The Last Table

The waiter had put every chair up except the one at her table. Clara still had half a glass of beer and her phone faceup beside the coaster. Whenever the screen lit up, she lifted her hand a little. She set it down again when she saw it was only the time.

An organ played low through the speakers, its gentle sway lost whenever a bus went by. Outside, the pharmacy sign was already dark. In the glass, Clara could see the tables reflected more clearly than the sidewalk.

She had come to listen to the message her brother had left her. It was eleven seconds long. She had poured her beer, answered two emails, and even looked up how long half a lemon would keep in the fridge. At last, she held the phone to her ear.

“I found the box of photos,” he said. “Do you remember whose dog that is beside Dad in the one from Mar de Ajó?”

Clara had thought he would ask when she was coming to help clear out the apartment. Since their father died, every conversation had started with something that needed taking care of. She played the message again. At the end she could hear her brother turn the photo over.

She remembered the dog. It had come up to their beach umbrella one windy morning, and her father had given it half a sandwich. Then it had followed them for three blocks. In the photograph, he had one hand open beside his knee. For years, Clara had thought he was telling the dog to stay. Now she remembered he was giving it the last piece of bread.

She recorded a reply. She deleted it when she realized she had started talking about the apartment.

The waiter came by with a cloth and asked if he could wipe the next table. Clara moved her bag out of the way. When she picked up her phone again, she laughed to herself. She had just remembered that her father had spent the rest of the holiday calling the dog by her brother's name.

She sent him a voice message almost two minutes long. Before she sent it, she nearly cut out the long silence in the middle. She left it in. While she was looking for what to say next, the organ was still playing.