

Sister

*Olívia Bueno Silva Fortes**

She was sitting on the floor of the taxi, holding, with great care and attention, a tiny plastic cup. Crammed inside it, there was a cotton ball, from which grew a bean sprout she planted on the weekend she had gone away from home to her grandmother's house. It was about 6 centimeters long now, and there were even little beans showing at the end of the stems. She had never been able to grow one for such a long time, and was very worried about it being destroyed on the trip.

– Are we almost there? – She asked again with inquiring eyes.

– No, not yet, sweetie – Her aunt answered impatiently.

She had just turned 8 the week before, and her aunt gave her a big party – there were lots of cake and loads of kids – but her mother wasn't there. For 9 weeks she had been staying with her grandmother and her uncles, and it was the longest, by far, she had stayed without seeing her mother. But, at last, the baby was born two days before, and they could finally go home. She had always wanted a little sister: two of her little brothers were with her in the taxi, but by now it seemed to be too much of a sacrifice for someone she hadn't even met before.

– Why is this taking so long? You said we'd only be here for a couple of weeks! – Her voice sounded tearful through the telephone. She had been away for over a month at that time.

– I know, darling, but it is not up to me, you know that. We have to wait for her to be ready, we can't rush her. It probably won't take much longer, you have to be a big girl and be patient.

After an hour and a half inside the car, three beans had already fallen off their stems, to her despair. There were two reasons for her decision to sit on the car's floor.

* Undergraduate student at Universidade de São Paulo (USP).

The first was that she couldn't stand the crowded seats on the taxi anymore. There were seven people inside the taxi: the driver, two aunts, her cousin and her two brothers, who were 6 and 4 at the time. It had been hard for them too, specially the youngest. After mum's belly started to grow, she couldn't carry him anymore, what led to tantrums and lots of crying. The other reason was that she had heard the driver and her aunt talking about how dangerous it was to take the road with such a crowded car, and they could get caught by the highway patrol. The comment made a strong impression on her, and the idea of having to wait even more to get back if they were caught was way unbearable, so she crawled down and sat on the floor. Plus, that way it was easier to take care of her beans, even though there were only two left by now.

– How about now? Is it almost over? – She was unbelievably anxious and bored, she couldn't see the view anymore, and the broccoli shaped trees she loved.

– A little longer, kitten – she was distracting one of the boys with a bright-colored rubber truck.

– My beans are dying! They can't stand much more...

– You can grow more later, if you want. They are too fragile, but they are so easy to plant. Why don't you just give up on those and grow some others ones once you're home?

– I don't want other beans, I already have these ones, and I've worked hard on them for weeks, why would I want to plant new ones? - She grumbled back to her aunt.
– Besides, if she had been born when she was supposed to, the beans wouldn't be so big by the time I had to go home, and it would be easier to carry them.

The whole pregnancy had been very fun until the end, when mum was too big to take care of all the kids and they had to leave, so that when the baby was born they wouldn't be alone. She and mum would talk for hours about the baby and she was even allowed to choose her little sister's name. Because she was the oldest, she followed mum to the doctor, and saw the baby on the monitor for the first time some months earlier. But after a few weeks at grandma's, even though it was her favorite place in the world, she couldn't endure how much she missed her mother anymore. It was the first time she had ever wanted to leave the ranch, and mum had never been absent on her birthday either. That was a difficult day. When mum called in the middle of the party to

wish her happy birthday, she was distractedly playing with the other kids, but after the phone rang up, she hid behind a distant tree until she was done crying.

– This is it, you're home! – Her aunt had a huge excited smile on her face.

There were no more beans left. Just some branches lasted, and rose sadly from the yellowed cotton ball. A hundred things flashed through her head at the same time, and the little screams from the other kids didn't make things any easier. They were squealing and fighting to see which of them would jump out of the car first, while her aunts and cousin tried their best not to lose control of them. She felt annoyed, her back hurt from sitting on the floor, and her arms from unsuccessfully trying to hold the beans still throughout the trip. She tried to focus on these feelings, trying to put herself together, straightening her clothes and her hair, trying not to let herself to feel anything else. Still, a growing pain on her throat was distracting her, and the fact that she didn't have the tiny plastic cup to hold, left her hands uncomfortably with nothing to do.

The door opened. Everything looked the same, but there was something different, the tension in the air was too much and she couldn't calm herself down with the boys screaming. The littlest one ran into the corridor, and she followed him, but restrained herself from running. When she reached the kitchen, her little brother had found her mother in front of the sink, and ran as fast as he could to her, and she was able to pick him up, after the 6 months he had been waiting. The pain on her throat became unbearable, and soon tears fell down her face while she watched the two of them together. The other brother came in, and jumped into mum, grabbed her by the hips and started talking excitedly nonstop: – mum I saw this big horse on the way here and it was black and white and it was eating grass did you know that horsies ate grass ma did you?

She shyly walked closer, and when she hugged them, she heard mum say:

– How about it? Are you ready to see her?

For a moment she had forgotten all about the baby, there were only the four of them in the world. She was led to the bedroom by her mum, who was holding up the littlest boy, while the other one was still grabbing mum's shirt and chatting away. The aunts and cousin followed them. Once they got into the bedroom, everyone silenced, mum let her brother down and walked into the small light pink bassinet. She slowly picked up the little pink thing, and sat on the bed so that they could see her better.

There she was. Wearing pink wool baby clothes and a tiny knitted cap, shaped like a kitten's ears. She looked soft and peaceful, completely unaware of all the people around her, absorbed in her little face, not knowing the effort they all had made just for her throughout the last months. Her peacefulness spread through the room. Everything was different and everything was calm, because from then on, every time she felt anxious, and annoyed and overwhelmed, she would have a little sister with little kitten's ears, to make it all different, to make it all calm.