

**SOMEONE**

Adriana Borja Enriquez

*I wanted to sleep, I wanted to have  
cried with eyelids placed on my needs,  
on the forgotten, to go back to someone,  
to her, to me, to us  
dispersed...*

*Jorge Enrique Adoum*

## I

We drink a cup of warm milk for breakfast every day, sometimes it comes with chocolate, but usually it is plain milk with its skin. I love milk skin. While the cup of milk cools off, I wait until the skin forms on top of it; when it is ready, I have it all in one bite. We also have juice and cheese sandwich for breakfast. They give us jelly once a week, so the cheese sandwich becomes a cheese sandwich with blackberry jelly.

Today it is jelly day, and I'm not enjoying it. It tastes weird, kind of fermented. It's too runny; it looks more like syrup than jelly. I squeeze the sandwich and little purple drops spill over the paleness of a yellowish plate where I am having my breakfast. I squeeze more and more until the bread drains all the jelly, so the smashed bread and cheese takes the shape of my fingers. My hands get dirty and I lose my appetite. Don't play with your food! —someone shouts from far away. Then, I remember mom asking me to wash my hands before dinner or ordering me to wash my mouth three times when a bad word escaped my lips, one of those "big words" as she used to call them. I had to wash my mouth a lot.

## II

Granny sleeps on her side and snores a little bit. Her light snoring reminds me of a cat's purr. I don't really know if Granny likes cats, but she really likes to have her nails done. She has a very thick nail polish, almost dried, hidden between the mattress and the back of her bed. Sometimes she lets me do her nails, but due to my shaky pulse, I miss the nails and stain the skin around them. Granny gets mad and doesn't let me finish, so she ends up with four fingernails done and six fingernails nude.

Granny has very short hair, like a boy, grey hair has started to grow, slate-gray, like the color of a cat. I don't know if I like cats, I have never had one. I have a dog though, but I wasn't allowed to bring him here with me. I have to take care of Granny. She is angry most of the time, she has a very hoarse voice and she speaks less and less. Granny doesn't like to talk to me. Sometimes I feel she is annoyed when I'm around. So I try not to upset her, I don't speak much and I try not to stare at her much either.

## III

I don't really like it here. Every day something strange happens. And when I think I won't see anything stranger than before, I'm wrong because soon enough something worse happens. For example, the other day Lady Susana vomited some spiders.

I was hanging out in the patio; I had collected geranium leaves to share with Granny. When I was walking down the hallway, I saw Lady Susana puking right there on the wooden floor. My mom would have made her wash her mouth immediately, at least five times. Lady Susana was covering her face with her hands and I didn't know if she was trying to swallow back the vomit or rather trying to get it out of her mouth. Nobody said anything and silence was only interrupted by Lady Susana's retching.

Two nurses came and took her away, the vomit was left behind. Claudio, who is a pretty strange man with a whitish beard and a shoddy haircut, went to check what the puddle contained; he took one of his slippers off and stirred the liquid on the floor with it. Everyone stared in disgust. Manuela, the haggard girl who doesn't speak to anyone, left right away. Even though I was feeling sick, I stayed there because I was also curious. Then Claudio, murmuring, recited everything he was seeing: rice, lentils, white pill, blue pill, spider, another spider...

Soon the janitor came to clean the floor and a nurse took Claudio away. She was very angry, she took his slipper and threw it in a trash can.

I wasn't sure if I had understood well what Claudio had said, while he was doing an inventory of all the things he saw in the disgusting puke, but I kept thinking about the spiders.

—Is it true that Lady Susana vomited spiders? —I asked the janitor.

—One vomits what one eats. Nobody eats spiders —he answered staring at the mop.

—But Claudio said there were spiders in the vomit —I told him, feeling afraid of making him angry.

—That old man is crazy. You shouldn't believe what the crazies say —he replied again without looking at me.

—But if those weren't spiders, what were they?

—Hair! What else could it be? —the janitor answered looking at me with angry eyes like those mom used to have when staring at me if I said something stupid.

If one vomits what one eats and Lady Susana vomited hair, then she probably ate hair. This was the conclusion I came to. When I entered the room, I saw Granny sitting on her bed, staring at the window.

—Granny —I said— I think Lady Susana likes to eat hair. She didn't answer. Granny —I continued—I'm afraid she will come into our room one day and cut my hair to eat it. I think she was the one who cut your hair, Manuela's and all the others'.

She wasn't saying anything. I thought I had made her mad but maybe she had just decided not to talk to me, as usual. Suddenly, I heard her repeat something in a very quiet voice, words came out of her lazy mouth and I couldn't understand them well. I quietly approached her until I could hear her say she was pregnant.

#### IV

This is not a place for little girls. I have been thinking about it since I woke up this morning. I feel like I'm driving myself crazy. Every night a nurse walks around the hallway checking the rooms to make sure that everyone is asleep. Granny is always asleep, but those white shoe steps always wake me up. I can't go back to sleep until I toss and turn in my bed, and when the morning comes I feel that dying rats have slept in my mouth. As soon as I wake up

I have to go to the bathroom to wash my mouth. Then comes the breakfast, always the milk, the juice and the cheese sandwich, and the jelly, if it is jelly day. All these is driving me crazy.

—Granny, I can't stay here with you anymore. Tell mom to come get me. I don't want to be here—I beg her during breakfast time, but she doesn't listen. It seems like even the yellowish plates listen to me more than Granny does.

Every morning after breakfast, a little old lady they call Dominga starts singing. She sings *pasillos*. I think she only knows two or three of them, and she sings solo, no guitar, no music, only her voice. She sings alone in her room, but I can't help listening to her. Dominga barely leaves her room, not even to eat. I think she sleeps all day long when she is not singing. At a quarter past nine she starts her morning singing and some of us stay in the hall right outside of her room listening. Then comes a nurse to take her breakfast tray away.

Today's song was about kisses, love kisses. The lyrics said "*lips that don't kiss are dead petals*", and I kept thinking about that. I wanted to ask Granny if my lips were going to die if I didn't kiss anyone. I had to ask her because while being here with her, I will never meet a boy who kisses me so my lips don't die.

I knew Granny wasn't going to answer, so I asked Claudio but he didn't answer either. He just stared at me with a half smile and, from time to time, he scratched his head.

—Lips don't die, Luna, we die —Claudio said and, picking his nose, continued—but if you die I can give you my life and you will rise again.

—Am I going to resurrect like Jesus did? —I asked Claudio.

—No —he said—you just won't die and then you can come live with me, and I will take care of you.

I didn't answer, I didn't say good bye either, and I quietly walked to my room, in a slow pace, as I usually do.

I remembered what the janitor said about Claudio, that he is crazy and that one should not believe what crazy people say. Claudio is crazy. Everyone is. The crazy scare me. I didn't get what Claudio meant when he said he was going to give me his life so I wouldn't die. He said that I could go live with him and that he was going to take care of me. I didn't understand but I was scared anyway. I had to tell Granny and beg her to call mom. I had to go back home.

—Granny —I spoke almost whispering because she seemed to be sad— I think Claudio wants to marry me, but I do not want to. He is too old and I have to finish school.

I felt Granny had listened to me for the first time. She looked into my eyes and she came so close, that I could smell her breath. It seemed to me like the dying mice did not only sleep in my mouth, but also in hers, and since she didn't have any tooth to brush, her wrinkled lips kept that breath I hadn't smell until she approached and looked straight at me as if I started to exist. She stared at me for a while. I could see the wrinkles around her eyes, like the eyes of the chickens my mom used to have in our backyard.

—Men only use us and then they leave us! —Granny said, before breaking into tears. Her crying was heavy like the rain, and she didn't stop until lunchtime.

Today we had chicken and mashed potatoes. I don't like potatoes. Mom would have forced me to eat, but not Granny. Granny doesn't pay attention when I eat or when don't, she

doesn't care if I am there by her side, or under a table. She doesn't care about many things really.

## V

Mom used to say that the happiest day of her life was when my dad asked for her hand in marriage. She used to show me their old wedding pictures, feeling very proud. She looked so happy in her white dress, next to my dad in an elegant suit. In the background you could see a wedding cake, it was not huge, but it was a cake. I love cakes. Mom used to say that one day I would fall in love and my boyfriend was going to propose to me, and I should cry, because that's what in love women do. And I should say yes, of course. And that was supposed to be the happiest day of my life.

The first thing I will tell mom when she comes will be that somebody already proposed to me, and it was not even remotely something that made me happy. It rained yesterday like it never does or like it usually does, I don't know, I don't remember when was the last time I saw rain like that. Granny went to bed and I went to the living room but the TV was off because the nurses said it could get damaged by the lightning. I sat quietly and suddenly I stopped being alone. Claudio entered the room and stared at the window.

—Luna! —He said while waving his hands so I approached him —I'll take care of you —He whispered.

I stayed still, sitting next to him, and suddenly a lightning followed by a thunder made the window glass shake and made me bounce; it was one of those little hops you do when you are scared.

With a smile on his face Claudio told me not to be scared. I don't like to see him smile because he has a couple of teeth missing and you can see the holes when he laughs, but mom says it is rude to tell people their flaws, so I said nothing. Then Claudio stood up and told me that if the rain was making me feel afraid, he was going to kill it, so he started shooting the sky blocked by the ceiling with his invisible shotgun. He shot imaginary bullets and his body swayed back every time. He moved his lips shouting at the rain, like he was fighting with it, but I could barely hear what he was saying. They were big words. Mom would have ordered him to wash his mouth, maybe twice because he doesn't have too many teeth to brush.

After a half an hour, it stopped raining and during all that time Claudio never stopped fighting with the rain.

—See? I take good care of you! —he said— So Luna, will you be my wife? —He threw the question just like that; it came from nowhere, from the rain.

The happiest day of my life was not supposed to be like that. It wasn't happy at all.

—No, I am not old enough to be anybody's wife—I said before I left. I wanted to run, but the hallway floor was wet.

## VI

Granny was pregnant and the news spread quickly. Lady Susana came one morning to congratulate her. Granny got mad, she screamed asking her to go away and then started to cry as usual. I was scared and even though I was trying to get her to calm down, she kept

crying and, from time to time, Granny said she was pregnant and that she didn't know what to do.

—We have to get out, Granny, this is no place for children—I told her— Let's go home. You could stay in my room and I could help you take care of the baby. She didn't answer.

When the doctor came with two male nurses, Granny kept quiet, her weeping stopped and she didn't complain about anything. The doctor asked questions and Granny answered. The doctor said she wasn't pregnant. Yes, I am—she claimed while grabbing the doctor's hand against her belly. He insisted that there was no baby in there and then Granny cried more than ever. She shouted and shouted she was pregnant and that her child wasn't going to have a father nor a surname. She cried so intensely, that I felt like crying too, so I cried.

The doctor wrote something in his folder before leaving the room with one of the nurses. The other nurse helped Granny back to her bed, while she kept insisting about her tragedy. He told her not to worry, that he would give the child his surname if she wanted it. Granny calmed down, she thanked him and let him tuck her in bed.

Watching from my corner of the room, I kept wondering. Why did the doctor say that Granny wasn't pregnant, but the nurse offered to give the baby his surname? I wanted to ask many things to Granny, but she stared at the window and I disappeared once again.

## VII

Manuela and I are sitting on the grass, making small holes in the ground with our fingers. Mom wouldn't like this at all, but I know that Granny won't mind if my hands get dirty.

Are you drunk? —Manuela asked me after I told her Granny was pregnant. I say no, I am scared of drunks, then she ignores me for a while. Manuela is like that, weird and angry all the time. She is a very skinny girl, with long legs, dark bags under her eyes and dark hair. She always wears long-sleeved clothes. Claudio says it's so she can cover her wounded arms, after trying cutting her wrists to drink her own blood, but that's one of the many things everyone says about everyone here. They all think they are less crazy than the others, there's always someone crazier than oneself.

—Why do you think she is pregnant? —Manuela asks me.

—Because she says so.

—Old women cannot have babies. —She answers, with a serious look, and I do not know why she says what she is saying.

—Why? —I ask Manuela who has already stood up.

I stay sitting there, looking at her from below. She stares at me, rather with sadness or pity. She doesn't say anything and she walks away. I stay quiet digging my fingers in the ground. Manuela is the only young person in this place and she doesn't want to be my friend. Claudio is my only friend, but he wants me to be his wife. Granny doesn't talk to me but when she does, she says she is pregnant. And Mom doesn't call me, neither does she come to visit Granny, or take me home.

I'm afraid of staying here, end up being crazy like Claudio, sad like Manuela, isolated like Dominga, or eating hair like Lady Susana does.

## VIII

Today somebody new came, a young man who entered Granny's room and sat next to me. Granny glances at him and then covers herself with a blanket. He keeps looking at me, asking how I am doing.

—I'm okay—I answer.

He shares with me a bag of chocolate cookies, the ones I really like. He is very quiet watching me eat the cookies; he has some as well.

—So, what's your name? —I ask him.

—Vicente —he answers in a sad voice, even sadder than Manuela's.

—How come you are here?

He reaches his head with his hands and squeezes his hair with his fingers. He has black curly hair. I tell him that I like his hair.

—It looks just like yours —Vicente says. I don't know if it's a real compliment or if he is just saying that.

I tell him not to worry because everything will be fine. I don't really know that, but he seems sad and I don't know what else to say. Vicente stands up and kisses me on the forehead. Watch out! —I shout— if Claudio sees you, he might shoot you.

—Who is Claudio? —Vicente asks concerned.

Then I explain to him that Claudio is a man who wants to marry me, but I don't like him, he has two teeth missing and he is too old for me. I'm still a little girl —I tell him. Vicente kisses me again and leaves the room without saying goodbye. I don't recall feeling this happy since I came here.

—Granny, that guy kissed me! I shout out loud so she pays attention to me.

—Duh, that old man! —she replies angry— He will leave when he gets you pregnant!

Granny's response makes me feel both, scared and happy. This is one of the few times that she has answered to me; I don't like what she says though. It actually scares me. So then I ask her how one gets pregnant, but she doesn't answer and instead, she cries again.

## IX

Manuela was right. Granny isn't pregnant. I have finally realized that she is also crazy, even crazier than Lady Susana and Claudio put together. Granny woke up holding a pillow that she has named Pepe. She said she gave birth to it without any problem.

Pepe, the pillow, who would be sort of an uncle for me, doesn't have a last name, but Granny speaks with him more than she has spoken with me since I came here. Now I am the loneliest I could be, even lonelier than the three in the patio.

I haven't seen Vicente lately, not in the hallway, or in the room, not even in the TV room. Claudio doesn't say hi to me anymore, maybe he's forgotten that he wanted to take care of me. I know by heart every *pasillo* that Dominga sings, and Lady Susana scares me a lot. She has pulled out her eyelashes and brows; her desire for hair is much stronger than my cravings for chocolate cookies.

I'm sick of everything, I will have to go back to school soon and mom hasn't come to take me home yet. I will never ever come back to take care of Granny. It's really unfair and boring. There is nothing for me to do here. The crazy people are getting crazier every day that

passes by, and they don't even notice it. I want to go back home now, I want to say big words, so that mom will order me to go wash my mouth. I miss everything, my dog, my bed, even the food that I didn't like.

## X

A nurse measures my blood pressure and the doctor looks at me from outside the door. As soon as she's done, the nurse writes something down in a folder, and gives it to the doctor. Granny and Pepe are not in their bed. Another nurse has come to get them so they can go take a bath. I ask the doctor if I can go outside and play.

— No —he says— Vicente is worried about you.

— Have you seen Vicente? Where is he? —I'm excited to hear about him. I thought that maybe I had made him up in my dreams and that we never really met. I even thought that perhaps Claudio threatened him with his imaginary bullets.

—Your son has to work; he comes to visit you when he has the time —the doctor says.

—I don't have a son. Granny just had Pepe, but I don't have a son.

The doctor takes his glasses off and looks at me closely, so close I start feeling scared. I think that he might be a little crazy, like everyone here is. Maybe he is not even a doctor and he just believes he is one, as much as Dominga believes she is a singer and Claudio believes that he can defeat the rain.

—So, Lucia, who is your granny? —the doctor asks.

—Granny. She is taking a bath, she will come back soon, you can wait for her. Also, my name is Luna —I answer, while silently praying for Granny to come back and tell him that I am allowed to be here.

—Lucia, Teresa is your roommate —the doctor says, pointing at Granny's bed.

— Granny is here because she is sick, and I came to take care of her.

The doctor takes a deep breath; he tells me that we will do some exercises. He asks me to stand up and orders me to point at the ceiling, at the floor and at the window; with my left hand first, and with my right hand later. He takes some notes and then steps up to me.

—Close your eyes—he says— and tell me if you know what object I just put in your right hand.

So I go on and feel a round metallic thing.

—A coin! —I tell him before opening my eyes. I take a look at it and I realize that it is not a *sucre*, it's a weird coin, one I haven't seen before —What country is it from? How much candy can you buy with this? —I ask him. The doctor doesn't stop writing things down in his folder, and later he replies to me that it's a dollar, while he puts it back in his pocket.

## XI

—Today is November 25<sup>th</sup>, 1961—I reply when the doctor asks today's date. I meant to tell him that since he is a doctor, he should have a calendar, but that would have been rude.

—Repeat after me: Today is December 11, 2012. De-cem-ber-e-lev-en-two-thous-and-twelve —slowly says the doctor, and then I realize I must certainly be right. The doctor is not a doctor, he's just another crazy man. One shouldn't believe what the crazy say, as the janitor explained.



—December 11, 2012 —I repeat, keeping myself from laughing.

—This is today's date, remember it. Do you know what this is? —he asks me, pointing at the mirror.

—A mirror. —I answer, even though his questions are a bit annoying.

While I'm standing in front of the mirror, he asks me what I see.

—Someone.

—Who is it? —The doctor asks, staring at me so intensely that he almost makes me feel nude.

—Someone. —I say, when finally, Granny and Pepe the pillow reenter the room.

—Do you remember today's date? — he asks again.

—Today is November the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1961. —I reply, while approaching Granny.

The doctor stops asking me questions, closes his folder and walks down the hallway we are not allowed to in. The nurse takes us with her to have our breakfast now.

—Granny, when will mom come to get me? —I ask, although she is cuddling Pepe and doesn't say anything —Please tell her that I have taken good care of you, not even one big word has escaped my mouth, and I haven't been rude to anyone. It's time to go back home—

We find a seat at an empty table in the dining room. Claudio and Lady Susana fight for the seat next to the window, Manuela stares at them, feeling annoyed, and Dominga hasn't begun her singing yet.

Our breakfast is finally served. Granny tries to feed Pepe with little pieces of bread. Today is not jelly day, and the cheese sandwich looks delicious, I'm eager to have it, as much as Lady Susana would be before taking a first bite of a wig.

We drink a cup of warm milk for breakfast every day, sometimes it comes with chocolate, but usually it is plain milk with its skin. I love milk skin. While the cup of milk cools off, I wait.

*Translated from the Spanish by the author.*