

Juryns motivering:

Stämmingsfullt och välskrivet om hur barns vänskap, lek och skratt övervinner alla språkliga barriärer, och om hur vi i vår tid kan nå varandra långt över landsgränserna även när det verkar vara omöjligt. Ett fint slut som också är början på en möjlig fortsättning.

The boy who didn't speak English

Oliver sat out on the edge of the large fountain in the middle of the Townsquare outside of the little townhouse they were staying in. It was really warm today, so Oliver decided to put his feet in the water while his mom wandered around looking at all the street vendors. They weren't going to be here long, only a couple of weeks. Oliver wished it was longer, because, only a few days into the trip, he was already loving Spain.

Suddenly, his eye caught something on the other end of the pool. Another little boy. One who was kicking off his sandals and clambering over the outer wall of the fountain. Oliver was ecstatic. He hadn't seen any kids even close to his age the entire time he'd been here! He'd always been good at making friends, it was like his superpower. And if he was here for two weeks, a friend might be nice...

He didn't hesitate for a second, and immediately greeted the boy, who smiled at him a little, before returning his attention to the water.

"Um... I'm Oliver! How are you today?" he smiled, still trying not to let the bottom of his pants drop into the water. The boy said nothing, and just continued to create ripples in the fountain. "Hello? Can you hear me?" He asked.

The boy looked up again. "*Se supone que no debo hablar con extraños.*" He spoke quickly.

That surprised Oliver. He blinked a couple of times. "I'm sorry, what did you say?"

The boy frowned and tilted his head a little as he looked up at Oliver from where he sat. His feet stilled in the water. "*Lo siento, no entiendo. Puedes preguntarle a mi mamá.*" He sounded like he was trying to offer Oliver something, even though he had no idea what. What was he even saying? It sounded like gibberish. However, regardless of not knowing the words he spoke, Oliver noticed that this boy's voice was surprisingly melodious. It was like he was singing... but he wasn't. He was just talking. Oliver couldn't quite explain it.

The two just looked at each other blankly for a moment. Oliver's mind was working at a mile a minute. This language barrier definitely put a wrench in his "Make Friends with the Boy Across the Fountain" plan. How was he supposed to become friends with this boy, if he didn't understand him?

He looked around at the square for inspiration. There were a bunch of adults that were leaning over various carts that were full of goods. There weren't really any kids around besides the two of them, but there was a stray chicken being chased through and around the legs of the shoppers by a cat, tailed closely by a scattered vender, who was grabbing at them both wildly.

Chase. That gave him an idea.

He reached out and quickly tapped the other on the shoulder.

"Tag!" He said, through a giggle.

Then he was off, running unsafely through the water, kicking up foam behind him as he tore away. He had gotten halfway across the fountain before he checked over his shoulder. To his delight, the boy behind him was now running after him, his hands outstretched toward him.

But Oliver hadn't really expected him to catch on so fast, and the boy caught up quickly, returning his tap on the shoulder, before racing off in the other direction. They continued to play for what felt like hours, until Oliver changed directions too quickly, and slipped. He looked up, made eye contact with the boy, and they both started laughing.

Apparently, it didn't matter where you were from, or what language you spoke. Laughter was universal.

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Oliver was sitting cross-legged on the ground with a large, leather-bound photo album in his hands. He flipped through it, smiling fondly at some of the photographs that showcased the pictures from their family trip to Spain.

Oliver didn't remember much from that trip, as he'd only been five years old at the time of the trip. He remembered the warm sun and the marketplace

with the large fountain in the middle, but that was about it. His fingers danced across photographs, and it all looked pretty normal, until his eyes landed on a very special picture.

It was of two people. One of them was himself, with those old glasses that had always been too big for him. The other person, though, was someone that Oliver didn't recognize. A little boy, that looked to be the same age as Oliver. Maybe a little older, but not by much. He had bleached brown wavy hair and an adorable little smile that would've made anyone want to pinch his cheeks. Oliver's own hair was curling a little at the ends, as it always did when it got wet.

He frowned a little.

"Hey, mom?" He called, carefully pulling the photo out of its little transparent plastic pouch. "Who's this?"

He heard a shuffle from across the room, and then felt a presence behind him shortly after. He looked up to see his mother's eyes sparkling a little. "That's your little Spanish friend. You met him one day in the market." his mom laughed as she remembered the incident. "I had no idea how you befriended him. I'd known that you were good at making friends, but this little boy didn't speak a word of English, yet you had managed to become best friends with him anyway."

Now that he thought about it, he did remember playing tag with someone in the water. He hadn't realized that had been on their trip to Spain. Or that it

was with this little boy. Well, he clearly wasn't that little anymore. If Oliver was in his third year of university, then this boy was an adult too. He wondered what he looked like now...

His mother sat down beside him, and delicately took the photograph. "You went out to the fountain every day after that to look for him. But he never came back." She handed the photo back and watched her son slip it back into its place in the album. "I wonder where he is now."

"Me too," Oliver said, his voice distant and thoughtful. "Can you imagine if I found him again?"

"That would be something." His mother said, in that dismissive and entertained tone that told Oliver that she was just humoring him. Oliver tried to do the same after that, and continued to go through the albums, but his thoughts kept turning back to his foreign friend.

When his mother left the room, he quickly took a picture of the photograph, then tucked it all back away, pretending that nothing had happened. He didn't touch the phone for the rest of the day.

Until midnight.

Oliver was lying in his bedroom, glancing at his phone. He'd heard about how many people had met over social media. Maybe, just maybe, he'd be able to re-meet someone over it too? It was a bit of a stretch, sure, but Oliver figured that it was worth a shot. He took to Twitter, his only platform that wasn't

private, and typed out a quick message about this boy who didn't speak English, who he'd befriended in Spain sixteen years ago. He attached the picture that he'd taken earlier and sent it off into the world.

Then he plugged in his phone and forgot about it, until about a month and a half later, when he was least expecting it. The ding on his phone, signifying a notification. One from Twitter, he realized on further inspection.

Someone had mentioned him in a post.

He opened it to see a selfie of a man that he didn't recognize. He was about to close the app, thinking it was just spam, when he saw it. That dazzling smile that made Oliver's familiarity bells ring off somewhere in his mind.

Wait a minute. Was this...?

His eyes drifted to the caption with anticipation. Could it be?

"Oi que me estabas buscando :)"

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