

Dos Mundos, Un Solo Hogar



A Children's Book
by Fedena Jean



1

The number of words I know keeps going up and up. I know a lot of words in *Español*. I know even more in English. I can't count all the words I know, even if I count them on my fingers AND my toes.

There are words from the doctor. These are worlds like "heart" and "stethoscope."

There are words from the landlord. The landlord is the man who owns the house that my family lives in. These are words like "rent" and "deposit." Rent is the money that my family pays every month to be able to live in our house. It seems like a lot of money. The "deposit" is the money that my dad says we are supposed to get back when we move out. Dad says that he will be surprised if we get it.

There are words from lawyers. I have a hard time with a lot of these words, but I know others. These are important words like "immigration" and "green card."

There are words from grocery stores.

There are words from the bus driver.

There are words from teachers.

There are words from from every place you can think of going, words about everything you can think of doing. I am learning more and more of these words.

But the number of words that my mom knows stays the same. All the words that she knows are in Spanish. English is hard for her. *Mi mamá no habla Inglés.*

2

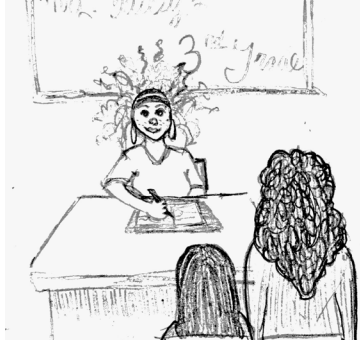


I am happy to help my mom when I can. I help her when she talked to the doctor, when she talks to the landlord, when she talks to lawyers and the people at the grocery stores, when she talks to the bus driver and my teachers. I want to help my mom. English is hard for her, but it is easy for me, so I help.

I learned that this is called being a “language broker.” People speak to me in English, and then, in Spanish, I tell my mom what they said. She says something to me in Spanish, and I use English to tell the people what she said. I am a translator. I talk and change one language into another one.

I am in the third grade.

3



At parent-teacher conferences, I sit down at the small table with my mom and Mrs. Bailey. Mrs. Bailey is my teacher. She is a nice woman with a colorful dress and bright red hair that seems to stick out in every direction. She has all my worksheets in a dark green folder.

Mom holds her purse in her lap. She clutches on to it tightly, as if she is afraid of losing it. It is like she thinks that if she lets it go she will never get it back.

Mrs. Bailey says to my mom, "Marta is doing very well in class, but she is so quiet. It is hard to get her to speak up."

But now it is Mom who says nothing, and I am the one doing the talking after all. I talk to Mom in Spanish, and she talks back to me in Spanish.

Mrs. Bailey looks at me.

She knows that I speak both Spanish and English, and she is waiting for me to translate what my mom said into English so that she can understand it. Mrs. Bailey only speaks English.

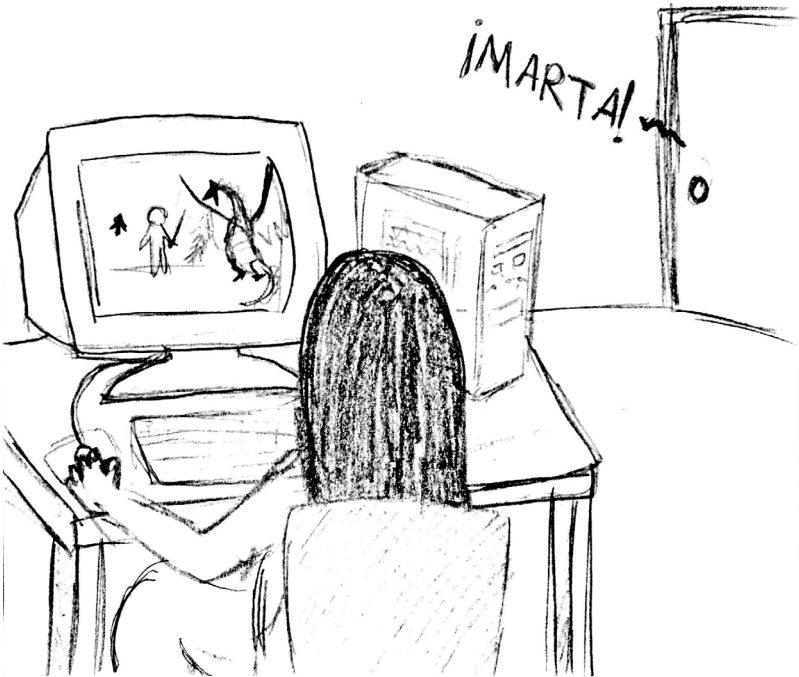
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I am sitting in my room, playing on my computer.

My mom shouts up the stairs, “Marta! Ya nos tenemos que ir.”

This means that we have to go somewhere and we are late.

I tell her that I want to get to a save point in the game I am playing, but she says to come right now.



5

I go to the doctor's office with my mom. We sit in a big room.

Waiting.

Waiting.

No talking. Everybody else in the waiting room is silent too. The TV plays in English. The magazines on the table are in English.

This is not a doctor's office for kids. There are no toys, and the magazines are for grownups, but my mom doesn't read them because she can't understand the words that are inside of them.

There are no other kids in the waiting room.

After what feels like 100 years, my mom and I go into the examination room. There is a nurse there. He smiles and is nice. The nurse says that he is going to do a blood test.

I tell this to Mom, in Spanish.

Mom says, "No me gusta el sangre." This means, "I don't like blood."

Then she says, "No me gustan los agujos." This means, "I don't like needles."

I tell my mom that it's okay. It won't hurt that bad. I love my mom and I want her to be happy.

6

I like school. Mrs. Bailey thinks that I don't talk very much in school. I have to talk sometimes, but not usually. It feels nice to just be quiet and listen sometimes. Sometimes it feels like I have to talk everywhere I go that isn't school. I am talking, and talking, no matter what.

I like school because I only have to think for myself. Nobody is relying on me to translate anything. Sometimes I wonder which language my thoughts are in. I don't know whether I think in English or Spanish. Sometimes I wonder if I am even thinking at all, but I must be because I am learning.

I especially like math because I can think in numbers, which don't have to be in English or Spanish. Numbers mean the same thing in any language. I am good at math.

7



I have friends at school. Their names are Sara, Maria, Leah, and Stephanie. Sara, Maria, Leah, and Stephanie are great.

Sara and Leah speak only English, and Maria speaks English and Spanish. Stephanie speaks mostly English, but a little bit of Spanish that she has learned from her grandmother.

But we don't really speak to each other all the time.

At recess, we are horses. We make horse noises, which are the same in any language. No one comes to talk to us or bother us because most people don't talk to horses.

We the horses dance and prance and eat grass. I rip a handful of grass out of the ground and put it in my mouth because that's what horses do.

(I don't swallow it though because I know I'm not really a horse and grass might make me sick).

8

I am at home with mom and dad when the telephone rings. Mom looks at it and then looks at me. I look at dad. He is tired from working all day. He has fallen asleep in front of the TV, watching Telemundo. Telemundo is a TV channel that is in Spanish. Most of the other channels are only in English. Cartoons are my favorite.

I don't want to wake my dad up, so I answer the phone.

The person on the other end asks for mom. I tell them that Mom doesn't speak English, but that she is standing right next to me and that I will tell her what the person wants. I will translate.

They person on the other end of the phone asks if there is any other adult who does speak English.

I look at Dad. He speaks English, but only when he is awake.

I say, "No."

The person on the other end of the telephone tells me words that I don't understand in English or Spanish. I do my best to tell them to mom afterwards.

Mom wakes up dad.

He looks funny and groggy, but he listens to the words again. Then he looks serious. Mom and Dad send me up to my room so they can talk.





Every night when I go to sleep, I have dreams. In my dreams, I am a horse again, but for real this time. In my dream I am running, running, running with the other horses. I don't talk to the other horses, but we know about each other, we know what we need without having to ask.

We need to run.

We need to eat grass

We need to look at the birds above us and the green mountains in the distance.

10

I have other sorts of dreams too. In these dreams our truck is broken, and I am at the mechanic's shop with my mom.

The mechanic says the names of car parts that I do not know how to translate into Spanish.

I don't even know the words in English. I don't know what the parts do.

In my dream, it is clear to me that the repairs and maintenance the mechanic needs to do will be expensive.

Mom clutches her purse tightly.

I try to take it from her, to pay the mechanic because we must have a car to live in this city. There might not be any city in the whole country where we can live without a car but in my dreams, Mom doesn't want to pay.

I try to tell her that we must give the mechanic some of what we have so that he can give us his services and his automotive knowledge. That way, he can have money to pay the rent on the house for his family. And we can have a truck so that we can go to the grocery store, to the doctor, to the school, to church, and everywhere else.

But in my dream my mom doesn't understand my words. I can't speak in Spanish anymore. I can only speak in English now. For some reason I have forgotten Spanish.

I know that I will never be able to speak to mom again.

And she knows this.

And Mom cries.

It is a very bad dream, but I am glad it is only a dream.

I'm not dreaming anymore. This is real life. At the grocery store Mom seems nervous and stressed out. Her eyes are red.

She pushes the cart around, and I pick up the food and put it in.

When we get to the counter, the cashier says how much the groceries will be. Mom looks at the number on the cash register and opens her purse and pays the bill.

We push the cart out to the truck (which is running fine in real life, not broken like it is in my dreams), and I load the bags into the cab, one at a time. I am careful so that I don't break the eggs or bruise the fruit.



12

In Mexico there are states, just like there are states in the USA. My parents were born in a state called Sinaloa. I have never been to Sinaloa. I have never even been to Mexico, but I know that Mexico is a part of me. I know that Mexico makes up a part of who I am.

The blood in my veins is Mexican, a mix of Spanish and indigenous. The words in my mind are American, a mix of Spanish and English.

I am at home here in the United States. I don't know if I would feel at home in Mexico. I am as at home in the USA as anyone, except for my mom and people like my mom. It is hard for them to feel at home when it is so hard for them to speak English. This is true even though they live in a house in an American neighborhood, or work at an American job like my dad does.

All their friends are Mexican, and they speak Spanish with their friends, but I am able to speak English and Spanish, one or the other or both, with everyone I know.

I am in America. I was born in America, and I know how to live in America.

I like my home.

13

Mom and I go to the hair salon. It smells like hair dyes and chemicals and cut hair. The hairstylist chews bubblegum. I like her.

I climb into the big chair and get my hair cut first. I tell the stylist that I want my thick black hair cut the way it already is, just shorter and cleaner. She laughs, but I don't know why.

Mom gets her hair cut next, and I stand by her chair running my fingers through my shorter, smoother hair.

My mom says to me in Spanish, "I want my hair cut to look like Katy Perry's"

I tell that to the stylist, and she nods and smiles and begins cutting.

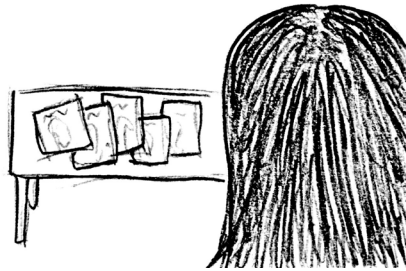
"How does it look in the back?" the stylist asks.

I ask mom and then tell the stylist how mom wants it.

"How does it look now?" the stylist asks.

"Like this in the bangs," I say, and I hold up my fingers like scissors. I mimic cutting mom's hair, and they both smile.

When mom opens her purse and pays, I remind her that she needs to give the stylist a tip. That's how things work here.



We go to the doctor again. This time Dad goes with us, and I stay out in the waiting room, flipping through the magazines that aren't for kids and reading an article about Katy Perry.

There are pictures of Katy Perry in the magazine. She has a new hairstyle. It doesn't look anything like her old hair style, which is also mom's new hairstyle.

When Mom and Dad come out of the examination room, they are both crying a little bit. The doctor said that Mom is sick.

15

In America, lots of people get sick. Almost everybody gets sick at some point in their life. People all over the world get sick. They go to the doctor and find out what's wrong. Even when people speak the same language as their doctor, it is hard to be sick. Being sick can be scary and sad.

It is even scarier to be sick if you don't speak the same language as your doctor.

16

In school, Mrs. Bailey is so happy with me. I know the answers to the questions she asks, even the hard ones. I even know the answers to some that my other classmates don't know. I feel good.

Mrs. Bailey asks, "How do you know everything? How do you learn so fast?"

I shrug my shoulders and say that I like learning. Learning is easy.

Mrs. Bailey smiles at me and says that she is proud of me.

I try to smile back, but I think about Mom and Dad's tears, and I don't really smile, but just sort of pull my mouth into a tight line and say "Thank you."

17

I go to the doctor more times with my mom and dad. Sometimes they go without me and let me stay at home and play on my computer or do my home-work. Sometimes, when they come home Mom looks as though she has been crying. Sometimes she doesn't look sad at all. Life keeps going as it always has.





Dad is smiling, watching Univision. His fútbol team is winning. He is jumping to his feet and shouting, just like all the people in the stadium. The stadium is far away, in Sinaloa, but it is also here in our living room.

Dad forgets for a minute that our living room is not Sinaloa. He feels at home in his home.

I smile, and I look over at mom. She is smiling too.

I have another dream. And in this dream I am sitting on a grassy hill with my mom and dad. We are sitting on a blanket eating a picnic and smiling. The sun is warm on my face. We are sitting and eating and having a nice time.

Then, in my dream, horses start galloping toward us from every direction. They come up and stand around our blanket. I am not scared. I love horses.

The horses start talking in English and Spanish, but they can all understand each other. Some of the horses are from Mexico. Some are from America, but they are all our family



20

Mom keeps going to the doctor. I keep thinking that something bad will happen, but it hasn't happened yet. I don't know if it ever will. I think that Mom is getting better.

Mom keeps taking me to the grocery store, to the hair stylist's, to the post office, to the DMV, to all the places that she needs to go and talk to the people who will help her get things done here in America. I meet new people. Sometimes they are grumpy or angry because they don't want to be at work, but mostly they are nice to me. Mom is nice to me, of course, because she is my mom, and she loves me.

The number of words I know in both languages keeps going up and up. I still don't know what language I think in, but it seems like my number of thoughts keeps going up and up. It seems like I am able to think about more things, the things that the words represent, that I didn't even know existed before.

Dad comes home from work.

Mom keeps going to the doctor.

Mrs. Bailey keeps telling me that she is proud of me.

And I keep learning more and more.

It is easy because I am at home, with my family, in America.

THE END.