YOU'RE WELCOME

Abdul and Faith arrived in Spain from a sub-Saharan country about 20 years ago.

Abdul's mother, worried about the bleak future that awaited her son, took out a small loan, using part of her meager land as collateral, and paid someone to look after him and others, guiding them to an African country bordering the Mediterranean Sea. They traveled on foot, crossing the Sahara Desert, enduring extreme temperatures day and night, running out of water along the way, and ultimately being abandoned by the group's leader. Of the original fifteen, only three survived. Upon arriving in the aforementioned country, he had to beg and work in very precarious conditions, sometimes suffering exploitation and abuse. After eight months in these circumstances, he managed to save enough money for the sea voyage in a small boat to a city on the Spanish coast.

Faith was a young girl who had lost her mother to a sudden death. Since then, she had to live with her grandmother in very poor conditions due to the abject poverty surrounding the elderly woman. Someone in her circle, who had been working in a European country for several years, sent a significant sum of money to a middleman to arrange the girl's journey from her village to the country where the benefactor resided. However, the middleman, more concerned with increasing his own wealth than fulfilling his promise, took her to the same country where Abdul had arrived more than seven months earlier. There, he left her in a northern city with a family who rationed her food because she ate too much. After two weeks, another person accompanied her to a ship, paid for her ticket, and said goodbye. Upon arriving at her destination, a Spanish coastal city, Faith was worried and somewhat afraid. At the passenger checkpoint, a National Police officer looked at her in puzzlement, very surprised to see a child without any adult by her side. After several attempts to speak to her in very basic English, she learned that she had arrived alone on the ferry. Luckily, her passport was valid; she was from a sub-Saharan country, and only a woman named Nana was listed as her closest relative.

Abdul was immediately rescued by Maritime Rescue and taken to port along with his fellow travelers. The Red Cross checked their health, provided them with food and thermal blankets, and treated those suffering from hypothermia or injuries. They were then handed over to the National Police and the Civil Guard for identification. The adults were taken to the Foreigners' Detention Center, and the minors were taken to the local reception center, whose conditions were far from ideal. Faith underwent the same process as Abdul.

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The children spent a year at the reception center. There, waking up, washing, and meals followed a fixed schedule for everyone. Attendance at the regular secondary school classes was mandatory, where, initially, they dedicated a significant portion of their time to learning Spanish. In the afternoons, they attended non-formal vocational training and job orientation workshops so that, when they turned 18 and were discharged from the center, they would have better chances of finding employment. They had only been at the center for a month when the regional government's social services minister eliminated the weekly allowance given to unaccompanied migrant children; there were no restrictions for Spanish minors under the guardianship of the regional government. The weekly allowance amounted to fifteen euros; this sum only covered the most basic personal expenses.

Rocío and Manuel had no children; they had tried everything, but hadn't been able to have any. They were determined to foster one of these unaccompanied children; it was a matter of social justice, they believed. Their lives had been very hard and complicated; therefore, they deserved the same opportunities as the children here. So they went through all the stages of the Foster Care Program, managed by a non-profit foundation, until they achieved their goal: mandatory talks, submitting the application, passing the suitability assessment of the family environment, training workshops on the emotional and social needs of children, assignment of the child, and follow-up by qualified professionals. They had fostered several children temporarily, but it pained them greatly when they had to be separated from the children in their care. So they took a step forward and dared to undertake a double permanent foster adoption, because they thought that the gender difference would be positive for both the boy and the girl, and also for them as adoptive parents. Given his track record, the administration did not object to it, although the help from professionals and the monitoring was increased in the first nine months.

Abdul and Faith received constant love and attention from Rocío and Manuel. The boy was quite tall for his age and chose to play basketball. The girl showed extraordinary psychomotor skills and joined rhythmic gymnastics. They worked diligently in their studies because they wanted to take advantage of the opportunity before them to achieve a promising future. Rocío was a math teacher at the high school they attended, and Manuel had an architecture firm that worked with various construction companies in the region. They only helped the children if they asked. During their first year with the family, they provided more consistent support with their studies because they didn't yet understand Spanish well enough. When they were in their fourth year of secondary school, Faith's grandmother died. Faith then went from being in permanent foster care to being adopted.

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The foster parents had no doubts about it; from the beginning, they knew that, given Nana's age, this would happen sooner or later. The two teenagers completed their ESO (Compulsory Secondary Education) and Science Baccalaureate with flying colors and achieved excellent scores on the University Entrance Exam. At this point in their story, Abdul turned 18, which meant he would no longer be living in the foster care center. Manuel and Rocío had already agreed with him that, at this time, he shouldn't worry, that he would have their support, that he would continue living with his adoptive sister, and that they would both remain their children until the end of their lives. Abdul studied Nursing and Faith studied Physiotherapy; both graduated within the officially established timeframes. They registered with the corresponding professional associations and, after long and intensive preparation and several temporary contracts in the public health system, successfully passed the competitive examinations for employment in their respective specialties.

For five years they worked in different hospitals in the region until they arrived at one of the three in their hometown. One winter day, Abdul had to leave in an ambulance for an emergency call related to a stroke. The patient presented with paralysis of one side of his face and one arm, difficulty speaking, blurred vision, and an intense headache. He and the doctor checked his vital signs, inserted an IV to keep him stable during the transfer, administered oxygen, alerted the receiving hospital to prepare for the transfer and activate the Stroke Code so that the team of neurologists and specialists would be ready upon their arrival, and communicated the exact time the symptoms began.

Thanks to the timely and effective intervention he received both in the ambulance and at the public hospital, and to treatment over several months by various specialists, including Faith as a physiotherapist who, at that time, already had extensive training in motor therapy for cerebrovascular patients, the patient recovered very well. Coincidentally, the patient was the former advisor to the Autonomous Government who maintained that unaccompanied minors should not be allowed to be taken in because most were criminals; words that reality and statistics categorically refuted. Instead, as he routinely stated, they should be deported and returned to their families because that was where they belonged; a belief he could not implement because national law prohibited it; and, following this line of thought, he eliminated the weekly allowance of fifteen euros that immigrant children in reception centers legally received. She never knew that two of these children were now two qualified professionals who, along with others, had helped ensure their recovery process ended successfully.

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"Stories without Mufflers" (2006 -)

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