

NOBODY CAME

Excerpt from CHAPTER THREE: Now.

The following days are turbulent. Waking is hell. If he needs to venture out, Gene waits until darkness descends, then visits the small supermarket on the corner of Independencia and Almirante Barroso. He buys alcohol, snacks. But most of his days are spent in his room, on his bed. Occasionally, throughout this time, there is a knock on his door. He no longer answers it. He recognises the small, polite tap. He has given up all pretence of decorum. His waking hours, of late, have one goal: to get drunk enough to pass out. In this mission, he has mainly been successful. When he is in oblivion he feels no pain. He has no memories, no aspirations, no regrets. He has given up opening the door when Rosana knocks. If he is awake he will shout 'OK,' or 'Sí, sí.' He will shout it gruffly and unfriendly. He does not answer the door. He doesn't care. He doesn't care, is what he tells himself. In his present stupor, he convinces himself that he is beyond caring; that he is not capable of caring. The truth is that he is ashamed. This is not the first time that Gene has cold-turkeyed – weaned himself off the class A drugs that he has been addicted to for a very long time. He is in a small town, if he has any friends, they do not know that he is here in Coyhaique. He does not want to meet anyone.

His days and his nights, dim and fade.

Eventually, when he is sure that Rosana is gone, when he can hear her downstairs, eventually he will open the door, and there is a plate of food: bread, sausage or stew, the occasional cake, a can of soda or a bottle of water. He leaves some money in an envelope, secured with a stone, on the concrete platform outside his door. The money, the envelope, remains where he placed it, but the food and drink are replenished.

Sometimes, on his forays to the shop, he sees Rosana's children playing in the small yard at the front of the house. He keeps his head down. At first, they would shout greetings, but eventually they stopped; they would cease their playing and stand and stare as he sloped past them and out through the gate. He is ashamed. He is sick. The self-induced alcohol fug means that he is almost oblivious to his surroundings. It's a small neighbourhood, but nobody bothers him. He feels the hollow-boned ache of opiate withdrawal, only able to think far enough ahead to fulfil his need for the amnesiac stupefaction that the alcohol provides. His determination is not strong. Occasionally, he thinks of getting to Santiago; he longs for the anonymity of a city. He is ashamed, he is weary. He is almost delirious. Sometime – often – he is suicidal.

After seven days – he's not exactly sure – maybe eight days, he awakes from a dream in which he was flying, to find himself on the floor, fully clothed, his trousers around his knees. His head pounds, his kidneys ache. He crawls on all fours to the small bathroom, pushes the door open with his head. By holding on to the toilet bowl, he raises himself up, then attempts to stand. The effort causes his head to spin, he makes a grab for the toilet handle, but fails to connect and stumbles backwards, his hand goes out and clutches the plastic shower curtain. It rips from its fastenings, and he falls sideways into the shower tray. He lies for a while, breathing hard, then, with

supreme effort, he rolls onto his front. He pushes himself into a kneeling position, and then by steadying himself on the tiled wall, he manages to get to his feet. For a long moment he stands, slightly bowed, with both palms pressed flat against the white tiled, shower stall wall. He takes deep breaths and in his mind, he counts to three, but doesn't move. So, he counts aloud: 'One, two ...' and on 'three' he pushes hard and stands upright. He keeps hold of the wall, his eyes closed. For a long while he stays, with his eyelids press tight. Eventually he opens them; his head has stopped spinning. And then he feels his stomach lurch. He twists around and bends to the toilet, vomiting a bitter bile. He grips the cistern and retches. When the nausea has subsided and the spinning stopped, he turns and grips the sides of the wash basin. With head down and eyes closed, he stays motionless, until he is sure he is not going to faint. When he opens his eyes, he is staring at himself in the small mirror. His face looks grey; he has deep furrows in his brow. Bloodshot eyes set deep in dark sockets, and he's sure they are closer together than they should be, or were. He desperately needs a shave.

He splashes his face with cold water. He wets a towel and wipes around the toilet seat, flushes. What time is it? Early morning or twilight? There are birds singing outside.

He goes back into his bedroom, sits on his bed and lights a cigarette. He takes a gulp of brandy, the glass smudged with finger marks.

He is remembering the dream.

He kneels on the floor and rifles through his suitcase, pulls out a pad. He writes:

'I just woke up from a dream. I dreamt I was flying. I could soar with ease. I was flying above London; coming in from the south, across the Thames. I could see everything so clearly. I flew above Westminster Bridge; the Houses of Parliament. North - Trafalgar Square. I circled Nelsons Colum. I flew up Tottenham Court Road, around Centre Point. I flew east, through the City. Everything was so clear - I could see everything. I flew up Whitechapel High Street, Mile End Road. I flew past my mum's block. She was on her balcony - she looked so young. She waved at me. She shouted something, but I couldn't really hear. I wanted to fly down and hear what she was saying, but for some reason I couldn't. I flew on. I flew over your block. Do you still live there? I didn't see you.'

We do not know why he wrote this, or who he was writing to, but we assume he did not know then that his mother had died.

We do not know what his plans were.