

Manolito Four-Eyes



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The Number-One Bum

My name is Manolito García Moreno, but if you come to my neighborhood and ask the first guy that passes by, “Excuse me, please, Manolito García Moreno?”—one of two things will happen. The guy will shrug, or he’ll mutter something like: “Hey, beats me.”

That’s because nobody knows me as Manolito García Moreno, not even Big Ears López, and he’s my best friend; even though sometimes he can be a dog and a traitor (and other times, a dog traitor), he’s still my best friend and he’s a whole lotta cool.

In Carabanchel—that’s the name of my neighborhood in Madrid, in case I haven’t told you—everyone

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knows me as Manolito Four-Eyes. Everyone who *knows* me, of course. People who don't know me don't know that I've worn glasses since I was five years old. Well, that's their loss.

I was named Manolito after my dad's truck, and the truck was named after my dad, whose name is Manolo. My dad was named after his dad, and so on back to the beginning of time. In other words, in case Steven Spielberg wants to know, the first velociraptor was called Manolo, and that's the way it went right on up until today. Until Manolito García number one—that's me, the Number-One Bum. That's what my mother calls me in certain crucial moments, and she doesn't call me that because she's a sociologist researching the origins of humanity. She calls me it when she's about to start one of her world-famous lectures. It bugs me that she calls me Number-One Bum, and it bugs her that people call me Four-Eyes. Obviously, different things bug us, even though we're from the same family.



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I like that they call me Four-Eyes. At my school—which is called Diego Velázquez—anyone who's a little important has a nickname. Before I had a nickname, I used to cry plenty. When a bully started in on me at recess, he always ended up calling me Four-Eyes or Fat Glasses. Since I've officially become Manolito Four-Eyes, insulting me is a waste of time. They could call me Fathead, too, but it hasn't occurred to them yet, and you can bet I'm not about to give them any clues. The same thing happened to my pal Big Ears López; ever since he got his nickname, nobody really gets on his case about his ears.

One day Big Ears and I got into a kicking fight on the way home from school because he said he'd rather have his ears over my Coke-bottle glasses, and I said I'd rather have



my Coke-bottle glasses over his monkey-butt ears. He didn't like that "monkey butt" thing at all, but it's true—it's been certified by a notary. When it's cold out, his ears turn the same color as the monkeys' butts at the zoo. Big Ears' mom told him not to worry, because when you get older,

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your ears shrink, and if they don't shrink, a surgeon trims them, and all's well that ends well.

Big Ears' mom is a whole lotta cool because she's divorced and since she feels guilty, she never chews out Big Ears. She doesn't want him to have an even bigger trauma than the one currently being cured by Miss Esperanza, our school psychologist. My mom doesn't want me to have traumas either, but since she's not divorced, every now and again she chews me out, which is her specialty.

It's not just because she's my mom; the truth is, she's an expert like no other. My grandpa doesn't like how my mom chews me out, and he always tells her, "If you're gonna do it, do it later, woman." My grandpa calls her the Colonel, but only behind her back. He doesn't dare say it to her face, even though he's her dad. She's the Colonel for a reason.

My grandpa's cool; he's so cool, he's a whole lotta cool. Three years ago he moved back from his village, and my mom closed off the terrace with exposed aluminum and put in a sofa bed so that my grandpa and I could sleep out there. Every night I fold out the bed. It's a deadly pain, but I just grin and bear it because afterward my grandpa always gives me a ten-cent coin for my pig—it's not a real pig; it's a piggy bank—and I'm getting filthy rich.

Sometimes he calls me the crown prince, since he says that everything he has saved up from his pension will go to me. My mom doesn't like us to talk about death, but my

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grandpa says in the last year of his life, he plans on talking about whatever he wants.

My grandpa always says he wants to die before the year 2010; he doesn't feel like seeing what will happen in the next decade; and when it comes to decades, he's already had enough with this one. He's determined to die in 2009 from his bad prostate. He says he's spent so much time dealing with the pain-in-the-neck prostate, it would be a real drag to die from something else.

I've told him that I'd rather inherit all his pension without him dying, because sleeping on the terrace with my Grandpa Nicolás is so cool, it's a whole lotta cool. Every night we go to sleep with the radio on, and if my mom tries to turn it off, we wake up. That's just how we are. If my grandpa died, I'd have to share the terrace with the Bozo, and *that* would ruin all the fun.

The Bozo is my little baby brother, the only one I have. My mom doesn't like how I call him the Bozo (there's really no nickname that she gets a kick out of). Just to set the record straight, I started to call him that without realizing it. It wasn't one of those times when you do heavy thinking with your fists holding your head up so it won't explode. The nickname just popped out the day he was born:

My grandpa took me to the hospital. I was five years old. I remember because I had just broken in my first pair of glasses, and Our Nosy Neighbor Luisa was always saying,

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“It’s okay that his dad wears glasses, but that poor little thing, he’s only five.” Anyway, I went up to the crib and I put in my hand. I was going to open his eye, because Big Ears had told me that if my little brother had red eyes, that meant he was possessed by the devil. I went to do it, with the best of intentions, and the dude started to cry with that fake bawling of his. Then everyone jumped on me as if I were the one possessed, and for the first time I thought, “What a Bozo!” And it’s just one of those things that get stuck in your head.

So nobody can say I gave him the nickname on purpose. It was all him. He was born to bug me, and he deserves it.

Just like I deserve my grandpa calling me Manolito the New Joselito. It’s from my grandpa’s favorite song, which he taught me, called “The Bell Ringer.” It’s a really ancient song, from back when there was no bathroom in my grandpa’s house and the TV was “silent.” Some nights we play like I am Joselito, who was the ancient boy who sang the song in the past, and I sing it and then I make like I’m flying and things like that—because if I don’t play like I’m Joselito, once we finish singing “The Bell Ringer,” it turns into a bore galore. Not only that—my grandpa’s eyes well up because of how old “The Bell Ringer” is and because the ancient kid ends up in jail, and I get embarrassed that my grandpa cries, what with how old he is, over such an ancient kid.

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Summing it up, if you go to Carabanchel and you ask for Manolito the New Joselito, they’re not gonna tell you anything or they might point you to the jail in my neighborhood, just to be funny, which is a habit people have.

They won’t know who Manolito García Moreno is, or the New Joselito, but everyone will give you the ins and also the outs of Manolito, otherwise known on this side of the River Manzanares as Four-Eyes, and even better-known in his own house as “Look who’s talking, the Number-One Bum.”

