

Álvaro Magalhães

O ESTRANHÃO 3

A FLY IN THE SOUP

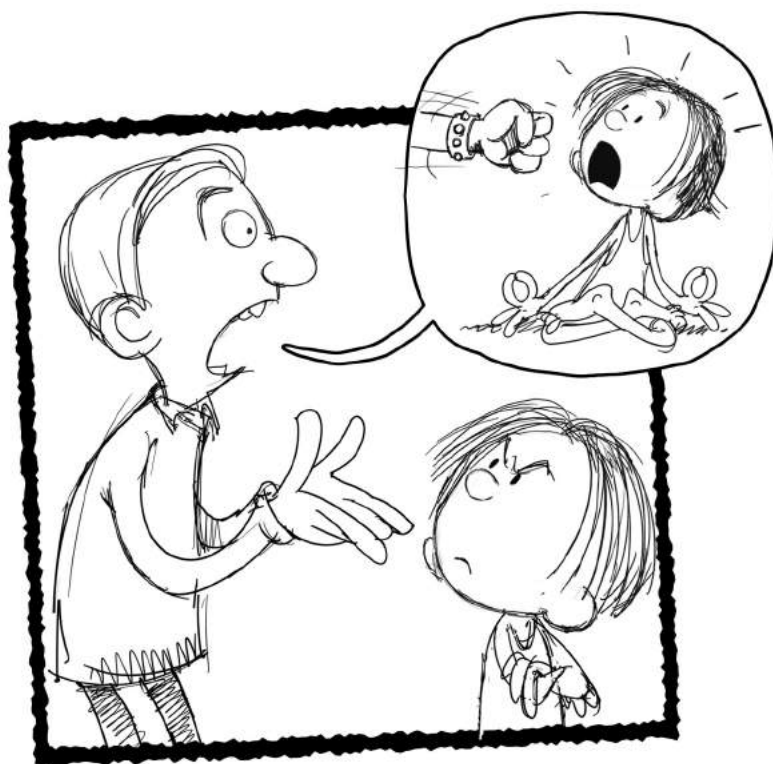


Ilustração de Carlos J. Campos

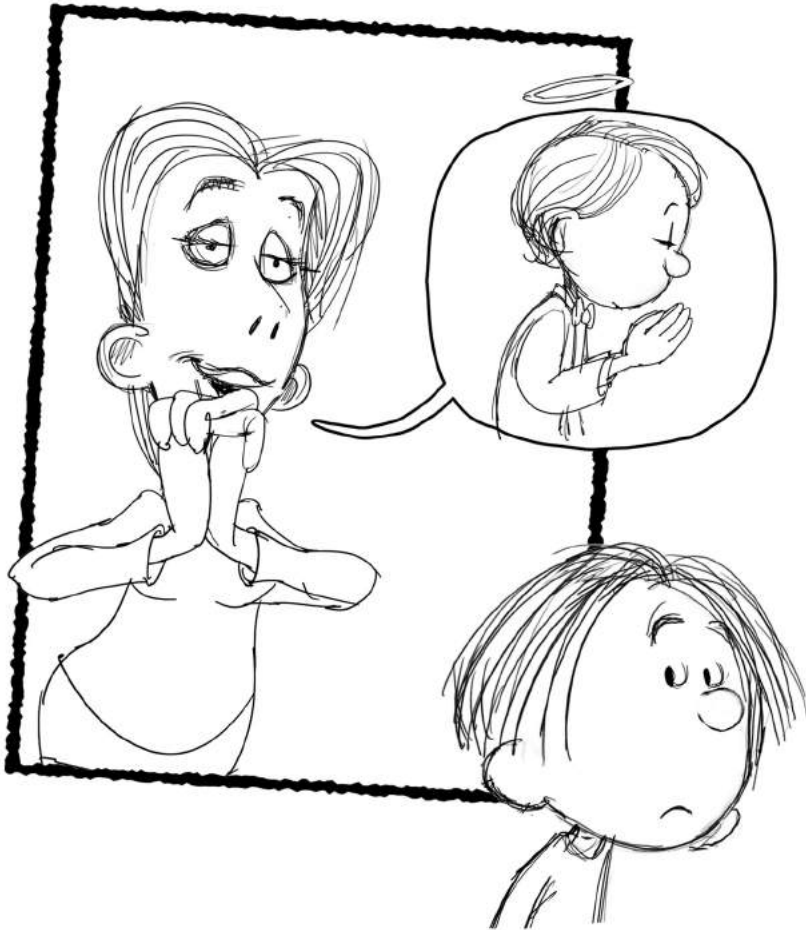
 Porto
Editora

A fly in the soup

Listen to this: I wanted to enroll on a yoga course for beginners and dad said it was too quiet, only something crazy adults would do. He would prefer it if I started kickboxing or karate, something like that. He said “Yoga?! Ok. When someone attacks you in school, will you assume the lotus position, eyes closed, so that you’re an easy target?”



Mum, on the other hand wanted me to take a religious vow, but I didn't want to compromise religiously until I reached an age when I could decide things better for myself.



There are so many the differences between us, I should divorce my parents and find others who understand me better. I would do that again if I hadn't done it poorly three years before, when I was 8.

Do you want to know what happened? It's a good story. I was constantly getting mad at my parents and sister, I was like the wrong part in a big machine. I didn't fit. But I was getting by, just not fitting in. One day, I saw a fly floating in my soup at dinner time.



My sister didn't get it. I wasn't afraid, I was disgusted. Mum removed the fly from my bowl and expected me to eat that soup where a nasty fly had just drowned. They see something small and say "That's nothing!".

No, it isn't. Once you've seen one magnified a thousand times, as I have, online. It is awful!

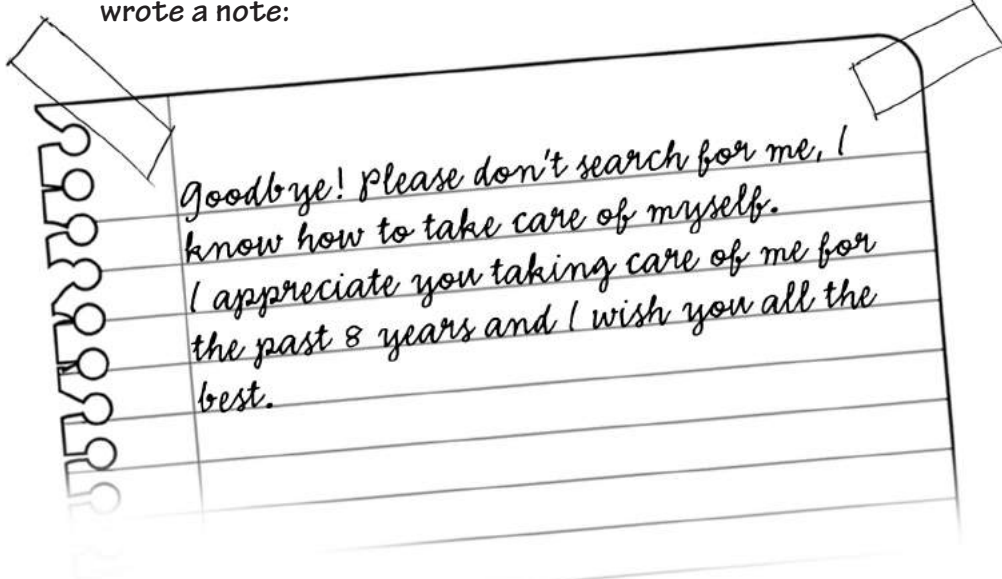
I already have a hard time eating soup and with the floating fly... I refused to eat the soup and my mum refused to give me any more. There wasn't any, anyway. So what?



They forced me to eat the fly soup. After the second spoon I stormed out and threw up in the bathroom.



We were done with the soup and I went to my bedroom, grounded, no dinner for me. I sat like a prisoner in a Nazi concentration camp. And what does a prisoner do? Fights for his freedom. I put my things in a backpack and wrote a note:



Goodbye! Please don't search for me, I know how to take care of myself. I appreciate you taking care of me for the past 8 years and I wish you all the best.

I left home afterwards without making a noise when they were entertained watching TV. That night, I didn't sleep in my room.



It was Friday night, which is a good night to divorce our parents as there are no classes the following day, or on the other one. Streets were busy with people but none of them was a boy divorcing his parents. As I didn't have any money to rent a hotel room, not even the cheapest one, I walked to my grandma's house, which wasn't far.

"What are you doing here?" she asked.

"I divorced my parents", I said.



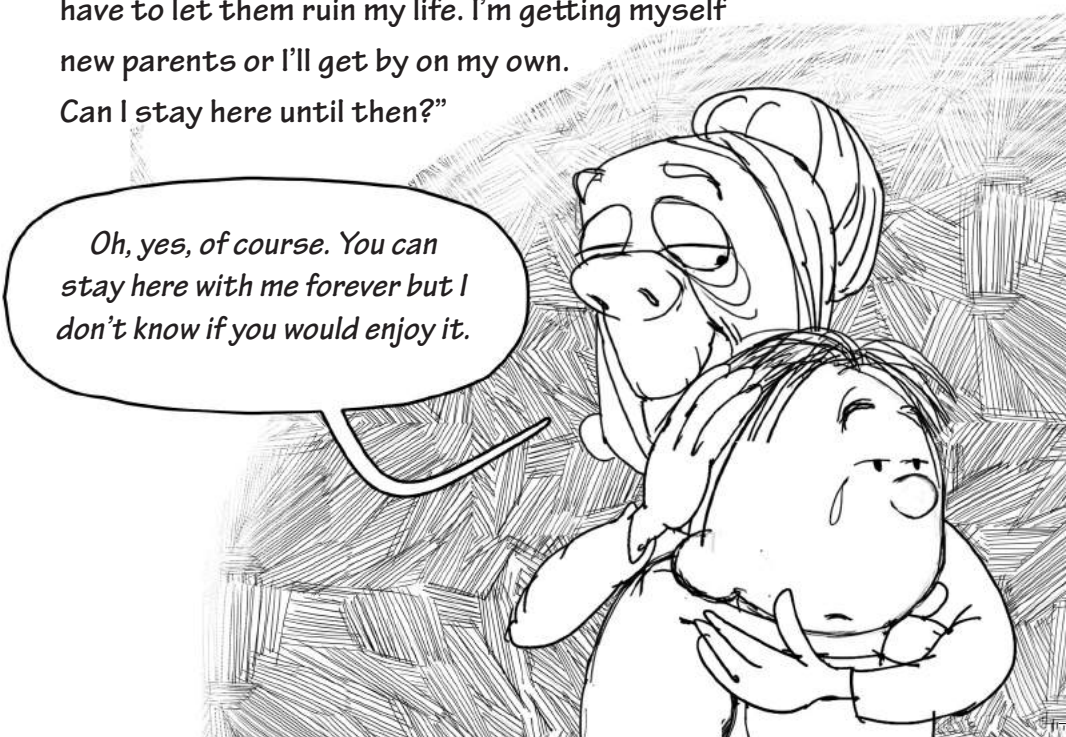
She stood there, her jaw dropped and only after some considerable time could she speak.

“No one has ever accomplished such a thing but then you are special” she said, at last.

Yes. I felt capable of doing that. I imagined myself defending my cause in court.



“So, what are you planning on doing?” grandma asked me.
“I need a place to stay for a few days. Until I sort things out.”
Grandma went to her room to make a phone call and when she got back she said:
“You can stay. But what happened after all? Did you argue?”
“My parents don’t know how to deal with me.” I said. “They don’t know how to raise me nor understand me. If I do what they want, I may become like everyone else and that’s not what I want to be.”
“I see.” She said walking back and forth in the living room.
“Don’t your parents like you?”
“Well, about that...”
“But that’s the most important, isn’t it?”
“Maybe” I agreed. “But it’s not because they like me that I have to let them ruin my life. I’m getting myself new parents or I’ll get by on my own.
Can I stay here until then?”



Oh, yes, of course. You can stay here with me forever but I don't know if you would enjoy it.

Grandma sat on the sofa recovering from all emotions of the moment. “I was once like you” she said “And I divorced my parents as well.”



“Where did you go?” – I asked.

“To my grandma’s house. Where do you think?”

I got upset with the information.

“Does that mean I’m not the first one divorcing from parents?”

“You will be” she said. “I gave up. When we’re 8 years old most people can’t be divorced from their parents more than a weekend. But you...”

“Wow!”, I might be the first. Wow, it was nice to be the first at something.



There was a spare room at my grandma's, but it was filled with lots and lots of shoe boxes. There was no cable TV. It was as if I had moved to a different planet. Creepy-crawlies, used to being there alone, walked around freely. When I finally gave up and fell asleep, they must have crawled all over me as well.

However, the worst part was the following day, the first day of my divorce process. I went everywhere with grandma not to be alone at home. Where? To church, the cemetery, physiotherapy, hydrotherapy, the pharmacy. Everything done very slowly with endless conversations about illnesses with other old ladies who would always appear.



If we add to this four bus trips where the bus was always late, we have a full day. Full of what? I wish I knew.

Around midnight I had already figured out the life of a divorcee wasn't easy, and also that grandma wasn't able to take care of me anymore. She had lived alone since grandpa passed away, and she was already too old, or she wouldn't be a grandma.

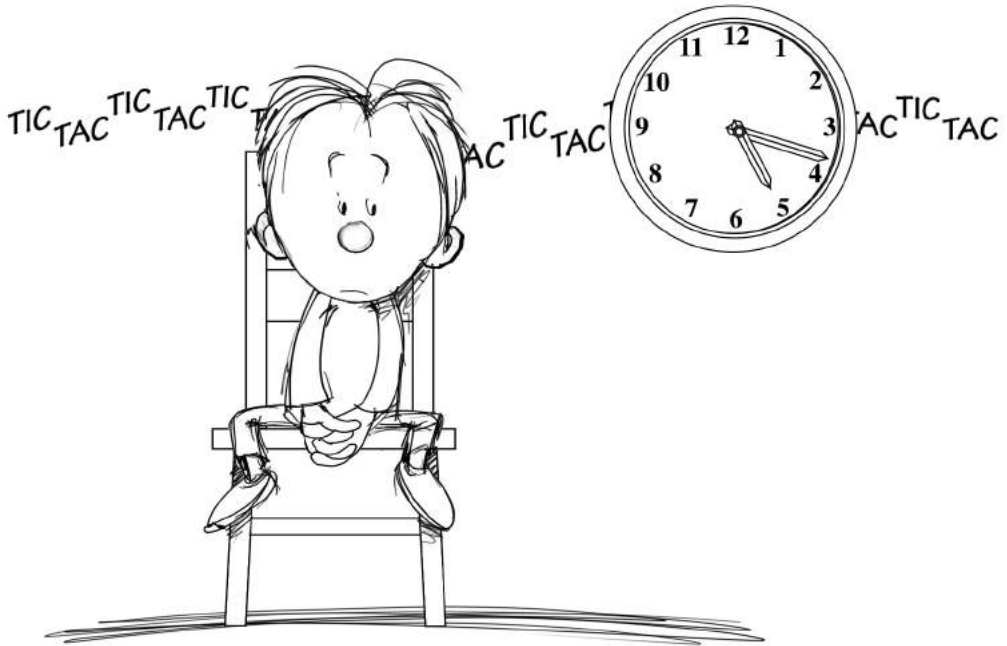
My mum was always asking her to move in with us, but she liked being independent.

I wish I could do the same, but I was too young for that. I had to hold out for a few more years. For now, a new family was just what I needed. Thinking about that, I advertised online.



**Polite, intelligent,
sensitive 8-year-old
boy, divorcing his
parents, seeks a
suitable new
family.**





I waited all afternoon for an answer and nothing. It was a delicate subject and people had to think it through. In the evening a couple answered offering to take care of me. They wrote:

“Unfortunately, we won’t be as intelligent as you but we have lots of love to give. If we fail in your education, it will be because we love you a lot. Can you understand this?”

Of course I could! They lived in the city and had a daughter who would be my new older sister (it seemed hard to get away from that situation). They didn’t say anything else.

I accepted. What else could I do? It was my only offer.

**“We’ll pick you up tomorrow afternoon at 5 pm.
We can barely wait. What about 3 pm?”**

I said yes but I was oddly sad and worried. The idea of changing parents was sounding more and more risky. I didn’t feel so confident about that new life but I didn’t know why. I couldn’t fall asleep thinking on that. I didn’t even know what my new parents did for a living.

They could be bank robbers, street market traders. And there was another older sister. She could be mean and stupid and they could be psychopaths. Yes, what kind of people would adopt a divorced boy? If they had a daughter, why would they want a new son?



There were a thousand questions whirling in my mind and all because of a fly in my soup. Early morning, really early, I phoned home to tell where I had left the key to my wardrobe...



You have already figured out my idea, haven't you? I was trying to get a better offer from them but no one answered.



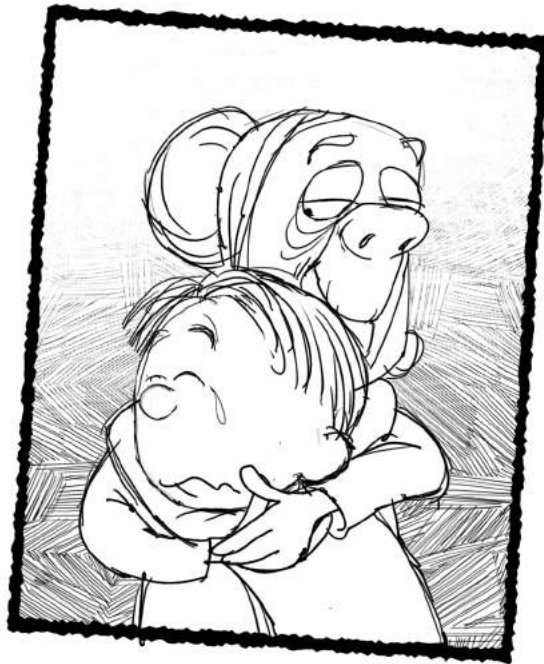
They had left me. I deserved it. I had wanted to be the first boy to divorce his parents. I was making them the first parents divorced from a child in the world.

Time was passing by and I could only think of two ways to get out of the arrangement and escape from my new parents. I would have to fake a terrible contagious disease or be rude so they would refuse me.

I went to the kitchen and chewed one garlic clove then two, and eventually, three more.

I almost threw up but my breath was awful. I could also play crazy or hyperactive... I was considering the second when someone knocked at the door. They had arrived.

Tears came to my eyes because I didn't want those parents. Grandma hugged me and told me not to worry, they would like me. She had had some intel and she said they were the perfect parents for me.



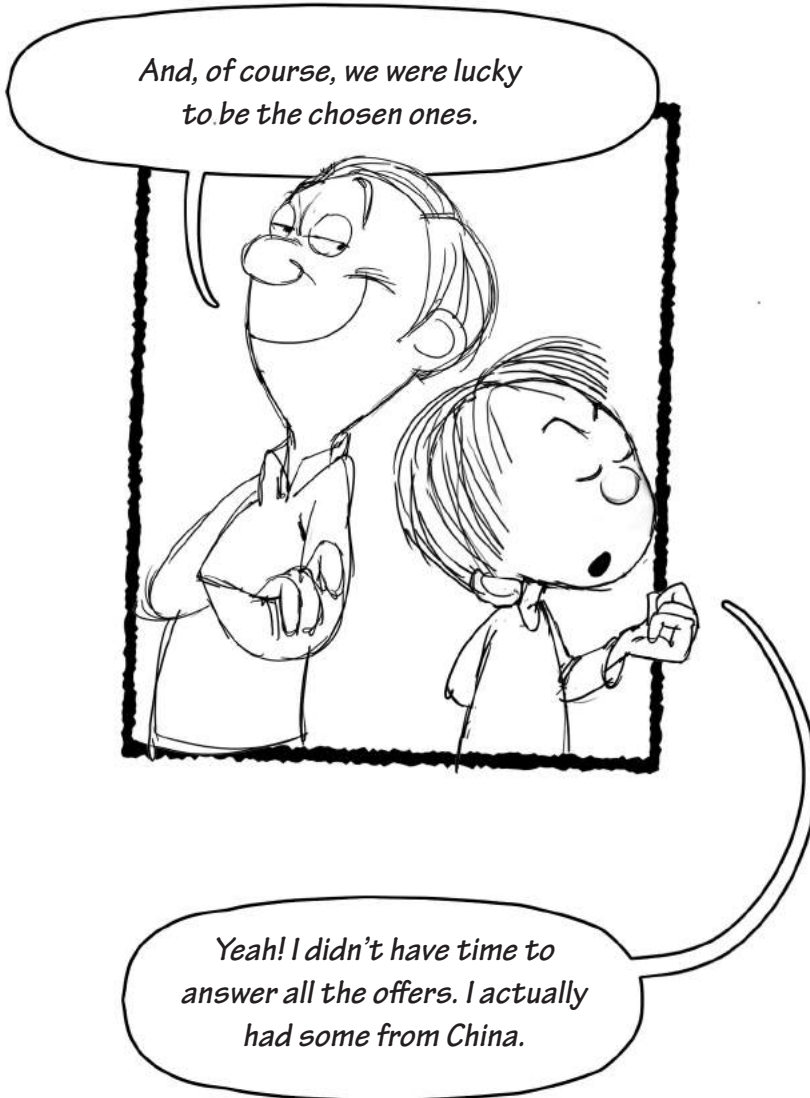
How could she know? I asked but she didn't answer me. She just repeated the same sentence while walking towards the door. Grandma opened it and I closed my eyes scared. When I reopened them, I saw my parents. What were they doing there? And by the look on their faces, they weren't there to sign the divorce papers. On the contrary, they couldn't stop smiling, arms flung wide open. It seemed they were more into maintaining the marriage, or in this case, the parenting relationship. I played hard to get but only for a minute or two, then we hugged.



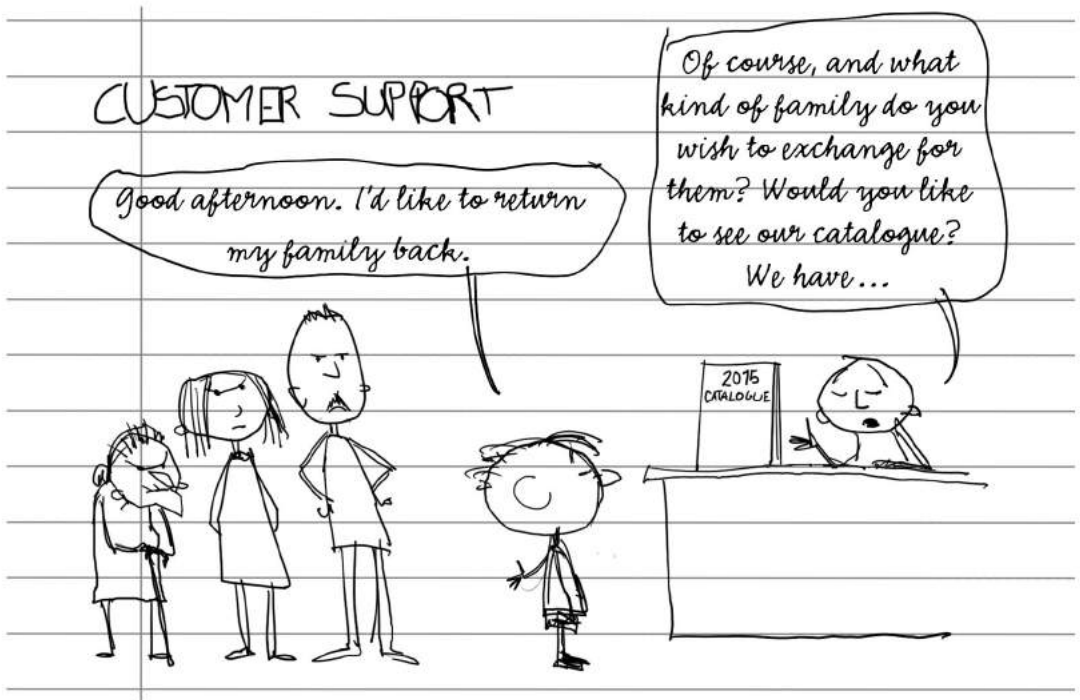
Grandma was right. They were the right parents for me because they were my parents.

“What about the ad?” I asked and then explained. “I put out an ad...”

“We know. It was us.” My mum said.



I was later aware that my grandma had been a double agent, like the spies in the war, and that my parents were always aware of where I was, at my grandma's house. Anyway, they didn't rush anything and let me do things my own way. That way I got to know how things were, how things really are. We can't choose family. We are given one. When we are born they are already here waiting for us. It's like a lottery game. We are either lucky or not so lucky. No matter what, we can't return nor change for a better new one.



And if this is not possible and we can't choose family nor trade them in for another, it's better to accept them as they are.