

ROSA RIBAS

FAR

Translation from Spanish by Charlotte Coombe

Chapter 2

As she did every morning, she slammed the garden gate shut, patted her thighs, and started to run.

First, she zigzagged her way through the area of terraced houses where she lived. Then into the part where the large villas were. Each one was a different colour, so that nobody could get their houses mixed up. Luxurious two-storey villas, with double garages, terraces, balconies, gabled roofs and dormers; with extensive gardens, with ponds and flower beds; with loungers in dark wood and cast-iron tables and chairs, covered with custom-made cushions for sitting and drinking beers or lemonade in summer. And all built nice and far apart.

She carried on through the streets of apartment blocks. The first phase boasted full occupancy. There were gaps in the following blocks, but only a few. The ratio increased into Phase 2, and then went down again in Phase 3, with its most recent buildings barely occupied. Phase 4 was filled with unfinished buildings and surrounded by a metal fence. She would not be running in there. She only went into that part when she had to, on special occasions. Not today.

On normal days she would run through the area where, according to the development's plans, there should be a large park with wide paths, gazebos, pergolas, statues, benches, flowerbeds, fountains and even a small lake. The paths had been marked out, a few trees planted, the lake dug out, but the rest still had to be imagined. She ran as far as the statue marking the spot where the other entrance to the park should have been, circled the roundabout at the entrance to the residential development, and then back. At that time of the morning, she usually crossed paths with very few of the two hundred and thirty-six inhabitants. 'Settlers' was what the locals in town called them; at one time, they would have been called 'outsiders'.

That morning she didn't bump into anyone. Anyone who commuted had already left for work. It was the holidays, so the children didn't need to be taken to the school in the local town, and the shops weren't yet open. What other reason could anyone possibly have to leave their home?

Homes built as part of an Urban Development Programme approved in 2000, the documents relating to which were in the hands of some judge investigating real estate corruption. The entire development was constructed on a pile of poorly concealed sleaze, a chain of bribery, corruption, intimidation and complicit silences. No ancient manuscripts, no mythical foundations. If these lands had been the scene of some momentous event, back when battles of conquest and reconquest were being fought all over the area, no one had bothered to record it. It was a bleak place, devoid of stories, where it was impossible to satisfy any yearnings for greatness. Although, what degree of greatness could anyone begin to aspire to, living in a place called the Residencial Fernando Pacheco?

Fernandos tend to be smug about the name they've been given. This one tacked on his surname out of smugness about his project. A premature self-satisfaction that was set in stone when he baptized the development the Residencial Fernando Pacheco. She had always found it strange when whole towns were named after one person, the way streets are. Don Benito, Pedro Muñoz, Comodoro Rivadavia or Perito Moreno. At least that last one got the name of a famous explorer. And had a glacier to show for it.

Here, they had three billboards lined up less than a kilometre from the entrance to the development, still advertising apartments for sale. On the middle one, the developer Fernando Pacheco, in a suit and tie, looked out towards the main road. His eyes were bleached white by the sun, but before that, he must have been like one of those images of Christ of the Sacred Heart, whose eyes seemed to follow family members around the dining room. Pacheco's outstretched arms pointed to the billboards on either side. The righthand one depicted a bird's eye view mock-up of the development. On the lefthand one, a multitude of smiling people, men golfing, kids splashing around in a swimming pool, a mature couple sipping on cocktails while two couples played padel tennis in the background, young families with children strolling through a forest. How could they be so blinkered, seeing only what was on the billboards, and not the reality surrounding them? Not even the implausible forest scene snapped them out of their reverie of social ascent.

Most of the colours had faded in the sun. Blue held out, as always. Clever of Pacheco to choose a suit in that colour.

The Residencial Fernando Pacheco. *Si, señor.* There they were.

The small town was four kilometres away; the capital seventy. 'On your doorstep,' the advertisements proclaimed. 'Near and far.' Bullshit. It was just far. But that didn't matter, right, if they had practically everything they needed right there?