**Name and surname: Andrea Muñoz Fernández**

Genre:short story

Age: 19

Country: Spain

EBU National Member: Spanish National Organization of the Blind

Number of words: 1004

**“In case anyone still wants to read me”**

Thanks for giving me some of your time. I’m braille, although if you’re reading this you probably already know that and know about my recent past.

I’ve been here for many years now, moving forward with humanity and its life cycles and forming part of many mundane but beautiful moments in people’s lives.

Although I was born a long time ago now, time doesn’t go by for me like for people, and I still clearly recall my first steps in the world and my slow but steady growth, adapting to people’s lives and opening up to areas which were hitherto thought to be unreachable.

The texts I’ve helped to create have provoked joy, sadness, fear, indignation, peace,…with me, blind people have played an equal role - just like others - in literature, music, politics, education,…and I’m tremendously proud of that.

To be frank though, I feel neglected. Yes, that’s it: set aside, ignored, replaced, like a tacky item in a shop that’s gone out-of-fashion and, despite the increasingly rare moments of optimism, I think this situation is unfair and unrewarding.

In the end I’ve grown tired of fighting my feelings, against the systems that are scrambling to put me out of my misery and the human beings who promote them, so…here they are: my last missive, my last words. Well, it’s all over!

It’s often been said in texts I’ve known and helped to create that part of being mature involves knowing when to stop or change direction so that we and those around us can continue to progress with no bonds holding us back. I’m sure these ground-breaking devices, where my human beings can read things written by their colleagues, who rarely have access to me, enable them to read, in short, written texts and those yet to be written, but also help make others accept the differences that don’t separate us, but rather contribute to making life more precious.

So, I bid you farew…no, wait a minute! What’s going on? I feel contact, a caress…a small hand brushing warily against one of those notebooks full of words with no logical meaning, but which are the start. I’m moved by the wariness, innocence and curiosity of the person whose hand is touching me.

I let myself get carried away by the touch of the small girl, who attempts to decipher the code with the help of a woman who is talking to her in a quiet voice, full of unfounded courage and hopeful expectation for the fruits her patient work will bear. And then, after a struggle and some explanations, I hear the voice of the little girl: “b…be…bed”. I am elated and thrilled to sense, from the boundless joy shown by the smile of the instructor, that the little girl with her face lit up, fidgety hands and eager heart has just read her very first word.

While I reflect on this new achievement and weigh up if it should influence my decision, I focus on the notebook, one of those papers with bits of me, in some ways literally, and I see it being taken somewhere else; now it is the hands of a very different person from the innocent young girl that are touching the dots, spread out but grouped like a stellar constellation in order, but only accessible to those who have the code to understand them.

These hands have more wrinkles and are more tired from what I can tell, and they belong to a man with a sad countenance who, despite his best efforts, can’t help but shed a life-laden tear on my hard paper.

I’m already used to the first times - when someone thinks they have lost everything and are perched on the edge of a deep, dark well into which they are bound to fall. Experience shows me, however, that many of them, maybe because they try to salvage the things they care about most and fill their lives, grab on to the edge of the well with their furious nails and, gaining momentum from an ennobling, titanic effort, manage to escape, move away and get on with their lives practically as before, burying the wounds behind a heart fortified by the battle in which I was by their side.

Although the image of the man is bleak (even for me) I can see the outcome thanks to the perspective experience affords, and I see him sitting in his home, ecstatic, enjoying once again that novel he always wanted to re-read and talking about it to someone close to his heart. And, in my own way, I smile. I smile because I know there is a ray of light at the end of his night and, in that moment, a resounding and life-giving truth opens up within me.

If that little girl, and if that man, and if so many people are still learning to decipher my code, how can I disappear? How can I let them down? How can I deprive them of the joy of reading for themselves without an annoying, robotic voice, of reading a ballot paper or the gibberish on a box of pills? How is it possible that, if there are still humans who insist on not forgetting me and trust me despite everything that’s happened and everything still to happen, I can’t do the same?

Maybe those devices that combine new technologies with the sense of touch aren’t undermining me, but instead giving me a helping hand and a boost to continue my work to make everyone equal regardless of their sight.

So, despite everything, I’ll still be there to help people - young and old alike - who need to read and write with me.

Now is my chance to grow stronger and prove I have earned my place in the world. I’ll do my best to evolve with the times, as I always have, gradually and without letting anyone forget me.

Here’s to another two hundred years together!