

*Escúchame.* Do not pretend to be deaf.

I get that you're in a bad way. I see fear in the way your fingers twitch at your side. You left home in a hurry, I can see that too. You have no bags and your sweater is too thin for this time of year. You say Vico sent you. Maybe that's true, or maybe you're looking for someone specific. Someone who maybe isn't looking for you. I get that you think we are the answer to your problems.

But we're not even the answer to our own problems.

¿You think you can be one of us? ¿You think you can just show up here because you need help and have romantic ideas about the underground? We're not going to let you in just because you have a sordid curiosity about what we get up to down here, far from the prying eyes of the respectable. We are no one's entertainment.

We didn't choose to go underground. No one abandons the surface of the world, the light and air and snow-cruled glories of the Andes, unless choice has been taken away. You burrow under the mountains because the surface world sends you there. Because a god has dragged you down by your hair. Because the lords of death have challenged you to a ball game and you don't know the rules. Because they want to use your head as a football. Because you lost.

Or you burrow into the earth because there is nowhere else left.

Before you plead your case, let me ask you a few more things: ¿How do you feel about darkness and dirt? ¿How do you feel about hot food and showers? ¿A comfortable bed? ¿And are you willing to set yourself on fire, to throw yourself in front of the wheels of the train hurtling toward us all?

Most importantly: ¿Is there really nowhere else you can go?