

# I



Plants don't drink coffee. They don't like coffee, and neither do flowers or trees. Birds don't like it either. My aunt told me. I do. Sometimes I don't breathe while I drink my café con leche. One whole mug. It's a big mug. I down the whole mug every morning, without taking a breath. That's a record of mine. Maybe I'm the only one in the world who holds that record.

Yesterday I learned the recipe for café con leche. Aunt Martina explained it to me. I made some afterwards. By myself. And I made delicious café con leche, maybe the most delicious in the world. And the weirdest one as well, because Aunt Martina's mugs are green, made of glass, and the coffee came out

green, not brown. So I told Aunt Martina how my mother makes brown coffee, not green. My aunt said green coffee tastes better. And she was right.

This is the recipe for café con leche: first pour the coffee. The coffee is always in a thermos. Coffee is a very very black liquid that's brown at the edges. For children you only have to pour a little, but Uncle Abel pours more than that, and Uncle Simon more still, and my cousin Iñes too, so their coffee is darker than mine.

Then you pour the milk on top of the coffee. My aunt warmed the milk up, because to make milk warm you have to use the stove, and children who fool around with stoves go blind and burn their fingers and their fingers stay black for the rest of their lives. This is why Aunt Martina warmed the milk up, not me. But I poured it into the mug, on top of the coffee.

And when the coffee and the milk are in the mug you have to put a spoon in and stir. Or maybe not: maybe first you have to put the sugar in and then stir. I am not so sure how that goes because Aunt Martina explained the recipe yesterday and I have forgotten the order of things a bit.

Rugby too. I have learned everything about rugby. And that isn't so common. Because no one at school knows about rugby. About soccer, yes. Everybody knows about soccer, because we are always playing soccer. Knowing about soccer is nothing special. Everybody knows about penalties and yellow cards and corner kicks. And about red cards too. Even the stupidest ones know that. But only I know about rugby.

Uncle Simon explained rugby to me. Uncle Simon always

says that first you have to learn Latin and rugby, and then everything else. Everything else is math and school stuff. “First of all Latin and rugby,” Uncle Simon says, “then everything else.” Latin is a very very perfect language. Uncle Abel explained that to me. I asked him, what is Latin, Uncle? And he told me: a language, a very very perfect one.

I watch rugby on TV with Uncle Simon. You can watch soccer outside. Cycling as well. But not rugby. Rugby only happens on TV. And Uncle Simon talks a lot in front of the TV when a rugby match is on. He says: “He’s good, that Irish guy, number fifteen.” Or he says: “Please, please.” And that means that the player is not very intelligent. But more than anything else Uncle Simon says this: “He’s wrong, the linesman, he’s wrong.” My uncle says that in every match. And then he says he would make the best linesman in the world. And it’s true. Because there are many rules in rugby, many, and Uncle Simon knows them all. And when we are watching a match on TV he is never quiet, not even for a second. He referees the match and speaks the rules aloud:

“Offside,” he’ll say.

Or he’ll say “The English played dirty in the scrum.”

Or he’ll say “Only gangsters play like that.”

Or “They haven’t defended very well.”

That’s what he says. That’s how I’ve learned everything about rugby. Because Uncle Simon is never quiet when he’s watching it on the TV. “He’s wrong, the linesman, he’s wrong,” he’ll yell. Uncle Simon is always better than the linesman on the TV. That’s what he thinks. I think so too.

The players on TV almost always have band-aids on their faces and foreheads and fingers, and some on their legs as well, and they are always Irish or Scottish or English or Welsh or French. Once I saw Australia play a match. Australia is an island but I don't know where it is for sure, maybe in Africa or Asia.

Then there are insects. Insects are 200 million years old. My cousin Iñes told me that. Iñes knows a lot about insects. Maybe Iñes knows more about insects than anyone in the world. Insects are: butterflies, beetles, and dragonflies, and they are 200 million years old. That's why insects are so small, because they are very old. Old people are also often smaller than young people. They are not smaller than children, because children are the smallest people of all. Especially just after they've been born. But old people are also very small, compared to young people. Piedad is an old lady I know. And she is very very small, because she is old. My aunt told me Piedad is eighty-two years old. And insects are 200 million years old. That's why they are so small.

I go out with my cousin Iñes every day. We take the glass jars and the nets and we go every day. The insects go in the glass jars. After we catch them. Sometimes things break: butterfly wings, grasshopper legs, dragonfly wings. Beetles never break.

Afterward you have to put cotton wool balls into the jars, soaked in this liquid. The insects smell it and fall asleep. Afterwards Iñes pins the insects to a corkboard, with needles, with their wings spread. And if the wings are broken we do a jigsaw with wings. And if the wings are very broken Iñes says "We have to catch another one, just like this one." This means that

we need to catch another butterfly, one exactly like it, to pin to the corkboard, because this one won't do. Same thing with the dragonflies.

And she puts away the insects with the broken wings or broken legs or antennae, and I don't know what she does with them but I think that later, at night, when I am sleeping, she wakes the insects up with another liquid. And she throws them out of the window. But then I think that the insects have broken wings, so she can't throw them out of the window. Maybe it isn't right to throw insects with broken wings out of windows. But then I think that most insects have hard shells, especially beetles and dragonflies, so maybe it's not so bad to throw them out of the window. I think beetles might have the hardest shells of all insects.

Iñes explained it to me: "I have to hand in the corkboards in September." "September" comes just after the summer ends. There is another one that comes later, "November." But "November" happens in winter. Then there is another one, "May." But I'm not sure if that one is summer or winter.

The summer ends in September, and I don't know if I'll go back home when the summer ends or if I'll still be eating and sleeping at Aunt Martina's house, with Iñes. Iñes has to hand in her corkboards at school in September, and Iñes calls her school "college" sometimes, and sometimes she calls it "university," and I don't know if they are both the same or if Iñes goes to two different schools. It might be that she goes to two schools at the same time, because Iñes is very intelligent. Most of all about insects and about cats.

Some of the corkboards are white and others are brown. Uncle Abel brings them. Because Iñes is his daughter. Otherwise he might not give them to her. Or maybe he would. I am sure Uncle Abel would give a corkboard or two to anyone. I am sure that Uncle Abel has more pieces of corkboard than anyone in the whole world. He carries the corkboards in his truck. And sometimes he walks home with them under his arm.

Sometimes Iñes sings. But she spends more time talking than singing. She loves to talk, Iñes. Uncle Abel says: If only talking were a sport. And when Uncle Abel isn't home Aunt Martina says: If only talking were a sport, and she makes her voice sound a bit like Uncle Abel's. And with that they mean Iñes talks too much and she loves to talk so much it's incredible.

Iñes talks to me a lot too, and she tells me stories about insects most of all. And for me Iñes is a television, and the stories she tells are movies.

Yesterday she told me a story about butterflies. She said once some butterflies flew from Canada to Australia. "Some butterflies" means two million or three million butterflies. And there is an ocean between Canada and Australia, and you have to cross it to get to Australia, and that's a big adventure for a butterfly.

And she said they arrived in Australia at night. And butterflies don't like nighttime so much. Butterflies much prefer daytime, and light, especially. And they saw a big light at one end of Australia. And that light came from an athletics stadium with the stadium lights on. And it was during the Olympics, and all the lights were on, because of the Olympics. And the

butterflies flew towards the lights, but these lights are like fire. And the butterflies started to burn, the tips of their wings and the tips of their antennae burned. Iñes told me this, and then she told me that after being burned the butterflies were half asleep. The way they get when they go into our glass jars. And when they fall asleep butterflies can't fly, so they started falling into the athletics stadium. And there were two or three million butterflies. Iñes said it started to rain on the athletics stadium, but it rained butterflies, not water. And they stopped the Olympics, because there were two or three million butterflies on the ground and they couldn't very well run on them or do any sports on them. And they spent an hour picking butterflies up. And then the Olympics started again.

And Iñes said not all the butterflies flew toward the lights. She said some butterflies flew towards people, and there were maybe one hundred or two hundred butterflies on the head and all over the body of a child who was watching the Olympics, and the child was very happy, but his mother wasn't. His mother was frightened and started to scream and the butterflies flew away from the child immediately, because butterflies like light but they don't like screaming.

And these are the kinds of things Iñes tells me, most of all about insects. And things like these for me are like movies, or better than movies, and for me Iñes is a television. That's why I never tell her that she talks too much. Uncle Simon too, he never tells her she talks too much. Because Uncle Simon also talks a lot. And sometimes he has to drink a little water to be able to go on talking. Uncle Simon is Iñes' uncle and also

my uncle. But he is Iñes' uncle more, because he lives in their house.

I don't know what happened in the end with the butterflies and the Olympics. I think they picked the butterflies up off the ground and brought them to an Australian forest, so they could rest there before flying back to Canada. Because insects do that: first they go someplace, but then they come right back where they were before. Just like birds.

Iñes is never sick. Not even when she has a cough. When she has a cough she gets out of bed all the same and does the dishes and gets the bread. Her cough can be as loud as a truck and she still won't stay in bed. That's what Uncle Abel says: This girl's cough is as loud as a truck. But Iñes won't stay in bed.

My cousin Mateo has a pair of binoculars, fat ones, and 107 books in his room. Fat binoculars are better than thin ones. They say so at school. Mateo says you can see a mosquito on a blade of grass in the soccer stadium from the balcony at home. But when I go out with Iñes we don't catch mosquitoes because they are not as spectacular as beetles or dragonflies and can look a bit sad on the corkboards. Iñes says so. Mateo has 107 books in his room, some are on the floor and others aren't. I often go to count Mateo's books in his room. And there are 107.

Aunt Martina's soup is much better than the soup at home. Because the noodles are fatter, like the binoculars. Uncle Abel likes Aunt Martina's soup a lot too. And Uncle Simon, too. My cousin Mateo prefers the bean stew. Iñes, the bean stew and the salads. We all drink café con leche. My cousin Mateo too.



It's summer now and the elastic of my pajama pants is broken. Aunt Martina told me she would sew a new one on, but she still hasn't. It's summer now, until September.