THE LAST WARM PLACE

CHAPTER TEN

WHAT ONE MAN KNOWS

I hear the pump.
Listen after it.
That little knock?
There. Again.
An old support. It talks when the line warms.
We still check the trend.
Put that in the book.
Which part?
How you know. And how you could be wrong.

The original count reaches the eighteenth.
I remember the count.
We have partial treatment after that. Not a replacement supply.
Another shore search?
Nothing suitable found. We keep checking.
A date on a box is a poor forecast.
So is feeling well. Tell us immediately if anything changes.

I need another operator on each teaching round.
Taken from which watch?
Defer these. Keep the relief cover.
Put the delay against my name.
What belongs in the public record?
Coverage. Not my consultation.
Agreed. Who can do the work, and where the gaps are.
You lead the next round.
I was going to.

That smell meant hot insulation once.
Once is not a diagnosis.
What else could smell like it?
Oil on a warm casing.
The gauge disagrees. I would stop and call.
Good. Do not choose the comforting answer.
You have doubled the pages.
You left out being mistaken.

Three copies. Three different places.
Same revision date on each.
A bad copy can outlive a good correction.
Then corrections get a handover too.
This explains the plant. It does not outrank the procedures.
Especially when the plant surprises us.
No single flood takes the lot.
No single person either.
You can say that while I am here.

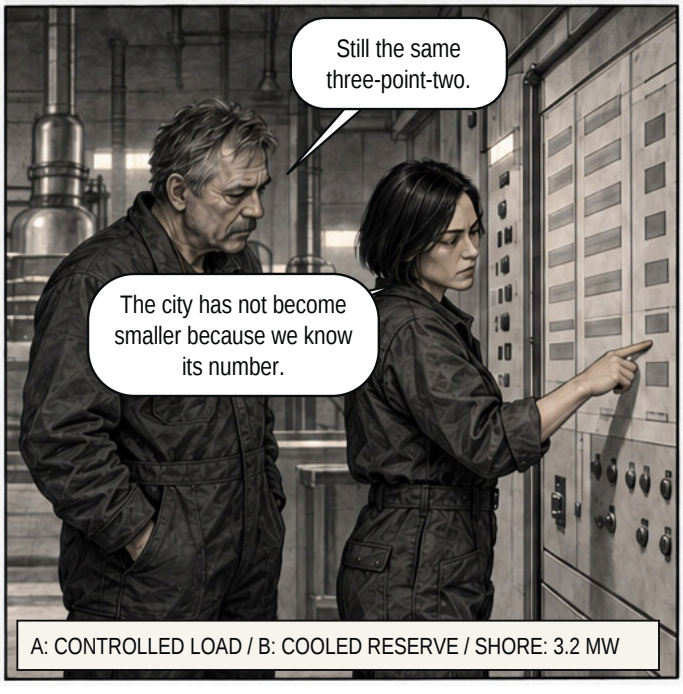
I accepted a shore post before we sailed.
Which plant?
You have not asked why.
I can guess badly, or listen.
I wanted work that did not begin with being Pavel's widow.
I made staying easier to offer than leaving.
You made leaving feel like a verdict.

Pavel would have complained about the train journey.
Then packed my tools before I woke.
Yes. He would.
You owed him a life together. Not the rest of yours alone.
And what did I owe you?
A proper handover.
I can still give you that.
I can still learn to take it.

Tabletop only. Nothing changes on the live plant.
Chief engineer unavailable. Understood.
TABLETOP EXERCISE
I cannot reconcile these indications.
What can you verify independently?
Check the other channel. Keep the limit. Call for help.
I would have asked one question sooner.
He got there without your voice.
Again tomorrow. Different case.
Different teacher.

I need a steady test window. Not extra power.
Put it against the watch plan.

Another clean check is not permission to serve it.
Then we keep that distinction on the board.


Still the same three-point-two.
The city has not become smaller because we know its number.
A: CONTROLLED LOAD / B: COOLED RESERVE / SHORE: 3.2 MW

You are off watch.
A revolutionary interpretation of the roster.

You put my name first on every sheet.
You are the deputy chief.
These started in September.
You were the deputy then too.
I kept giving you the title and taking back the work.
Sometimes.
This one is still uncertain.
Write uncertain. Leave room.
15 JANUARY 2035 — REVISION COMPLETE; OPEN QUESTIONS RETAINED

Could you pass the... the...
Ilya?
Medical help. Now.
When was he last speaking normally?
Just before breakfast. I noted the time.
This may be a stroke. We are assessing him now.
The watch is covered. You do not have to finish anything.

No plant change. Your relief is on the roster.
Give me the full handover anyway.

What can we bring you?
Time, rest, and the supplies we have. No unsafe journey.

Was it the medicine?
We cannot say. The illness has more than one risk.

Can you stop another one?
We are treating him. I cannot promise that.

Water?
I will ask Samira.
You... have the watch?
The team has it.
Chief.
Yes.
No examination today.
Good.

Chief engineer, effective today.
Not until he is gone?
The work is here today. So are you.
My signature does not remove anyone's right to stop.
Including stopping you.
Especially then.
Do you want someone with you?
For this door. Not the other one.

We reached the old inventory date.
And he is still here.
Yes. A supply count is not a clock inside a person.
Not... pumps.
A terrible novel. You recommended it.
I was... wrong.
I will mark that uncertain.

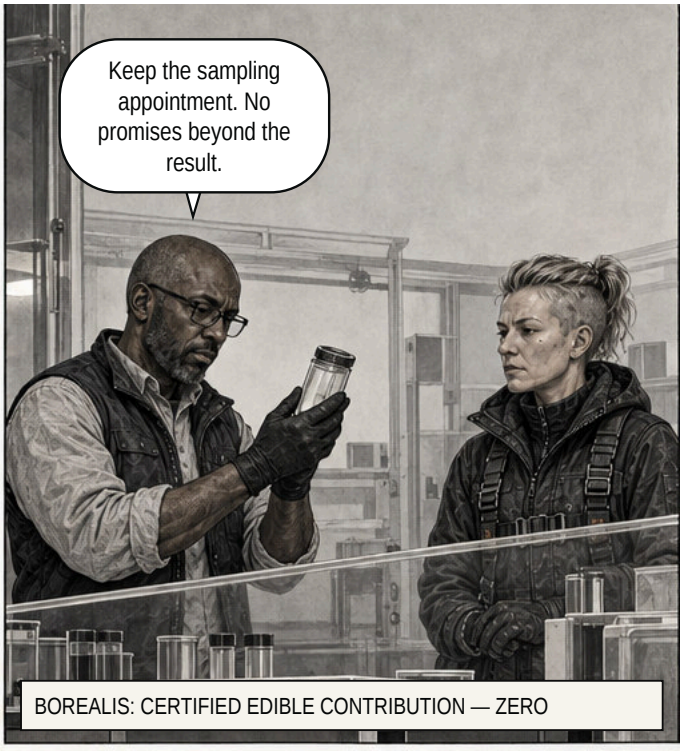
There has been another event. He is much less responsive.
Can I stay?
Yes. I will stay too.
He died a little after six.
All right.

Did anything happen downstairs?
An ordinary watch.
I do not know why that hurts.
You need not know today.
Shall I call the chief?
Her relief covers this. Read it back to me.
Your watch is covered.
For how long?
Until the next agreed handover. Not until you feel guilty.

You knew he had put you first.
I had not seen how many times.
SUCCESSION: DARIA CHEN-SOKOLOVA — FIRST

The plant gets copies of this. Not everything he left.
Of course.

Keep it.
I was going to.



CENTER SHAFT LAID UP. HARBOR ONLY. NO FLIGHTS; 29.40 HOURS REMAIN.

What do you hear?
The pump. Then that knock.
The support as it warms?
Perhaps. What else would you check?
Should I copy his words?
Write what you found. Keep his reason beside it.
Leave room for the next person.