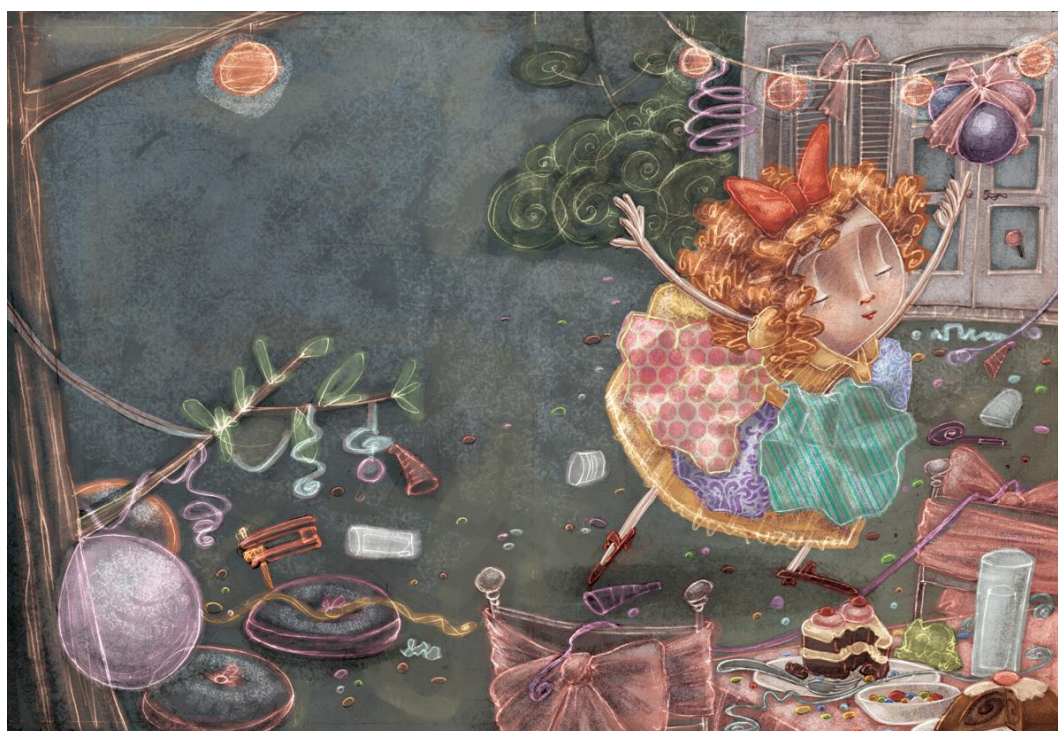


The little girl who enjoyed the end of parties

Leonor Tenreiro

Inês Silva (English version)

Illustrations by Eugenia Nobati



Rita was a little girl who liked to arrive in the middle of the end of every party she went to.

She walked in without being noticed, she wandered about in every room, went up and down the stairs... always tiptoeing around with her velvet eyes.

“Who said that the end of a party is a sad thing?”, wondered Rita.

She liked to see everything upside down, confetti and streamers on the floor, cake crumbs instead of cakes, wrapping papers all torn or crumpled, chairs with their backs turned to each other, dust in the air, as if tiny bits of the sun itself were also leaving, like any other guest.

When she finally got at the party, right at the end, Rita danced without music and, somehow, she felt that the party had always been there waiting for her. She was a queen and her kingdom was made of silent laughter, which rehearsed a show made just for her.

Clowns were no fun at all; they annoyed her! They were always stumbling on purpose, for no reason. Besides, they had large mouths, white and red, which barely moved.

She enjoyed trapeze acrobats, those who made things in the air which seemed impossible on the ground: as light as feathers, they flew up in acrobatic drawings, thus awakening some kind of magic in the audience. But as there were no trapeze acrobats, she threw a cushion in the air and imagined its feathers flying loose like pirouettes on a trapeze.

Rita had already attended the end of 49 parties. So she dressed up to celebrate the 50th. She chose her yellow dress with a flared skirt and put a red bow on her head.

Most of the guests already leaving Mafalda’s grandparents’ house. Mafalda was a spoilt little girl who lived in front of her and who collected toys as sugar packets. Three balloons of different colours were tied to the entrance gate, announcing her neighbour’s birthday party.

When she saw the path was clear, Rita came into the garden and twirled joyfully. "It's party time, it's party time!", she murmured smiling, as she grabbed the papers of unwrapped gifts. Then she wrapped herself up in the colourful papers, as if they were fancy clothes, and started to dance.

Her arm stretched out, like she had seen grown-ups do, Rita didn't seem to be alone; now she was a lady, then she was her male partner too. To play the man's role, Rita took the bow from her head and tied it around her neck. That was a true gentleman, who, at the end of each dance, pretended to kiss his partner's hand, whilst bending gently in a well-rehearsed bow.

In the middle of the dance, she removed with her feet some large coloured cushions, piled up by an old cedar.



For her surprise, there she found a boy who was quite amused listening to his *ipod*. Rita screamed and jumped back! Then she asked him, in a trembling voice:

- W-w-w-who are you?

The boy was as much astonished as she was:

- I am Lucas... And you?
- Rita! What are you doing here?
- I am hiding... to escape from all that hubbub!... I'm waiting for my parents to pick me up... Is everyone gone already?
- I am still here, as you see!... But what are you escaping from? – asked Rita, sitting next to Lucas.
- It's hard to explain... I only like the beginning of parties! That's the funniest part! All is well decorated; the cakes haven't yet been cut... when it comes to the middle, I feel tired with so many balloons, songs and yelling! And the end... uff, the end is unbearable!!
- That's funny! I only like the end! Do you know I've already attended the end of 50 parties? It feels so good to come smoothly in an empty space where so many people have been! You have more room to dance, you can make up things to do, imagine the guests, their games and talks ...
- But now all's empty and sad... There's nobody to play with... How can it be fun?

It was then that Rita crumpled the papers she had tied around her waist and threw them over Lucas' head. The boy dropped his *ipod* and started to throw the cushions at her. They looked at each other. They started to laugh in a low voice, but then they went louder and louder. Eventually, laughter gave way to hiccups and both children had to wash their eyes for having laughed to tears.

They played and sung, they rolled over, played tag and hide-and-seek; they burst balloons and coiled themselves up in streamers. And when some of the neighbourhood children started to come over again, Lucas' parents arrived to take him home.

The beginning and the end of the party were interrupted quite in the middle!

The good thing is that the beginning of a friendship never reaches an end!

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