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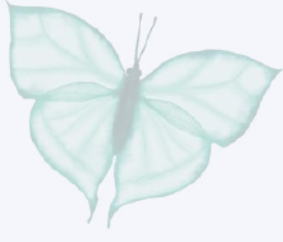
Stories 4 Wings

2024-1-ES01-KA220-ADU-000255317

Active Citizenship

The Post Office



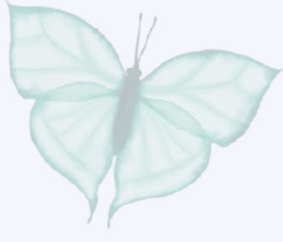


I don't like public offices. I go there when I can't help it because every time I go, I feel like I'm entering a suspended dimension, made of waiting, plastic chairs, luminous numbers slowly scrolling on a display, the sighs of people who don't want to be there. That day, I was there to pick up a package that had been lost in the delivery, and unfortunately, I'd forgotten to make an appointment, so I had to take a number from the machine and get in line. My ticket indicated a long wait: more than twenty numbers before my turn.

I sat down, a book in my hands that I wasn't going to read. Meanwhile, I looked around at the people around me: some were tapping their phones, accidentally playing a video at full volume; some were staring into space; some were talking intently to the person next to them; some were huffing and puffing with a resigned expression. The routine of any office on any given Monday morning. At a certain point, a woman wearing a dark headscarf entered, accompanied by a boy of about eight years old, whom she held by the hand. He clutched a small yellow backpack, while she clutched a rather bulky blue folder. They sat two rows ahead, and the way she leafed through the pages revealed a strong sense of anxiety: her hands were shaking and her brows were furrowed with obvious effort.

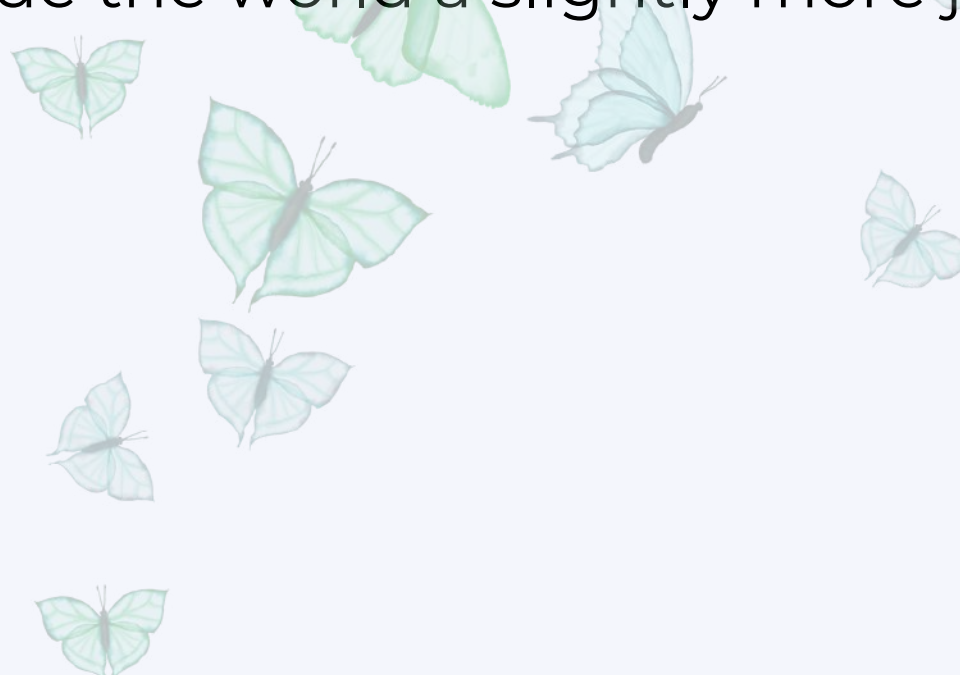
When what must have been her number appeared on the display board, she hesitantly stood up. The boy followed her, like a trusting shadow. They approached the counter, where an employee greeted them with tired courtesy. The woman began to speak, but the words came out in fragmented, at times incomprehensible Italian. The employee's face stiffened: not out of malice, but from the fatigue that comes when you find yourself communicating without being able to understand each other. The boy tried to translate but knew only a few phrases. The mother showed the documents, trying to explain, but her eyes revealed panic: any mistake could mean postponing everything, missing an opportunity, returning home without what she needed, and having to start over again in the immense bureaucracy that accompanies requesting documents. I watched the scene from my chair, noticing that other people were also watching what was happening, as curious as I was to know how the story would end.





It was then that something happened that struck me deeply. A man sitting at the back of the room stood up and approached. He was in his forties, wearing a leather jacket and a backpack slung over one shoulder. "Excuse me," he said to the woman and then to the clerk, "can I help you? I know a little of the language." We all looked at him. The woman stared at him in disbelief, then nodded with relief. He sat next to her and began to translate, calmly and patiently. The woman's broken sentences transformed into clear requests; the clerk's doubts were answered. Every time the official explained a step, the man turned to the woman and repeated it in his own language, making sure she understood. I watched, enthralled. There was no ostentation. Just an ordinary citizen who decided, in that moment, to become a bridge between two worlds, between two languages. The child looked at him with wide eyes, as if the man had appeared by magic. The mother, as the minutes passed, relaxed.

Finally, the official handed out the corrected forms, explained the next steps, and smiled at all three of them. It took just one person to transform a situation of confusion into an act of welcome. When the woman turned to thank her, she couldn't find the words in the local language. She placed her hand over her heart and lowered her head. The man responded with a simple gesture: a smile and a "You're welcome, that's why we're here." Then he returned to his seat, as if nothing had happened. I remained seated, my closed book on my knees, but I felt a lump in my throat: I had witnessed a gesture that was both small and gigantic. I wondered how many of us could have done the same. How many knew that language well enough to offer help. But then I realized it wasn't just a matter of skills: it was above all a matter of attentiveness. Of getting up from your seat when you see someone in need. The display board called my number. I stood up and went to the counter. But that scene remained in my mind: a woman regaining confidence, a child learning that solidarity exists, a man who, without proclamations, has made the world a slightly more just place.



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