

Away
With
Words

For Naia – finally!

LITTLE TIGER

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Away With Words

Sophie
Cameron

LITTLE TIGER

LONDON

One

The head teacher had *slugs* on his face. Lime-green, right in the middle of his chin.

Not the animal – the word.

The word *slugs* stuck to his chin in lime-green letters.

“Welcome ~~~~~, Gala,” Mr Watson said.
“~~~~~ school.”

At least, that was how it sounded to me. I tried to read the missing words as they fell from the head teacher’s mouth – they were bright and bold, egg-yolk yellow – but I was too distracted by the *slugs* on his face. Why had he been talking about slugs so early in the morning? Maybe he was a gardener and was worried about his vegetables. Maybe he stepped on one on his way into school and felt bad about it. Maybe he’d eaten them for breakfast. Maybe that was normal in Scotland.

Mr Watson must have noticed me staring because he brushed his hand over his chin, and the word *slugs* fell on to the desk. “I think you ~~~~~,” he told me. “~~~~~ change, but ~~~~~.”

The sentence dropped

piece

by

piece

from Mr Watson's mouth and disappeared into the pile of words in front of him. It wasn't even nine o'clock yet, and his desk already looked like he'd spat out half a dictionary! I saw a few words I knew – a small grey *cold* caught behind the space bar on the keyboard, *music* in cursive purple letters by his coffee cup – but I still had no clue what he was saying.

Beside me, Papa smiled and nodded. “Gala is very ~~~~~,” he said, putting his hand on my shoulder. His voice slipped into that funny up-and-down thing it always did when he spoke English, as if his vocal cords were riding a carousel. “I am sure ~~~~~ happy here.”

The word *happy* caught on the collar of Papa's jacket. It was a light blue lie. I wasn't happy to be here. I didn't want to be in Scotland at all. It had only been five days since we'd moved here from Cadaqués, a little town by the sea in the north-east of Spain, but I already missed it so much it hurt. I wanted to be back at my old school, racing my friend Pau down the corridor and getting into trouble for talking too much in class. I wanted to go home.

As words spilled from the head teacher's mouth, there was a knock on the door. Mr Watson said a large orange, “Yes?”, and two girls stepped into the office. They were both around my age, almost twelve. One was White and

very tall with freckles and light brown hair, and the other was Black and short with smiley brown eyes and braces on her teeth. The tall one said something, and Mr Watson nodded.

“Thank you, ~~~~~. Gala, this is ~~~~~ and ~~~~~,” he said, turning back to me. “They ~~~~~.”

The girls smiled awkwardly at me as Mr Watson talked. There was a word he kept saying, something I’d never heard before. I realized from the way he was pointing to the girls that it was a name. When Papa nudged me to reply, I quickly scanned the desk and found it dangling from the tip of a pencil in Mr Watson’s pen pot:

Eilidh.

“Hello –” I tried to sound out the word – “Eyelid?”

The girls blinked at me, then the tall one’s eyes went wide, and she said a lot of bright pink words very, very quickly.

Seeing I was lost, Papa finally switched to Catalan, the language we spoke at home. It turned out *Eilidh* was their name – both of them, Eilidh Chisholm and Eilidh Obiaka – and it was pronounced ‘A-lee’.

Mr Watson and Papa both chuckled at my mistake, and the girls giggled too. It wasn’t a mean sort of laughter, but I felt my cheeks go red. Why bother spelling it E-I-L-I-D-H if they weren’t going to pronounce half the letters? That made no sense whatsoever.

Outside Mr Watson’s office, a bell rang. He and Papa stood up and moved towards the door, so I did the same. From the way the Eilidhs lingered by the doorway, I guessed

they were here to show me to my first class. The one with braces, Eilidh O, gave me another smile and stepped aside to let me into the corridor.

It was noisy now, dozens of kids laughing or swinging their bags or shoving last-minute breakfasts into their mouths as they went to their classes. This place was bigger than my last school, and with everyone rushing around it felt enormous – there must have been twice as many kids here. But that wasn't the reason my mouth fell open.

It was because of the words.

Hundreds and thousands of words falling out of mouths

and flying through the air,

bouncing off

walls

and

fluttering

to

the

floor.

what
ed
red
power
nesday
And
now
run
which
like
friends
when
we're
imagi
noti

Mr Watson was pointing towards the corridor behind reception, but I couldn't catch what he was saying. There were too many words whirling round us, and I couldn't pick out the ones I needed. Papa explained in Catalan that the Eilidhs were in most of my classes, and they would show me to registration. I didn't even know what 'registration' meant. It sounded like it might be something to do with computers or filing cabinets.

"OK, Gala?" Papa touched my hair and smiled. "Have fun. I'll see you at home."

Papa shook Mr Watson's hand, said a bright blue goodbye to the Eilidhs, then waved to me again before walking towards the main doors. Ever since we arrived in Scotland last week, all the English words that I'd learned at my old school and from Papa and TV shows had been jumbled up in my head, a puzzle that I couldn't put together. But, as I followed the two Eilidhs towards the next classroom, a few pieces finally connected.

This is NOT my home.