

A Peculiar Encounter

Courtney Levitt

Department of Biology
Lake Forest College
Lake Forest, Illinois 60045

The first thing I noticed were her glasses. Large and magnifying, they almost fooled me into believing the innocent green eyes staring widely at me were just as overwhelming. The young girl watching me a few feet away had been tugging on her mother's coat, seemingly trying to approach me. I smile at her and she shyly turns toward her mother. I currently was waiting at the train station for the daily commute to my restaurant in town. The station was quickly filling up. Most of the to be passengers are adults, varying from just out of high school to somebody's grandpa. A few minutes roll by and I look back at the girl. She notices my glance and confidently, albeit slowly, walks towards me. She opens her mouth.

My translator, David, turns towards me and signs, "Hello! My name is Heidi, what's your name?" I look back at Heidi and turn towards David. I sign, "Hello Heidi, my name is Danny." As David translates to her, Heidi's eyes somehow grow even larger than they already were. She asks, "May I ask why you use sign language?" Bending down to her level, I sign to David, "I have a condition called Usher's Syndrome. It means I was born deaf. I will eventually lose my sight as well." Heidi's face expresses shock, and she nods her head several times while speaking, "I'm sorry, I didn't know. I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings by asking. May I give you a hug?" Smiling, I nod my head up and down to indicate my approval. This girl is quite peculiar. It feels as though I am being reacquainted with an old friend. Heidi tells me, "I have a condition too. It's called William's syndrome. I'm really good at playing music!" Ah, there it is. The way she looks makes so much more sense. Her upturned nose, her large, puffy eyes, and those pudgy cheeks.

"You know Heidi, I have a friend who is just like you. He comes by my restaurant every day to eat my spicy shrimp gumbo." Heidi glows with happiness, and exclaims, "Wow, you do? He must be good at music too! All my friends play instruments at my summer camp. But they don't like loud noises, especially when they're trying to talk to each other." As David finishes signing, I sign back, "Do any of your friends like spicy Cajun food? I'd love for them to eat at my restaurant. All my staff are deaf and communicate using sign language, just like me. It's very quiet in our restaurant, and we like it that way. Even President Clinton enjoyed my food! The secret service agents surrounded the restaurant as he pulled up in his black limo. It was so funny to see how serious everything was. President Clinton shook my hand, thanked me for the meal, and was on his way. Apparently, his whole crew was jealous of how good it smelled!" Heidi grins and tells me, "We like music, and we like it quiet. Maybe we can play for you, and everyone can dance!"

"Heidi, I would love for your friends to play music for us. Even though we cannot hear, we still like to dance in our own, expressive way. We must be very expressive in our facial features too. With just words, you can't tell how the other person feels. But with sign language, we let the other person know how we feel with our face. When we lose our vision, we still express ourselves. We can sign to each other by feeling the signs with our hands. We adapt to our quiet world, and we always look out for each other. Do you look out for your friends Heidi?" Heidi nods her head. I then signed, "You see Heidi, even though it can be difficult at first, we conquer our downsides." Heidi then tells me, "I understand. My mother says I am emotionally sensitive, which means I can pick up on small details that other people might miss. Even though my hearing is sensitive, I can use it to my advantage as a musician! My friend Christian's blood doesn't pump properly; he has an arrhythmia. But despite that, Christian is an amazing pianist! He was able to play 'Beautiful Dreamer' for the first time just by listening to it." By the time David finished translating, the train arrived. Heidi looks back to her mother. "I have to go, Danny, it was so good to meet you!" She quickly hugs me, then skirts back to her mother. I smile at the two of them as they embark the train, and I soon make my way to my seat.

What a blessing it is to have met such a fine girl. She speaks almost as well as I do, well, if I could speak. From the beginning, I could tell she was different. Despite the obvious facial features, something

about the way she held herself set her apart from any other child I've met. The train bumps along the tracks, each bump jolting this strange, wonderful interaction deep into my memory. She does remind me of my good friend, Tom. Everyone has told me William's syndrome affects the brain in a way much different than my own. Although I cannot hear, they can hear with extraordinary precision. They are pitch perfect, and I am tone deaf. I wonder if their sense of taste is as good as my own. It must be hard on her mother, having a girl so young and trusting in strangers. If she were my own, I would be worried sick, constantly watching over her and making sure she doesn't make friends in the wrong places. I look out the window. Friends in the wrong places... well, maybe it would be better to have such a perspective in a world that can be so cruel. I pray she never gets taken advantage of, although her advanced vocabulary may prove helpful in the future. Trees blur together as I struggle to make out the details through these tunnel vision goggles of life. A strange day indeed.

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