

LOLA
LARRA

VICENTE
REINAMONTES



SOUTH OF ALAMEDA

Diary of an occupation

EKARÉ
SUR



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Diary of an occupation

LOLA LARRA

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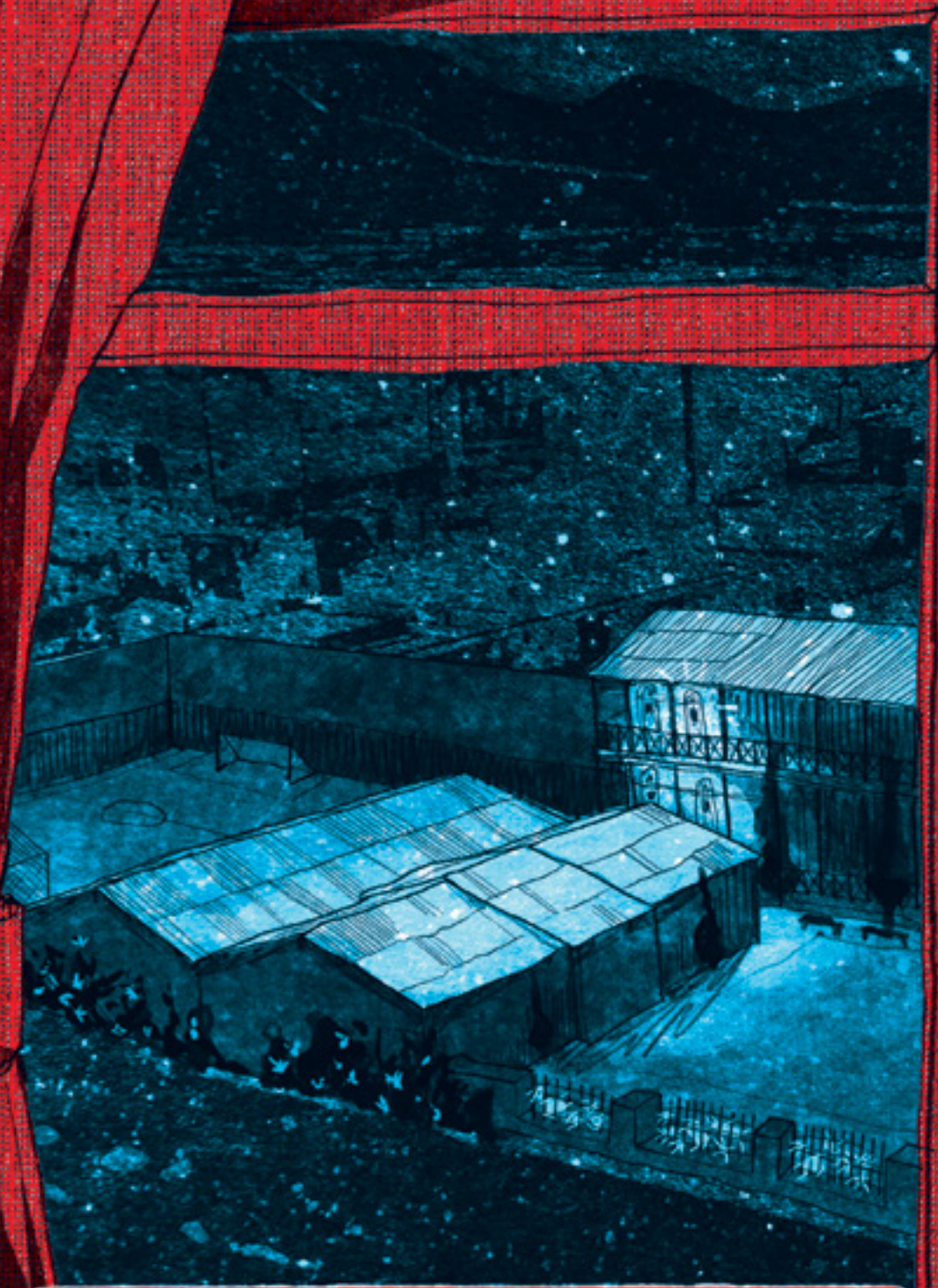
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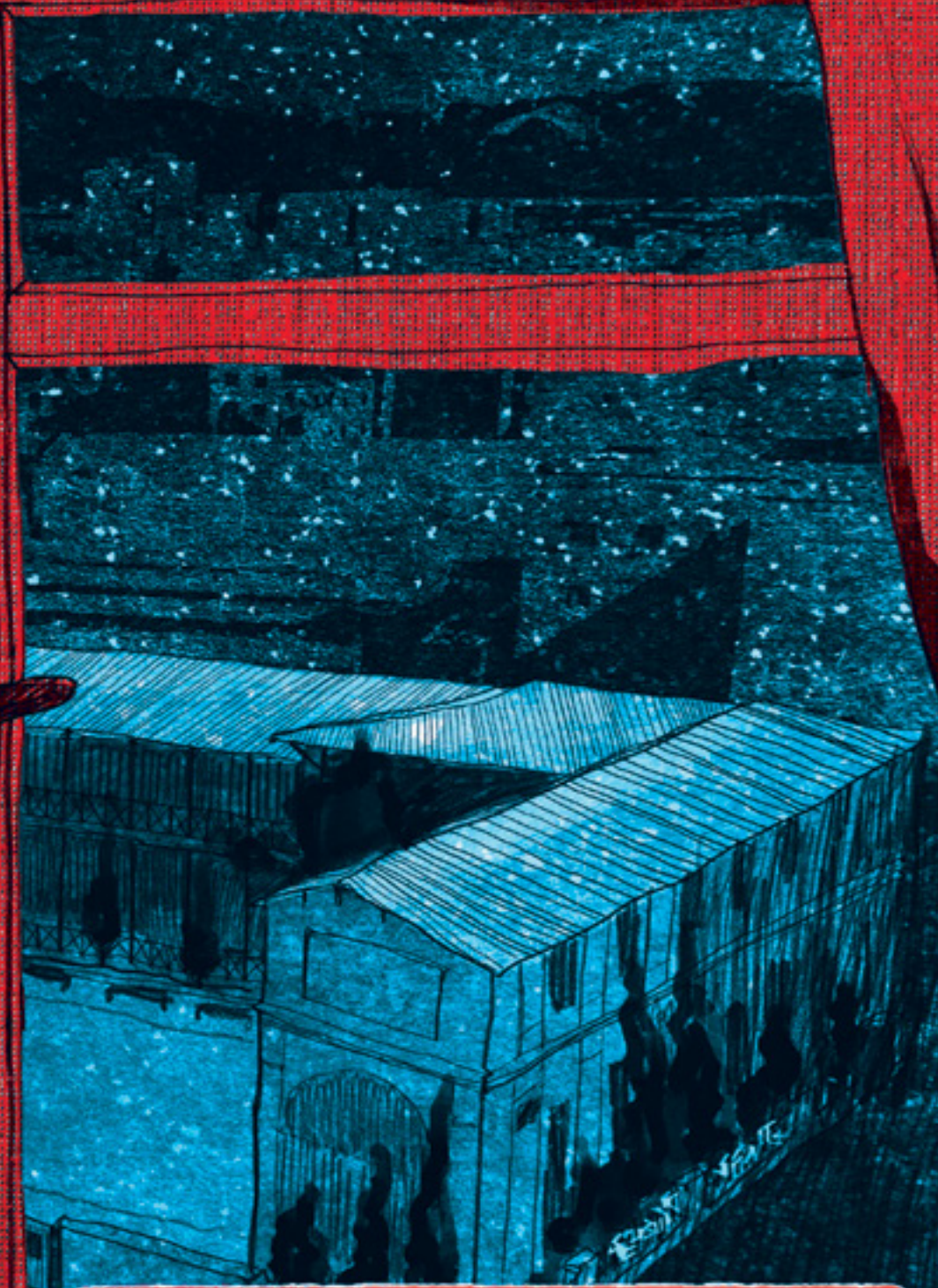
Ediciones Ekaré Sur



FROM MY WINDOW I CAN SEE A GREAT PART OF THE CITY.
BUT I AM NO LONGER INTERESTED IN IT.



I MUCH PREFER TO WATCH THE SCHOOL CLOSE BY. THE SAME ROUTINE EVERY DAY: AT EIGHT, THE NOISY BUSTLING UPON ARRIVAL; AT TEN, THE ROARING OF RECESS;



THE CALM HOURS DURING CLASSES; THE IMPATIENT DEPARTURE AT THREE. AFTERWARDS, SILENCE. DURING THE NIGHT, THE SCHOOL SEEMS A BIG ABANDONED SHIP.

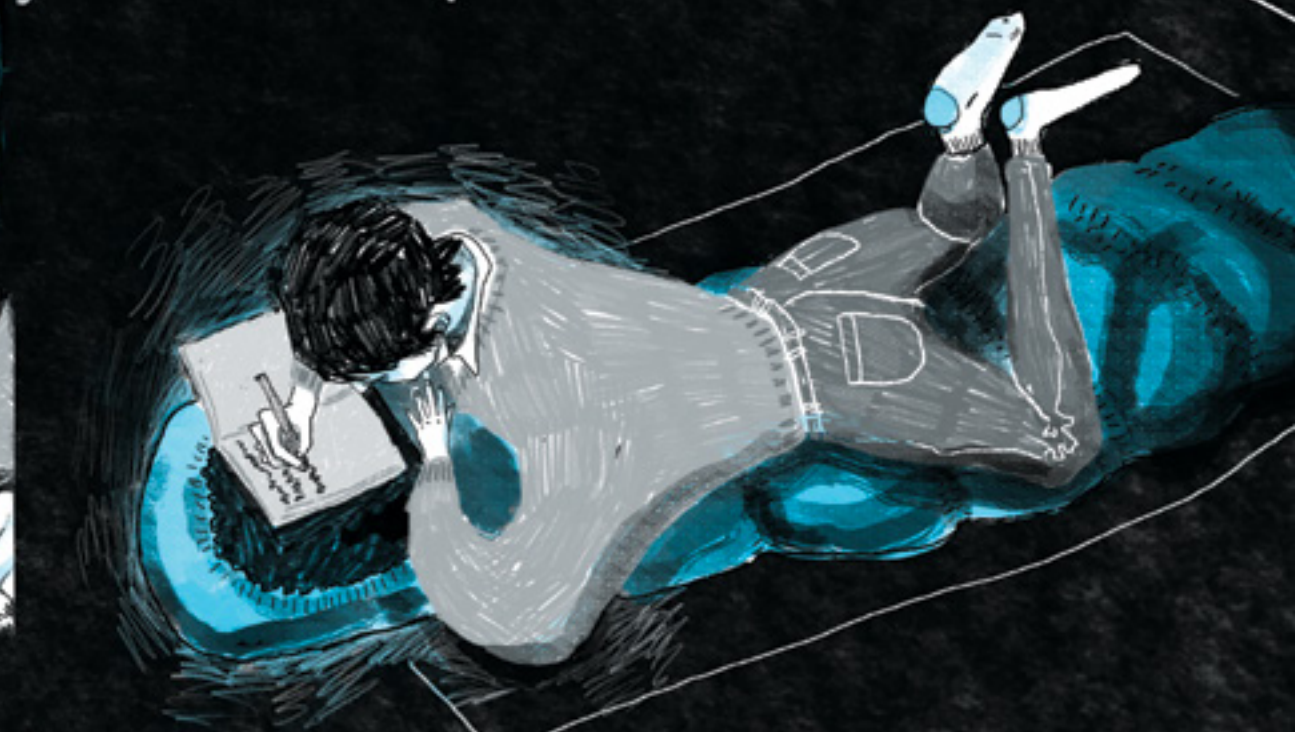


BUT THREE DAYS AGO, EVERYTHING CHANGED. TEACHERS LEFT, THE OCCUPATION BEGAN, AND THE STUDENTS MADE THE SCHOOL THEIR HEADQUARTERS. DURING THE NIGHT THE SHIP IS FILLED WITH LIGHTS AND VOICES, WHISPERING AND SCURRYING.





AND THERE IS ONE, NICOLAS, WHO WANDERS BY HIMSELF, AS IF LOST. AND HE WRITES. RIGHT THIS MOMENT, I CAN JUST MAKE HIM OUT IN ROOM 6 WITH HIS NOTEBOOK OPEN.



Friday

DAY THREE OF OCCUPATION



We just finished the last meeting of the day. Our days are spent entirely in meetings; it's a kind of illness which I'm not sure I'll be able to bear. I'm writing while in my sleeping bag, in room 6 on the second floor. It's much calmer here than downstairs, where the majority sleep crammed together in room 2, between the kitchen and the infirmary. Or should I say, the rooms that were chosen for preparing food (quite scarce and very bad at this point) and to cure the sick and the wounded (of which there have been none).

During these three days of occupation the school has changed, so have the students. The chairs are piled up outside, tables are covering the windows, sleeping bags strewn about the floor. And although the majority is still dressed in their school uniforms, they look different, or I see them differently.

The members of the Student Council had been preparing the occupation in the past week. They secretly smuggled into school sacks of rice, packages of pasta, cans of tuna and tomato sauce.

But the reserves are dwindling and they aren't sufficient to really feed us. We could improve our diet if we could gain access to the school's cafeteria. I would give anything for some chocolate chip cookies or some cereal bars. Or at the very least, a packet of sugar. Petrosi, in charge of the kitchen matters, completely overlooked this detail: we don't have a grain of sugar.

Nevertheless, that said, the cafeteria is locked down tight, fenced and padlocked. A bunch of us, after finishing our puny dinners, proposed, once again, to break through the fence and into the cafeteria. "No looting", voiced the members of the Student Council. "Not for now", they added to appease us. "We *must* give an impeccable image", they concluded. The rumor is that since Aldo, the son of the cafeteria owner, is a member of the Student Council Directive, they are avoiding giving the order. But it won't be long, I mutter to myself, hungry.

In the "infirmary", two chicks, juniors, spend the day there, filing their nails and fixing their hair. They make braids, they dye their hair and play around with makeup. They also offer their styling services to the other girls, but so far only their own hair has gone from a dark brown to a very odd reddish green. The Council constantly reminds them that they can take shifts, that there is no need for them to be on guard all the time. But both huff: they state that since they are going to study medicine they are the most qualified. On the blackboard they write recipes and instructions: "Before tending to a wound, you must disinfect your

hands with alcohol". Or mysterious phrases like "You never know what a wounded persons ailment might actually be"

My favorite one is the Recipe for Rehydration, written off to one side of the blackboard which they never erase:



I doubt any of us will suffer dehydration. We're in the middle of autumn and the temperature drops more and more by the day. And especially during the night. They should be giving us recipes for hypothermia instead. I have no doubt that very soon it will get much colder. The school's walls are humid and the tiled floors are cold.

It's been three days since we locked ourselves in and it looks like it's going to be a long ride. This was the Student Council's new announcement. That we must resist, that we will achieve our goals, that we must remain united. But some students, the younger ones, are nervous and some whisper they want to go home.

This afternoon Valentin, president of the Council, was clearly exhausted. More nervous than usual. He goes from one place to another, attending meetings inside and outside school. Members of the Council are the only ones who get to move around a bit. And Valentin is the one that spends the most time outside. He meets with other student leaders, with representatives of the Coordinated Assembly of Upper School Students. He even meets with journalists.

Valentin is a curious matter for me. Until last week, to my friends and I he seemed like a jerk. Always talking in class with his haughty voice, quoting long phrases, and staying to talk to teachers after the final bell rang. Always getting good grades, even in gym class because he's a pretty good athlete. Always clean, tidy and hair combed, he never takes his tie off, not even now during the occupation.

And on top of everything, he's president of the Student Council. But who the hell cared a few days ago?

Now, instead, Valentin is always surrounded by people. Everyone asking him about everything, expecting him to tell them what to do, what to say, and how to behave. Now Valentin is

even showing up in newspapers; we saw him today in an article of *El Mostrador*, with a picture and such. Valentin gives speeches and makes statements every time he opens his mouth. Valentin decided the teacher's lounge was his place now and there he established Base One, as they like to call it. As if we were climbing Mount Everest.

From one day to the next, he's gone from being a jerk to becoming the leader of the school. That's how fast things can change in here.

We are thirty-five in total. From different grades, although most of us are juniors and seniors.

Not one of my teammates from the soccer team stayed. So in here I can't count on Domingo, or Fernando, or Rafa, my best friends.

I don't know what they're thinking about me. They must think I went nuts. I would've thought the same thing. A week ago I never would've imagined that I'd be here. A week ago, when the protests began and the school's occupation was decided, I thought, as did my friends, that all the commotion created by the Student Council was something that had nothing to do with us.

Now I'm not sure what I think. I blame Paula for all of this. Paula, the *French* chick.



FROM HERE I CAN SEE PAULA IN ONE OF THE HALLWAYS. I'VE HEARD THEY CALL HER THE FRENCH CHICK. THEY USED TO CALL ME "RASPY", IN THOSE YEARS, WHEN YOU WERE NOT SUPPOSED TO DISLIKE OR FAVOR ANYONE. BUT NOW, NONE OF THAT MATTERS TO ME. THIS YEAR, PAULA IS MY FAVORITE.







Paula looked at me with her dark eyes as I crossed the entrance of the school towards the street, ready to leave:

—Nicolas —she called me without raising her voice—. ¿You're leaving?

I stopped, uneasy. I stared at her, with no response. Then, she made the comment that you can't always watch life from the safety of a goal post. She doesn't have a clue about soccer, I thought, much less what it means to be a goal keeper. Being a goalie isn't looking at life from the sidelines, like spectators. That's why I dared to correct her "I don't like watching the game from outside, I never do", I told her. And I turned around, walked up the steps, and went back into the school. She smiled at me for a few seconds, then she continued her attempts to convince the students who were leaving, in a cramped and impatient line, to stay for the occupation.

Before crossing the entrance back into the school I noticed the dumbfounded (stunned) faces of Domingo, Fernando and Rafa, that stood in the street watching me go back in, making gestures, yelling something I couldn't make out.

That was three days ago. When all of the teachers, along with the principal, had gone. And also the majority of the students. When the 35 of us here on the inside, officially took over the school.

I had heard about protests and occupations and, in truth, it wasn't as at all as I had imagined it. Although I never speak of it, in the mid-eighties, before I was born, my parents were protesting

and building barricades on a daily basis. Especially my mom, who I never call mom. At home we all call her Maria Jose. And Maria Jose was always the first person out the door, and the first person driving the police (cops) crazy. That's what Ernesto says, my father. On more than one occasion they beat her and threw her into a patrol car. My grandfather would go and take her out of the police station, before there was any chance "something misfortunate should occur", as he usually says. My grandfather had a high ranking police officer among his contacts, although this is a story my mother would rather avoid. Maria Jose and Ernesto actually met in a protest. Ernesto was a University student, and my mom was still in high school. They escaped together, they lived in a room downtown and secretly got married two months later when my mother turned eighteen. My grandfather almost had a heart attack, at least that's what grandma says. Even to this day, my father and grandfather barely speak to each other. Only to say hello, always very stiff and polite, and they exchange grunts every so often if they are, on rare occasions, in the same room together. Three times a year, to be precise. For Christmas, on my birthday, and for my younger sister Javi's birthday.

So, time and again, I had heard the stories about the protests in the eighties, during the dictatorship. The police waiting to attack, the riot trucks (guanaco) firing their furious streams of water, the teargas bombs, the police clubbing people left and right, the swollen tearing eyes, the scratchy and inflamed throats that only

found relief by sucking on lemons, and the friends that were taken away by the police and sometimes never seen again.

None of this has happened. This is the most civilized occupation I could imagine. First, on Tuesday, we carried out a half hour strike, in an act of solidarity with other schools that were already under occupation.

We left the classrooms and we sat in the schoolyard. There were a few students with signs and some would shout slogans. Everybody loves a good excuse to miss a class, that's why there was such a good turnout. After a bit of disturbing the peace, we went back to class.

But on Wednesday morning the members of the Student Council called for a general assembly. They read a manifesto and stated they would occupy the school.

Only a few blocks from here are the most emblematic public schools of the city, the most determined and combative. El Nacional. El Aplicación. We've always been aware of them, but they on the other hand, had no idea we existed. Until now, because we are among the few private schools that have joined the protests and occupations in all of Chile.

When Valentin finished reading the Student Council's manifesto, the teachers went home. The principal closed and locked his office and left, after suggesting to all of us to remain cautious and to give Valentine a few pats on the shoulder. The majority of the students left, more than happy to accept a few days of obligated

vacation time. And we stayed, the thirty five. The doors were shut, and the windows were jammed with pieces of wood and branches. Outside, we barricaded the fence facing the side street with chairs and tables, pushed outwards with their legs facing the street, it seemed like an enormous wood and metal sculpture.

The next morning, we were visited by a delegate of the Coordinated Assembly. Valentine introduced him to us as el Cachorro (the Cub) Salazar, almost bowing in reverence as he lead him up to the blackboard in the meeting room. Salazar was big and tall and looked like he was eighteen or twenty years old, even while wearing a high school uniform. He stood in front of us with his hands on his back and the first thing he did was congratulate us for the occupation. Everybody outside is really proud that a school like ours had joined the student strike, he said. Because, he added, it meant that all the students in the country, rich and poor, were on the same frequency. It is an excellent symptom, he continued, that this emblematic occupation has occurred (and the tone he used to say "emblematic" sounded twisted to me, as though this was not meant as a complement).

—Chilean education has become a new vehicle for propagating the tremendous inequality of our society. To those born poor in a community without resources there is no choice but to attend a poor municipal public school with an extremely low quality educational environment. Almost a month has passed since we started the protests, in the beginning we only demanded free

student bus passes and a free SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test). But in the process of discussing our situation we have come to realize that these petitions are but a small part of what we actually need. The educational system requires a fundamental restructuring, we urgently need to change the LOCE (Constitutional Law for Education), and put a stop to municipalization. And we can make a change. Our mobilizations have more than demonstrated- that —at this point Salazar made a long pause, as if he needed winding again—. Everyone says we're a lost generation, that we are selfish (self-centric), that "we don't give a shit"...I'm sure they've told you that you are spoiled brats, who's only interests are cool clothes, bad music, and getting wasted in the parks and plazas...

I looked around. Everybody was very concentrated and attentive listening to Cachorro Salazar, who personally struck me as being just plain arrogant. If Rafa or Fernando or Domingo had been here, we would have all looked at each other, and without a word we'd have all thought the same thing: that that's exactly what Cachorro thinks, that we are a bunch of wimps compared to the rest of the students like himself.

—...because we are one, because together we will accomplish our common objectives. That's why it's so important that we all unite and march together on Tuesday the 30th... —Salazar continued, but I went to the door and walked out to the patio. On that Thursday morning, in the meeting room, packed with people, the atmosphere was thick and suffocating. I needed a

breath. And it was the first time the feeling really hit me of how alone I was in this Occupation, without a friend in sight to laugh and joke around with.

—¿Where are you, man?—Fernando had asked me the night before on the phone. I had just turned my cellphone on, just re-charged, and there were already a ton of missed calls.

—Here, at school.

—¿What are you doing there, man?

—I'm in the Occupation.

—You're a fuckin' idiot.

As you can see, Fernando has an extensive vocabulary.

—¿Is there a problem?

—No, no problem—Fernando stayed silent for a long while, almost two minutes.—. ¿Have you already talked to Domingo and Rafa?

—My cellphone was dead. I just turned it back on. Mangueras loaned me his charger.

—¡Hey, only 16 days to go! —Fernando religiously counted off the days to the World Cup—. We have to make our bets. I think it should be 20 dollars each; any less would be a waste of time.

After a sad and brutal battle, Chile had been eliminated from the play-offs. As a result, everyone was placing their second bets: Fernando was rooting for Italy; Domingo, for the host, Germany; my choice was France, because Colombia, my other favorite team, was also eliminated. And Rafa, just to be different, said he would

bet on Ghana, ¡on Ghana!

—And,...¿is everything ok? —continued Fernando when he realized I didn't answer.

—Yeah, everything's cool.

—Ok.

—Ok, well, I have to call home. They must be worried that I have gotten home for dinner.

—Yeah. Alright. I'll see you tomorrow.

—Yeah. Bye.

At my house, it was my little sister that answered the phone. Javi always had the phone, she carries it with her everywhere, waiting for this kid she likes to call her, and she's just a little seventh grade runt. She answered and yelled hysterically, calling my mother. I could tell she couldn't believe I'd joined the Occupation. She told me that my parents were fully aware, that she had told them everything.

—Pass the phone to María José —I said. I heard my mother's steps along the wood floor as she ran down the hall towards the phone.

Even though she tried to hide it, I could sense the emotion in my mother's voice.

—¿Are you ok, Nicolás?

—Everything's fine, María José.

—¿Do you have something to keep you warm at night?

—We pulled the mats out from the gymnasium and there are

extra sleeping bags too.

—Good. Great idea.

—We also have food.

—I can see you're well organized. If you need anything, I can help you guys. You can count on us for anything.

—¿And Ernesto?

—Your father is still at the office, but he knows what's going on.

—Well, my cellphone doesn't have many more minutes left, it would probably be best if we hung up.

—Yes, of course. I'll be calling you.

—Ok.

—Nico —my mom cleared her throat—. I just wanted to tell you that I'm really proud of you. That you're fighting for what you believe is right and just.

Things are funny in a way. I've stopped more goal kicks than any other goalie in the inter-school league. I've stopped seven penalty kicks in championship games and there's nobody else my age that can say the same. But this was the first time my mother had ever said she was proud of me.



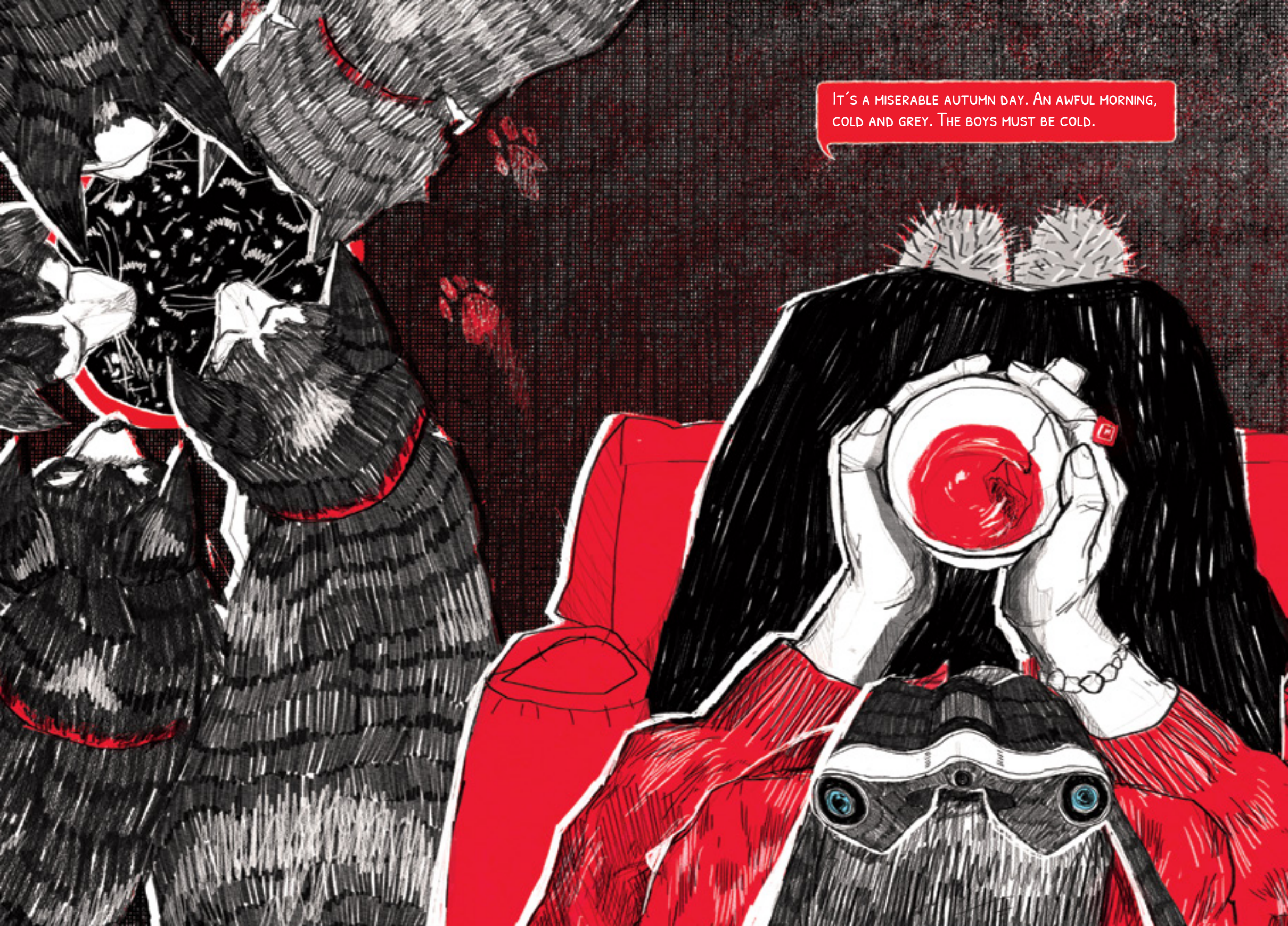


¡GLADYS,
SALVADOR,
NEVADO,
MANCHI,
BRUNO,
HORTENSIA,
CELESTE!

TIME TO EAT!



IT'S A MISERABLE AUTUMN DAY. AN AWFUL MORNING,
COLD AND GREY. THE BOYS MUST BE COLD.





LAB

COCINA



Paul Eluard





My daily routine begins with training at seven in the morning, I'm used to waking up early. I can never sleep past seven thirty, or eight, at most. I usually run 4 kilometers (2.5 miles), then do push-ups, sit-ups and finish with some jump rope. It isn't as much fun to run within the confines of the school, so I decided to skip this part of my routine. I use the school gym for my work out; afterwards I wash up as best I can and then go and have breakfast, at this point neither Petrosi, nor Tini, a redheaded sophomore girl that helps him in the kitchen, have woken yet.

Scrambled eggs, warm toast with slices of avocado, a banana milkshake and a bowl of cereal and fruit topped with some yoghurt and honey. ¿Is this what you'd imagine we have here in our "occupied kitchen"? Keep dreaming(Not even close)... That's only my ravenous imagination as my stomach squeaks and rumbles. With a certain sense of resignation, I stir up some oatmeal with milk in a small pot and place it on a portable stove until it starts to bubble, then I bring some water to a boil and throw in a couple

of teaspoons of Nescafe (instant coffee). I don't even think about toast, bread just isn't an option, we have a couple of bags full, but we save it just for emergencies, besides, there's nothing to spread on it. No marmalade (jam), no butter and least of all any avocado. This is the time of day when I could kick myself for ever having decided to stay. After my workout, I get home and Maria José is already awake, preparing breakfast for the likes of an army platoon. She says I have to stay well nourished, because I burn too much energy. Just thinking about it makes my mouth water. The oatmeal I cook up, with no honey or sugar or fruit, just plain sucks.

This morning, Paula sat next to me in the school cafeteria. She was carrying a book in one hand. Paula could always be seen carrying a book around. She told me I could borrow it if I liked, she had just finished reading it. I hesitated. And that was enough to make Paula smile: "Oh, right...I almost forgot, you're not so big on reading are you..." She said it with this tone, with a somewhat sickening air of superiority. ¡What a snob!

There are a lot of people that can't stand Paula. Very few can tolerate her "unique personality" and how she says things. I have to admit, she is pretty special. She is one of those people that just won't keep quiet, especially when keeping quiet would be in anyone's best interest. Also, she tends to talk with this provocatively calm demeanor that simply gets on my nerves.

The first time I noticed her was in the cafeteria, at lunchtime.

She was the new student, she had just started at school and I didn't know her, she isn't in my class. Paula got up from her chair, clutching her tray with cafeteria food, and very calmly walked over to the cash register, where Aldo's dad would be breaking a sweat juggling lunch money and change, while simultaneously attempting to keep the lunch tickets in order.

- Did you know that Chile has one of the highest statistics of child obesity in the world? - she said to him, with perfect pronunciation.

Aldo's father tilted his head up and gazed at Paula with a confused expression.

- Do you need anything?

- What I need is to tell you that you are contributing to the child obesity crisis. The food you are serving here is a disgrace. Not only that, but it is over-cooked and has too much salt.

Aldo's father couldn't believe what he was hearing. He stood dumbfounded as Paula left the untouched tray of food on the counter in front of him, turned, and calmly walked towards the cafeteria exit.

Some people think Paula does things just to show off. Maybe that's partly true. But there's something else, which is what I like about her: Paula just seems fearless. At least she doesn't seem to care what other people think about her.

Paula's parents lived in France. She was born there, in a city called Lyon, I have no idea (no clue) where that is. I'll have to

look it up on the web (google it). She returned to Santiago last year and enrolled in our school. She's taller than the other girls, her hair is straight and cut short, level with her chin, she has deep dark eyes and when she pronounces her rrr's she makes a strange rolling gurgle sound. Neither Fernando nor Domingo, who are constantly harping about girls, consider her worthy of being included among the "flawless", as they enjoy classifying the most attractive and voluptuous of the specimens among the girls, of which, by the way, there are only four according to them. They say Paula isn't necessarily ugly, she's passable, but by no means does she stand out in any particular way. I prefer to keep my opinion silent.

Paula is a member of the Student Council. She's among the vocal members, and these last few days she's proven herself to be a very talented speaker. She moves through one topic at a time, everything well thought out and clear. Sometimes I envy those people who seem to have the picture so clear in their heads so as to be able to verbally express them in just one go. Like Paula, who pronounces every letter in each word, without dropping the sss's at the ends. And never uses annoying fillers such as, *like*, or *ya know*, or *totally*.

One time she spoke about how education was free for everyone in France, even the Universities, which I have to admit, nobody really believed, later that day at home I asked my parents and they confirmed it. From that moment on, everybody started

referring to her as the *French chick*.

- "What makes you think I don't read?" - I mustered the courage to say, before she walked away holding her mug with oatmeal. - You think us soccer jocks don't read?

Paula stopped and looked at me, slightly wrinkling her nose with a gesture of concentration.

I thought of the library in my room, about my comic collection that I've kept since I was little. I have all of the Tintin's, and all of Asterix, of course. I'm sure these books would seem childish to Paula. Then there are my police novels on the top shelf. I have the complete collection of Sherlock Holmes and a few crime (noir) novels by Hammett and Chandler. I'm sure Paula reads more "serious" novels.

I tried to find out the title of the book Paula was holding in her hand. It was something in French. I couldn't make anything else out. Tintin and Asterix are written in French, I told myself, but I suppose neither qualify for her.

- Maybe I'm mistaken, but I've never seen you with a book in your hand.

- Well, I prefer not to show them off... - I answered.

- Oh, well I guess they must all be in your backpack - she left the mug on the table and ran towards the steps leading to the second floor classrooms.

It took me a couple of seconds to figure it out. I jumped out of my seat and ran after her. I caught up to her in Room 6, where

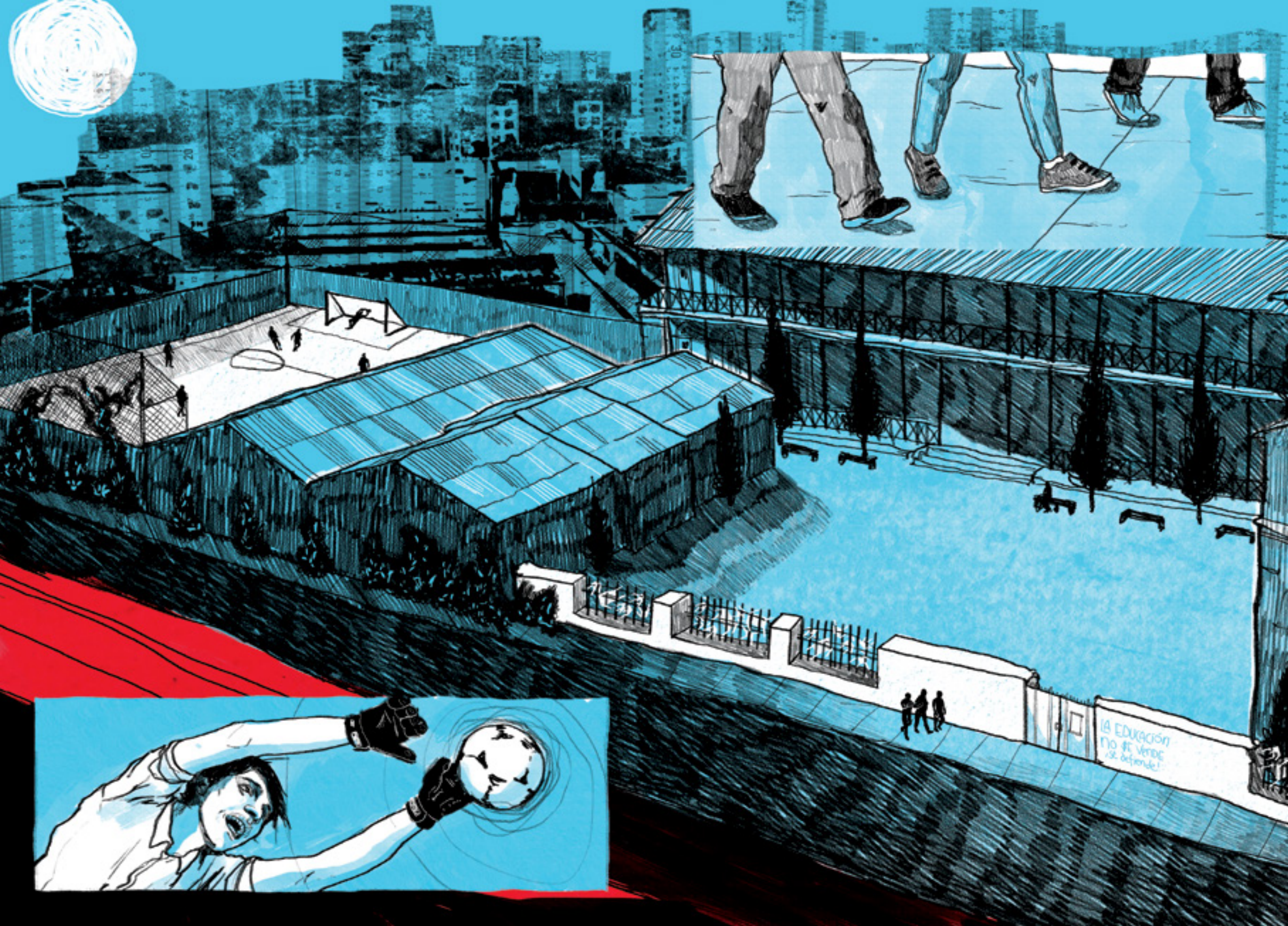
she was already on my sleeping mat, trying to find my backpack among the disheveled folds of my sleeping bag. I leaped on top of her before she could manage to get it open. I didn't want her to see this diary. That would be terrible.

We wrestled around a bit and ended up exhausted, lying on the sleeping bag, laughing. Then we heard a voice:

- Hey, keep it down! Show some respect for those of us who are trying to sleep...- It was Mangueras, rolled up in his sleeping bag only a few feet (meters) away.

Paula seemed to have forgotten about snooping through my stuff and we both tiptoed out of the classroom. As we walked down the steps towards the courtyard, she said to me in a very serious tone:

- We should organize something. A soccer match, or something.
- ¿A soccer match?
- Everybody is really on edge and I think if we did something fun, and especially something exhausting, it might be good for everybody, to let of some steam, right?



LA EDUCACIÓN
NO SE VENDE
SE DEFENDE!

WHY ARE THE BOYS FROM THE SOCCER TEAM SHOWING UP AT SCHOOL? COULD IT BE THEY'RE JOINING THE OCCUPATION?



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The match started at midday in the playground's soccer court. At first, it was planned to be a girls against the guy's game. Then, it changed to an A classmates versus the B class. Finally, there were so many changes that I lost track of the criteria. A bit of everything I guess. Paula was on the opposing team and nobody could get the ball past me, as goalkeeper, during the first twenty minutes of the game.

- Unfair! That's cheating! - you could hear the other team complain.- Nicolás should play a different position.

I shrugged my shoulders, and passed my gloves and kneepads to Mangueras, and took a lateral "mid-field" position. I scored two goals. Paula would glare at me with a mix of contempt and amusement. We won, of course. At the 42 minute mark of the match the other team gave up. They were almost all heaving and breathless, exhausted and strewn about the edges of the court, along the benches or on the ground.

Right then, my cell phone rang. It was Domingo. We'd already spoken a couple of times, and on both occasions, Domingo had mentioned that he thought it was "sick" (awesome) that I was involved in the occupation. And I responded by saying he should join.

- So Nicolás, what's going on in there? - Domingo asked.

- Well, basically, there isn't much food and we're pretty bored. But we just finished playing a soccer match we organized. You should have seen it. They barely lasted more than half an hour.

- Yeah, we went and tried to get in, but they didn't let us.

- What?

- Yeah, a little while ago, Fernando, Rafa and I, we walked up to the main entrance and knocked, for what seemed like a really long time. Finally some little kids opened the peep slot and told us to leave, that we couldn't enter.

- Were you planning on joining the occupation?

- Well...I don't know whether the plan was to join, we mostly just wanted to hang out with you for a while.

- A while? What do you mean for a while?

- Yeah...why not?

- Because this is an occupation. Nobody can leave, unless they've been chosen for some kind of specific mission. Nobody can enter, unless we've specifically organized some activity open to the general public - unconsciously I was reciting back the rules we were given at the first assembly. I am starting to sound like that jerk (asshole) Valentin, I thought to myself.

- We brought some hot dogs and buns and we'd thought about cooking 'em up and eating 'em with you, but they didn't even let us peak inside.

- Enough for thirty-five of us? Because that's how many of us are in here.

- No, of course not! We didn't plan on feeding the entire school? The food was just for us four.

I didn't get angry because I thought about his parents. They were

pretty stiff older folks, very conservative, republicans through and through, as Maria José would say. I'm sure he'd never heard any mention of student occupations and the like at his house, they never spoke of politics and I never really understood why they enrolled him in this school, it being of relatively liberal tendencies. Maybe it was just out of convenience because it was only a few blocks from their home.

- Thanks, bro - I said. - It would've been really nice to have a couple of hot dogs. We're pretty starved in here.

- I don't exactly know who was talking to us through the peep slot. They even asked us to show them our ID cards. As if they didn't know who we were. As if we were complete strangers?

Domingo, alongside the rest of the soccer team, took it somewhat for granted that the entire school knew who they were. We are the stars. That's what Domingo thinks at least; especially given he plays as the center forward on field. And it's also what I thought, until Wednesday: even though we didn't know the name of anyone else, everyone obviously knew who we were, our names, and our athletic achievements. Now I'm fully aware that there are many students that couldn't care less (don't give a damn) about soccer, much less who we are.

- Well everybody is pretty nervous at this point; they have the feeling the cops are on the verge of breaking in and kicking us out.

- Yeah, ok. Maybe.

- Valentín is pretty worried. Along with the rest of the Student Council.

- Rafa wanted to stay.

- Rafa...really?

- Yeah, he said he wanted to stay with you. He figured you needed some company in there.

Of the four us, Rafa is the quietest. He's a year younger, but he's also the tallest and strongest among us. He arrived at the school three years ago. He's from Concepción originally and he was the best soccer player at his old school. They were even thinking of recruiting him for the junior Huachipato league. But that year, Rafa had his growth spurt. In a few months he had grown to 6' 2" tall. Some officials from the soccer league called his parents and recommended that he would be better off playing rugby, that he would have a better chance in that sport because in soccer, according to them, though it's not true, it's better to be short, light and fast. The truth is, Rafa's really fast. You'd never imagine it by seeing him walk, a bit clumsy and ungainly, with his shoulders always hitched up close to his ears. But when he steps on to the field he's a bullet. And no opponent would dare get in his way when he's shooting down center field, moving the ball with ease, as if he were caressing the ball with his feet. I don't why, but Rafa avoids shooting for goals. He always passes the ball at the last minute, when he's right up close to the goal. He makes a good pass, clean and well placed, so that someone else can take the

glory. The coach says that Rafa is a generous player. Others say he wimps out. I'm not sure what to think. Sometimes I can see him from my goal post, with the goal at shot distance, perfectly lined up... and he passes it. As if he weren't willing to risk missing it.

- Tell him that I'm going to talk to the Student Council about it. And I'll let him know. If he still feels like joining the occupation, I'd be happy to have him here. Call me in a couple of hours, I ran out of minutes on my cell.

- Ok, cool... - and Domingo hung up.

I grabbed my backpack and headed towards the teachers lounge. I wanted to tell Valentín that Rafa wanted to join the occupation, and ask him what we would need to do to let him in.

The door to "Base One" was closed, but there was an open ceiling window that shown onto the courtyard and I could hear voices coming through, arguing.

It was Paula that was talking at the moment.

- We have to tell everybody. We need to call a general assembly immediately! - she said - I can't believe you received this yesterday and didn't tell us!

- Paula, it's best we keep this quiet for now. - it was the voice of Valentin.

- That's playing dirty - Paula had lowered her voice and her voice sounded a bit more hoarse than usual.

- I'm always for total transparency - I couldn't recognize this voice, most likely one of Valentines' followers, one of those that,

since the occupation began, haven't left his side except to go to the bathroom. - But in this case we need to be cautious, like Valentin says. Let's vote first amongst ourselves, the Student Council, and tomorrow we'll decide on what to do. Or better yet, on Monday. Maybe it's best we keep things calm during the weekend.

- The Principal has the authority to call in the cops to kick us out. We need to be prepared! How will we be ready if nobody knows what's going on?!? -it was Paula's voice again. When she said prepared she let one her gurgly rrr's slip by.

- The letter clearly states that they have no intention of removing us from the school.

- Then, why don't we tell everybody? We agreed that all decisions were to be made by the entire group and voted on democratically, the Student Council doesn't make decisions on it's own. You shouldn't forget that.

Valentin fell silent for a few seconds. I imagined Paula standing in front of Valentin, with an air of defiance. And I imagined Valentin and the other guy, not knowing where to look, unable to lock with Paula's dark glare.

- Let me think about it, maybe it would be a good idea to consult with members of the Assembly. They have more experience. I'll give Cachorro a call - Valentin spoke with a worried tone, as if things were beginning to feel overwhelming -. It was a mistake not to have told all of you immediately. But believe me, Paula, last night I didn't even pay attention to the letter. I was mixed

up in a dozen different things and forgot about it. Give me some time, just until tomorrow.

- Tomorrow morning, at the first meeting, not a moment longer. With everybody included, not an internal vote by the Student Council.

Nobody answered.

Paula and I almost ran into each other, I followed her down the hall. Her lips were tense; she stayed quiet when I asked her what was going on. We walked to the end of the hall in silence, where a wall crowned with barbed wire separated us from the street, a corner of the school some students used to sneak a smoke. There was nobody around. Paula sat on the edge of a low wall and gestured me to come closer. I sat beside her. Paula pulled a folded piece of paper out of her sweatshirt pocket and handed it to me.

It was a letter with the schools seal on it. It took me a few minutes to finish reading.

Santiago, May 25, 2006.

Esteemed Student Body:

With respect to the student protest and the involvement of our students in it, please note:

The Administrative Board supports the position adopted by the Directorate that, even though it values the development of the

students' political vocation it does not support the take over and occupation of the institutions facilities as it is deemed unnecessary and inconvenient for the school.

In spite of the aforementioned, and in consequence with the values of our school, no forceful measures will be sought to vacate the students from the premises, being that they are democratically mobilized members of our community.

Confident that maintaining an open dialogue, and a search for joint solutions, will allow us to advance effectively towards the normalization of activities within the school. We are fully aware and recognize that this process has proven itself to be a highly relevant socio-political experience.

Signed: The Administrative Board

When I finished, I handed the letter back. Paula sat there expecting me to say something. I had nothing to say.

- Can you believe it?

I hesitated a moment before answering:

- That the Directorate is no longer in agreement with the occupation.

- Neither are the teachers. And that means trouble. - Paula spoke in a very serious tone.

- What kind of trouble? - And it was an honest question, no joke, I sincerely didn't see what the problem was.

- For one, a lot of the students that are here decided to stay

because the directorate stood behind the occupation. Didn't you see how calmly the principal left the school; he was actually cheering us on. Did you see the attitude of the teachers when they left, no objections at all. There was a meeting on Tuesday morning and they agreed that they wouldn't take any actions against the occupation. Even Gertru, the math teacher, and García, the history teacher, offered to come and give some special classes so we wouldn't fall behind in our studies.

- So, why did you think they suddenly changed their opinion?

- I don't know. Maybe the Principal was pressured by some of the parents, by the Ministry, or even City Hall, who knows?

- Well...then we'll continue without the support of the Directorate. This is the same situation that other schools usually face, is it not? Up until now, to be honest, this occupation has been pretty dull. It's all been so civilized, it doesn't really feel very real...

- But now - Paula interrupted -...many are probably going to quit, they're going to want to leave. They won't be willing to go up against their own parents, the school, or the Principal. This could mean the collapse of the occupation.

Paula seemed frustrated. I wanted to hold her hand, or caress her hair, but I didn't do anything. I wanted to tell her that I didn't think it was such a big deal, I was confident that most of the group wouldn't care about the Directorate's change of heart. We had already taken the risk by staying in the school. But I didn't say anything.

- I guess what most disappoints me is Valentín's attitude - she said, and suddenly looked really sad -. I believed in him. We all had faith in him.

- Valentín is a dick!

- Don't say that. I have a lot of respect for him as a leader. He truly believes in this and sees the situation very clearly. He was the first to speak out about our joining the protests and to put the debate on the floor. He organized the takeover and occupation. And he got the entire school to take interest in what was going on outside. In a school like this, where nobody cares about anything other than hooking up, dressing up, the party on Friday, and the soccer match on Sunday...

Paula abruptly interrupted herself.

- I'd tell everyone right now -I said. Hearing Paula praise the virtues of Valentín had brought out the fighter in me. - I can't stand the way he constantly makes a distinction between the Council and the rest of us. We're all in this together, right.

Paula raised her eyebrows, which were as dark as her eyes.

- Seriously...I don't want to start a fight with Valentín -Paula shook her head and her short hair danced around her neck. - When I arrived at this school he was one of the only people who talked with me, pretty much the only one. He helped me out... We became friends. But I have to admit that since the occupation began, he's become pretty full of himself. Sometimes he acts like he's our boss or something.

Paula stood up from the wall, then she brushed her hand across her skirt, as if she had gotten dirt on it. I know some of the girls make fun of how she grooms herself, her haircut and her makeup. They say she looks like she's from another time, I say there's nothing wrong with looking like your from another time. Sometimes I think I would've preferred it, to live in another time.

- Well, let's go - said Paula, and gave a huge sigh. - Let's get everyone together.

- Are you going to read the letter out loud to everyone?

- I don't know, I guess. I don't know what to do...Valentín asked me to give him until tomorrow.

I stood, thinking for a moment. Paula stood doubtful, letter in hand.

- I have a better idea - I said. - Mangueras can help us out with this.

- How?

- He's in charge of the occupations blog. He writes in it every day, he constantly keeps it updated, and almost everybody reads it - Paula nodded, she already knew this. - He could publish the letter in the blog. That way Valentín can't place any blame on you. Journalists call it 'filtering' information.

Paula looked at me smiling, surprised.

- ¿How did you come up with that?

- My mother, Maria José, is a journalist. Once, she told me that when someone wants to reveal information to public opinion,

but needs to stay anonymous and avoid being connected in any way to the information, they simply filter the information to the press (media). We'll just filter the letter to our press (media), which happens to be Mangueras.

- Paula laughed. This time it was more of a mischievous (devious) laugh, and I loved it. Then she passed me the letter, and followed me down the halls towards the computer room. Just before going in she took hold of (grabbed) my arm, I could feel her soft fingers on my skin.

- Maybe this is a bit cowardly. Doing it this way, it seems kind of sneaky. I'm not so sure...

- It's called freedom of expression. Trust me, come on.

- There are twelve computers in the room and on a normal day they're almost always occupied. But now, with the occupation, they're never ever empty, no matter what time it is. Everybody wants to be connected. Everybody has to sign a waiting list, and the wait can last hours. When you get your turn, there's a forty minute limit to use the computer. Mangueras is the only one that can use the computers as long as he pleases because he's in charge of the computer room and the blog. And there he was, typing away furiously; I called him from the doorway.

We spoke in the courtyard, far from everyone else. I told him what was going on and passed him the letter. Mangueras nodded the entire time. He gave us a wink and took off. Mangueras really seems like he's from some other time. He has long hair, and he

keeps a thin, spindly moustache and a grungy beard that makes it seem as if he never washes his face. Now that I sleep next to him, I've had the unfortunate opportunity to verify that he doesn't wash much at all.



At eight in the morning, in the general assembly, the students are restless. The majority had already read the Directorates letter on the blog. And every one of them wanted to ask Valentín what was going on? But when Valentín came into the room, followed by the other members of the student council, the first thing he did was raise his hand to hush the murmuring and chatter and then spoke with a firm voice:

- I know that most of you have already read the Directorates letter. And I'm glad you did. That's precisely why it was published in the occupation's blog, so that you would all be prepared for this mornings meeting and we could discuss it.

Paula and I looked at each other, surprised. Mangueras, which was seated in the first row, also turned to look back, and searched for me among the faces with his eyes wide as saucers. I locked eyes with him and could only shrug my shoulders in response. Valentín was no dummy. He new the letter had been published on the blog and was trying to take advantage of the opportunity.

- The situation is getting difficult – continued Valentín -. This

is why we need to be well prepared. Remember the eviction of Lastarria this past Monday. They evicted over forty students by force, using batons and dragging them out, arguing that they had no right whatsoever to be there...in there own school. ¡If you don't have the right to be in your own school, to ask for a bit of justice and put into practice all the democratic theory that they inculcate in us, then tell me, what is the point of coming here to learn at all! – everyone was totally captivated. Another statement like that and people would break out clapping and cheering. – They have succeeded with two...only with two. But today eight new regional schools joined the occupation movement. So the movement isn't only in Santiago, Valparaiso and Concepción. In the whole country there are currently over one hundred schools on strike. The FECH supports us. The people support us. The media is listening to us. So we have to keep on resisting.

When Valentín stopped talking, a murmur of voices started to resonate throughout the room, which started to get louder. Everybody was asking questions and arguing, while Valentín tried to get everyone to settle down.

I turned around again to look at Paula standing in the doorway, she looked really pale or at least I thought she did. Valentín gave the floor to a junior girl by the name of Francisca. She wasn't a member of the Student Council but she was always involved in anything concerning school politics. She was an Anarquist, Mangueras had told me one night when we were in our sleeping

bags. He confessed it with admiration, followed by a short sigh. And it was more than obvious that Mangueras was really into this girl. – At Insuco things have gotten really violent. A friend of mine texted me about it – Francisca started out saying in a sharp and shrill voice. As she talked, she would take a lock of her long hair and continually curl it between her fingers. Mangueras watched her spellbound. – But since this school is private, nothing will happen here. The cops will never come here. Personally, I don't think we need to worry.

Valentín nodded affirmatively while he scratched his beard. Another two students spoke as well. They were convinced we should continue with the occupation.

Then, a freshman they called Barracuda, because his teeth were short and sharp, gathered the courage to say out loud what most were only muttering under their breath. That, from that moment on, without the support of the school's directorate, the parents would also retract their support for the occupation. Many would obligate their kids to return home. Half the students booed his statement, calling him a coward. But many of the younger students remained silent and pensive.

I looked towards the door again, but Paula wasn't there anymore. I snuck out into the hall and searched for her on the first floor. I couldn't find her anywhere; I figured she must have gone to the bathroom. I went up to the second floor, to Room 6, where I sleep. Nothing. There was nobody to be found. Everybody

was at the assembly. The jumbled voices could be heard coming up from the meeting. I felt like lying down and sleeping. Just then, my cell phone rang. It was Rafa.

- Hey – and then silence. As I'd mentioned before, Rafa is a man of few words.

- I'm glad you called 'cause I ran out of minutes on my cell.

- Yeah, Domingo told me.

- How's everything on the outside?

- ¡Bah! Calm. Boring. No matches on the weekends...

- Yeah, I know, with the occupations they've suspended the league...- We remained silent for a few seconds -. Domingo told me you were thinking of coming to join us.

- Yeah, if necessary... I don't have anything else to do.

- I think it'd be great, I could use some company – I said.

- I can't go right now, I'm taking care of my little brother. I have to wait for my mom to get home; she'll be back around nine.

- And you think she'll let you go out at that hour and come over to the school at night?

- Pfffff – he let out -. I doubt she'll even care or notice.

- Well, if you can't come over tonight, just come over in the morning. I'll tell the Student Council that you want to join the movement, so they can tell the guys at the gate to let you through when you get here.

- They're crazy. Today they didn't even let us peak in.

- Yeah, things are a bit of a mess here. Right now everybody's

downstairs in assembly. I think they're trying to decide whether or not to continue with the occupation. Call me back later. Let me know when your mom gets home and if you can come over tonight.

I hung up and immediately my cell phone rang again. Every time it starts to ring, I get a little nervous. To be honest, I don't like cell phones very much. Truth is, I don't like phones in general much, cell phones in particular. I can't stand talking to people I can't see.

The call coming in was Maria José, my mom. Normally she never calls me, she doesn't like phones either. She has a cell phone basically because her work demands it. But she hardly ever calls. I mean, she's not like those ladies that are in traffic, or in the supermarket, and they light up their cell phones to call their husbands or their kids, just to let them know that their in traffic or at the supermarket. Conversations on the phone are short with Maria José. But now that I'm with the occupation she calls me a couple times every day. Once at noon, when she gets home from work for lunch, and again at night, before sitting down at the table for dinner. More than wanting to know how I was doing, more than being a mother concerned for the physical and mental well-being of her son, I think she calls primarily because she wants to know how things are going in here. I listen to her and she sounds excited, as if thanks to what I was telling her she could flash-back to her youth, and her own student uprisings

and revolts. Of course I don't tell her much. I'm not a talker, least of all when Maria José is concerned. If it were my younger sister in here, she'd tell her everything down to the last detail. But not me. When we hang up, and I realize I left her wanting to know more, and that I didn't provide her with what would have made her happy, I feel somewhat miserable. Then I think that when all this is over, I'll show her this notebook, and we'll read it together and remember each one of these days. Immediately I snap out of it, and change my mind, as is to be expected.

This time Maria José called to let me know that she had deposited credit on my phone so I could make calls.

- And how'd you do it? - I asked with a certain sense of admiration, because my mom is completely useless when it comes to technology. I read the instructions for her cell phone, I type in the contacts for her phones agenda, I choose and set her ringtones, while she grumbles on about how cell phones should be exclusively for making calls and not for a thousand other things.

- Me? - and she cracked up laughing. I love it when Maria José laughs; luckily she does it pretty often. - I gave Javi ten dollars to charge to your phone and she took care of it, I hope that was enough?

I laughed to myself. Normally ten bucks would last me a month for calls.

- Thanks, that's plenty, it couldn't have come at a better time.

– I said.

– And how is everything going there? Your dad and I are glued to the news. I feel there's a lot of support for the students. Lots of support. The whole situation around education has become a dark abyss that no one wants to face, Nicolás. And it's wonderful to hear the leaders, just kids, speaking truths to the entire country – she spoke very emotionally. – But, you know, some people are scared. Today the principal called. ¡That they no longer agree with the occupation! ¡That they were letting the parents know so that we would take measures! –

– We were just discussing that in the assembly.

– Look, I had to bite my tongue, but I think he's such a coward.

– I hope you didn't yell at him.

– Relax. I was well behaved. And...what are you going to do?

– Nothing. I suppose we'll have a vote on the situation now, whether we continue or not?

– Then I won't take any more of your time. Go and vote.

– Alright. Thanks again for taking care of my phone.

– Oh, it's nothing. And, Nicolás...take care of yourself.

Upon hanging up, I went downstairs and approached the meeting room. They were voting. Valentín asked who was in favor. Half the group raised their hands immediately, then after a moment a few more hands went up, including my own. Valentín counted 27 raised hands. It was a majority for the Student Council's position. Some yells broke out among the group: –“We're staying,

we're staying!” – The occupation would continue.

I tried to locate Paula among the people exiting the room. But she wasn't there. I tried looking for her in the kitchen, where the group in charge of the evening shift was already making dinner preparations (Some spaghetti and canned tuna). I was feeling wasted (exhausted, tired). I didn't feel like eating, much less did I feel like talking to anyone. Rafa called me and said he'd be coming to the school in the morning. I told him that was fine. I went to room 6, my bedroom, as is already known. It was dark and empty. Down in the patio, I could hear some drumming and bongos that a group of Juniors were playing to liven up the evening a bit. I didn't want to turn on the light, so I remained in the dark, trying to sleep.

SEGUÍ

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SEGUIMOS en TOMA



SYNOPSIS

**What happens when 35 students take control of their school? What happens when no grown-ups are around, when the regular daily routine is abandoned and where time seems to be altered?
A student writes in his diary his account of the occupation.
A neighbour close by watches.**

Nicolás is in his third year of high school and is the star goalie of the soccer team. When the Student Council announces that they will occupy their high school, in support of the mass protests held by other schools, Nicolás isn't convinced. He doesn't like politics, so he gathers his books and starts to leave as the majority of the other students do. But Paula, a somewhat odd and defiant girl, stops him at the door: "You can't always look at the world from the safety of the sidelines," she says. Nicolás knows that being a goalkeeper is not a safe position and has nothing at all in common with the sidelines, but Paula's challenge makes him think twice. He stays. From that moment on, he starts "un diario de la toma", a personal diary of the school occupation. The takeover, at the beginning simple and smooth, even boring, becomes complicated when food grows scarce, a sabotage takes place and, above all, an unexpected visitor arrives.

In May of 2006, thousands of Chilean high school students took to the streets. They occupied their schools and organized massive marches to protest against the Educational Law which only enhanced social inequality and conceived education as a lucrative business. It was called "The Penguin Revolution."

Five years later, in 2011, the Chilean student revolt led by university students and charismatic leaders, became a major concern for the government and reached the headlines of the international press. Today, four of these leaders are the youngest representatives of congress in Chilean history.

This illustrated novel is a fictional story freely inspired by those events.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



LOLA LARRA is half Chilean, half Venezuelan and a little bit Spanish. She has published many short stories and novels, two of them for teenagers. She has lived in several cities and has worked as a journalist, editor, reporter and script writer. She chose Santiago de Chile to have a son, plant some bougainvilleas in her terrace and write this story that started out as a notebook about one of the student occupations during the Penguin Revolution of 2006.



VICENTE REINAMONTES is a Chilean illustrator and designer with an incurable vocation for activism, culture and editorial projects. He is a regular collaborator in national and international magazines and in several academic and artistic collectives. Just as the main character in South of Alameda, he was part of the student movement when he was a teenager.

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A small school has been taken over and occupied by the students. Everything seems to have changed in there: the classrooms, the schoolyard and even the students themselves.

Among them, is Nicolás, the best goalkeeper on the soccer team, who gets bored during the long assemblies and writes in his notebook his account of the Occupation.

While things in the school are bustling, someone watches from the old house close by.

An illustrated novel that takes place during the vibrant beginnings of the Chilean student revolt of 2006.

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