There was once a boy who always treated his mother horribly, shouting at her, insulting her. It didn't matter to him how sad he made her.

One day, without knowing how, he woke up in an immense and lonely place. He was sitting on a rock from which four huge pillars rose up into the sky, appearing to support the entire world.

He was all alone, but soon an enormous flock of crows with beaks made of steel landed on the rock, and set about violently chipping away at it.

After the crows left, a mysterious door in one of the pillars opened, and through it came a charming and pretty girl.

- "Have you come to help us? That's great! We need all the people we can get."

The boy was puzzled, and spotting his confusion, the little girl explained.

- "So you don't know where you are? This is the centre of the Earth. These pillars support the whole planet, and this rock keeps the pillars in place."

- "And how can I help you?"

said the boy, confused.

- "Well, to help look after the rock, of course. Anyone can see by your face that you're the best person for the job," answered the girl,

- "The birds you saw are only increasing in number, and if we don't look after this rock it will eventually crumble and everything will come crashing down."

- "And what do you see in my face?!"

exclaimed the boy, surprised.

- "I've never looked after a rock in my whole life!"

- "But you'll learn how, even if you've never done it. Here, look in this mirror," said the girl, holding one in front of the boy's face.
The boy could clearly see he now had the face of a bird, and his nose was gradually turning into steel. There he stood, shocked and worried, not a word passing his lips.

"All those crows used to be children like you and I," explained the girl,

"but they decided not to look after the rock. Now that they're older they've turned into evil birds; all they do is destroy. Up to now, you haven't done much to look after it, but now that you know, will you help me to preserve all this?"

She said all this with a smile, taking his hand in hers.

The boy still didn't quite understand all this. He looked closely at the pillars and could see that each one was made of thousands and thousands of little figurines, representing the best virtues: sincerity, effort, honesty, generosity...

Closely inspecting the ground beneath him, he could see that the enormous rock was made up of little instances of children showing respect to their mothers, grandparents, brothers, sisters, and old people.

What the crows were trying to do was cover over these instances by carving out scenes of shouting and insults. Next to his feet, he could see his own little carving, representing the last time he shouted at his mother. That image, in such a strange place, made him realise that the only thing keeping the columns standing was respect. Respect was sustaining the world.

The boy, filled with regret, stayed there and looked after the rock for many days. He carried out his task joyfully, going without sleep to repel every crow attack. He carried on until, exhausted by his efforts, he collapsed; completely spent.

When he woke he was back in his bed at home, and he didn't know whether it had all been a dream. However, what he was now sure of was that no crow would ever again get the chance to carve a picture of him shouting at his mother.

By Pedro Pablo Sacristan