



ESL

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AN OTHERWORLD
FLASH STORY

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JULIE STROLLED BETWEEN the tables, watching her students learn. They were doing a cards game in pairs. One student would read a question, and the other student would have to give an answer as quickly as they could. It didn't matter if their answer was true. What mattered was if they used the correct grammar.

She stopped at a table where two eight-year-old boys were sitting. Alberto was like many of her students. He was from a family that primarily spoke Spanish. Most of the children in the classroom were in a similar situation.

Arkeda, Alberto's partner, was different. Julie had gotten very good at guessing her students' origins from the sound of their first languages and accents, but Arkeda had stumped her. His guardian, a woman named Dominique, claimed she didn't know where he was from either.

Wherever he was from, Arkeda was learning quickly. She'd had to start at the beginning with him, teaching him the alphabet and basic letter sounds. After just one lesson, he'd understood. Now, several

months later, he was the most fluent student in the room. He still had a long way to go, but Julie was sure he'd be done in a few months.

During the first few weeks, she'd been worried about Arkeda. She could tell something terrible had happened to him and that he was struggling emotionally. No matter what she tried, though, he refused to tell her anything.

Julie pushed away her reverie and listened to Alberto and Arkeda.

Alberto picked up a card. "Did you watch TV last night?" he read, words slow and careful. He looked down at the stopwatch next to him.

"Yes, I did!" Arkeda said with a grin.

Alberto nodded and wrote down the time from the stopwatch. "I think that was right."

"Yes, it was," Julie said. "Good job, boys."

"Thanks, Ms. Mouters!" they said.

Julie smiled at them and continued down the row.