

The Curly Doll

When I put on the white clothes, I think about the interminable rains that come down from the slopes in front of my grandmother's house, bending down the trees and even the houses sometimes. The storm happens far away, up above, but vestiges of the muddy water come down the sidewalk, curving through the gaps of the cement, leaving marks. In the corners, garbage piles up, and many cans of empty soda can be found.

Just like the dirty waters, I feel stained, and Manuela helps me in these moments. When my father tells me I'm too attached to my doll, I answer that I just need her company. But he doesn't believe me. So I decide to ask for protection to her in my Holy Communion. Mom obeys what father has to say and controls my coming and goings with the doll, saying that I am already too grown up to be seen with her in public. What I try to explain is that I don't play, but talk. It is with her that I learn about life, the behavior of all people, and the manner of how everyone love. I'm not sure if I am different. I like to change, caress her body and kiss her.

I don't know why my dad doesn't like when I smooth her curls.

"It is nothing serious, mom," I explain.

But she's angry, and her bracelets shake intensively, demonstrating her impatience.

"It's just a phase," my mother says, when my father arrives and finds me having dinner with Manuela.

“The doll is like an imaginary friend to her,” my mom explains.

“You don’t know what she wants,” he affirms.

All this inspection puts me down. What I know is that the doll is very intelligent because she watches television shows, interviews, and many soap operas. Since mother is never at home, I can choose whatever we can see in between homework intervals. Counting that father is also out, me and the doll can stay together, she is my best company, we have a perfect relationship.

I am standing in front of the mirror when my mom enters the room. Manuela is sitting in the chair. I see the curtains with lace-trimmed ends swinging, as though indicating the arrival of the rains.

“Do you think my costume is going to get dirty with the storm?” I ask.

“It’s not going to rain, Sabrina,” mom answers.

She arranges my bed with long fingers, tucking in the sheets, smoothing my hair with the brush.

“You look beautiful to receive Jesus,” she affirms, when she finishes tying a white rose on my chest.

“I want to take Manuela with me,” I say.

“You need to learn to be on your own,” mom affirms, closing my bedroom’s door.

I walk through the hallway without knowing well what happens inside my house. My dad, when not at work, spends hours in front of the computer. My mom, before going to sleep, always stops by the altar and speaks with saints and crucifixes.

There are many objects inside the house which converse with the silence. Manuela is just one of them. "I need to purify you," I tell her, holding the doll.

But before I can say anything, she's beyond my reach. Mom kisses the image of the Saint in the kitchen's entrance and I think about the doll, alone in my room. I also would have liked to say goodbye, before leaving. But it's not a problem, I brought a piece of her hair with me, and it will be blessed.

"I have faith," I tell my dad, when he's reading the paper in the kitchen.

Before leaving, I still look at the perfect hem of my suit, and the starched shirt. Mom has her legs exposed, in a dress that lets her tattoo visible. I don't know why she chose a peacock to draw on her leg. I want to ask but the radio of the van is turned on and the man is speaking about the storms predicted at the end of the day.

"Mom also likes dolls," I say, without thinking about the consequences.

"I told you to forget this toy. You need to find real friends," my dad affirms, trying to control his voice.

"You speak with the saint, don't you, mom?" I ask.

"More respect. The Saint is a Saint," mom replies, combing my dad's hair with her fingers as he drives.

Mom is preoccupied in organizing lunch after Communion. My father drives with only one hand, while fidgeting in his cellular with the other. The traffic on the road is intense.

"You're selfish," I affirm, recalling the scene in the soap opera where one of the artists accuses the other of jealousy.

“What are you saying?” Dad says, with open eyes, looking back.

“Why can’t I do what I want?” I ask, without answer.

After some time, I get tired of being angry. The Church is on the other side of the city, near the city Center. We live a bit far away, in a neighborhood with just houses and no business.

“What were you trying to say?” Mother asks, when dad parks the car and begins to talk to some relatives.

“You say I need to learn to be on my own but you’re always with someone,” I say.

“You were kissing the doll in the mouth, Sabrina,” she affirms, adjusting my hair.

“Was I?” I ask, without knowing what she means.

“You’re very small to kiss someone in the mouth, whoever it is,” she says, breathing relieved when I line up with the other girls.

“Why?” I insist.

“Forget it, Sabrina,” she completes, careful when she walks on the ground covered in red earth.

She stops at the church’s entrance, where dad talks with a lot of acquaintances. The steps are worn out, the painting old, but the general aspect of the place is celebratory. A woman in a yellow dress, with red laces, hair tinted blond, touches my face and pinches my cheeks.

“You’re a doll,” she says.

Nobody rejects or look at me strangely. Does someone else likes to play with dolls, chat and imagine they’re our best company? I want to ask. The line up of boys is as agitated as the girls and the priest greets them all, trying to calm them. Everybody is the same, I think.

One of the boys is carrying a cellular phone in his pocket. I think his name is Breno. I notice how he wants his parent’s attention, and tries to show them something on the screen. In the altar, the objects are all prepared, the candelabra and the wine. The ceremony begins and the priest raises his hands, praising God. In the middle of his speech, a telephone rings. It is the boy’s, who forgot to turn it off inside his suit. Everybody begins to laugh but immediately his mother appears and takes the equipment from him. Everything continues normally.

Unintentionally, I look beside me and notice his eyes watery. I want to hold his hand. I look up and shrill when seeing the amplitude of the church’s dome. “God will accompany you,” the priest emphasizes, when everything ends and the communion is handled. I feel purified.

Everybody is hugging, and even those who don’t know each other well. It’s the peace in Christ, they repeat, when parents crowd the altar. I decide to play outside, with the rest of the group. When I am leaving, I notice Breno sitting near a Saint covered in a purple mantle with a contorted body. He’s close to the image with his hands up, as though taking pictures.

“What are you doing?” I ask.

“Taking a picture,” he answers, closing one of his eyes, aiming.

Many flowers pots are near the Saint's feet. The pedestal exhales jasmine, and Breno's company is unusual. I put a chunk of Manuela's hairs on the ground.

"What is that?" He asks, pretending to take a picture of the object too.

"It's my doll's hair. I want her to be blessed," I explain, a bit embarrassed.

He shows me a handkerchief and says he also prayed for his mother to give his cellular phone back.

"I always clean its screen with this cloth to protect it," he affirms.

The kerchief has blue lines and the drawing of a flower.

"It's very pretty," I say, walking with him to the exit.

I hear the thunder far away and I am afraid of the approaching rain. These days make me more scared. I hold Breno's hands and take him to the van.

"Can we play together?" I ask, when I meet my mother with one of the priests.

"Where's your mother?" My dad asks, when he sees the boy.

"My name is Breno," he explains.

After looking for his parents and they are introduced to us, they accept the invitation to have lunch at our house, since mother is making a get together for family members. On our way, it begins to rain strongly, and I think about the muddy waters that come down the slopes near grandmother's house, and the garbage in the street.

Despite exiting the car carefully, I notice the hem of my white pants have traces of red dust from the Church's parking lot. I brush my leg with my hands and I

feel even more blessed. Minutes later, when I am talking with one of my cousins, Bruno shows up with his cellular phone in his pocket.

“It worked, my mother forgave me,” he says, happy.

“I want to show you my doll,” I say.

There arriving, I want to see if the mystery of purification also happened inside. I open the door and I see that the doll is still kept inside the closet, and appears calm and appeased.

“Here she is,” I show, proud.

Breno explains that there’s an app in his cellular phone where he builds the houses and clothes of many characters, and that’s what he likes to play most.

“Do you want to see it?” He asks.

“Ok,” I answer.

From the hallway, I see my mother walking back and forth from the kitchen to the living room carrying a tray with rice. She smiles, and seems relieved. I keep thinking about the amount of news I will have to tell Manuela later, after everyone leaves. The rain falls, my suit is stained but I feel less afraid, in Breno’s company.

In a few minutes I hear my father calling for lunch and we have to go back to the living room, despite being in the middle of our game.