



XI TORNEO ESCOLAR DE LECTURA EN PÚBLICO 2024

GANGSTA GRANNY

“No!” shouted Granny as her hearing aid began whistling furiously.
 “Yes!” shouted Ben.
 “No!”
 “Yes!”
 “Nooo!”
 “Yeeees!”
 “NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO OOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!”
 “YEEES!”

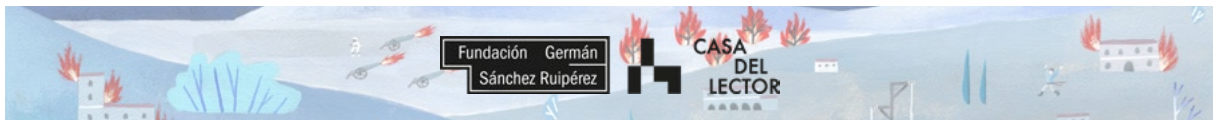
This went on for a few minutes, but to save paper and therefore the trees and therefore the forests and therefore the environment and therefore the world I have tried to keep it short.

“There is absolutely no way I am letting a boy of your age come on a heist with me! Especially not to steal the Crown Jewels! And most important of all it’s impossible! It can’t be done!” exclaimed Granny.

“There must be a way...” pleaded Ben.
 “Ben, I said ‘no’ and that’s final!”
 “But-”
 “No buts, Ben. No. ‘N’ and ‘O’ spells ‘no’.”

Ben was bitterly disappointed, but the lady was not for turning.
 “I’d better go then,” he said, despondently.

Granny looked a little downcast too. “Yes dear, you’d better, your mummy and daddy will be very worried about you.”



“They won’t be-”

“Ben” Home! Now!”

Ben was sad to see that Granny was becoming like one of the boring grown-ups again, just when she’d started to become interesting. Still, he did what she said. Apart from anything else, he didn’t want to make his parents suspicious, so he raced home and climbed up the drainpipe to his bedroom window, before rushing downstairs to the living room.

Unsurprisingly, though, Mum and Dad hadn’t been worried about where Ben was at all. They had been too busy planning their son’s rise to dancing superstardom to notice he was gone.

Dad had been calling and calling the national under-twelve dance competition hotline until finally he got through and secured his son a place. Mum was right, the competition was at the town hall in just a couple of weeks’ time. There was no time to lose, so Mum had been working every waking moment on her son’s Love Bomb outfit.

“How’s the rehearsals going, boy?” asked Dad. “You look like you’ve worked up quite a sweat.”

“Fine, thank you, Dad,” lied Ben. “I really am getting something really spectacular together for the big night.”

Ben cursed his runaway mouth.

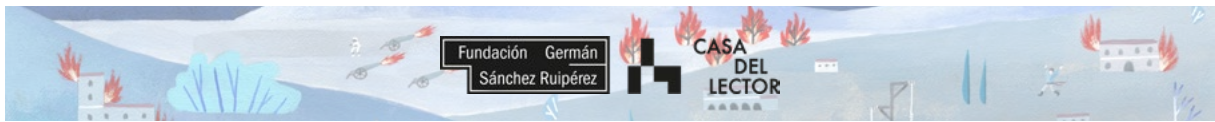
Something spectacular?

He’d be lucky if he didn’t fall over and knock himself out.

“Well, we can’t wait to see it! Not long to go!” said Mum, not even looking up from the sewing machine, as she stitched a row of hundreds of sparkling red hearts down the side of his Lycra trousers.

“I’d kind of like to practise on my own for now, Mum, you know...” Ben gulped nervously. “Until it’s completely ready to show you.”

“Yes, yes, we understand,” said Mum.



Ben sighed with relief. He had bought himself a bit more time.

But only a little bit.

In a couple of weeks Ben was still going to have to perform a solo dance routine for the whole town.

He sat on his bed, and reached underneath it for his stash of Plumbing Weeklys. Flicking through an issue from the previous year, he saw that it contained a feature entitled ‘A Short History of Plumbing’, that focused on some of London’s oldest sewage pipes. Ben frantically turned the pages to find it.

Eureka! There it was.

Hundreds of years ago the River Thames, on the banks of which the Tower of London is situated, had been an open sewer. (Technically speaking, that means there was a lot of wee and poo in it.)

Buildings along the riverside simply had big pipes leading from their toilets straight into the river. In the magazine were detailed historical diagrams of various famous buildings in London, showing where their old sewage pipes connected to the river.

And...

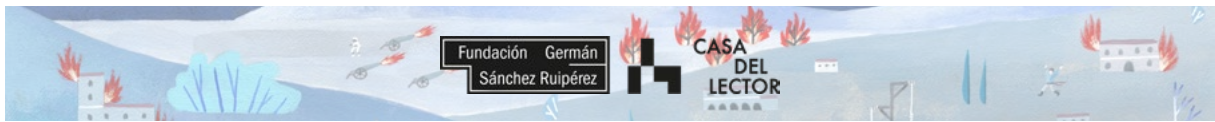
Ben’s finger ran down the article...

Yes! A chart of the sewer pipes at the Tower of London.

This could be the key to stealing the Crown Jewels. One pipe was nearly a metre wide, big enough for a child to swim up. And maybe big enough for a little old lady too!

The article also said that, when the plumbing systems were modernised and proper sewers installed a lot of the old pipes were simply left where they were, because it was simpler than digging them up.

Ben’s head spun as he thought about what this meant. It was possible – just possible – that there was still a huge pipe leading from the Thames into the Tower of London, and that most people, apart from very keen plumbing enthusiasts, had forgotten it was there. Ben wouldn’t have known himself, if he hadn’t been a long-term subscriber to Plumbing Weekly.



He and Granny could swim up that pipe, and get into the Tower...

Mum and Dad were wrong! he thought. Plumbing can be exciting.

Of course, it was a sewage pipe, which wasn't ideal, but any poo and wee still in it would be hundreds of years old.

Ben didn't know if that was a good or bad thing.

At that moment, he heard a creak in the floorboards and his bedroom door flew open. His mum burst in holding a big piece of Lycra that looked ominously like his 'Love Bomb' outfit.

Ben quickly concealed the magazine under his bed, which made him look incredibly guilty.

"I was just going to get you to try this on," said Mum.

"Oh yes," said Ben, as he sat on his bed awkwardly, his heels pushing the remaining Plumbing Weeklys out of sight of Mum's prying eyes.

"What's that?" she said. "What did you hide when I came in? Is that Nuts magazine?"

"No," said Ben, swallowing his guilt. This looked way worse than it was. It looked like he was hiding a naughty magazine under the bed.

"It's nothing to be ashamed of, Ben. I think it's healthy you are expressing an interest in girls."

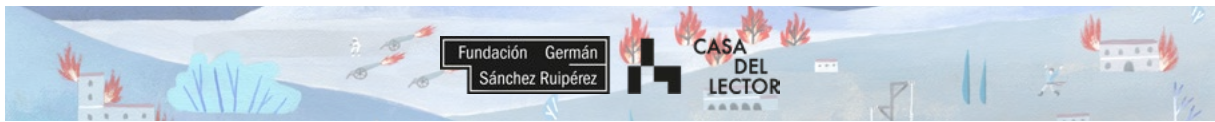
Oh no! Thought Ben. My mum's going to talk to me about girls!

"There's nothing embarrassing about being interested in girls, Ben."

"Yes there is! Girls are gross!"

"No, Ben, it's the most natural thing in the world..."

She's just not stopping!



“THE DINNER IS NEARLY READY, LOVE!” came a shout from downstairs. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING UP THERE?”

“I AM TALKING TO BEN ABOUT GIRLS!” Mum shouted back.

Ben was so red that if he opened his mouth wide enough he might be mistaken for a postbox.

“WHAT?” cried Dad.

“GIRLS!” shouted Mum. “I AM TALKING TO OUR SON ABOUT GIRLS!”

“OH, RIGHT!” Dad shouted back. “I’LL TURN THE OVEN OFF.”

“So, Ben, if you ever need to-”

BRING BRING. BRING BRING.

It was Mum’s mobile phone going off in her pocket.

“Sorry dear,” she said, placing the handset to her ear. “Gail, can I call you back? I am just talking to Ben about girls. OK, thanks, bub-bye.”

She hung up the phone and turned to Ben.

“Sorry, where was I? Oh yes, if you ever need to have a little chat with me about girls, then please do. You can trust me to be very discreet...”