

Fable

One hot Sunday morning Ursula awoke in a frenzy and announced to the family that she'd had a dream about sailboats. It had been a clear sign that they should go to the bay as soon as possible, while there was still time. Sundays mornings were usually for church, but Ursula was superstitious, especially when it came to dreams. She with preparing sandwiches and darted around the house, collecting sunscreen, towels, and of course a camera, in a canvas bag.

"Is Feo coming too, mama?" Esteban asked.

She opened a can of dog food and it plopped in the dog's bowl. Feo, an overweight pug-chihuahua mix, limped to the bowl and licked the brown lump of food, his milky eyes wandering blindly. "Not today, mijo. He's old and needs rest," she said.

Feo and Esteban had a special connection because they'd been born on exactly the same day. Once Feo was old enough, he became very protective of his human companion.

Esteban whistled for the dog. Usually Feo would wag his tail wildly and lick Esteban's toes, but recently he'd been losing his hearing. Esteban whistled again and the dog just kept licking the food with his slow tongue.

For ten minutes, Ursula argued with Isabelle, her elder child, because she didn't want to go. Ursula chided her about shirking her duty to her family. To her brother. Isabelle had other plans, she said.

Huffing, Ursula ushered Esteban into the car and they went to the bay, just the two of them. They found a shady spot with a picnic table, and Ursula flipped the brake levers on his wheelchair. She regretted making him wear the massive sombrero, it made him look like a mariachi cartoon character. But the doctor said that, since his immune system was poor, every precaution must be taken to protect his skin from the sun.

Sitting on the bench, she broke off pieces of a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and fed it to Esteban. He hadn't lost all motor movement in his hands yet, but he couldn't do sandwiches anymore. He chewed slowly and needed frequent sips of water because his salivary glands no longer functioned properly.

In the bay, the crystal blue water was streaked with the wakes of yachts, motorboats, and catamarans. Ursula knew that Esteban especially loved catamarans.

"Mama?"

"Yes, mijo."

"Did you know that catamarans have two hulls? It makes them faster than regular, sailboats. And they can do better tricks."

"Be sure to chew." Ursula made him drink from the water bottle. "Where did you learn that?"

"Papa told me."

Esteban's father had always wanted a sailboat but could never afford one. Sailing was the only thing he ever talked to Esteban about. When he found out Esteban was sick, he

stuck around for a month and a half before he, and all of his possessions from the house, vanished without a trace. Not long after that Ursula was served with divorce papers. She never asked for an explanation. She hated him for being weak. He wasn't strong enough to deal with Esteban's condition. Wasn't man enough to face the truth, that he would outlive his son.

Ursula and Esteban watched the boats for hours until the heat of the day had soaked her blouse through. She was tossing sandwich wrappers and empty water bottles into the canvas bag when her cell phone chimed.

She answered. It was Isabella. She was crying.

Esteban's sombrero had fallen into his lap and he was trying to pawing it with his hands, trying to pick it up.

Ursula stepped away, out of earshot. "What's wrong?"

"It's Feo. Something's not right. He's not getting up."

"Maybe he's just asleep," she said.

"No, Mama, I think he's dead."

Ursula sighed and touched her forehead. It was burning hot from the sun.

"I'm sorry, Mama."

"Oh mija, it's not your fault."

"No, I mean... I remember what you said one time. Something about Feo and Esteban."

Ursula knew what she meant. She and Isabella had been in an argument. Isabella had forgotten to feed Feo. Ursula snapped back, saying that if Feo died, Esteban would soon follow. Looking back, it was a horrible thing to say to her daughter, but secretly Ursula believed that the fates of her son and his dog were intertwined. They were born on the same day, after all, and neither of them had a better friend.

"We're coming home right now," said Ursula. She returned to her son. It took all of her willpower to force a smile.

Ursula knew this could well be their last trip to the bay. In the previous weeks, Esteban's immune system had been at an all time low. And now this news about poor Feo. Who knew what it would do to Esteban?

"Who was it Mama?"

Ursula turned her head so he wouldn't see that her eyes had welled up. The catamarans continued to sail easily along the coastline.

Blinking away the stinging in her eyes, she replaced the sombrero onto Esteban's head. Then she sat on the bench of the picnic table and put her hand around her son

"Let's stay a just while longer," she said.