The Best Girl

by Carolina Bandinelli

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English sample translated by Antonella Lettieri

To Clarissa Dalloway

Emma Sestieri wakes up at eight o'clock in the excessively soft bed of the Big Rental House.
When her brother Ettore had come over the first time, he had said, "You'll never live in a house like this ever again." And maybe, as is often the case with Ettore, he was right.
After snoozing the alarm five times, Emma eventually gets up, reaches the sink in exactly four steps, and thinks, "Hotel comfort, what a joy!"
She looks at herself in the mirror, her face still wet, and wishes good morning to the line that has recently started forming between her eyebrows.
Emma is thirty-six and has only just realised how foolish she's been, clinging to the whimsical idea of being eternal, or at least immune to the effects of time on her body.
But no. That isn't the case.

Her friends are coming over for dinner tonight.
Violante – who is in London for the weekend – has left her two young daughters with Saverio in Florence, in the apartment she inherited from her grandmother. Instead, Veronica has recently moved into a fifty-square-meter council flat in South London whilst she is waiting for the portion of a Victorian house she's bought with Tom to be knocked down and rebuilt. Rachele – who's in London on a business trip – lives in a house that has just been renovated under her boyfriend's careful direction. For years, Rachele has dreamed of a cosmopolitan lifestyle in a metropolis, of always getting on and off planes, of having Paris Fashion Week as a fixed event in her calendar, but instead she fell in love with a surveyor from Signa with a big family and an untamable passion for local politics. She's happy now – skyscrapers are overrated. Olimpia can't make it tonight as she's just given birth. The baby was premature but, in the end, it all went well. Unlike that woman from the news, the one who was so tired she fell asleep (or did she pass out?), smothering her baby girl by accident. The midwife had told her to try and manage on her own – after all, she'd wanted that baby, hadn't she? Then she'd run off to look after the many other women who still needed to give birth that day, before finally heading back home, exhausted and with only just enough energy to pop into the supermarket and buy a couple of frozen pizzas. Olimpia didn't fall asleep, didn't pass out, didn't collapse, and so her daughter is alive. After only a few days in the incubator, she was able to take her baby home.
Just at the last minute, Matilda has confirmed that she'll make it too: she's left her baby daughter with her parents because she doesn't trust her partner to be up to the task. When she talks about men, she says, "They're boys, they don't get it." And she says it with her enormous blue eyes and the open smile of those who cheerfully accept an unchanging reality.

Emma loves them all, they've been friends since forever – she and Violante even go as far back as primary school – and yet the idea that, in about ten hours, she'll be hosting them for a "reunion" makes her queasy. This is no simple dinner party, gathering, or soirée. This is the coming together of people who've known each other for decades, yet rarely meet up. As such, the collective unconscious of a reunion is too big for the conversation to flow easily.
Also, they'll want to know if she's made up her mind.

Does she want children? Yes or no. If it's a "Yes," then no further explanation is needed; but if it's a "No," then it must be very well argued. At any rate, she could at least treat herself to an orgasm, just to soothe her anxiety a little. If she can find the right focus, it'll only take a moment – five minutes tops, she can totally make it. She pulls off her knickers, lays a towel on the floor, and sits with her back against the closed door, legs outstretched and feet touching the edge of the shower tray. Given the time constraints, she goes for a safe bet. As she squeezes her clitoris with the fore and middle finger, she pictures the usual scene in which five masked men fuck her, one after the other. A good old fantasy always does the trick. Though that doesn't mean it's an easy one to pull off. Details are key: there should be no faces, really, nothing personal, perhaps not even anything human at all. The representation must be precise yet improbable. Sharp poetics, hazy anatomies. There's no clear sense of who's doing what, maybe it isn't even dicks penetrating her. A penis is too intimate a thing, too attached to the body of its wearer. Possibly, they're fucking her with broomsticks – something organic yet foreign – or with their hands, which sometimes are better, or with their fists and arms. Everything mixed up in a delightful, tentacular intercourse.
She comes. The muscles in her legs and buttocks spasm. Hopefully, this session will also count as exercise. Forget about yoga and kayaking, fitness apps should definitely add "masturbation" to their workouts.

She washes her hands and applies mascara to her upper lashes and bronze eyeshadow to the lids. According to the shop assistant in the make-up store in St Pancras, a glowy face requires four different products. But she needs to be out of the door in an hour and she's running late already, so some eyeliner is all she can manage. She only has one attempt to draw an uninterrupted line at the right angle. She should have watched a tutorial. She could be more beautiful if only she learned how to apply foundation, concealer, blush, and powder properly – and if she could get up early enough to do so. It could really make a difference. It could be her winter project.

Besides buying the Uphill Flat.

Emma is buying a new place and will be moving in in a few weeks. The tricky bit is that this place is in London, where a house with a garden like the one she grew up in in Florence costs at least a million.
Twenty years ago, Greenwich, Blackheath, and Deptford used to be much more affordable. Emma has checked the Land Registry online, street by street. Now houses cost at least a million and she'll never have a million. She'll never live in one of those period homes with a garden in Ashburnham Grove, Egerton Road, Hyde Vale, or Gloucester Circus. Coming to terms with this has taken her a while. Over the last two years – that is, during the pandemic – she's walked all over the neighbourhood, looking into other people's houses through their bay windows, peeking into their gardens, imagining herself happy around those kitchen islands, in those double Victorian parlours, and the rooms with a view, the tulip beds, the lavender bushes, the huge rosemary plants overflowing from the railings.

When she's making a roast, she snaps off a couple of sprigs to take home.

Emma Sestieri is buying a sixty-square-meter flat carved out from a brutalist cube of cement with fairly dirty and crooked tiles on its façade, a small front door, and a balcony with rusty railings. The building obviously dates back to the fifties and must've been built in the crater left by a bomb. You can tell because it's embedded between two period houses. One is empty, while in the other one lives Grace, a seventy-six-year-old born and raised in Blackheath Village. Grace says she has travelled all over the world, "South Africa, Nigeria, north of the river." Grace never married and doesn't have any children. What she does have is a fuchsia fan, six bamboo plants, and a four-storey house. She's recently upgraded to quadruple-glazed windows, to block out the noise from the street. The street is Blackheath Hill, a major thoroughfare that endures endless traffic, with pollution levels well above the limits set by the World Health Organization.

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That was how she'd described it to Ettore last Sunday, as she sipped at a Bloody Mary with too much tabasco in one of those bars recently opened in Deptford to cater to people just like her, her brother, and their friends – that is, people who prefer smashed avocado on toast to fried chicken but still ardently wish for the fried-chicken shops and Caribbean salt-fish shops to stay open so that they can look at them from the outside. Ettore had told her to watch out for the middle class: we're giving way too much importance to spaces. It's the people who create the vibe, not spaces, not things.

But then what about architecture? And what about urban planning? Nobody can say that the conversations you have in the bedroom could just as easily take place in the kitchen, or by the sea. Do corridors and halls inspire the same thoughts? And what about motorways and alleyways? Or gardens and terraces? Would she be the same person if she lived in one of those houses with a jacuzzi in the bedroom?

Ettore had replied that that wasn't the point. Yes, but the thoughts you have in the shower aren't the same as those you ponder in the bathtub: in the shower, you sing; in the bathtub, you listen. Emma was convinced that she was right and yet she would have much preferred to think like Ettore.

How different thoughts were in the space of another body!

Emma and Ettore had been raised to believe that the value of objects such as suitcases, towels, sheets, crockery, cutlery, and glassware is tied exclusively to their usefulness and that in aesthetic classifications and quality judgements resides the seed of false consciousness.

All towels are created equal.

Of course, Emma had noticed at times that some towels were ridiculously soft and thick – unlike hers, which were almost bristly – but she'd always chalked it up to chance.

Now she's thinking about it. Now she likes things and can almost empathize with her father. Ettore, instead, is still innocent, or so it'd seem.

Emma likes Egyptian cotton sheets, crystal whisky glasses, and blenders that are a breeze to clean. But ever since she's been buying her own place, things have become too important, they're huge and misshapen, just like the large wooden furniture from her grandparents' house in Marina di Ravenna from her childhood nightmares. In her grown-up nightmares, too, she feels smothered by appliances, their looming presence, her sudden interest in induction hobs, her yearning for a broom cupboard – which the new place won't have so brushes, buckets, and bins will have to be left in full view.
Her anguish in the face of things makes magazines like *Casa Moderna* suddenly speak to her; for a moment she even considered having the special issue *Gardenia Balconi e Terrazzi* shipped from Italy.
Horrified, she watches herself bowing her head as she takes on the legacy of generations of housewives with a passion for decoupage, those unrivalled masters of upholstery and crochet. She's recently watched a video on a wireless vacuum cleaner that could solve, at least in part, the problem of the missing broom cupboard.

Hannah Arendt writes that things condition us. She argues that spaces and objects act on us, the living, and on the way we feel human. We're hurled through time, history, and things. The wrong table, the wrong fridge, the wrong sofa. How will they act? How will they change her?

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Emma has been renting for the last thirteen years. Six house shares, to be precise, with multiple housemate configurations. She and T had moved into the Big Rental House just before the pandemic. All of a sudden, Emma was living in a one-hundred-square-meter flat with high ceilings and three bedrooms. At first, she had felt quite misaligned with that extra layer of bourgeoisie: the drive that lights up automatically, a room just for the washing machine, and the "half bath" on the ground floor. It all seemed foreign, out of someone else's story, a story of fraudsters and inglorious heirs, or of ordinary people with a degree in Business and Economics and a spa subscription. T, instead, had had no issue with it. "It's not like you *have* to live in a damp room in a dilapidated house," he'd said. "It's a great opportunity, let's go for it!" T seemed to believe that he deserved a pleasant life. He didn't think commodities were the seed of moral corruption. Emma marvelled at such a belief but enjoyed the guest room, the open-plan living room, and the kitchen with an island. She liked welcoming guests and compliments, hosting parties, and setting the table for sixteen at Easter.

Emma had never cared much about money. She'd spent her life studying and regarded wealth as the embodiment of evil. Maybe it was because of her father, who'd had money and then lost it. Or maybe it was because of her mother, who loved flowers and believed that the most beautiful gifts come from nature. Or maybe it was because of Marx's *Capital*, which she'd never read but could quote. Whatever the reason, Emma had never done anything to save money or indeed accumulate it. She'd started working only a few years earlier and what she earned she spent on food, booze, trains, and plane tickets.

It'd only been when she'd decided to buy her own place that she'd experienced, quite clearly, how a certain amount of money puts you in a very precise bracket: it's like a test telling you how far you've come, what you can afford, and therefore who you are.
Figures like one hundred thousand and two hundred thousand, which used to mean absolutely nothing to her, have now become quite tangible in the form of gardens, quiet streets, wooden floors, and large windows overlooking the park.
Recently, she's also realized that you can't find, or conjure up, money if it isn't there already. The materiality of money, together with its abstractness and the arbitrariness of its value, are enough to turn her brain to mush. She feels stupid: she wants a house with a garden but can only afford a flat with a terrace. She wants at least three bedrooms but can stretch no further than two. Plus, she wants it to be quiet.

T says that the new place is solid and full of potential. T cares about things being future-proof, which is why he deems solidity and potential as conditions both necessary and sufficient when assessing a house. And in fact, all his misgivings were dispelled when he saw the garage of the Uphill Flat. Now, he chimes in in every conversation with, "It even has a garage!" As if a garage, by its very nature as a space that contains things, could guarantee an orderly, safe, and dignified life.
Emma struggles to understand how anyone could have any trust in things and their durability when it's evident that things keep ending all the time, undeterred. She hopes though that T might be right and that it will indeed be things that prop them up in the future.

All she cares about is beauty. And, in this regard, she must admit that the Uphill Flat features proper parquet floors and designer radiators. And, if you turn forty-five degrees when looking out of the bedroom window, you can just see a sliver of a view with trees and sloping rooftops. But there's no denying that the flat is in an ugly building, on an ugly street.
You'd need to resort to some nebulous principles of pseudo-Marxist aesthetics to find some attractiveness in them. You'd have to focus on the allegedly superior importance of "inner beauty."

It's nine in the morning. Emma dissolves a spoonful of matcha powder into some hot water with a wooden stirrer. She feels a wave of self-loathing: has she really let herself be corrupted to the point of suffering over the aesthetics of a building, and all because she has been earning just a little more than nothing at her university job? She turns the matcha into a mush, then adds more hot water while the frother warms up half a cup of oat milk. Oat milk hasn't quite made it to Italy yet. If you order an oat cappuccino, baristas go, "Come again?" And then, "No, no," as if wanting to shake off an insult. Young professionals swear they wouldn't drink that stuff even if you paid them. But Emma knows that they too will soon develop a certain suspicion towards cow's milk, begin to realise that soy milk is too basic a choice, and then feel much better people, all thanks to oat milk. It's just a matter of time – she's just waiting for them to catch up.

When the milk is ready, she pours it into her yellow-and-white ceramic cup. The perfectly crafted froth gives her a provisional sense of accomplishment. Matcha is a great thing. As she stands by the kitchen counter, Emma looks out of the window and thinks that, soon enough, she'll completely lose track of the family across the street, their expensive garden furniture, the pizza

oven they don't know how to use, the springtime parties they throw for their children, and the young gardeners they hire to water their plants with the hose. She'll lose all of this. For some things, it will really be the end.

Perhaps, instead of looking out of the window, she should make herself a bowl of yoghurt, Emma thinks, as she tries to avert her focus from other people's living rooms to concentrate, instead, on the right proportions of Greek yoghurt, walnuts, almonds, and dates. Since she has a long day ahead, she also makes herself a freshly squeezed orange juice to ward off any seasonal illness. As soon as she takes the first sip, she already feels better, healthier, more suited to life.
Emma sits at the table with her breakfast. She doesn't have much time, but it's better to sit down for meals – she read that on the internet. As she eats with her right hand, the left goes for her phone. She doesn't know what for. She opens a few apps one after the other. The one tracking her period lets her know that it was due yesterday. Is it late? Not really, a day doesn't mean anything. And she might've put the date in wrong last time. Anyway, that's not why she picked up her phone. In fact, she has no idea why she picked up her phone. Darian Leader, a British Lacanian psychoanalyst, suggests in his book *Hands* that we might think of our smartphones as the most recent iteration in a long history of objects invented to discipline and occupy our hands. Pockets, snuffboxes, and cigarettes are all things that only serve the purpose of busying our hands so that they mightn't remain idle or, even worse, wander somewhere else on our body, somewhere obscene. So, it's as if hands were a part of our body with their own will, like Thing in *The Addams Family*.
Emma closes her period tracker and opens another app. The algorithm presents her with a picture from her PhD years: she and Lorenzo in the garden of her old house on Achilles Road, eating tagliatelle.
She's wearing a T-shirt in an ugly colour that suits her and he a polo shirt, very Italian.
The fact that she's still inviting people over for meals reassures her.
Not Lorenzo, of course, who's moved to West London, but other people for whom she cooks roast dinners and tagliatelle. The thought that she'll keep doing so in the new place consoles her. And yet, she doubts that they'll be able to have the same relaxed conversations with such low ceilings. Emma doesn't know when the height of the ceilings became a thing. She tries to defuse her feelings by way of excessive earnestness. For example, she's already talked to Enriquez about the low ceilings and their potential impact on her social life. "Will you still come over for dinner if the new place isn't as nice as this one?" She asked him last night, her eyes bright with tears.

She texts Ettore and makes him promise that he'll come over even if the flat is at the top of a hill. He replies with a joke. Of course he'll come over. He's her brother, after all: it'd be hard to imagine that a ten-minute walk uphill might make him never want to see her again. Laura says that she has nothing to fear: her friends come over because they love her, not because of her ceilings. Emma repeats these words to herself. Of course she knows them to be true, but she also feels that she can understand the torment of the rich, of the very rich, who don't know whether the guests on their yacht really care for them or are simply being opportunistic.
But you have to be really rich for this kind of doubt to make any sense, and Emma isn't rich.

So why is she thinking all this? Why is she putting so much stock in the finishes and décor of a living area and so little in her friends and family? When did it happen? Is this reversible, or will

she forever fixate on the colour of the tiles in other people's bathrooms? She tries to think rationally: in Achilles Road, the house was falling apart but that had never bothered her.
At 76 Achilles Road there was and still is a Victorian house – though not for Emma. Mr. and Mrs. Blatora, parents of Michele Blatora, had bought it in the eighties for two hundred thousand pounds. They'd lived there when Michele was a child and then gone back to Italy after they'd retired. Michele had moved into a smaller flat in a less disreputable neighborhood and so he'd decided to rent out Achilles Road to students. Students just like Emma, Ettore, and their housemates. At first, there'd been a blond Russian guy who used a colour-coded Excel spreadsheet to organize his days – purple for work, green for free time, and blue for errands – and left his loafers all over the kitchen (had no one ever told him that you shouldn't leave your shoes lying around?). Then there was another guy from Molise, dark-haired and with foal-like eyes, who was never seen without make-up or combat boots and had studied in Bologna under Umberto Eco.

Emma does some quick math: over five years, she and Ettore had been through more or less sixteen housemates. They're still friends with many of them. Not with the one who kept embalmed pigeons in the freezer for an art project, nor with the one who hid tuna tins under her bed out of fear that the others might steal them, but with almost everyone else.
The point is that, in Achilles Road, they hadn't cared a thing about double glazing. The paradigm itself was different. In that paradigm, it was a given that people you'd never met before might show up at your birthday party and that, the next morning, one of them might be asleep on the leatherette sofa you'd found in the street. Over time, the water leak from the conservatory roof had turned into actual rain and the tea towel they used to mop up the dampness had turned into a bucket to catch the water. They'd tried to arrange for it to be repaired. In order, there'd been a tattooed boxer who was friends with a local drug dealer who, in turn, was friends with the Welsh housemate; a guitarist who owed money to the taxman; an Irishman who went by Shiva and wanted to convert everyone to tantric sex; a couple of recovering junkies they found on the Internet; and a Polish man who always scared Cucci.

No one had managed to repair the plexiglass sheet that served as a roof to the conservatory. Emma cannot remember ever finding that painful. She remembers that it felt like camping and that she always said that there was an "outdoorsy feeling" to it.

When they had to leave the house in Achilles Road, Emma knew that it'd be the end of an era. Ettore kept saying that nothing would change. That a household is made of people. That they'd all move into a new place, Enriquez too. That they'd all be much better for it. And that Emma was making a big deal out of a small thing as usual, projecting onto the house a hidden fear of hers and turning it into a plaster, into a placeholder for the original trauma. Ettore had just started studying Lacan's theory systematically. Ettore was wrong. Michele Blatora, the legal owner of 76 Achilles Road, had not only evicted them from the house but also kicked them out of an epoch. That space and time warp would never come back.

Now she even misses the loose tile, the one that would come off from the floor and reveal the soil and rusty pipes underneath. She thinks back to the light-wood cupboard doors in the kitchen and to how Ettore had said, "Look, it's like being in a cabin." A few months later, the cupboard

doors had all started wobbling and the bathroom had become freezing. They only had one bathroom for four bedrooms, and it was on the ground floor, next to the kitchen – a modern-day annexe, an appendix added many years after the build.
In her search for a place to buy, Emma discarded all the listings where the bathroom was too far away from the bedrooms. And yet, in Achilles Road, the layout of the rooms didn't seem to matter in the least. It'd never been a matter of floor plans – she knows that for a fact now. The point is that Achilles Road had been the first place where she'd actually felt at home. Before Achilles Road, home had always been a vague direction, a place occupied by others, never a precise address you could give to the taxi driver when he picked you up from the station.

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When she was little, she'd pretend to fall asleep in the car on the way back from the dinner parties her parents used to take her to, while her mother and father sang Antonello Venditti's latest hit, "Welcome to Paradise, just us, we don't want any more snakes." As soon as she sensed that she was being put down on the bed or the sofa, she'd start screaming. "I want to go home," she'd say in tears. "But you *are* home," they'd tell her.

"I know, but take me home, I want to go home."

She'd noticed that Achilles Road had become "home" all of a sudden. She was on her way back from the summer holidays of 2012. As soon as she got in front of the door – a little white aluminium door with frosted glass – she'd noticed that some roses had flowered of their own accord in the courtyard, even though the entire neighbourhood used to litter it with yellow-and-red fried chicken boxes. As she pulled along both her suitcases, the large one and her hand luggage, Emma realized that she'd arrived home and felt happy.

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A dull, repetitive noise distracts Emma from her memories of Achilles Road. In the kitchen, Cucci is asking for food by banging her paws against the cupboard door. Emma tries to ignore her, but a few seconds later Cucci jumps onto the table and attempts to steal some of her yogurt. So, Emma is forced to get up, open the cupboard door, take out the cat food, and give her just enough to be able to finish breakfast in peace. She spreads the food in the slow-feeding bowl designed to stop Cucci from gorging on it. If it were down to Cucci, she'd do nothing else but eat. According to Ettore, this goes to show that pets develop a humanized form of desire, a desire that doesn't only deal with a need, which is hunger, but also with metonymy. So, food becomes a surrogate for attention and love, like the breast for a baby. At any rate, the source of Cucci's complicated relationship with food can be found in the emotional configuration of Kennet Jar, their Welsh housemate from Achilles Road who used to feed her all the time to win her over and become her favourite. As soon as he noticed Cucci purring on top of Emma or Ettore, he'd call her to him and fill her bowl with food. At the time, he was depressed and unemployed, and the cat's affection was his only form of validation. When he later found a girlfriend and they'd moved in together, he'd got a small dog. But he'd lost interest in it after their first child was born and so he'd abandoned the dog with his girlfriend's parents.

"A remarkable progression of fetishes," had been Ettore's comment.

Emma, instead, has remained loyal to the cat: she's her cat, there's no doubt about it. It's a steady cat, and this is already a win. In a way, the cat is the indication that she's become independent and knows how to pick the right animal for herself, without then having to give it up. Her cat is the best in the world, she's certain of it. One night, her senses on alert thanks to a lysergic substance, she'd had the impression that Cucci could understand her. It was dawn and Emma was about to go to bed. She'd opened the window and the cat had gone out onto the balcony. So, she'd chased after her in her pyjamas, calling, "Come here, Cucci. Come here, come back home." Cucci had stared at her, still and silent, but her expression showed that she'd understood Emma perfectly. Over the following hours, Emma had dreamed that Cucci was speaking to her from the beige-carpeted stairs of the Big Rental House. Her gaze as vacant as ever, Cucci had said a brief but unmistakable "Yes."

Cucci is the only true success story in the history of Emma's pets. A history that didn't have the best start. When Emma was born, her parents had taken in the wrong dog, perhaps one of the worst – a fairly aggressive Yorkshire terrier. After that, all her requests for a poodle or a Maltese had fallen on deaf ears. A Maltese would've been the absolute best, but a poodle too would do very nicely. The important thing was for it to be one of those sweet dogs – even better if it was white – that Emma could braid and adorn with pink ribbons. "Those aren't real dogs," her mother had said. "And they cost a fortune," her father added.
Emma had learned that sweet, loving dogs weren't real dogs. Or, if they were, their value was outrageous and therefore inaccessible.

"It could be that this neurosis of thinking that everything I want is structurally unreachable started precisely with the dog," Emma thinks as Cucci gulps down her hypo-allergenic food and Emma herself rushes to finish her yoghurt and stares at the whitish sky outside. As a child, she'd kept looking for her Ideal Dog but never found it. Fairy tales and cartoons offered endless examples of little girls befriending dogs, cats, rabbits, horses, and little birds, but things had been quite complicated for her. Animals were always distracted, and sometimes even hostile, like Sally the Yorkshire terrier that growled all the time.

Once, though, she'd got quite close to it and it had almost happened.

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Excerpt 2 – Ending

Next to where T keeps his keys, there's a red tin box that's vaguely Art Deco in style and originally contained Chinese loose-leaf tea. Emma picks it up, sets it down on the kitchen counter, then turns on the oven to fifty degrees and puts in a clean plate while she starts the dishwasher, so everything will be tidy in the morning. She takes out of the tin box a very small, see-through bag containing a plastic wrapper, its rolled-up end sealed into a little bump by warming it up with a lighter. It contains a little ketamine – a staple in her house, just like lentils and fizzy water. Emma believes that small doses of ketamine over long intervals (more than four to eight weeks, to be clear) can only be beneficial. She pulls the plate out of the oven, takes her ID card from when she was a PhD student along with her loyalty card from that Chinese restaurant in Milan that used to let people smoke inside, and uses them to create three small lines that she'll take in forty-minute intervals.

This living room in a rented house is her own boiler room.

At first, the substance only has a mild effect – it relieves tiredness and lowers the pressure on the knees and ankles, hydrating the cartilage. It simply allows you to feel good, like when you're sober but better.

Emma Sestieri turns off the light, lights two candles, and turns up the volume. Minimal techno: 124 to 128 bpm, four-on-the-floor, some tracks have a voice that talks about stuff, tells of a stolen dream, of the colour blue. A track that always does it for her insistently asks a certain Rebolledo if he has a cigarette, "Rebolledo, do you have a cigarette?" Rebolledo answers, "No, I don't smoke, I don't smoke." Emma likes imagining this scene and feels herself smiling as she experiences her hips rolling, her arms stretching. "Rebolledo, do you have a cigarette? No, I don't smoke, I don't smoke, I don't smoke." Fragments of a discourse repeated and carried forward by the reiteration of sounds. Two sentences like any others that exist but can't change, let alone stop, the underlying rhythm that renovates itself but is always unchanging, an unaffected substance withstanding any accidental variation.
"The repetition of the same is a form of eternity," Emma thinks. "You can say what you want, the bass carries on regardless."

She feels understood by that steady bass, by those hypnotic sounds, and by that voice drowning in reverb that says:

Hey little raver
Where have you been raving?
Did you boom boom boom?
Did you chi chi chi?
And the soom soom soom
With the cla cla
On the head head head

Oh…

Onomatopoeias hold the experience of those who entrust themselves to synthetic drugs and let everything converge into one sound only, the point from which the world spreads open.

She does the second line.

The day now finishing feels like a faraway thing, like a past era when it was still possible to ask questions and answer in detail. Jimmy Sax starts playing over the electronic music. His saxophone sounds like a speaking being without a dictionary, only sounds hint, evoke, allude and yet remain untranslatable. The melody starts with the calm of someone saying things that are right and just, and then carries onwards towards the joy of what is beautiful, and the enthusiasm of what is true. Emma moves her chest and takes off her socks because she wants to move her chest and take off her socks. Tautology is where things don't need anything besides themselves to be justified. Enthusiasm turns into a frenzy that stretches out in a struggle with the ineffable at every beat. Everything seems to say, "How can you not understand? I'll repeat it. Did you understand it now? I'll repeat it again. Understood? I'll repeat that I'll repeat until you understand that you understood, understood?"

But there's nothing to understand except the recursive structure of the question that, with its unmoving repetition, pushes at the threshold of language.

And yet Emma understands, now that the walls are stretching and square meters no longer matter and the doors hush on the cupboards and the wardrobes – she understands.

She thinks how limiting it is, how we normally move, always with an aim outside of movement itself – we walk to catch a train, run not to miss it, sit down to eat, do yoga to alleviate stress and open the chakras, do crossfit to lose weight or find a date. Then she does the third line because she can no longer stand meanings and functions, she can no longer stand intentions. She puts Roman Flügel on – no conversations, no words, only sounds with the mathematical elegance of correct formulas.

Outside of meaning, there are time and the body.

To stretch out, lie on the floor, raise your arms in the air, and draw spirals with joined hands, codes that don't need to be broken. The body wants to sense the vertebrae as they lean against the wall and the feet as they root to the ground. It wants to roll and feel the fibres of the parquet, which tonight is soft and warm. The hands want to touch the plaster because they know that they're both made of microparticles, and that walls cannot be crossed only ostensibly, and that the difference between floor and skin is just a defect of perception.

She closes her eyes and, instead of the furniture, there's an expanded orange with yellow swirls dancing around.

Oh, finally! Emma Sestieri sighs and enjoys the symbolic as it disintegrates in a warm vapour. She relaxes her organs and frees them from their incessant and invisible activity.

Now she exists without a body and without a tongue.
Only a subtle breath in the succession of microsounds.

Boom boom boom
Chi chi chi
Cla cla cla