Once, long ago, in a very small town in Spain, an orphan boy took up residence just outside the gate of a palace which housed a great King. No one had seen the King, for he spent his days inside the castle, and if he ever did leave it was not often and he always dressed in disguise.

Since the boy rarely left the spot by the entry gate, he knew those who entered and left the courts. The boy thought that being a King was an honorable duty and he took it upon himself to ask all who would enter if he could polish their shoes.

“All who beg to be in the presence of our King should do so in perfect attire and clean soles on their feet,” the boy would say.

Now there was one thing about the boy that went unnoticed by all who passed by...he was blind. The boy was made orphan from the time he could walk; seen as a disgrace by his family he was left near the courts of the King in hopes that he would be looked after by the guards who watched over the gates.

As the years passed, the boy grew to be a familiar face at the gates and all those who came to enter stopped so the boy could polish their shoes. One day, it just so happened that the King was not able to sneak past the boy like he had done for all of the nine years before and the boy stopped him.

“Excuse me, kind sir, but may I please polish your shoes, for those who beg to be in the presence of our King should do so in perfect attire and clean soles on their feet.”

The King was taken aback by the gesture that the young boy offered in his honor and each day after that he would sneak out in his disguise just to see the boy. The boy didn’t know that the man he spoke with was indeed, the King but he welcomed a friend with kindness and enthusiasm.

The King and the boy spent much time together and they talked and they laughed and dreamed.

“If I could be anything and I could see with my eyes,” the boy said, “I’d be the brave guard who stands at the gate of the King and I would protect him.”

Many times, the boy confided in the King and expressed his sadness that he could not see. The King always reassured him and told him the story of a boy who was like him.

“Once, long ago in a very small town in Spain, an orphan boy took up residence just outside the gate of a palace which housed a great King. No one had seen the King, for he spent his days inside the castle; and if he ever did leave it was not often and he always dressed in disguise…” and the story continued but always stopped at the same place.

“Please tell me how the story ends!” the little orphan boy would beg but his friend in disguise always stopped at the part where the orphan boy longed to be the guard at the gate.

“I can’t tell you how the story ends,” the King would say but he never answered
why. He’d always remind the boy that no what his duty was that he should always persist on and work with pride and never wish to be in another’s shoes.

Many more years passed and as the boy grew into a man he never grew tired of the King in disguise’s company. He’d sit outside the gates from morning to night shining shoes until his friend would come and sit beside him. The King looked forward to their visits just as much as the boy for the two had become best friends. Every once in a while the King would mention the story that he used to tell but he’d always leave it at the same ending as all the years before and the two would laugh and laugh.

“I know, I know,” the boy would say. “Never wish to be in another’s shoes.”

One particular day the King came to see the boy at the usual time but the boy wasn’t there. The King was perplexed since the boy was always there so he waited for a quite some time. When the boy didn’t show up, the King slipped through the gate and waited until morning to see if he returned.

The next morning, the boy was sitting there in the same place he had for all the years before. He polished shoes and at the end of the day he counted every coin that had been left for him. The boy was so well-known that he often received coins from all those who entered and exited the courts. For the first time ever, the boy began to think about leaving the gates and using the money collected to finally find a place to call home. Later that evening, he discussed his plans with the King in disguise. The King listened but offered no advice.

A few days later, while visiting the boy, the King made mention of the old story again.

“I think it’s time I share the ending of the story with you, boy,” said the King, and he began the story as he always did.

“Oh, once long ago, in a very small town in Spain, an orphan boy took up residence just outside the gate of a palace which housed a great King...”

The King in disguise continued until he reached the point where he always stopped before; he paused and then continued.

“...the little orphan boy longed for many years to have the ability of sight so that he could one day have a chance to guard the gates that protected the King. He met a friend and over the years the friend came to see him at the setting of the sun each day. The friend was special but the little blind boy didn’t know just how special he was; but he would soon find out. You see, the friend that the little boy confided in every night from the time he was a boy until he became a man was not just an ordinary man. He was a great King dressed in disguise. The King in disguise wanted to show the little blind boy his thanks for his kindness and willingness to offer himself to his service for so many years. But he had to wait until the right time.”

At this time, the King stopped telling the story and he took the boy who was now a man, by the hand and he led him to the guard at the gate. At the King’s command the guard opened the gate and the boy and the King in disguise entered into the King’s court.

“For many years I watched you work, most days without much food and nowhere to sleep but the street, but you never complained. You worked out of the
kindness of your heart and although you longed for greater things you never wa-
vered in your strength to persist. I thank you for all that you did for me and I offer
you a place in my palace.”

With that, the boy accepted the invitation. The King removed his disguise but
the blind boy couldn’t see. He laughed and teased the King, “you may have been a
King in disguise but I could not see.”

The King and the boy reigned together for many years and one day while the
boy was returning from a visit to town, he was stopped by a voice at the gate.

“Excuse me, kind sir, but may I please polish your shoes? Those who beg to be
in the presence of our King should do so in perfect attire and clean soles on their
feet.”

The boy stopped.

“You can polish my shoes and while you polish them, I will tell you a story…
Once, long ago, in a very small town in Spain, an orphan boy took up residence just
outside the gate of a palace which housed a great King.”