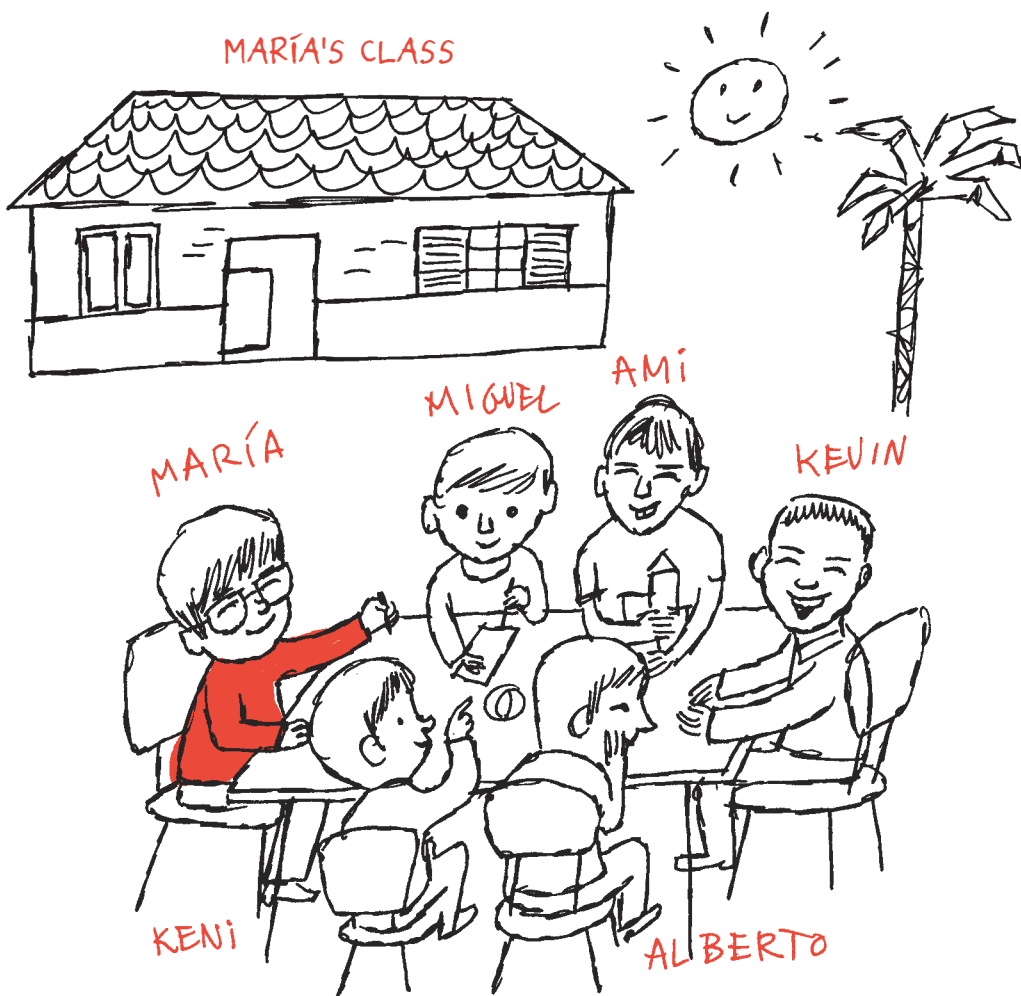


MARÍA

## DRAWINGS

ONE OF THE THINGS THAT MARÍA ENJOYS MOST IS ME DRAWING THE PEOPLE SHE KNOWS. THIS TIME I'VE COME PREPARED. AS WELL AS MY SKETCHPAD, I'VE BROUGHT A LAMINATED SET OF DRAWINGS OF ALL HER FRIENDS AND RELATIVES. SHE LOVES TO POINT OUT AND NAME EVERYONE.



THESE ARE HER CLASSMATES AT SCHOOL IN THE CANARY ISLANDS, WHERE SHE'S THE ONLY PRINCESS SURROUNDED BY THE BOYS. HER FAVORITE GAME IS TO REPEAT OVER AND OVER THE LINE-UP OF HER OWN PERSONAL TEAMS: CLASSMATES, TEACHERS, UNCLES AND AUNTS, COUSINS AND SO ON.

## FACES

MARÍA'S INFECTIOUS LAUGH LIGHTS UP THE WHOLE ROOM.



AT FIRST, YOU MIGHT ASSUME THAT NOT MUCH INTERESTS MARÍA, BUT I THINK THAT'S BECAUSE WE DON'T UNDERSTAND HER.

BY REPEATING THE NAMES OF ALL THE PEOPLE SHE'S MET (INCLUDING THOSE WHO ARE NO LONGER AROUND), MARÍA IS ABLE TO REASSURE HERSELF THAT EVERYTHING IS IN ORDER AND THE WORLD IS A SAFE PLACE. I OFTEN LACK THIS BLIND FAITH THAT SHE HAS IN PEOPLE.

### FACES I DON'T LIKE TO SEE WHEN PEOPLE LOOK AT MARÍA



THESE ARE THE FACES THAT PEOPLE MAKE WHEN, FOR EXAMPLE, MARÍA MAKES A SCENE IN A RESTAURANT BECAUSE SHE'S NERVOUS OR BECAUSE I TELL HER NOT TO EAT SO FAST. THESE FACES MAKE ME SAD AND SOMETIMES ANNOY ME.



SOMETIMES I'D LIKE TO TELL THEM, TOO:



## UNIQUE

THE OTHER DAY, AMONG THE T-SHIRTS THAT MARÍA'S MOTHER HAD PACKED FOR HER, THERE WAS ONE THAT SEEMED IDEAL FOR THE SITUATION:



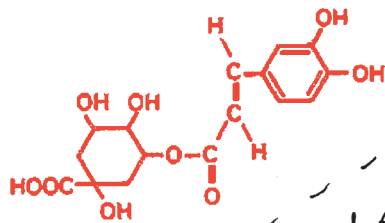
I PUT IT ON HER SO THAT SHE'D BE THE QUEEN OF THE DINING ROOM, BUT I DON'T THINK ANYONE GOT THE MESSAGE. THAT'S THE THING ABOUT MARÍA: SHE IS THE STAR, NOT THE T-SHIRTS SHE WEARS.

## EVERYTHING IS FALLING INTO PLACE



I THINK OF THIS SONG BY KEVIN JOHANSEN WHEN I SEE MARÍA ON THE BEACH PLAYING WITH THE SAND. FOR HOURS ON END, SHE LETS THE GRAINS SLIP THROUGH HER HAND, RIGHT IN FRONT OF HER EYES, AS IF SHE CAN SEE THE THING THAT WE ARE ALL DESPERATELY LOOKING FOR.

THIS IS ONE OF MARÍA'S FAVORITE RITUALS. SHE'S DONE IT SINCE SHE WAS VERY SMALL.



I AM AN IMAGINATIVE PERSON AND I FANTASIZE THAT MARÍA CAN SEE THE COMPOSITION OF ATOMS, OR MAYBE SEE NEW WORLDS OR STARS...OR MAYBE JUST FALLING SAND. BUT MARÍA IS HAPPY WHEN THE SAND IS PASSING THROUGH HER FINGERS. WATCHING GRAINS OF SAND FALL FOR HOURS AND HOURS...LIKE A CLOCK SLOWLY TICKING.

EVERYTHING IS FALLING INTO PLACE.

SOMETIMES SHE PAUSES HER GAME TO MAKE AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT. I THINK SHE DOES THIS JUST TO LET US KNOW THAT SHE'S STILL THERE.



RENÉ HAS  
A HORSE

LETI GOT  
MAD

CEIBA PINCHED  
ME!

MARTITA GOT  
INTO TROUBLE

KEVIN'S MOM CAME

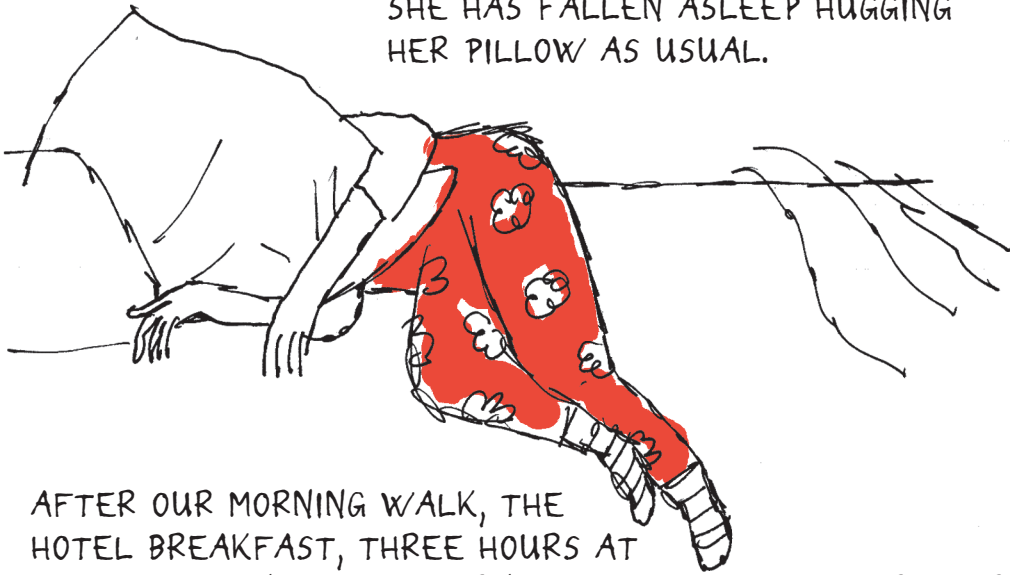
## COMIC INTERLUDE



AFTER THROWING A BALL AT ME ON THE BEACH, AN ISLANDER TOOK ME FOR A FOREIGNER AND SAID "SORRY" IN ENGLISH. JUST LIKE THAT, I PASSED FROM "GODO" \* TO "PENINSULAR" \* TO FOREIGNER. MY RECENTLY ACQUIRED LOBSTER COLORING GRANTS ME THE SAME STATUS AS MY FELLOW GUESTS AT THE DORADO BEACH. I MUST LEARN SOME GERMAN AND THEN I'LL REALLY FIT IN!

NOW MARÍA IS ASLEEP.

SHE HAS FALLEN ASLEEP HUGGING HER PILLOW AS USUAL.



AFTER OUR MORNING WALK, THE HOTEL BREAKFAST, THREE HOURS AT THE POOL, LUNCH, THE JOURNEY TO THE BEACH, FOUR HOURS OF SAND PLAY AT THE BEACH, A WALK ROUND THE TOWN TO BUILD UP AN APPETITE AND THEN THE BUFFET, MARÍA HAS RUN OUT OF BATTERY. I HAVE TOO!

\* **GODO**: PEJORATIVE CANARIAN TERM FOR A SPANISH TOURIST.  
\* **PENINSULAR**: SOMEWHAT BETTER...AN ACCEPTABLE SPANISH MAINLANDER.

## LISTS

TODAY'S LISTS OF PEOPLE HAVE BEEN LIKE QUESTIONS IN A TV SHOW WHERE I HAVE TO GUESS WHO MARÍA IS TALKING ABOUT. THEY COULD BE THE KIDS FROM HER CLASS (I ALREADY KNOW WHO THEY ARE) OR THEY COULD BE THE KIDS WHO WENT TO CAMP, OR THOSE AT THE WATER FESTIVAL...AS WELL AS THEIR MOTHERS' FULL NAMES.



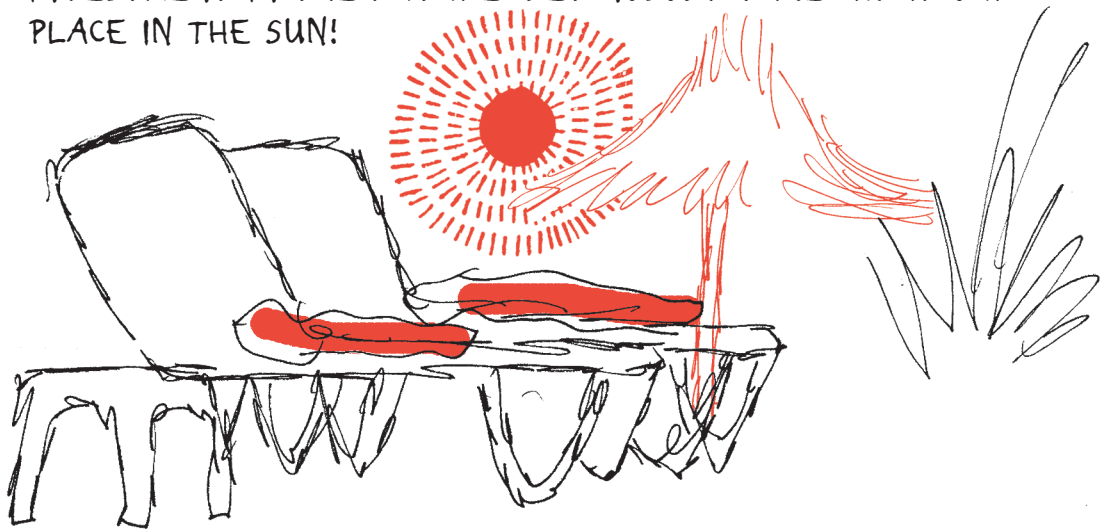
GULP!

...AND NOW NAME EVERYONE IN HIS CLASS.

...AND TO THINK, I FAILED AT SCHOOL FOR NOT REMEMBERING THE KINGS AND QUEENS OF SPAIN, AND THE RIVERS OF THE WORLD, AND OTHER LISTS OF GENERAL KNOWLEDGE.



EVERY MORNING, ALTHOUGH IT'S STRICTLY FORBIDDEN, THE GUESTS IN THE HOTEL PUT THEIR TOWELS ON THE SUN LOUNGERS TO SAVE THEIR SPOT. IT'S LIKE A SMALL INVESTMENT IN THE FUTURE: LET NOBODY TAKE AWAY OUR PLACE IN THE SUN!





AT THE BEGINNING OF EVERY DAY IN THIS SECOND-RATE REFUGEE CAMP, THE PUBLIC ADDRESS SYSTEM COMES TO LIFE WITH STATIC INTERFERENCE.

KKKKRR...LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, WELCOME...KKKKRR



MORE STATIC NOISE. EVERYONE STOPS TO LISTEN.

TODAY AT 12 NOON, THE WATERPOLO CHAMPIONSHIP...

(THE SAME MESSAGE IN GERMAN)...SILENCE...

ANYONE FOR WATERPOLO?

EMBARRASSED SILENCE...STATIC NOISE AGAIN.

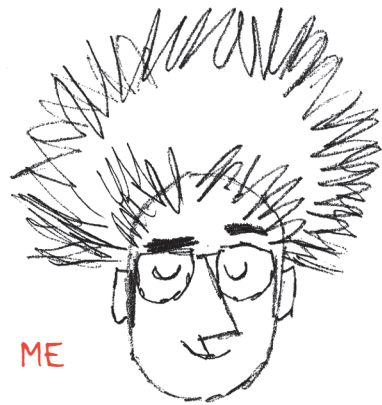
ADULT AND CHILDREN'S DARTS COMPETITION

LONG SILENCE...ANYONE FOR DARTS?

NOBODY GETS UP. THE GERMAN NATIONAL TEAM IS EXHAUSTED AFTER A NIGHT OF KARAOKE.

TIME FOR ANOTHER DAIQUIRI!





ME



MARÍA

AS WELL AS STRONG, THICK HAIR - MINE WHITE, HERS BLACK - MARÍA HAS ALSO INHERITED THE FAMILY NOSE AND A ROUND FACE, WITH HER MOTHER'S DIMPLES. WE ALSO SHARE CERTAIN PECULIARITIES AND HABITS - MINE I HAVE INVENTED, AND HERS ARE A MIXTURE OF HER AUTISM AND BEING STUBBORN LIKE HER GRANDMOTHER. WE ARE BOTH RELUCTANT TO CHANGE AND WE WANT EVERYTHING TO BE IN ITS PLACE.

## FOOD

WALKS

POOL

CANARIES

PHOTOS

BARCELONA

FRIENDS

## SAND

NAMES

SWIMMING

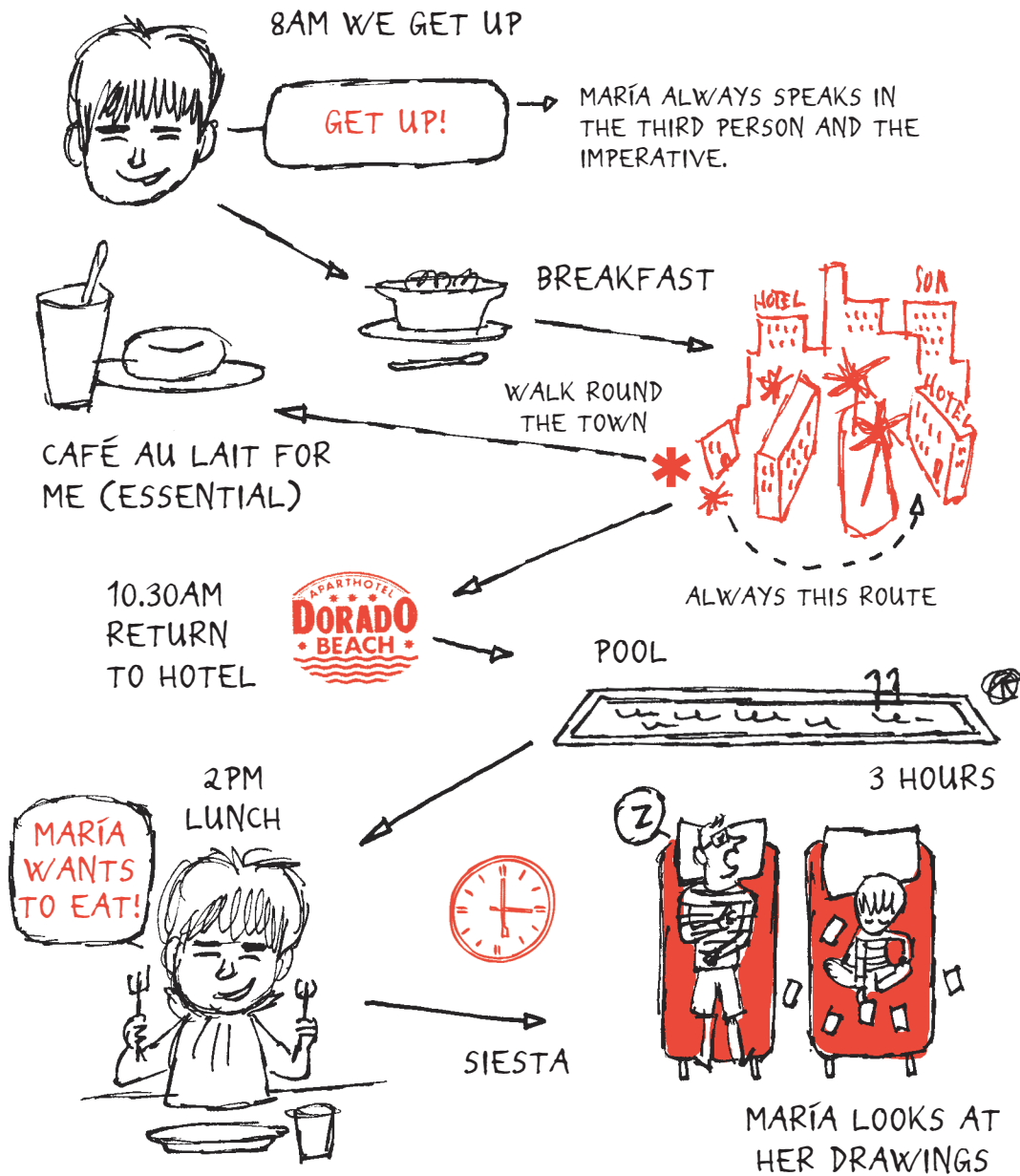
QUESTIONS

BIRTHDAYS

OTHER STUFF

# ITINERARIES

WHEN MARÍA AND I MEET UP SOMEWHERE IN THE CANARY ISLANDS OR IN BARCELONA, WE MAKE UP RITUALS AND ITINERARIES THAT WE'RE BOTH HAPPY WITH (IN CASE I HAVEN'T ALREADY SAID THIS, ONCE SOMETHING'S BEEN DECIDED UPON, MARÍA DOESN'T LIKE CHANGES TO THE SCHEDULE). FOR EXAMPLE:



ALL THIS IN PREPARATION FOR THE HIGHLIGHT OF THE DAY:



LOADED WITH TOWELS,  
WATER, BUCKETS AND  
BANANAS, WE TAKE A  
TAXI TO THE BEACH.

EXCEPT ONE DAY  
WHEN WE DECIDE TO  
TAKE THE DEADLY BUS.

ERM...THE  
STOP FOR  
THE BEACH?

DO YOU THINK  
I WORK FOR  
TOURIST INFO?

BEFORE WE CAN EVEN  
SIT DOWN

AAA!EEE

AAAAA  
AAAAA

NO BRAKES!!!

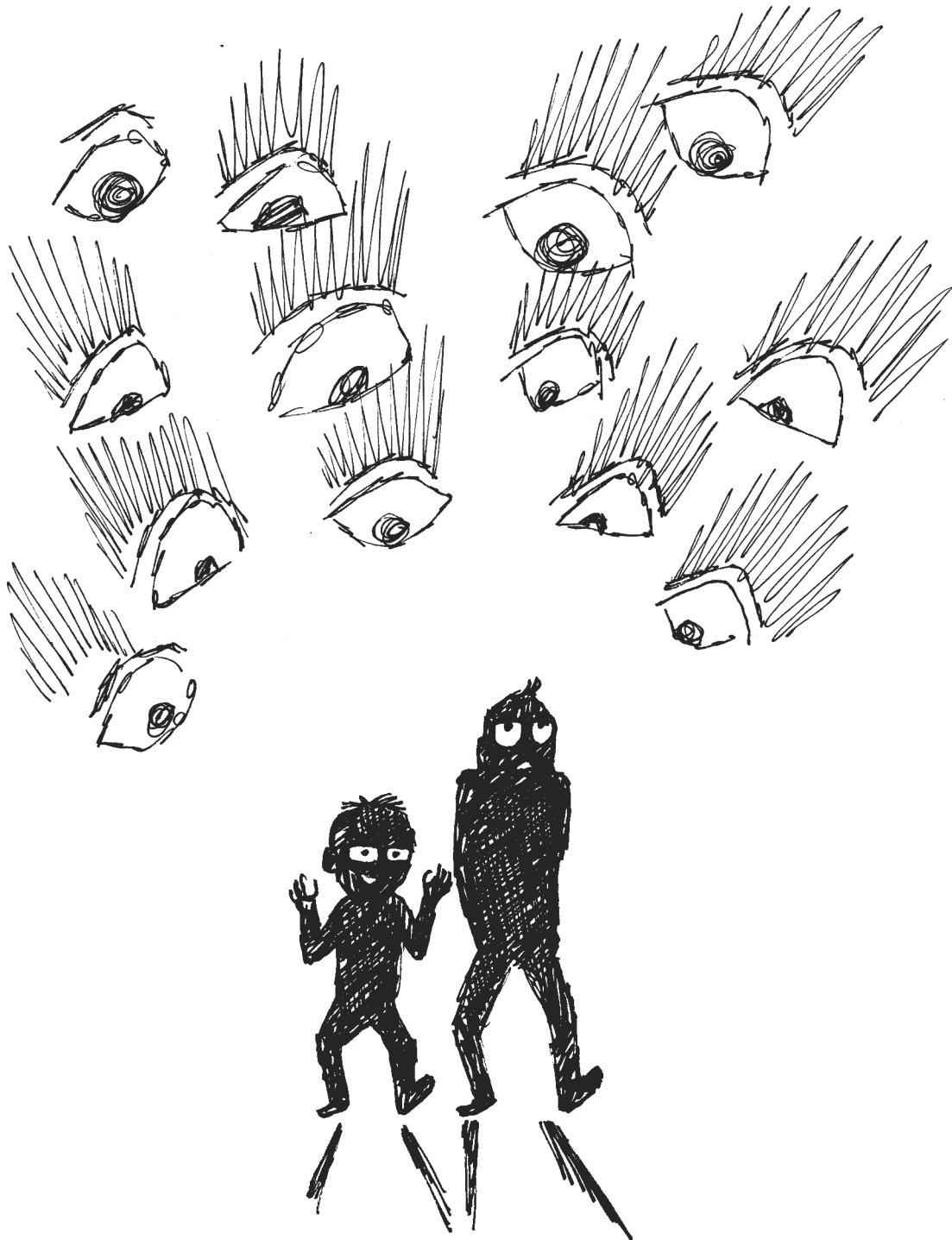
THE BEACH!

NEVER AGAIN BY BUS

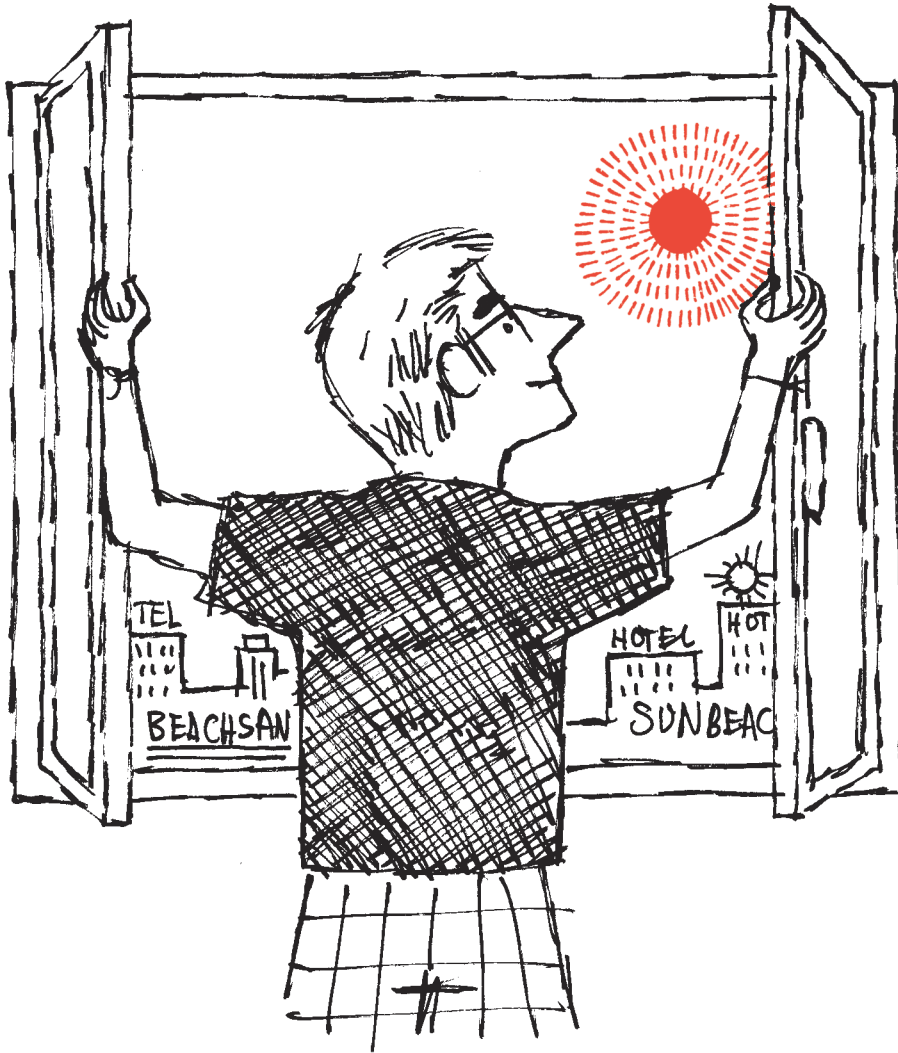
NEVER  
AGAIN

BUT AT LAST WE'RE  
AT THE BEACH AND  
THERE'S TONS OF  
SAND TO PLAY WITH...

AND AGAIN THERE ARE THOSE LOOKS. ALWAYS THOSE LOOKS.



ANYWAY! ... IT'S PARTY TIME AT THE DORADO BEACH!  
ANOTHER WONDERFUL SUNNY DAY!



IT'S RAINING CATS AND DOGS ON THE MAINLAND - THE FLOATS IN THE HOLY WEEK PROCESSIONS ARE BEING ROWED THROUGH THE STREETS! EVERYONE IS LOOKING GLUMLY AT THE CLOUD-COVERED BEACHES. BUT NOT HERE! WE'VE GOT PLENTY OF SUN.

BESIDES, TODAY WE HAVE...AQUAGYM! DARTS! WATER POLO! BINGO! KARAOKE! AND RIFLE SHOOTING!!

## FISHES

WHAT TO DO ON A DAY LIKE TODAY? I ONLY HAVE TWO DAYS LEFT WITH MARÍA IN THIS TROPICAL PARADISE.

### POOL TIME!

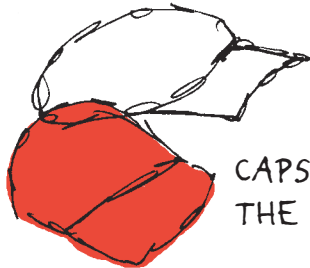
AFTER THE BREAKFAST BUFFET AND OUR WALK ROUND THE TOWN, IT'S TIME TO GET OUR BAG READY FOR THE POOL.



SUN CREAM



SWIMMING GOGGLES  
(THERE'S ENOUGH CHLORINE IN THE POOL TO KILL A HERD OF ELEPHANTS)



CAPS TO KEEP THE SUN OFF

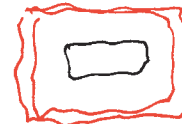


NOTEBOOK FOR ME

NOTEBOOK FULL OF NAMES FOR MARÍA



TOWELS FOR BOTH OF US,  
MINE BEING THE MORE VINTAGE OF THE TWO



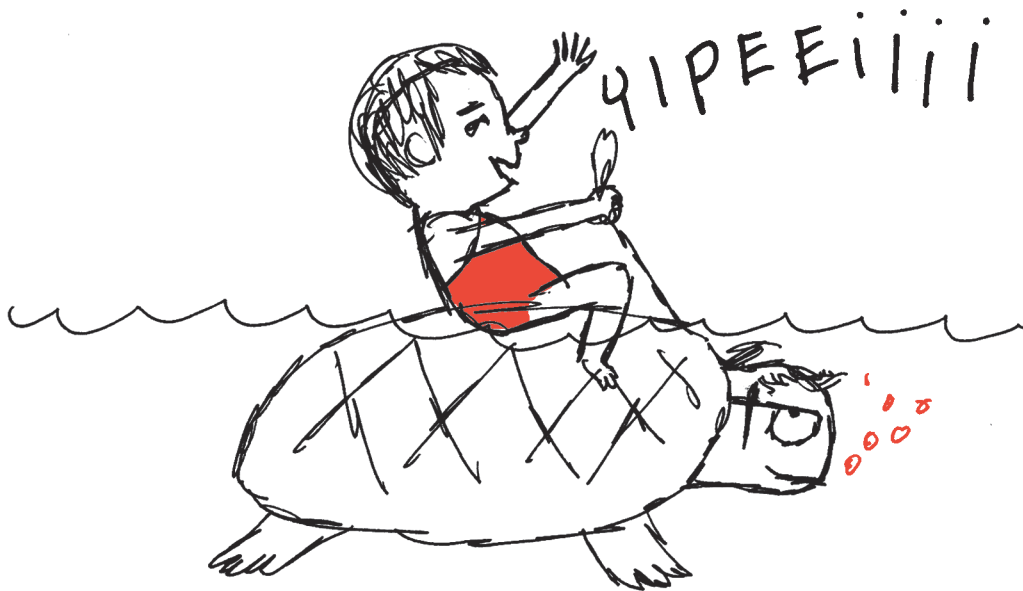
WET WIPES,  
JUST IN CASE

ANOTHER THING MARÍA AND I HAVE IN COMMON IS OUR LOVE OF WATER. WE ARE BOTH FISH! IN MARÍA'S CASE, THOUGH, THE WATER HAS TO BE WARM, AS SHE'S A RATHER DELICATE FISH!



IN THE WATER WE ARE HAPPY!

MARÍA IS FINE IN THE WATER AND SWIMS IN HER OWN WAY. SHE LOVES TRYING TO DROWN PEOPLE AS A JOKE AND DRINKING THE POOL WATER. SOMETIMES I GO UNDER AND CARRY HER ON MY BACK LIKE A GIANT TURTLE.





## DOWNTIME

SOMETIMES MARÍA GETS BORED WITH ALL THE REGULAR STUFF THAT'S HAPPENING IN HER LIFE: SCHOOL, THE PARK, EATING, THE BEACH AND VISITING PEOPLE AND PLACES. SHE DOESN'T READ OR WATCH TV MUCH, AND THERE ARE FEW THINGS THAT REALLY CATCH HER ATTENTION. THAT'S WHEN MARÍA GOES INTO HERSELF AND STARTS A DANCE WITH HER HANDS AND HER ARMS. SHE SOMETIMES HITS HERSELF ON THE CHIN OR ON THE SHOULDERS. THIS STIMMING\* SEEMS TO FOLLOW SOME INNER RHYTHM AND IS DIFFICULT TO STOP UNLESS YOU CAN OFFER HER A DEFINITE ALTERNATIVE.



ALL OF THIS IS ACCOMPANIED BY A SCREECH THAT OTHER PEOPLE FIND VERY DISTURBING, BUT I'M USED TO IT.

\*STIMMING: REPETITION OF AN ACTION IN A CONSTANT AND SEEMINGLY MEANINGLESS WAY.

## A WALL SURROUNDS MARÍA



A WALL SEEMS TO SURROUND MARÍA WHEN PEOPLE COME ACROSS HER FOR THE FIRST TIME. IT'S A WALL OF FEAR OF THE UNKNOWN. NOBODY KNOWS WHAT TO DO OR HOW TO BEHAVE AT FIRST; HOWEVER, PEOPLE WHO GET TO KNOW MARÍA, EVEN BRIEFLY, ARE ENCHANTED TO FIND THAT THE WALL THEY'D BUILT UP IS NOT THAT HIGH. IT'S TRUE THAT MARÍA IS VERY SENSITIVE TO REJECTION, AND SHE'LL ONLY GET CLOSE TO THOSE WHO ARE PREPARED TO PAY ATTENTION TO HER AND LISTEN TO HER. BUT I'VE KNOWN PEOPLE FALL IN LOVE WITH MARÍA AFTER HAVING ONLY SPOKEN WITH HER FOR A LITTLE WHILE AND REALIZED IT ISN'T THAT DIFFICULT TO COMMUNICATE.

MARÍA IS DIRECT, HONEST AND SINCERE AND TRUSTS (ALMOST) EVERYONE, AND IF SHE SMILES AT YOU, WELL, YOU'VE GOT IT MADE. BUT BE CAREFUL, MY FRIENDS...MARÍA IS NOT FOR THE FAINTHEARTED. IF SHE DOESN'T LIKE YOU (OR IF SHE LIKES YOU A LOT)...

**SHE'LL PINCH HARD!!**

MARÍA DOESN'T HAVE NORMAL CONVERSATIONS; THEY ALWAYS FOLLOW CERTAIN RIGID FORMS THAT SHE LIKES TO STICK TO. ONE PART OF HER SPEECH IS MADE UP OF HER LISTS OF NAMES, WHICH ARE THE KEYS TO HER MEMORIES OF THINGS SHE HAS DONE. THEY ARE PERFECTLY STORED IN ORDERED BOXES. IT'S LIKE WHEN YOU REMEMBER A SPECIAL MOVIE AND THE PERSON YOU'RE WITH ALSO REMEMBERS: YOU BOTH SHARE AN EMOTION. IT WORKS LIKE THIS WITH MARÍA: THE NAMES SHE SAYS ARE CONNECTED TO HER MEMORIES. THEY ARE THE END OF A LONG PIECE OF STRING THAT CONNECTS HER TO A BIRTHDAY PARTY, TO HER CLASS AT SCHOOL, TO A PARTICULAR FAMILY. EACH MEMORY HAS ITS INTEGRAL PARTS. SHE NEVER FORGETS A SINGLE ONE. THAT IS MARÍA'S GIFT: AN EXTRAORDINARY MEMORY FOR PEOPLE. THE REST OF MARÍA'S SPEECH IS MADE UP OF SET PHRASES RELATED TO THE SITUATION.

HER SPECIALITY IS FAMILY LISTS: COUSINS, UNCLES AND AUNTS, FRIENDS AND THEN, TAKEN OUT FROM THE VERY BOTTOM OF ONE OF HER BOXES, THE NAME OF SOMEONE THAT EVEN YOU HAD FORGOTTEN ABOUT (NOT ALL THAT UNUSUAL IN MY CASE), FOLLOWED BY HER OVERJOYED EXPRESSION WHEN SHE SEES THAT YOU ARE AMAZED AT HER MEMORY. THIS, MY FRIENDS, IS GOLD. MOMENTS OF PRIDE WITH MARÍA ARE NOT MEASURED BY THE STANDARDS OF OTHER PARENTS, BUT ON A DIFFERENT SCALE. ANY ADVANCE, ANY SMILE IS A GREAT SOURCE OF JOY FOR THOSE AROUND MARÍA. AND MARÍA NEVER FAILS TO GIVE US REASONS TO REJOICE.



# A TYPICAL CONVERSATION WITH MARÍA



