

FRESH EYES

From hell to paradise

Infierno y paraíso

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–This is what they call an emergency room! I’ve been here for more than four hours and still no one has seen me! - Says a woman out loud

The security guard approaches her with disguise. The woman, carrying a large bag, takes out a packet of cookies and offers him one. The guard declines.

Now she turns to me. I am sitting next to her with two empty seats in between.

–This morning I was here for another long time and had to leave without being attended. Yesterday it was the same thing.

Judging from her looks and her odd behaviour, one could think she is a mentally disturbed person but perhaps she is just a normal lady looking for a partner to practice the national sport of complaining about public services.

In any case I am not willing to play along for several reasons, the main one being that my attention is fully focused on myself. I have the strong intuition that in a few minutes the doctor will diagnose me with a severe disease that will undoubtedly be the cause of my death in a few months, from which I will experience unbearable suffering in both body and mind.

I am familiar with this situation which repeats itself each time I take a medical test ever since I awoke from the illusion of immortality. That is precisely why I kindly refuse the cookies that the lady with the big bag offers me and continue with my eyes fixed on the blue sliding door instead. It opens to make way for the patients who are summoned by a guttural voice calling their names and surnames and closing again after they go through.

This is not the first room I’ve waited in today; I’ve been in another one earlier. There, I was called into a small consultation room where I explained to the doctor the reason for my visit. While doing so, I scrutinized his face in search of some gesture that would indicate the severity of my situation. They took my blood pressure and did an electrocardiogram.

–How did it go? I asked.

I can only say that fear didn’t allow me to integrate the answer on a good-bad scale.

–The pressure is high, he told me, and the EKG is fine.

I take both news well, as the first one reaffirms my concerns. But then I worry it must be a symptom, together with the constant dizziness I have been suffering for days, of what will undoubtedly end up proving the malfunctioning of my organism.

A nurse brings me a pill to put under my tongue. It seems that my blood pressure figures are too high. She explains that I should wait for a while to see if it goes down, and then I will be seen by a doctor. It will be another one, I think to myself, for sure a specialist. I can’t calm myself down.

The woman with the cookies, takes her chance to address the nurse:

–Ma’am, I’ve been waiting here for a long time.

The nurse does not answer, and the security guard approaches again.

–You must wait to be called. He says patiently. She can’t attend to you.

–Okay, but I didn’t disrespect her, I just asked.

While the pill melts in my mouth, my attention is drawn to a young girl who has just arrived and whose gestures make it difficult for her to sit down: she winces in pain and when she manages to rest her buttocks on the seat, she can’t find comfort and gets up again. She takes out her cell phone and dials:

–Stop annoying me, Mom, I told you that you can’t come in, you’ve got to wait for me outside! Yes, I have to see another doctor! No, they haven’t given me any painkillers! You can be so irritating sometimes, Mom! You wait for me outside, I’m a big girl now, I know what to do. I should have taken a cab!

With a gesture of desperation, she ends the conversation and puts the phone away. A few seconds later, I see her turn to the security guard who waves her in a direction. A few minutes later, a nurse brings her a pill and a glass of water.

I can’t help but smile at the scene, and I wish, out of solidarity, that I could dial the mother’s number to tell her:

–Don’t worry, your daughter has done what you advised her to do, but she will never admit it to you.

I feel grateful for that scene that, for a few moments, has disconnected me from my thoughts. And once again

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I focus on the blue door that, in addition to welcoming patients, also opens and closes to give way to the health-care personnel in different colored pajamas.

The cookie woman has risen and loiters in the corridor around the blue door until she takes advantage of an oversight by the watchman to cross it.

From where I sit, I can't see the consulting rooms. I see a wide, dark hallway with wheelchairs, gurneys and IV hangers stacked on either side, and the cookie woman who, ignored by passers-by, wanders around with her large bag.

The guttural voice calls my name and I leave my seat with a leap. I am attended by a woman.

–“It's funny how young the emergency physicians are - that's the first thing I think - this girl could be my daughter.”

Such is my vulnerability, however, that at this point I put all my trust in their knowledge.

–There doesn't seem to be anything abnormal,” is her verdict, after all her questions and tests. “It must be linked to stress.”

Her words sound like heavenly music to me ears.

–However, she continues, “we'll wait a while longer for the blood pressure pill to take effect. If it comes down to normal levels, you'll be discharged.

Back in the waiting room, my seat had been taken, so I look for another one in a more secluded area.

Suddenly I am overcome with immense fatigue, but still my internal dialogue does not cease:

–“ Stress? - I think - it's true that there are four or five circumstances that worry me, but from there to stress?”

I recall the ten or fifteen minutes of my consultation with the young doctor. She referred to the cervical spine as a possible cause of the dizziness. As for the blood pressure, she told me that it is not advisable to take it so often.

“It looks like today won't be the first day of the end of my life,” I smile, ashamed of my fears.

–Do you want one? I hear from the depth of my thoughts, and as I raise my head, there is the cookie woman sitting across from me.

–The mind can be such a bitch sometimes, can't it? - she says, with her arm outstretched and the package in her hand.

I look at her puzzled, perplexed. Suddenly I hear my name again over the PA system and I jump up like a spring.

–“ White coat hypertension,” says the young doctor as she hands me my discharge report.

With it in my hand, I walk out of the blue door for the last time and happily walk back to my everyday life, like Eve returning to Paradise, unaware of her nakedness.