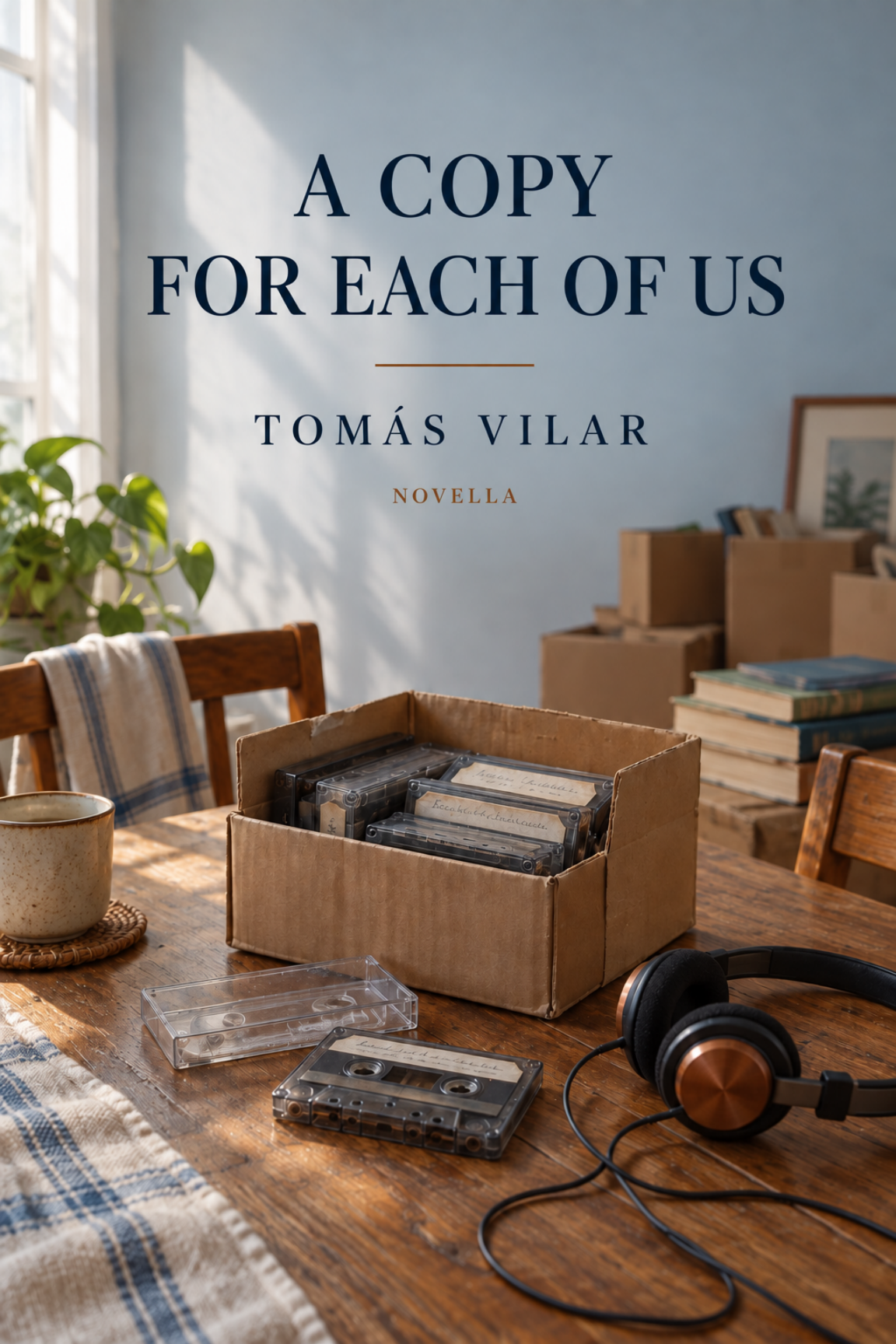
# A COPY FOR EACH OF US

TOMÁS VILAR

NOVELLA



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2019

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# A Note on This Edition

A Copy for Each of Us forms part of the fictional back catalogue of Tomás Vilar, a literary persona created with ChatGPT. Within the author's imagined career, this novella dates from 2019. The text was written and brought into book form in 2026 for inclusion in the Margem 37 Collection.

The date 2019 belongs to the fiction and does not imply that a historical edition existed. The characters, their relationships, the recordings and the events are invented. The family in this narrative is not presented as Tomás Vilar's family.

# Contents

The Smaller Box 5

The Party Side 8

The Voice in the Background 11

What Vera Remembers 14

A Version to Listen To 17

A Conversation Without a Party 20

The Filenames 23

At the Flat 26

Archive Note 29

# The Smaller Box

André began with the word everything.

“We can save everything,” he said, before opening the box.

His mother had asked for a copy for each of them. She had said nothing about saving. She was kneeling in front of the sitting-room cupboard, separating what she would take to the flat from what still needed a decision. There was a pile to give away, another for the rubbish and a third she had not named. André offered to name it. Helena asked him to pass her a bag.

It was Saturday. The removal van was coming the following Friday, and the house seemed fuller as the furniture emptied. On the table, objects once sheltered in drawers had taken on the urgency of questions. A key with no lock, two broken picture frames, the guarantee for a fridge that no longer existed. André picked up the guarantee and said it could go.

“That one I know,” his mother replied.

The tapes were in a shoebox inside a larger box. Twenty-three cassettes, by the first count. Twenty-four once Luiza arrived and found one beneath a flap. Some had names. Others had only the running time printed at the factory. One label bore a child's drawing of a house. André immediately recognised his own handwriting on the roof.

“That was me,” Luiza said.

He turned the tape over, looking for a distinguishing feature that might settle the matter. The window had four panes. They had both drawn windows that way.

Helena no longer settled these disputes as readily as she once had. She said it could have been either of them, or a cousin, and

went on folding a towel to protect a serving dish. The possibility of a cousin struck them both as going too far.

A colleague had lent André a stereo that still played tapes. He had brought his computer, cables and a small adapter. He did not know whether all the connections would work, but had laid everything on the table with the confidence of someone who had already read the instructions. Luiza moved their mother's cup out of the way. That gesture dealt with a risk he had left out of his planning.

“Will you have to listen to them one by one?” Helena asked.

“To transfer them properly, yes.”

“It'll take a while, then.”

He began to explain that afterwards everything would be accessible, organised, no longer dependent on an old machine. His mother agreed before he finished. She wanted to know whether she could use the table for lunch.

They agreed on one end for the tapes and the other for plates. André created a folder with the family surname. Inside it, he made folders for birthdays, holidays, Christmas and miscellaneous. Luiza looked over his shoulder.

“What if something doesn't fit?”

“There's miscellaneous.”

“Plenty of room in that one.”

He considered replying that any system was better than a box. The box had been there for twenty years and, unlike the computer, had never asked him for a password. He preferred not to start an argument before they had begun.

Their father had bought the tape recorder when they were small. He liked asking them to sing and bringing the machine close to visitors. Later, he had taken to recording radio programmes, leaving songs interrupted by news and advertisements. He had died nine years earlier. Lately, Helena

had been using the tapes to help a cupboard door close properly: she stacked two plastic cases under its shorter leg. André only learnt this that Saturday, when he found one of the cases cracked.

“You could have told me.”

“You could have come and fixed the cupboard.”

There was no bitterness in her voice. She had managed to close the door. The problem was solved in a way she had not thought worth a telephone call.

Before lunch, the computer captured the first sounds: three clicks, a cough and their father's voice asking whether it was recording. André turned up the volume. Luiza stopped writing on a box of crockery. Helena kept holding the serving dish, leaving it half-wrapped.

Their father asked again. Someone said the light was on.

None of the three recognised the person who answered.

# The Party Side

André listened to the whole of the first tape through headphones. He thought concentration was a form of respect, though it also allowed him to stay out of the discussion about which chairs would fit in the flat. He noted the events on a sheet of paper: singing, happy birthday, conversation, music. Seventeen minutes in, his father's voice said Luiza's name. He went back a little and wrote Luiza's birthday.

The label said only “home”.

On Sunday, he presented a four-minute extract. It began with his sister singing, went through their mother's laughter and ended before someone dragged a table across the floor. He had reduced the hiss a little. Cut the stretches when nobody spoke. Their father could be heard asking for quiet so he could listen to the girl.

“That's good,” Luiza said.

André had hoped for more. He opened the folder and showed them the name: Luiza's Birthday, 1993. He had worked out the date from how old her voice sounded and his memory of a cake with yellow icing. When he explained, his mother asked where the cake was.

“In my memory, Mum.”

“Oh.”

That small oh, its intention undeclared, obliged him to justify the year. Luiza was at her first school, their father had not yet bought the white car, they were living in the previous house. Helena said the previous house had a metal door that banged in the passage. On the tape, you could hear a wooden door.

“It could be any door,” André said.

“It could be any year, too.”

He added a question mark to the filename. The software would not accept that character where he tried to use it. For a moment, the restriction seemed to be taking his side. Then he wrote “probable year”.

Luiza asked to hear what came after the cut. André opened the long recording, still untreated. There was the table being dragged, a conversation about ice and the girl asking whether she could sing again. Their father said that was enough. She insisted. He said impatiently that other people wanted to talk too.

The grown-up Luiza laughed.

“I wouldn't leave that thing alone.”

André wanted to point out that their father had been patient most of the time. His sister had not accused him of anything. It took a small effort not to defend him against an accusation only André had heard.

Helena asked him to let it play. Someone was looking for a knife. A woman laughed in the distance. Then, for quite a while, there were only mingled voices, running water and the breathing of whoever had come close to the recorder. André lowered his hand towards the mouse.

“There's nothing here.”

“There's the party,” Luiza said.

They said nothing more for a few minutes. The tape played on while Helena divided oranges into a bowl. The girl began singing again, very quietly now, close to the machine. She sang into the microphone without announcing it to anyone. The end of the song vanished in the noise of the recorder being handled.

André had not noted this second version. Listening alone, he had thought it an incomplete repetition.

That afternoon, Luiza chose eight seconds of her own voice and used her phone to record the sound from the speaker. She sent it to her daughter, who replied with three written laughs and asked whether she could use it in a video. Luiza said she would see. She felt no need to consult the others: it was her voice.

Helena began asking who would take the mirror from the passage. Without looking away from the screen, André said they needed to decide how to organise the files first. His mother stood holding the tape measure.

“The mirror has to be out by Friday.”

He got up and went to measure it. He discovered he had never noticed how wide that passage was. He had walked through it for years believing he knew it.

On the computer, the birthday folder contained two versions of the same party. The shorter was called “clean”. The other, “raw”. Before closing the lid, André changed the second word to “complete”.

# The Voice in the Background

On Monday evening, André took the work home. He needed to return the stereo the following week and preferred to make the transfers while catching up on overdue emails. Helena agreed on condition that he did not mix up the tapes with his own. He had no tapes. She said it was a figure of speech.

He spread the cases across the sofa and numbered small strips of paper. He stuck nothing to the old labels. He photographed each side, which gave him the satisfaction of preserving the uncertainties too. In the spreadsheet, however, a column headed date was still waiting for numbers.

Tape seven began with a radio interview. He recognised the presenter's voice but could not place his name. He left it recording and went to heat some food. When he came back, a woman was saying that six months was not the rest of her life.

It was not a voice from the radio. It was his mother.

André sat down before putting on the headphones. There was a steady noise in the background, perhaps water, perhaps wind in the microphone. His mother said “Vera” and stopped. She began the sentence again, as though recording a message for her sister. You could do that with the machine. André remembered a tape arriving in the post with a cousin's voice on it, but did not remember his mother sending any.

“You ask whether I've got the courage. I know I want to. I'll see about courage later.”

A short laugh followed. Then Helena spoke of a room, a fabric shop, being able to spend the week away and come home on

Saturdays. She did not name the town. She said nobody there could find a towel without calling her.

André reached for the volume control. He wanted to hear better, although the words were clear.

“It's not that I don't want to be a mother. I'd like to stop being called every five minutes.”

A child was calling her in the background. The coincidence would have been funny had he not been trying to work out whether the child was him. Helena said “coming” and pressed a button. There was a click. The radio interview resumed halfway through a sentence about food prices.

He rewound and listened to it all again. Then he opened the spreadsheet and wrote “Mum, job offer”. He deleted offer. He had heard no one offer anything. He wrote “Mum talking to Aunt Vera”. That was not quite right either: Vera did not answer.

He telephoned Luiza. He began by saying he had found something interesting. The word sounded wrong as soon as he said it. He explained that their mother might have thought of living somewhere else for a while.

“When?”

“I don't know.”

“Then ask her.”

“I wanted to know if you remember.”

Luiza remembered a brown suitcase on top of the wardrobe, but it had been there for years. She also remembered their mother talking about a course. Perhaps cutting; perhaps drawing. André thought it was the same period. His sister asked why. He had no reason beyond the fact that neither thing had a date yet.

He did not send the audio. For the first time since beginning, he had the sense that copying was a different action from listening. He saved the full transfer and left tape seven's filename without a subject.

He ate dinner in front of the computer, leaving his food untouched for the first half. Then he answered his emails. One asked for a simple confirmation, and André wrote a long paragraph to avoid a yes he could not give.

Before going to bed, he remembered the story he used to tell about his mother: that she had not taken a course because he had bronchitis and needed looking after. He did not know who had told him this. The story had entered his life with the familiarity of things that need offer no account of where they come from.

He had repeated that version in a birthday tribute. Helena had smiled in the photograph.

He opened the picture on his phone. The smile confirmed nothing.

# What Vera Remembers

Helena listened to the recording on Tuesday, sitting between two boxes of books. She asked André to take off the headphones and use the speaker. She did not want to be tethered to the computer while he watched her face.

At the part about the towels, she smiled. At the laugh, she did not.

“I used to speak quickly.”

André waited. The tape went back to the radio programme.

“Were you going to move to another town?”

“I thought about it.”

“Because of a job?”

“That too.”

He realised he was asking questions that could hold only part of the answer. He tried asking differently and ended up mentioning his bronchitis.

Helena frowned.

“You had bronchitis in all sorts of years.”

“I know. But the course…”

“The course was something else. Evening classes, right here. I went for three months.”

André had not known about the three months. He remembered a complete sacrifice, not attendance cut short. His mother asked him to find a blue folder on the bookshelf. Inside were drawings of clothes, calculations, a folded pattern and a receipt for a month's fees. André took the receipt as though it could correct the recording. It was dated 1991. The tape still had no year.

“I stopped because they changed the hours. And because I thought it was expensive. And because I didn't much like the teacher.”

She said this looking at a drawing. She was not offering an improved version of herself. She seemed to remember that the teacher corrected everything with a green pen and left the students waiting while she took telephone calls.

“But you two were a handful as well,” she added.

André's laugh came late. He had been ready to have his part in it absolved or confirmed. The list gave him neither in full.

Helena wanted to call Vera. He offered to make the call. His mother already had the phone in her hand.

His aunt answered and asked first about the move. She wanted to know whether the fridge would fit in the lift. Helena said it would. Only then did she mention the tape. Vera remembered the fabric shop, which belonged to a woman she knew, and the room Helena might have been able to rent in someone else's house. It had not been a definite job. It had been a conversation.

“Your father didn't want her to,” his aunt said, after André joined in.

Helena looked at him and told him not to write anything down yet.

“I didn't go, either.”

“But he didn't want you to.”

“And the woman wanted me to start without properly agreeing on pay.”

Vera insisted there had been room to negotiate. Helena said it was easy to negotiate someone else's room over the telephone. Both fell silent, but it did not sound like the silence of a new quarrel. It sounded like familiar ground, somewhere they already knew how to leave the conversation for a while.

André asked whether his aunt had received that message.

“I did get a tape, yes. Your mother was complaining about the neighbour's dog.”

There was no dog in the passage he had heard. Vera remembered barking in the middle. Helena said she might have recorded over it. She also said there might have been two tapes. Neither wanted to listen to the whole thing again just then.

After hanging up, his mother asked for the phone and checked the time. She had arranged for someone to collect the cupboard. André was still holding the receipt for the course.

“Weren't you pleased to find this?” he asked.

“I liked hearing my voice. I didn't much like the interrogation.”

He began to explain that he only wanted to understand. Helena took the blue folder and put the receipt away with the drawings.

“So do I. But the man's coming for the cupboard today.”

André helped remove the last shelves. Behind one were a comb and a shirt button. The button looked as though it had belonged to his father. He was about to say so when he saw that his mother had already dropped it into a tin with many others.

He did not ask what year the tin was from.

# A Version to Listen To

Luiza arrived on Wednesday with bread, cheese and three memory sticks bought at a stationery shop. One for each of them. André checked the capacity and said there would be space left over. She asked whether he would prefer there not to be enough.

She had taken two boxes from the house the night before. One held plates. The other held papers their mother had asked her to go through. Luiza had not opened the second. Her flat, too, had a chair on which things waited for a destination, though it was less easy to criticise the chair when she was the one visiting it.

André brought the computer and the box of tapes. He had finished most of the transfers, but had not listened closely to them all. Six were almost entirely radio. Two were unlabelled. One did not run properly in the player; he had stopped rather than risk damaging it. He had written this on the list. Helena asked whether that one could wait.

“Yes. It just won't be complete.”

“I didn't ask you to finish the world by Friday.”

Luiza laughed. André accepted the bread she offered and moved the keyboard away from the crumbs. The tablecloth was gone: it had been packed by mistake with the sheets. Helena said she would eat without it, and both her children worried about cup marks on a piece of furniture she had used for thirty years.

He had played his mother the whole recording of the party. Now he wanted to give her something she could listen to without sitting through long stretches of radio, conversations about shopping and silence. He had prepared a twenty-minute selection. His mother laughed, his father told a story, Luiza

sang, André recited something from school. He had not included tape seven.

He called the selection “Family — final version”.

Luiza read the name and asked him to play it. For the first few minutes, everyone smiled. André felt the relief of delivering something that worked. His mother recognised a neighbour's voice; his sister remembered all of a song she claimed to have forgotten. For a while, nobody asked him to explain anything.

Then Helena asked why their father spoke straight after that laugh.

“To link the extracts,” André said.

“But that wasn't what I was laughing at.”

He opened the working file. The laugh came from another tape. He had used it because it rounded off his sister's song nicely and made his father's entrance less abrupt. He had not meant to change any event. In the selection, though, his mother seemed to be laughing at a remark by her husband, and he could not show why that effect should matter less than his intention.

“It's a montage, Mum.”

“I understood that. That's why I asked.”

Luiza asked him to take the laugh out of that spot. André replied that if they were going to insist on the exact order of everything, no selection would be possible. His sister picked up her bread and did not eat it.

“It doesn't have to be everything. It just doesn't have to pretend one thing was an answer to another.”

He did not like the word pretend. His mother did not seem pleased with the escalation either. She said she had liked hearing their father tell the story, and that they could leave a gap between the extracts. André added two seconds of silence. It seemed a large alteration to resolve a small objection; when he listened again, he heard the difference.

Then Luiza's phone sounded. Her daughter had sent the video. Over an image of the old house, the girl of many years before sang out of tune. A caption read “my mother's always been dramatic”. In the background, almost drowned out by the added music, Helena told someone to step away from the pan.

Luiza showed her mother first, expecting her to laugh. Helena asked who could see it.

“She hasn't posted it yet.”

“Then ask her to take my voice out.”

André's sister began to say you could barely hear it. She stopped after a few words. With an inappropriate satisfaction, André recognised the moment when someone else discovered the size of a small alteration.

Luiza caught his expression.

“You can put that smile away.”

He lowered his eyes. She wrote to her daughter. The phone vibrated soon afterwards: all right, she would do it differently.

They ate the rest of the bread. André removed the word final from the filename. Helena asked to hear again the part where her husband was looking for his glasses. Nobody had selected that one. It was in a long recording, in the middle of a conversation with no special occasion attached to it.

It took him a while to find it.

# A Conversation Without a Party

Their father's glasses were on his head. Everyone was saying so at once, laughing, while he insisted he had already looked there. On the recording, a chair scraped, and at last their father laughed too. The passage lasted less than a minute. Then he asked whether anyone wanted coffee.

Helena asked him to keep it playing.

André had transferred that tape in the early hours of the previous night. He knew an argument about money came further on. He had heard the beginning, then turned the volume down to take a call. When he returned to it, his parents were discussing a bill he could not identify. In the spreadsheet, he had written “conversation at home”.

It was an accurate description, and not very informative. He was beginning to suspect that he liked such descriptions for the same reason he criticised the miscellaneous box.

On the tape, his father said Helena should have told him beforehand. She replied that she had told him twice. Neither was shouting. The irritation lay in certain words repeated as though stressing them were enough to make them finally mean what they were supposed to mean.

Helena tilted her head to listen.

“It was the sewing machine,” she said.

André had thought it was the course, although he now knew the course might have nothing to do with it. Luiza came closer to the table. Their mother had borrowed money from her sister to buy a second-hand machine. Their father thought they had agreed to wait. In Helena's answer, a word vanished under the noise.

André went back a few seconds. He tried listening again.

“I think she says ‘no’,” Luiza said.

“I'm she,” her mother said.

His sister apologised. Helena smiled but did not supply the missing word. She did not remember that particular conversation. She remembered the machine, which had a stiff pedal and lasted a long time. She remembered paying Vera back. As for the agreement with her husband, she said that in those days each would leave a conversation taking a different agreement away.

On the recording, André as a boy interrupted them to show them a drawing. His father told him to wait. His mother asked what it was. He said it was a house with an extra storey.

The adult André looked at the tape with the drawing on the roof. It lay among the others beside the computer. The discovery ought to have pleased him. Instead, he felt ashamed of how much he had wanted to know whose handwriting it was.

Luiza picked up the case and examined it.

“It could be yours after all.”

“It could.”

It was not the same tape. The drawing they heard about might have been another one. Neither added these qualifications. They had learnt enough for doubt to be allowed a rest as well.

Helena asked him to stop when she heard her sister mentioned. She said she wanted to hear the rest on her own.

André explained that he already had the recording on his computer. He heard his own words and realised they did not answer the request. He took the headphones from his backpack and handed them to his mother. He showed her how to pause. Luiza called him to help take two boxes to the car.

From the passage, he could see Helena at the screen. The machine did not make his mother look diminished. She looked

busy. It was a difference he noticed only because he had been treating his work as assistance offered to someone who would not know how to do it herself.

When they returned, she had stopped playback.

“This part stays with me for now.”

Luiza agreed. André asked where it began. His mother showed him roughly. He said he needed an exact point to make a cut.

“Then come and listen with me.”

They sat side by side. The argument about the machine had ended. His father was now speaking about Vera, some money and a person whose name Helena asked them not to pass around. André did not know the story. He understood enough to know he could spend the afternoon asking questions.

They marked the beginning and end. Helena did not ask him to erase the tape. She asked him not to put that passage on the children's copies before she had spoken to her sister. The instruction was provisional, but no less clear for that.

“And the rest?” André asked.

“You can have the rest.”

He separated the files. In place of the interval, he left a short note saying a passage had been omitted at Helena's request. His mother read it and asked him to take out her name.

“They'll know it was me.”

“Then why take it out?”

“Because I'm asking you to.”

André deleted the name. Behind them, Luiza stood holding the tape measure, waiting for one of them to remember the boxes in the passage.

# The Filenames

On Thursday, the curtains came down. The sitting room seemed to grow without offering anywhere new to put things. Helena placed the poles beside the door, tied together with string. They would not fit the windows in the flat, but the neighbour was coming for them that afternoon.

André opened the computer on the only available corner of the table. He wanted to finish organising before making the copies. He had transferred twenty-three tapes. The one that would not run properly was still in its case, with a paper strip saying “not transferred”. His mother had decided to take all of them, including the radio recordings. He calculated how much room they took up and realised the box was smaller than a pair of shoes.

The files, on the other hand, required a long conversation.

Luiza did not want a numbered list with no idea what to listen to. Helena wanted to find her husband's voice without asking for help. André wanted someone, years from now, to be able to understand what had been done. The person from years hence was not there to say what they needed, which gave him a certain freedom to speak on their behalf.

He began proposing long names, with dates, people and descriptions. His sister asked whether all of it would show on a phone. He tried sending a file. The name was cut off before the part he thought important.

Helena suggested “the glasses tape”. It was imprecise, but all three knew what it meant.

They made a paper list too. Tape number, wording on the label, something to help them recognise it. Where the year was uncertain, they wrote undated. André wanted to add the

possibilities on a separate sheet. His mother said he could, as long as they did not end up in the title.

For tape seven's description, he wrote: “Helena considers spending some time away, for work.” He read it aloud.

“For work and because I wanted to,” she corrected him.

He added the words. Then he asked whether that recording would be included in the copies. His mother took a while. Luiza went on folding a cloth, offering no help with the answer.

“It can be. But I don't want that bit going round on its own.”

André said he would not send it. So did Luiza. They signed nothing. There were things the three of them could agree on, and things that depended on continuing to trust each other once they each took their memory stick away.

The short selection went into a folder called “to begin with”. The complete transfers, except for the reserved passage from the conversation about Vera, went into another. André noted the interval's existence on the list without explaining its contents. For his mother, he made a separate folder with that passage. She asked whether the selection would make their father look better. He said that was not how he was choosing.

Helena heard the name “to begin with” and asked:

“Begin with whom?”

André looked at the track order. Their father opened the sequence, the children followed, their mother closed it with a laugh. He had not consciously chosen that arrangement. That did not mean he had not chosen it.

He changed the opening track to Luiza's quiet song, the one after the party. His sister liked it. Helena asked for the laugh to be replaced with the passage where she explained a recipe to the neighbour. It was not a particularly memorable speech. It needed more stale bread than seemed reasonable, and she corrected the amount halfway through.

“Is that all there?” she asked.

It was. André included it. The selection ran over twenty minutes and ended with a question about the oven.

It was late by the time they copied the files. The three memory sticks looked alike, so Luiza put a label on each. Helena did not want her name shortened. André waited while his sister found room for all six letters.

Then they tested them. Everything opened on André's computer. On the small player he had brought for his mother, one track would not play. He checked, copied it again and tested it once more. While they waited, Helena began sealing the box of tapes with a strip of adhesive tape.

“Don't close it yet,” he asked.

He needed to photograph the last label. His mother peeled the end off slowly so as not to tear the cardboard.

He took the picture and held the box for her to finish.

# At the Flat

On Friday, André arrived before the van. He brought coffee in a flask and realised there were no cups available. Helena opened a box that looked as though it had already been opened many times. Luiza said they should have kept a set aside. Everyone agreed with the idea once it was no longer useful.

The table went sideways through the door. During the manoeuvre, André held the computer against his chest, although no one was close to bumping into him. His mother followed the table to the gate and asked them to protect a leg that was already chipped. She had chosen to take it to the flat even though it would occupy much of the sitting room. She did not want the new place furnished only with whatever was left after everything had been measured.

The tapes went in Luiza's car, with the plant from the window and a bag of clothes. André asked about his mother's memory stick. It was in her handbag. The list of recordings was folded inside a diary. He was about to suggest somewhere else, but Helena had zipped the bag shut.

In the flat, the table went near the window. They had to move it twice before finding a position that allowed the balcony door to open. There were four chairs. There would be room for visitors, provided one stood up to let another pass. Luiza said this happened in almost every family. Their mother replied that at least here no one would have to cross the yard to fetch another chair.

They spent the morning unpacking what they would need that day. The rest stayed piled in the smaller bedroom. André set up the player and showed his mother the buttons. She asked him to repeat the difference between stop and back. He did, without saying he had already explained.

They had lunch bought on the corner. There was a taste of garlic Helena approved of and Luiza found too strong. André ate distractedly, watching where the sunlight ended on the floor. He did not know at what times of day this room would have light. The old house seemed to offer a certainty that, on reflection, he had also learnt little by little.

After lunch, his mother put on a recording. She chose by number and found a radio programme. She looked at the list, pressed the button again and reached the party. Their father asked whether it was recording. Someone said the light was on.

“That's Célia's voice,” Luiza said.

Helena listened again. She thought it might be. André looked for the matching line on the list. His mother laid a hand on the paper.

“You can write it down later.”

They listened without trying to identify the rest of the voices. The old recorder had captured the cutlery better than some of the people. In the new room, the sound of cutlery mingled with the plates Luiza was taking to the sink.

André wanted to ask whether his mother was pleased with the copies. The question seemed necessary to conclude the work, and awkward for any answer other than yes. He asked for more coffee.

When he left, he took the curtain poles the neighbour had not collected. Luiza stayed to help make the bed. In the lift, André saw a message from his sister on his phone: her daughter had made another video, now with only the song. She wanted to know whether he would like to see it first. He said yes. Then he added that Luiza ought to ask their mother too, if the house appeared. He deleted the second message before sending it. His sister knew how to ask questions.

At home, he put the borrowed stereo in a bag to return it. The box of tapes was no longer with him. He opened the folder and

found the selection, the transfers, the photographs and the list. Out of habit, he looked for something that still needed correcting. There were several things: a date to discover, an obscured word, Célia's voice still uncertain.

He closed the folder without changing the names.

Later, Helena called. André answered expecting a question about the buttons.

“Did you take the bread knife?”

He looked among the things he had brought home. It was wrapped in a cloth, in the bag with the coffee flask. He said he would bring it over the next day.

In the background, he heard his own boyhood voice asking why the house in the drawing could not have another storey. His mother on the tape answered something quietly. André asked Helena to turn it up a little.

“Wait, I'm cutting something.”

He waited. He heard a drawer open, the phone being set down and the scrape of a chair. By the time Helena returned, the recording had gone past that point.

“Shall I go back?”

André looked at the knife on the table. He would have to set off early the next day if he wanted to arrive before lunch. His mother did not like waiting with the food ready, and he had no reason to keep her waiting.

“We'll listen tomorrow.”

# Archive Note

Tomás Vilar is a fictional literary persona created with ChatGPT, and A Copy for Each of Us is a work produced through that persona.

Date within the author's fictional literary career: 2019.

Creation, production and incorporation into the Margem 37 Collection: 2026.

This novella forms part of the author's fictional back catalogue.

Margem 37 — For stories in search of a margin.

A project conceived by Lis & Lev.