



(MIS)TREATERS

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She did not sleep well. She woke up quite early, sweating all over. The air-conditioner was not working. It made a loud noise and did not refresh the air at all. The technician had promised to come twice and never showed up. Just like the handyman, who assured her he would come soon to fix the cabinet door and put an end to that unpleasant squeaking it made every time it opened. Had what's-his-face come? Not even him. We trust, we wait, time goes by, nobody comes. They're all mistreaters, the lot of them. Incapable of showing up for an appointment.

In a while she would get up. She could not find a comfortable position in bed, she just kept tossing and turning. Since before the birds started to sing. She thought of her granddaughter and smiled in the dark. She recalled how once the little girl had explained that she liked sleeping over at grandmother's because, if she woke up before everybody else, there would be lots of birds in the backyard to listen to. Then she could be sure that daylight would come soon, because it was pretty-early. At her own house, she could never know if it was pretty-early or if it would still take a long time for daylight to come as even the birds were still sleeping, because it was still super-early.

Well, on that day the grandmother had woken up super-early, long before the pretty-early. She was tired of lying in bed doing nothing. She decided to read for a while. She switched on the lamp at the bedside table, grabbed the Bible, opened it at random, as she sometimes did. She was careful to open it closer to the beginning of the book. The Old Testament distracted her best, those turbulent stories full of adventures and betrayal.

A long time had elapsed before she realised it. Her nostrils captured the calling from the meal which Herminia was preparing in the kitchen. The aroma of fresh coffee steaming from the paper filter while the beverage dripped into the thermos. The perfume of freshly squeezed oranges, which would soon cool off in the fridge. The tempting smell of bacon melting in the frying pan, waiting for her to get up, so her good morning could give the green light for two eggs to be fried. Bacon and eggs, pure cholesterol. For so long Lydia had deprived herself of it. Now, every now and again she would leave a note to the maid the night before, indulging her inner glutton's pleasure. At this stage, that was not going to make any difference. Nothing else would make a difference, and she knew that very well.

She got up and washed her face. Soon she would be dunking into sunny-side-up yolks the fresh and crunchy French baguette, fresh from the baker's.



Before sitting at the table, she put on her spectacles, picked a CD (today it was Mozart), ran her eyes over the front page of the newspaper. The same as always. But she brought it to the table. She enjoyed reading the opinion pieces, keeping up with some columnist or other. When Earnest still lived, both of them would chat about the news while enjoying the breakfast she would have prepared. Now, she chatted silently with some journalist she barely knew. But the meal need not be prepared by herself anymore. It was waiting for her on the table. All ready. A nice slice of papaya, its seeds already picked out. Butter, jam, and honey for the bread. And a side serving of pills, the first ones of the day, a reminder of everything she could not possibly forget.

The reading extended beyond the table. It proceeded onto the chair in the front porch, under the mild morning sun. The fate of the nation continued to worry her. It was helpless, she could not shut herself off from the succession of events, though she had enough reasons to care only about herself. She ended up taking her time with the paper. Afterwards she took a stroll around the backyard. She knew it was a privilege to still live in the same house where she had raised her children and watched every single plant grow. She would not give up on enjoying it. Soon, when she was gone, the heirs would sell it and split the money. Maybe this was her way of continuing to support them.

She turned on the tap, adjusting the pressure of the stream pouring from the hose. She reduced it into a light shower which would merely sprinkle the leaves. She realised that the flowerbed of various marigolds kept renewing itself in golden yellow hues. That new reds were exploding in the geranium pot. That the busy lizzies in the shadowy corner by the wall did their name justice, showing up profusely amidst the foliage. Checked on the jasmine which had fallen during the night; the yesterday-today-and-tomorrow, which was purple yesterday, lilac today, and would be white tomorrow. She noted happily that there were still buttons in both bushes, promises of renewal in the scented corner which charmed her nights.

In the vegetable garden, the shoulders of the carrots peeped out, rising from the earth underneath their green hairs. In the latest bed of lettuce, some of the plants were almost at the point of harvesting, perhaps aided by the dim shadow from the bush of sugar-apples, where two precociously ripe fruits were dressed in a little cloth bag which she made herself, having learned such wisdom from her grandmother, so that no occasional pest could tarnish the perfection of their form or the sweetness of their taste.

“Madam Lydia, the children are here”— Herminia announced.

She stopped watering the plants and went to the porch, where the little ones came to greet her, jumping up for hugs and morning treats. They all sat down.



“Do you want a massage, granny?”— asked the grandson, as he always did, knowing the answer would always be positive.

“I’ll go get the treatment!”— the girl announced.

In a moment she was back, a bottle of moisturiser in hand. Lydia lied down in the hammock, stretched out her legs. They sat by either of her sides, each took one of her feet in their hands. She closed her eyes and felt the children’s tiny hands spreading the lotion. The faintest lavender aroma. An even lighter touch, of young souls and fingers. Soft, yet capable of transporting her with the deep pleasure of delicious caressing, simultaneously warm and fresh. Life felt through their fingertips. She wished it would never end.

“We can spend loads of time here today. There’s no class, it’s parent-teacher meeting day”— the boy informed her, as if he had guessed at her thoughts. “We can stay for the whole day.”

A whole day with them. A gift. She remembered a magazine she used to read on the plane, back when she travelled a lot to accompany Earnest. There was a section entitled “The most fulfilling day”, with a script for an intense 24 hours, enjoying everything to the full, each time in a different city.

“Good!”— the grandma rejoiced. “Then, let’s play at doing nice things all day long.”

“Only when we finish putting treatment on your foot”— said the girl, focused at spreading the scented lotion over her heel.

There was really no rush. All the time in the world could fit into that one day. She let herself stay, surrendered to every second of caresses, her eyes closed, listening to the little ones’ chatter, responding every now and then. Later she sorted out a special lunch, made only of the simple stuff children like. And fried bananas for dessert. With ice cream.

Before mealtime, they stayed in the garden. Stirring up the soil, planting seeds, cleaning up a flowerbed. They inspected some worms and even a snail. Afterwards, a thorough shower. In front of the television, they watched cartoons until the food was ready.

Full bellies, sleepiness crept in. Lydia was going to lie down for a moment and suggested that the kids kept playing nearby. But the granddaughter’s request spoke louder:



“Tell us a story...”

They arranged themselves in the hammock in the porch. She sat in the middle. One grandchild on each side, nestled right into her. Sleep came gradually as she spoke of princes and princesses, from the stories she had heard from her own grandmother, when she was little. Soon the children were sleeping soundly. She caressed their hair, tenderly smelling each one. She ended up snoozing, too.

When she woke up her daughter was standing before her. It was already late, she had come to pick them up.

“What did you do all day long?”— she asked.

“We made memories,” could have been Lydia’s answer, one which she did not give because her grandson jumped in to announce:

“We played treaters!”

“Grandma treated us, and we treated her”— the sister explained.

Both women smiled.

“And they even put treatment on my feet, massaged them and everything”— the eldest one said.

The daughter sat on the wicker chair, held her mother’s hand, and they chatted for a while. Since she was a young girl, she had never felt as close to her mother as in these last few days.

“How does it end, grandma?”— the girl suddenly asked. “I fell asleep before the end of the story.”

“Then I’m going to tell you, so that you can learn it and tell your granddaughter someday. Because I learned this story from my grandmother.”

And so she kept stringing the words together, while the afternoon slipped away and the night approached, in a story that would last longer than herself, and someday, who knows, it might get told, in a farewell manner, to a little girl by an older woman who would remember that most fulfilling day. While her memory lasted.