shoved it into his mouth, gulping it down in two big bites. He ate hungrily, and Silvio let him.

When the plate was clean, Silvio tried again to understand.

“What happened back then? You just disappeared,” he said. “The police, Neves, no one could find you. We all assumed you were dead.”

“But it’s only been a day,” Fernao said. “I fell. Blacked out and hit my head, just after you left yesterday.” He reached up and touched the back of his head. “And I woke up and went home, but Neves wasn’t there. Neves and Gui, I can’t find them. I can’t find my wife and son.”

Fernao looked anguished, as if he might cry. He swiped his nose with the back of his hand and stiffened his face into what could best be described as a grimace.

“I’ve just been walking around,” he continued. “There’s a lot of strange stuff.” He caught Silvio’s look.

“You don’t believe me?”

“No, I do believe you,” Silvio said. He leaned forward. “That was 45 years ago, Fernao. It’s 2004.”

Both men were quiet, letting it sink in.

“Then how did I get here?” Fernao asked.

Silvio shrugged. “I was hoping you could tell me.”

“You’re not joking,” Fernao said and looked up sharply.

Silvio shook his head. “No, I’m not joking.”

“Then I have lost my mind totally,” he said. He pushed back his chair, scraping it across the paving stones.

“Wait,” Silvio pleaded. “Where are you going?”

“I need to find Neves,” he said. “She’ll know what to do.”

Fernao darted down the street before Silvio could hoist himself to his feet. He stood, looking after him, then shook his head and waved for the check.

“Maybe you’re losing your mind,” he muttered to himself, but then he noticed the empty plate across from him and looked back down the street where Fernao had disappeared.

Jazz and Wube

When people asked about Sol – Lu to teachers at school – Jazz and Wube could honestly reply: “I don’t know.”

They didn’t know where she had gone or what had happened to her.

Eventually, the school called the police, and the police called her mom. She didn’t want to file a missing person’s report. The police decided Sol was a runaway. Case closed.

Wube was resigned. Jazz was distraught.

“How can they just give up?” Jazz demanded. “They need to do their jobs and find her!”

Wube shrugged. “We know her, and we haven’t been able to find her,” he reasoned.

“This is so messed up!” Jazz bounced even more than usual. He was banging into the wall with every bounce. Just watching him made Wube tired.

“Will you please stop?” he asked.

Jazz shook his head. “Can’t.”

“Oh, Christ,” Wube muttered. “What will it take to settle you down?”

“Tagging,” Jazz blurted out.

It was true. The kid who couldn’t sit or stand still was smooth as glass with a can of spray paint in his hand. It calmed and soothed him like nothing else.

Wube considered it.

“We can tag,” he said. “Pick a spot, set it up. Might be good to get our mind off this.”

Even as he said it, he realized the futility. Tagging without Sol would only lead to thinking about Sol. But at least they would be doing something.

“Yeah?” Jazz asked, incredulous. He stopped bouncing. Jazz hadn’t wanted to suggest it. He thought Wube wouldn’t want to make art again.

“Yeah,” Wube said. “But maybe we should come up with a new design. You know.”

Jazz nodded. He knew. They couldn’t create their signature design. It wasn’t just Sol’s artwork – it was Sol herself – pictured in the artwork. And they would be missing her part of it – the touches she made to bring it to fruition. Sure, they could each complete the work solo – but they didn’t want to.

“Maybe sketch up something from that new video game,” Wube suggested.

Jazz nodded again. “OK, yeah.”

They both were silent for a few minutes.

“Let’s start scouting locations. There must be buildings we haven’t seen yet. Maybe we’ll get lucky,” Wube said.

Jazz started to move again a little, but this time in anticipation. “We haven’t looked at the area by the bridge. We kind of slacked off when we found the other spot so quickly. The warehouse area might be promising.”

Wube fake punched his shoulder. “Yeah, that’s a great idea. Let’s go.”

They started making plans to get supplies and finalize a design as they headed for the metro. For the first time in many weeks, Sol wasn’t the only thing in their heads.

Sol

Sol cursed under her breath when she realized she would have to scale the wall back up the platform. Sliding off was much easier than getting up. She gripped the edge and tried to muscle her way up, her shoes scrabbling on the tiles. She let go and stood back, sizing up the wall. Her small stature was sometimes a good thing but not tonight.

At least here she could see a little thanks to the exit signs. She peered toward the far end of the platform. Reaching out her hand, she slid it along the wall as she walked, hoping for something – anything – that would give her a leg up. Nothing.

She turned back and put her hands on her hips in exasperation. The messenger bag brushed against her thigh.

The bag! Maybe she could stand on it and have enough of a boost to get up.

Sol pulled it over her head. She dug around in it and pulled out her wallet, which she tucked in her back pocket. Feeling the soda, she popped it open and took a big slug. The caffeine might help the throbbing in her head. She swiped her hand across her lips, and considered the spray paint cans. With their plastic caps on, if she set them upright, she might be able to use them as a step to get up.

She took another drink and set the can on the ground. Crouching down, Sol set up the two remaining spray cans, cap-side-up, about hip-width apart and a few inches from the wall. She hoped she could balance on them long enough to hoist herself up.

Touching the wall, she lifted first one foot, then the other, testing the placement before she put any weight on them. She might have only one shot at this and didn't want to mess it up.

Reaching down, she adjusted the placement slightly. She grabbed the soda can and drained the cola. Slinging the bag up on the platform, she stepped up and gripped the edge of the platform above her head. Gingerly, she put her toes on the left cap, and then in quick succession the right and pushed with all of her strength. The spray cans clattered over beneath her, but it had been enough of a lift. She had hooked her mid-section over the edge and was hanging half on, half off the platform. Kicking her foot, she hooked her knee up, and then she was up and panting, face down, one leg still sticking straight out over the platform. But she was up, she had done it.

Sol lay there for a few seconds, breathing heavily. The throbbing in her head had abated a little. Maybe the soda had helped. She pushed one hand up and brushed back her hair, then shifted to get her hands under her and finally stood. Sol picked up the empty messenger bag and slid the strap over her head. She pulled her long hair out from under the strap with one hand and started for the nearest stairs.

Almiro

Almiro lurched awake. How long had he been dozing? He glanced up at the message board at the head of the train, but it was dark. The young couple who had been cuddling by the doors was gone. He glanced around. The train car was empty.

Instinctively, he felt for his possessions – his backpack, scarf, even the stocking cap still tucked in his pocket. The blackness outside the windows didn't tell him anything. An odd feeling spread over him, and he shivered, but not from the cold this time.

He stood quickly, grabbed his backpack and crossed the few steps to the nearest doors. He stood close to them, willing the train to stop and the doors to open. Now, more than anything, he wanted off.

He glanced again at the message board that usually lit up with the approaching station details. Sometimes they didn't work. Had it been working when he got on the car? He couldn't remember. His trips tended to blend together. The sea of faces, doors opening and closing, rotating seatmates, stations that blurred past and together.

The train started to slow, and Almiro let out a sigh of relief. He realized he'd been holding his breath.

The lights of the nearing station flicked into view. It was one of the two stations he had considered staying at tonight. Even though he had no idea what time it was or how close he was to the end of the night, he couldn't bear the thought of staying on this train car one minute more.

When the doors opened, he burst out, as if someone pushed him. He stumbled, caught himself and swung around. There was no one there, of course. He'd been alone on the car.

Glancing to the side, he saw he was the only person to disembark. The alarm sounded, and the train doors slid shut. Something had crept him out, and he didn't know why.

Almiro ran a hand over his face. Maybe he'd had a bad dream and just didn't remember, and that's why he wanted to get off. The whole thing was odd.

But what to do now? The overhead sign flickered the time and the minutes until the next train. It was 1:15 a.m. The next train time was blank.

Of course, that was the last train for the night. How had he slept for so long? And how had he stayed on one train for so long? Even riding one line from top to bottom wouldn't take an hour, and yet he'd "lost" several hours at least. He'd never stayed on a train past the last stop.

When he was a boy, he could sleep through anything. His parents used to tease him about it. If he fell asleep on the sofa or chair, reading a book or watching TV, his dad had to carry him to bed. There was no way they could wake him enough for him to walk to bed.

But when you were homeless, you always were on alert. Even when you slept, you seemed to keep one eye open, so to speak. You never knew who was around and might cause you harm or try to steal from you. Even teens looking for a prank would target homeless people, at times.

Standing on the platform, he tried to make sense of it. A few minutes ticked off the clock. He realized he had to move. He couldn't just stand here. He would be visible on the security cameras, and staff would send someone to evict him if he didn't leave.

Almiro slung the backpack over his shoulders. Slowly, he turned and stumbled toward the stairs. He decided to play drunk, so if anyone had been watching, they wouldn't be suspicious of how long he had stood rooted to the spot. He kept his head down and ambled up the stairs. He leaned against the wall about halfway up. He was just above the level of the cameras on the platform, and he was just coming into view of the cameras on the turnstile level.

He tried to look like he had just paused, but then he froze in position. The shadows covered him, and with his head down, his backpack behind him, he became a slightly different shadow on the

wall. Unless someone had been watching him exit the platform and failed to see him arrive in view of the cameras above, he would be home free.

Well, he thought, it's not home.

He kept his eyes open this time. Almiro had no desire to doze off again. He didn't know what would happen if he did, but he was afraid it could end badly.

Instead, he stared at his shoes, the laces tied neatly.

His mom had taught him to tie his shoes. He still remembered her showing him how to make two loops – bunny ears she had joked with him – and twist them around into a knot. That's still how he tied his shoes. Bunny ears every day.

There had been years when he'd helped her tie her shoes, when the Alzheimer's robbed her of the ability to dress herself or even understand what clothing was for.

She had cared for him, so he cared for her. In many ways, she regressed into childhood. She no longer remembered how to do simple things, so, like a toddler or even an infant, he did them for her.

That was just the way it was.

The lights flicked out, and he was plunged into blackness. He caught his breath, raised his head and breathed out between pursed lips. He was safe for tonight, at least, out of the cold, and spared from a long night of walking to stay warm and awake. He briefly gave thanks to whatever gods might have given him this shelter. He wasn't religious, but he was grateful.

Julinha

She stumbled down the stairs, crying in her fear. She had to get away, because if he caught her now, he'd kill her. There was no way he wouldn't. But she had nowhere to go. She wasn't even wearing shoes.

Four flights down, she burst out into the night. Tears continued to stream down her face, and she sobbed silently. She didn't know which way to go. Left, she thought. Portuguese always go left.

So, she darted to the right, hoping when he followed her, he would turn left first.

Julinha ran down the block, her stocking feet padding on the uneven sidewalk pavers. The ground felt gritty, sticky, rough and smooth, all at the same time. At the corner, she turned to get out of sight and chanced a look back. No one was following her. She realized she hadn't seen anyone since she left the apartment.

She knew the neighbors could hear what he did to her. She noticed how they averted their eyes and would go the other direction if they saw her – or him – coming. No one would dare pass them on the stairs. If they were chatting near the mailboxes, they clammed up and quickly went

their way. They heard, but they wouldn't interfere. They wouldn't want the devil after them, either.

At the end of the block, she turned again, heading away from the apartment, zigzagging her way to who knew where. But she slowed to a walk. She had a stitch in her side, and she was breathing heavily. Shaking all over, she thought maybe she was having a breakdown – she still wasn't able to stop crying – although she made no noise. She was sure he would hear her. Panicked again, she started to jog, pinching her side with her fingers to ease the pain.

She had to hide somewhere. But where? It was late – although she wasn't sure of the time. Not much was open in their residential neighborhood. The shops and restaurants were closed. It was a week night. Glancing up and down the street, she could see nothing that would offer her shelter.

Quickly, she tried to figure out where she was. She'd run without thinking. Nothing looked familiar. She rarely was outside at night, and the city looked different. Now, she felt exposed, as if standing on the street would send a beacon to him, guiding him straight to her.

She spun around, frantic, then twisted back the other direction. Which way? Where do I go?

Left, her brain said again, Portuguese go to ... But she cut off the thought, turned to the right and ran.

Dores

Dores sat in the small office, her head in her hands. She had cried – sobbed really – from the time staff got to her until police arrived. One officer had spoken to her briefly, then he stepped outside and closed the door to talk to another officer.

They probably are saying I'm a bad mom, she thought. I lost him. I lost my little boy!

The tears increased, and her breath hitched in her chest.

There was a quiet knock, and the officer poked his head around the door. "May my partner speak to you?" he asked.

Dores nodded. She needed them to find her son.

Oh my God, she thought suddenly. What if he's dead and they are going to tell me?

The officer ducked back out the door, and a young woman, probably a decade younger than Dores, stepped in.

"I'm Officer Mora," she said as she entered, and seeing the only chair taken by Dores, she leaned on the small desk.

"I need to ask some questions so we can start looking for your son," she said gently. Dores noted the clipboard she held; a pen poised above it. She nodded consent.

“Please spell your son’s full name for me,” Officer Mora said.

Dores whispered it, sniffing her way through it.

“Date of birth?”

Dores replied quietly again.

“Physical description,” Officer Mora began, then said instead: “What does he look like?”

Dores’ hand flew to her mouth, and the tears began in earnest.

Officer Mora put the clipboard on the desk and reached out a hand to Dores’ shoulder. She patted it, and then braced her hand firmly against it, squeezing her fingers to give some comfort.

“I’d like to give you more time,” Officer Mora said, “but the more information we have right now, the better we’ll do to find your son.” She squeezed Dores’ shoulder again. “Do you understand?” she asked.

Dores nodded.

“I ... I’m sorry,” Dores stammered.

“No, no,” Officer Mora said. “It’s hard, but I need you to talk to me, OK? You need to tell me about Tomás.”

Dores nodded. “OK.”

“Tell me what he looks like,” Officer Mora prompted as she picked up the clipboard and pen again. “Tell me all about him.”

Dores wiped her nose on a tissue and began telling a perfect stranger everything about her beautiful boy.

Nuno

Nuno felt the rumble low in his belly. How many times had he heard and felt a train approach a station platform? Countless, he guessed, and they seemed to flash before his eyes. Bits and pieces of his life, early mornings and late nights, laughing with her, alone and despondent.

He closed his eyes in the dark, to shut out the visions, but they were in his mind, so they played on. They flashed forward and backward, flicking like lights on the train windows, illuminating first the interior, then the exterior. Again, he watched her through the train window, laughing easily, her hair swinging loose as she hung on the arm of a tall, handsome man. He was laughing, too. Then the image was gone, as the train passed through darkness.

Nuno opened his eyes and stared straight into a man’s face. Not the man from the vision, Érica’s new love, but a man in a train car. No, that’s not right, he thought. A train engine.

The driver stared at him. Their eyes met, and even though the train was bearing down on Nuno with great speed, they had time to lock eyes and share a moment. Nuno saw the fear and amazement in the man's face. *I'm sorry*, he thought. And then the train hit him.

Leonor

Leonor dropped into the seat and leaned her head against the window. Work had been beastly. Her boss had been on her all day, and Leonor was fed up and tired. *Why did I think working in a gallery would be fun?* she wondered for the hundredth time that day. When she'd seen the ad for it, she thought it would be the perfect place to learn more about the art world and maybe find a way to share her work.

Instead, she got coffee, kept her boss's calendar clear, made phone calls her boss didn't want to make, swept up, talked angsty artists into sticking around for their show openings despite being high or hung over or both. *I am too old for this shit*, she thought. At 32, she should be doing her own shows. Not messing around as a glorified secretary to a whiny woman.

Today had been a steady stream of gripes and complaints about everything from the quality of the coffee and the lack of pastries to the poor personality of the latest artist signed to a show, which Leonor had no control over but still somehow was her fault.

The swaying of the train car lulled her. Leonor sighed and closed her eyes. *It's not that bad*, she told herself. *You're just tired. The woman won't be as maddening tomorrow.*

The train jostled, and her head cracked against the window. She jerked up and realized she was alone in the car, yet she was certain there were others when she got on. Yes, she thought. There was a woman across the aisle, and two teen boys had followed her on.

She looked over her shoulder, but the car was completely empty. She couldn't see into the next car. Leonor looked the other direction, but there was no door to another car. Only darkness beyond.

Leonor frowned. The lights flickered, and she glanced instinctively toward the window. Her own eyes peered back. The lights from the car reflected in the glass, and outside the window, tunnel lights flicked past the window. She glanced up at the electronic board to see the next station, but it wasn't working. She squinted at the metro map over the door and tried to figure out where she was on the line.

The jolt would have been the curve before Colina station, she thought. Her eyes dropped back to the window. It should be appearing now, even though the train wouldn't stop here. It was closed for repairs and had been for a couple of years. But a few work lights usually were on, dimly illuminating the platform. It was ghostly in the dark.

Leonor shuddered. The train slowed ever so slightly, and the platform flitted past. She saw him standing on the platform, more of a shadow than anything, yet she knew him. He was the man from her vision. The one she saw who saw her, too. There was no doubt it was him.

The cold enveloped her and the dark closed in on her vision. She gasped involuntarily and stumbled forward, catching herself before she fell. In the void, the dim light remained, encircling him. Hesitantly, she took a step toward him. Her breath came in short bursts, and she tried to slow it and breathe deeply. It hitched in her throat.

Leonor drew near but stopped. Her light bubble nearly brushed his. She put out her fingers, then pulled them back. For the first time, she spoke.

“Hello?” she half-croaked, half-whispered.

He lifted his head and looked at her, his dark eyes troubled.

“Who are you?” she asked.

The figure leaned toward her, and she instinctively pulled back, but it was too late. Their lights mingled, and he was gone. She was back on the train in her seat. Sweat poured from her head, and she shivered uncontrollably.

Across the aisle, an old woman eyed her suspiciously and got up, hoisting her shopping bags as she swayed toward the door.

At the next stop, Leonor waited for the woman to exit, then she bolted out the door and up the opposite stairs, taking them two at a time. Her purse banged against her back as she ran all the way home.

Chapter 7

Fernao

In the dream, Fernao was in the metro station, watching as a train went by. He marveled at the speed it moved, how the lights flicked off the metal and glass, the flashes of interior, of people riding. It was a long train, and many cars went past. The darkness between each one stretched out. In the last car – it was the last before he woke up – a girl stared at him out the window. She wasn't just looking out the window. She was looking at him. He could feel it. Their eyes met.

He jolted awake. He'd found a quiet bench in a quiet park and fallen asleep almost as soon as he sat down. The dream stuck with him. Still, he could see her, the girl in the train car.

Well, girl was relative. She was a young woman, he guessed, with light brown skin, dark brown eyes and frizzy dark hair. Her white jacket offset her coloring. He could tell she was dressed more like the people around him now than the people of his own time.

He still wasn't convinced he was in a different time. He was pretty sure he had hit his head hard enough to cause brain damage, and now he believed he was in the future. He actually made a scoffing noise as he thought of it.

Yet, he wasn't sure what to do. He couldn't go back to his house, because the woman had threatened to call the police. Silvio was probably just a figment of his imagination, an example of the brain damage.

Neves, he thought again. *Neves can help*.

But how to find her? He should have asked Silvio. But no, Silvio wasn't real.

Or was he?

Fernao was so confused. He covered his eyes with his hands and was transported back to the train cars. The cars zipped past as they had in his dream, but instead of riding the train, the girl stood between him and the flickering cars, wearing her white coat. She looked at him. Her eyes got big, as she realized he could see her, too.

He jerked his hands away from his face, and daylight flooded his vision.

"Oh, no," he muttered. "It's getting worse. Now I'm seeing visions, too." He staggered to his feet and set off at a fast walk to where he didn't know.

Sol

The first thing that struck her was the sky. It was dark, much darker than usual, with stars actually visible overhead. The second thing was that it was quiet, super quiet, too quiet. The third thing, as she climbed the steps, was that the barricades were gone. Instead, as she came up to street level, Sol could see all the way across the street.

It was deserted. No cars, no people. She hadn't expected to see anyone, or she'd hoped she wouldn't. But where were the barricades keeping people out of the metro station?

She glanced around, then ducked around the corner and looked at the wall where they'd created their art. It was just a concrete wall, no spray paint adorned it.

Sol looked quickly around. Yes, this was the right entrance, she was sure of it. But things seemed off, somehow. Just to be certain, she swung around and headed off at a trot toward the entrance a block away. Her head seemed to feel a little better now that she was back in the cool night air.

The entrance came into view. No barricades here, either. The sky above was inky. The lights seemed dimmer and further apart.

What had happened? She came to a stop. She'd been in the station for what, maybe 30 minutes? There's no way the barricades could have been moved and the artwork removed. And what was with the darkness?

Despite the late hour, Sol realized she hadn't seen anyone. Not a soul. Even the windows were dark. There should be someone out, right?

Am I dead? she wondered. She held out her hands and looked at them. They looked like her hands. If she was dead, wouldn't she look or feel different?

A breeze picked up, ruffling her hair. It brought with it a faint sweet smell, like fruit tree blossoms. She inhaled and turned instinctively toward it. A side street lay ahead, and she started down it. She'd only gone a half block when hands grabbed her roughly and pulled her inside a doorway.

Almiro

Almiro groped his way back down the stairs to the platform. It somehow seemed darker tonight, although he didn't think he'd ever camped out in this station before. He had scoped out all of the stations, walking their stairs, hallways and exits to familiarize himself with them.

He realized the exit sign at the bottom of the stairs wasn't lit. The one at the far end of the platform glowed dimly. Faintly, he could make out the ones on the opposite platform.

He suddenly realized he didn't know which direction he was headed after his odd waking on the train. He should have been traveling north, but now he wasn't sure. Was he on the northbound or southbound platform? He guessed it didn't matter for the night. He wasn't going further than the row of seats nearest the stairs. He felt along the wall with his hand until he found them. He sank down wearily. Almiro didn't know when he'd last been so exhausted.

Maybe when his mom got bad but could still walk. Her days and nights were turned around. She was up until all hours, then slept most of the day. By late afternoon she was awake, and by early evening, she was agitated. "Sundowning," the literature called the agitated state. Almiro cursed it. She pressed him with constant questions, most that made no sense and he couldn't answer if he tried. She wailed and cried. She paced, trying all of the doors repeatedly.

On top of the sleep deprivation, he found it hard to deal with her anxiety. There was no way to calm her. None of his tricks worked. Not food, distractions, talking about her parents, music or television. Certainly not television. She hated it. He rarely turned it on. He felt cut off from the world, but it was better than having her upset.

She also had started trying to leave the house. After the second time he escorted her back in at 4 a.m. wearing only her housecoat, he put deadbolts on the doors above where she could easily reach them. They also seemed to be out of sight and so out of mind for her. He couldn't risk having her walk away while he slept, so he tried to only sleep when she slept. And that didn't stop her from trying the doors, rattling the knobs and banging on them.

Even though they were Portuguese and kept later hours, his mother's hours were erratic. Sleep deprivation wasn't helping him cope. He found himself trying to avoid her as the day waned, knowing she would become nearly unbearable. Almiro wasn't sure how much more he could take, but he didn't know what else he could do.

Their meager income – his mother's social security – wouldn't cover a caregiver.

He had no money left of his own, and he never did know what happened to the little savings from his father's life insurance policy. When Dad died a decade before, Almiro thought his mom would have enough to live on comfortably, but he didn't know then that she'd been declining, and his dad had been covering for her missteps.

By the time Almiro recognized it, her finances were in complete disarray, bills hadn't been paid in months, and the landlord was threatening eviction. Almiro paid the rent and bills from his bank account, and set about trying to piece a life together for them in the house where he'd grown up.

This was not how he had thought his life would turn out.

And then one day, the sundowning ended. Tea time came and went, and his mother's anxiousness was gone. She no longer wailed or fussed. She sat quietly in her chair, rocking slightly, humming a tuneless song.

The anxiety was gone, but so was much of what little had remained of his mom.

Almiro forced himself back to the present. He was thinking so much of his mom and dad tonight, especially his mom, and even Fofo, and he didn't know why. Rarely did he allow himself to ruminate this way. He couldn't go back and change anything, and there were things he wouldn't change.

Almiro unzipped his backpack and pulled out the sandwich from the top of the bag. It would have to do for tonight, since he hadn't found anything else. Carefully, he unwrapped it, relying more on feel than sight. There were just darker areas, not really any light.

He took a bite. It wasn't great, but it was edible. That was most of what he ate these days – edible, but not good. His stomach rumbled, and he realized how hungry he was. Almiro forced

himself to eat slowly and not gobble it quickly. If he ate more slowly, it would seem like he'd eaten more, and he'd feel fuller.

His mom didn't care for sandwiches. When he was a boy, she'd bake bread every week. He still could smell it – drawing him back to a time before everything went to hell. She would give him a slab of bread with jam or butter on it, open-faced. They didn't have meat sandwiches often, either. Meat with gravy over potatoes or rice, with vegetables or a small salad – but not sandwiches.

Now sandwiches were common. It was an easy food to eat on the go, and Almiro was grateful for them, because people would toss the leftovers rather than take them home. Another's waste was his sustenance.

Fofu liked sandwiches, too. He'd daintily take scraps of bread, meat, cheese, egg or tuna. The little dog wasn't much on vegetables, but Almiro ate those. Dill pickles were the dog's favorite, though. Almiro liked them, but Fofu liked them more, so Almiro always left him any pickles. He smiled in the dark at the image of the little dog wolfing down pickles like it was raw steak.

He finished the last bit of the sandwich and wrapped up the paper and tucked it back inside the plastic bag. He thought about trying to stumble up the bathroom in the dark, but he didn't want to pay the money to use it if he didn't have to, and right now, he didn't have to. Many of the restrooms were locked until you inserted 50 cents. For a homeless person, that was an inordinate amount to pay, and he had no intention of sleeping in the bathroom. They weren't cleaned often and usually smelled of piss and weed.

Instead, he unzipped his bag further and felt inside for his rolled towel and blanket. He took them out and shook open the blanket. After he zipped the backpack, he reached into his pocket and pulled the girl's hat from his pocket. He slid it on his head. It was warm and snug but not uncomfortably so.

Almiro grinned in the dark at the image he must present. A stubbly-bearded man in a multi-colored stocking cap. With a pom-pom. *That will have to go*, he thought. He shook his head from side to side. He couldn't feel the pom-pom move. Well, maybe he'd leave the pom-pom on. He didn't plan to wear the hat all the time. He'd leave it in his backpack when he rode the metro.

He tucked the backpack under the row of seats beneath his feet, arranged the towel/pillow on the seat next to him and stretched out. He shook the blanket out over him and settled in. A cool breeze brushed past him from the stairs. He shivered and pulled the blanket up to his nose. He was glad he was inside and not outside on tonight of all nights. He hoped everyone else like him was someplace safe, too.

His last thought was of being tucked in his bed at home, his mother reaching to pull the blankets up to his nose before she kissed his forehead.

Moisés and Julinha

Moisés scrambled for the door, cracking his knee on a table in his haste to get past it. Another curse passed his lips. He grabbed the door knob and jamb and leaned into the dark hallway. The light from the apartment spilled out and lit him from behind. If Julinha had been watching, she would have sworn his eyes glowed.

Swiping his keys off the table by the door, he stomped into the hall, and slammed the door shut behind him. He was halfway down the stairs when he realized he wasn't wearing shoes. He'd be damned if he went upstairs to get them. That bitch had run – *run away* – and he had to catch her before ... Before what? Moisés wasn't sure. He only knew he had to get her back. And would she get it this time.

He swiped the blood from his chin with the back of his hand. It stung. It probably would leave a scar, he thought. But what the hell did he care?

He smacked open the outside door, and it banged against the wall, sounding like a shot. He strode onto the sidewalk and without even pausing he turned to the left and headed down the street, stocking feet slapping the paved sidewalk.

Three blocks later, he wondered, briefly, if he was going the right direction. Of course, he was, he thought. He could smell her fear and hear her thoughts, he told himself. There was no way he wouldn't find her.

He punched one fist into the other for emphasis. He would find her, and she would learn, finally, exactly what was on his mind this time.

More than a kilometer in the other direction, Julinha turned another frantic corner and saw shelter at last. The light glowed from the metro sign, soft and inviting. She rushed to it, like a lost lover, and nearly threw herself down the stairs. She could get on the metro and get away from here, she thought. Her feet slipped on the stairs, and she forced herself to slow down. She didn't want to break her neck now that she had a way to get out.

At the bottom, she followed the curve to the ticket counter. As she realized it was closed for the night, it also dawned on her she had no money, no purse, no ID. She had the clothes she was wearing, and that was it. Even if they were open, she couldn't buy a ticket. Julinha slid down the wall opposite the ticket counters, dropped her head to her knees and finally sobbed out loud.

Moisés spun around. He was sure he'd heard something, but the street was empty behind him. It was odd, because even late at night, there usually was someone out walking a dog or going home drunk. He hadn't seen a soul since he left the apartment. He turned back and started marching again, following a trail only his brain could conceive.

The blow completely caught him off guard. The stick hit him in his midsection, and he doubled over as the air was knocked out. The second hit to his shoulder knocked him off his feet, and as he sprawled, a boot kicked him in the ribs, twice, hard.

Moisés barely registered that he was being attacked, it had happened so quickly. Instinctively, he reached up to cover his head. Just as he did so, the boot came down, smashing his hand into his

ear. Moisés heard and felt bones crunch, although he wasn't sure if it was in his hand, head or both. Despite the beating, he'd barely made a sound.

Now, he realized her could hear voices, but he didn't know what they were saying. It wasn't Portuguese, but he didn't know what it is. They seemed distant, yet close; whispered, yet loud. He felt hands on him, reaching in his pockets, feeling his body. *Thieves*, he thought. *They're robbing me! You bastards are fucking robbing me!*

His eyes flashed just as the boot connected squarely with his face. Moisés slumped, silent on the pavement. His assailants disappeared into the night.

Julinha sobbed until she had no tears left. Then she sobbed dry heaves that racked her body. She cried for her loss, for her pain, suffering, the years she'd spent with a man who didn't love her and did everything to hurt her. She grieved for her friends and family, now lost to her. She cried because she had nothing and no one left – not even money for fare. She bawled because she had nowhere to go, and she had no idea what to do. She just knew she couldn't go back. Not ever. He must never find her – never.

Tomás

Tomás sat on a wooden chair. He was small enough on it that his legs stuck straight out. A police officer had given him a cup of juice and a cookie, but it sat untouched on the desk. His big brown eyes continued to well with tears. He'd wipe them with his still-chubby hands.

He had told them his name and how old he was. But he didn't know his mom's name, and he didn't know who his dad was, and he knew they lived in an apartment on the street by the bakery and the pharmacy, but he didn't know the address or even the street name. Tomás knew his letters, but he didn't know how to read much beyond his own name and some simple words in his favorite books, like cat, car and train.

Officer Fortes was stumped. The little boy was obviously lost. He was healthy and well cared for. It was obvious he loved his mother. But no parent had come forward. It had been a couple of hours, and there had been no frantic parent calling or coming in. No one had reported a missing child. Not a soul had raised any concern about the boy.

She had seen babies abandoned at hospitals occasionally, usually by a teen parent who couldn't afford and didn't want a baby. But this boy had been with someone for four years – he'd had a birthday the week before, or so he said.

It was odd, very odd, she concluded.

Nor did it help that he didn't know his address or phone number.

She had tried to piece together why he was there, building an explanation, looking for clues about who he was and what had happened to his mother.

That was the explanation she kept coming back to: Something had happened to his mom, and he either didn't know it, or he knew it and couldn't talk about it or didn't understand it.

Officer Fortes sighed. Somehow, she wasn't sure this would have a happy ending for everyone.

She pushed open the office door and met Tomás' big brown eyes. She gave him a little smile as she squatted down in front of him.

"Hey, buddy," Fortes began.

Tomás watched her with wide eyes. He looked so scared. She reached out and gently touched his sneaker, wobbling his foot from side to side slowly and rhythmically as she talked.

"We're going to go to the police station," she said, trying to keep her voice bright. "I have some friends who can help find your mom."

Tomás gripped the edge of the chair. She saw it without seeming to notice it.

"How about we go for a ride in a police car? I bet you might like to see a police car." She raised her eyebrows and nodded her head to get him to mimic her. Tomás nodded, silent eyes watching her.

"OK!" she said with a bigger smile. "Let's go take a ride."

She stood up and offered her hand to Tomás. He slid forward on the chair and took her outstretched hand. She folded his small warm hand inside hers and took a breath as she stepped out the door.

Tomás looked up at her, a tear trickled down his cheek. Then he followed her out and away from the station.

Benedito

He was there.

And then he wasn't.

Benedito had already pulled the lever to slam on the brakes, throwing the train into a screeching, grinding halt. He jolted ahead, smacking his own head on the windshield that curved on the front of the train. He felt the lurch of every car behind his. Sickeningly, he felt every person on his train thrown forward then jerked back.

He stared, slack-jawed, at the track illuminated before him.

It was empty.

And yet he knew it had not been empty. Only moments before there had been a man there, wild hair standing on end, an overgrown beard, shoulders slumped, but the eyes sharp and piercing. Dark eyes like his own.

The radio crackled.

"What's going on?"

Benedito blinked. He was asking himself the same question. *What the hell?*

His hand trembled as he moved it toward the radio. Central station would have gotten the message that his train stopped abruptly. He had to tell them it was nothing. And yet, he was sure there had been a man on the tracks. He could describe him down to his scuffed shoes and T-shirt.

Benedito passed his hand over his face, blotting out the vision. He opened his eyes to the empty track.

The radio crackled again. “Train No. 15, report please. What’s going on?”

Could he tell the controller he had seen a man? But where had he gone? There was no place in the tunnel to go to. If he had stepped to the side, onto the other tracks, Benedito would have seen him move. Rather, the man had simply vanished. He had slammed on the brakes, and the man disappeared.

The radio again. “Train No. 15, report. ... Benedito, are you OK?”

He was close enough, the train would have hit him, Benedito thought, ignoring the radio.

Is that what happened?

“Bene –” the radio began.

Shaking, Benedito flipped a switch on the console, and the radio was silenced. He unbuckled his lap belt, which had tightened in the sudden stop. He reached out his hand to push open the door. He had to look – to know.

The door slid back, and Benedito slowly looked down, praying he wouldn’t see a body under the train.

Instead, he just saw the shadows of the track. Holding the door, he leaned a little further out, looking both fore and aft. The track was unmarked before the train. There was nothing behind that he could see, either, nothing to indicate he’d hit a person.

And he hadn’t felt anything. Surely, if he’d hit someone, he would have felt the thump of striking a man.

Benedito remembered the time he hit a squirrel while driving. He hadn’t meant to strike it, but it skittered into the street between two cars, and he’d hit it squarely. Even the little rodent under the Fiat’s tire had caused him to feel the thump. He remembered the regret he felt at its demise.

So, he likely hadn’t hit the man.

But where had he gone?

And what the hell did he tell control? “I thought I saw a man on the tracks.” They could sack someone for that, and Benedito really needed this job. So many people were out of work. If he lost this job, he might never find another.

Swallowing hard, he settled back into his seat.

His hand hovered over the console, and he noticed it was shaking. He flipped the switch and the radio crackled to life. “—ing assistance immediately. Protocol 10-52 has been activated.”

Benedito snatched up the microphone and jammed in the button.

“Benedito here,” he snapped, then remembered. “Train 15 reporting in.”

He released the button.

“Benedito? Thank goodness,” came the voice. “What happened?” All formality was gone.

He pushed the button to reply. “I, uh, there was something on the tracks. It looked, uh, dark, like oil or grease,” he lied. In his mind he could clearly see the young man, hands stuffed in his pants pockets. Waiting for the train. Waiting for the train to hit him.

He released the button.

“What was it? Are you OK? Did you stop before you hit it?” The questions came fast.

Benedito shook his head and closed his eyes. The young man still haunted his vision.

He realized the questions had stopped. It was his turn to talk. He pressed the button.

“I don’t know what it was,” he said truthfully. “I don’t see anything on the tracks now.” That also was the truth.

Control crackled back on, beginning to use numbers and jargon to convey the next steps. Benedito listened with half an ear. He affirmed the train was drivable and that he could drive it. He knew, distractedly, his passengers were beginning to worry at the sudden stop and the delay. Fortunately, it was the last train, and he had few people still on board. There would be no train passing by on the other track, either.

He released the emergency brakes and reset them manually. Checking his console, he flipped the switches, and the train eased forward on the track. He imagined he heard a collective sigh escape from the cars behind him. He heard his own sigh, as the train rolled forward.

The lights spilled ahead on the tracks as the train moved down the tracks. In the dark that remained, an echo of someone filled the darkness.

Leonor

“Dinner’s on the stove,” Dina called out as Leonor entered the flat. “I made pasta.”

“Thanks,” Leonor mumbled. “I’m not really hungry.”

Dina rounded the corner, plate in hand.

“What happened to you? You look like you saw a ghost.”

Leonor kicked off her boots and slung her coat on the rack.

“Maybe I did,” she said.

“Seriously. Did you just run all the way home?” Dina demanded.

Leonor nodded.

“What? Why?”

“I got freaked out on the metro,” Leonor said, she realized she probably didn’t want to share more with her flatmate. Too often, people thought she was crazy enough without really knowing what she experienced. Dina was pretty new. They’d only been living together for a few months, since her last roommate had gotten married.

“There was a guy,” Leonor said lamely, as an explanation. But it worked. Dina nodded emphatically.

“Oh, yeah. There were some weird guys there the other day, too. Really freaked me out. I kept my mace in one hand and my phone in the other.”

Leonor breathed a sigh. Dina was off and running.

“I was thinking about complaining to the metro workers about them. I mean, we have to use the metro, right, but it’s creepy when they follow you around and talk to you.”

Leonor grinned to herself as she headed to her room. “Thanks for dinner, Dina,” she called back.

“Nada.”

Leonor closed the door and headed straight to her book shelf. She ran a finger across the sketch books and stopped at one. Pulling it out, she went to her bed and let it fall open. He looked up at her. Those dark, dead eyes, seeing her.

She flipped the page over and read the date penciled there. Eleven years. It had been 11 years since she’d first seen him. Why was he back now?

She glanced up at the shelf that held her sketch books. She’d filled so many in the intervening years. Pictures from her imagination and portraits like his. The hauntings were becoming more frequent, more vivid. And sometimes, she saw someone. Their faces were burned into her memory and her sketchbooks.

She flipped the pages in the sketchbook before her. His face flipped past on page after page. Yet she hadn’t seen him again until today.

“Why?” she asked out loud. “Why now?”

And then: “What do you want?”

And finally: “Who are you?” as she gazed at his portrait, captured in a variety of styles.

Getting up, she went to her desk, and pushed the button on her computer. It hummed to life, and she sank into the chair and propped the sketchbook under the desk lamp. Flipping it on, his face was illuminated.

She tented her fingers in front of her face while she waited for the computer to boot and considered the picture. Her boss this afternoon had done an image search on Google for a certain kind of cake she wanted Leonor to order. Leonor wasn't sure how it worked, but her boss had found the exact cake and the bakery with just a snapshot from her phone. Google could match photos with images in its database.

Could it work on him? Leonor didn't know. But it was worth a shot.

She clicked on the browser icon and waited for it to load. She drummed her fingers nervously on the desk. It dawned on her she'd need to upload the image. She fished her phone out of her purse and turned it on. Because it tied her to work, she often turned it off as soon as she walked out the door.

It vibrated in her hand as she turned it on and accessed the camera. She tried steadying her hand, but it was shaking. She laid the sketchbook flat and stood over it, bracing the phone against her stomach while she pinch-zoomed to get a closeup. The camera clicked as she took a few photos.

A few minutes later, they were in her downloads folder, and she was uploading the best one into the program. She hit enter and held her breath.

The results turned up a variety of images, many just artistic drawings in a similar style. She sighed and scrolled. Further down the page were actual photos of people – mostly men of a similar age. They were modern photos, stock images, she guessed. A tiny black-and-white image caught her eye. It was an old photo, obviously taken as a black and white, not gray scaled afterward like photos were now. Leonor leaned forward and double clicked it.

The screen filled with the man's face. Full size as if she'd drawn from the photo before her instead of her memory. He had the same hair, the same jawline. And those same eyes, except in the photo, they looked alive – not dead as she'd come to think of them. He was handsome, in his own way, wearing what looked like a dark colored work shirt, the top button done up.

"Who are you?" Leonor whispered.

She closed the image and clicked the website link beneath it. It looked like a news website archive, and her heartbeat quickened. Maybe she'd find an answer right away.

It opened to a spam-filled page promising all sorts of viruses if she clicked on any of the blinking or flashing links. She quickly closed out of the page.

She tried copying just the publication name from the link and finally got it typed into the search bar. It had been a newspaper, now defunct, she learned. She looked for archives but could find nothing online. Opening a notebook, she wrote down the publication name. Maybe the library would have access to old copies or know where to find them.

That still didn't help her know who he was or even how to find his photo in the archive if one existed. Chances are, they weren't online and searchable like Google.

Leonor sighed and rubbed her eyes. She was no closer to knowing who he was. She switched off the light and closed the notebook, but his picture remained on her laptop, glowing dimly.

Chapter 8

Fernao

Fernao spent his second night under a tree in a garden. It was outside a museum, but there was no gate, and it seemed quiet. One of the trees had oranges, and he ate a few fruit that fallen to the ground. He felt a little guilty about this, but he knew the birds and animals would eat them if he didn't. The juice refreshed him and helped fill the hole in his belly. When he slept, he had no dreams and no visions.

The morning dawned misty, and he felt damp through. He scooped up a few more oranges, and tucked them in his shirt, peeling and eating them as he walked. Down an alley by a bakery, he pulled several squashed pastries and a loaf of stale bread from a trash can. Glancing quickly around, he scooped them up and hurried on. Partly ashamed and partly worried he'd be arrested for theft, he ate them quickly. Only later did he realize he should have kept the bread for when he was really hungry.

By noontime, the mist had turned to rain, and he was soaked. He didn't know where to go to escape it, when he turned up a street and noticed a church in the next block. As he drew close, he could see one of the doors was propped open. He slipped inside and stood just by the door, dripping, as his eyes grew accustomed to the semi-dark.

He was in a small entry way. The church sanctuary was ahead, lit by a dim glow. He took a step toward it, then hesitated. He was wet and ... *And what?* His mind asked. *Not very religious*, he admitted.

And you're out of your mind, he thought to himself, so what difference does it make?

He walked quietly toward the nave and slipped into a wooden pew in the back. He kept his head down for a few minutes. Slowly, he looked up. It was a fairly simple church and looking at it from his seat made him think it was familiar. *Perhaps a wedding ... Yes, that's it*, he thought. He and Neves had gone to a wedding here. Her cousin, he recalled. *What seven years ago? Before Gui was born.*

He closed his eyes. *No, that's not right either*, he thought. *Not if Silvio is right, and everything else.* The more he saw, the more he knew he wasn't in his time. And everything seemed so real.

Tears sprang to his eyes, and he wiped at them. Now he'd have a nervous breakdown, too, and start crying? He chastised himself and was about to get up when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Do you need help?"

He glanced up and saw a woman there. Her hair with a few strands of gray was pulled up in a bun, and she wore a dark skirt, white blouse and flower-printed cardigan. It seemed out of place and yet normal.

He shook his head. "No, *obrigado*. I'll go." He started to get up.

"You can stay," she said. "I didn't mean to disturb you." When he didn't answer and started moving again, she said, "It's still raining. Why don't you wait until it lets up?"

He paused, then nodded. “If it’s OK.”

“Of course,” she said. She sat in the pew in front of him and turned with her arm across the back.

“I don’t think I’ve seen you before,” she began.

He shook his head. “No. I think maybe I came here to a wedding one time,” he said.

“Oh,” she said. “When was that?”

He hesitated. “Um, maybe six or seven years ago.”

She gave him a curious look. “Ooh! Maybe I officiated at the wedding. Who was the couple?”

He looked up sharply. This woman was a minister? She was, well, a woman for one, and she was wearing a flowered sweater. She didn’t look like a minister.

He shook his head. “It was my wife’s cousin.” Then he added, “I don’t think so. I would have remembered you.”

Then he looked down, realizing he’d likely insulted her. She chuckled.

“I get that a lot. Don’t look like a minister, do I? Well, that’s OK. I don’t mind. If you don’t mind ...”

He shook his head.

“I’ve been the minister at this church for the past 10 years. I grew up in this neighborhood. Then after university, I worked as a professor for a number of years before I decided this was my passion. I got my divinity degree and moved back here.”

Fernao listened.

“What about you?” she asked. “What’s your story?”

He shrugged. He wasn’t sure how much to tell her. What if she turned him in for being crazy? He felt like he had to say something. He settled on the truth.

“I grew up in a small town and moved here to get a job. I’m a tiler, and I married my wife, Neves, about nine years ago. We have a little boy, Gui – Guilherme. He’s 6.” He paused. “I think.”

The woman chuckled again. “That’s like a dad thing to not be sure,” she said. “My name’s Roberta.” She stuck out her hand. “What’s yours?”

“Fernao,” he replied, taking her hand. The warmth and firmness surprised him.

“Well, Fernao, welcome to our church,” she said. “You may stay as long as you’d like. But I have a little work to do, so you’ll need to excuse me.”

He nodded. “It is nice to meet you.”

“Likewise,” she replied as she walked up the aisle. He watched her turn into a door near the front.

He was doing math in his head. If Guilherme had been 6 when he disappeared in 1959, and Silvio said it was 45 years later, that meant his son would be 51, around the age of this woman.

What if it was true? What if he had somehow jumped through time, missing all of the years in between.

He looked down at his hands. Roberta had been real. She had taken his hand. He was real. So, what had happened?

And then he wondered about what had happened to Neves and Gui. His beautiful Neves. Would she be an old “vó” now? A grandmother like his own? And Guilherme? He’d be older now than Fernao, by many years.

He shuddered. Then he bolted out of the seat, his shoes squeaking on the floor as he hurried to the door. It couldn’t be true. It just couldn’t.

Sol

“What are you doing?” the voice hissed. “Do you want to get yourself killed?”

Sol was released with a shove and a cry escaped her lips.

“Shhh!” the voice ordered. “Shut up or you’ll get us all killed!”

Sol swung around to face her abductor. It was a young man, probably in his early 20s. Next to him, another young man peered out the crack in the door. He slid it shut and turned toward Sol.

“I think we’re clear, but to be sure, let’s go in,” he said, as he pushed past Sol and the first young man who had hissed in her ear.

“What’s going on?” she demanded.

In tandem, they turned and shushed her.

“Not here,” said the door man, who looked a little older. “Inside.” He cocked his head down the hallway, toward the interior.

Sol was wary, but she wasn’t sure what danger was outside, either. She realized she believed these young men were at least apprehensive if not necessarily afraid of what was outside. False bravado, she thought.

But why had they grabbed her and pulled her in here?

“I want to know what’s going on,” she whispered, trying to not sound scared herself.

The two men exchanged a look. Sol couldn’t read it.

“It’s the Revolution,” the door man finally said. “It’s happening.” He turned and walked down the hall where Sol could see light from an open door. She realized she could hear faint voices or maybe a radio coming from the room.

The other man followed his companion. After a couple of steps, he turned back to her.

“I’m sorry if I hurt you,” he said. “We were worried about you on the street. They’ve ordered everyone to stay inside.” He paused. “Come on.”

She must have looked confused because he added: “We’ll explain more, but not by the door.”

When he turned and walked down the hall, Sol followed. She was even more confused, but they didn’t seem to be keeping her here against her will. She thought about turning and going back out the door. It was right there, and it would be easy enough to slide the bolt and run.

But she didn’t. Instead, she took a hesitant step toward the light at the end of the hall.

Almiro

When Almiro awoke, he couldn’t remember where he was. Dark and cold enveloped him. He raised his head as if to look around and was hit with a feeling of dread so complete that he gasped and dropped it back down. It connected with his pillow, and his memory flooded back: The cold, the metro station, hiding out until lights out.

Almiro let out a slow breath, remembering. Carefully, he raised his head again and was grateful when there was no jolt. He rolled onto his side and pushed himself up until he was sitting. He yawned and stretched. Without a watch or the electric boards illuminated, he didn’t know what time it was, but he guessed he’d been asleep for a few hours at least.

The metro would open again at 6:30 a.m., so he’d need to be hidden away by that time, but he guessed he still had a couple of hours to catch more sleep. In the dark, the exit signs seemed to glow more brightly. And they looked different – like an older style, but they seemed brighter somehow. He couldn’t quite put his finger on it, despite seeing them every day, many times a day, when he was riding the metro.

He laid back down again on his makeshift bed, adjusting the towel/pillow and the blanket that covered him. Sleep embraced him almost immediately, a deep sound sleep that he rarely enjoyed any more. His lips curved into a smile in the dark, and he slept peacefully and dreamlessly.

Julinha

She pushed herself up to sit. It was so dark, much darker than when she came here. She realized the lights were off. Only the green exit lights glowed dimly in the blackness.

She suddenly panicked. She had to hide. What if he had followed her here? What if he was waiting just outside now for her to come out, to catch her?

Quietly, she got to her feet, and then remembered she had no shoes. Still, she tip-toed toward the platform, away from the outside stairs and whatever monsters might be lurking. She squeezed past the turnstile and feeling for the railing, descended the stairs to the metro platform. It was darker here, illuminated only by the exit signs at the far end of the platform. The ones on this side seemed to be out. That was OK with her, though. She'd rather have it be pitch black if it meant the devil couldn't see her. But with those eyes, maybe he could see in the dark.

Julinha slipped her hand around the corner of the wall at the bottom of the stairs and felt with her toes for the edge of the platform. When she found it, she sat down, with her legs dangling over. She couldn't remember how far down it was to the tracks. She'd never done this before, but she'd seen how the trains sat lower on the tracks, maybe by a meter or so. In the dark, she didn't want to fall and get hurt.

She rolled onto her stomach and scooted down, so her hips hung off the platform, and she could hinge her legs behind her toward the tracks below. She couldn't feel the ground, so she pushed back a little further, still trying to feel the ground beneath her. Finally, overbalanced, she dropped down, but caught herself with her hands on the wall before she fell.

She picked her way down the track in the dark. It actually helped to be nearly barefoot. While it was rough, at least she could feel her way better in the blackness. She wasn't sure how far she'd gone, when it suddenly dawned on her what she was doing and how dangerous it was. Didn't people die on metro tracks? She could get hit by a train or touch the deadly "third rail."

But the trains were shut down for the night, and the power obviously was off, so she was in no danger of electrocution – at least for now.

Still, she thought, maybe she shouldn't go too far from the platform, in case she needed to get back to it quickly. Like when the power came on in the morning. How much time would she have before the first train came through? She had no idea.

She leaned against the wall, and for the second time that night, slid down until she was sitting.

This time, though, the tears didn't come. She was exhausted and cried out. Instead, she folded her arms on her knees, leaned her head forward and fell instantly to sleep. This sleep was deeper still, filled with ghostly images of people she'd once known and others she didn't know, and behind it all, were those damned eyes, burning in the dark.

Isabela

Officer Fortes closed her eyes and furrowed her brows.

It had been two months, and she still had nothing on the missing woman. That's how they were treating Tomás' case, not a missing or abandoned child – but a missing woman. It felt right but also wrong.

Fortes didn't know what she was missing – except Tomás' mother.

She had interviewed the boy – talked to him about all manner of things to try and figure out everything she could about him and his mother.

He didn't know his dad and seemed a little confused by the concept. Tomás said he lived with his mom. There were no grandparents, no aunts or uncles. His mom had some friends, but he didn't know where they lived or their full names – just first names. He had some friends, but he didn't go to school yet. Neighbors were identified as Senora T. and Benjamim. So many streets had apartments, bakeries and pharmacies.

He and his mother had visited a friend of hers for the afternoon, and they were on their way home when he got lost at the station. That told Fortes that he didn't live in the neighborhood. She hadn't tried to take him around to see if he recognized anything. He could live kilometers away. It would be a shot in the dark.

Fortes once again cursed the lack of knowledge – hers and Tomás'. If he only knew his phone number, his address, his mother's name, his last name. By 4 years old, every child should be able to provide basic information about themselves and their caregivers. "Mom" and "Dad" need real names.

He said his name was Tomás "Doo-shoos," which meant nothing to her. She realized it was probably phonetic, but it sounded more French than Portuguese, and it certainly could be. The boy could have a French father, although he looked like every other little Portuguese boy with his dark hair and eyes.

She had very little else to go on.

Tomás was bright. He loved trains, cars and anything mechanical. He confided to her that he had slipped away to "see where the trains lived," and when he came back, his mom was gone. When Fortes had pressed him – gently – on where exactly he went, he clammed up.

Officer Fortes picked up her desk phone and dialed. Ana answered on the second ring.

"Ana, it's Isabela Fortes."

"*Bom dia*," Ana said cheerfully. "*Como estas?*"

"Eh," Fortes began, but Ana cut her off.

"Do you want to talk to him?"

"No, no," Fortes said quickly. "I just wanted to see how he was doing."

"Oh, he's a joy," Ana bubbled happily. "He's such a good boy. Any word on his mum?"

"Unfortunately, no," Fortes said. "Has he said anything more?"

Ana paused for thought. "No, not said anything," she began.

"Yes?" Fortes asked hopefully.

“He’s been having dreams, nightmares really,” Ana said. “Since he came, but now he tells us about them.”

“Oh,” Fortes said. She wasn’t sure what she had expected, but she didn’t think bad dreams were the answer.

“Yes,” Ana continued. “In his dream, he says it’s dark, but there’s a lady in white. That’s not the bad part. He says she smiles at him. But sometimes there is a bright light, and he gets hit by a train, he says, but then he gets pulled away and wakes up.”

“What?” Fortes asked. “Hit by a train?”

“I know it’s odd,” Ana said. “Maybe it’s because he was in the metro station. Maybe that’s the train.”

Fortes took a second to think. Ana chattered on about Tomás learning to tie his shoes and starting to read more words. He liked to paint and color, and Ana promised to send a picture to Fortes to brighten her office. At last, Fortes was able to disengage.

As she hung up the phone, she wondered why she had called. She’d had nothing to share and no reason to check in. It was unlikely Tomás would offer any more clues than he already had.

And Fortes was up against a brick wall, a dead end, a dark tunnel.

She remembered the adage about the light at the end of the tunnel and how for an unlucky soul it wasn’t a brighter day – it was a train. Had Tomás actually witnessed that? A train in the tunnel? But then he’d be dead ...

Is that what happened to his mom?

Fortes shivered. She flipped open the file on her desk and picked up the phone.

“This is Officer Fortes. I need to speak to someone in charge of maintenance of the metro train tunnels.”

Benedito

Benedito bolted upright in bed, a cry on his lips. Priscila jolted awake. Instinctively, she reached out to him. He was dripping sweat.

“Bento,” she whispered gently. His breathing was labored, puffing out of him. “The dream again?”

She felt rather than saw him nod in the dark.

He hadn’t been able to lie to her. He didn’t want to, anyway. Priscila was the best thing he had in his life. Telling her wouldn’t jeopardize his job, either.

She had listened quietly as he told her what he thought he saw. Reasonably, she asked him questions. Was he tired? Had he hallucinated? Had he taken any medication or had anything to eat or drink that would cause him to imagine such a thing?

No, Benedito said. Nothing. He hadn't even been that tired despite it being the end of the shift. Benedito had been on second shift for several months. He'd had never had anything like this happen before.

He hadn't even ever considered that he might see someone on the tracks. When he was trained, it surprised him when one of the older drivers said sometimes people died on the tracks, usually as a suicide. Benedito couldn't imagine that – wanting to die and then to be hit by a train. *Damn, what a way to go*, he'd thought with a grimace.

And now he had nearly brushed that very thing, and it unsettled him. He couldn't forget the young man on the tracks. The hair on his arms stood up straight, glinting in the light of the oncoming train. His shadow splayed out behind him as the train bore down on him. And his eyes met Benedito's, met and held them.

Benedito knew the young man wanted to die. He'd seen that truth in those brown, liquid eyes. The sadness on his face was apparent, but so was the set of his jaw. He'd had enough of living and only wanted the respite of death. The young man had chosen death by train, and Benedito was his executioner.

And then he wasn't, because the young man was gone.

Benedito swung muscled legs over the edge of the bed. His head hung down, and he sighed.

"Come back to bed," Priscila said, stroking his back with soft fingers.

"In a minute," he said, as he pulled away and stood up.

Her hand dropped to the tangled sheet.

It had been like this for weeks. Every night he was startled awake just before dawn, with only a couple of hours of sleep in him after his shift ended near 2 a.m. Rarely could he get back to sleep. Instead, she'd find him slouched on the sofa with the TV on but turned down or hunched over the kitchen table, reading the paper or a book.

His face was beginning to show the signs of wear, dark crescents under his eyes, a sharp set of his jaw. Sleep deprivation was taking its toll on her handsome husband. She wasn't sure how to help.

Priscila pushed herself up from the bed and padded after him down the hall. He had pulled a small blanket around his shoulders. He sat at the kitchen table, the light on the wall providing a small spill of light beneath the plaid shade. The overhead light remained off, leaving the rest of the room in shadows.

She pulled out another chair and sat, propping her elbows on the table and her chin on her hands. She studied his downturned face. Absently, he unfolded the newspaper and laid it on the scratched table top.

“You could ask for sleeping pills,” she suggested again.

“I don’t want pills,” he said tiredly.

“I know,” she answered, “but you’re tired. You can’t keep going without sleep.”

He didn’t answer. Benedito knew it was true, but he didn’t want to medicate. He was worried it would affect his job. And he didn’t know what would happen in his dream if he couldn’t wake up. Would the young man finally die, hurtled through the windshield into Benedito? Each night when he awoke in a sweat the train hadn’t stopped, and only jerking himself awake had halted the impending impact.

Benedito hadn’t told Priscila *that*. She knew about the young man but not exactly how he visited every night since then.

“Can you at least try to sleep again after dawn?” Priscila began again.

Benedito closed his eyes.

“Yes,” he said, although he knew it wouldn’t work. Once he was awake, it was impossible to go back to sleep with the young man staring him in the face. It was only after the work day, when he was most tired that he was able to sleep. But the dreams were always the same, and soon after he would force himself awake.

Priscila watched him, a crease beginning between her brows.

“Tell me about it,” she said quietly.

He shook his head. “You’ve heard it,” he said.

“Tell me again,” she said. She folded her arms and rested her chin on them. She tilted her head to make eye contact. His eyes flicked to hers. She raised her eyebrows in question. He sighed and closed his eyes. When he opened them, she could see they were bloodshot.

She stretched out her hand and stroked his arm that rested on the table. “Please,” she said.

“Maybe it will help.”

He looked at the paper in front of him. He smoothed it out and began talking.

“I was on the No. 15 train, picking up and dropping off the last run of the night. It was quiet. There were few people. I wasn’t tired, though. It was just an ordinary run. I had left Colina and was barely at speed when I saw him.”

Priscila stroked his arm rhythmically as he talked, swirling her fingers along the fine hairs of his arm.

“The hair on his arms stood up,” Benedito said, and Priscila could feel a prickle along his skin. She said nothing.

“I could see it in the light of the train. You wouldn’t think you could see something like that in that moment, but it’s like he’s burned on my brain. His face, his hair, his clothes. I see it. I see all of him.”

“What does he do?” Priscila asked without pausing in her motions, although she noticed that the hair was standing up on Benedito’s arms, too.

“Nothing,” Benedito said. “He just stands there.”

“No movement?”

“No.”

Priscila paused and thought. “Does he say anything?” she asked.

Benedito shook his head.

“His face is still, but I can see he’s sad. So sad. But he’s kind of happy, too. Happy that he’s going to die.”

Priscila suppressed a shiver. She saw the shadow cross his face, just as he saw the shadow across the young man’s. Priscila never doubted that Bento had seen a young man on the tracks. Now he was haunted by him, and she didn’t know how to get rid of a ghost.

“Why do you think he wants to die?” Priscila asked.

Benedito shrugged. “Living is too hard,” he said simply.

This time she couldn’t suppress the shiver. It quaked her from inside. *What if that happened to Benedito?* she thought. *What if living was too hard for him?*

Shrugging it off, she said quickly, “It’s cold in here. I can’t stop shivering.”

“You should go to bed,” he said gently and looked at her. Her pale hair framed a delicate face. Her gray eyes were troubled. The furrow between her brows was deep.

“I’ll be OK,” Benedito said. “I’m just going to read for a bit.” He indicated the paper smoothed on the table.

Priscila hesitated. She didn’t want to leave him sitting here.

“Would you talk to someone else about it?” she asked.

“Who?” he asked. He turned his face to look full at her for the first time. Their eyes met.

“A doctor, maybe,” she said evenly.

A hurt look came over his face.

“You don’t believe me?” he asked.

“Yes, yes, of course I do,” she said, the words spilling out quickly. “It’s just that maybe it would help if you talked to someone who could ask better questions.”

He shook his head.

“No. If they found out at work that I was talking to a shrink ...” the thought trailed off.

Priscila knew this was a sticking point. Bento was so worried about keeping his job, he’d do anything to keep it, except maybe what he needed most to do to save his sanity. She pushed herself up from the table, suddenly very tired.

“Maybe think about it,” she urged. “They won’t have to know at work. We wouldn’t tell anyone.”

She placed her hand on his shoulder and stooped to kiss him. She felt the fine stubble rising on his cheek.

“Please come back to bed, Bento,” she whispered.

“Soon,” he replied, patting her hand. Then he opened the paper and bent his head over it, pulling his shoulder away from her touch.

She paused, looking at his tangle of curls, silhouetted in the light. Then she turned and went back to bed, shivering as she stepped away.

Leonor

She tucked her bright scarf around her neck and shoved her hands in her pockets. The day was bright and cold, and she sucked in her breath when she stepped outside. Squinting, she angled toward the library on the far corner. Her reflection followed her along the street, her white coat a spot of light over dark leggings and tall boots. Leather purse was slung across her body. She avoided looking directly at herself, just allowed glimpses of the woman walking past.

She counted the steps to the next door, tapping out the numbers, and then starting over to reach the next door. At last, she climbed the steps to the library, and pushed against the heavy wooden door. She blinked in the semi-darkness after the bright outside. Her eyes adjusted, and she headed toward the desk at the center of the room.

“Can I help you?” a young woman asked. She was slight, with oversized glasses and wavy hair. She wore a man’s style vest over a button-down dark blue blouse, the top undone and pearls showing at her neck.

Leonor nodded. “I’m looking for a newspaper article. I think it’s out of print, and I don’t have the date, but it’s a picture.”

The librarian cocked her head slightly.

“You’re looking for a picture?”

“Um, yeah, kind of,” Leonor said. “I mean I have the picture. I want to know who it is. I did a Google search and found a newspaper name, but I couldn’t find out more.”

The woman held out a tiny hand. Leonor blinked at her.

“Do you have the picture?” she asked.

“Oh, yeah,” Leonor said. She shrugged her purse away from her body to dig her phone out. She flipped it on and accessed the photos. Turning it to the woman, she waited, as if she’d have an answer immediately.

“And the name of the publication?” the woman asked as she took the phone and drew it close to her face. Leonor could see the man’s image reflected in her glasses.

Leonor shook her head. “Oh, it’s here.” She pulled out her notebook and turned it to the librarian, who tilted her head to look at the name before returning her gaze to the image.

“Did you draw this?” she asked Leonor.

“Yes,” Leonor said. “But it’s a real photo, too. It was just tiny, so I thought this would be easier to see.” She took the phone back as she spoke and swiped to the newspaper image she had snapped from her desktop. The librarian squinted.

“Wow, that’s a really good likeness,” she said.

“Thanks,” Leonor said.

“You’re a good artist,” she continued.

Leonor felt the discomfort rising. She always felt awkward when people praised her art, and yet she wanted to be an artist. Maybe that’s why she put up with managing the angsty artists at the gallery. She knew what it was like for them.

The librarian handed the phone back and picked up the notebook. Turning, she spoke over her shoulder as she headed to the back of the room. Leonor hurried to catch up.

“You can go through the microfilm. We have most of the papers archived, including this one. I’ll show you how to use the machine, but if you don’t know when it was published, this will be like a needle in a haystack. You can’t just Google it.”

Leonor nodded as she came up beside the librarian who was pulling open drawers that contained plastic rolls of film. She flicked several shut and settled on one 50 years in the past. She took the spool and loaded it onto a viewer, explaining to Leonor how to thread it and wind it.

“If you have any idea of when it was in print that would help,” the librarian said.

Leonor shook her head. “I have no idea,” she said. “I only thought yesterday of trying a Google image search, and that got me the name of the newspaper.”

The librarian nodded. “Well, good luck. Let me know if you find him.”

It was Leonor's turn to nod. "OK," she agreed, although she was pretty sure this would be fruitless.

She glanced at the clock on her phone before slipping it in her purse. She didn't have much time before she had to head to work, but maybe she'd get lucky. Maybe.

Chapter 9

Roberta

Roberta leaned back on the sofa and stuck out her wine glass. Otília poured more in, then settled on the other end of the sofa, her feet propped on the cushions between them.

“Oh, the rain today,” Roberta said. “It brought in this strange man. Homeless, I’d guess. But polite. He seemed a little odd, out of place.”

Otília nodded and encouraged her. “What makes you say odd?” She nudged her with her foot.

“The way he talked and looked. He was surprised by me,” Roberta said.

Otília grinned. “Everyone is surprised by you, darling.”

Roberta grinned back, then pressed her lips to her wineglass.

“Yes, but this was different. Even the old-timers now don’t react like he did. It’s like he’d never even heard of a female minister. And I don’t think he liked my sweater.” Roberta pouted playfully. Otília laughed.

“I’m not sure I like that sweater,” she said. “It’s a bit garish.”

“Is not,” Roberta said. Then she paused.

“He said he’d been to a wedding at the church in the past decade, but he didn’t remember me. Mentioned his wife and son, which also seemed odd, since I would have bet 10 Euro he was homeless.”

“You shouldn’t be betting,” Otília said. “Isn’t that a sin?”

“Well, yes,” Roberta replied.

“Oh, and he mentioned a name. ‘Gui,’ that’s his son. It made me think of that boy we went to primary school with. You don’t often hear that name, although he corrected it to Guilherme.”

Otília frowned. “Gui, huh? Wow, I haven’t thought of him in years. Wasn’t he the one whose father went missing?”

Roberta nodded. “You’re right. That’s him. I wonder what happened to him.”

Otília got up and went to her laptop at the desk. She flicked the mouse and began typing. When she pulled out the chair and sat down, Roberta said, “OK, this is serious.”

Otília made a face. “I’m just checking Facebook. What was his last name?”

Roberta shrugged. “Your memory is better than mine.” She took another sip of her wine.

Otília kept tapping away. “I guess I need his last name,” she began.

“Look up and to the left,” Roberta said. Otília nodded and did so. They’d learned the trick from a magazine article, and it worked to help find something that was just on the tip of your tongue.

“Got it!” Otilia exclaimed. She typed quickly, her eyes darting over the screen.

“He lives in Lisbon, still. Looks like he’s a teacher. Pictures of a wife and kids, or wait, maybe that’s grandkids.”

“Let me see a picture,” Roberta said as she came over.

Otilia pulled one up full size on the screen, and Roberta gasped.

“That’s him. I mean, older than the man I saw today, but that looks just like him!”

Otilia clicked through a few other photos. One of a young boy reminded them both of Gui as a child.

“So, was this guy his dad?” Otilia asked.

“I don’t know how that’s possible,” Roberta answered. “He went missing when we were kids, and he’d be an old man now – like our parents’ age. This man was in his 30s. But ...” her voice trailed off. “Does Gui list anything about his parents? Names, or maybe a picture?” She knew people sometimes posted old family photos.

Otilia shook her head. “No. No mention of parents or grandparents.”

Roberta crossed her arms and pressed her lips against her wine glass again.

“What are you thinking?” Otilia asked.

“How we can find out more,” Roberta answered. “I don’t want to reach out to him if it was just a coincidence. I mean there have to be other people with that name.”

“But do they look like him?” Otilia waved at the screen. It was a younger picture of Gui, posing with a woman they guessed was his wife. It was almost like looking at the man in the pew, Roberta thought. She shook her head.

“Let me send him a message,” Otilia said. “I won’t ask outright, just mention that we were wondering about him, and see if I can get him to share info about his parents.”

“Wow,” Roberta said. “Only you can make fishing for information sound easy and not at all scammy.”

Otilia grinned as her fingers flew across the keyboard. “You have no idea of my many talents,” she said.

Roberta grinned back. “Oh, but I do.”

Sol

Several young people were sitting and standing around the room. It was sparsely furnished, with a basic wooden table, a few chairs, and a low sofa that had seen better days. They all looked up

at her as she entered. She felt their eyes on her, and all conversations ceased. The radio voice seemed to grow louder in the silence.

“... are encouraged to stay inside until further notice,” the radio announcer said. “For your own safety, please stay inside and do not go out.”

“Who’s she?” someone asked. Sol turned to see who had spoken. It was a young woman, probably a few years older than herself. Her dress seemed odd to Sol, kind of like a hippie throwback. She wore a loose striped top and khaki pants. Her hair poofed above and below a bandana tied around her forehead.

“Dunno,” said the man who’d pulled her inside. “We saw her on the street and worried she shouldn’t be out alone.”

The woman looked at Sol. She arched an eyebrow.

“I, uh,” Sol stammered.

The woman crossed her arms and stuck out her hip. Sol got the message.

“I’m Sol,” she said.

The woman ducked her head with a shrug, like it didn’t mean anything to her, which it didn’t.

Sol tried again. She wasn’t sure how much she could say. She didn’t know how much she knew. Somehow, she didn’t think she should tell this group she had no idea how she’d gotten here or what was going on.

“I was out with friends.” That was true, she thought.

Heads shifted around the room as the group looked at one another.

“Who? Where?” the woman demanded.

“It was secret,” Sol said quickly. Well, that was true, she thought. “I was, uh, heading home.” That wasn’t true, but she’d live with the lie.

The woman and her companions seemed to relax a little.

“Why were you out tonight? Of all nights?” she asked.

Sol shrugged. She had to figure out what was going on. Someone had mentioned a revolution. Could she just ask outright or would that give her away?

“I didn’t know it was going to happen tonight,” she said. Sol watched the woman. Their eyes locked and held.

“OK,” the woman said after a long pause. “I’m Beatriz. Introductions around.” She nodded at the door man.

“Carlos,” he said.

“Mouth,” said the man who had pulled her off the street. Beatriz gave him a look. “It’s Rufino, but I talk too much, so they call me ‘Mouth.’”

The others, six in total, men and women, spoke up. Sol tried to keep each one in her head.

“Sol’s not your real name,” Beatriz said. It wasn’t a question. Sol shook her head.

“But you don’t want to use your real name, right? I get that.”

The radio, which had been playing music, cut back to the announcer and everyone hushed, listening. People were ordered to stay inside, and even Sol could read between the lines that something bigger was going on.

The announcer introduced the next song: “*Grândola, Vila Morena*.” The group around her cheered quietly, raising fists and grinning at one another.

Sol sucked in her breath. Beatriz turned to her with a questioning look.

“What’s the date?” Sol asked, quietly, so only Beatriz would hear.

Beatriz looked at her oddly. “April 24. No, wait. It’s after midnight. April 25.”

Sol blanched and swayed. Beatriz grabbed her arm. “Are you OK?”

Sol shook her head, then nodded instead. “I’m OK,” she mumbled.

Now it was Beatriz’s turn to shake her head. “You are not OK. What’s going on?”

“Not here,” Sol whispered. Beatriz took the hint. She dropped Sol’s arm and turned to the group.

“That’s what we needed to hear. Let’s get ready to go. Be in the hall in 10 minutes.”

The group followed her orders quickly, exiting the room quietly, whispering excitedly to one another. In a matter of moments, Beatriz and Sol were alone.

Beatriz turned to her.

Sol knew she had to tell her something, but she had no idea what. That she was from the future? That she’d somehow traveled in time nearly 20 years into the past?

Fuck, she thought. When she thought of it that way, it made her want to puke.

“Are you going to be sick?” Beatriz asked.

Sol jerked around, looking for someplace to vomit. It was coming up.

She leaned over and threw up on the floor. There wasn’t much in her stomach, so there wasn’t much to come up. But still she retched. Beatriz waited until she’d swiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

“Sol.” She said her name simply, but Sol heard the sincerity in it. She felt something or understood something despite the decades between them – literally.

Sol felt her hand on her shoulder. “You can tell me,” she said.

Sol shook her head. No, not right now. “Later,” she whispered. It was too soon, too fresh.

Beatriz waited for a beat. She was weighing her options. She had to get ready but she was worried about Sol. What had happened to her? She knew she wasn’t telling her anything close to the truth. *Was she a spy?*

Beatriz almost laughed out loud at the thought. Had she really just considered that a girl they’d pulled off the street was a spy. Man, this was getting to her.

“C’mon,” she said. “The bathroom’s through there. Get yourself cleaned up. We roll in just a few minutes.”

Beatriz turned and strode out of the room, and Sol wiped her face again, this time, dislodging tears that had formed in her eyes.

Almiro

Lights overhead brought Almiro immediately awake and bolt upright. He clutched at his blanket and scrambled to ball it up while simultaneously grabbing his towel to stow it away. He had to hide the fact he’d been sleeping here overnight. His eyes scanned both directions, but there was no one around. He heard footsteps then, on the stairs, and a couple people came down the steps at the far end of the platform. The man was dressed in a trench coat with a fedora. The middle-aged woman was in a long coat and a dress. She carried a big purse. He wondered at her hat. It was rare to see women wear hats these days, except an occasional baseball or winter cap.

It reminded him of his hat. He reached up and pulled the pom-pom hat off, shoving it into his pocket.

He reached underneath the bench for his backpack, but his fingers found nothing.

He pulled his gaze from the people and looked for his bag. It was gone. The bench was open underneath, with the smooth wall behind.

He glanced around quickly to be sure it hadn’t been moved, but he hadn’t moved it, of that he was sure.

His backpack was gone.

He cursed silently. Someone must have snuck it away while he slept, but it would have been in the dark, and who could have seen it in that pitch black? Almiro couldn’t see it, and he put it under the bench!

He took the towel, which was still rolled, and shoved it into the front of his jacket, which was partially zipped. Then he took the blanket, which he’d balled up, and shoved it in the other side. Bulky now, he stood up and considered going up and out of the metro station, but he didn’t want

to cause any workers who might be around to question why he was coming out when no trains had yet arrived.

Instead, he decided he could make it to the next metro stop, assuming the train came soon. He checked the train display. It was, indeed, just after 6:30 a.m., and the next train was set to arrive in 11 minutes.

He turned away from the couple who were standing at the far end of the platform and stretched his stiff legs and back, trying not to make it obvious what he was doing. It was slow and steady, a gentle easing as he walked slowly down the platform.

Another man came down the stairs nearest him. He was wearing an overcoat and a winter hat with flaps that covered his ears. Almiro had had such a hat when he was a youngster. There had been a picture of him wearing it in one of the old albums.

Instinctively, he reached for his pocket to touch his keepsakes and ensure they were still safe: the photograph, the dog collar, his wallet and cash. All accounted for, except the backpack. He glanced back to the bench. It had been there, but he had no idea where it was now.

It was too bad he lost his change of clothes and minimal toiletries, but at least he had the towel and blanket, his cash and little mementoes. Somehow, he'd replace the others. He shook his head. He didn't know how. It was difficult being homeless, without a job, without a means to get the things he needed. Yet he didn't know if he should even try to get another job. It was hard to get to a job on time when he never knew where he'd sleep or how he'd get to work.

He wished he could help himself. Almiro wanted to work, that was true. The factory job had been uninspiring, but it was work that paid. Later, caring for his mother wasn't really a job, but his duty. Despite the hardships, he had enjoyed taking care of her, but he didn't see how that could be a job. He didn't have skills to work in a home for the elderly. Most older people stayed home with family, as his mom had with him.

Still ... he let the thought hang there. Maybe there's a job waiting for me today.

Down the track, Almiro heard the approaching train, and he stepped nearer the edge to prepare to embark. The train seemed shinier as it pulled into the station. Everything seemed somehow newer or brighter on the platform, he thought, before he stepped onto the train.

And then he realized several things simultaneously:

There were no posters advertising fast food or entertainment along the walls of the station.

It was cleaner than he'd ever seen it.

The upholstery on the train was like new and a pattern he'd never seen before, although the train car seemed somehow antique.

Something else niggled at his brain. Another change or difference that he hadn't quite pinned down. It felt like one of those picture puzzles where you had to find the difference between the two images.

He closed his eyes and thought of the station as he'd seen it the night before. The bench was the same, the tiled patterns the same but brighter today. The train started moving, and his eyes flicked instinctively to the clock display over the platform. And it hit him.

The clock had a face and three hands to mark the hour, minutes and seconds. The next train time indicator was a flip design, to count down the minutes. Gone was the digital display that alerted riders to beware of pickpockets and to keep their tickets for their full ride. The digital display clock with message board was gone. In its place was this old-school time clock.

It took him until the next metro stop to figure it out. It wasn't just an old train and old station. It was an older time.

Moisés

Moisés awoke as the stretcher banged against the ambulance. He tried to move his head and hands, but they were strapped down. He squinted his eyes open and groaned.

"Hold on, there," a thin voice said. "You've been injured. We have you immobilized until you get to the hospital to be X-rayed. You may have broken bones."

The voice came from the side, but Moisés couldn't see the person. He guessed it was a man.

Gloved hands worked over his, and he felt a pinch. Then he saw the needle embedded. The hands attached the tubing for an IV. The hands were connected to strong, hairy arms. Finally, a face came into view. He was a young man, with typical Portuguese features and dark hair cut short. His eyes were light brown and seemed to laugh, even though his face was serious.

"Best if you don't try to talk," he said. "Just sit tight. We'll be there shortly."

Moisés realized there was a siren wail intermittently punctuating the air. Items rattled, and he heard wheels moving quickly over the pavement.

The ambulance crewman guessed the man on the stretcher had been attacked. He had fractures in his hand, nose and possibly arm, lacerations to his face, head, hands and arms. And that was just what was visible. He was pretty sure the patient would be one massive bruise before the day was up. He glanced up at the IV. At least they'd be able to give him pain killers once they determined what was wrong.

Moisés closed his eyes. It hurt to keep them open. Everything hurt. He'd never felt such pain. It came at him in waves, barely ebbing before the next one crashed over him. If he thought about any one part for too long, it became unbearable. He couldn't have spoken if he wanted to – the pain was that bad. He didn't know it then, but his jaw was broken, too. He wouldn't be talking at all for quite some time.

The crewman looked at Moisés feet. It was odd that he had no shoes. *What a weird thing to steal*, he thought. *Why would anyone steal shoes?*

Isabela

Isabela Fortes hopped up the steps, keys jingling on her hip, her pony tail bouncing beneath her cap. At the landing, she paused in front of the dark, polished wood door. She knocked precisely – three, quick raps – then waited with her hands clasped in front of her. She held them firmly in place.

Fortes was nervous.

It had been six months since Tomás was found and his mother went missing, and Fortes was no closer to figuring out even who she was. She had spent countless hours on the mystery. She was sure that's what it was. No decent mother who had cared for a boy like Tomás would abandon him in a metro station. Something had happened to her.

The door opened, breaking her reverie. Ana stood before her. Tomás peeked out from behind her skirt.

“Bom dia!” Ana nearly shouted, pulling Fortes to her for the traditional Portuguese greeting of three kisses.

Isabela smiled despite herself. She really liked Ana. She was a warm, welcoming woman who had taken Tomás in and made him her own son.

“Bom dia!” Isabela answered as she returned the embrace. She caught Tomás' eye. He was smiling shyly. Isabela winked at him.

“Bom dia,” she said more quietly, as she leaned down to ruffle his hair. He threw himself at her legs and hugged her tightly with both arms wrapped around her. It surprised her, and she looked startled up at Ana. Her face asked the question: What?

Ana smiled broadly. “Tomás has been so excited to see you! He kept saying he would give you a big hug! He said he missed you.” Ana reached down for the boy and gently pulled him to her.

“Come in!” she called brightly over her shoulder as she headed back into the apartment toward the cozy kitchen. “I've got tea on.”

Isabela pushed the door shut and followed the pair to the kitchen. She passed hooks in the hallway and several rugs for shoes, most of which were empty. Ana and her husband were foster parents to several children, but they were in school. Tomás was the youngest, and he was a good fit in their family.

In the kitchen, the counters were clean and the table set for tea. Ana was pulling the tea kettle from the stove. Tomás held a plate of biscuits, proudly, while he waited for Isabela to sit.

“Would you care for a biscuit?” he asked carefully. He obviously had practiced with Ana.

Isabela smiled. “Yes, please,” she told him, refraining from stroking his head. His tousled curls drew her hand each time she saw him. He was a handsome little boy, even if he tended to be quite serious.

She was glad he was here. If he had to lose his mother, getting Ana as a replacement was probably the next best thing.

Isabela's smile faded. Tomás' mother. She had come to deliver bad news. Ana, turning to the table, saw it on her face.

"Tomás, would you please go get the new book we got at the library? You can show it to Isabela while we have tea."

Tomás dutifully set the plate down and scurried down the hall.

"What is it?" Ana asked in a low voice. "Have you found her?"

"No, no," Isabela said quickly, glancing toward Tomás' departing figure. "I'm no closer to even knowing who she is."

Ana looked puzzled. "Then what is the bad news?" She sat at the table.

"My superiors are taking me off the case." Isabela paused. "Actually, they are closing the case."

Ana nodded. "There's not much to go on, is there?"

Isabela shook her head. "No, there's not." She paused again. "I've tried every angle I can think of. Dead ends everywhere."

Tomás bounded back into the room, a book held at arm's length. "Here's my new book!"

Ana opened her arms to him, and he climbed eagerly onto her lap. He turned the pages while Ana peered at Isabela over his head. Isabela noted it was a book about trains: *Thomas the Tank Engine*.

"What does it mean for you?" Ana asked.

Isabela shrugged. "Back to real crime, I guess. There's always something."

"What will happen ..." she trailed off. Isabela understood.

"Nothing will change that way," she said. "You're doing great, and no one wants to upset that. It's an unusual case, though, so you may not have the same long-term options."

Ana nodded in understanding. She knew it would be impossible to adopt Tomás outright. He was an orphan, but there was no way to determine his parentage, so he would remain a government ward until he was an adult. Ana pressed her cheek into Tomás' head. He squirmed and giggled.

"Let's have tea," Ana said, shifting Tomás onto his own chair between her and Isabela.

"That's a nice book," Isabela said. "Why did you pick it out?"

"I watch it on TV," he said.

"Oh," Isabela said. She knew very little about children's books or television, but she seemed to remember Thomas the Tank Engine.

“He keeps asking to see the program, but there’s no TV program about it,” Ana said. “I think he likes it because they have the same name.” She tweaked Tomás’ cheek between her thumb and finger. He grinned and tilted his head.

Isabela grinned, too, but then her smile faded. She was hit with the realization that this little boy probably would never see his real mom again. That life was over – whatever it had been. While he would be well cared for and loved by Ana and her family, he never would know what happened to his mother. Isabela wondered how much it would impact him and in what ways.

She forced a smile back on her face when she saw Tomás watching her.

“Come here and show me that book,” she said. “Have you learned to read it yet?”

Tomás scooped the book up and clambered from his chair onto her lap. He nodded his head. “I can read a little!”

Ana’s and Isabela’s eyes met over his head, smiling sadly in understanding of what wasn’t said.

Then Tomás flipped open the book and began to tell the story of a little train engine named Thomas.

Benedito

Benedito felt her go. He didn’t want to hurt her. He loved Priscila more than anything. He had loved her since he set eyes on her when he was 14. They had married at 20, and that was 15 years ago. He was no longer young, but not so old either.

And she would always be beautiful, he thought. No matter how old she was, she would always be beautiful to him. Priscila had a beautiful soul, he had decided. She was always kind and gentle. She would have made a good mom, but that wasn’t to be.

He folded back the newspaper page and smoothed the edge with his thumb. He wasn’t reading it, he knew that. It was more just something to do to pass the time until it was time to get up. Working shift work could take its toll, but he enjoyed second shift. It fit well with many other Portuguese who went to bed late and got up late. Meal times were later, too, and that suited him fine. Priscila didn’t mind the hours, either. She waited up for him, and they went to bed together, usually a little after 2 a.m.

He loved to feel her curved against him as they slid into sleep. Each time he’d wake in the night, he’d reach for her, just to feel her there. It was reassuring to touch her in the dark, feel her warmth and know she was real.

And then the nightmares started, and it was all he could do to not wake up screaming. He refused to reach out to her in that moment of terror, lest he somehow hurt her with his dreams. He was worried the train wouldn’t stop in time, and he’d be hurtled through the front window, impacting with the young man who simply stood there waiting for death.

Benedito closed his eyes. The young man was there. Always there.

Blurily, he opened them, and pinched the bridge of his nose. He blinked open his eyes and forced them to focus on the newspaper. A small article took shape among the gray type. "Missing man was despondent" read the headline. Then several paragraphs down, a black and white photo jumped off the page.

The young man was staring up at him. Benedito's ghost had a name.

Leonor

Sofia had come to expect Leonor every Tuesday and Thursday at the library. Twice now, she'd gotten a coffee for them to share as they pored over the newspaper archive.

Leonor had scrolled through so many pages, learning to skim for just images of the right size or shape and ignore the rest. Her first few times, she'd been bogged down in stories from the past, headlines from a different era. It was fascinating and disturbing how she would be caught up in the different stories. Crime always seemed to sell papers. But she also liked the articles about beauty queens and new shopping malls. Ships lost at sea and politicians caught in sex scandals. But she didn't have time to read them all, so now she tried to ignore them.

Sofia had created a spreadsheet to track her progress through the years. Leonor wasn't sure if she had done it because she was helpful or she liked her. Either way, she was pleased to have the help.

The library search also had seemed to provide a reprieve. Since she had started the quest, as she now thought of it, she hadn't had a spell. Like an athlete trying to maintain a streak, Leonor would do anything to stay in reality and not slip into the cold. Yet it always seemed so close.

She sipped her coffee as the pages zipped past, her eyes flicking and lighting on a word, a letter, a picture. She snapped the page into frame. It was a picture about the right size and shape, but a woman gazed out at her instead of the man's dark eyes. She pressed the button to start the movement again.

"I wonder who he is," Sofia mused. She was running her finger over the wooden case that held the microfilm. Leonor shrugged. "That's what I want to know."

"But how did you come to draw him?" Sofia asked. Leonor had always skirted that topic.

For whatever reason, today she answered as truthfully as she could.

"I saw him in a vision," she said.

Sofia nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, that's it."

Leonor glanced at her to gauge if she was being honest. She certainly seemed to be sincere.

"I can feel it," she said. As if for emphasis, she closed her eyes. Her fingers flitted over the case and paused on a handle. Her head still down, she pulled it open and took out the film.

"Try this one," she said simply.

Leonor stared at her. It was the same film she had offered to Leonor when she first came in.

“I think you already gave me that one,” she said gently. Sofia looked up.

“Huh,” she said. She twisted the reel between her fingers. “Really?”

Sofia looked at the date and compared it to the spreadsheet. “I think this is a year earlier,” she said. She held it out to Leonor.

Leonor shrugged. Sofia seemed so sure. She slid it onto the reel and threaded it through. The plate pressed down, and she could see the newspaper image. By now, they all looked similar, but there was something familiar about it. She started to say so, but then realized Sofia was waiting expectantly for her to scroll through.

She stifled a sigh and began to scroll, the pages shifting quickly beneath her gaze.

“Stop,” Sofia said simply, and Leonor did. She pressed the page into focus and sucked in her breath.

He stared back at her, smaller than she expected, on an inside page. But it was him.

She scrambled to center it on the screen and zoom in to read it.

“Metro worker missing from job” the headline stated. The story was only a few paragraphs long, but it told her everything she needed to know. His name was Fernao. He was a tile worker, and he’d disappeared during the construction of the metro in 1959.

Leonor’s eyes flicked over the words and back to the picture, again and again.

Slowly she realized that Sofia hadn’t moved or said a word. She turned to her and found the librarian’s eyes wide.

Chapter 10

Guilherme

Guilherme glanced at the message notification. It seemed someone was always trying to get his attention, usually a parent or a former student. Most of the time he didn't mind, but he was in the middle of editing a paper, and it needed his full attention.

The icon bounced. Guilherme looked at the ceiling and back to the screen. The icon continued to bounce.

"Oh hell," he muttered. He knew he should just remove the program from the computer, but he hadn't. And now wasn't the time. But he couldn't stand the bouncing icon. He clicked on it, and the program opened. There was a message from someone named Otília. It niggled at his brain. How did he know that name?

He opened it, and the niggling became a snap as the pieces clicked together. Otília and her spouse – Roberta – had been talking about him, so she looked him up and wondered how he was, how his family was, how his life turned out.

Otília and Roberta had been childhood classmates before he and his mother moved from their flat to a new neighborhood that was cheaper and held no memories of his father.

It all rushed back, those early years in school, the looks the kids gave him, and the teachers, too. He was the little boy without a dad. In 1960, that didn't happen. Parents didn't often divorce, and it was rare for a parent to die young.

But Guilherme had had neither of those things happen. His father had vanished, and no one knew what happened. No one believed he'd walked out on his family – he wasn't that type of man. He'd had no enemies. There's no way he could have had an accident at work, because they would have found him. Instead, he never came home after his shift one day.

It marked the beginning of the end for his mom. She was heartbroken and never understood how or why Fernao could have left. Honestly, she never believed it, Guilherme thought. She always wondered where he was and what he was doing. She didn't want to believe he was dead or that he had chosen to leave. Instead, she pictured him somewhere in the world, living his life, but trying to get back to her and their son.

Guilherme hovered over the X to delete the message without replying. But he hesitated. Why would Otília reach out now? Gui had been thinking more about his mom and dad lately.

The mouse hovered, and he clicked on reply. He tried to sound upbeat in his response, and he read it over twice before hitting send.

"Otília (and Roberta), How nice to hear from you. I am fine. I trust you are, too. Despite a challenging start, my life turned out well. My wife and I have two children and two grandchildren. My mom passed a few years ago, and we never knew what happened to my dad, as you may recall. Why did you get in touch now, after all these years?"

Guilherme turned his attention back to the paper, but the moment was gone. Instead, he clicked back to Facebook and clicked on Otília's profile. There was a picture of her and Roberta, probably taken recently, standing together with a beach in the background, squinting into the sun. They had their arms around each other and were grinning like fools. Guilherme smiled despite himself. He loved a good love story, when two people got together and really seemed happy.

His eyes glided to the pictures on the shelf over the desk. There was a small black and white image of his parents on their wedding day. They both looked scared, but there seemed to be a tenderness, too, in the way his dad's arm circled his mom's waist and his other hand held hers. She clutched a small bouquet in her free hand and seemed to cling to his hand with her own.

Otília was prompt. Her bouncing message brought his eyes back to the screen.

"This is going to sound odd," she wrote, "but what were your parents' first names? Roberta thinks she met a family member today."

Guilherme leaned back to consider this. A family member? His dad had a brother, but he had died a decade ago. His mom was an only child. There were cousins on both sides. Perhaps that's what she meant.

"Neves and Fernao," he typed back.

He waited to see if she would reply again. But nothing came. He had closed the other programs and was going to shut down Facebook when the message popped up.

"Can we get together to talk? Sometime soon?"

Guilherme wanted to say no. But the whole thing was odd, and he felt compelled to go along with it.

"OK," he said. "I've got some time tomorrow afternoon."

They arranged to meet for coffee. Gui shut down the computer and went to make dinner, questions circling in his brain.

Sol

Exactly 10 minutes from her announcement, the group was assembled in the hallway. Sol was wedged between Carlos and Rufino/AKA Mouth. She didn't think it was by accident that she now had protectors. Beatriz was addressing the group.

"Stick together, as much as you can. Keep your eyes and ears open. If anything seems bad, let the others know. We want to stay safe, but we need to do this. Our country depends on us, got it?"

There were murmurs around.

"For Portugal," she said, and raised a fist. The others followed suit. "Portugal," they echoed.

Then Beatriz opened the door, and they filed onto the street into darkness.

Sol knew exactly where they were going. Every Portuguese school child learned about the Carnation Revolution of April 25, 1974. It was when the government was overthrown in a mostly peaceful coup. She held onto that knowledge, that it would be OK in the end, even if it was scary now, because she was shaking in her sneakers. The song on the radio had clued her in. The famous song was used to signal people that the revolution was at hand.

Somehow, she had been dropped into the past, into a historic date and time.

She thought, not for the first time, that she was losing her mind. It kept bubbling up with each step she took, and yet, this felt so real. Why would she descend into madness this way?

But why was she here? How had she come here? And for what purpose?

She thought about the metro station, where she'd gone for refuge. She had hidden in the tunnel, run to it with abandon. And then come out here and now. Had it been a portal to the past for her?

With a twinge she thought of Jazz and Wube. They must be frantic looking for her. When she didn't turn up at the check point, they would look for her. But she wasn't anywhere to be found. They weren't even born yet in this world. Nor was she, she realized.

Her companions intruded on her thoughts. Beatriz was in step just in front of her, and Sol caught herself looking at her, admiring her curvy hips and wide shoulders.

Carlos bumped her shoulder. "*Desculpe*," he muttered. Mouth noticed.

"Hey, are you getting fresh with the new girl?" he teased. "Bea won't like that."

"My name's Beatriz," Beatriz said. "And lay off the new girl. Both of you."

Carlos glared over Sol's head at Mouth.

Mouth grinned back. "Yeah, lay off the new girl, Carlos," Mouth joked.

Sol smiled despite herself. It was easy being with them. They reminded her of Jazz and Wube, a protector and a talker, friends who would razz you but have your back. She wondered if they were OK. Sol knew they would worry about her, but she didn't know what to do. She had no idea where to even start.

Her mother flashed suddenly into her mind, and she flinched. She hadn't thought of her at all until that very second, she realized with a twinge of guilt. But her mother had stopped being a mother a long time ago, she reasoned. Was she thinking of her, of Sol, or rather Luzia? Even her mom – or maybe especially her mom – didn't know about her alter ego with the spray can art. At home she was simply Lu.

No, Sol realized. Her mom wasn't thinking of her. She hadn't thought of her since she shackled up with the boyfriend. Sol shuddered and forced him from her mind.

Instead, she put one foot in front of the other.

Their group turned the corner, and suddenly the street was filled with soldiers. They ducked back quickly, tripping over each other as they retreated down the dark street. Carlos pulled her into doorway, and Beatriz pushed in next to her. Sol felt rather than saw the others slip into similar hiding spots. They all held their breath, waiting, listening.

Sol felt a thrill at what was happening. It was like being part of a re-enactment, she thought. But if everything was true, this was the real thing. She was living in history.

Was it safe? From what she knew, the military coup had been peaceful, with barely any shots fired and no civilian deaths. Even the dictator had left the country alive and went into exile in Brazil.

Still, she didn't want to be arrested. Not now, not here.

Beatriz nodded her head slightly in the direction they had come from. Sol and Carlos nodded. When Beatriz slipped out, they followed. The others joined them as they made their way silently back down the street. They skittered around the corner into an alley.

"All good?" Beatriz asked in a whisper, surveying the group. Everyone nodded. Sol could see everyone was shook up. The military was a surprise.

In the distance, she heard a grinding sound, like metal on pavement. They all turned to look but could see nothing.

"Who wants to check it out?" Beatriz asked.

"I'm on it," said Mouth, and he had started off at a trot toward the sound before anyone could say anything. Beatriz watched him go. Turning back to the group, she addressed them.

"We'll stay here until Rufino gets back," she said. "Then we'll decide our next steps."

She shoved her hands in the pockets of her jacket and turned to watch for Mouth. The others spread out and leaned against the wall, whispering low, heads bent. When someone pulled out a cigarette, Beatriz shook her head. "No smoking. Not now."

Sol watched her. She noticed Carlos watching, too.

Beatriz must have felt their eyes, because she turned to them.

"It's probably not the best time for this," she began, "but we may not have time later." She looked pointedly at Sol.

"So, Sol. What's up with you?"

Sol didn't know where to begin. Her heart beat thudded as anxiety rose in her.

Footsteps spared her. Mouth was jogging back. They surrounded him as he entered the alley.

"Tanks," he wheezed. "Four blocks up and over. Lots more troops. Armed."

Beatriz frowned. Everyone else paled noticeably, even in the dim light.

“Right,” she said. “You ran all the way there and back?” Mouth was panting. He nodded and leaned to place his hands on his knees.

“You’re out of shape,” she said. He smirked up at her.

“That’s the thanks I get?”

Beatriz ignored this, but it helped ease the tension.

“OK,” she said after a pause. “We can go back. We can go on and try to find another spot without soldiers. But we probably shouldn’t stay here. They’re too close and might come looking for us.”

There were nods all around. “Who’s for going on?” she asked.

“Me,” Sol said.

They all looked at her in surprise. Sol was betting her life on history lessons from school. If this was real, she was in the middle of the Portuguese revolution that overthrew the government and set the country toward democracy.

Beatriz nodded. “OK,” she said. “Anybody else?” The group had shifted to face her, encircling her in their makeshift meeting space. A couple of them looked hesitant. Mouth spoke up.

“Yeah,” he said. “We don’t wanna be stuck here when the action is somewhere else.”

Carlos gave him a look over Sol’s head. Then he nodded and sighed. “OK. Yeah.”

Everyone else was silent.

“OK,” Beatriz said.

She addressed the others. “Stay together. Go back to the flat. Go quickly, and stay safe. Got it?”

They murmured and nodded. Beatriz grinned at them. “It’s really happening, amigos! We’ll see you soon.” She reached out to them and hugged them close in a group, whispering encouragements to them. They broke off and left around the corner.

When it was the four of them, Beatriz cocked her head and met Sol’s eyes. Without a word, she turned down the alley, Sol followed, and Mouth and Carlos fell in behind.

Almiro

Almiro swung out of the train car and bounded for the stairs. He passed people in what looked to be costumes of long coats and hats, even some galoshes. A pair of young women wore skirts past their knees and woolen berets. Glancing around, he saw no signs of modern clothing – no brightly colored ski jackets, body-hugging clothing or jeans. Gone were tattoos, piercings and unnaturally colored hair.

In fact, he felt like he'd stepped into a photograph from his parents' generation, before he was even born.

He took the steps two at a time and stopped, winded, at the top. He reached out a hand to steady himself and noticed how it was shaking. That's when he realized he might be hyperventilating, his breath coming quick and shallow. Down the hall, he could see a bench, so he slid his way toward it, one arm propping him up. There weren't many people, and they seemed to pay him no mind. *At least that's normal*, he thought.

Sweat broke out on his brow as he slumped onto the bench. He stared at the floor in front of him. *What's happening to me?* he wondered. *Am I losing my mind?*

Almiro had no good answer. He didn't think he had a reason to nor did he feel particularly like he was out of his senses. In fact, they seemed to be functioning fine. A whiff of perfume as a woman walked past. The click of her shoes on the tiles and rustle of her coat and skirts. He saw the tiles and felt the bench beneath his clenched hands. Other than taste, which he couldn't test at the moment, everything seemed fine. His stomach rumbled as he thought about it.

I am all right, he thought, pushing down the hunger pang. *I'm just in the wrong time.*

That thought was followed immediately by: *Where am I?* and *How did I get here?*

And then: What do I do now?

Almiro chanced a look up. He recognized the station, although it looked much newer than he remembered it. His stomach growled louder. Outside there would be a market where he could find a breakfast and bathroom. Maybe once he'd eaten something he would have a better idea of what to do.

He heard the train rumble into the station below him. He paused and waited for the riders to ascend. Glancing around, he stood as casually as he could and headed for the exit gate, following the crowd up and out of the metro.

Julinha

Julinha jerked awake in the pitch dark. For a moment, she was lost, not remembering where she was. It came in a flash, and she scrambled to her feet.

What had woken her? Was it a train?

No, it was still quiet in the tunnel. Quickly, she turned and with her hand along the cool tile headed back to the platform, picking her way along the rails in her sock feet. It wasn't until she got there that she realized she had no way to get back up. It was a drop for her to get down, and she wasn't sure she could pull herself up.

Three attempts later, she was panting heavily and cursing her short legs. In desperation, she went to the far end of the platform. Maybe there was something there she could stand on – a step or a ladder or something.

And there, sure enough, was something. Julinha cried with relief.

A metal box was built into the wall just to the side of the opening, about halfway up. It felt like an electrical box, maybe, with a metal cover protecting the wires running from the bottom to the floor of the tunnel. If she braced herself on it, she might be able to get enough leverage to get out.

She put her hands on the platform and raised her knee and put it against the box. It cut into her painfully, but she pressed on, grimacing. She'd experienced worse. She was able to lever her foot off the floor a few inches. Her leg slipped, and she scrambled to get her feet back under her.

Julinha took a deep breath and pulled her foot up to brace against the box. She was getting tired, so she needed to make this count.

Bouncing a little, she gave a big push with her standing foot and hoisted with her hands while she pushed with her foot. It was awkward, but it worked. She got an elbow on the platform, and she shoved against the box with her stocking foot, pushing herself up and over the edge until she lay sprawled, panting. Then, she started to laugh.

It was an odd sound in the dark, even as it touched her ears. She realized she was sobbing and laughing at the same time.

That's when the lights came on, and Julinha closed her eyes and wailed.

Dores

Dores crossed her arms and hunched her shoulders. She wanted to walk with her head down, but she forced herself to look up, look around. Look for her boy.

It had been years, and her feet still took her to the metro station where she would board the train and ride to the stop. Sometimes she would get off and simply sit there, watching people come and go. Other times, she would walk the neighboring streets, hoping to catch a glimpse of Tomás. Occasionally, she would ride past, and simply watch the platform from her seat on the train. But more often than not, she would get off and just wait.

He haunted her days and nights. When she couldn't sleep – like tonight – she walked.

Dores was on foot, crossing kilometers and neighborhoods in the dark to get to the station. It would be closed when she got there, but it didn't matter. It was the closest thing she had to Tomás – the memory of him there. His hand holding hers, hopping down the last step. His smile and mop of curly hair she couldn't bear to cut.

Tomás had been her world, and now he was gone.

It's my fault, she thought for the millionth time. I should have kept a hand on him, not let him leave my sight, even for a moment.

Her counselor would say carrying the guilt didn't help. She should "let it go."

Dores swiped a hand across her eyes. It still was raw. She still cried every day. Every single day. She couldn't "let it go."

Not knowing was the worst. She almost felt it would be better if she knew he was dead. But she didn't know. He could be dead or alive. He could have been taken for who knew what purpose.

They had searched the tunnels in both directions, but they didn't find a body or any evidence that he had fallen on the tracks and been hit.

No one had seen anything. Does knew nothing about what happened to him. Only that he was gone.

She rounded the block, and the entrance lay ahead, steps descending into darkness. There was no barricade. The gates at the bottom would be closed, but she could slip in, if she wanted. *I'll go down for just a minute*, she thought. Glancing around, she made sure no one was on the street, and then she hurried down the stairs.

Her footsteps echoed in the tunnel as she rounded the curve at the bottom. The ticket booth was dark and shuttered. A vending machine blinked dully in the gloom.

Tiptoeing now, to keep her footsteps quiet, she went through the arch to the gates. There was a gap between the last turnstile and the wall. She could squeeze through it if she slung her purse through first and twisted her hips and shoulders as she passed through.

She glanced over her shoulder and paused to listen. It was silent leading to the exit. Below her, darkness waited.

Dores fumbled in her purse for a tiny flashlight she kept for this purpose. She turned it on. The small beam illuminated the steps, and she descended as quickly as she dared. She wasn't sure what would happen if staff found her here. Maybe she'd be arrested. At the worst, she might be banned from coming to the station, and that would be awful.

At the bottom, Does let her breath out. She hadn't realized she had been holding it, but she must have – for quite some time. She almost felt light-headed.

The platform extended in the darkness. The exit signs were the only lights on at this time of night. The one above her glowed green but not enough to light anything.

She directed her flashlight to the floor, although she knew it was smooth. *I'll go sit on a bench for a few minutes*, she thought. *I'll think good thoughts about Tomás*.

She took a step and stopped. Does was sure she had heard something. She flicked the flashlight off and held perfectly still. Holding her breath, she strained her eyes and ears against the dark and quiet.

What did I hear?

Faintly, she could just make out a sound, like it was coming from a great distance or from a very quiet source.

In the dark, she took a step toward it. She turned her head, angling it to try and get a better path for the sound to reach her ears and her brain.

There, she thought. It's coming from there.

Dores took another step forward, and another, pausing with each one to listen again and try to pinpoint the sound.

Her foot brushed the edge of the platform, and she jerked back. She flicked on the flashlight and realized she was standing on the edge of the abyss.

Well, not really, she thought. Just the drop to the track level.

The sound came again. She turned her head and stared down the black tunnel.

Eyes wide, she recognized it.

It was the sound of a child crying.

Benedito

Benedito pushed the paper toward Priscila when she sat with her coffee and fruit.

"What's this?" she asked. He tapped the article wordlessly. She glanced up at him, took in his haggard look, and lifted the paper. It must be important, she thought.

"Is that him?" she asked a moment later, already knowing the answer.

Benedito nodded.

"So will you," Priscila started then stopped. She calculated the various outcomes of Bento reporting what he knew.

"No," Benedito said. "I won't." He'd already considered his own what-ifs. "I can't tell them anything. First, I don't have anything except that I saw him. But he wasn't really there. The train didn't hit him."

Priscila nodded. The furrow between her brows deepened and the lines at her mouth tightened. "But maybe you could tell them anonymously," she said.

He shook his head. "Who else besides a train driver on that line could report seeing him in the tunnel?"

"Maybe you don't say in the tunnel. Just say you saw him in the metro."

Bento sighed and rubbed his eyes.

"I'd want to know," Priscila said, gently. "If I was his wife or girlfriend or sister."

She'd not said mother, Benedito noticed. She took his hand and squeezed it.

"That's true," he said. "How would I do it?"

“We can write it down and mail it.”

He considered this. “OK,” he said. “But I think first I’m going to lay down for a bit.”

“Of course,” Priscila said quickly, getting to her feet ahead of him. “I made the bed, so it will be like getting in fresh.”

Benedito reached out to her and pulled her back into his arms. She curled into him, and pressed her lips into his chest. It was all she could do to not sob as he held her.

Leonor

The sketchbook slid off the desk and plopped loudly on the floor at Sofia’s feet. She picked it up and turned it over. The man’s face was there, but it was different somehow. Sofia started to ask about the drawing when she flipped the page. It was him, again, but a different pose, head tilted slightly down, the eyes mostly hidden behind the lids.

She turned the page.

Page after page, he was there in various poses and expressions, mostly sad, but sometimes angry or frightened.

“It’s all him?” she asked. Leonor glanced up.

“Not all him,” she said. “There are others, too.”

Sofia looked at her, a slight furrow in her brow, pinched behind the frames of her glasses.

Leonor pulled several sketchbooks from her bag. Sofia flipped one open. A young woman peered from behind long hair, her face nearly in profile. She was beautiful but sad, too, and scared. Sofia could see all of the emotion.

She turned the page, and the young woman looked away, as if out a window, although the page was blank around her figure.

On the next page, she pushed her hair behind her ear, her hands small, her features delicate.

Sofia flipped the pages and watched the young woman change, even as she’d watched the man.

Her eyes met Leonor’s over the sketchbook.

“Who is she?”

Leonor shook her head slightly and gave a tight smile. “Don’t know.”

“Why do you draw them?” Sofia asked.

Leonor looked away and fidgeted with her hands in her lap.

“I,” she started, then stopped. “I’ve never talked about it,” she said after a moment.

Sofia sank into the chair next to her. In the hushed library, she was aware of how whispers could be overheard.

“Do you want to talk about it?” she asked.

Leonor glanced at her quickly, then away, trying to judge how much she should say. Or how much she could say without sounding absolutely crazy. Sofia seemed nice. She had helped her. They sometimes chatted if Sofia wasn’t busy.

Leonor swallowed.

“Can you tell me why you draw them?”

Leonor’s palms had gone sweaty, and her pulse quickened.

Approaching footsteps jerked them both back to reality, like school girls caught gossiping in class. Leonor took the sketchbooks and stowed them in her bag while Sofia removed the microfilm cassette from the reader. One of the other librarians paused to quietly tell Sofia she had a phone call before retreating.

Leonor pulled on her coat. Sofia stopped her with a hand on her arm. “I get off at 6 today. Can we meet for dinner?”

“You don’t have to do that,” Leonor started, but Sofia cut her off.

“Please just say yes. This is a mystery for sure, but more than that, you look like you could use a friend.”

Leonor smiled despite herself. “OK. I’ll meet you here then.”

Chapter 11

Guilherme

He almost didn't show up. He told them that when he pulled up a chair at the table by the window.

"We're so glad you did," Otilia said, smiling warmly.

Roberta nodded agreement. "Absolutely."

Gui wondered again if this was a good idea, but here he was, facing the women who sat side by side and watched him closely. They looked at each other, and he felt a chill tickle the back of his neck.

"What's this about?" he asked abruptly. "I don't mean to be rude, but this is all very odd. If it's something bad, I'd like to know now. Don't string it out."

The women looked at each other, and Roberta nodded. She looked at him, her eyes clear but her face serious.

"I agree, Guilherme," Roberta began. "Let me tell you about a visitor I had yesterday at my church."

She filled him in as she had Otilia, explaining that he had seemed out of place. But it was his mention of his son that pricked her ears. "He called, well, he said he had a son named 'Gui,' and that made me think of you. Otilia offered to look you up on Facebook."

Gui let out a sigh. "Well, that doesn't sound too serious," he said. "But you mentioned it was a relative?" He looked at Otilia for confirmation. "Was that just because of my name?"

"Well," Otilia began, but Roberta put a hand over hers.

"It was because of the man," Roberta said. "He said his wife was named Neves and his name was Fernao."

He stared at them, flicking his eyes back and forth between them. They met his gaze and sat in silence, giving him time to think.

Gui had a million questions come to mind, but none left his mouth. They all seemed absurd, but not as absurd as this. What sort of joke was this? Because surely it had to be some elaborate hoax.

"What do you want me to say?" he finally asked.

"Do you have any other family with those names?" Otilia asked.

He shook his head.

"You don't expect me to believe that this man was my father?"

Otilia shrugged. "Why not?"

Roberta leaned forward. “He looks like you,” she said. “When Otília pulled up your picture on Facebook, it was like I was looking at him. Except he looked younger.”

He raised an eyebrow. “Younger?”

“Younger than you are now,” Roberta said, “but you look like him. Your eyes are the same.”

The picture of his parents flashed in his mind, their tentative smiles and clasped hands. His dad’s hair swept back from a handsome face with dark gray eyes. They shared the same eyes.

Gui shook his head. “No, my dad disappeared more than 40 years ago. He’s not sitting in your church talking about his wife and son and some cousin’s wedding.” He grasped onto that. “He probably was talking about his cousin. My dad had a brother and cousins on both his mom and dad’s sides. He probably meant one of them was named Fernao. You probably met a relative. Isn’t that what you said?” He turned to Otília.

“He introduced himself to me as Fernao,” Roberta said gently. “He seemed very sincere. There was no confusion.”

Gui let this sit.

“I don’t know what to do about it,” he said. “I can’t believe you actually think you talked to my dad who’s been gone since I was a kid. He’d be nearly 80 now, yet you say he looked younger than me.”

Roberta nodded. “Yes.” She paused. “I know this must be hard.”

“It’s ridiculous,” he said. “I don’t know why I wasted my time.” Gui pushed back his chair. Roberta reached out for his hand, but he shook her off.

“Just, let me be, please. I lost my dad once, a long time ago, and then I lost my mom. Just leave me alone.” He stalked out of the café and turned up the street away from them.

Roberta and Otília turned to watch him, then looked at each other.

“That didn’t go very well,” Otília said.

Roberta shook her head. “No, it did not. But what did we expect?”

“Answers,” Otília said. “To all of our questions, but we couldn’t give him any.”

“Precisely,” Roberta said.

Sol

They had traveled a few blocks, keeping mostly to alleyways and shadowed doorways. Soldiers were plentiful, but they seemed at ease, and the group scuttled away when they saw them. Sol realized they were near the small square in Chiado, *Praça do Carmo*. Her stomach fluttered at the thought.

Beatriz came up next to a tiled wall. She paused, and turned, waiting for Sol and the boys to reach her. They pressed into her space and Beatriz shifted to make room. Sol could see more of the wall behind Beatriz. It revealed a small tag, a stylized word: "*Rosa*."

Sol blinked and thought about their artwork.

Beatriz caught her looking and turned to see.

"What is it?" she asked Sol.

"I'm surprised to see that," Sol said.

"Does it bother you?" Beatriz turned back to her.

"No," Sol said. "I like it." She paused. "I do it, too."

Beatriz cocked the corner of her mouth. "Is that what you were doing with friends tonight?"

Sol nodded. She was embarrassed in a way to admit it, but she also loved doing the work and having people see it.

Beatriz' grin grew wider. "Sol. That's your graffiti name," she said.

Both Mouth and Carlos now looked at Sol, too, as she nodded and blushed.

"You do something illegal?" Mouth asked. "Amazing."

Sol wasn't sure if he was joking.

"Have we seen your work?" he continued, but Carlos cut him off.

"Cool it," he said quietly. "Leave her be."

"I was just askin'," Mouth replied, but he said no more.

A shift in the light caused them all to look up. There was motion at the end of the block.

"I think the square is just around the corner," Beatriz said.

"Yes," Sol said. "It is."

"Wanna go for it?"

"Yeah," Sol said.

They slid down the wall toward the street, and Sol glanced at the tag. She'd seen it for a reason, but she wasn't sure why.

Almiro

Almiro rounded the corner and stopped dead in his tracks. Parked at the curb was a behemoth of a car, all curves and chrome, like something out an antique car show. Across the street, another

caught his eye. They weren't show cars, though, he could see the layer of dust on the one closest. These were real cars.

His eyes flicked up to the buildings behind. They were in their places, but the colors were different, the signs older, even hand-painted. The shops didn't seem familiar. Slowly, he turned his head and let his gaze move up the street. He had a sense of things being not quite right.

That's an understatement, he told himself. Of course, things are not quite right. You're in a damned different time!

Swiveling his head back, he caught sight of a newsstand kitty-corner across the street. He got moving again, and headed toward it. "Moment of truth," he mumbled.

The news agent glanced up as Almiro stepped up. The day's papers were stacked up, and Almiro took a minute to look at them. Then another minute.

"Can I help you?" the agent asked. "Looking for a certain paper?"

Almiro jerked his head up. "Uh, no, um," he stammered. "Just, uh, seeing what you had," he finished feebly. He couldn't say he was checking the date on every paper visible. Almiro raised a hand and stepped back. "*Obrigado.*"

The agent went back to his paper. He didn't see Almiro run a hand over his face.

January 14, 1961. Ten years before his birth. Five years before his parents had married. Fifty-five years from when he went to sleep. A lifetime into the past.

Julinha

Julinha felt the presence before she heard the voice.

"Are you OK?" It was a man's voice.

She cringed and tried to make herself smaller, curled up on her side on the edge of the metro platform. Part of her pictured what she looked like to someone coming upon her. "OK" did not cut it. She knew she looked like shit, and she was crying hysterically on a metro platform.

"Are you hurt?" he tried again.

How do I answer that? she thought. Yes, truthfully, but it wasn't like she'd had an accident.

Instead, she tried to quiet her sobs. Focusing on breathing, slowing it and swallowing.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

It wasn't like a clerk asking to help. It sounded like he genuinely wanted to help her in some way.

She raised one hand a little off the ground, to show she had heard him. Julinha knew she couldn't speak. Not yet. It would be incoherent.

“I’m going to go call for help,” he said. “If you’re hurt, they can help you.”

Julinha didn’t know what to say. She wanted to scream “NO!” But she didn’t. She needed help, but she had no idea how anyone could help her.

A few minutes later, she heard the voice again.

“I’ve called an ambulance. Here, I brought you a blanket. May I put it on you?”

She felt him behind her. She ever so slightly nodded her head. Then, she felt a light blanket draped gently over her. Once more, she wanted to cry, but she sniffled instead.

She raised her hand again, in thanks.

“It will be OK,” he whispered. She nodded and squeezed her eyes shut.

Dores

Dores wasn’t sure how she made it down off the platform without breaking something. She was short and slight, and she knew there was no way she was getting back up the way she came.

This is madness! she thought. You’ll be killed by a train! You can’t get out!

She kept walking and tried to ignore her own thoughts.

The little flashlight helped some, and she kept the tunnel wall at her shoulder. She paused every few steps to listen. Since she had entered the tunnel, the sound had stopped. She willed it to start again.

And yet, what did she expect to find in a metro tunnel in the middle of the night? A child? Her child?

I’m losing my mind, she thought. It’s finally happening.

Every few steps, she raised the flashlight to see down the tunnel as much as the tiny beam would allow. It glinted dully on the dirty tile walls but revealed little else.

Turn around, her mind ordered. Go back. This is madness!

Dores stopped. Again, she wiped tears from her cheeks. A half cry escaped her and she clasped her hand to her mouth. The tears streamed, and she crumpled to the ground, sobbing. The flashlight went out, and she was left in complete darkness, sobbing on the cold floor of a metro tunnel.

Benedito

Benedito slept soundly. Priscila checked on him often. He barely moved, she noticed. His breathing was slow and calm, not the frantic panting that so often woke him. She let him sleep, turning off his alarm. His supervisor didn’t seem surprised when Priscila called to tell him

Benedito wasn't feeling well and wouldn't be at work. Finally, she took a book and tried to read in the chair by the bed.

It was late in the day, and she was just beginning to wonder if she should wake him when he roused.

"Hello, love," she whispered, coming to the bed. She slid next to him and wrapped her arm up and under his, holding him close.

He smiled and mumbled "mmm" when she snuggled up to him.

"Did you sleep well?" she asked.

"Yes," he said.

"No bad dreams?" she asked.

"I don't recall," he said. "I don't know that I dreamed at all."

Priscila said a silent thank you. To him, she said, "That's good, right?"

"Yeah," he said. "I needed that sleep." He rubbed his head and face.

"Feeling better?" she asked, and he nodded.

Then he stiffened in her arms, the tension flooding back.

"What is it?"

"I forgot about him," Benedito said quietly.

"That's OK," she said. "You needed to sleep. And now you know who he is."

Benedito was silent, unyielding in her embrace.

"We'll write the letter," Priscila reminded him. "You take a shower, and we'll do that."

"Yeah, OK," Benedito agreed. But he rolled away and swung out of bed before she could catch hold of him.

"Bento," she began, but he had left the room, and she felt a coldness where he'd been.

Leonor

Sofia waited until their dinners were ordered and beers were in front of them.

"I can't wait anymore," she said. "I've been dying to know more all day." She leaned forward, her eyes even bigger behind her glasses. "Do you think they're ghosts?"

Leonor gave a tight smile. The ease she had felt earlier in the day had disappeared. If she hadn't promised to meet Sofia for dinner, she would never have come. She thought it might be easier to

meet it head on but not say too much. Now, she regretted that choice as she realized Sofia wouldn't let it go.

"I don't know," Leonor said. She fiddled with the napkin beneath her drink.

"Where do you see them?" Sofia asked.

"It's like a dream," Leonor said with a half shrug.

"It's *like* a dream or it *is* a dream?" Sofia pressed.

Leonor wouldn't meet her eyes. She said nothing.

"Are you asleep or awake?" Sofia asked. She waited while Leonor twisted her glass.

"Not really asleep," Leonor finally said.

"It's a vision," Sofia said. She tapped her fingernails on the table top in a quick repeating pattern. Then she flattened both palms in front of her. "How often do you have them?"

"It depends."

"On what?"

"I don't know," Leonor said. "I mean, they aren't on a schedule." She glanced up at Leonor who was nodding.

"Do you have them every month? Every week?"

Leonor looked down.

"Every day?"

Leonor looked up. Their eyes met.

"Oh my God," Sofia breathed out. "You see them every day."

"No," Leonor said. "I don't *see* them every day." She watched Sofia's brow furrow, a crease creeping up from the bridge of her nose.

"What am I missing?" Sofia asked carefully.

Leonor closed her eyes, then snapped them quickly open. Instead, she shook her head slowly side to side.

"Leonor," Sofia said. "Please tell me. Maybe I can help."

"Doubtful."

"Maybe it will help to talk about it," Sofia tried.

Leonor was quiet. She had never told anyone about it. Her mom suspected something was wrong, but she had no idea. Leonor had friends, even boyfriends, but she never spoke of it. And she'd rarely had a spell in front of anyone she knew. When it happened, she tried to pass it off as

being ill or dizzy, and then she'd step away from the friendship, letting it unravel until there was nothing left to tie her to that person.

She hesitated now out of habit. But what could it hurt to tell Sofia? Even if she thought she was crazy, they weren't really friends. They didn't even share acquaintances. The most she would lose was a librarian, and there were other branches in the city she could visit.

"Please," Sofia said.

Leonor opened her mouth to speak, and the waiter slid their plates across the table. They both jerked back in their seats, having been hunched over the table. Again, they felt like children caught in an act of mischief. Sofia made a fuss about opening her napkin, and Leonor asked for salt and pepper. Neither met the others' eyes until the waiter turned his back. Sofia's mouth twitched, and Leonor raised her eyebrows. They both burst out laughing.

It was the icebreaker they needed.

Having laughed to the point of tears, they wiped their eyes and apologized to the waiter profusely, assuring him he was not the butt of a joke.

Leonor cut a bite and angled her fork toward her mouth when Sofia said again gently: "Please, tell me. I really want to know."

Leonor put down the fork, the bite untouched.

"OK," she breathed out. "I've never told anyone. Please don't think I'm crazy, because I don't think I'm crazy. But I know it will sound crazy." Leonor realized she was talking too fast. She took a swig of beer.

Sofia reached across the table and laid a hand lightly on her wrist. Her fingertips were warm.

"It's OK," she said. "Just take your time."

"I have visions," she said. "I used to get them once in a while, but it's more often now. Usually, I don't *see* anyone. I see a light or I hear someone crying, a person or a child. I'm in a really dark place, but there's like a spotlight around me. And it's cold. Freezing cold. I can see my breath. And when I go to the light or sound, it stops. I mean the vision stops.

"But sometimes, I *see* someone. I go to the light, and I see one of the people I've drawn."

Leonor paused. Sofia looked at her, her questions quieted.

"And they see me, too."

Chapter 12

Fernao

Fernao ducked into the shop door. He'd seen the man coming toward him, and he was shocked at how much he resembled him. Yet, he was older, his face a little more lined. He was broader, too, through the shoulders, like Ernesto. *That's it*, he thought. *He's got my eyes and hair, but he's built like Ernesto.*

And he has Neves' mouth and chin.

The last thought came as an afterthought and startled him.

Neves?

On the sidewalk, the man stalked past, moving fast, shoulders squared, head up, jaw set.

Fernao watched his reflection pass, then leaned out to watch him. Carefully, he stepped out to follow, keeping his distance, but wanting to know who this man was. *You know who it is*, he told himself. *You just don't want to admit it.*

"That's not true," he muttered out loud to himself. "I'm crazy. And that's the truth."

He continued to talk to himself, under his breath as he ducked along, narrowly avoiding passersby, worried that the man might turn and pick him out of the crowd. But the other man kept his head facing forward. He seemed to steam along, almost stomping his feet as he walked.

Just like my dad when he was mad.

That thought brought him up short. People stepped around him as he stood, stock still in the middle of the sidewalk. Fernao hadn't thought of his own dad in a long time. Who is this man who reminded him of family? And why was he angry?

Fleeting, he wondered if it was because of him, then shook that thought away. "What's wrong with me?" he whispered. Since he had paused, the man was getting further away, and Fernao had to hurry to catch up. At one point he thought he'd lost him, but then he noticed him heading toward the metro stairs. He hung back, not wanting to cross the space where he'd be more visible. He waited near the corner, pretending to look in a shop window, while trying to peek out of the corner of his eye. As soon as he saw the man descend the stairs, he bolted over and watched him disappear.

He shivered. Rooted to the spot, he wanted to continue, but the metro bothered him. He hadn't been back in a station since he came out. The odd dream, or vision, had spooked him, too. The modern young woman didn't seem threatening, but he worried about it all the same. He worried he might never get better, might never get home.

And now this man who looked like family ...

Fernao passed a hand over his face and rested his forehead against his palm, eyes closed.

Three teens darted past and jostled him as they made their way to the stairway, scrambling down two at a time. Fernao started to reprimand them, but he stopped. He was the one in the wrong, standing here, a crazy man.

Turning, he caught sight of the minister he had met before. Roberta, she'd said her name was. She was walking with another woman, about the same age, with silvery blond hair and a long coat. She hadn't seen him because she was walking and talking to the woman, but if he continued to stand here, she would. He wasn't sure he wanted to run into her again. She'd been friendly, but he felt like he probably shouldn't share too much with anyone.

Slowly, he continued his turn, and started to walk past the railing. He'd gone a few steps and had his back to them, but he heard her voice and one word stood out: Gui.

"He looks like him, there's no doubt. But how do I convince Gui to meet him? And I don't even know where the man is."

"Maybe that's your first step. Find Fernao and find out how he's related to Gui. There have to be some family ties there."

"Why do you think he was so defensive?" Roberta asked.

"He might have been worried we were trying to scam him in some way. It's probably still really raw, even after 40-some years. Imagine if you lost your father."

Their voices dwindled, and he had to strain to hear them.

Gui. Fernao. A lost father 40-some years ago.

Had he skipped 45 years? Was the man who looked like him, Ernesto, his father and even Neves actually his son? *My boy is 6*, he thought. *But add on 45 years ...*

His jaw dropped open and he whirled to the wall of the metro station, peering over at the opening below. "Gui?" But his son and the women were gone.

Sol

Soldiers filled the small square formed by buildings around an open block, their guns slung over their shoulders or hanging loosely by their sides. She watched one young man tip his hat back on his head, a grin on his face as he chatted with friends. Throughout the crowd, Sol could see civilians of all ages sprinkled in. An older woman carried a basket of flowers. As she passed the soldiers, she offered them each a flower: Red carnations.

Sol's mouth went dry.

"There are people here, too," Mouth said quietly so only they could hear.

Beatriz looked at him. "Soldiers aren't people?" she asked.

"You know what I mean," Mouth said.

“Shh,” said Carlos. He nodded toward a soldier who had turned in their direction.

They all stood stock still, frozen in place but in full view. If they ran now, they’d only draw attention.

Carlos broke the spell. “Hey,” he said bumping Sol’s shoulder next to him. “Just act natural.”

They all looked at him. It was so out of character, but it did the trick. They all laughed – quietly – and relaxed. The soldier turned back to his conversation and shoved the carnation he’d been holding into the barrel of his gun.

“What is it?” Beatriz asked. Sol had an odd look on her face.

“It’s like déjà vu,” she said. And it was true. Seeing this square on this night was surprisingly like seeing something again.

After a pause, Mouth asked, “So, what do we do now?”

“I guess we wait,” Beatriz said, “and see what happens.”

“Then I’m gonna take a load off,” he said, and he strolled to a window ledge perch.

Sol slid down the wall next to him, knees to her chest. Beatriz and Carlos flanked the window, arms crossed. She suddenly was tired. So very, very tired. Her head lolled onto her knees, and despite everything that had happened, or perhaps because of everything that had happened, she slept.

Sol jerked awake, her head snapping up, eyes wide. It took her a beat to remember where – or rather when – she was.

“Sleeping Beauty awakes,” Mouth joked. He and Carlos passed a cigarette between them and Mouth held it out to her. Sol shook her head and passed a hand over her face. She must not have been asleep too long, but the crowd had grown, and Beatriz was gone.

Mouth noticed her looking. “Little girls’ room.” Sol nodded and pushed herself up, stretching her legs, arms and back.

“Might need that myself,” she said.

Mouth tilted his head toward the corner behind him. Sol nodded and started to push past him. He touched her arm.

“You OK? You don’t need an escort, do you?”

“Nah, I’m good,” she said.

Carlos and Mouth watched her go.

“Damn shame,” Mouth said. Carlos gave him a questioning look.

“It’s a damn shame she likes Beatriz better than us.”

“I like Beatriz better than you,” Carlos said. “Everybody likes ...” But Mouth cut him off.

“Not like that. I mean she *likes* Beatriz.”

“Oh,” Carlos said, realization dawning. “How do you know?”

“I’ve got a thing for that,” Mouth said. Carlos’ mouth twitched, but he said nothing.

“Don’t believe me? Wait and see.” Carlos shrugged.

Almiro

He swung around the corner, slightly off kilter, still reeling, mentally and physically, from the shock of waking up five decades in the past. Almiro shook his head again as if to clear it, but it didn’t help.

What? It kept repeating over and over in his head.

He smelled the sweet scent before he saw it: baked goods and fruit overpowering, but vegetables and the tang of fish underneath. The market lay ahead, across the street, and Almiro’s belly rumbled. Rather than climb the steps to enter, he headed for the corner and the back street. He was hoping for squished bread or bruised produce, discarded in the trash. But when he turned the corner, the trash cans were gone, and an old woman pushed a broom slowly across the paving stones. She seemed ancient, a scarf covering her hair, tucked behind her ears. Her olive skin was wrinkled, and she had a twinkle in her eye when she saw him looking.

“Want to help?” she asked. “A young man like you could be useful.”

Almiro gawked. First, she had seen him. Second, she had looked him in the eye. Third, she had called him “young.”

The old woman grinned. “Cat got your tongue?”

Almiro stammered. “Oh, uh, no, pardon. Um, what?”

The woman stopped and looked at him, taking in his bulging jacket, unshaven face and wild look in his eyes. Yet, she saw nothing dangerous there, and she’d lived a long life on the wrong side of the tracks. Hunger was so obvious on his face.

Setting the broom aside, she reached out to him. “Come,” she said simply. “Let’s get you something to eat.”

Almiro couldn’t even nod, only follow her small footsteps into the back of the market.

Da Rocha

The police officer at the end of the bed with a clipboard and a ballpoint pen scratched something onto the paper and looked up again. Moisés peered at him from one slitted eye. The other was too puffy to yet open.

“Why were you in the alley?” Officer Da Rocha asked.

Moisés gave no answer. He couldn’t speak, only nod or shake his head.

Da Rocha caught his mistake and switched to yes-or-no questions, which went against his training. You wanted people to talk, so you asked open-ended questions.

“Do you know who attacked you?”

Head shake for no.

“Do you know why they attacked you?”

Shrug.

“Were you going somewhere?”

Shrug.

The officer eyed Moisés. Why would he not give a yes or no answer to that question?

“Was it more than one person who attacked you?”

Nod: yes.

“Two?”

Shake.

“Three?”

Nod.

“Did you see them?”

Shake.

“Were they young?”

Shrug.

“Did they say anything?”

Nod.

“What did they...” The officer caught himself again. “Did they threaten you?”

Shrug.

Good grief, Da Rocha thought. This is impossible.

He scribbled more on the paper and glanced up at Moisés.

“I’ll just put down that you were attacked. Maybe we can get a full statement when you’re ... better,” he said.

Moisés glared at him with one eye. Bastard, he thought. You stupid bastard. You don't care that someone did this to me. To me!

If he could have, he would have jumped up and yelled at Da Rocha to catch them, demanded that he personally find the thugs who halted his search for Julinha.

Da Rocha recognized the hate in Moisés' face, despite the bruising and swelling. He knew the hate wasn't just for the men who had done the beating but for himself, too. The officer turned on his heel and walked out, his shoes squeaking softly on the hospital floor.

Moisés closed his one eye and felt the pain echo throughout his body. Even with the medication, he still ached. He had broken bones – including the broken jaw, lacerations and a concussion. Every bit of him was bruised.

And it was all her fault. That bitch. That fucking bitch.

Moisés had decided he would kill her. Slowly. He'd tie her down and break each of her fingers and toes, then her hand and foot bones, then her arms and legs and so on, until he got to her heart. He thought he should probably stab her in the heart with a long knife, like she had stabbed him when she ran away. It had hurt him to the core when she left, and that was wrong. She was wrong to leave, and now she would never leave again.

In the hall, Da Rocha stopped at the nurse's station to let them know he was leaving.

"Has anyone been in to see him?" he asked the young woman behind the counter.

"No," she said as she shook her head. "He didn't have anyone listed in his records to call in an emergency."

"Is he married?" Da Rocha asked. He hadn't seen a wedding ring, but the man's hands were swollen, so maybe they had taken off any jewelry.

"Not that I know of," she said.

"How long will he be unable to speak?"

"The jaw injury will take probably six weeks to heal," she started. "But he probably will be able to 'talk' a little in a week or so. Once the swelling goes down and the pain fades."

The officer nodded. "Thanks. How long will you keep him?"

The nurse shrugged. "That's not up to me, but probably a week or so. He'll need help getting around for a while and with dressing and such. We'll see how the breaks are doing and if he can be stabilized enough to go home."

"OK, thank you," he said. The nurse nodded and smiled.

Home, Da Rocha thought. Were you going home? Or someplace else?

He checked his watch as he walked down the hall. He had a little time. Maybe he could figure out what Moisés was doing.

He tapped the clipboard against his hand, the edge of it clicking against his ring. While it wasn't out of the question that the man was single and had no family, it was unlikely. Most Portuguese men stayed in touch with their families, and many continued to live at home until they married.

Yet Moisés lived alone and had no one listed as an emergency contact. *Odd*, Da Rocha thought.

He slid into the driver's seat and turned out of the hospital parking lot toward the spot where Moisés had been found.

When he reached the location, Da Rocha circled the block, and glanced down the alley. It wasn't the worst he'd seen, but it was narrow. Delivery trucks would have a tight squeeze, he thought.

At the end of the block, he turned to head toward Moisés' apartment, about 2 kilometers away.

Da Rocha parked on the street and backtracked to the faded building. It was a six-story walkup, which had seen better days. The other buildings on the street were similar. At the corner, a laundromat hummed, and across the street, a few small shops were open, dusty light shining through dirty windows.

He stepped to the door and tried it. It was locked, but inside he could see movement, as if someone had stepped quickly back. Da Rocha shielded his eyes and leaned forward. His curved finger tapped the glass. Yes, he could see someone in the shadows. A woman in a dark dress or coat.

Da Rocha tapped again and smiled his best reassuring smile.

"I'm Officer Da Rocha. Can you open the door please?"

The woman hesitated. She glanced up at him and realized he could see her. Slowly, she crossed the small foyer and unlatched the door.

Da Rocha pushed it open. "*Obrigado*," he said with another smile. The woman kept her head down.

"*Bom dia*," he began again. "I'm looking for ..." he trailed off. What was he looking for? He knew this is where Moisés lived, and he didn't need to verify that, yet here he was.

"I'm looking for information about a man who lives here," he finally said. The woman kept her head down.

"Maybe you know him," Da Rocha said. "His name is Moisés ..."

The woman recoiled as if he'd handed her a snake. She grasped her bag closer to her body.

"Do you know him?" Da Rocha asked, although he knew the answer.

The woman nodded.

"He was injured last night," the officer began. "Do you know why he might have left the building?"

The woman paused, as if considering, then shook her head. She darted a glance at the officer. Da Rocha knew she wanted to ask him a question, but she didn't dare.

"It's OK," Da Rocha explained. "I'm just trying to learn who hurt him and why. He was attacked in another neighborhood, and he's not able to tell me what happened."

Another eye dart. Her lips moved as if to speak. But then she clamped her mouth tight shut into a line.

Da Rocha tried another tactic. "Do you know anyone he was friends with here? Anyone I could talk to who might have known him better?"

A firm head shake no. Her hands opened and closed on her bag, almost kneading it.

"Did he live alone?" Da Rocha suddenly asked.

The woman jerked up right, her head turned quickly as she scanned her surroundings.

"No," she whispered. "Ask her."

Then she hurried past Da Rocha and out the door before he could say anything more.

What the hell? he thought. Her? Who is that?

Dores

Dores awoke with a start. She'd been having a nightmare about Tomás. She couldn't find him in a sea of people, and then it got dark. Oh, so dark.

She blinked her eyes and realized the dark was real, not part of the dream. She raised her hand to her face, but there was nothing covering it.

Then, she remembered where she was.

Shit, she thought. Oh no. I fell asleep! No, no, no!

She scrambled to her feet and remembered the flashlight. She squatted down and felt around for it. It was missing. *Maybe it rolled away*, she thought. She reached further, but she still couldn't feel it.

OK, keep calm, she thought. You don't need it. You can go back to the platform by staying next to the wall.

And then what will you do? she asked herself. She remembered she couldn't climb out, even if she wanted to.

Don't think about that, just get back there, she ordered herself. She didn't know how long she had slept or what time it was. What happened if the trains started running while she was still on the tracks?

She pushed the thought away and staggered toward the platform, hurrying as quickly as she could.

Dores felt rather than saw the platform as the space opened up. It was still dark but not quite as dark. She realized there was some light here, from the exit signs and a little filtered down the stairs.

She tripped over something and fell forward, knocking her knee and landing hard on her hands so her wrists stung. She rolled over and felt for what had tripped her.

It was a ladder.

Dores was stunned. She would have bet her life that it hadn't been there when she entered the tunnel, and yet here it was.

She jerked to her feet and slung her purse across her body. Then straining, she hoisted the long metal ladder upright from one end, walking it up a little at a time until it was straight up. She kicked the end of it back toward the tracks to brace it.

Taking a deep breath, she started to climb, hand over hand, one rung at time. She came level with the platform and paused to try and figure out how to get off the ladder. Finally, she stretched out a foot and was able to scramble off. Panting, she paused, hands on her knees. Then she turned, and headed toward the stairs. That's when she realized she could see her surroundings faintly, and something had changed, drastically.

Benedito

For three days, Benedito hadn't spoken to her. The dreams still came, she knew when he wrenched awake after only a few hours of sleep. He refused to say anything, shutting her out. And she didn't know why.

She'd put the pen and paper away, sliding the drawer shut as if closing a chapter. But it hadn't changed anything. Despite every attempt to apologize, he was silent. Her patience waned and she wavered between panic and pissed off.

Then, she'd see him and the fear would flood back. Was he having a breakdown before her very eyes? Is that what was happening to her husband? Her love? And then she'd drown in her own tears, which she was careful to hide from him.

Her days passed in a fog. She didn't know what she was even cooking or eating or how they were living.

The newspapers piled up on the table, and Benedito read each one, cover to cover as she cried herself to sleep.

On the fourth day, after he'd left for work, she reached for the stack of papers to throw them away when a photo caught her eye. It was the young man. She held it closer to read it. It was a short article asking for information about his whereabouts. He was described as "at risk."

As she started to put the paper down, she noticed the others were folded open, and on each page facing up was a short story about the missing man. It detailed snippets about his life. He'd lost his job in the recession. His parents were dead. He had a brother and friends who were concerned. The last one quoted his brother as saying even if he was dead, they wanted to know what happened to him.

Priscila furrowed her brow. If Benedito knew this, why would he refuse to write an anonymous letter?

She slid the stack of papers off the table and into the trash and set about deep cleaning. Anytime she was upset, she'd clean. By the time he came home, the house would sparkle, and she'd have an answer.

When Benedito returned an hour later, she was ready, pen and paper on the clean table top. She sat waiting for him in the halo of light. He had a newspaper tucked under his arm.

"Maybe you won't need that tonight," she said. He glanced at her and she looked at the newspaper. He shrugged.

"I thought we'd write the letter," she tried again. "Together. You and me."

Benedito slipped off his jacket and hung it on a hook behind the door. When he turned back, she searched his eyes.

"I don't know," he began, but she cut him off.

"You need to tell someone. You said we could." Now Benedito stopped her.

"I don't need to tell anyone. What can I say? I can't tell the truth, and I don't want to lie. I can't lose my job."

"Will you stop about the job?" Priscila said, exasperated. "Your sanity is more important than a job!"

"My job is everything," he said sharply. "If I don't have a job, how do we live? What do we do? Do you know how many people need jobs right now?"

"Of course, I do," she said, her own anger flaring. She pushed up from her chair. "I read the damn newspaper, too. But you won't lose your job by writing a letter!" She waved her hand over the pen and paper.

"But I don't have to write a letter," he said.

"You need to sleep," she countered.

"I did sleep," he retorted.

"One day. Because you were exhausted. But what happens tonight? Will you be up before dawn again? Will you still have nightmares about it?"

Benedito didn't answer her. He clenched his hands into fists. He'd thought of that, too. What if it had been a fluke and the man was still haunting his dreams.

Priscila softened.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't shout. But I'm worried about you."

She saw his jaw tighten, the muscles in his neck were taut.

Priscila reached out to him then, and he pulled back.

"Bento, please." He turned away and walked silently down the hall. She heard the bedroom door close with a click.

Priscila swiped tears from her eyes with the back of her hand. She tried taking a deep breath, but it was ragged, and a sob caught in her throat.

Leonor

Jolted out of her stillness, Sofia pummeled Leonor with questions. She had her recount her first visions, and tears sprang to her eyes as Leonor shared how terrifying it was.

"How often do you see the ones in your sketchbook?" Sofia asked.

"Usually just once."

Sofia looked confused.

"Then why are there so many pictures of them? All of those poses?"

"It's hard to explain," Leonor said. "But it's like in that one instant when I see them, I see everything about them. Who they are, who they were, who they will be."

Sofia nodded, thinking.

"You said they see you, too. How do you know that?"

"I see it in their eyes," Leonor said. "They are as surprised to see me as I am to see them. It's like we both have seen a ghost. It's a good way of describing it. You see something that's not there or that shouldn't be there. And it's surprising and frightening. You know when someone sees you, when you've startled them. You can't hide that."

"Wow," Sofia said. "That really is like a haunting then. But why are they haunting you?"

"I guess because I have the visions," Leonor said. "Maybe it's how they can connect with me, because we can meet in that place."

"What do they want?" Sofia pressed.

"Don't know," Leonor shrugged. "I wish I knew. But I can't ask them. I don't even know I will see them until 'boom' – there they are. And then 'boom' – they're gone."

Sofia pushed her plate to the side, most of her dinner untouched.

“And you don’t know who they are.” Leonor shook her head.

“Or if they are connected?” Leonor shook her head again.

“Are there any similarities?” she asked.

“You mean between the people?”

“Yes. Or between the experiences?”

Leonor paused, thinking. “They don’t seem similar.”

“Is there anything to tie them together? Anything that’s the same each time?”

“Just the metro,” Leonor said.

Sofia stiffened, straightening her spine. “What do you mean?”

“They all happened in the metro, either on a train or station.”

“The visions?”

Leonor nodded.

“They all happened while you were in the metro?”

Leonor nodded again.

“In one particular spot?”

Leonor cocked her head to the side, thinking. Slowly she nodded. “I think so. There were a few on the train itself, but yes, they all happened around Colina station, either on one of the platforms or on a train traveling past the station. One happened right as we passed it. It’s shut down now for renovation.”

Sofia was nodding quickly. “Yes, I know. Do you think it’s connected? The metro? Are they connected to the metro in some way?”

Leonor rubbed her lower lip with her thumb. “I don’t know,” she said shakily. “I hadn’t thought of it,” she admitted.

They were quiet a minute.

“What is it?” Sofia asked.

Leonor paused. She’d come this far. She plunged ahead.

“The metro. One of them. He told me about the metro.”

Sofia blinked at her.

“He talked to you?”

Leonor nodded.

“And you heard him?”

Leonor nodded.

“Did you talk to him?”

“I couldn’t,” Leonor said. “When I would open my mouth, it was like a scream came out, but I wasn’t screaming. I closed my mouth, and he told me he’d traveled through time, from his time to an earlier time. I think he thought I was there to ‘take him home.’”

Sofia only nodded.

“Maybe like an angel or something,” Leonor said.

“And then?” Sofia asked. Her voice was breathless.

“The light intensified until he was gone, and I woke up freezing.”

They were silent for at least a full minute.

“Wow,” Sofia said.

“Yeah,” Leonor replied. She felt a chill go up her spine and she noticed Sofia shiver, too.

“Do you think I’m crazy?” Leonor asked.

“No way,” Sofia said. “Not in the least.”

Chapter 13

Fernao

Fernao was in a dream: the metro station platform, the young woman. She emerged from the train that was flashing past, a trick of the eye or simply the magic of the dream. The train continued to pass behind her, although even the longest one would pass in a matter of seconds in real life. The dream one squealed as it sped by on the tracks.

She walked toward him, small steps that seemed to take forever, and yet he couldn't look away from her face. Somehow, he took in all of her, the bounce of her hair as she walked, the hunch of her shoulders, hands pushed in her pockets. She wore pants like modern women did and tall brown leather boots that came to her knee. Her eyes pierced him. He wanted to look away, but he couldn't.

They were drawn together, and he felt himself moving, too, although his feet were planted. When they were near enough to feel the other's breath, she took her hand from her pocket and reached toward him. They both looked at her hand. Fernao stiffened, waiting for her touch to launch him into wakefulness. She hesitated for a bare second, then reached toward his shirt pocket. Her hand slipped through, as if he were nothing more than air. They met each other's eyes, wide with fear, and she jerked her hand back.

Fernao woke with a cry on his lips.

"No!"

His chest rose and fell, and he clasped his hands to it. Yes, he was real. He could feel his heart pounding in his chest, the air he gasped in ragged gulps to fill his lungs. Tears streamed down his face; a look of agony was frozen on his features.

"No, no, no," he repeated, more quietly, coming more fully awake. Yet he still shuddered and heaved, recalling his horror as her hand passed through him.

Was he dead? he wondered. That might explain why time had seemed to pass him by. But if that were true, then why was he back now? Was he a ghost?

And finally: Who was the young woman? She must hold some answer for him.

Fernao wiped his face on his sleeve and stumbled to his feet. It was still dark. He thought he'd barely been asleep when the dream began. He was damp from the night air, and he pumped his arms in front of his chest to warm himself as he began to walk. His feet fell into a familiar rhythm, from days of walking Lisbon's streets. He'd searched the old neighborhood, block by block, looking for any sign of Neves. He'd run out of ideas, though. Stealing food had become normal, and he'd gotten good at finding places to sleep relatively undisturbed, except for the dreams.

The young woman's face flashed in his mind, and he closed his eyes to study her. She didn't look threatening, and yet he was sure she wanted something. From him. She was seeking him out, and Fernao didn't know why.

He shook his head and opened his eyes. “You’ve got to get a grip,” he muttered to himself.

Despite all of his efforts, he was no closer to knowing what had happened. And to be honest, he was terrified of learning the truth. Pretending to be crazy and homeless somehow seemed better.

Still, he was haunted by the thoughts and visions in his head.

Neves. Gui. Roberta. Silvio. The young woman.

Up ahead, he saw the entrance to the metro. It was the station he’d left on his last day in his old life. He’d avoided it, feeling only dread when he thought of how he awoke there and wound up here. But there it was again.

Doesn’t it all come back to the metro? he thought. That’s where it all went wrong ...

“Then maybe that’s where I have to go,” he said aloud.

A chill ran up his spine, prickling the hair on his scalp and arms. Fernao squared his shoulders and set his jaw. “I’ve got to find her,” he said, except this time he wasn’t talking about Neves. Now he knew, he had to find the young woman.

Sol

The square had filled considerably while they were gone. As she and Beatriz returned, they heard people talking, and rumors were shared person to person and group to group. “It’s a coup.” “They are overthrowing the government.” “The dictator is already gone.” “He’s already dead.” “He’s refusing to give up power.” “He’s hiding out.” “He’s plotting his revenge.”

There were shouts and chants. Songs would start, and people laughed and sang. It was like a festival, Sol thought. A crowded festival, waiting for the main act to take the stage. But she knew it wasn’t that. The four of them huddled together as the crowd thrummed around them.

The gunshots threw up a shout, a collective scream, as people sucked in breath and ducked instinctively. A brief silence, then pandemonium followed. Everyone was talking at once, shouting and calling out.

“What happened?” “Was that a gunshot?” “What’s going on?” “Are you OK?” “Where did they come from?” “Who’s shot?” “Is anyone hurt?” “He’s dead!” “He’s been shot!” “Who?” “The dictator, he’s dead!” “He’s been shot!” “It’s over!” “Is it really over?” “No one’s dead.” “Who was shot?” “Nobody was shot.”

Voices rose from whispers to shouts as the news spread that the coup was over, although there was lots of speculation about what actually happened.

Sol stood in the midst of it, the sound washing over her, living history she’d read about in books and saw in pictures and some grainy news clips. She turned around to see the crowd and her place in it.

There, she thought. That’s where they take the picture.

She looked at the window and saw the flash of the camera. The photographer advanced the film and raised the camera again. She swiveled her head and saw the soldiers with the flowers in their guns, slung over their shoulders, the crowd filling the square.

And me, she thought. I'm in it now, too.

Almiro

She held up a hand, halting him, then ducked through a makeshift curtain, separating the flow of people and the stand. Almiro stopped obediently, just before the stand. He tried to look nonchalant, like he was looking around for something. In a few seconds, she was tugging at his sleeve. "Come."

She led him back the way they had come, weaving through the people in the market, again, a strange mix of people in old-style dress and hair styles. When they stepped into the back street, he blinked at the raw daylight. The woman was turning toward him with a paper-wrapped packet. She held it out to him, and Almiro took it without even thinking.

"*Obrigado*," he whispered.

"*Nada*," she replied with a wave of her hand.

When he paused, holding it, looking down, she poked a finger toward him. "Eat. Now."

Almiro's stomach grumbled, and she grinned. "See? You are hungry. Eat. Then you can help."

Almiro pulled back the paper wrapping and was overcome with the smell of cooked meat and vegetables. A chunk of rustic bread was slit open, and meat and onions and peppers were stuffed inside. He bit into it and nearly cried; it was so good. He couldn't remember when he'd last had hot food. Taking another bite, he swiped his eyes with the back of his hand.

The woman grinned again. "It's good, no?"

Almiro nodded and chewed.

"My daughter is a good cook," she said. Then turning, she took up the broom and began sweeping again.

Almiro reached out. "Let me do that," he said.

"Eat first," she commanded. "There's plenty of work and plenty of time."

Almiro lowered his head. He was sure about wanting to work, but he wasn't sure about time.

Julinha

Julinha sat on the exam table, a paper gown covering her body, a thin sheet across her lap. She'd tucked it under her thighs to try and keep warm. It was freezing. The doctor glanced at her, got

up and opened a cabinet door. She pulled out a couple more sheets and draped one around Julinha's shoulders while Julinha covered her front and legs.

"Desculpe," the doctor said. "It's a bit cold." Julinha only nodded.

The doctor returned to the desk with what looked like a fancy typewriter but with flat keys and a TV-type screen instead of paper. Julinha kept staring at it, fascinated. The doctor typed something, and Julinha heard the keys click softly – not at all like the typewriters she'd used to type papers for school.

The doctor had told Julinha they would do the exam first, then talk. Both the doctor and nurse who came in had seen the bruises in various states of discoloration on her body. The welt on her face was raised, causing her eye to swell slightly. Julinha could feel the puffiness. Neither had said much during the exam except to tell Julinha to lie back or sit up. Afterward, the doctor had sent the nurse out. She was looking at Julinha.

"Do you feel safe at home?" the doctor asked.

Julinha stared. No one had ever asked her that. She wanted to say the obvious, but what if he found out?

"I won't discuss what you tell me with anyone," the doctor said. "Our conversations are confidential." She paused.

"Has anyone ever hit you?" she asked.

Julinha dropped her eyes. Very slightly, she nodded.

"Do you feel safe at home?" the doctor asked again.

Julinha shook her head.

"Can you tell me who it is?"

Julinha couldn't say his name, couldn't bring herself to even identify him. She closed her eyes. The doctor took the hint.

"Husband? Boyfriend?"

Julinha nodded.

"Do you have someplace you can go?" the doctor asked. "A family member or friend's house?"

"No," Julinha said. "There's no one. No one can help me."

"That's not true," the doctor said. "I can help you, if you want to be helped. There are people, agencies, that can help you out of an abusive relationship."

Julinha looked up suddenly. She'd had no idea that someone could help her. People? Agencies? Abusive relationship? It suddenly felt like the doctor was speaking a foreign language.

"I don't understand," Julinha finally said.

“I’ll refer you to a social worker, and we can get you to a safe place, a shelter, today. OK?”

Julinha nodded. She didn’t know what else to do. She had nowhere to go – certainly not home. Just thinking that caused a jolt of terror to ripple through her. She shivered.

The doctor noticed. “You can get dressed.” Then she glanced around. “Oh, wait. You don’t have decent clothes.” The doctor paused.

“Can you tell me why you were in the metro station?”

“I was hiding,” Julinha said. “Running away.”

The doctor nodded. “Let me get you something to put on.” She picked up the typewriter and closed it like a book. She turned back to Julinha.

“You’re going to be OK,” she said. Then she was out the door.

A few minutes later, a nurse came in with a pair of clean scrubs. She went to set them down, and then looked at Julinha, noticing her filthy hair and dirt-smeared face. She paused. Julinha felt her eyes and she knew she must look like hell. She ducked her head in shame.

The nurse opened a cabinet door and pulled out a piece of fabric and held it out to her. Julinha realized it was a robe.

“Here,” the nurse said. “Put this on, and I’ll take you to the staff shower room. It’s a little unorthodox, but you look like you could use a shower.”

Julinha sniffed and nodded. “Thank you,” she whispered. “*Obrigada.*”

Dores

Construction equipment, tools and scaffolding were stacked and strewn across the platform. The floor was gouged, and tiles were missing from the walls. Stacks of wood and metal were placed where the benches had been.

Dores picked her way around the piles until she got to the stairs. Dusty sunlight filtered down as she climbed them quickly.

Daylight? Construction? What the hell?

Dores was so confused. Had she come up at a different station? That must be it. She must have walked to the next station through the tunnel. But she would have seen construction like this at the next station when she rode the train, and there was no work being done at any of the stations. Not to this extent, anyway.

At the top of the stairs the exit was blocked by tall barricades, but she could see a gap she thought she could squeeze through. She paused and peeked between the walls. No one was visible on the other side. She turned to the side and slipped through, glancing quickly around.

Safe, she thought. No one saw me.

And then it hit her. This was the same station, but not only had it changed drastically, the neighborhood was altered. Directly across the street where there should be a coffee shop, shutters covered the windows, and dust blanketed the awning and stoop. Glancing to either side she couldn't see anything familiar. Doors were closed where they usually would be open at this time of day.

She checked her watch. It said 1 o'clock. Had she lost 12 hours in the metro? Looking around, she knew she had lost more than that.

Maybe you better go home, she thought. Perhaps you've finally lost your mind entirely.

Had she? she wondered. She thought back to the night before. The station. The child crying.

Her heart lurched. She had gone looking for a child and been swept away to this ... place. Had it been Tomás? Or had it all been in her head?

She had lost him once. She couldn't bear to lose him again.

And though her heart ached like it would break again, she realized something different. The tears were gone. Her eyes were dry.

Dores wiped at her cheeks all the same and checked her fingertips. No tears.

She wasn't sure if it was an improvement since she felt like crying.

The voice startled her.

"You lost?"

Dores whirled. An old man stood looking at her. He had a dark checkered cap on his head and a shopping trolley behind him. His jacket was open revealing a paunch.

She snapped her mouth shut, realizing she'd had it hanging open. "No, I, uh ..." Does didn't think she was lost, but she wasn't sure *where* she was.

He shrugged and started off.

"Wait," she said suddenly. "Where is this?"

He paused and looked at her with a little frown. "You mean the neighborhood?"

Dores nodded.

"Colina," he said. "I have to walk 2 kilometers since this station is under construction. Who knows for how long?" He started moving again as he spoke.

Dores nodded slowly. Another thought came to her. Before she could stop herself, she blurted it out: "When is it?"

Now the man stopped and fully faced her, his frown deepening.

"Are you alright?" he asked.

Dores nodded again and pulled her purse in front of her, wrapping her hands around the straps.

“You mean the date?” he asked.

She nodded. She realized she was doing a lot of nodding, but she wasn’t sure she should say anything else.

“It’s the 14th.” When she didn’t react, he added: “September 14th.”

Still, she paused, rooted to the spot.

“2019,” he finished.

Dores paled. She could feel the blood drain from her face. Suddenly, she felt quite woozy.

“Miss, are you alright?” He was looking at her with concern now, noticing how she had blanched. She swayed slightly, and he reached a hand toward her as if to steady her.

Perhaps she had misunderstood, she thought.

“2019?” she squeaked. It was his turn to nod.

Dores shook her head as if to clear it and opened her mouth, but no words came out. She swallowed. His look of concern had deepened, if that was possible.

“Can I call someone for you?” he asked, reaching into his jacket pocket. He pulled out a flat object about the size of a deck of cards and waved it at her.

Her confusion must have been apparent because he stopped. “Maybe I should call the police,” he began.

“No, *obrigada*,” she whispered. “I’m sorry. I don’t know what I was thinking.” Dores forced a smile and turned away.

After a pause, the old man spoke again. “*Nada*,” he said. And then: “Take care.”

She heard his shopping cart clatter on the sidewalk pavers, and she focused on the ones in front of her feet.

2019. 2019. That’s, what, almost 30 years from now? Yes, almost 30 years. How can that be? That’s in the future, not now.

Yet, she had seen reality with her own eyes, the changes in the metro station, in the neighborhood. She looked at her watch. It hadn’t moved. *Stuck in the past*, she thought, *while I’m in the future*.

Nuno

A rushing sound grew in intensity, filling his ears. A cacophony of many noises, he realized, not just one.

It swirled around him and reversed into his head, like a concert recording played backward. Then, silence.

Nuno jerked up. It was dark, and he couldn't remember where he was. He felt like he'd just had the oddest dream, but he couldn't quite remember it.

His head throbbed, and he reached up instinctively. It felt wet, sticky.

Blood? he thought. How did I bang my head? Did I fall out of bed?

At the same moment he had the thought, Nuno realized he wasn't in bed or even his bedroom.

He placed both hands down and felt rough wood underneath them. He reached out further, and on one side, he connected with a smooth piece of metal.

Instantly, it all flooded back. The train. He'd been staring into the driver's eyes when the train hit him. So how could he be on the tracks? How had he survived?

He moved his hands over his body, feeling for broken bones, tender spots, anything to indicate he'd been struck by a train. Other than the gash on his forehead, he seemed fine. That and he was bawling like a baby.

Am I dead? he thought. He wasn't sure, but he thought it would be odd to die and come back right where you died.

And yet, isn't that what ghosts do? Haunt the places where they died? Nuno asked himself.

He shuddered at the thought. Was that to be his doom? His punishment for killing himself? He'd haunt the train tunnel where he took his life?

"Stop it," he said, and he could hear his voice outside of his head. "Just, stop it."

If he could hear himself, and his head was bleeding – he felt it again to be sure and cringed when he touched it – he probably wasn't dead, he reasoned. He swiped at his eyes to get rid of the tears. And well, maybe ghosts did weep, he thought.

He struggled to his feet, and stumbled over the rail to the tile wall. In the dark, he had no sense of direction, so he put his hand against the wall and began to walk carefully, trying not to trip in the dark. It took longer than he expected to reach the platform. The glare from the lights made him shield his eyes and blink. He was aware tears still streamed down his face.

"What the hell ..." he heard someone say.

"Is that a man?"

"Is he OK?"

"What happened to him?"

"Get him up out of there."

"Help him up!"

“Here, hang onto my jacket.”

“Give me your hand, mate.”

“Help him out, Jorge.”

“Grab his hand.”

“I’m trying.”

The voices continued, swirling through his head, as he felt hands reach for him and hoist him up to the platform.

“What happened?”

“He’s bleeding.”

“Someone, call for help.”

“Did someone call an ambulance?”

“Get something to stop the bleeding.”

“I can call.”

“I’m calling.”

“I have an emergency to report ...”

Nuno felt rather than saw the crowd around him. His rescuers sat him down on the platform and tried to press him back, but he struggled to sit up.

“Please,” Nuno said. “I can sit up. I’m OK.”

“How did you get in there?”

“What happened?”

“Leave him alone. He’s hurt, can’t you see?”

“The ambulance will be here soon.”

“Here, hold this to your head.” A cloth was pressed into his hand, and someone’s hand guided it to his head.

“I only wanted to know ...”

“Shh. Look at him. He’s probably in shock.”

“What’s your name?”

“Can I call anyone for you?”

“He probably has his own phone.”

“I was just asking.”

“Leave him be.”

The tears were abating, and Nuno could see the feet of the small crowd around him. He guessed it was men and women, since some of the shoes had heels and were fancier. But even the sneakers were different, with bright colors with patterns and laces. He could see five pairs, and he guessed there were two or three slightly behind him that he couldn't see, based on where the voices originated.

“What was he doing down there?”

“I don't know. Just leave it be, won't you?”

“But I want to know.”

The platform rumbled, and the air changed as the next train neared the platform.

“It's the train.”

“No shit.”

“Should we wait?”

“Someone needs to stay with him.”

“I'll stay. You go.”

“We should all stay.”

“I've got a meeting. I can't be late.”

“But what if the police have questions?”

“I can't help that. I can't help him. Ask him the questions.”

“I'll stay. I said I'll stay.”

“Yeah, us too. We got you, mate. Make sure you're fixed up good.”

The train doors opened, and two pairs of shoes turned and disappeared from his vision. The others shifted from foot to foot.

One woman, he could see that now, crouched down in front of him. She was wearing high leather boots and a short, white jacket with a bright scarf at her neck. Her brown eyes met his, and she smiled.

“I'll stay with you,” she said again. “My name is Leonor. What's yours?”

“Nuno,” he replied. She smiled again. It was a small smile, but she was beautiful, and he felt a twinge at that beauty smiling at him.

The train alarm sounded, the doors slid shut, and it squealed down the track. As the roar faded, they could hear a siren drawing closer.

“Hopefully, that’s for you,” Leonor said.

“Aye, mate,” the sneakers to his left said. “They’ll get you patched up.” Several other voices added their assent.

“Thanks,” Nuno said. “Thank you for helping me up. I must have fallen off the platform ...”

His voice trailed off. The lie was so obvious, and yet what could he tell them? He’d tried to kill himself and failed? He couldn’t even be hit by a train properly?

The woman, Leonor, was looking at him oddly, but she didn’t say anything.

They heard the commotion before it arrived. Ambulance staff were charging down the stairs, hoisting a gurney and bags of medical gear. His crowd of rescuers backed off to make room, and medical staff began asking a series of questions. Nuno tried to keep up.

They decided he needed stitches and observation in case he had a concussion.

“Where will you take him?” he heard Leonor ask. The attendant named a facility that Nuno didn’t recognize. It made him afraid, but he wasn’t sure why.

“Amaral,” he said suddenly and looked at Leonor. “My name is Nuno Amaral.” He pleaded with her to silently to understand and say she would come. Her brow furrowed slightly, and she nodded.

“We good, mate?” asked the young man in fancy sneakers. Nuno realized he’d been speaking in English since before he pulled Nuno to the platform.

Nuno nodded. “*Sim, obrigado, muito obrigado.*” He forced a smile, and the young man grinned. “*Nada.* See, I know a little Portuguese,” he said proudly to the girl at his side and slung his arm around her shoulders.

The medical staff began pushing the gurney toward the stairs. Nuno strained to look back at Leonor. She was standing with her hands stuffed in her pockets, watching him be carried away, that curious look still on her beautiful face.

Leonor

It was a bright but cool day, and Leonor was surprisingly refreshed. Her footsteps tapped out her count to the corner, and she pondered the night before with Sofia. Would she think she was crazy today?

It doesn’t matter, she thought. You don’t have to see her again. You can just walk away ...

She frowned. That might be true, but it wasn’t what she wanted. She liked Sofia. It had felt good to share her story, finally. And Sofia hadn’t seemed freaked out by it. She hadn’t gone running

and screaming, anyway. Maybe she would feel differently now, but that didn't change what it had meant to Leonor in the moment.

Still, it was easier to keep her distance ...

Her footsteps echoed as she neared the metro stairs. At the top she stopped. Several people brushed past her. She looked warily down the entrance. It wasn't dark, necessarily, but it wasn't inviting, either.

This is silly, she thought. It's not that station.

Leonor glanced up at the bus stop across the street. There were four people waiting, three on the bench and one leaning at the corner of the shelter. She wondered how long they had been there and how late the bus might be running. Pulling her phone out of her purse, she checked the time and calculated how much time she had before she'd officially be late to work. Sighing, she pushed the phone back in her purse and stepped down into the metro.

There was a commotion at the edge of the platform. Leonor had been pacing, counting down the minutes until the train arrived, willing herself to stay alert and awake. She kept repeating that it wasn't that station, over and over. But the commotion drew the attention of everyone in the station.

They were reaching down and hoisting someone up the side of the wall, several people reaching down. With others, she was drawn closer to see what was happening, to see if she could help.

A young man in a black jacket and backwards baseball cap seemed to be in charge, helping haul the man, she guessed it was a man, up onto the platform. He lay on his stomach but before she could wonder if he was alive, she noticed he was shaking and breathing heavily. She let out her own breath, realizing she had been holding it.

They gathered around, the small crowd of onlookers, forming a circle around the man. His head was turned to the side, and the man in the black jacket and an older man were leaning down, talking to the man, asking him if he was OK, if he was hurt, if he needed help. Leonor wanted to tell them to stop, just ask one question at a time, but she didn't. It was all moving too quickly.

Black jacket's girlfriend – she was too young to be a wife, wasn't she? – kept moving and blocking Leonor's view. Everyone shuffled and jostled, trying to see but trying to stay out of the way, too. Several held their phones in their hands, fingers paused to call 911, Leonor guessed.

"Is he OK?" a woman asked. "What happened?"

"Did he fall?" someone else asked.

Black jacket glanced up at the group. "Dunno. I just saw him there and helped him up. Did someone call an ambulance? He might be hurt."

Three people pressed buttons on their phones, and the group shifted again.

Black jacket was looking at the man again, talking to him low enough that Leonor couldn't hear. He and the older man had their hands on the man, and now she could see they were helping him

turn over. The shifting group continued to block her view, and she suddenly wondered why she was there.

I'm just in the way, she thought, taking a half step back. And in that moment, she caught a brief glimpse of his head. Black jacket shifted, and his face was obscured again. Leonor willed him to get out of the way. She took another step back and ducked down, to see beneath the group, to try and see his face. Legs and purses blocked her view.

She backed up again, and now she saw the group was moving, too. In the distance, she could hear a siren wail and knew at least one of the callers had gotten through.

One couple was loudly discussing that they needed to go.

Just go, she thought. Get out of the way.

They moved, and several others shifted, too. Leonor could see him now, although he couldn't see her. He was looking sideways, likely only seeing legs and feet.

The crowd was discussing who would stay with him. The train was coming, and people needed to go.

"I'll stay, you go," Leonor said. Work no longer mattered. All that mattered was to find out who he was and why he was here.

She crouched down and repeated again: "I'll stay. I said I'll stay."

He looked at her then, and she felt a jolt. She saw him, and he saw her. He was the young man, the one she'd seen before, drawn before and who had been in her dream the night before. But he didn't seem to recognize her, not like she did him. He looked at her like he looked at the others. They were strangers on a train platform, nothing more.

She smiled at him. "I'll stay with you," she said again. "My name is Leonor. What's yours?"

"Nuno," he said.

Chapter 14

Guilherme

Gui wrapped his arms around his wife. She was slicing vegetables for salad at the kitchen counter, classical music playing on the radio. Smiling, she melted back into him.

“*Olá, meu amor,*” she whispered, turning her head to kiss his cheek, propped on her shoulder. Gui smiled, too, but it seemed sad.

“What’s wrong?” she asked, putting down the knife and turning to him.

He rested his head against her forehead and held her close, his eyes closed.

“It’s nothing,” he said.

“No,” she replied. “You keep saying it’s nothing, but it’s clearly something. Please. Tell me.”

Gui sighed heavily.

“I can’t explain it,” he said.

“Try.”

“It sounds crazy.”

“That’s better than nothing,” she said.

He opened his eyes and looked at her. Sincere concern etched her face.

“Please.” She repeated. “Please, tell me. Just talking may make it better.”

Gui nodded. “OK. But please don’t think I’m crazy.”

She smiled tenderly. “I promise.”

Gui told her the impossible story, and she listened with care and concern, touching his arm, brushing his hair from his face and just listening. When he finished, she wrapped her arms around him, pulling him to her, their hearts melted together. He buried his face in her hair and wept, tears he hadn’t released in 45 years. She held him until he had finished.

“Gui.”

He nodded, still clinging to her.

“You want to find him. To see him. To ask him.”

Gui nodded again.

“Then we are going to church,” she said and squeezed him even more tightly before releasing him.

Sol

“Where did you learn to do this, Luzia?” Beatriz traced her fingers over the fine lines of an ink drawing. She marveled at her own face, caught in profile.

“Just doing it,” Sol said. “I learned some in school. One teacher said I had talent, so he showed me some different things. Let me try different techniques.” She trailed off, watching Beatriz marvel at the drawing. “It’s not that good,” she added.

Beatriz gave her a sharp look. “Yes, it is, Luzia. Why don’t you believe that?”

Since learning her real name, Beatriz refused to call her Sol, although everyone else did. Sol shrugged.

“Is it your parents?” Beatriz pushed. Sol stiffened. *Is another fight coming?* she wondered. Even before they started dating, Beatriz had seemed determined to learn anything she could, even if it meant starting a fight. “Did they not encourage you?”

Sol barked a sharp laugh. “No, they did not,” she said emphatically. “They didn’t do a damn thing for me.”

“They gave you life,” Beatriz countered.

“Yeah, well, that life was shit,” Sol said.

“How so?”

Sol shook her head. “I don’t want to talk about it.”

“That’s what you always say!” Beatriz exclaimed.

“And it’s the truth,” Sol hissed.

“Why won’t you tell me?” Beatriz demanded.

“Tell you what?” Sol asked, exasperated that they were fighting – again.

“Who you are? Where you’re from? What you want to do? Who you want to be?” She rattled off her questions rapid-fire.

Sol slumped onto her bed, head in her hands.

“Why?” she whimpered. “Why do you want to know?”

“Because I care about you!” Beatriz nearly shouted.

Sol rolled onto her side, away from Beatriz.

“I don’t know,” she said quietly. “I don’t know who I am or who I want to be.”

Beatriz slid onto the bed behind her, sidling up to spoon her. Her hand traced the line from Sol’s shoulder to elbow.

“I’m sorry,” Beatriz said. “I didn’t mean to get angry. I just don’t know anything about you. Except what I can see. And then you say you’re not a good artist, and that’s just not true.” Sol stiffened, but Beatriz pulled her closer, kissing her hair.

“Luzia, I love you.”

Sol opened her eyes and stared at the wall. It was the first time either of them had used the words. She twisted over to face Beatriz. Looking into her brown eyes, Sol was serious. “I know you do, but I can’t say it. Not yet.”

Beatriz gave her a long look, then closed her eyes and gently kissed her.

Almiro

When the sandwich was gone, she pointed to a nearly hidden trash can by the door. He crumpled it small and placed it carefully in the container. When he turned back to her, she was leaning on the broom.

“What is your name?” she asked.

Without hesitation he replied, “Almiro.”

He started to thank her for the food, but she waved her hand.

“No need. You already thanked me. Now, Almiro, you have work to do.” She passed him the broom and waved her hand in the general area of the sidewalk and alley. Without looking back, she passed back into the market.

Almiro’s eyes filled with tears again. It has been so long since someone had actually noticed him, talked to him, needed him. Granted, she didn’t really need him, but she hadn’t just given him a hand-out. She offered food for service. He grasped the broom with both hands and began the best sweeping job the street had ever had.

Halfway through, Almiro shifted his possessions. He folded the blanket and towel, and stuffed them into the sleeves of his jacket, which now was slung around his waist. As he worked, people came and went, vendors bringing in more wares or exiting with empty boxes, workers taking a cigarette break. No one said anything, but he knew everyone saw him. He figured, correctly, that they were surprised the old woman wasn’t sweeping, but they kept quiet.

He had his back to her, when she called out to him: “Almiro.”

Quickly, he turned and ducked his head in deference. Peeking up, he saw her smiling eyes twinkle. “How about lunch, eh? You’ve probably worked up an appetite.”

Gripping the broom in both hands, he nodded. Somehow, he was still hungry.

She nodded behind him. “You can wash up in there. You drink coffee?”

Almiro nodded again. “*Obrigado.*”

She held out her hand for the broom, and he passed it to her. She turned back toward the door, tiny footsteps carrying her quickly to it. He turned and made his way to the washroom. He hadn't realized how badly he had to go to the bathroom until he stepped in, and then it was a mad rush to disentangle his jacket and pants. Afterward, he splashed cool water on his face and smoothed his hair. He wished he had his backpack with his toothpaste and toothbrush. Instead, he swished a little water in his mouth, and realizing his thirst, tipped his head and lapped water from the stream.

She was waiting for him when he came out, holding a paper bag and a small ceramic mug on a saucer with a tiny spoon and packet of sugar. The strong, hot coffee smelled rich, and the bag felt warm. She tilted her head toward a half wall across the alley. They walked over and leaned against it. Almiro set down the coffee and opened the bag. Another sandwich was inside along with fruit and a pastry. He took out the sandwich and tried to eat less ravenously.

"Where are you from?" she asked, when he had eaten half of the sandwich.

"The country," Almiro said. He wasn't sure how much he should tell her. He didn't even know what to tell her. He'd had a lot of time to think while he swept, but he was no closer to answers. It was a mystery how and why he was here. He still hadn't completely ruled out insanity or a dream, although both seemed extremely unlikely.

"You don't have a job," she said. It wasn't a question, but a statement. He shook his head. No, it was obvious he didn't or he wouldn't be sweeping the street for her in exchange for food.

"Why not?" she asked.

He glanced up at her. She didn't look angry or upset. Just curious.

"It's a long story," he said.

"I have time," she countered.

Da Rocha

Da Rocha took the stairs to the fourth floor. Four doors opened onto a small landing. He went first to Moisés' and looked at the door. There was nothing remarkable about it or any of the others. A simple number was attached to the middle of the door, just under the peep hole. He wondered how many eyes were watching him at that moment.

He leaned toward the door and listened. He could hear a TV on inside, quiet but on.

He knocked on Moisés' door and waited. He didn't expect anyone to answer, but it would draw the attention of the neighbors, and maybe he could engage one of them.

It worked.

The door kitty-corner opened a crack.

"He's not there," a woman's voice said.

Da Rocha turned with a friendly face.

“Oh, thank you! I wondered if anyone else was at home,” he said by way of explanation.

“Doubtful,” the woman said. “She left first, then he went after, and no one’s been back.”

Da Rocha controlled the smile on his face. He always could count on a nosy neighbor who knew the comings and goings. Now, he just had to keep her talking.

“When was that?” Da Rocha asked.

“Last night. Late. They had another row, and she shot out of there like a bat out of hell. First time she ever did that.”

“Did what?” Da Rocha asked.

“Left,” the woman said simply.

She had opened the door a little more. He could see the lined face more clearly. She wasn’t as old as he had thought at first. Maybe no more than 50. Maybe closer to 40, but with hard years aging her.

“They had a fight?” Da Rocha asked.

“They are always fighting,” the woman sighed. “Well, he’s always yelling. You never hear a peep out of her, even when ...” She trailed off.

When he hits her, Da Rocha thought.

“How long have they lived here?” Da Rocha changed the subject.

“They moved in about a year ago. He came first, then she came a few weeks later.”

“Do you know her name?” Da Rocha asked gently.

The woman shook her head. “He calls her Julinha – when he uses her name, but I’ve never spoken to her.”

“Are they married?”

The woman shrugged. “It doesn’t matter with that type. He’s got her where he wants her, and a ring won’t make a difference.”

“But she left?” Da Rocha asked.

“Yes,” the woman said, reflecting on it. “He screamed he was going to kill her. He’s threatened before, but this time it seemed – worse,” she said. “Like he really meant it.”

“Did you see her leave?” Da Rocha asked.

The woman shook her head. “No way in hell I’m opening my door when they are going at it. I won’t even go out if I know there’s the least chance I might run into him. He’s evil.”

“Then how do you know she left?”

“I heard her. She struggled with the door, then ran down the stairs. A minute later, he was standing at the door screaming after her. I heard the door slam, and then he stomped down the stairs after her. But it sounded odd.”

“How so?” Da Rocha asked.

“Like he was barefoot,” the woman said. “They both sounded like they weren’t wearing any shoes. Their footsteps were softer.” She pointed at the wood floor. “It’s noisy with shoes and boots and such.”

Da Rocha looked down and tapped his foot. It echoed noisily.

When he looked up again, the woman was gone, her door closed firmly.

He glanced over his shoulder back at Moisés’ apartment door and wondered about the woman who ran away and what happened to her when Moisés caught her, considering how he looked.

Dores

Dores didn’t know where to go. If it really was 30 years in the future, her flat wouldn’t be hers anymore. Still, she didn’t know where else to go. Her feet took her home. As she walked the blocks she had taken so many times, now so unfamiliar, she thought about who could help her. The few friends she still had probably had moved, too.

Her mom and dad. The thought stopped her in her tracks. Were they still alive? Her aunts and uncles? Older relatives likely were gone.

Tómas.

Oh, God.

She sank down on the steps of a building. Her head hung down, long hair shielding her face. Her shoulders heaved as she finally sobbed. What had happened to him? Was he still alive in 2019? Had he even been alive in 1991? Dores wanted to believe he was alive, that she would have felt it if he was dead.

But not knowing had been so hard, yet she had nothing else. Only her visits to the metro and her memories.

And that crying child.

Her head snapped up.

The realization hit her like a proverbial train. If she had traveled through time, had Tómas done the same?

It wasn’t a question of where he was, but when.

Oh, God, she thought again. Is he here? Is that why I'm here? To find him?

Frantically, she jumped to her feet, unsure which way to go or what to do.

Nuno

A mild concussion and six stitches. Nuno figured it could have been worse, being hit by a train. But then he wasn't sure what had happened. He'd seen the driver, and then he came to on the tracks. Over and over, he went through it, trying to remember what had happened.

"Address?" the nurse asked, pulling him from his reverie.

Nuno told her.

"Public or private insurance?"

Nuno paused. He'd never been asked before. There was just – but his thoughts were interrupted by the nurse. "Public, obviously," she said with a sigh. "I don't suppose you know the number."

Nuno shook his head.

"Birthdate."

She looked up sharply when he answered. "You really did hit your head, didn't you?" she said. She changed tactics. "How old are you?"

Nuno told her, and she calculated in her head. "Eighty-five. That's better."

Nuno frowned. Now he was confused. He knew his birthdate, but she'd already moved on to questions about his health background.

Later, signing the paperwork, he didn't think about it, just took his copy, folded it and tucked it in his back pocket. He was walking out the clinic pharmacy with a bottle of extra-strength pain killers when he stopped dead in his tracks. A signboard at the door reminded visitors to vote in the presidential election: 24 January 2016.

The breath whooshed out of him, like he'd been punched. In fact, he staggered a bit.

"Sir, are you OK?" someone asked behind him. Probably the pharmacist who had helped him.

"*Sim, sim,*" he muttered and forced his feet to walk forward. Then he stopped and turned back. "The election," Nuno said. "It's which day?"

"Tomorrow," the pharmacist answered. "Like the sign says."

Nuno nodded and turned robotically toward the door. His face was passive, but his mind was screaming: *What happened to you? What happened to you?*

Outside he panted, hands on his knees, willing himself to stay upright, willing it not to be true. Willing this all to be just a bad dream or the result of a concussion.

A pair of brown boots stepped into his vision.

“So, we meet again, Nuno,” Leonor said. “You’re still not looking too good.”

Nuno let out a cry and crumpled to the ground at her feet.

Chapter 15

Roberta

Otília flipped her collar and smoothed her hair for the third time in five minutes. It was a move Roberta watched her do often, but the repetition pointed to her nervousness.

“You look fine, darling,” Roberta said. Otília gave her a look.

“It’s not about me,” Otília said.

“I know,” Roberta said gently. “You’re nervous. We’re all nervous.”

Otília had been especially nervous when Gui messaged, asking to meet him and his wife. She’d had misgivings after he stormed out of the café. They really shouldn’t have pried. *No, that wasn’t true*, she thought. *I shouldn’t have pried*. If she hadn’t played Facebook detective, if they’d just let it go at talking about it ...

“Maybe we will get answers,” Roberta said. Otília made a face.

“Maybe he will have his wife yell at us, too,” Otília said.

She hadn’t wanted to reply, but when she told Roberta, it was Roberta who said they must follow through. It was the right thing to do. After all, they were the ones at fault, who should ask his forgiveness. Now they had the chance. Otília grudgingly went along and sent the reply.

She was surprised when he said they wanted to meet at the church. Roberta just shrugged.

“Maybe he will be on his best behavior,” she said with a smile.

Roberta was comfortable at church. It was her second home. She spent many happy hours there, writing and giving sermons and communing with God and the congregation. It was a place of joy and sorrow, and it tugged at her heart each time she walked through the doors. The wood under her fingertips, the flagstones under her feet, the arches overhead. It all seemed perfect to her, in harmony and peaceful.

Otília was less at home there. She worked in a law office and preferred the hustle and bustle of the wider world. A childhood out of step with what was expected and a church that didn’t accept differences had left her feeling outcast. Even now, she felt like she didn’t belong, that she was being judged and found wanting.

She reached for her collar again, but Roberta stilled her hands. She took each of Otília’s in her own, and held them gently. Then, Roberta raised each hand to her lips and kissed them, the part between the knuckles and the first finger joint. Otília watched her, blue eyes wet and still a little wary. Roberta met her gaze, warmth in her own eyes.

“It will be alright,” she said quietly. “This too shall pass.” She squeezed Otília’s hands and released one as they heard the doors slide open. Roberta continued to hold Otília’s one hand in her own, together, as they waited for Gui and his wife to enter.

Sol

She'd been at university for a few months when the answer came to her. A professor had been talking about leaving your mark and how art is a way for people to do that. It reminded Sol of the tags she, Jazz and Wube used to do, leaving their mark, literally. Since she'd been back in time, she hadn't had a desire to tag. Rather than hide her artwork, she embraced it. All mediums were possible, and she filled her room with projects and creations.

But her artwork, their artwork, filled her mind. She had left her mark decades in the future. How would she leave it now? An image flashed in her mind. The tag she had seen her first night here: "*Rosa*" painted on a building's corner. A simple word left there for others to see and find.

And that was the answer. Sol felt it rise in her chest suddenly, like a pressure building. It was so strong, she put her hand to heart. It was beating fast.

"It could work," she whispered to herself.

She could recreate the artwork now in a place where Jazz and Wube would find it in the future. She could leave a mark that would tell them her story.

Despite loving her life in a new era, Sol missed her old friends. The fact she couldn't talk about them weighed on her. Beatriz's pestering made her wary of even mentioning them. Sol knew they must have worried about her. She hoped they thought she had run away. That would be easier, but she also knew they might think she was dead. Would they think she had been killed? That they were to blame?

She shuddered at the thought. She had to find a way to let them know she was OK. But she had struggled with how to reach across decades. Now, the threads were coming together.

She flipped open a notebook and began writing down locations where they had put their work. She squeezed her eyes shut and willed herself to see the locations they had scouted. There were a couple they had in mind when the metro popped up.

Sol raised her hand, and the teacher came over. "Do you have a phone book?" Sol asked. "I need to see a city map."

The professor hooked his thumb over his shoulder. "On my desk." Sol thanked him and went to get it. Opening the book to the map page, she squinted over the fine print.

There, she thought. The warehouse district. There was a really old building that hadn't been touched in years. Maybe it's abandoned now but not quite so old. She, Jazz and Wube had wanted to create in more abandoned places because it gave them more time to do it, and it wasn't likely to be painted over. Public areas were cleaned up quickly.

Sol tapped her finger on the map and made a note in her notebook. She would check it out tonight.

—

“Where are you goin’?” Mouth asked as Sol headed for the door, messenger bag slung over her shoulder.

“Out,” Sol replied.

“Want company?” he asked.

She hesitated. She didn’t want him to know what she was doing, but she also wasn’t sure she wanted to go alone. It was a sketchy place in the daytime.

“Uh, sure,” she said. “I wanna go for a walk to see something.” She tried to be vague.

“Something good?” he asked, shrugging on a jacket.

“Maybe,” she said. “I hope so. Where’s Carlos?”

“Still at work. He should be home in an hour or two.”

Sol nodded. “Beatriz, too.”

“Then we’ve got time without anyone asking questions,” Mouth said, “except each other.”

Sol grinned. “True. I won’t ask if you won’t.”

“Deal.”

Almiro

Almiro finished his food long before he finished his story, but he continued to fiddle with the cup and saucer as he shifted from foot to foot. When at last he was done, she nodded once. Her eyes, big behind her glasses, caught and held his.

“Two blocks up,” she waved with her hand, “and one block east. Manuel Lupesco hires men to build things. Look for his truck out front. He’s probably having his lunch right now, so you can catch him there.”

Almiro nodded.

“Well?” she asked. “What are you waiting for?”

Almiro jumped up from his perch on the wall and pushed the cup and saucer into her hands.

“*Obrigado*,” he began.

She waved her free hand. “*Nada, nada*. Tell him Maria José sent you.”

Almiro nodded.

“Go,” she said.

“*Obrigado*,” Almiro said. Tears pricked his eyes, and he turned quickly up the street.

He hadn't told her everything. Honestly, he had no idea how to tell her about his trip through time without sounding like a lunatic, so he skipped that part.

But he'd told her the rest, about his mother's dementia, moving to the city after she died, losing his flat and job, and finally, losing the little dog. Fofo simply hadn't woken up one morning, cold and stiff where he lay against Almiro's chest. He had cried that day.

He passed a hand over his face. All of these echoes of the past, haunting him. Instinctively, he glanced over his shoulder. Maria José was watching him. She raised her hand, her eyes bright. Almiro waved back, turned and hurried toward his future.

Julinha

A woman in a navy cardigan, a skirt and low heels was waiting for Julinha when she padded down the hall after her shower. Her hair was still damp, but at least it was clean.

"I'm Catherina," the woman said, sticking out her free hand to Julinha. She held a folder in the other and a leather bag was slung over her shoulder. Julinha could see other files through the open top. Julinha shook her hand. "I'm your social worker," Catherina continued, as she turned and led Julinha down the hall.

"I have a bunch of questions, and then we'll get you set up at a shelter," she said. "Let's go find someplace to talk." Catherina pushed through the double doors and walked purposefully to the desk.

"Is there a room where I can meet with a client?" she asked.

A jangly noise made Julinha jump. Catherina stuffed her hand into a side pocket of her bag and pulled out a small object, which she looked at, touched and then held to her ear. "Hello?"

Julinha must have looked confused. The middle-aged woman behind the desk gave her a small smile. "Come this way, honey," she said. "You can meet in here." She gestured to a door.

Julinha followed her, and Catherina brought up the rear, still talking into the thing she held to her ear. *Is it a telephone?* Julinha wondered. But how did it work? It wasn't plugged in, and it didn't look like a telephone.

The older woman pushed a button to light up the room, which had a round table and several chairs.

"Here you go," she said to Julinha. "You want any coffee? Water?"

Julinha's stomach grumbled. The woman laughed. "I'll take that as a yes. Be right back." Julinha sat gingerly on one of the chairs, perched at the edge, unsure of what to do.

Catherina had switched the device to her other hand and was pulling files out of her bag onto the table, talking quickly, almost non-stop. "I told you that's the one I needed to get more

information on. Right, like I said, it's the one, yes, that's right. OK, I'm with another client, so I really gotta go. No, I'll let you know. Yeah, tchau."

She laid the black thing on the table. Julinha stared at it. The surface looked like glass, black glass. Catherina was rummaging through the files she had dumped on the table. Setting one aside, she scooped the rest into her bag.

"OK," she said, looking up at Julinha. "How are you?"

The question caught Julinha off guard.

"Uh, fine," Julinha stammered.

"Tsk," Catherina said. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked that. Just habit of being polite, I guess. They said they found you in the metro station, quite a sight and crying."

Julinha nodded, unsure of what to say.

Catherina took a chair and pulled out a flat package from her bag. She opened it, lifting one side up and set it in front of her. Julinha could see the flat keys. Obviously, it wasn't just a medical typewriter if this woman had one, too, but she had no idea what it was.

Catherina caught her staring and cocked her head. "So, let's start at the beginning. What's your name?"

Julinha replied, spelling it out for her and Catherina typed.

"Date of birth."

Julinha answered quietly.

Catherina paused. "Sorry, what did you say?"

Before Julinha could answer, there was a knock at the door, and the woman from the desk stepped in. She balanced a tray with two cups, a bottle and a plate with a few pastries on it.

"It's drip coffee," she said, "but it's the best I could do. I'll leave you to it." And she was gone.

Julinha studied the tray. The label on the bottle said it was spring water. She thought that was odd, water in a bottle. Maybe it was a clinic thing, she thought. The coffee was in brown paper cups with black plastic lids.

Catherina looked from the tray to Julinha. "Go ahead," Catherina said gently. "You must be hungry."

Julinha reached for a pastry and pinched off a small piece. The sugary sweetness melted in her mouth. She thought it might be the best thing she'd ever tasted, and tears sprang to her eyes.

Catherina glanced around then got up to get a box of tissues off the counter. She brought it back, and set it in front of Julinha who took one and wiped at her eyes.

"It will be OK," Catherina said. "It's hard, but it will be OK."

Julinha sniffled and nodded. She took another bite of pastry and reached for the coffee.

The black rectangle made a noise and vibrated on the table top. Julinha jumped. She could see it light up.

“Desculpe,” Catherina said. “Let me silence that.” She touched a button on the side. Then she turned it over. The back was matte black, not glossy like the front.

“OK, where were we? Um, address,” Catherina said.

Julinha answered, going through the list of personal questions and then very personal questions, about Moisés and their relationship, finally ending with her escape to the metro station in the night. Catherina took notes, typing and asking follow-up questions.

“I know that was hard,” she said, as she looked at Julinha. She nodded and looked at her lap where she still had a tissue bunched up. Many others filled a small trash can at her feet, retrieved during the interview. “But you did really well in telling me,” Catherina said. “It will get better.”

She turned back to her device. “Let me just save this,” her voice tapered off. “Well, what am I missing?” Catherina leaned closer and peered at the device. “Oh, here it is. Birthdate. That’s right, we were interrupted.” She looked at Julinha.

“March 2, 1958.” Julinha pressed a finger into the sugar on the pastry plate and lifted it to her lips.

Catherina hadn’t moved. Julinha could feel her staring. She met her eyes.

“1958?” Catherina asked. Julinha nodded.

“That can’t be right,” Catherina said. “Do you mean 1988?”

Now it was Julinha’s turn to stare. Why was Catherina questioning her birthdate? And why would she suggest a date 10 years in the future. “No,” she said slowly.

Catherina licked her lips. She had on lipstick, Julinha noticed and immediately realized it was an odd thing to notice at such a time.

“How old are you?”

“Twenty-one.”

“Then, how. I mean, why. Um,” Catherina stumbled.

Julinha felt a chill come over her. The hair stood up on her arms and the back of her neck. The devices that seemed odd to her. Water in a bottle. Even the coffee in paper cups with plastic lids.

“What’s the date?” Julinha suddenly asked. “When is it?”

“May 14, 2013.”

The blood drained from her face. She could feel it go, and Catherina stared with her mouth open.

“Oh my God. You’re serious. You were born in 1958? But that was more than 50 years ago. And I can see you’re a young woman.” She trailed off.

“It’s 1979. August,” Julinha whispered. “Is this some kind of a, a joke?”

Catherina reached across the table and touched her hand.

“No, Julinha. It’s not a joke.”

She paused. “Did you hit your head? Are you maybe confused?”

Julinha nodded, then shook her head. “Yes, I mean, he made me hit my head, but I was fine. It wasn’t that bad.”

“OK,” Catherina said. “OK. We’ll figure it out.” She paused, then added, “It will be OK,” but that time, Julinha thought she was saying it for her own benefit instead of Julinha’s.

Dores

Officer Peres watched the woman through the glass. She fidgeted in her seat, crossed and uncrossed her feet, clasped her hands, tried unsuccessfully to not bite her nails. Peres just wanted an easy day, a chance to file paperwork and putter on his laptop. He did not want to take a statement from a woman who probably was deranged or on drugs.

He scratched that thought. She was nervous, but she didn’t look like she was high. Aida at the front desk was good at weeding out the druggies who showed up with tall tales. No, she’d let this woman through with questions about a missing child.

Peres sighed and picked up the clipboard.

—

Dores settled uneasily on the cot, feeling it sink underneath her, bowing in the middle. She glanced around. There were several other women on this side of the partition. One lay covered with a thin blanket, her arm thrown over her head. Another sat swaying, her eyes closed, tapping her fingers together in a rhythm Dores didn’t understand. A young woman pulled items from a duffel bag, shaking them out and laying them across the cot. She smoothed each piece before taking out the next.

The officer, Peres, she reminded herself, had given her a card with this address. He said she’d get a hot meal and a bed for the night. She had paused too long when he asked for her address. Somehow, she knew she shouldn’t give him the one that jumped to her tongue. He took her reticence as being homeless. Dores hadn’t argued. She needed a place to sleep and food to eat. She felt more shell-shocked than anything.

What had she hoped to accomplish by going to the police? She chided herself for not having a better plan.

I didn’t plan this, she argued with herself. I didn’t think I’d wind up in 2019.

Suddenly exhausted, Dore wrapped her arms around her purse and slumped over onto the thin pillow. She knew she should think about what she'd do, but she couldn't keep her eyes open. In a moment, she was deep in a dream where all was cold and darkness and a child wept in the distance.

Nuno and Leonor

He held a cup of hot tea between both hands, carefully lifting it to drink, afraid to use just one hand because he was shaking so bad. Leonor had ordered for them both: hot tea and savory biscuits. Now they sat at a small table by the window, a weak streak of sunlight spilling onto the scratched surface.

Hearing him tell it was surreal, even though she knew the basics from the news archives. His depression, losing his girlfriend and the cat – her heart ached for him. Clinical depression and alcohol were a bad combination, and suicide was a “logical” conclusion for someone in such a state of mind.

She tried not to interrupt, but to let him tell it in his own way, his own words, his own time.

“I got so scared out there, because I know what today is. I know when it is. And I know I shouldn't be here,” he said. His eyes searched hers. “Is it true? Is it 2016?”

Leonor nodded. “Yes, it's true.” His face crumpled.

“But how can that be?” he sobbed between the fingers he spread across his face.

“I don't know,” Leonor said quietly. She touched his arm. “But that part is true.”

Nuno had started to rock in his chair.

“Come on,” Leonor said, getting quickly to her feet. “Let's get some fresh air.”

She shouldered her bag and reached for Nuno's arm to get him to his feet. He let himself be pulled up and directed out the door.

It was brisk, and Leonor zipped her coat. Nuno shoved his hands in his pockets and shivered. “This way,” Leonor said. “We'll take the bus.” She led him down the street toward a plastic-lined shelter.

“You believe me,” Nuno said, when they had stepped inside out of the wind.

Leonor looked up quickly and met his eyes. “Yes, I believe you.”

“Am I crazy?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“Then how is this possible?” Leonor shrugged.

“Dunno,” she said. She looked at him. They both stood facing out, heads turned toward each other. She pivoted so their shoulders touched and made a right angle. “But it’s true. I looked it up.”

Nuno gave her a blank look.

“I Googled you,” she said. There was no recognition on his face. Then she realized he wouldn’t know what that was – not the internet or a computer or Google.

“It’s, uh, it’s a way of looking up information electronically. You use a computer,” she was floundering, speaking a foreign language that she suddenly realized she didn’t really understand. “I’ll show you. That might be easier.”

He nodded. “OK.” Then, “Where are we going?”

“To my flat, if that’s OK,” she said. He nodded again.

“Why are you helping me?” he asked quietly. His eyes were downcast. She noticed the long dark lashes, the stubbly beard that was several days of growth, how his hair curved against his cheek.

“Because you need it,” she said. “You seem like you could use a friend.”

Nuno nodded, then looked up to meet her eyes.

“*Obrigado*,” he said, and for the first time, his eyes were dry.

Chapter 16

Guilherme

Gui felt the knot tighten in his stomach. He was ashamed at how he'd reacted with Roberta and Otília, and now here he was asking to see them again. His wife slid her hand into the crook of his arm as they pushed open the door. He met her eyes, and she smiled. She squeezed his arm and the smile moved into her eyes. Gui felt himself relax, just a little. At least she was with him.

The door slid open, and their gaze shifted to the women at the end of the aisle. Roberta and Otília held hands, standing side by side, almost looking as if they were bracing for something. Gui let out a breath. Maybe they were as nervous as he.

Now, they were coming toward them, walking together. Gui and Vitória walked toward them, arm in arm. Gui realized they all were smiling, even if it seemed a bit forced.

Roberta reached her hand out first to Vitória and leaned in to kiss her on the cheeks.

“Bom dia. I’m Roberta. This is my wife, Otília. You must be Vitória. Gui, so nice to see you again.” Roberta leaned in to kiss Gui, who ducked his head to accept the kisses. Otília was kissing Vitória now, and then also Gui. They murmured greetings, and Roberta invited them to sit.

“Do you want to sit here or in my office?”

Gui ducked his head.

“Here is fine,” Vitória answered.

“Actually,” Gui said, “where did he sit?”

Roberta, without pausing, brushed past, down the aisle to the back of the church. She stood back and ushered Gui and Vitória into the pew. She nodded to the one in front of it for Otília and joined her.

Gui cleared his throat. “I want to apologize,” he began, but Roberta cut him off.

“No, we need to apologize to you. We had no business springing that on you. It was speculation, and we were too curious.”

Gui shook his head. “It’s very curious. Very odd. And I still don’t know what to think of it. What to make of it, really. But I acted poorly, and for that I apologize.”

“Oh, please don’t apologize,” Otília spoke quickly, her voice breathy. “I feel terrible that we made you feel sad and angry. We should apologize to you.”

Gui started to speak, but Vitória interjected.

“It’s all right, everyone. Please. I can see you all feel your first meeting ended badly, but let’s move on from here. Gui has some questions. Well, we both do. And while you may not have answers, perhaps we can find them together.”

Gui nodded. His hands slid over edge of the wooden bench, seeming to knead the plank that formed the seat. Vitória took the hand nearest her and moved it into her lap. He met her eyes, and then looked at the women sitting in front of him, turned so their arms were on the seat back, Roberta's hand covering Otília's.

"Can you tell me, well, tell us, really, about the day you met him, the man who said ... well, can you tell us?" Gui began. Roberta nodded. She started at the beginning and left nothing out in the telling.

Gui nodded and sighed. Vitória listened intently. Otília held her breath through parts, and Roberta would squeeze her hand to keep her from asking questions. At last, the story was done. Gui looked at the floor.

"He sat here. My dad sat here," he said at last.

Roberta lifted her shoulders. "I don't know if he was your dad," she said. "I don't know how he could be. But he said his name was Fernao and he had a son named Gui and a wife named Neves."

"You believed him to be truthful?" Vitória asked.

Roberta nodded. "Oh, yes. I can usually tell when someone is lying. He wasn't lying about that. He wasn't telling the whole story about why he was here. He was uncomfortable, but he wasn't lying about his name or his family."

"How do I find him?" Gui asked.

Otília spoke up. "We've been wondering that, too. Roberta wanted to ask him again about his family and to see if he's a relative of yours. We thought about checking the homeless shelters. He was out in the rain and seeking shelter in a church, so he may not have a permanent place to live."

Gui nodded.

"But we haven't found anyone by that name or description at nearby shelters."

Gui looked down, frowning.

Vitória squeezed his hand.

"Then, we thought of asking the police, but they haven't had anyone by that name come through," Otília said.

"We thought of putting out an ad in the newspaper, seeking information about him. We do that sometimes for legal purposes," Otília said. When Gui and Vitória looked at her, she explained that she worked in a law office.

"Did you place an ad?"

“No,” Otília said. “Not yet. When you got in touch, we thought we’d wait to see what you wanted to do.”

Gui released his grip on the bench and ran his hand over his face.

“Thank you for trying. For looking,” he said.

Roberta and Otília nodded.

Vitória tilted her head, as if she heard something in the distance. “I wonder ...” she began. All turned to look at her. She smiled slightly and looked at Gui. “Did your parents have friends? Anyone still living who he might have been in touch with?”

The women all looked at Gui. He shook his head. “They had cousins, but no one in the city anyway. Maybe a distant cousin, but no one I’d even know of.” He paused. “He had his work and his family, me and my mom.”

Vitória raised an eyebrow.

“What?” he asked.

“Who did he work with?”

Light dawned on Gui.

“Oh! Yes, his old workmate used to come to the house to check on us. He’d bring me a piece of candy. But after we moved, I only saw him once or twice. My mom would send me to my room when he came, and they would talk quietly, so I couldn’t hear.” His voice trailed off. “They must have been talking about Dad.”

They all were quiet.

“What was his name?” Roberta took up the thread.

“Uh ...” Gui closed his eyes, seeing the man, stocky, standing at the door, his work boots looking so much like his father’s. In his mind’s eye, he turned his gaze to the man’s face, a sad smile etched there. A smile, he realized now, just for the boy who had lost his father.

“Try the trick,” Otília said. Gui and Vitória looked at her. “Look up and to the left,” she said. “We read about it in a magazine, and it works when you’re trying to remember something.” She paused. “We used it to remember your name.”

Gui looked puzzled. “It works,” Roberta said. “Go on,” Otília prodded.

Dutifully, Gui looked up, tilting his head back and tipping it to the left, his gaze on the church ceiling.

“No, just your eyes,” Otília corrected. “You don’t have to move your head.”

“You’re not really looking at anything,” Roberta added. “It’s a trick to access information in your memory.”

They all watched as Gui swiveled his eyes up and to the side.

“Simon,” he started but quickly corrected himself. “No, it’s Silvio.”

“Are you sure?” Vitória asked, amazed.

Gui nodded. “Yes, I’m positive. That’s so weird!”

The women grinned at him. “Yes, it is,” Roberta said, “but it works!”

“Is he still alive?” Vitoria wondered.

Gui pressed his lips together. “I don’t know,” he said. “I lost track of him a long time ago.”

“And his last name?” Otilia prompted.

Gui shook his head. “No clue.” He paused. “But ...”

They all waited.

“I bet his name is in the newspaper.”

Now, they all looked at him questioningly. “What do you mean?” Otilia asked.

“There were stories about it. Not many. But a couple of short ones. A man can’t go missing without someone noticing it.”

Vitória stared, eyes wide. “There’s a newspaper story? You never mentioned that.”

Gui shrugged. “It wasn’t important. I told you my dad disappeared. And he did. We never knew what happened.”

“Do you have copies of the papers?” Roberta asked.

He shook his head again. “No. Mom had some of that stuff, but I didn’t keep it. I didn’t see the sense in it. I only kept their photographs and a few mementoes. Happier things, you know?”

They nodded in agreement.

“But we can look it up online!” Otilia exclaimed. She was clambering to her feet and trying to get past Roberta to the aisle. “We can use the computer.”

Roberta sighed and moved to let Otilia get past. “A woman on a mission,” she muttered with a grin.

Vitória and Gui looked puzzled as Otilia dashed up the aisle toward the front of the church.

“Come on,” Roberta said. “She’ll be like a dog with a bone. My office is this way.” She led them up the aisle.

Sol

“You want to go where?!”

Mouth was incredulous.

Sol pointed to the gap between the chain on the doors. She knew she could fit in. She was pretty sure Mouth could not.

“What the hell?! Why?”

Sol shoved her hands in her pockets.

“I want to see what’s inside. That’s all,” she said.

“That makes no sense! Why there?” Mouth started.

“Hey, I thought we weren’t going to ask questions,” Sol reminded him.

“Yeah, that was before you wanted to go into an abandoned building at night in a shady part of town!”

“You can wait out here,” Sol said.

“Of course, I’ll wait out here,” he said. “I can’t squeeze through there. And someone has to keep you safe from ...” he trailed off. “But you better be out in two minutes, or I will find a way to come in after you. And you better not do anything stupid.” He was off and running at the mouth again. Sol grinned.

“OK, OK,” she soothed. “I’ll be careful, mother hen.”

“Now don’t go patronizing me,” he started, and she patted his arm.

“I’m teasing. I’ll be OK. Just a minute, OK?” She slipped over to the door before he had time to object and slid between into the gapped opening.

“Be careful!” he hissed at her as she stepped into darkness. “Don’t break your goddamn neck!”

She could still hear him as she moved into the building. “Beatriz will fucking kill me. This is such a bad idea.”

Sol smiled. She knew she was safe with Mouth. Reaching into her bag, she pulled out a small flashlight and turned it on. A quick scan showed the building was divided into large sections, with walls and half walls separating parts. There was little else in it – some old crates and pallets stacked up, a couple of overturned barrels. It looked like maybe someone had slept in a corner, based on the dirty blanket and food wrappers left behind, but it didn’t look fresh.

Sol turned her attention to the walls. The outer walls were concrete. Solid and surprisingly bare. No taggers had found their canvas yet. Sol grinned. She would be the first. And maybe, even if others followed, they would leave her art untouched.

She would have to try. It was the only way she could think to let Jazz and Wube know she was OK.

She found a section on the back wall, not too far from the entrance but not too close, either. Some windows high overhead allowed in a little bit of night light. Maybe she could do it in the daytime so she could see what she was doing. She flicked the flashlight along the walls, looking for power. But then she reasoned even if she found an outlet, it was unlikely the building still had service. If she got several flashlights, she could set them up to illuminate the area enough to see. She held the light up to her head. She could get a headlamp, too. That might work.

Sol took a few steps back and smiled again. *This might work. It might really work!* She turned and headed back toward the entrance.

Almiro

The sunrise turned the sky shades of pink, scudded with purplish clouds. Almiro admired the view over his coffee cup, the hot steam rising. A nudge at his knee brought his eyes to meet the big brown ones that gazed at him. She rested her chin on his leg, and he scratched behind her ears. When he stopped, she looked at the plate, then back at him.

Almiro laughed out loud. “Now you want my breakfast, too? You’ve already had yours.” But even as he said it, he pinched off a piece of toasted bread and dipped it in egg before tossing it to her. Her tail thumped appreciatively on the floor.

“OK, that’s enough,” he said and leaned forward to finish his breakfast.

The dog sighed and lay at his feet, head between her paws.

“You’re a good girl, Cassie,” he said. Her tail thumped again, hearing her name.

Almiro stood at the sink to wash the dishes. The day was brightening, and he glanced at the clock. Half past seven. He’d have time to help Maria José set up at the market before he needed to be at work. Her daughter and son-in-law had an appointment and would come later, but it left Maria alone to carry heavy boxes and start cooking for the day’s customers. Almiro grinned, remembering her tasty food. He’d take away a sandwich for his lunch break. Maybe she’d let him pay for it. Probably not. He smiled again.

His first friend in this new place, that’s how he thought of her. She had seen a hungry man and gave him more than a handout. Since that first day, he’d tried to thank her or repay her many times, but she always brushed him away. He was a bit surprised she had agreed to let him help today. She probably knew he would show up anyway.

Almiro clipped the leash on Castanha – or Cassie as he usually called her – and shrugged on his coat. “Come on, girl. You need to go out, and then you’ll be good until I get home, right?” The dog tugged him out the door, sniffing the nearest bushes before settling on one by the fence. The day was crisp. Not bad for January, and nothing like the one he’d experienced at the time he came here.

Again, in his mind he thought about it as a shift in location rather than time. He'd never told a soul about it. Instead, he didn't share much about his past, nothing that would give him away. Even the story he'd told Maria José had left out key details.

Surprisingly, going back to before his birth was easy, he'd discovered. It was simpler. Life was simpler. People didn't need paperwork and birth certificates, just a handshake and a willingness to put in a day's work for a day's pay. Manuel had given him a place to sleep for a few nights, and his first paycheck covered a room in a boarding house. Now, he rented a first-floor flat with a small garden outside, where he'd planted vegetables and flowers last summer. He had a few furnishings he'd picked up second-hand.

Like Fofo, this dog had found him. She was hanging around a job site, begging for bits of food. The other men brushed her away, but Almiro had a soft spot and gave her half of his sandwich. She was dainty about eating it, not wolfing it down like he'd expected. When she was finished, she turned those big brown eyes toward him with what looked a smile on her face.

"You have pretty brown eyes," he'd said, giving her a pet. It was obvious to everyone that they had chosen each other.

Manuel shook his head good-naturedly. "You'll need to take the dog home, Almiro," he said. "She can't be hanging around work all the time."

Almiro grinned at the memory and pushed the door open for the dog. She sat while he unleashed her. He filled her water dish, and she lapped it heartily before flopping on the floor. He bent over and gave her a pat before he grabbed his hat and gloves.

His days were easy, now. He found serenity in doing the same things and simple pleasures like hot coffee, a pretty sunrise and the dog's soft muzzle. Almiro didn't need much, and he had everything he needed. He'd come to this new place and found a place in it.

Da Rocha

Officer Da Rocha had been on the force long enough he knew how things worked. He had been assigned to get a statement from a man who had been beaten, and, if possible, investigate who had attacked him.

He had not been assigned to figure out what happened to a mystery woman. As far as the department was concerned, the only crime was assault and battery against a citizen.

Da Rocha knew this, and yet he couldn't stop thinking about the woman – Julinha. Who was she? Was she safe and in hiding? Or was she dead? As a cop, he suspected the latter. Didn't that make it a potential crime worth investigating? He knew the answer he'd get from the brass at work.

They had a few domestic calls. Since the revolution, women had been speaking up more, although he suspected most continued to suffer in silence. Portugal was a patriarchal society, and cops didn't want to get involved in family matters.

He twisted the ring on his finger. Da Rocha didn't feel that way. He loved his wife – his bride – just as much as the day he had married her. Never would he have dreamed of striking her. Not then, not now. Not even when they argued, which wasn't often. But he welcomed the discourse, and he knew most men didn't. They believed they were right and that was that.

His mother had raised him, though, absent a father. He'd been killed in the service, and she never remarried. She took what she wanted in a man and made it into her son, knowing he would make a fine husband and father one day.

Officer Da Rocha shoved the report into a folder and tossed it on the corner of his desk. It slid over the edge and hung there, balanced. He looked at it. One millimeter more and it would skitter to the floor. He was that close to letting it go, but then he knew he couldn't. He grabbed the folder and pulled it back from the edge, setting it squarely in the center of his desk.

He had to find out. If she was alive, she would need help. If she was dead, someone needed to be told.

Peres

Peres stared blearily at the computer screen. He'd been scanning department files and cursing they weren't better coded in the database to be easily searchable by keyword. He reached unconsciously for his coffee, but the cup was cold and empty. He clattered it on the desktop and pushed back with both hands. He stretched and sighed.

"Long day?" Aida asked.

Peres gave her a smirk. "No thanks to you," he chided.

"Me?" she asked innocently, then grinned. "She wasn't on drugs," Aida added as Peres made a face.

"No," he agreed. "But it's weird. She says she's looking for her son, but she's vague about some of the details. I can't even find anything in the system, and I'm back 20 years."

"So, tell her you've got nothing," Aida suggested with a shrug. She leaned against the file cabinet.

"It's not that easy," he answered.

Aida waited for an explanation; an eyebrow raised. Peres sighed and ran his hands through his hair.

"I need more coffee," he said, getting up. "Are you coming?"

"Yes, sir," she said, and followed him through the double doors.

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It was Aida who'd suggested he try the internet instead of the clunky department system to dig up information on the woman's missing son. If it was real, it would have been in the news, she reasoned, and newspaper archives would turn it up quicker than scrolling through department files that may not have been coded properly.

Peres was drilling down into yet another Google search, looking for reports of a boy missing from a metro station. A sentence fragment caught his eye: "boy was found in a metro station." He glanced at the clipboard. That was the station she'd told him. He looked back at the screen, skimming the details of the short story. It wasn't what he thought he'd find. He'd expected to find a news report about her missing son, not a child found at a metro station.

And yet, wasn't that what she wanted? To find him?

Peres leaned closer, reading the article, looking for details. "There," he breathed out. He picked up his pen and jotted on the notepad: Officer Fortes.

He scrolled to the top of the page and looked for the publication date. His stomach sank. October 1976.

Damn it, he thought. *That can't be right*. He clicked back to check the link and went to the same page, the same article, the same date. It was right, but it made no sense. That was more than 40 years ago and the woman he'd talked to couldn't be older than early 30s. Maybe it wasn't her son. But it was the only thing he'd found so far.

He tapped the notepad, then underlined the officer's name. He could look up Fortes' files. Forty years would mean Fortes was retired. *Maybe even dead*, he thought with a grimace.

What am I doing? he wondered. He recalled the woman's eyes welling with tears as she talked about her son. She was either a good actress, a total lunatic or telling the truth. He tapped the pen onto the paper a couple of times. "Aw, hell."

Peres pushed back from the desk, peeled the top paper off the notebook and stuck it into the file folder at the top of his pile. He lifted his office phone and pushed a few buttons. Aida answered.

"Hey, I've got a little project for you," Peres said. "Can you find department files from 40 years ago?"

Nuno and Leonor

Leonor had placed a typewriter-like device with a TV screen on the coffee table. She alternated between typing and wiggling a little half-ball in small circles. After a few minutes, she turned it toward him and pointed.

Nuno looked and saw himself. It was a picture from his driver's license, so it was a few years younger. Back when he'd been with Érica. And happy. Even though he wasn't smiling, the eyes looking back lacked the pain he always saw in the mirror these days. The brief article that accompanied it said he was missing, and police were seeking information about his whereabouts. It mentioned he might be depressed or suicidal.

Nuno shivered. It was true. *How had they figured it out so quickly?* he wondered. He'd only been gone less than a day, he reasoned. Then reality rushed back with an almost audible sound: He was in the future. This article was surely decades old.

"Was that in a newspaper?" he asked. Leonor nodded and flicked the circle device. The page shifted, and he could see the newspaper name, date and page number. The date, at least, seemed more familiar, more normal to him.

She watched him as he read, saw the recognition in his eyes, the truth there.

"How did I get here?" he asked.

"I was hoping you could tell me," she said.

He shook his head. "I told you everything I know." He looked at her.

"How did you know?" he asked, tilting his head toward the story on the screen.

Leonor pursed her lips and pushed back from the desk. "That's a long story," she said.

"I told you my long, sad story," he said. "Really, I need to know how you knew about me. Do others?" He thought about the woman at the hospital who took his information and assumed his birthdate was wrong and the pharmacist who gave him an odd look when he asked about the election.

Leonor shook her head. She shifted on the sofa and curled up on one end. Nuno sat at the other end, stiffly.

"I'm different," she began. "I see things. ... People. ... I experience things."

Nuno looked at her puzzled.

Leonor tried again. "Sometimes, I go into a trance, sort of, and I, uh, I see things. Or not really. Usually it's just dark, and I hear things. But then sometimes, I see things. People."

"I don't understand," Nuno said. "Did you see me?"

Leonor was picking nervously at a sofa cushion. She looked up and met his eyes.

"Yes," she said. "That's why I looked you up. I saw you in that other place, and then I saw you in the metro."

"Where's this other place?" he asked.

Leonor shrugged. She'd gone back to running her fingernail along the edge of the cushion.

"It's dark. And cold. So cold. And usually, I can't see anything. But sometimes I feel something, or I hear someone crying, like a baby or a child or even an adult. When I go toward the sound, it stops, and I come back." She looked at him to gauge his reaction.

Nuno looked at her intently and nodded. "Go on," he said.

Leonor realized he might not think she was crazy. After all, he had somehow traveled through time. Nuno said again, "Please, go on. Tell me when you saw me."

"Sometimes, I see a light, and once in a while, I see a person. I go through the dark and cold toward this light, and sometimes, there will be a person, a man, woman or child in the light. And I get the feeling they can see me, too."

"But I never saw you before today," Nuno said.

Leonor shrugged. "But I saw you. There. You were standing there, just calm, looking straight ahead, and then you seemed to see something, and when I stepped in front of you, I looked into your eyes and we saw each other. I know you saw something. I saw your pupils change."

"What happened then?" he asked.

"You disappeared, and I was back here. Well, not here exactly. But back in reality."

"When was this?" Nuno asked. "When did you see me?"

"Ten years ago," Leonor said.

Nuno looked up intently. "But how? How did you know it was me?"

Leonor got up from the sofa and pulled several books from a satchel by the door. He realized they were journals. She set them on the sofa between them as she took her seat. This time, she curled her legs under her and hugged the sofa cushion to her chest. She rested her chin on it, staring at the books.

Nuno reached over and took the top one. The pages fell open, and he saw himself, sketched in pencil, pen, pastels, charcoal. Quick sketches. Detailed drawings. Different styles. And all different poses, as if she'd seen him from all sides, in motion and full of emotion. He was laughing, crying, full of wonder, joy, despair. It was all there on her pages.

"I'm stunned," he finally said. "How did you do this? I mean, it's wonderful artwork. You're very talented." He kept turning pages, seeing himself over and over.

"How often did you see me?" he asked finally.

"Once," she said.

He tore his eyes from the page to look at her. "Once? How did you capture all of this emotion? All of these poses?"

Leonor shrugged. "I think maybe I really see things, fully, from just one quick glance. I can do it with other people, too, but it's easier with people from that place. Maybe because it's so pure. There's no distraction."

"You've been drawing me for years?" he asked.

She nodded.

“But why?” he asked.

“Because I have to,” she said. “You haunt my dreams. It’s one way to sleep.”

There was a long pause as he eyed the other books next to him. Then his eye was drawn to a shelf where many other volumes were lined up.

“Those aren’t all me, are they?” he asked.

She shook her head.

“No, there are a few people I see. I draw all of them.”

“How did you know me?” Nuno asked suddenly, remembering the newspaper article.

“You told me your name,” Leonor reminded him, “today at the metro. And you told me where to find you. When I had your name, I could look you up, and that’s how I knew who you were.”

He nodded.

“But we don’t know why I’m here?”

“No,” she said.

“Why do you have your trances?” he asked.

Leonor shook her head. “I don’t know. I’ve had them since I was a kid. They used to just be once in a while, but they’ve been more frequent lately. It feels different. And now you’re actually here. You came through that other place.”

“I don’t remember,” Nuno said. “I was in the tunnel, and then the train hit me, and then I woke up with a gash on my head.”

He gingerly touched the bandage on his forehead.

“You probably have a headache,” she said, getting up. She brought a water glass and handed him his pill bottle. “Take this, and I’ll get you a pillow and blanket so you can sleep.” She disappeared down the hallway.

Leonor came back with a blanket and pillow, then stood back, hands on her hips. “I’m sorry. This is probably a lot for you to deal with.” Nuno nodded.

It was a lot, but it was good to focus on something else for a while. He’d stopped crying and didn’t feel like weeping. He felt tired and headachy, but he thought he felt a little different, too. Like maybe there was a little hope instead of just dread and despair.

Chapter 17

Guilherme

When they parted, Gui had a name, address, phone number and even an email address for the man he believed was his father's co-worker. He and Vitória thanked Roberta and Otília profusely, promising to stay in touch with updates. He'd resisted calling from the church. Rather, he wanted to meet Silvio in person. He thought he might get better information and not seem unhinged.

The whole thing was still so surreal.

"Do you feel better?" Vitória asked as they made their way home, taking the metro several stops to their neighborhood.

Gui nodded. "I do. It's weird. I still don't know what to think about it, but I feel better."

"They were very nice," Vitória commented. "A little excitable but nice."

He grinned. "Agreed. I don't know if they were like that in school. Maybe. It was a long time ago."

Vitória nodded. "Do you want me to go with you?" She pointed her nose at the note he still held grasped in his hand.

He looked at it and traced the corner with his thumb.

"No, I think I'll go alone," he said. "You don't mind, do you?"

"Not at all," she said. "I understand. It's your dad, your story to share. I just wanted you to know I would go, if you wanted."

He took her hand and squeezed it, then looked at her and smiled. "And I love you for it," he said. She smiled back.

The lights flickered on the train, plunging them into momentary darkness. As they came on, their gaze held steady on each other. They didn't see the woman reflected in the glass, watching them from the empty platform as the train pulled into the station. And when they disembarked, she was gone.

Sol

In the end, she told them, as much as she could. As much as she, herself, understood.

Gathered in the dark warehouse, they waited, flashlights ready, at least one in each hand, and several others propped up.

Mouth held his under his chin and made menacing and goofy faces. Beatriz rolled her eyes. Carlos ignored him, intent on Sol. She paced the length of the wall, making a few scuffs with her boot in the dirt, marking the points she needed to hit.

“How long will this take?” Mouth asked.

“You got someplace you need to be?” Beatriz asked. “Wait, do you actually have a date?” she teased.

“Yeah, with my *real* friends,” he threw back, and they all laughed.

“When you get a *real* girlfriend, then we’ll see,” Beatriz said. Mouth made a face at her.

“OK,” Sol said, and all eyes went to her. She turned to them, illuminated by their flashlight beams.

“I’m going to work as quickly as I can, like I do – like we do – when we tag. But because it’s just me, it will take longer. So, if you get tired, or something, maybe you can just set your lights down, because I need to do this in one go. I can’t stop and come back. If you can, please keep talk to a minimum.” She looked pointedly at Mouth.

“Yeah, yeah,” he said and made a zipping motion at his lips. “I’ll do what I can.”

“Thank you, Rufino,” she said and gave him a warm smile. He grinned back.

“Thank you, everyone,” she said, turning to Carlos and Beatriz. “I couldn’t do this without you, so thank you for your help. And for your friendship.”

Beatriz went to her then and hugged her. They rocked gently for a moment, and then Sol pulled back and readjusted her cap. She pulled up her bandana, and her friends followed suit. They spaced themselves out and readied their flashlights.

Sol turned and in one fluid motion pulled a can of spray paint from her bag, flipped off the cap, shifted it to her left hand and began shaking. Her right hand pulled out another can and flicked off the cap. Both cans shook up and down in rhythm. She tested the left with a little puff, and stepped up to the wall, arcing black paint against the concrete. Her right hand continued to shake, as her left hand danced up and down, creating random lines. Satisfied, she began adding the dark blue in her right hand. Both hands moved up and down, adding color to the wall. She moved along it, creating the framework.

Behind her, Beatriz, Rufino and Carlos stood like statues, mouths open behind their makeshift masks, eyes wide. The random lines and arcs were taking shape. Even now, they could see it was all planned to come together into something – although they weren’t sure what. While Sol had told them about her life before and the friends she left behind – or ahead – she hadn’t told them what she was painting. That would be a surprise.

At first, they thought she had to be joking or lying or perhaps suffering from a mental breakdown. As they talked it out and asked her questions, it became as clear as it could. Sol still didn’t know exactly how or why she had traveled through time, only that she had. The metro station had somehow transported her 20 years into the past, to a time before she was even born.

They talked for hours about the implications, the what-ifs. But they had no answers. No one had traveled through time, had they?

During one of their last talks, they sat around the kitchen table, drinking beer while the guys smoked cigarettes.

Mouth wanted her to sell her story to a newspaper or magazine and “become famous.”

“You thought I was crazy,” Sol said. “Why would I want to let the whole world think I was crazy?”

Mouth shrugged.

“I don’t want to be famous,” Sol continued. “Not for that. Maybe for my art but not for being a freak. And I don’t have any way to prove it,” she added. “There’s no way to prove that I’m from another time. Even if I ‘know’ what will happen, there’s a chance anyone could guess things. There’s really nothing that I know that would prove it beyond a doubt.”

“She’s right,” Carlos said. “It’s a strange thing, but it’s a gift. To her and to us. We need to accept it and help her.”

Beatriz, despite wanting to know for so long what Luzia had been hiding, wasn’t sure what to make of it.

“Why didn’t you tell me right away?”

Sol raised her eyebrows at her.

“And you would have what, thrown me out into the street? Called me crazy? Sent me packing?”

Beatriz backpedaled.

“No, no, no, I wouldn’t have. We wouldn’t have.”

“That first night,” Sol countered. “Hi, I think I’ve traveled through time. Can I hang out with you while I figure this out?”

Beatriz looked down. Sol reached for her hand and held it.

“It’s OK. I know it sounds crazy. I’m grateful you finally came around to it now. Back then, we didn’t have each other.” She squeezed Beatriz’s hand.

Beatriz looked up with tears in her eyes. “No, but we do now.” She wiped at her eyes with her free hand. They both smiled at each other.

“*Que merda*,” Mouth cursed. “Can you two lay off it for a while? We’re trying to have a discussion here.” But he grinned at them.

Beatriz and Sol dropped hands and picked up Mouth’s and Carlos’, sitting on either side of them. The four sat holding hands in a circle, looking at one another.

“Will you help me?” Sol asked. They all looked at her. She dropped her eyes.

“Help you ... do what?” Carlos finally asked.

“I need to send a message to my friends,” she said. “I think I’ve found a way, but I’ll need your help.”

They all let out a sigh. And Beatriz a little sob.

“What is it?” Sol asked.

“I thought you wanted to go home,” Beatriz said. “And I couldn’t bear for you to go!”

Sol looked at her. Even if she wanted to go home, she had no idea how to do it. But she didn’t want to, and she told them that.

She spent a long time explaining her life and why it was so much better now, in her new reality.

They listened attentively. Even Mouth stopped talking and just let her speak.

Finally, she was talked out.

“How can we help?” Carlos asked.

Sol smiled. “Do you have a flashlight?”

And now they stood in the dark, watching their friend design a wall-size piece of art using spray paint and raw talent.

An hour passed, but still they stood, stock still, flashlights raised. They would shift them a bit, adjust their postures a little as their arms sagged, but they were drawn to the creation in front of them.

Layer upon layer went on the wall, wet on wet, lowlights to highlights. They marveled at how quickly it came together. Finally, they were stunned by the vision before them.

From a swirling cosmos, with stars and planets, a figure emerged, her hand outstretched, the Earth spinning on her fingertip. Her black hair flowed freely, her dark eyes twinkled, her mouth smiling, her purple bandana loose around her neck. The image seemed to want to leap off the wall, it was so vibrant.

Sol stepped back to check her work. Satisfied, she walked to the left side of the painting and sprayed a date: When she disappeared. Then she went to the right side, and sprayed another date: When she appeared in time. At last, she signed her name, “Sol,” and hit it with the highlights. She wanted to write more, but she didn’t know what. Maybe that would be enough, she thought. She hoped it would.

Sol dropped the last spray can, and it rolled in an arc at her feet. Beatriz stepped up behind her and wrapped her arms around her. Together, they stood looking at it.

“It’s beautiful,” Beatriz breathed into her ear. Sol nodded in agreement.

“Do you always do this art?” Mouth asked.

“With my friends, yes,” Sol said. “It’s our signature piece. With them, we can do it in about 20 minutes.”

“You’re a great artist,” Carlos said. “This is great art. It should be where someone will see it.”

“I hope they will,” Sol said. “About 20 years from now.”

Almiro

Maria José’s sandwiches were tucked in a bag under his arm. Almiro swung his other arm as he walked with long strides down the street. He was meeting Manuel and the crew at the new job site, and while Manuel wouldn’t mind if he was a few minutes late, especially because he’d been helping Maria, he wanted to be on time.

Building could be physically exhausting, but he loved seeing a project come together, sometimes literally from the ground up.

He rounded the corner and caught sight of them at the end of the block. They were just starting to unload equipment. He increased his pace to a jog.

“*Bom dia*, Almiro,” they greeted him. “Where have you been?”

“Picking up lunch,” he said. He held the bag up.

“Is that from Maria José?” Rubem asked, rubbing his hands together with a grin of anticipation.

“Yeah,” Almiro said with a grin of his own. “I helped her set up this morning at the market, so I got sandwiches for us.”

“All of us?” Rubem asked.

Almiro nodded. “*Sim, sim, sim.*”

“All right!” Rubem exclaimed. “It’s a good day!”

They all are good days, Almiro thought.

Manuel was giving directions. They were to repair an exterior wall, damaged by a leaking water pipe. It would require them to take up the sidewalk bricks and dig up the pipe, replace it, fix the wall and replace the sidewalk.

Almiro grabbed a chisel and mallet and began to work a sidewalk brick free. Once the first one was out, it would be easier to pull out the others. When he had an opening, Rubem reached down and starting pulling bricks free, increasing the opening. Soon, the pile was high, and two other workers grabbed shovels to begin to dig out the compacted soil and transfer it onto a tarp.

The work progressed through the rest of the morning, the hole growing deeper and wider around the exposed pipe. They worked on the wall, too, opening it up to replace the damaged pieces.

When they broke for lunch, Almiro passed around the bag. Maria had insisted he not pay for the sandwiches. He felt he should, since he had ordered half a dozen. When he tried to press a few coins into her hand, she pushed him away playfully.

“You helped me today. The sandwiches are your payment,” she said. When he looked like he would protest again she cut him off. “Are you arguing with an old woman who’s set in her ways? And stubborn too?”

Almiro smiled sheepishly. “*Obrigado*, Maria José, my first friend.”

“*Nada*,” she said. She paused then to look deeply at him.

“Am I really your first friend?” she asked.

“Here, yes,” he said.

“But not your only,” she said.

He shook his head.

“No, I have other friends. And I have Cassie. She’s like a best friend.”

“*Oi*,” Maria said. “You spoil that dog. You’re not giving her my good sandwiches, are you?”

“No,” Almiro said. “Although she does have good taste ...” He grinned as Maria gave him a wink.

Now, as the bag came back to him, he realized there were two sandwiches left inside. He glanced around and counted the men who already ate heartily. Maria had packed one for Castanha as well. Almiro grinned as he pulled his out and unwrapped the greasy paper. Even cold they were the best. He sank his teeth into it and chewed while he listened to Rubem tell a story about a girl he wanted to ask out. They all laughed and ribbed him like older brothers.

The sun slanted down, casting lengthening shadows at their feet. Sunset came early in winter, and it got cold quickly. They usually wrapped up outside jobs earlier in the winter months. Today, Manuel had them start to load equipment. Almiro and Rubem set up a barricade around the gaping hole in the sidewalk and the pile of bricks.

Manuel offered Almiro a ride home.

“No, *obrigado*,” Almiro said. “I’ll catch the metro.” He hitched a thumb over his shoulder. Almiro knew Manuel would have to drive out his way to drop him at home. And Almiro didn’t mind riding the metro now. After so many days and nights, it was sort of like an old friend too, although it also seemed like a lifetime ago.

Manuel waved, and Almiro tucked the bag with the dog’s sandwich under his arm and headed across the street to the metro station.

Julinha

Catharina stepped outside and pushed the redial button on her cellphone. The clinic receptionist answered, and she asked for the doctor who had seen Julinha.

“I need to know if everything is OK with Julinha,” Catharina said.

“What do you mean?” asked the doctor.

“Did she check out OK? Were there any concerns with her, uh, cognitive abilities?”

There was a pause. “I can’t answer that, you know that,” she said. “Why do you ask?”

Now Catharina paused. “I can’t say,” she said, “but I’m concerned about her mental state.”

The doctor sighed. “She’s obviously been through a lot. It would be ‘normal’ to have some issues,” she said.

“So, you have concerns?” Catharina asked.

“I didn’t say that,” the doctor said. “I think she has a lot to get through.” The doctor paused, thinking. “Why are you concerned?”

“She said something that doesn’t make sense,” Catharina said, weighing how much she could tell another professional about a client. “It’s crazy, but she really believes it.” Then, Catharina had a thought.

“Can you look at her report?” Catharina asked.

“Yes,” the doctor began, “but ...”

Catharina cut her off. “I just want you to look at it,” she said.

The doctor sighed. Catharina thought she could hear her clicking on a keyboard. “OK.”

“What’s her birthdate?” Catharina asked.

“What? Why?” the doctor asked, confused.

“Just please look at her birthdate.”

There was silence on the line.

“Do you see it?” Catharina asked.

“Yes,” the doctor answered.

“Do you understand?” Catharina asked.

“I’m not sure,” the doctor said. “You mean she thinks ...”

“It’s 1979,” Catharina said.

“Huh,” the doctor said, which Catharina thought was slightly amusing. She’d never stumped a doctor before. “I’ll have her come in for an MRI,” the doctor said. “Do you have a number for her?”

Catharina passed along the shelter’s number and promised to get the clinic Julinha’s cell number as soon as she got one.

Dores

Dores awoke with a start. Twilight light filtered through high windows, and the surrounding cots came into focus. Her brain pieced together where she was: a shelter. And when she was: the wrong time. Her stomach lurched.

She kicked her feet over the edge of the cot and stumbled toward the restroom sign, trying to hold in what her stomach wanted to throw up. There wasn’t much, but it splashed into the toilet bowl and she retched, more dry heaves than anything. When she felt slightly better, she flushed and exited the stall to wash her hands and face. Her reflection was too pale, her eyes too dark and sunken. Lowering her head, she swished some water in her mouth and spit, getting rid of the taste of bile.

What am I doing here? she wondered again. Tomás flitted through her mind. Her beautiful boy.

He’d be a man now, she reminded herself. Older than you are now.

An image of her older brother flashed through her mind. Then her father. Then Tomás’ father. She wondered if any of them were still alive now. Her mother was gone, but she had family and friends. Could she find them? Would she want to?

Then she thought: *Am I here, too?*

A shiver wracked her body, and she gripped the sides of the sink. She had just seemed to accept that she was in a different time, so focused on finding her child. But now she had even more questions than answers and no one to ask. The police might be able to help find Tomás, but she couldn’t ask them to find her, too.

Get a grip, she thought, staring deeply into her eyes. You can’t fall apart here. Not now. Not after everything. You’re here for a reason. You’re here for Tomás. Go find your son.

Dores turned and hurried from the haunted eyes – her eyes.

Peres and Isabela

Peres lucked out. Not only was Fortes still alive, she was still sharp and living nearby with her husband. Isabela had married a fellow officer and made it work, through nearly 40 years, two kids, three grandkids and more cases than she could recall. But she did recall the little boy from the metro.

“Oh, he was lovely,” she told Peres as her husband slid a plate of biscuits across the table. Isabela was pouring tea from a pretty china tea pot. Peres wished it was coffee, but he didn’t want to be rude. “Milk? Sugar?” she asked. When he hesitated, she added them to his cup.

“What do you remember about that case?” Peres prompted. Isabela’s husband picked up a biscuit and dunked it into his cup. She gave him a sideways glance and a wry smile but said nothing. Instead, she looked Peres in the eye. “Everything,” she said simply.

“Who was the boy?” Peres asked.

“His name was Tomás, but he couldn’t tell me his mom’s name. He didn’t seem to know what a dad was. He obviously had been well cared for, but we never found his mother or anyone looking for him.”

Peres had brightened at the name.

“What was his last name?”

“‘Doo-shoos,’” Isabela said, giving the phonetic pronunciation. “Maybe French?” she asked. “We never had any luck tracking it down.”

Peres smiled. “DeSouza?”

Isabela looked at him sharply. “Oh. Yes, that could be it.”

Peres could see her mind beginning to whirl, conjuring details she hadn’t thought of in decades. “How did you come up with that?” She paused. “How did you find me?”

“I may have found his mom,” he said. “But it’s crazy. You’ll think I’m crazy.”

“You must tell me,” Isabela insisted. “I always knew something had happened to her. She wouldn’t just let him go.”

Peres sat back in his chair, unsure how to begin. “A woman came into the office the other day. She said she was looking for her son. He’d disappeared in the metro station. But she was really vague about when it happened. I mean most parents would be able to give you the exact date that something like that happened, but she was unsure. There was a lot about her that was ‘off,’ if you know what I mean. But I think she was sincere.”

Isabela nodded. “What’s her name? What does she look like?”

“Dores DeSouza,” Peres said. “She’s got long, dark hair, slight build, slim. Maybe mid-30s. Looks like she hasn’t slept well. Nervous.”

Isabela had stopped nodding. “Mid-30s?” Peres nodded.

“But that was, what 40 years ago? She’d have to be closer to my age,” Isabela said. Her gray hair was pulled up in a bun on top of her head, her face lined, her age obvious. Her husband reached over and patted her folded hands. She pulled them away and put them in her lap.

“That’s what I thought, too,” Peres said. “But she didn’t have ID. And she was homeless.”

“But where did she come from? And why is she looking for him now?”

Peres shrugged. “I don’t know. She identified him as a 4-year-old boy. I guess she was worried.”

Isabela looked confused. “But Tomás is nearly 50 now.” Her voice trailed off. “None of this makes sense.”

Peres leaned forward, elbows on the table. “I agree. Have you stayed in touch?”

Isabela shook her head. “Not for a long time. Tomás couldn’t be adopted because we couldn’t determine his parentage, but he lived with a great foster family. He grew up well-loved and accepted as their own. We used to chat occasionally and send Christmas cards. But I’ve not heard from his foster mom in a few years.” Her voice trailed off. They both thought the same thing, that perhaps the other woman was dead.

“And Tomás?” Peres prompted.

“I let him live his life,” Isabela said. “I don’t know how much he remembered. He was so young. Maybe it all became like a dream. I didn’t want to keep that alive.”

Peres nodded thoughtfully. Her husband slurped his tea noisily and then spoke for the first time since introductions were made at the door.

“I think I met her.”

Peres and Isabela turned in slow unison toward him. He took another biscuit and broke it in half, dunking half into his cup before biting off the soggy bit. He glanced up at them and smiled.

“You mentioned the station. It’s closed now for renovations. I have to walk 2 kilometers to the next station. It makes for a long trip to the market. I like the one in Alvalade, you know the one. That TV chef made it famous when he visited, and now buses come with tourists so they can take pictures.” His voice trailed off. They stared at him.

Isabela cleared her throat. “You mentioned the metro station,” she began, and he picked it up.

“Oh, yes, that’s right. I was going past when a woman came out looking lost. I thought it was odd that she would have been down there. All that dust and dirt and such. She looked like she didn’t know where she was. I offered to call someone for her.” He touched his shirt pocket where his cellphone bulged.

“Why do you think it was her?” Peres prompted.

“She was a tiny thing, with long dark hair, nervous.”

He paused.

“And she asked what the date was.”

Isabela and Peres exchanged a quick glance.

“And?” Isabela asked.

“I told her. ‘September 14th.’ And it was like she was waiting for the year, too, so I told her: ‘2019.’ She looked like she saw a ghost when I said the year.”

“Did she say anything?” Peres asked.

“No,” he said, shaking his head slowly. “I wanted to call you – the police – for her,” he said, “but she said no thank you.”

“She didn’t mention her son?” Peres asked.

“No. It was a short conversation,” he said. “And I had ice cream I wanted to get home before it melted. Would you like some ice cream? It’s chocolate swirl, my favorite. I probably shouldn’t eat so many sweets, but I’m not going to live forever, so why shouldn’t I eat what I want?”

Isabela reached over to cover his hand with hers. “It’s OK. Thank you for telling us.”

He quieted, and Isabela looked at Peres.

“Where is she, this woman?”

“I sent her to the shelter so she had a place to sleep.”

Isabela nodded. “Let’s pay her a visit.”

Nuno and Leonor

Nuno tossed fitfully, twisting in sleep where he’d stood still in life. The train bore down on him. He locked eyes with the driver, and the impact jolted him awake with a cry.

In the semi-dark, reality flooded back. He was in Leonor’s flat, he realized with wave of relief. Yet the dream still pulled at the edges, not wanting to be banished yet. He pressed his eyes closed and saw the driver again, the startled recognition that he – Nuno – was real.

And then the connection that flashed into a bright light. Nuno realized that the brightness of that light had burned a spot in his vision. Wherever he looked, he had to peer around the darkness. He blinked to try and make it go away.

Leonor wordlessly flipped on a light in the corner. He hadn’t seen her come in, staring off into space, she guessed. And he jumped at the flick of the bulb.

“*Desculpe*,” Leonor said. “I didn’t mean to startle you.” She paused when he didn’t say anything. “You cried out,” she prompted.

Nuno nodded.

“Bad dream?” she asked. He nodded again.

“How’s your head?”

Nuno thought about it and noticed it didn’t hurt as much as he thought it might. “It’s not as bad,” he said.

Leonor got up and returned with water in a glass. “I put on the kettle for tea,” she said.

“I’m keeping you awake,” Nuno said. “I’m sorry.”

She gave a little rueful smile. “I don’t sleep that well myself,” she said.

Nuno remembered their conversation from earlier but still felt like he was keeping her up. He’d already relied on her good graces for a lot. Probably in the morning she’d send him off, and he had no idea what he’d do then.

“What’s your plan?” Leonor asked, as if reading his thoughts.

Nuno shrugged. “My plan was foiled,” he said quietly. “I wanted to end my life, but here I am.”

“Is it really that bad?” Leonor asked gently.

He looked at her and saw kind eyes. He wanted to tell her, but he didn’t want to cry again.

“I think so. Thought so,” he amended.

“But not now?” she asked.

Nuno shrugged.

The kettle started to whistle, and Leonor hurried to hush it. In a couple of minutes, she returned with a tray of steaming cups and a tin of biscuits.

She dunked a biscuit in her tea cup before popping it in her mouth.

Nuno followed suit. It was sweet and soggy, and he realized he was famished.

“Let me see what I have in the fridge,” Leonor said, watching him wolf down several cookies.

Ten minutes later, he’d finished a hunk of cheese, some crackers, several plump dates and three handfuls of grapes.

“You were telling me about yourself,” Leonor prompted. She sat cross-legged, wearing gray pants and a long-sleeve top made out of what looked like T-shirt material. She’d pulled the crocheted blanket across her lap and held her tea cup between her hands. She alternately sipped and pressed it to her lips.

Nuno leaned, elbows on knees, and traced his finger through the crumbs on the plate. “I told you everything,” he said.

“No, I mean about you. What do you like? What are your hobbies? Interests? Are you close to your family? Do you ...” Her voice trailed off. He wondered what she’d started to say but let it go.

“Well, I like to read,” he said. “And I’m sort of good at fixing things. Like when a door doesn’t hang right, and you need to adjust the hinges. I can fix a leaky sink.”

“That’s great,” Leonor said. “You could get a job as a handy man.”

Nuno shrugged. “There aren’t any jobs,” he said. “I’ve tried everything. Even restaurants are cutting back on hiring waiters.”

“Um,” Leonor started. “You’re not in 1984 anymore.”

He looked up at her.

“We have plenty of jobs here, now,” she said. “With those kind of building skills, you could get a job as a superintendent and maybe even get a break on your rent. You’ll still probably need a flatmate, but that’s not so bad.”

Nuno stared at her. He realized she was telling him he could stay here in the future. Start over. Try again. It rushed in on him, like a huge wave crashing on the shore. He was rocked by it.

He slumped back against the sofa, his jaw slack.

He closed his mouth with a snap.

“You’re saying I should stay,” he said.

She tilted her head.

“You’re here. Do you have any idea how to get back? ’Cause I sure don’t.”

Slowly he shook his head. Somehow, he had felt like this was only temporary, like a stopping point on a journey. But Leonor had looked at the situation and found the only probable solution. Nuno had no way to go back, so he’d have to stay.

“But what ...” he started, then stopped. “How ...” Nuno wasn’t even sure what to ask.

“I dunno,” Leonor said. “But it seems to me that you’ll need to figure out how to live again, because you’ve been given a new chance at life, and it’s an all-new life at that.”

Nuno looked from her around the room. The strangeness of it. And yet, it was real. He could feel the sofa, the fabric under his fingertips. He could see the books on shelves, the odd shape of the “smart TV,” as she’d called it. It was a mix of what he knew and what he didn’t. What he understood and what was a mystery. And in that moment, he realized the overwhelming sadness was gone, not just muted, but missing.

He nodded his head as he turned his gaze back to her. “I guess you’re right,” he said. “I’m not sad anymore.”

Leonor smiled. That made one of them.

Chapter 18

Guilherme

Silvio greeted Gui warmly, shaking his hand heartily before settling his bulk back into his chair. Gui sat opposite and ordered coffee from the waiter. In the end, Gui had decided it might be best to call and arrange a meeting rather than spring himself on the old man. After all, Silvio had to be in his 70s or 80s, and Gui didn't know anything about him. If he wasn't in good health, it might be dangerous to simply show up, he thought.

Silvio had accepted the invitation without hesitation. Gui was a little surprised. And Silvio wanted to meet immediately, so they'd arranged to get together for breakfast at a café with tables under trees that dappled the sidewalk as the sun peeked through.

Silvio already had a big breakfast laid out before him, and Gui indicated he should continue. They made small talk about the weather until Gui's coffee arrived. Silvio mopped up some egg with bread.

"You probably are wondering why I got in touch after all of these years," Gui began. Silvio nodded and shrugged.

"I can guess," he replied.

Gui looked puzzled.

"Your dad," Silvio said.

Gui smiled. "Yes, that's right. My dad, of course."

"Have you seen him?" Silvio asked.

Gui nearly choked on his coffee.

"What?"

Silvio had stopped, fork midway to his mouth, which was open to receive it. Their eyes met. He put the fork down and closed his mouth.

"I thought maybe he'd gone to see you, too," Silvio said quietly.

Gui's eyes grew wide. He nearly sputtered out his questions.

"You've seen him? When? Where? How?"

Silvio wiped his mouth with a napkin and pushed the plate aside.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I thought when you called that you knew. I mean, I haven't thought of Fernao in a long time. Used to more, especially when I worked. But then I retired, and with kids and grandkids and the wives, I guess I got wrapped up in my own life.

"But a week or so ago, I was sitting right here, at this very table, when your dad came walking down the street."

Gui gaped. While Roberta had told him she'd met a man with the same look and name as her father, she didn't know him. Now Silvio, the last man to see Fernao alive in 1959, was saying he'd seen him within the week.

Gui couldn't think of anything to say, so Silvio pressed on.

"It was the strangest thing, though," he said. "He looked exactly the same. Not a day older than when I worked side by side with him. You look a lot like him, but you look older." Silvio gave him a close look. He leaned his elbows on the table.

"He should be my age," Silvio said. "That was 45 years ago. And Lord knows where he was in between. But even then, if he'd gone and had another life, he should look more like my age than yours."

Gui nodded and finally found his voice.

"You're sure it was him?"

Silvio nodded. "Yes. I called him Fernao, and he answered. It was him. He seemed confused though, talking about finding Neves. Said she wasn't home but she would be able to help him. He mentioned, you, too."

"Me?" Gui squeaked and cleared his throat.

"*Sim, sim*," Silvio said. "He was worried when he couldn't find you and your mum. Mentioned you both by name."

"What else did he say?" Gui asked.

"He said a lot of strange things had been happening, but he didn't elaborate. He told me it was only one day since he'd been at work. He said he fell in the tunnel and hit his head, and when he came out, he was here. Now."

Both men were silent, contemplating it.

"Where did he go?" Gui asked.

Silvio hooked a thumb over his shoulder. "He took off before I could ask anything more. I bought him breakfast, but then he went off in a huff. Said he had to find your mum." Silvio patted his big belly. "I didn't think I'd be able to catch him."

Gui gave a little smile. "Mum is gone now, too, several years ago."

Silvio nodded. "Yes, I saw it in the paper. I'm sorry for your loss."

They were quiet again.

"So, you really believe it was him?" Gui asked. "Not some sort of hoax or trick or joke?"

Silvio shook his head. "No. We were both sure about the other. It had to be him." Silvio paused. "He was wearing his work boots. He was dressed exactly as I saw him the day he disappeared."

Gui was silent.

“What will you do?” Silvio asked.

Gui shrugged. “I don’t know. This is ... I don’t even know what. Crazy. Impossible.”

“It is,” Silvio said. “You’ve taken it pretty well, though. I thought when you got in touch that maybe he’d found you, somehow.”

Gui shook his head. “Someone I went to school with met him in a church. My name stood out to her, and, well, she was surprised by how much he looked like me now, or I guess when I was a little younger.”

“I wish I could be more help,” Silvio said. He waved for the check.

“You’ve been a great help,” Gui acknowledged. “Truly. It was a shot in the dark that you’d know anything about it, and I hit the mark.”

Silvio held out his hand, and Gui shook it.

“Let me know how it turns out. Fernao was a good man. *Is* a good man,” Silvio corrected. “Good luck.”

Wube

The sun was setting in the west, and it tinted the eastern sky shades of cotton candy pink and blue. Wube leaned his elbows on the balcony railing and watched it, twirling a glass in his hands. Sunsets weren’t always great in Lisbon, but the eastern sky was beautiful all the same. A rooftop bar offered the promise of a sunset but delivered on the eastern show.

Behind him, laughter burst out, as several bar guests shared a laugh. On the street below, movement caught his eye, a person walking, and he straightened. There was something about the bouncy walk that made him think of Jazz. It had been years since he’d seen him. Without their glue, he and Jazz had pulled apart, finally finding it too hard to stay friends with the constant reminder that she – Sol – was gone.

A woman’s laugh behind him sent a chill up his spine.

Wube turned slowly, not sure what he would see. Despite the years, it was still fresh – the disappearance.

Several men and women were talking and laughing near the bar. His heart leaped and sank. They were older, much older than he was or Sol would be.

Disappointed, he turned back to the street. The man who walked like Jazz was gone.

“Shit,” Wube said. He downed his drink, set the empty glass on the rail and headed for the door.

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The woman brushed her short graying hair back behind her ear. Despite the poofy bob, she still found herself in old habits, even when it didn't stay in place. Her companions were sharing a story, and she laughed out loud, throwing back her head and exposing a long, still lovely neck.

Across from them, at the balcony, a younger man turned suddenly. She realized she'd probably laughed too loud, which only made her want to laugh more. They all paused, then burst out laughing again.

She saw him turn away, and there was something in his manner, his movement that reminded her of someone. Glancing at her partner, she tried to catch her eye, to get her to look, too, but by the time she did, the man had gone. Only his empty glass remained, balanced on the balcony railing, backlit by the eastern sky at sunset. She stepped away then, toward the glass. Across the bar, she saw him moving toward the exit. He paused near the door, to check his pockets, like he was looking for something.

Cigarettes, she suddenly thought. And it clicked. It was Wube, albeit a good deal older than the last time she'd seen him. She did the mental math and realized he'd be about 36 now, while she'd aged another two decades past that. Sol watched him go and didn't try to stop him. Better to let him live his life without any interference. She'd left her message years ago, and she hoped he and Jazz had found it. In silent salute, she raised her wine glass, and then he was gone.

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Hands shoved in his pockets, Wube walked slowly down the darkening street. He wanted a cigarette, but he'd promised his wife he'd quit. *I shouldn't drink*, he thought. *Then I always want a cigarette.*

She was working late at the hospital, and he'd agreed to go out for a drink at a new rooftop bar with a co-worker, but then he'd texted that he couldn't come. Wube already had ordered his drink, so he watched the paltry sunset and eastern glow. It was as close to art as he got these days. He pushed papers in an office job. It was good money, but it was boring.

He reached a corner and was surprised to realize he wasn't sure where he was. He thought he was heading toward the nearest metro station that would take him home. Wube squinted up at the street name and tried to remember where it was. He glanced both ways and then back down the street behind him. Nothing looked familiar.

Sighing, he dug in his pocket for his phone and opened the map app. It took a couple of seconds to "find" him and place his location on the map. Hunched over his phone, he tried to figure out where he was. He poked at the screen to zoom out but instead it zoomed in, and icons popped up on the map around him.

Wube made a face and tried to "pinch" the map to make it smaller. Instead, he clicked on one of the icons. A small photo displayed at the bottom of the screen with "Street Art" beneath it.

Wube felt his chest tighten, and his hands began to shake. His finger hovered over the image. He touched it.

The picture jumped to the top of the screen, slightly larger. The location populated beneath it, with an address and directions beneath that.

Again, he touched the picture. Now it filled his screen, banded top and bottom in black. His breath came in short gasps, and he staggered backward until he came up against a tile-covered wall.

It was her – Sol. It was like their art but different. In their art, she always wore the bandana, her identity protected.

Wube swiped and another picture, a slightly different angle, filled the screen. Several more swipes revealed more images, including some closeups.

Sol stared back at him, a smile on her lips, eyes sparkling.

“What the hell? What is this?” he mumbled. He found the X in the corner and closed the picture viewer. The address returned. The blue directions button drew his eye. He clicked on it. The map returned with a highlighted route. It was only a few blocks away.

Wube looked up again and down the street in the direction of the so-called street art. They’d considered themselves graffiti artists, but most people thought “artist” was a stretch. He didn’t talk about it. Hell, his wife didn’t even know about that part of his past. He’d only ever hinted that he had a classmate who disappeared. He’d not shared the details or that they were close or that she – Sol – had disappeared immediately after they created one of their murals. Other than Jazz, no one knew that.

He shivered although the night was relatively warm. Turning, he walked up the block wondering if he’d find answers or just more questions.

Almiro

Her face flicked on the window across the aisle. He’d been looking out at the darkness, staring into space, when a woman’s face appeared. It was only an instant, but it was like she was outside the window looking in for just that split second. It made him jump and look around. A few other people were in the train car, but none looked like the woman. She had brown skin, deep brown eyes and a full face. A bright scarf at her neck gave her a modern appearance.

Almiro shivered. He continued to stare at the window for the remainder of the trip, but she didn’t reappear. Reluctantly, he stood up for his stop, still watching the window, wondering if it had just been his imagination. As he stepped out of the door, he looked at the spot outside the train window where he’d seen her. It was just an ordinary train car.

Shaking his head, he headed for the stairs, and he took them two at a time to the top, then double-timed it home, trying to get her face out of his head.

—

In the dream, the young woman walked toward him, her hands shoved deep in her jacket pockets. No noise, just her in a spot light coming toward him in the pitch black. She stopped a few feet from him, her eyes searching his. He could see her breath, like it was cold, but he felt warm. She opened her mouth as if to speak, and the shriek bolted Almiro upright in bed, hands over his ears to try to blot it out. He panted in the dark, eyes squeezed shut, dripping sweat.

It was her, he thought. The girl from the train. Now I'm having nightmares about her.

He pushed the covers back and swung his feet to the floor, smooth wood cool on his skin. Pausing there, he steadied himself, trying to shake the cobwebs from his head, the dream from his mind. But she remained.

He sighed as he headed to the kitchen to make coffee. He knew he was done sleeping this night.

Julinha

Julinha had finished the paperwork and was shown up the stairs to a room on the third floor. The woman who walked her up huffed a little and paused at each landing, but she smiled good-naturedly. "A bit out of shape, I guess." Julinha nodded. She wasn't in a rush. This was all so new to her – she appreciated a few minutes to take it in.

The woman said her name was Lil and explained she volunteered at the center one afternoon a week. Pushing open the door, she let Julinha step in first. The narrow room was simply furnished with a single bed, a wardrobe, a side table with a lamp and a chair with an upholstered cushion. Lil went to the wardrobe and showed her the extra linens and towels. A small bar of soap and bottle of shampoo were laid on top of the towels.

"The bath is at the end of the hall." Lil pointed. "Four of you will share it, so please clean up after yourself."

Lil chattered on about meals and the schedule.

"We have a community closet downstairs. You might be able to find some clothes there," she said, "although you are a tiny thing."

Julinha wrapped her arms around herself. "Thank you for showing me around," she said.

"Of course," Lil said. "You come down when you're ready, and I'll finish the tour of the common areas." Lil closed the door as she left.

Julinha sat on the bed. It was firm but not too hard. She suddenly was exhausted and wanted nothing more than to curl up and sleep. Instead, she pushed herself up and went to the window. It looked out over a courtyard of sorts, with some sparse grass growing around a spindly tree. There were a few benches and a picnic table. The light filtered through the tree leaves and left a patchy pattern on the ground below. It shifted as the wind blew the leaves.

She leaned her head against the window, then drew her eyes up. She could see other buildings, and she knew he was out there somewhere. He had to be looking for her, and that sent a shiver

up her spine. Suddenly, his eyes, black and devilish flashed before you. “You bitch!” she heard him say, and she recoiled, then realized she was seeing her reflection in the window. Her eyes were sunken, darkened. Bruises marked her cheeks.

Julinha turned away quickly and hurried downstairs.

Dores

The dream came again, the dark, cold, the crying. But this time, the sound was closer, all around her. It took several minutes for her to realize she was the one crying, big, heaving sobs. It was how she’d cried for months after Tomás had gone missing. *Tómas*, she thought. And the sobs became even deeper, shuddering through her entire body.

She became aware of a light in the darkness, a dim prick that brightened as it came closer. Her crying eased but didn’t completely subside. The orb of light drew nearer. Dores hiccupped and tried to wipe her eyes, but the tears still flowed, blurring her vision. There was something in the light. Or someone.

“Tomás?” she croaked through her tight throat. The light flickered and went out.

Dores woke sobbing, the ache of her missing child returning with a ferocity she hadn’t felt in months.

“Oh, for God’s sake, quit crying,” someone hissed in the dim room. “Some of us want to sleep.”

“*Desculpe*,” Dores whispered back. “I’m sorry.” She tried burying her head in her pillow but finally gave up and got up. She slid her feet into her shoes and wrapped a borrowed sweater around her shoulders.

The hallway was better lit, and she could hear voices from the kitchen, workers already starting the day’s meals. She inched quietly along the corridor and slipped past the open kitchen door to the exit beyond. They weren’t supposed to leave the shelter at night. The operators were worried about people drinking or doing drugs, but Dores only wanted some air and to walk a little, as had become her nighttime habit.

Sliding the lock on the door, she eased it open and stepped outside. It was chilly but not too cold for an early morning in late September. She was wearing stretchy pants and a long-sleeve T-shirt. Many of the women wore these same stretchy pants. Very few wore dress pants and even fewer wore skirts. Only older women seemed to still dress nicely in public. Although she felt self-conscious about being outside in night clothing, she knew she didn’t look odd.

Dores moved quickly down the paved sidewalk, her shadow flicking out behind and before her as she passed the occasional street lamp. Her reflection kept pace in shop windows.

As she walked, she thought again of the glowing orb that had come toward her in the dream. Dores tried to remember what it looked like, what was inside it, but her memory was fuzzy, too. Somehow, it seemed important, like she needed to know, to remember.

With a start, she realized she'd walked back to the metro station. The entrance was now barricaded, but she could see the darkness yawning behind the chain-link panels. Does shivered but not from cold. The dark reminded her of that other place with crying children and mysterious orbs.

She looked back the way she'd come. She really didn't want to go back. Not to the shelter or even this place or time. She felt the pull of her frequent nightly walks.

It was 2 kilometers to the next station, she recalled the old man saying. She wrapped her arms around herself and headed in that direction.

Benedito

Priscila slid the plate in front of him and sat at her own place. She hadn't said anything. Neither had he. Watching him over her wine glass, she could see how tired he was. The dark circles aged him. She set the glass down and picked up her knife and fork. He barely picked at his food. She ate heartily, even if she didn't feel hungry.

Suddenly, he looked up.

"Where are ...?" He stopped, realizing he'd spoken. She paused, fork half way between her plate and her mouth. Slowly, she lowered it.

"Where are what?" she asked, trying to keep all tone and emotion from her voice.

He paused, looked around the room. His eyes swept back to the table. She knew he could see how she'd cleaned. Everything sparkled.

"My papers," he finally croaked. "Where are my newspapers?"

"I cleaned up," she said as evenly as she could. She barely dared to breathe.

"But I was saving those," Benedito said.

Priscila gave a tiny nod in answer.

"Where are they?" he asked again.

"I threw them out," she said. She knew her voice was tight, but she couldn't help it.

"Why?" he demanded.

Priscila's mind flew to all of the answers she could give. She finally decided on, "Because you don't need to save pictures of a dead man."

Benedito looked at her, hurt and pain and anger filling his eyes. "You think he's dead?"

She nodded again.

"You think I killed him?"

Priscila gulped. And slowly shook her head. “No, Bento. No, you didn’t kill him. But I think he’s gone.”

Now Benedito nodded. “Yeah. They think so, too. His family. The police.”

She nodded. “Yes,” she said quietly.

There was a pause.

Priscila swallowed and worked up her courage to say it.

“You could write the letter,” she said finally.

This time, he didn’t react. He just stared straight ahead, seeing something, but not her or the room. She shuddered. He was back in the train, seeing the young man.

Priscila slid her hand along the table top to rest on his forearm. It was warm under her finger tips.

“Bento, let me help you,” she said gently.

When he turned to look at her, his eyes were rimmed with tears.

Leonor

Leonor couldn’t wait to talk to Sofia. She desperately wanted her to meet Nuno. She was sure she’d be thrilled that perhaps a piece of the puzzle had fallen into place.

But her phone was acting up, and when Leonor tried to text her friend, she couldn’t find her in her contacts.

“Bloody cloud,” she muttered as she swiped at the screen with her thumb.

She’d left Nuno a note explaining she had to go to work – another missed day might cost her her job. Now she waited for the train to arrive and tried to send a message to Sofia. The train pulled in, and Leonor joined others on their morning commute. She slid her phone into her purse and plunked down in a seat. She’d have no service until she got to work, and then she’d be too busy trying to catch up.

Leonor squinted her eyes as she tried to remember what was on her schedule today. She was pretty sure she had to pick up materials from the printer for the opening. And she’d have to check in with the caterer and florist. Lost in her thoughts, she suddenly was startled by the face peering at her from the darkened train window. She physically jumped before she recognized it as her own reflection. But there’d been something about the eyes, like someone had put on a mask of her face while their own eyes still showed through. And Leonor couldn’t tell who it was.

After work, Leonor hurried to the library branch, eager to catch Sofia before she left for the day. She checked the time on her phone. It was 15 minutes past her usual shift end, but Leonor hoped she’d dawdled a bit to put materials away as she often did when helping Leonor with research.

Leonor bounded up the broad steps and into the library. The research desk was empty, the librarian on duty probably helping a patron. She scanned the room for her friend. An older woman Leonor didn't recognize was coming toward the desk.

"Can I help you?" she asked as she approached.

"Yes, is Sofia still here? I was hoping to speak to her."

The woman smiled but shook her head. "I'm sorry, I don't know who that is."

"Oh," Leonor said. "I've been working with Sofia for a while."

The woman's smile remained, but she shook her head. "I'm afraid I still don't understand. Who is Sofia? Is she your colleague?"

Leonor looked puzzled. Sofia wasn't really a colleague. She was a reference librarian. Even if this woman was new, she should have met Sofia when she came in.

"She works here," Leonor said. "She would have just gotten done with her shift. Maybe you don't know her name."

Now the woman looked puzzled.

"We don't have anyone named Sofia who works here."

Leonor started to speak. "But you ..." *You what?* she wondered. Slowly she looked around, taking in the room as if for the first time, yet she knew it well. She'd visited often, working with Sofia to track down her ghosts. And now, Sofia was gone.

Her brain wondered if it was a joke, but Leonor didn't think so. The woman before her was very sincere, and now she was waving to a man across the room.

"This patron is looking for someone named Sofia," the woman explained. "She thinks she works here."

The young man shook his head. "I don't know anyone by that name," he said, glancing between Leonor and the woman. Leonor saw a look pass between them. They were worried about her. Her guard went up. If she didn't leave now, they might report her to the police or worse. Leonor didn't need to be known as crazy.

"I'm sorry to bother you," she said. "I must have been confused with ... where I was," she finished lamely. She'd started backing away, and now she turned quickly, slinging her purse over her shoulder.

The woman's voice trailed after her. "No trouble. I hope you find her."

Leonor hurried back out the library and down the wide steps. Sofia was gone. She reached in her purse for her phone again and paused to scroll through her contacts. She clicked over to email and couldn't find the messages from Sofia, even doing a search. Finally, she opened her text

messages. She rarely deleted messages, but there was none from or to Sofia. It was as if she didn't exist.

A lump formed in her throat.

Leonor slumped onto the steps and opened social media apps. Facebook. Twitter. Instagram. Her friend's profiles were gone.

In Google, Leonor carefully typed Sofia's first and last names, checking the spelling three times before hitting search. Instead of a reference librarian as the top hit, she found a teen in the US and a couple of women with slightly different spellings of either their first or last names.

But Sofia, her friend Sofia, was gone.

Leonor's chin dropped to her chest and the tears slid down her cheeks. Her first real friend since school, and she was gone. She'd shared details with her she'd never shared with anyone. And now that she'd told Sofia – and Nuno ...

Leonor's head jerked up. Nuno. He was here, and Sofia was ... gone. The realization hit her. Were the two connected? Did someone disappear if someone else traveled through time?

Nuno, she thought. I have to see him.

Her boots tapped quickly down the sidewalk pavers, echoing in the quiet street.

Chapter 19

Fernao

Fernao had let his feet carry him out of the secluded garden and down an alleyway. It joined a quiet street, where a few cars were tucked at the curb. He stuck close to the buildings that lined the sidewalk. Seeking shadows, he wanted to avoid being seen. He wasn't sure how safe it was to be out at night. During his time here, he'd noticed things and people. Something told him he'd be better off hidden away, staying put during the darkest times of night. Being on the street now felt risky, and his heart beat increased.

I should go back, he thought. He hesitated, pausing in the shadow of an awning over a shop door. Surveying the street in front and behind him, he didn't see anyone. He was about to turn back when he heard a noise and looked sharply in that direction. A shadow moved, and Fernao felt fear rise in his throat. He flattened himself to the door and stared hard at the shadow. When it moved again, he bolted from his hiding spot and continued away from the seclusion of the museum garden.

His feet slapped the pavement, and he felt an adrenaline surge. Behind him, he was sure he could hear someone following, their footsteps echoing after his own. It spurred him even faster, but he wouldn't take time to look back. Instead, he could picture someone reaching, reaching out to him, nearly touching his back.

He spun around the corner, and the metro station lay ahead. Without thinking, he tore down the steps. Too late, he realized he might be blocked off, without a means of escape. Instantly, he started to think of where he might be able to hide. The halls were bare, the station level void of any places to hide. Even the ticket booth offered no shelter, built into the smooth tile wall. It was dark. The lights were dimmed. The stairways to the platform were dark. The metro was closed, he realized. There would be no help for him here and no place to hide.

Still spurred by fear, Fernao vaulted the stanchion where tickets were collected and headed for the dark stairway. *Perhaps I'll be safe in the dark*, he thought. *Maybe I can hide*.

He slowed slightly as his feet hit the stairs. It was so dark, and he didn't want to fall. He clasped the hand railing and stumbled his way to the bottom, tripping when he ran out of stairs at the end. His head whipped around as he tried to see in the dark. At the far end of the platform, a green exit sign glowed dimly. He pressed his back to the cool tile wall, his hands splayed at his sides. He forced himself to stop and listen. Holding his breath, he paused. There was no sound. Tilting his head from side to side, he strained to hear his pursuer. Surely, he was right behind him ...

He must be coming down the other stairs, Fernao thought. He squeezed his eyes shut, then forced them open. Gazing at the far end of the platform, he strained in the dark to see any movement, to hear any sound save his own breath and pulse.

Minutes passed and nothing moved, no sound came. He started to relax. But still he held his place at the wall. He became aware of the smooth tile under his fingertips. He could touch the grout between, feel the slight raised edge of the tile. Briefly, he wondered if he'd laid these tiles, touched them before. He found comfort in the smooth coolness.

Suddenly exhausted, he slid down the wall, keeping his back to it, but bending his knees as he sank to the floor. He swung his hands up and let them dangle between his knees. His head lolled against the wall.

Had it been only his imagination? He wanted to laugh out loud, but he didn't dare. While he felt more at ease, he'd had a fright, and he didn't want to risk anything. But he gave a grimace in the dark.

When he slept again, he didn't dream.

Wube

Wube had put on a few pounds since his school days. For the second time that night he reminded himself that he should not drink. It made him fatter, too. He pressed against the metal door, which groaned in response but shifted a bit more, giving him enough room to squeeze in.

Darkness greeted him, so he switched on the flashlight on his phone. Its small beam barely lit up the ground at his feet. When he held it up it was lost in the cavernous darkness.

"Shit," he muttered. "This is a bad idea." But he moved ahead anyway. He figured he'd make a circle and come back to the entrance. Following the wall away from the door, he sidestepped decades of debris. Every few steps, he'd hold up the light to see the wall, then put it back down so he wouldn't trip or step in something.

Working this way, he made it around to the far wall. He took a few more steps and lifted the light. His breath caught. There it was. The edge of the cosmos. Taking another step, he drew closer and illuminated more of the art. Her hair, shoulder, outstretched arm. The Earth was spinning on her fingertip.

He stopped and fully faced her, looking deep into her eyes, noting her smile. Wube frowned. She'd never wanted her full face in the art. She was worried someone would recognize her. He thought she was beautiful, then and now, both when she was alive and immortalized in spray paint.

Now, he looked closer. The mural was old. Worn in a way, but not from the elements or even from humans or animals. Rather, it just looked like it had been there for ages. But how could that be? They'd been tagging in the 1990s. He did the math. Twenty years. If Sol had made this art then, it would look fresher, wouldn't it?

It was all her style, too. He and Jazz had their own quirks in their painting, their own techniques that he recognized and knew. None of them were visible in the painting in front of him. This was all Sol.

He slid the light to the corner where they signed their names. Sure enough, only Sol's name was there. He noticed a date underneath it. 4/25/74. The date of the revolution, he thought. Everyone in Portugal knew that date. Even the city's famous bridge was named for it. But it meant nothing to him related to Sol. They had learned about it in school, but that was as far as it went.

Wube scowled. What was he missing? He stepped closer, holding his light near the surface, looking at the layers of paint, searching for a clue. He retraced his steps to the left and found the first date: 3/29/94. The date she disappeared.

Wube broke out in a cold sweat. Her eyes twinkled. He turned and retched.

—

Two weeks had passed and Wube could think of nothing but Sol's art. Had she lived? Had she somehow gone back in time? Was the artwork a message to him and Jazz? Had Jazz seen it? What did he think?

Jazz was the only person Wube could talk to about it. Despite the passage of time, he still knew he'd been under suspicion for her disappearance. He and Jazz were the last to see her alive.

Jazz. He had to find him.

He leaned over and peered around the door frame at the room beyond. People were busy at their desks, typing or on their phones. He rubbed his eyes, pinched the bridge of his nose. Finally, he pushed the mouse cursor to the search bar and typed in Jazz's name. Several clicks later, he was looking at a social media profile. Jazz was a commercial artist, working for an agency in the city. He looked nearly the same. *Maybe skinnier*, Wube thought. *He got thin, and I got fat*. His hooded sweatshirt was replaced with a button-down shirt, open at the neck. His smile was faraway.

Wube clicked to message him. The box popped up, and he paused, fingers over the keyboard. What would he say? What could he say? "Hey, Jazz, sorry we stopped being friends. I think Sol sent us a message."

He hit the backspace button to erase it.

"Hi, I wondered how you were doing, it's been a while. I saw something that reminded me of you and I wanted to talk about it."

Wube sighed and deleted it.

"Hi, Jazz. Long time, my friend. Sorry I haven't been in touch. Recently, I saw something that reminded me of you and another old friend. Maybe we can meet to talk about it."

He read it and re-read it. The mouse hovered over the send button. A knock at the door startled him, and he pressed the button, sending the message before it could be retrieved and deleted.

"Sorry to disturb you, but your 2 o'clock is here," the woman said.

Wube nodded. "OK, give me a minute before you send her in." She nodded and retreated.

Wube stared at the screen. He clicked back to his spreadsheet as the young woman entered. Wube waved her into the chair across from his desk. "Thanks for coming in. Let's talk about the quarter results."

By the time he was shutting down his computer to go home, Wube had forgotten about the message. He was closing tabs when he remembered what he'd done. He clicked over to the page, not sure what he'd find.

A message waited: "Wube, it has been a long time. I'd love to see you and talk about Sol. Dinner? Drinks? I'm free most nights. You can call me." He included his phone number.

It sounded so ... professional, Wube thought. He tried to hear Jazz's voice in the note and finally found it when he'd mentioned Sol by name.

Wube punched the number into his contacts, slipped his phone in his pocket and shut down his computer. *Another night*, he thought. *Another night*.

Almiro

Almiro was subdued at work. The others chatted and teased about Rubem's date, but Almiro let it wash over him. After lunch, Manuel sent the others to a new project site, but he kept Almiro to pass tools and get supplies.

Almiro stood with one hand on the brick wall, staring into the gap where new pipes were being installed. The wall felt warm under his hand despite the cold. He stared into the dark, not seeing the pipes but seeing her face instead. She stood closer now, her face tilted toward him.

Manuel broke the spell. "Almiro, hand me the wrench." He pointed, and Almiro jolted into action, handing over the tool.

When he looked again, the girl was gone. But he could almost feel her still watching. He touched the wall where his hand had been, and it burned so hot he jerked it away.

"Are you OK?" Manuel asked. Almiro only nodded.

Manuel looked closely. "Why don't you take a little break? Get some coffee."

Almiro shook his head. "I'm OK." But Manuel insisted.

"Please, go get a coffee for me at least." He gestured over his shoulder the café across the street. Almiro nodded agreement and turned reluctantly.

As he crossed the street, he could see his reflection in the shop windows, the brick building behind him, Manuel on his knees, working to twist the caps onto the pipes. And there, in the dark space, a woman wearing a white coat, watching him. He whirled around to look, and a car honked at him, speeding past. Almiro stumbled back. When he looked again, there was no one in the gap or in the window reflection.

"You are losing your mind," he said low to himself through clenched teeth. "Get a grip."

He yanked open the shop door and queued up at the counter. His mind whirled. Who was she and why did she frighten him? Was she from before?

He considered this. Her clothing looked modern, like the era he'd left behind. What did she want? Each time he saw her, she looked as if she wanted to ask him something, but only the shriek had emanated from her in the dream.

Maybe I should ask her what she wants, he thought. Oh, boy. Now you're thinking you'll see her again. You really are cracking up.

"What can I get for you?" the woman behind the counter interrupted his thought. Almiro ordered and paid. He stood, hands in his pockets, cradling the coins he'd received as change, while he waited for the drinks.

Instinctively, he reached for his inside pocket, for his talisman. He didn't keep all of his mementoes with him. Most were stored in a small metal box at home. A little lock with a tiny key kept them safe. But old habits die hard, and he still carried a coin from that other time. He didn't know why. It just felt like something he needed to do. Although he'd never spoken of it – not even to Maria, his oldest and first friend – it still pushed in on his daily existence. There wasn't a day he didn't think of it and gratefully thank his lucky stars for this new life.

The woman pushed a tray toward him with ceramic cups on saucers. "Bring it back when you're done," she said and watched him balance it to the door and out onto the street.

Almiro kept his gaze just ahead as he crossed the street carefully. He didn't want to drop the cups, not with the shopkeeper watching.

"Manuel, coffee's here," he said. Manuel backed out the gap in the wall and swiped his glove off to reach for a cup. He sipped the hot liquid, and Almiro took his own cup off the tray and leaned it against the wall. They held their cups and looked at the wall.

"It's a tight fit," Manuel said.

"Do you want it opened up more?" Almiro asked.

"No, I've almost got it," Manuel said. "It's chilly, though. I thought it would be warmer in there, but it's like a deep freeze. Maybe that's why the pipes broke."

Almiro looked at him. "Cold? It's cold out here." He gestured at the winter air.

Manuel laughed. "I know that. But it's cold in there. See what I mean." He nodded at the gap.

Almiro felt a well of fear rise in his throat. He swallowed hard. Manuel hadn't noticed.

"No, really. It's cold." He put his hand into the hole. "Feel it."

Almiro reluctantly put his hand toward the gap. He could see the pipes now, not the girl. His eyes flicked to the brick where he'd put his hand before and thought of how hot it felt. But that couldn't be, could it?

His fingertips passed the brick wall and he felt the numbing cold, many degrees colder than the outside temp. He jerked his hand back.

“See what I mean?” Manuel said. He laughed then caught sight of Almiro’s stricken face. “God, Almiro. You look like you saw a ghost.”

Maybe I did, he thought. But he forced himself to shake his head and give a tight smile. “Just surprised, is all,” he said. “It is cold,” he agreed, trying to make his voice sound light.

Manuel gulped the last of his coffee and shoved the cup at Almiro. “Well, back to work. Break’s over.” He picked up his glove and wriggled it back on, then picked up a tool in each hand.

Almiro balanced the two cups back across the street, only remembering the tray when the woman asked him about. “*Desculpe*,” he apologized. “I’ll get it.”

As he trotted back across the street, he noticed Manuel was by the truck, digging in the tool box. The hole gaped, black and cold, he now knew. Inside, he saw the shadows gather into a now familiar shape. She reached out her hand and placed it on the brick behind where he’d touched it. He came to the wall and touched it, feeling the warmth. It no longer burned, but it was warm when it shouldn’t have been.

They stood that way for a minute, looking at each other.

Finally, Almiro whispered: “What do you want?”

Her eyes grew wide. She’d heard him, but she said nothing.

“Are you a ghost?” he asked.

Imperceptibly, she shook her head.

“Can you see me?” he asked.

A nod.

“Why?”

Her eyebrows raised.

“Almiro!” He jumped at Manuel’s call. “I’ve got to go back to the shop. You good here for a few minutes?”

Almiro nodded. “Yes, I’ll keep an eye on it.”

Manuel waved as he hopped in the truck.

Almiro looked back at the gap. It was only a dark space. He touched the wall. Cool bricks met his hand. Her warmth was gone. She was gone.

Julinha

Catharina had been patient with her, showing her how to plug in her cellphone to charge, how to turn it on and make a call. She had programmed in her own number and the shelter number. When Catharina asked if there were any other numbers she wanted to add, Julinha shook her

head. Outside of the shelter, she knew no one. The past few days she'd spent sleeping, doing chores and sitting in the courtyard when she had a break.

Julinha purposely had not asked anyone about the time she lived in, but all of the changes were obvious now that she knew. People dressed differently and wore their hair differently. There were different shows on TV, and most people walked around staring at their phones, touching them. Julinha wasn't sure why. Her phone had colorful squares, but she only touched the one that looked like a phone – a real phone – when she wanted to make a call.

Different products were advertised. She saw many more women in various jobs and careers. And they weren't all white women, either, but from India, Africa and the Middle East. Stores sold products she'd never heard of and labeled others "bio." *Aren't all fruits, vegetables and eggs bio?* she wondered.

Catharina hadn't pushed her on her birth date. Instead, she said it must have had something to do with hitting her head. The clinic planned an MRI, but Julinha had no idea what that was, either, only that it sounded scary.

And Julinha knew there was nothing wrong with her brain. Nothing that would make her forget 35 years, anyway.

She wiped the mirror with her towel, and tilted her head back to inspect her neck. The bruises had faded, and her color was improving. She didn't look so gaunt, she decided, but more like the young woman she was. She caught her own eyes in the reflection and saw the fear still there. Despite being in a safe place – the shelter staff assured her that her abuser wouldn't find her – Julinha still worried about Moisés. He wouldn't let her go. Not without a fight.

She smirked ruefully at that turn of phrase. Another fight with him would kill her, she knew.

And yet, if it was 30-odd years on, was he still looking for her? Or had he given up, thinking she was gone or dead? She ran a comb through her long, wet hair.

There was no way to know, she thought as she started getting dressed. She couldn't go back to the flat and risk seeing him. She'd already told Catharina she would never press charges. There was no way anyone could keep her safe from him. No way.

Julinha tossed her towel over her shoulder and scooped up her pajamas. She clicked off the bathroom light.

Maybe Catharina could help her find out about Moisés without him knowing, she mused. Sunlight streamed through her window and onto the floor. She stood in the golden square and felt it warm her feet and legs. For the first time in a long time, Julinha smiled, just a little bit. She pulled her phone off the bedside table, and turned it on to make a call.

Dores

Dores slipped down the stairs in the metro station, a shadow in the early morning light.

Commuters who worked shift work might be arriving soon, but for now it was still mostly dark

and quiet. But unlike the other station, this one was lit along the stairs and halls. She paused by a vending-style machine that dispensed tickets. That's when she remembered she had no money. Her purse was tucked under the cot, although it contained little.

Had she come to get on the metro? No, she reasoned. She just felt the familiar desire to be near the last place where she'd seen Tomás. But that place, that station, was frightening to her now.

This station was more welcoming. She followed the wall to the turnstiles and looked for a gap where she could slip through as she had so many other times. Finding none, she ducked under the nearest one. She had no idea cameras were watching, recording her moves. But it would be a while before a station employee showed up to shoo her away.

Dores drifted slowly down the stairs to the station platform. It was darker here, the exit signs glowing green above the stairs. A familiar row of chairs lined the back wall, and she took one, crossing her legs and looping her hands over her knees. She wasn't sure how long she sat there before the lights flicked on. Distantly, she could hear voices, mechanical noises and footsteps. Across the tracks, several people came down the stairs to the platform. The signs overhead began scrolling messages, welcoming travelers and warning them to take care of their belongings. Train arrival times began to show up. A few more people came down on each side.

When the train arrived in the station, she got up from her seat and climbed aboard. She was the only one in her car – it was still early. She had her choice of seats, and she picked one in the middle by the window. As the train began to move, she watched the lights of the station flick out and off behind her. The lights inside the train illuminated the window, mirroring her own face back. She tried to focus instead on the dark outside, but her eyes kept coming back to her own.

She didn't know why she got on the train. She had nowhere to go and no plan. It just felt right, like going for a late-night walk or sneaking into the station.

For the next three stops, more travelers got on as they headed toward downtown businesses, filling the seats. A man sat in the seat opposite her, a little older, with a handsome face and a quick smile. Most people didn't look at each other, she'd noticed. But he met her gaze and grinned.

"*Bom dia*," he said warmly. Dores gave him a small smile. She couldn't help it. "*Bom dia*," she replied in a low voice.

He cocked his head and looked closely at her.

"Have we met? You seem familiar."

Dores shook her head. "No, I'd remember you," she said, hoping she wouldn't blush.

He grinned again. "You remind me of ..." he started to say, but his voice trailed off, and the smile faltered.

Dores looked troubled, too. "Pardon me," she said and deliberately turned to the window. She could see him still watching her. He shook his head.

“I’m sorry,” he offered. “Please don’t be upset. It’s just you seem like someone I used to know.”

She glanced back at him. He seemed sincere, but she didn’t know what else to say.

“Anyway,” he continued. “My name is Tomás.” He stuck out his hand to her, leaning forward. “Pleased to meet you.”

Dores stared. Her mouth dropped open a little in shock. The recognition began in her eyes and traveled inward to her heart. Those big eyes she’d seen a thousand times – a million. The dark curly hair, a tiny hand pressed into her own. Feet stuck out straight from short legs on a tall chair. Her son’s image, a 4-year-old boy, flashed before her and superimposed over this man’s features.

Could it be? Was this her Tomás? Her mind raced. Her heart pounded. All in a few beats.

He lowered his hand, watching emotions play across her features. Shock, surprise, wonder, fear and finally love. He knew instinctively it wasn’t a romantic love, but something deeper, more raw.

“Are you OK?” he asked after a long pause.

“Tomás?” she whispered.

He nodded, unsure of what else to say or do.

“My Tomás?”

He furrowed his brow but smiled.

“I thought you said you didn’t know me,” he said.

“I didn’t. I mean, I don’t,” she said. “But maybe ...” Her words trailed off.

“Maybe what?” he prompted gently.

“No, it can’t be,” she said. But her heart told her differently. “Only, maybe it really is you.”

He smiled again, a soft gentle smile, and she saw the boy he once had been. “It’s me,” he said, not understanding what she meant.

“What happened to you?” she whispered. “Where did you go?” She had leaned forward.

Tomás leaned back, uncertain now of what she was asking. She saw the confusion on his face.

“At the metro station. What happened? I couldn’t find you.”

Tomás looked confused. “We’re on the metro now,” he said carefully.

“No, then,” Dores said. “When you were 4. When you disappeared.” Her words came tumbling out. Tears pricked her eyes as the fear and sadness welled up in her again.

The creases in Tomás’ forehead deepened as he frowned, trying to make sense of what she was telling him.

“Nothing,” he said slowly. “I didn’t disappear. I’m here.” He cast his mind back, and then it hit him, why she looked familiar.

“My mother left me at a metro station. They couldn’t find her. She disappeared. I was 4. How ...” Tomás took a shaky breath.

Dores felt her stomach sink. She shook her head, slowly, emphatically.

“I did not leave my son,” she said, stressing each word. “He disappeared. Into thin air. He.” She paused and tried again. “You. You were there, and then you were gone. The police couldn’t find you. I never knew ...” her voice trailed off. The tears had started, trailing down her cheeks.

Tomás reached into his pocket and pulled out a colorful cloth. A bandana, she realized. He pressed it into her hand, and their skin touched. His hand was warm. She wiped her eyes and wadded up the bandana. He watched her for a minute.

“You haven’t changed,” he said at last.

She could see him counting in his head, trying to figure out how old she should be. She closed her eyes and shook her head.

“It won’t work,” she said.

“What?” he asked.

“The math.”

He looked puzzled.

“I haven’t changed because ...” she faltered. What? Had traveled through time? And yet hadn’t Tomás done the same?

“I somehow traveled through time. And it was only when I got here, to 2019, that I realized that maybe you had traveled, too. Not to a different place but a different time.”

“You traveled through time?” Tomás asked. He couldn’t hide the amazement from his voice.

“Are you serious? Is this a joke?” He sat forward suddenly, staring at her intently.

She shook her head firmly. “No. No joke. I don’t know how it happened, but I went into the metro tunnel where, well, where you disappeared, and I fell asleep, and when I woke up, I was here.”

Tomás caught his breath. He’d been going to look for where the trains lived, he remembered. And then he’d come nose to nose with a screaming train before he was plucked onto the platform and into a new life.

“Momma?” he whispered and opened up his hands, arms resting on his knees.

She smiled wistfully and put her tiny hands in his now large ones.

“Tomás,” she answered.

—

He hugged her warmly, enveloping her in his big arms, easily lifting her off her tiny feet. Anyone watching them might think they were lovers. He held her a moment longer, and she clung to his shoulder.

“I’ll come before lunch,” he promised. “I just need to let my team know what’s happening and make a couple of calls. I can’t wait for you to meet Michele and August. Oh, and Ana, she’s the one who raised me. I think you’ll really like her.” The train signaled its warning, and Does pulled back and slipped inside. She smiled easily at him and waved.

“See you soon!” he called.

“I love you!” she called back.

They both grinned.

The train pulled ahead, and Does took a few steps to keep Tomás in sight for a moment longer. As the train pulled out of the station, she slid into a window seat and smiled at her reflection. A delirious, happiness had overtaken her. She’d found her son. He was OK. Oh, he was more than OK. He was wonderful. Somehow, he’d grown into a warm, caring beautiful adult, despite the trauma of losing her.

She gulped back the tears she’d held in, but it was too much. She hung her head and wept into her hands. Her shoulders shook. Passengers eyed her, but no one moved to even offer a word to her.

The lights flicked out, momentarily plunging the train into darkness. Does felt more than saw the dark and the pull of it, the smoothness and coolness that it offered. She turned her head to the window and saw the glowing orb keeping pace with the train car, pulsating just outside of the window. It shimmered.

Fascinated, she reached up her fingers to touch the glass, but the glass was gone. The seat was gone, the train was gone. Does found herself in a plane of blackness, no up, no down; no beginning, no end. And the glowing orb hovered nearby.

It was cold and quiet, she realized. So, so cold and silent. She couldn’t even hear her own breathing, her own pulse. Only stillness.

The memory of a sound came to her then, a child crying in the darkness. But it was only a memory. This space held no sound, nothing beyond the orb and herself.

She watched as the glow seemed to solidify, and inside she could see a figure emerge, a woman with kind eyes, a peaceful smile and a halo surrounding her curly-haired head. Does smiled back. And as her smile widened, she reached toward the woman, and everything disappeared in a dazzling light.

When the lights came on the train car, the sobbing woman was gone, and no one noticed.

Benedito

They wrote the letter but never sent it. It was too uncertain, too speculative. But the simple writing was cathartic, and Benedito agreed to see a counselor. Priscila found a well-recommended one nearby, and they both were relieved to learn that the sessions and what was discussed was confidential.

Still, Benedito never revealed exactly what he'd seen, but talking to someone about his feelings and worries helped. And within a few months, he was sleeping better.

Six months later, Priscila was jolted awake. Benedito was sitting up in bed, breathing heavily. She fumbled for him and the light at the same time. He grasped her searching hand.

"Bento," she whispered hoarsely. "What is it?"

His breath was jagged.

"What's wrong?" she asked again.

"I, uh, I saw him," he said, and his voice cracked.

She didn't need to ask who. Instead, she squeezed his hand and reached her free hand up to his shoulder. He squeezed back.

Priscila waited while his breathing eased. His racing heart seemed to calm as well.

"I saw him," Benedito tried again. "It was like before, but different."

"How so?" she asked quietly.

"He was looking at me, but instead of wanting to die, it was like he wanted to tell me something. He smiled at me, and he nodded."

Priscila waited.

"And then he faded out before the train got to him. I didn't hit anything. The train just kept rolling along."

She didn't say anything, but she squeezed his hand.

"He looked at me, and he smiled and nodded. He saw me, and I saw him. But it was like it was happening now. Like I really just saw him. Just now. Not like I'm remembering it from before."

He looked at her then.

"That probably sounds odd."

She smiled. "No, it sounds good."

Benedito put an arm around her shoulders and kissed her forehead.

She wrapped her arms around his waist, savoring his warmth, his arm holding her tight. They were silent for a few minutes. She didn't dare to speak or ask more.

Finally, he leaned over and turned out the light, then pulled her to him.

She lay still for a long time, listening to his breathing slow into even, deep sleep. She smiled as she curled next to him, and finally, they both slept.

Leonor

The flat was empty when she let herself in with the key. Her flatmate had left a scrawled note on her door about staying at her boyfriend's flat for the weekend and that the milk was bad. Leonor rolled her eyes, jerked open the fridge and yanked out the bottle of milk. She ran water in the sink as she dumped it down the drain. Dena had this annoying habit of pointing things out but never doing anything about them.

As Leonor dropped the glass bottle into the recycling bin, her eyes were drawn to the drainer on the counter. Dry dishes were lined up neatly. The dish towel was folded and hung across a cabinet door. Her gaze moved around the room. The floor was swept. The counters wiped. The sink was spotted with milk, and she rinsed it down.

Back in the living room, the blanket was folded neatly on the pillow.

He'd been here. Nuno had been here. Dena couldn't be bothered to do dishes or sweep the floor.

But where was he?

She swiveled her head, looking for a note, for anything that might show where he'd gone. Nothing. Even her books were stacked neatly on the coffee table.

Instinctively, she grabbed one, the second one down, the one with Nuno's images. She flipped through the pages, and the slip of paper fluttered out. She caught it as it floated toward the ground, dropping the book on the floor. Her hands were shaking, and she smoothed it out. It was blank. She turned it over and saw a faint pencil scrawl.

Leonor stepped toward the window, where late light spilled in. Holding the slip stretched between her hands, she could see an unfamiliar script, slanted and carefully formed.

Dear friend,

You've given me a gift that I can never repay. But I can't stay.

Not now.

I don't want to hurt you. Please let me go and forgive me.

Forever in your debt,

Nuno

Leonor dropped to the floor, a sob escaping her throat. She folded over, her head touching the floor. Her hand crumpled the paper. She wasn't sure he'd written his suicide note, but she knew she'd never see him again.

Chapter 20

Roberta

Roberta stood on the metro platform, waiting for the train. She was meeting Otília for dinner at a new restaurant several stops from their neighborhood, but she'd had a board meeting, and Otília was returning from an appointment downtown.

The platform was nearly empty, a mother and child sat on plastic chairs, the girl reading a book, the mom absently thumbing her phone. Three teens in ripped jeans and tight T-shirts loudly descended the stairs on the opposite platform, jostling and joking as they made their way to the bottom, skateboards tucked under arms and ball caps pushed high off their foreheads. Roberta and the mother paused to look their way.

That's when Roberta realized the opposite platform hadn't been empty. Directly across from her stood a woman, younger than she was and certainly thinner. Roberta sucked in her stomach without thinking.

The woman looked at her intently. Roberta felt her gaze and looked up to meet it. Their eyes locked, and the younger woman cocked her head to the side, as if asking a question.

She jumped when someone touched her arm.

"*Eita*, Roberta," Otília said, jerking back at the same time. "What's up with you?"

Relief flooded her. "Oh, Otília! I'm sorry. I was frightened by ..." her voice trailed off. By what? A woman who looked at her?

She gave a half-hearted laugh. "I guess I'm not sure why I'm so jumpy." She reached for Otília who leaned in for the traditional three kisses.

"You made *me* jump!" Otília exclaimed. "But what was it?" she pressed.

Roberta frowned and cast a quick glance across the tracks to the opposite side. The woman was gone.

"I'm, uh, not sure," she said. "I guess I was just in my own head, and you startled me."

Behind Otília, a tall, good-looking man with graying hair descended the last of the stairs to the platform. He held a bouquet of yellow daisies casually in his left hand. Otília caught her gaze and followed it.

"Who's that?" she asked.

"I'm not sure," Roberta said, "but I feel like I should know him."

Otília studied him for a minute. "You know, he looks sort of familiar. Like I've seen him before. Did we go to school with him?"

Roberta shrugged. "I thought maybe I'd seen him at church sometime. Maybe at a wedding. I don't know all of the guests who come."

Otília nodded. “But that doesn’t explain why he seems familiar to me.”

Feeling their gaze, Gui glanced up to see two women about his age looking in his direction. As a relatively handsome man, he was used to having people give him a second glance. They quickly looked away, caught in the act of staring, but they seemed familiar to him. *Parents of students at school? No, that wasn’t it*, he thought.

The train was pulling in, the air rushed and the noise enveloped them. Ahead, the doors opened, and Gui stepped in. As he sat, he pulled his phone from his pocket and typed a quick message. “Be home soon with flowers. Need anything?”

The three dots danced almost immediately.

“No. Your mom will love the flowers, and your dad is puttering with the grill. He may have the fish cooked by the time you get here!”

Gui sent a smile emoji, and then, after a pause, a heart emoji. Vitória sent back a laughing emoji and a kissing emoji. He grinned to himself and slid the phone back into his pocket. He never saw the woman on the platform or felt the echo of time passing.

But Roberta did.

She and Otília entered a car several back from the front. They fell silent as they sat, side by side, on blue fabric seats. As the train started to move, Roberta felt her gaze pulled to the opposite platform. The woman was there again, staring directly at Roberta. But this time, she smiled, and Roberta smiled back.

Wube and Jazz

Wube found himself scrolling through his contacts, looking for Jazz. Dinner had been a disaster. Mara had wanted to go out, but when they couldn’t agree on where to go, they’d wound up in a fight. It wasn’t the first. She’d slammed the door as she shouted that she’d order takeaway. Wube sighed heavily. They hadn’t always been like this, but it had been bad lately. He knew he wasn’t helping. His job frustrated him. His life frustrated him.

But he loved Mara, and he wanted the marriage to work. He slid the phone across the table and sat with his head in his hands. The light glinted off the chandelier and cast a prism at his feet. Wube watched it, the colors shifting, a tiny piece of art skittering across the floor. He followed the patterns across the floor and up the wall. Their wedding photo was there, the two of them happy. Wube grimaced.

He got up and went to the desk and dug around until he found a paper and pen. Sitting down, he wrote a short but heartfelt note of apology. He signed it Roberto. Even now, as he thought of himself as Wube, he realized Mara wouldn’t. It was a side of him he’d never shared. The thought made him sad.

He glanced at his phone, lying face up on the table. He went to it and found Jazz’s number. It rang only once before he answered. “This is Jeronimo.”

Wube paused. It had been so many years since he'd heard his voice. And all those years he'd only thought of him as Jazz.

"Olà?" Jazz asked.

Wube cleared his throat. "Hi, it's me. Wube."

Now it was Jazz's turn to pause.

"Wube? Damn. Is it really you?"

"Yeah, I mean, yes, it's me."

Jazz laughed. "Oh man, it's so great to hear your voice! How've you been?"

Wube glanced at the note propped up on the desk.

"Uh, well, OK, you know. Um, just living life and all that."

"That's great, man," Jazz enthused. "Can you meet for a drink? I'd love to see you."

Wube paused. That was why he called, right? To finally talk to someone. To talk about Sol and what he'd seen.

"Um, yeah, sure. That would be great," Wube finally rushed out.

"You pick the time, man," Jazz said. "I'll make sure I'm free."

Wube fiddled with a button on his shirt. Below him, the prisms swirled on the tiles. "How about now?" He closed his eyes, picturing Jazz making a face. It was too much, too soon.

"Absolutely!" Jazz said. "I was hoping you wouldn't make me wait. There's place in Baixa Chiado. We can get drinks and maybe dinner, if you haven't eaten."

"Sounds great," Wube said. "I can get there in," he glanced at the clock, "20 minutes."

"Perfect! Can't wait to see you, man. Damn, this is going to be great!"

After they hung up, Wube picked up the pen and added a note that he'd gone out and would be home later. "I love you, Mara," he wrote. "I hope I can explain why I've been so miserable. You don't deserve this, and I'm sorry. I shouldn't take it out on you. Please forgive me." Again, he started to sign the foreign name – Roberto – but he stopped. Wasn't that part of it? That she didn't know him, who he was, who he was hiding? His hand paused over the paper.

"Aw fuck it," he said, and he signed his name with a flourish he hadn't used since his days of tagging: WUBE.

—

They'd talked but barely scratched the surface. It was like meeting a new guy at the office. You shared what you had to but there wasn't any substance. And despite their initial plan to talk about Sol, neither had brought up her name.

Wube looked down into his glass and swirled the ice cubes. Jazz watched him and fidgeted with his watch, a techy device with buttons and lights, without looking at it.

“You’re not as high-strung as you used to be,” Wube said. “Just a little fidgety now.” He looked pointedly at the watch.

Jazz grinned. “That’s true. I’ve mellowed some, but I still like to move somehow, some way. What about you? Do you still smoke and make beautiful art?”

Wube smiled ruefully. “No and no. But damn, I want to.”

“Which?” Jazz asked.

“Both,” Wube replied honestly. “I quit smoking when I got married. But it’s still hard. Especially when I drink.” He set his glass down.

“What about the art?” Jazz prompted.

Wube shook his head. “No. Nothing. I work in an office. The most creativity I get is watching a sunset.”

“That’s too bad,” Jazz said. “You and —” he paused. “You were really good.”

“We all were good,” Wube said. “You, too.”

Jazz nodded. “But not as good as her.”

Their eyes met.

“Did you ever find out anything?” Wube asked.

Jazz shook his head. “No. I tried some internet searches when I finally got a computer and figured out how to use it. Looked up the newspaper archives. But I never found anything. She’s never been on social media, not by her real name, anyway.”

He looked at Wube again. “You?”

Wube started to shake his head. “Not for a long time, no. But ...” He trailed off. Jazz watched him. Finally, he continued.

“I saw something, and it makes me think that maybe she was OK.” His voice dropped lower. “That she didn’t ... die or have something bad happen to her.”

Jazz stared at him. “Go on.”

Wube recounted finding the art, the mural he was sure that Sol created with the dates that sort of made sense.

“Where is it?” Jazz asked.

“In the warehouse district where we were planning to tag but never did.”

“Can you show me?”

Wube swallowed. He wasn't sure he wanted to see it again. But he didn't want to send Jazz alone like he had been. He nodded slowly.

"Why do you think she's OK?" Jazz asked.

"It's her artwork, her style," Wube said. "You know what I mean. But it's our piece. And the dates mean something. I think she was trying to tell us something."

"Let's go see it," Jazz said. "Right now."

"Now?" Wube asked.

"No time like the present," Jazz said. He waved at the bartender for the check.

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They exited the metro, and Wube held up his phone to get his bearings. The map swung around and pointed them in the direction of the warehouse. A block up, he recognized the street where he'd discovered the site on his phone.

The two didn't talk much on their walk. Wube noted Jazz still had his bouncy walk, but he didn't fidget as much.

At the entrance, Jazz held up his phone to light the way. He looked back at Wube.

"You don't need to come in," he said. "I can find it."

"No, you shouldn't go alone," Wube said. "I wish you'd been here with me the first time."

Jazz smiled at him and slid between the doors. Wube sucked in his gut and squeezed after him. Inside they turned meager flashlights toward the far wall, and Wube led the way, picking his way among the junk accumulated over the decades.

Sol's face came into focus first this time, smiling at them from her spot in the universe.

"Wow," Jazz muttered. "That's ... fantastic." He stepped closer, then backed up, to try and see the whole thing. Their tiny phone lights didn't do it justice. The light wouldn't reach from one end to the other.

"Is it bigger?" Jazz asked.

Wube nodded. "Yeah, I think so. It feels bigger."

Jazz walked in front of the mural, peering at the design, the technique, as only another artist could see it. Lightly, he touched the paint, a highlight on the spinning Earth.

"It looks so real, and yet it's not realistic at all," he said. "It's like anime that will come to life and jump down off the wall."

Wube nodded in agreement, then spoke up when he realized Jazz was looking intently at her face.

“Yes, that’s a good description,” he said.

“There’s no doubt it’s her,” Jazz said. “We never painted her without the bandana, so no one but us would know what she looks like. And that’s a perfect likeness.” He pointed to the tiny scar by the right corner of her mouth. Wube leaned in and squinted. He hadn’t noticed that the first time. Sol had a tiny scar from a childhood scrape, just by her mouth. The scar was there.

“And I agree it’s her technique,” he waved his arm. “We all had similar styles that worked well together, but this is all hers.”

Jazz paced to the far-left edge and squatted down to look at the date. He adjusted his camera and took a picture. Then he walked to the date at the opposite end and photographed it. Then he stood back and tried to take a picture. Wube knew it wouldn’t be lit well enough to show up the whole thing. “It’s too dark,” he said. “And it’s too big. I can’t get the whole thing in here. I’d have to stand half way across the room.”

Jazz snapped a few photos of her face, the spinning Earth and her name tag.

“What do you suppose it means?” he asked Wube.

“I was hoping you could tell me,” Wube said.

“You don’t have any ideas?” Jazz pressed.

Wube shrugged. “You’ll think I’m crazy.”

Jazz waved at the art on the wall. “This is crazy. Tell me what you think.”

Wube cleared his throat. “I, uh. I think she went away, to someplace else.”

“Where?”

“Don’t know. It’s something to do with the Revolution, though.”

Jazz nodded. “That’s an obvious date.”

“And the other is when she ...” Wube trailed off.

“Disappeared,” Jazz finished. “But they are in the wrong order.”

“What do you mean?” Wube asked.

“Logically, the older date should be on the left,” Jazz said. “On a timeline, older dates are on the left. Newer dates on the right. But this is reversed. The newer date is on the left, like it came first.”

Wube stared at him. “Maybe it did,” he said.

Now Jazz stared. “What do you mean?”

“What if she went back through time, somehow? To like, 20 years earlier? What if she traveled to the past?”

Jazz was breathing heavily now, panting through his open mouth. “But, that’s not possible,” he stammered. “Is it?”

“I don’t think so,” Wube said. “But I don’t know what else it could mean. And when I think about it, I get woozy.”

“Yeah, me, too,” Jazz said. He passed a hand over his face and head.

“How, uh, how could she do that?” Jazz asked.

Wube shrugged. “I have no idea. But this is old. You can tell that, too.” Jazz nodded.

“She painted this. We agree on that.” Jazz nodded again.

“She didn’t paint this 20 years ago,” Wube continued. Jazz wrinkled his nose. “No, probably not. It’s older than that.”

“So, maybe she painted this 40 years ago. Maybe she went back in time and painted this.”

“Why?” Jazz asked suddenly.

“For us,” Wube said. “To tell us she’s OK. Or she was OK. That’s why she included the dates. We would be the only ones to understand the date she disappeared. We’re the only ones who would know what this was and that she was the one who painted it. It was her message to us.”

Jazz breathed out slowly, a low whistle. Wube inhaled shakily.

“That’s fucking amazing,” Jazz finally said, staring at Sol’s image. Wube clapped him on the shoulder, and the two men hugged as their long-lost friend watched their reunion.

Almiro

The dream came again, but this time, she didn’t speak. She came to him, her eyes searching. Her hands were bunched under her arms, for warmth, he presumed.

“You’re looking for me?” he asked. She nodded.

“Why me?” he asked.

She only looked, blinked once.

“Can you speak to me?” he asked. A pause, and then a slight shake of her head.

“Are you lost?” he asked. She shook her head no.

“Am I lost?” he suddenly asked. Her eyebrows shot up in a question.

“No,” he answered. “I’m happy here.” He paused. “Is that why you’ve come? Because of ... the other time?”

Her eyebrows rose even higher.

“I traveled ... through time,” he said. “From my time to an earlier time, before I was born.”

He explained it as best he could, simply, quickly.

“Do you understand?”

She nodded slowly.

“Can I stay here?” he finally asked.

She looked at him, her brown eyes warm. She nodded.

“Thank you,” he said. “Oh, thank you.”

He noticed she was starting to shiver.

“Are you cold?” She nodded.

“Is it the gap?” She looked puzzled again.

“In the building wall? Is that where you are?”

She looked confused.

“I saw you in the wall. In the metro. And here, in my dream.”

A small smile played at her lips, but she didn’t open her mouth.

And then, she disappeared, replaced by complete and total blackness.

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Almiro felt warmth on his face and realized it was Cassie breathing on him. She shifted her velvet muzzle, and her damp nose pressed against his hand. Softly, she whined. He slit an eye open, and her tail picked up tempo as she recognized he was awake.

Stretching, he scratched behind her ears. She gave an impatient chuff. Almiro chuckled.

“OK, OK,” he said. “I’m up. See? I’m getting up.”

He rolled up to a seat, legs swinging over the edge of the bed. She nosed him again, her feet tapping a staccato on the wooden floor. He ruffled her fur with both hands and stood. A brief moment of vertigo caused him to reach down to the edge of the bed. He sat down again, feeling the blackness creep into the edges of his vision. It felt like he was supposed to remember something. He pinched his eyes shut and concentrated.

And then it was gone. He shook his head as if to clear it, but the feeling was gone. The dog nosed his leg, and he petted her back absently, his mind still circling, trying to remember what he forgot.

Julinha

Julinha jostled with her girlfriends on the metro platform. Hands shoved in pockets, they stamped their feet against the cold as they waited for the train. It was their regular Thursday night out, a habit they'd started at university and continued now that they all had jobs. Tonight, they were celebrating a friend's new position in an engineering firm. Julinha was happy for her – for her and all of her friends and for herself. She'd been given a second chance, and she never looked back.

That's not to say she didn't think about it. She volunteered at the shelter where she'd found solace, offering a shoulder to cry on and a quiet, calm reassurance for the people – women and men – who needed it. But she never told the whole story.

How she crossed decades was still a mystery to her.

The dreaded MRI had showed no damage to her brain. Neither Catharina nor her doctor could figure it out, and Julinha simply refused to discuss it. Eventually, her medical records were changed, and with Catharina's agency's assistance she was able to get identification. That allowed her to enroll at university, rent a flat and get a job.

The devil still haunted her dreams occasionally, but more often she dreamed of an angel in white who smiled at her from a halo of light.

The train pulled in, and they pushed their way in, taking up several rows of seats. Julinha slid into a window seat, and then leaned forward to joke with her friends across the aisle. They all laughed, and she pulled back, tucking her hair behind her ear.

The skin pricked on her neck, and she glanced around instinctively. Her time *before* had taught her always to be aware, wary even. There was no one nearby. Several people had gotten on the train with them and were seated a few rows ahead. Two teen boys were holding skateboards and cellphones, leaning against the windows at the back of the car.

Still, the feeling persisted. Slowly, she turned to look out the window.

Moisés

In a dirty bar on a dusty street, Moisés lifted a beer to his lips. Gray glinted in the hair that curled over his frayed collar. He took a drag from the cigarette in his other hand, then let his fingertips trace the scar down his cheek, absentmindedly following its contours. A couple of other patrons watched the football match on the TV over the bar, but Moisés had his eyes on the mirror behind the bar, or, more precisely, his reflection.

Even now, his eyes burned bright. The bartender kept his distance, standing at the far end, his back to the mirror and booze, watching people pass by outside. Occasionally, he'd glance at his customers to see if anyone was low, but he never said anything. Moisés liked that about him. He preferred silence.

He took another drag on his cigarette, then stubbed it out. The beer was gone, too. He rose from the chair unsteadily and fished around in his pocket for a few euros, which he tossed on the bar. Heading for the door, he didn't bother to look back or he might have seen the bartender shudder. It wasn't from the cold.

At the corner, he turned toward the metro station. It was a short ride, but the broken leg hadn't healed quite right, and it was a struggle to go very far on it, especially after working all day at the factory. He didn't feel like making the walk tonight.

He felt his pockets and found his cigarettes, pulled one out and lit it with a match from a pack he'd taken from his supervisor's desk. He shook it out and dropped it on the ground. Soon, the butt would join it and thousands of other pieces of litter.

His leg dragged a little as he neared the station. He paused at the top to finish his smoke, eyeing the young guys across the street in their hooded sweatshirts and designer shoes. He sneered at them. *Privileged pieces of shit*, he thought. *Back in my day, I'd have kicked all your asses.*

Tossing the cigarette butt, he leaned heavily on the railing as he descended the stairs.

On the platform, Moisés slumped on a bench. The next train wasn't due for at least 10 minutes. His leg was really hurting now, and his hands ached. He clenched and unclenched his fists, feeling the arthritis that was setting in, worsened by the damage all those years ago.

He gritted his teeth. "Bitch," he said hissed. Even now, 40 years later, he hated her, the woman who had done all of this to him, who had made his life like a hell. She had fled in the night, and he never saw her again, but every day he cursed her and hoped she had died a painful death. He liked to think about that: Killing her slowly. Torturing her. Making her feel pain over and over again before finally slitting her throat. Or plunging a knife into her heart. Or bashing in her head.

He had lots of ways of killing her. He'd thought about each one many, many times. Outside of drinking, it was his favorite pastime, even though he hated to think of her. It pissed him off, and he couldn't do it at work. He needed to stay focused there.

But during the long hours in his tiny, dank flat, he'd plan how he'd kill her, if she was still alive.

Across the tracks, the train pulled in and rolled to a stop. Doors opened, and people shifted in and out of the train cars. Sitting next to the window was a woman who looked very much like her. She had the same hair, although it was shorter. Her profile was the same. She reached up and pushed her hair behind her ear with one hand, a gesture he'd seen Julinha do many times. Moisés was on his feet, staring, slack-jawed. He didn't remember getting up.

He hadn't expected to see her. And if it was her, why did she look so young?

He willed her to turn her head and look at him. Then he'd know for sure. He would know by her eyes.

"Look at me," he said. "Look at me, bitch." He was walking toward the tracks, his shuffling gait hitched him along.

The alarm sounded, and the doors closed. Moisés at the edge of the platform nearly screamed as he waved his arms.

“Fucking look at me!”

As if she heard, the woman turned and looked right at him.

His eyes burned into hers for an instant before the train slid into the tunnel. They both were sure.

He took a step toward her and connected with the train coming into the station.

Da Rocha

Officer Da Rocha never found her.

Months, then years passed. Moises was released from the hospital, but he never spoke of a girlfriend or wife. He was vague about why he’d been out that night – without shoes. By the time he was released from the hospital, he’d lost his apartment and moved to another, more run-down building. His former neighbors probably breathed a sigh of relief, Da Rocha thought.

Occasionally, Da Rocha would think of the mystery woman and wonder about her. It was as if she’d vanished into thin air or perhaps had never been real at all. The neighbor and others had seen her, but they could provide no details about her. No missing person reports lined up during his time on the force.

The newspaper headline barely registered: “Man killed by metro train”

He assumed it was a suicide, but he felt compelled to get the paper. Sliding a few coins across the counter, he picked the paper and continued to read as he walked home. He stopped dead in his tracks when he got to the name of the deceased: Moisés Bomba.

It was him. It had to be him.

Da Rocha snorted out of his nose. *Maybe he got what’s coming to him*, he thought. He flipped over the paper to read the rest of the story, but it shared little information. Moisés had lived a dreadful existence and died stepping in front of a metro train as it entered the station.

Good riddance, Da Rocha thought. Too little, too late.

His mind went back to the mystery woman, and he wondered about her, again. He hoped, not for the last time, that she’d found peace and happiness.

He stuffed the newspaper into the next trash bin he passed.

Peres and Isabela

Isabela and Peres thanked the superintendent for her time. Dores had gone missing the night before and hadn’t returned. She’d left behind her purse and a couple items of clothing. The

superintendent had turned them over, but Isabela pressed the clothing back at the woman and told her to keep it for someone who could use it.

The purse contained a worn wallet with a few bills, coins and an old-style card that identified the bearer as Dores DeSouza, born in 1951 with an address in a Lisbon neighborhood half-way across the city. Inside a pocket in the purse, Isabela unearthed several dog-eared snapshots of a little boy with dark curly hair and bright eyes. It was Tomás. She'd have known it even if his name hadn't been printed in neat handwriting on the back, complete with his age and the date: his 4th birthday, 1984.

"What do you make of it?" Peres asked her as they stood on the sidewalk. She fingered the pictures, flipping them over, tracing Dores' neat printing.

"I knew she hadn't just abandoned him," she said. "He was too well-cared for. I knew something had happened to her."

"But what?" Peres asked.

"I think she got lost in time. Or I guess maybe he did," she said, reading the date again. It was nearly a decade after she'd had tea with a 4-year-old Tomás and his foster mom Ana. *Had he gone back in time? But how had it happened? And how had Dores come to the present, looking like a still-young mom?*

Isabela shook her head. It was too much to comprehend.

"I don't know," she finally said. "But I doubt we'll see her again."

"And the boy?" Peres asked.

Isabela shrugged. "I could find out where he's at now, but what's the use? What would he remember from being so young? Hopefully, he's forgotten all about that time. And what do we have as proof? An abandoned purse, a few old pictures."

They both were silent for a moment.

"So that's it?" Peres asked.

Isabela nodded. "Except this time, you get to write the report instead of me," she said.

Peres nodded. He tipped his head at the photos. "Do you want to keep those?" he asked.

Isabela considered it and finally shook her head.

"No, you take them. It's not my case anymore."

They parted with promises to meet again for tea. Isabela hoped sincerely that he'd come, but she wasn't sure he would. Her husband had the kettle on when she walked in the door, and he pressed a macaron into her hand. She offered him a sad smile, and he held her against his chest for a long time as the light faded.

Tomás

For the second time in his life, Tomás lost his mother. They had agreed to meet at a café she'd suggested in a few hours' time. He'd hurried to the office, walking on air with anticipation. He'd texted his wife to tell her, but he couldn't figure out what to say. Instead, he told her he had great news he'd share as soon as he could. Tomás wanted to call Ana, but he didn't know how to tell her, either. She'd been such a good mom, even though she hadn't been his birth mom. Wouldn't it hurt her to know he'd found his missing mother?

Instead, he breezed into the office, making a few attempts at setting the day in motion before giving up and heading back out, instructing his team to do what they did best and telling them he'd catch up with them later. They exchanged glances and wondered if he was having an affair. Tomás exuded love and lightness. He was beautifully distracted. But no one asked, and no one gossiped. They liked him that much.

An hour later, he sat impatiently at a table near the window, perking up at every motion on the sidewalk and street. Two hours later, he'd searched every café in a three-block radius. Three hours later, he was fingering his phone, wondering if he could report his mother missing.

It really had been her, he felt it, he told himself. She was familiar. She knew things about him.

But had she really? he asked himself. Or had she just been a lunatic or an actress, someone setting him up.

But for what purpose? his mind demanded.

Tomás had no answers. And now he didn't even know what to say to himself or anyone about it.

Dejected, he trudged down the metro stairs to catch the train home.

He half expected to see her there, waiting for him. But the platform was nearly empty. A woman in tall boots paced in a tight, slow arc, gazing at the ground as she circled. Tomás wondered what she was doing. As she circled around, she lifted her head and saw him. Their eyes met, and she stopped, swaying a bit at the change in momentum. She read the pain in his eyes, and he saw the pain in hers. He could see she'd been crying. Slowly, she tilted her head to the side, as if she'd asked a question, but neither had spoken.

Tomás felt tears well in his eyes, but he smiled instead, a sad, steady smile.

She met his smile with a matching one, and he felt the pain ease a little, felt a shift in his understanding, in his loss.

It was a gift, he thought suddenly. He'd been given a gift that no one else would ever understand, but he would. And he would cherish it forever.

He and the strange, silent woman smiled at each other, and the smiles widened to grins. When the train came, he got on, but he didn't know what happened to the woman in the white jacket and tall boots.

Leonor

Leonor felt someone watching her and looked up to see an older, handsome man a few meters away. She had expected disapproval as she realized she had been walking in circles, her mind stretched into the other place. Instead, he smiled warmly at her, although she could see sadness in his face, too.

Leonor recognized him, but she knew he wouldn't know her. Yet, he stared at her intently.

It was the little boy. The one she'd seen in the other place, who cried huge tears from his beautiful brown eyes. She'd seen him grow up in her drawings, finally becoming the man before her.

His stare made her pause. She cocked her head a little to one side. It was a question, almost. *What do you want?* she wondered.

Suddenly, he looked even more sad, but his smile remained. Slowly, she answered it with her own smile.

That made him smile even broader, and she couldn't help but widen hers. They both were grinning when the train pulled into the station.

He nodded at her as he ducked into the open train car, and she lifted her chin in response.

He'd found what he was looking for, she thought. And although he was sad, he was also happy.

As the doors slid shut, she remembered the woman in the void, the one who'd been weeping inconsolably. Her sobs had felt like true heartbreak, not just sadness or loss. Leonor had seen her before, a younger woman who paced as well, so Leonor had to circle around to see her. This time as she circled her, the woman looked right at her and stopped crying. It jolted Leonor, and she'd opened her eyes to see the man watching her.

They were connected, Leonor now realized, and she thought of the man as a little boy. She could see a resemblance between them – mother and son. *That's it*, she thought.

Standing on the platform, she closed her eyes and was transported immediately back into the cold. She shivered and looked around for the light and strained to listen for sound.

It was cold and silent. Leonor turned in small circles, pacing a little to find whoever had pulled her there.

But it was empty – a true void.

And from the platform, Leonor disappeared.