

# Orphan

by Inés Arredondo

Illustrated by Juan Palomino  
Visual artist; @juanpalomino.ilustrador

*For Mario Camelo Arredondo*

I thought everything was this dream: on a hard bed, I was covered by a stark white sheet, a little girl with her arms cut off above the elbow and her legs amputated above the knees, dressed in a little gown that revealed the four stumps.

The room she was in seemed to be a run-down doctor's office with old-fashioned windows. I knew we were on the side of a U.S. highway, where the whole world had to go by sooner or later. And I say we were there because next to the bed, in profile, was a young doctor, happy, perfectly shaven, and clean. He was waiting.

My mother's relatives came in: tall, beautiful, filling up the room with sunshine and bustle.

The doctor explained, "Yes, it's her. Her parents had an accident not far from here and they both died, but I was able to save her. That's why I put the sign up so that you'd stop."

A very fair woman who reminded me vividly of my mother stroked my cheeks. "How pretty she is!"

"And what eyes!"

"And that curly blond hair!"

My heart leapt with joy. The time for comparisons was here and, amidst that fiesta of praise, not a single mention was made of my mutilations. The time for acceptance was here: I was one of them.

But for some mysterious reason, they left happily, chattering and laughing, without looking back at me.

Then my father's relatives came. I closed my eyes. The doctor repeated what he had told the first relatives.

"Why did you save *that*?"

"That's just inhuman."





"No, a freak always makes for a surprise and is even a bit funny."

Someone short and strong grabbed me under the arms and shook me.

"You'll see that something more can be done with her."

And he put me on a kind of railing between two brackets.

"One, two, one, two."

He swung me back and forth by my leg stumps like a trapeze artist, holding me by the neck of the gown like a grotesque little doll. I squeezed my eyes shut.

Everybody laughed.

"Sure, something more can be done with her!"

"It's funny!"

And they left the room laughing, crudely, and I hadn't even looked at them.

When I opened my eyes, I woke up.

A deathly silence reigned in the dark, cold room. There was no doctor, or doctor's office, or highway. I was here. Why did I dream about the United States? I'm in an inside room of a building. Nobody was passing—or would pass by—ever. Perhaps nobody had passed by before either.

The four stumps and myself, lying in a bed fouled with excrement.

My horrible face, completely different from the face in the dream: the features are shapeless. I don't know. I can't have a face because nobody recognized me . . . or ever will. **MM**

