

Teresa

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EDITORES



TERESA

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TERESA

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To Elibey, Mariana and Ágata

TERESA



Rechargeable Fruit

Last Friday, Teresa asked me to take her to Mr. Arturo's fruit shop, next block from us. I didn't want to take her because I don't like walking on the street holding hands with a little girl—even though she's my sister—but because she really insisted, I ended up saying yes:

—Let's go quickly and afterward you'll leave me alone, okay?

Teresa moved her head several times up and down with a triumphant expression on her face. Before we left, she went to the kitchen and came back with a paper bag.

When we arrived at the fruit shop, she took out the skin of a banana from the paper bag and asked Mr. Arturo:

—Can you fill it again?

Between a flower and a bird

One Saturday, around midnight, Teresa entered Mum and Dad's room and lay down in their bed between the two of them.

—Mummy —she asked before they said anything—, how was I born?

Mum and Dad looked at each other, moved restlessly in the bed, and sighed.

—Why do you want to know? —Dad asked.

—Just to know —Teresa answered.

—That's not easy to explain —Mum said—. It's enough for you to know that you began to exist as a seed... or better yet, as an egg.

—Which one? —Teresa wanted to know, after thinking about it for a few seconds.

—What's the urgency? —Mum asked.

—It's very urgent: I want to know whether I'm a flower or a bird!

Speaking doodles

One night, while we were having dinner, the phone rang, and Teresa left the table hastily to answer it.

In those days, she loved talking over the phone and, every time it rang, she stopped whatever she was doing to answer it.

This time it was Yasunari who called. He is a Japanese friend of Dad's that doesn't speak any English. He wanted to let him know about his pending visit to Venezuela, the country where we live.

But because Teresa didn't know what he said, she hung up quickly and came back to the table confused.

—Who was it? —Mum asked.

—I don't know —Teresa answered—, it was a man that spoke doodles.

How did you know?

Teresa was sitting down on Mum's legs combing her hair and, every few minutes, proudly, Mum would hug and kiss her on the cheeks.

Dad watched the scene, pleased.

Suddenly, Teresa came down from where she was and climbed on his legs. Then asked, pointing at Mum:

—Daddy, how did you know that was the Mummy I wanted?

Ideas ache

Teresa had a very strong headache that wouldn't stop even with the medicine Mum gave her. That's why, as soon as Dad arrived from work we took her to the doctor's.

—Tell me, child —the doctor asked—. Where exactly is the pain?

—In the head.

—I know —said the doctor—, but, whereabouts in the head?

—Here —Teresa answered, pointing out her temple with her two hands—, where ideas live.

Questions and answers

The day that my parents enrolled Teresa at the kinder garden, a teacher asked her a few questions, while Mum and Dad filled some forms. After half an hour, the teacher approached my parents with a smile that didn't fit her face and said:

—No child before her has ever given me such beautiful answers!

She showed them the questions and the answers Teresa gave:

—What is the Universe?

—A very big house, full of stars, where God lives... And we also live in it.

—Who makes a day radiant?

—Butterflies.

—Who lights the nights?

—Mum.

—Where in the world do you live?

—In a house full of love.

—What is a river?

—The highway where the fish and the boats pass through... And from time to time a submarine.

- What is a mountain?
- It's a stone that grew up because it wanted to touch the sky.
- What is a tree?
- A building for the ants and the birds.
- What is rain?
- The tears with which God cleans the world.
- What is a man?
- A child, only bigger.
- And a woman?
- Like a man, but prettier... And with other things.
- What is remembering?
- It's thinking the same thought twice.
- What is forgetting?
- Letting things go dry.
- What is laughter?
- Having a joyful mouth... And heart.
- What makes you laugh?
- Tickles.
- Only tickles?
- Yes... And the stories that make me tickle inside.
- What is crying?
- Is like raining but with the eyes.
- What makes you cry?
- Sadness... And sometimes Mum and Dad,

when I'm a bad girl.

—What is fear?

—Something cold in my tummy that makes me close my eyes.

—What is death?

—When you stop seeing yourself.

—Are you afraid of dying?

—Yes.

—Why?

—Because if I die, I will be invisible, and nobody will see me.

—What is a cemetery according to you?

—Where they sow the dead.

—And a church?

—A building with apartments where the saints live.

—What would you like to be?

—A fish that doesn't let anyone catch him.

—What wouldn't you like to be?

—The floor.

—Why?

—Because nobody sees it.

Cats with labels

Dad went to visit a friend of his and took Teresa with him so that she could see some kittens that were born there two or three weeks ago.

From the moment they arrived, Teresa didn't stir from the kittens that, according to her, were very cute and naughty.

Hours later, when Dad and Teresa arrived home, my sister said that they were two females and two males.

—And how do you know? —Mum asked.

—Dad pulled them and saw their bellies —she explained. Then added—: I think it was written there.

I wouldn't sell my brothers

Every time Miss Leticia comes for a visit, she reads one or two stories from the Bible. Afterward she asks what we think of them and what would we have done if we were in a situation like the one she's read. After we answer, she continues to ask many other questions that make us dislike her stories.

One day that our cousin Sophia was home, Miss Leticia arrived and, before we could escape, she told us the story of Joseph and his brothers and how they sold Joseph and made their father believe that an animal had eaten him.

When she finished, she looked at us and asked:
—Would any of you be capable of selling your brothers?

—Not my brothers, but I would sell my cousin

—Teresa answered, pointing at Sophia, with whom she argued about a doll a few minutes before Miss Leticia told us the story.

What Granny did

When Granny came to visit us in November, she arrived on a plane and we all went to wait for her at the airport. “All” of us, I mean Mum and Dad, Charles, Louie, Teresa and me.

Before the plane stopped at the end of the track, Dad told Teresa that Granny was inside it.

As always, over the next few days, Granny pampered us and filled us with candy, cakes, ice cream, and chocolates.

Also, as always, we had a tummy ache and Mum scolded Granny many times.

Fifteen days afterward, when Granny had to go, we went back to the airport and we stayed there until the plane took off and got lost amongst the clouds.

Then Teresa asked:

—What did Granny do for them not to let her live on earth, like everyone else?

Granny shouldn't

Making the most out of Granny's visit, Mum and Dad went to dinner with some friends and left us in her care.

When they came back at two in the morning, they found Teresa sitting down in the living room.

Before they recovered from the surprise, Teresa told them, putting a finger in front of her mouth and pointing out to the couch on the other side of the living room:

—Shhhh, Granny is asleep!

—But you shouldn't be awake! —Mum scolded her.

—Nor should Granny be asleep! —Teresa answered.



First day of school

The first day Teresa went to the kinder garden she was very relaxed and calm, while other children were crying and held their mother's hands with all their strength.

But after a while, during class, when even the most frightened kids were calmed, she began to cry:

—Little Teresa, love, what is it? —the teacher asked.

—Is just that I realized that the only girl I know here is myself.

As pretty

When Granny came, one Saturday afternoon she took us to the circus.

Charles and I loved the magician, who turned six handkerchiefs into six pigeons and pulled out a horse from a large container in which he had placed a lizard before.

Louie loved the clown that was falling on the floor all the time and the tiger-tamer.

Teresa, on the other hand, absolutely adored a trapeze artist that was wearing a silver and red cape that sparkled in the spotlight. She was surrounded by a circle of light that stayed with her the whole time during her act.

As soon as she saw her, Teresa pointed at her with one finger while holding Granny.

The trapeze artist took off her cape and started climbing up a rope ladder. Under her cape she had a swimsuit made with the same glittery silver and red fabric, so she bathed us with sparkles again.

Then, Teresa held Granny harder and said: –Granny: she's as pretty on the inside as she is on the outside!

A dead rainbow

One day, a car stopped in front of our building because it had a problem with the engine. For the car to work again, the oil had to be changed.

When the car went away, it left a puddle of oil on the road that changed its colors with the sun.

After a while, when Teresa arrived from the kinder garden, she stood there in front of the puddle of oil and after contemplating it in amazement for a couple of seconds, she said: –Look, Mum, what a sad thing: a dead rainbow!

One coin for another

One afternoon so long ago I've forgotten when it was, Teresa was playing in the living room when all of the sudden she screamed at the top of her lungs.

I had just discovered that the leaves from the trees have different ways of falling on the ground, according to their shapes and sizes, but when I heard my sister screaming I ran to the living room.

—Reuben, I'm going to die! —Teresa moaned while shaking.

—Why are you going to die? —I asked her.

—Because I'm going to die! —she said holding me.

Mum arrived then:

—Baby, what happened?

In tears, Teresa told us that she had hidden a coin in her mouth, for her teddy bear not to find it, and that she swallowed it after bumping into the couch.

—What was the size of the coin? —asked Mum.

—Like those! —Teresa pointed to two other coins that were lying on the kitchen table.

—Take it easy —Mum said—, nobody dies from swallowing a coin that size!

—Buuuuuuuh! —Teresa howled, crying even louder than before— I’m going to die and you don’t want to tell me!

Right then Dad came in from work.

Teresa ran to him and said holding him:

—Daddy, I don’t want to die!

When Dad heard of what happened he looked in his pants for a coin just like the one Teresa had swallowed, hid it on his right hand, and pretended to take it out of one of her ears.

—I pulled it out—he said—. You are not going to die anymore.

Teresa stopped crying and, charmed with what Dad just did, took the coin from his hand, put it in her mouth before any of us could stop her, and swallowed it while demanding:

—Daddy, do it again!

Vegetable Lies

At home, we give thanks before every meal and once or twice a week Charles, Louie, Teresa, or I are the ones who get to do it.

Some nights ago, it was Teresa's turn and she said the whole prayer that they taught us but, when she finished, she remained pensive and asked:

—Mummy, does God know that I'm lying to him when I thank him for the chard and broccoli?

The small puddle

At school, Teresa's teacher said that two and two are four, but my sister wasn't convinced.

—Why don't you agree? —the teacher asked.

—It's just that— Teresa answered—, two and two are not always four.

—No? the teacher asked astonished—. Give me an example.

Teresa went to the drinking water bottle and filled a glass with it.

She came back to the teacher and soaked a tip of a finger in the water.

—One drop, another drop —she let them fall on the teacher's desk. Then she soaked her finger again—. Another... And another.

—They are four drops, Teresa.

—No, teacher —my sister clarified—, they are a small puddle.

What is the baton for?

A Sunday long ago we went for the first time to a Symphony Orchestra concert and, we were amazed at the size of the theatre, as well as at the number of musicians that were on stage and the noises they were making while tuning their instruments.

When we least expected it, the lights were off and, none of my brothers nor I were sitting down at the moment, so when we tried to come back to our seats in the dark we tripped and argued until Dad ordered us to stay quiet. Nevertheless, when the concert began our eyes and ears didn't belong to us anymore.

—Why is the conductor using a stick to direct the Orchestra? —Louie asked between tunes—. Couldn't he do it with his hands?

—Good heavens! —said Teresa—. Can't you see that he uses it to stir the sounds?

Endless shell

One Sunday we went to the beach, and Teresa found a big shell. She put it in her ear and listened to it for the whole trip.

In the afternoon, when we arrived home, she was still listening to it and at night she fell asleep doing the same.

On Monday she wanted to bring it to the kinder garden, but Mum didn't let her.

Afterward, at noon, when she arrived from school, she ran to her room, took the shell, and immediately put it in her ear again.

—Amazing! —she said—. The batteries are still working!

“Our daily bread”

Miss Leticia asked us one day if we knew the prayer for “Our Father” and because we said no, she decided to teach it to us.

For more than an hour, she made us repeat it until Charles asked:

–Miss, why do we ask for “our daily bread” and not for bread for two days or for a week?

Miss Leticia was going to say something, but Teresa interrupted her saying:

–Charles, don’t be so dumb: we ask for “our daily bread” for God to always give it to us fresh.



Against boredom

Three weeks ago, on Friday Martha, a friend of Mum's that's expecting a baby, visited us. They were both talking in the living room and, they asked us to lower the volume of the television because they didn't want to be disturbed by the noise.

Suddenly, Martha sighed and grabbed her tummy.
—The baby is kicking —she said.

—It must be because he is bored —Teresa pointed out and, standing up from her seat, she suggested—. Why don't you eat a toy? If you want, I can lend my teddy bear to the baby...

She took two steps to her room when she stopped and added:

—But only for the evening, because the little bear can't sleep without me.

The first image of God

One morning that the teacher wasn't able to go to class, Teresa moved closer to the substitute teacher and said:

–I'm going to draw God.

–But nobody knows what He looks like – the substitute teacher pointed out.

Teresa answered:

–But when I draw Him everyone's going to know.

To learn halfway

—How was school today? —Dad asked Teresa one day at lunchtime.

—Very good —she answered—. Today I learned how to write.

—Oh, that's great! —said Dad proudly—. And what did you write?

—I don't know —Teresa answered—, because I don't know how to read yet.

Awoken ears

One night, Mum asked me to read one or two stories to Teresa for her to go to sleep. She loved the one about the princess that couldn't sleep in a bed with 30 mattresses because of the pea underneath the last one, so I had to read it to her three times.

When I was finishing the third reading, I saw Teresa asleep and stayed quiet. After a few minutes, I got up in silence and tried to get out of the room.

—Don't go, Reuben —she said without opening her eyes—. Keep on reading to me.

—You are already asleep.

—My eyes are asleep —she answered—, but my ears are awake.

Holidays

Five days after school broke for holidays, Dad and Teresa went to the dentist to fix a cavity that she had and, they met her teacher coincidentally near the doctor's office.

—Did you say hi? —Mum asked when Teresa told her.

—No —she answered annoyed—, we are on holiday!

Puzzle

When Martha, Mum's friend, was pregnant and came to visit us, Teresa usually spent a long time touching her belly to feel the baby kicking.

Once, instead of doing that, my sister stared at Martha, up and down, until Mum asked her what happened. Teresa was intrigued because she had no idea how the baby was going to come out of there.

—First, the head comes out —said Martha—, afterward the body, then the arms, and lastly, the legs.

—Oh, I get it —said my sister with an enlightened gesture—: and afterward the doctor and you assemble it!

**FOR THE
SECOND TIME,
TERESA**

One cat with her four kittens

One night, at dinner time, when Mum called us to the table, my sister took several minutes to arrive.

When she got there, she brought a picture of a very fat cat.

—This cat is going to give birth to four kittens —she explained.

While Mum served dinner, Teresa drew on the cat's belly and Dad asked:

—Do you know how they got there?

—Of course —my sister declared with a smile that made him turn pale and Mum trip. Only after a long five-second silence, she added—: I drew them myself.

Dad, the teacher

One morning that Mum went out with Charles, Louie, and I to get us school supplies and clothes, Dad took Teresa to the University where he works.

The next day he had to give a lecture to a new group of students, so he went into an empty classroom to rehearse and sat my sister on a desk with crayons and paper for her to draw in the meantime.

During the rehearsal, Dad didn't only present his lecture but he also answered a few questions that he pretended to hear from some students. My sister registered all of this in detail.

A week later, when in school Teresa was asked what her Dad's occupation was, she answered very proudly:

—He teaches invisible people.

Gossipy birdies

Over a party in her school, and after running, jumping, dancing and even singing, Teresa felt very tired and she sat next to her teacher.

When she saw her, her teacher put an arm on her shoulder and asked:

—Did you know that I love you a lot?

—Yes —my sister answered, leaning her head on the teacher's chest—, and I love you too.

After a few minutes of silence, the teacher told Teresa, jokingly, while she held her tightly:

—But, from what I know, I love you more than you love me.

—And how do you know? —my sister asked lifting her head.

—A birdie told me —the teacher answered.

—From now on I'm not telling anything else to those birdies! —Teresa said angrily—. They are such gossips!



We are all French

Teresa went for a walk with Granny and, while they had ice-cream, she asked:

—Granny, do you know where I come from?

Granny told Mum later that she didn't answer because she didn't know what she was told about the origin of babies. But then, because Teresa wouldn't stop asking, she answered:

—You, like all the other children of the world, came from Paris and a stork brought you here.

My sister remained thoughtful for a few minutes and then asked:

—Does that mean that all children, when we are born, are French?

An “I” and a “You”

On a holiday we spent in Margarita Island we stayed in two rooms on the fourth floor of a hotel.

On the second day, Teresa went down by herself to get a chocolate bar and, when she arrived, she got the wrong room.

While she unwrapped her chocolate, she knocked on the door.

—Who is it? —a woman’s voice answered.

—It’s me —said Teresa.

—And who is me? —the voice wanted to know.

—Teresa —my sister answered surprised. Then asked—: And who are you?

—Me —said the voice.

—Oh no —Teresa protested—, there couldn’t be two “Is” in the same place! There has to be one “I” and one “you”, and if I am an “I”, you have to be “you”!

Illiterate flights

When we were in Margarita Island, we went to Playa El Agua and saw a flock of seagulls approximately thirty meters above us.

—Look —Dad said—: they are forming a letter “V”. Teresa followed them with her eyes until, without breaking the formation, the seagulls disappeared behind a hill.

A few moments later we saw gannets flying at the brim of the sea, also forming a “v”.

The rest of the time we were there, several groups of seagulls and gannets passed through where we were, almost all of them flying in the formation of a “v”.

Minutes before we left, Teresa turned towards Mum, who was reading a magazine under a huge parasol and lying down on a deck chair and said:

—Mum, we are going to have to move to this beach.

—Why, baby, do you love it that much?

—No —my sister answered—, so that Dad can come and teach these birds the rest of the letters of the alphabet!

If you had heard

I arrived the other day in the afternoon when my Mum was telling my sister:

—But Teresa, of course, I heard what you said. Why do you insist that I haven't heard you?

Teresa answered, extremely angry:

—Because if you'd heard me you would have scolded me.

You didn't bring me

A few days before her third birthday, Teresa had the habit of not being apart from Mum, even for a second.

One afternoon that Mum was very hot, my sister was distracted playing in her room with some little pieces of wood. When she saw her occupied, Mum tried to make the most out of that opportunity to take a quick shower.

She was about to get into the shower when Teresa knocked on the door of the bathroom asking:

—Mum, are you there?

Mum sighed and didn't answer, but Teresa insisted:

—Mum, are you there?

Because Mum didn't answer again, my sister asked for a third time but this time whining:

—Mummy, are you there?

Mum said then ironically:

—No, I'm not here. I'm taking a stroll.

Teresa cried even harder and Mum complained:

—And now, why are you crying?

—Buuuhhh — my sister answered intermit-
tently—, be-cause-you-didn't-bring-me-
for-a-stroll!

Where Mum measures her feet

On Teresa's third birthday her schoolmates came to the party we threw for her.

The first kids to arrive were two twins and one girl with a head full of braids. As soon as they arrived my sister gave them a tour of the house.

—This is my room —she said proudly because she and Mum had tidied it that same morning—. 'This one, so untidy, is Louie's and Charles'. 'This one, not as untidy, is my brother Reuben's. and this one is Mum and Dad's...

There's a bathroom in my Mum and Dad's room and Teresa opened the door and showed it to her friends. One of them, the one with the braids, had never seen scales and, because she saw the one underneath the sink, she asked what it was.

Teresa answered:

—That is where my Mum measures her feet every day.

What for?

Teresa stayed the other day with aunt Elvira. She has a baby who's less than one year old, and we call him "Eme" because that's all he knows how to say.

"Eme" doesn't walk yet and he can barely crawl.

At night, when Dad, Louie, and I arrived to collect Teresa, aunt Elvira said she wished "Eme" could talk and walk soon.

My sister then faced her and asked her:

—Why would you want "Eme" to talk and walk if you were telling me the whole evening to sit down and shut up?

A question, any question

An encyclopedia seller knocked on the door of our apartment and, after explaining why he was there, Dad let him in.

He showed us a collection of books and records that he took out of a briefcase and put it on the kitchen table. Within them, he said, lie all the answers to all the questions that we could ever ask.

—Let's see, little girl—he said to Teresa—, ask me a question, any question you can think of, something you want to know, to show your parents how easy it is to find the answer in these books.

Teresa closed her eyes, frowned, and then asked:
—What is God thinking about right now?



Someone else's fang

Teresa was playing with some girls in the gardens of the building when suddenly someone opened a door and it hit a neighbor's dog on the snout.

The blow was so strong that the dog lost a fang and, howling in pain, it ran to hide underneath a car at the roofed car park.

All the children of the building that were there followed the dog, except for my sister. She stayed behind looking at the door that hit it and alongside she found the bloody fang.

As soon as she saw it, she took it and saved it in her pocket. She went up to the apartment and washed it.

That night, at bedtime she put it underneath her pillow as if it were hers and announced that she was waiting for the tooth fairy's visit. In the morning, when she woke up, she quickly lifted the pillow up to see what the fairy left there in exchange for the fang, and she was very happy when she found a small paper envelope.

There wasn't a coin inside, as she expected, but a dog's cookie.

A story about a very tidy and clean little girl

Teresa didn't want to learn to tie up her shoelaces nor comb her hair or tidy the toys in her room, so one night Mum told her a story about a little girl that was very independent when it came to tidying and cleaning.

—The little girl —said Mum— woke up when she heard the alarm that she had programmed the night before. Afterward she fixed her bed, brushed her teeth, took a shower, made breakfast for herself, and cleaned the dishes before she went to school. When she was at home, she would clean her room and leave all the toys in their right places.

The story went on like that until the girl had to go to bed, not without doing her homework first, brushing her teeth, and arranging her backpack with the books and notebooks for the next day.

While she was listening, Teresa kept her eyes closed, concentrating on the story.

When Mum finished it, my sister opened her eyes and asked:

—So that girl didn't have a Mum, right?

Granny doesn't like youngsters

A few days ago, while we were waiting in the living room for the rain to stop so we could go out, Teresa said that Granny didn't like youngsters.

—Why would you say that? —Mum asked.

—Because she's married to a Grandpa —she answered.

Knitted noodles

To celebrate Teresa's fourth birthday, Dad took us to a restaurant where the chefs prepared the dishes behind a large glass screen so people could look at what they were doing.

When we arrived, one of the chefs was stirring noodles with chopsticks.

When my sister saw that she, pointed at him:
—Look: that man is knitting the food!

Sandwich in the dark

Last Saturday we were making some sandwiches for an afternoon snack when Dad arrived and invited us to the cinema.

—Bring the sandwiches —Mum said—, to eat during the movie.

—Where should I put mine? —Teresa asked.

—In my purse —Mum answered.

In the cinema and after the lights went off, Teresa asked for her sandwich. Mum was going to take it out of her purse, but instead, her hand came out empty, sticky, and soaked.

—What did you put in here, Teresa? —Mum asked alarmed.

—My ice cream sandwich.

Questions without answers

When she was five, Teresa spent several months bombarding us all the time with questions. Not only Dad and Mum, but also everyone around her, including Granny, me, Charles, and Louie.

In those days I thought I could write a book about her, so I wrote down in notebooks and small pieces of paper some of the questions she asked. These were the ones that nobody could answer.

She asked Dad:

—What is the last number? And which one is the next one after the last number?

—If the sun is made out of fire, why isn't there any smoke coming out of it?

—If the world was made out of ice cream, would it melt?

To Mum:

—Are the teachers who don't have pupils still teachers?

—Can the school die one day?

—Where do dreams go?

—If people change when they grow old when I grow up what am I going to be: a woman or a man?

To Granny:

—At what time does God color the flowers?

—Is my guardian angel a boy or a girl?

To Charles:

—Was the guy that killed the Dead Sea put in jail?

To Louie:

—Do drums have hearts?

To me:

—If hours are longer than minutes, why do clocks use the bigger hand for minutes and the small one for hours?

—How do people make ladders: from top to bottom or from bottom to top?

**ONE, TWO,
THREE, TERESA**

IGRRR!



“The ogre with a skirt”

Teresa’s third-grade teacher, Miss Delphina, was the most feared in her school and that’s why they use to call her “The ogre with a skirt”. She would grunt and start a fight over nothing. The thing she hated the most, though, was when she was called out of class for a moment to return to pupils talking, laughing, or running around the classroom.

One day she went to answer a phone call and, when she came back, she found everyone quiet in silence and sitting on their desks.

—What’s happening here? —she asked, but nobody answered.

—Let’s see, Teresa, can you explain what’s happening?

—Yes, but...

—But what?

—But you are going to be angry if I tell you.

—No —said Miss Delphina, grinding her teeth— I promise I won’t be mad!

—It’s just that yesterday when you went out, you said that if one day you came back and found us calm you were going to die of a shock.

Accelerated growth

During an Easter holiday when Granny visited us, she showed us several images of Christ going to the Calvary.

She noticed that Teresa didn't recognize the character, so Granny said:

—This is grown-up baby Jesus.

My sister opened her eyes wide until they looked like they were coming out of her face. And then said, amazed:

—He has grown so much since Christmas!
How did he do it?

Not yet

When Teresa was a little bit older than two years old, Mum had to travel to Mérida for a few days to help out Granny because she was ill.

The first morning after Mum's departure, Dad made breakfast, woke us all up, and distributed us in the two bathrooms of the apartment for us to get ready for school. Whoever brushed their teeth, washed their face, was dressed, and had combed their hair, would go to the table and help themselves to what Dad had made.

While we were eating, Dad hurried us up several times and then started the car.

Teresa was rubbing her eyes instead of eating, so Dad said:

—Quickly, baby, quickly, you are going to be late for school!

My sister looked at him, stood up, put her hands on her waist, and said:

—Dad, you are so silly! Don't you remember that I don't go to school yet?

Everything I own is yours

Granny always tries to teach us things that have something to do with God and religion and that's why, when she comes, my brothers and I run and keep away from her as much as we can.

But because Teresa is a girl and the youngest, she can't escape like us.

The last time Granny came, she taught my sister a prayer to say before she ate.

When they said the prayer for the first time and reached the phrase that said "God, everything I own is yours", my sister stopped for a second and, through clenched teeth, covering her mouth, she whispered:

—Except for my teddy bear.

Who is the wicked one?

Uncle Alfred, Mum's brother, is a mechanic and works at the maintenance department of a factory.

One night, during Louie's birthday, Teresa asked uncle Alfred what his occupation was. —I fix the machines in a factory —he answered.

Some months later, uncle Alfred was visiting, and my sister asked again what his occupation was. She received the same answer as before, so she said:

—Uncle, I'm going to give you a piece of advice: find out who keeps breaking the machinery down.

Ignorance

Miss Juliet, the principal of the school where Teresa goes, gave a lecture about the dangers of ignorance and how important it is to study and get to be someone in life.

When she finished she stared at the pupils and asked:

–Do you understand what ignorance is?

–Yes –they all answered in unison.

–I would like to know what you understood.

Let's see, who can tell me?

Several children raised their hands, but the principal pointed at my sister, who had her hands on her desk.

–Tell me, Teresa, what's ignorance?

My sister stood up, bit her lip, looked at the principal, but didn't say a thing.

–You don't know what ignorance is?

Teresa thought for a second and answered:

–It's when one doesn't know something and somebody finds out.

Candle juice

Two years after Grandpa's death, Mum lit a candle in a corner of the house and offered it to God for his soul's rest.

For a few minutes, Teresa stared at the candle and, suddenly, she called Mum, alarmed: —Mummy, look: the candle is losing its juice!

Help not welcome

One day that Dad was away, Mum took us to a new ice-cream parlour that had opened in the shopping mall three blocks away from home.

Charles asked for a banana split, Louie for coconut ice cream, Teresa for the biggest chocolate ice cream cup they had and I asked for the same as her, but with strawberry.

—And you, Madame? —the girl that was serving us asked Mum.

—No —she answered—, I don't want anything, I'm on a diet.

—Oh, no, Mum! —Teresa protested—, does that mean that you are not going to help me finish my ice cream?

After watching that circus

On a holiday in Mérida, at Granny's house, Dad took us to a circus that came from China and we loved it more than all the other ones we have seen before.

Teresa came out of it so excited that, when we arrived home and she saw Granny, she said, while hugging her:

—Gran, you should see that circus! After that, you are never going back to mass!

Cold water shower

One night that Teresa had a very high fever, our parents took her to a nearby clinic, where they put her in a cold-water shower until her temperature lowered down.

When she felt the cold water, my sister cried, screamed, and begged to be taken out of there, but none of the nurses let go of her.

When she left the shower, Teresa was shaking uncontrollably. One of the nurses gave her to Mum, who tried to give her warmth by hugging her.

—Don't cover her up or get her dressed yet —said the other nurse—. Leave her like that.

Every time the nurses moved away or turned their backs, Mum hugged Teresa strongly. She was still shivering with cold.

After a while, one doctor ordered to take my sister's temperature and, while doing it, the nurse said that she didn't have a fever anymore.

—Now you can dress her up —she added.

When they were coming out of the clinic they ran into Carmen, one of my sister's friends, and her parents. They brought her there because she had an intense tummy ache.

When she saw her, Teresa asked:

–Did they shower you?

–No –Carmen answered.

–Don't let them shower you –she recommended–: they don't have any hot water.



The demonstration

My parents decided to send Teresa on the school bus so that Mum wouldn't have to bring her and collect her every day.

After the second day of going and coming back on the bus and, while we were having lunch, Mum asked my sister how her day was, and she answered:

—On the bus, a kid asked me whether I was a female or a male, and when I answered “female”, he asked for me to prove it.

—And what did you do? —Dad asked amid a coughing fit.

—I proved it to him —said Teresa, between one bite and the next.

—What did you do exactly to prove it to him?

—Mum wanted to know. Her face was red like Dad's.

Teresa swallowed what she was chewing, while everyone at the table stared at her and said:

—I showed him that my ears are pierced.

Where I had Mum

One Saturday we went to collect Anna, Teresa's best friend, and went for a drive with Dad. Anna lives near the clinic where my sister was born, so when we passed by, Teresa pointed at the building and said:
—Look, that's where I had my Mum!

The Agriculture Minister

To explain how the government is organized, Teresa's second-grade teacher distributed among her pupils the position of President, Ministers, Congress Presidents and the Supreme Court of Justice, Governor, Mayor and the President of the City Council.

—And what position did you get? —Dad asked my sister during lunch.

—The Agriculture Minister —my sister answered.

—Oh, that's great! —said Dad before asking—: and do you already know what the Agriculture Minister does?

—Yes —Teresa answered —, and this whole week I have to do in the classroom the same thing he does.

—And what is that? —I wanted to know.

—Watering the plants.

Situation under control

Mum was taking a shower one afternoon and, when she was coming out of it, someone knocked on the door of the house.

Although they taught us not to open the door to strangers, Teresa did it.

It was a beauty products seller and, when she saw Teresa, she asked:

–Is your Mum home?

–Yes –my sister answered–, but she’s taking a shower.

Mum opened the door of the bathroom and, while she was getting dressed as fast as she could, she heard the rest of the dialogue between my sister and the saleswoman:

–She might be interested in these beauty products.

–No, I don’t think so –Teresa said–, she is very pretty.

–Does your Mum wear make-up?

–No –Teresa answered–, she doesn’t need it.

–And perfume? Does she wear perfume? I figure you like it when she smells good –the saleswoman insisted.

—Yes —my sister admitted—, but I like it better when she smells of French fries.

The saleswoman went away when she realized that she wouldn't be able to sell anything there. As soon as she left Mum came out of the bathroom, wrapping her hair with a towel.

—Don't worry, Mum —Teresa said, while she was closing the door—. I managed the situation.

Through the air

Teresa loved one circus we saw so much that she was still talking about it a long time after we came back from the holidays.

She loved the tight-rope walker the most. She wouldn't shut up about her!

One night, before bed, Mum said:

—I also loved that girl walking on the wire.

—Was she walking on a wire? —my sister asked disappointed—. I thought she was walking on air!

If a child were to swallow the key of the house

In a first aid class, Teresa's teacher asked her pupils:
—What would you do if a child swallowed
the key of the house?

My sister raised her arm.

—Let's see, Teresa, what would you do?

—I would come through the window.



The cat's curiosity

In those days when Teresa asked questions constantly, we all ran out of patience, even Mum.

One Saturday morning, my sister asked so many questions that Mum, who's the most patient person in the world, exploded:

—That's enough, Teresa! Go play in your room! Curiosity killed the cat!

My sister didn't move, but instantly asked:

—And what did the cat want to know?

Only one “Our father”

During the holidays we spent in Mérida, Granny took Teresa to a mass in the church she goes to.

The sermon was very long, so my sister got bored and began to hit the prayer stool with her feet. Granny then asked Teresa to pray the “Our Father” that Miss Leticia taught her. That had her going for a while.

After a few minutes, she went back to hitting the prayer stool in front of her with the feet, so Granny told her to pray another one.

—I can’t, Gran —Teresa excused herself in a low voice—, Miss Leticia only taught me one!

The weight of the Earth

Last week I went to the library near home to study and I ran into my sister's teacher, who was on one of the computers looking for information to answer a question Teresa had asked.

—This morning —she told me—, Teresa wanted to know how much the Earth weighs and I didn't know how to answer, so I told her that it was a very interesting question and that tomorrow me or one of her school-mates would give her an answer.

The next day, when the teacher asked if anyone researched what the weight of the Earth was, everyone kept quiet. So, she gave the information she found at the library. When she finished her presentation, she said:

—Teresa, are you satisfied with the answer?

—No, miss —she replied.

—No? Why?

—Because I don't know if that's the weight of the Earth with or without people.

A lady without a girl

A few days ago, Mum went with Teresa to the opening of a massive shopping mall. They split up while being there and Mum didn't notice.

When my sister found herself alone, she went to one of the guards and asked:

—Mister, have you seen a lady that was missing a girl like me?

Making history

My sister Teresa loves to watch T.V. and when she watches it, she doesn't want to be interrupted, talked to, and sometimes she doesn't even want to be seen.

One afternoon, her show was interrupted to broadcast the arrival of the president of the United States to Venezuela, our country.

Teresa got mad because of the interruption and Mum explained that she shouldn't be mad because that was history in the making. My sister changed the channel and, when she realized that they were all broadcasting the same thing, she complained:

—Mum, is it necessary for history to be made at the same time on all the channels?!

At least once

One afternoon, when Mum arrived at the kindergarten garden to collect a Teresa, my sister said:

—From tomorrow onwards, I want to take a shower in the morning and not at night.

—Why, honey? —Mum wanted to know.

—Because the teacher always asks if we took a shower today and I haven't said yes even once in the whole year.

TERESA'S ROOM

Truly new

When Mum's friend Marta had her baby, we went to the clinic to meet him. We could see him through a glass, inside a see-through crib, asleep.

He was only wearing a diaper and there was a light on around his crib.

There was a label hanging from his big toe. Looking at it, Teresa said:

—He is truly new: they haven't even removed the price.

God was here this morning

Some time ago, Granny was talking to Mum and said that there were so many bad things going on in the world that it felt like God went far far away.

—I would even say —Granny added sad—, that He went away a long time ago and left us alone.

—No, Gran —my sister interrupted—. God was in Mum and Dad’s bathroom this morning.

—What do you mean? —Mum and Granny asked at the same time.

—Because this morning —Teresa answered—, Dad said in the bathroom door: “Oh my God! When are you coming out of there?”



Teresa's room

Granny came for a visit and our rooms were messier than ever, so Mum organized an urgent family meeting in the living room.

—You know —she said angrily—, that the first thing that Granny does when she arrives is to go to your rooms. She will scold me when she sees this chaos!

She added that she was already old enough to receive a scolding from her Mum and gave us two hours to clean our rooms.

—But Granny arrives tomorrow —Louie protested.

—It doesn't matter when she comes! —Mum exploded—, I want your rooms clean and tidy right now!

Two hours later, the three rooms were so tidy that they didn't look like our rooms at all.

Precisely because of that, at night, half an hour after we went to bed, Teresa went to Mum and Dad's room and said whining, while sitting in the bed between them:

—It's just that I can't sleep in that strange room.

Backwards arms

Teresa's first-grade teacher didn't turn up for a few weeks in school because of a surgery she had to have, and, in the meantime, they hired a left-handed substitute teacher.

On her first day, at recess, my sister stared at the substitute teacher, who was writing something on a notebook and asked:

—Miss, does it hurt to have backwards arms?

How to have a bear as a pet

For a few months, when she was four, Teresa asked Dad to get her a pet.

—It could be a cat —she said one day—, a dog or a bear.

—And how could we feed a bear? —Dad wanted to know—. A bear eats a lot.

—Easy —my sister answered—. We would get a cage like those ones at the zoo with a “forbidden to feed the animals” sign and put it in there.

Something unexplainable in my heart

My friends wonder why I write about my sister and why I love her so much, if some of them wish not to have siblings or for them to be very far away.

I always answer that I don't know exactly why, but that I remember so many nice things she has done or said that it's impossible not to love her.

Charles, who's always quiet and gets mad when Mum hugs him or kisses him, allows Teresa to wake him up jumping on his bed or to mess up his hair or to climb all over him when he's watching T.V. Louie melts when she calls him "my little brother" or gives him the olives from her salad, which she hates and he loves.

Me... I don't know how to explain it. I love her kisses with her lips cold from the ice cream she just had or sticky with candy. I love it when she hides behind Dad or me when she's scared of something and, most of all, I've loved all those times when she

comes into my room and, without saying a word, she hugs me, kisses me, and then leaves to play, study or watch T.V.

I just love stuff that she does, like last month, when at four a.m., on the morning of my birthday, she woke me up, calling from the bedroom door:

—Reuben! Reuben!

—Oh! —I opened my eyes, startled, and turn on the light from my night—stand.

Then she opened the door, came close, and sat on the bed head.

—Did you have a nightmare? —I asked.

—No.

—Are you thirsty?

—Nope.

—What is it?

—It's just that I got you this present —she said while giving me a small box wrapped in shiny paper. I knew immediately that it was a C.D.—, and I couldn't wait to give it to you. The C.D. came with a card that she made herself, with a drawing of me with a red bow in the head. I was looking at the card when she held me with her tiny arms, and then slammed her right cheek into my left cheek. —I love you so much —she said. Although

I always make fun of corny stuff, I didn't think this was one, nor it is what I couldn't say then because the words were twisted inside my throat and I wanted to laugh and cry at the same time.

Afterward she kissed my right cheek again and tiptoed back into her room.

I couldn't go back to sleep.

This I can say, I spent all day long with a feeling in my heart that can only be explained with eyes wide open and with a smile that takes up most of the face.

The buttons monster

When Teresa was younger, Dad made up a game to entertain her, with the buttons of his suit.

My sister would touch one of them, the first one from top to bottom, and Dad would stick his tongue out, widen his eyes, lift his shoulders and walk like the monsters from T.V. When Teresa touched the next button, Dad would come back to be himself.

One night, Dad arrived exhausted from the university and Teresa went to the couch where he was lying down. Sitting down on his knees, she touched the first button and Dad turned into the monster.

Then, my sister ran to where Mum was, saying: –Let's leave him like that, so he can frighten his students tomorrow and that way they won't make him work so hard.

The age of lies

One holiday, at noon, Mum asked Teresa if she had cleaned and tidied her room as she was told, and she said yes.

After a while, Mum went there to change the sheets on Teresa's bed and she noticed that the room was still untidy and that the floor hadn't been swept.

—I don't like it when you lie to me! —Mum scolded her—. When I was your age I didn't lie! But the scolding stopped right there and then because my sister asked:

—Mummy, and at what age did you start to lie?

Lost speleologist

One afternoon when Teresa was learning how to read and read everything that crossed her eyes, Dad was reading the paper and stopped because she interrupted him:

—Daddy, here it says —and pointed at the paper that was on the other side from the one he was reading—, that a spe—leo—lo—gist is lost, what is a spelologist?

—Not “spelologist” —Dad corrected her—, “speleologist”.

—What is that? —she insisted.

—It’s the person that studies... You better look for it in the dictionary.

My sister thought for a few seconds and then asked:

—And do you think that I will find him there?

What's learned at the kinder garden

When Teresa started first grade, the teacher asked what they had learned at the kinder garden and she answered:

—That the kids that hit shouldn't be hitting and that the ones that don't, should hit if another kid hits them.

The Three Kings

Teresa drew the Three Kings, riding their camels, going back to their countries, after visiting baby Jesus.

One of the Kings carried a big square box, so the teacher asked what that box was.

—It's a T.V. —my sister answered—, that they have so they can watch themselves tonight on the news.

Cuckoo's nests

Dad was promoted to department's chief and, to celebrate, the Dean of the university where he works invited him for lunch at his house.

—But you have to come with your family—he said—. I haven't had the pleasure of meeting them yet.

On that day, a Sunday that my brothers and I wanted to go to the stadium to watch a baseball game, Mum made us wear suits and ties, and she also put a white dress on Teresa.

Before we went out of the house, she repeated the instructions she gave us during the week, about how to behave at the house we were going to.

And, according to what she said afterward, we did great, although the Dean said that we were very strange children because we almost didn't speak.

Only Teresa spoke, after looking at a cuckoo's clock:

—Daddy, why do cuckoos make their nests in clocks?

Why love is important

My sister was asked to write about what love was according to her and she wrote this:

Love is when you love the people that are closer to you every day. One cannot love people in other countries because they are far away, and we don't know them.

Love is important because if people don't love one another there wouldn't be people.



Great Danes

Some friends of my Dad's that have a ranch outside Caracas invited us to spend a weekend with them and announced that they had a present for Teresa, who around those days had her fourth birthday.

The present was a Great Dane dog that Dad didn't accept because it didn't fit in our apartment.

When the dog was laying down on its back paws, it was bigger than Teresa standing up. She saw it, and immediately hid behind Dad and asked:

—Is he for me or am I for him?

Messenger at your service

One night, before she went to bed, Teresa went to the living room where we were all watching a baseball game on T.V. and asked, coming between the screen and us:

—I'm going to pray. Does anyone have a message for God?

For a mistake to be a mistake

Miss Daphne, Teresa's third-grade teacher, asked her why she had written the word "mistake" without the final "e" on a test.

—Because with it —Teresa answered—, it wouldn't be a mistake.

Two cheese slices

Mum forbade Teresa to eat between meals so that she would have a healthy appetite when it was time to eat, but my sister cheated in any way she could to evade the prohibition.

One afternoon, Mum was watching and making sure she wouldn't take anything out of the fridge or the cupboard, so Teresa went to visit Margot, our neighbor from the fifth floor.

When she came back, for dinner, Mum asked her:

–Did you eat anything at Margot's?

–Yes –my sister answered–, two slices of cheese.

Nevertheless, at dinner time, Teresa showed no appetite.

–Did you really only eat two slices of cheese and now you are not hungry? –Mum asked.

–Yes Mummy, the thing is that they were laying inside a loaf of bread.

Important absences

For a holiday, Dad took us for one week to the countryside, to a ranch that some friends of his own in Guárico. Mum didn't come because she had to go to Mérida to take Granny to a doctor's appointment.

Despite us not having a television on the ranch, we had the best time ever, looking at the rivers that the ants formed in the soil and in the trees, milking cows and drinking warm milk, swimming in a real river, riding a horse, and a thousand things that can only be seen in a movie.

At night we would fall asleep early, completely exhausted, and the next day we would wake up when the sun was rising.

Teresa, nonetheless, missed two things while being away from home, and she said it when we arrived back:

—Daddy, next time we come we can't leave Mum home, nor the ketchup.

To share

My sister and her second-grade classmates would only speak of the gifts they were going to receive for Christmas, so their teacher said in the last class before the holidays that this was a time to give and share and not only to receive.

Then she invited all the pupils to write their letter to Santa Claus so she could send it to the North Pole.

My sister's letter said the following:

Dear Santa Claus: I'm going to share all my gifts with the other kids, so I ask you to bring me a lot of toys so I'm not left without anything.

Forgiving enemies

Teresa was saying her prayer before she went to bed, in front of Mum, and suddenly she stopped and said:

–Mummy, I don't know if I should ask for God to bless Anna, because this morning, at recess, she hit me very hard.

–Remember that you have to forgive your enemies –Mum advised.

–Yes, but, how can I forgive Anna if she's not my enemy?

Teacher Juliet

When Miss Juliet, the principal of the kinder garden where Teresa went, graduated as a teacher from the university where Dad works, she invited us to a party that the other teachers threw for her.

She arrived directly from her graduation, so she still had the gown on and the mortarboard, and she was grabbing her title with her left hand.

My sister had never seen anyone dressed like that—not even Dad, who wore a similar suit every time there was a graduation at his university—, and said when she saw her:

—I didn't know that Miss Juliet was Batman's Mum.

For a museum

Last December, Teresa wanted Dad to get her new roller skates, one of those rollerblades to replace hers that were the traditional ones.

My sister argued that all her friends had them.

—Baby —Dad explained every time she insisted on the purchase—, what matters is that you can skate. The ones you have are better than your friend's. If they break, they are easier to fix.

—But I don't like those wheels —Teresa moaned.

After half a month, Dad thought he had won the battle because, for two days, my sister didn't say anything else about the roller skates.

On the third day, when he arrived for lunch, he found a sign on the elevator, made with our computer that said:

BEHOLD FOR FREE

SKATES

THE OLDEST

OF THE BUILDING

Apartment 44

When I grow up

In one of the several trips we have made to Mérida on a plane to visit Granny, a lady that was sitting down next to Mum and Teresa, asked my sister:

—What are you going to be when you grow up?

—Myself —she answered—, who else am I going to be?

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