

Find X [C]

The sky was a pastel pink, slowly fading into the blue haze of the evening while the strongest of the space lights cut through the creeping night. As the sun sank into the horizon, the park was still alive: children in groups of three playing Ring Around the Rosie, couples enjoying the evening air, and a few loners scattered throughout. Slicing through the middle of the park, a creek lightly rolled off of the rocks in the bed, producing a faint gurgle. Connecting the two sides of the park was a simple bridge, with the parallel aesthetic of an equals sign. Next to it, under one of the many weeping willows, Xavier slouched on the rough bench, his emotions reflected by the tree above him.

From his vantage point, one half of the park spanned in front of him, while the other tucked itself behind him. He could see three groups of children playing Ring Around the Rosie, with three kids in each group. Though his mind wanted to drown itself in his sorrows, he couldn't help but notice the beauty in their joy. Such a simple game, and yet it brought such excitement to the youngsters. Their high-pitched giggles were contagious, and soon Xavier couldn't help but grin. He even began to chuckle as they called out, "We all fall down!" And then it stopped. The laughter was cut in two by a little boy's shout of pain—his palm had met the jagged edge of a broken beer bottle as he fell to the ground. His hand was turning crimson as his heart kept supplying the fresh cut with warm blood.

When Xavier reached the boy, he found the wound worse than he had expected. His first aid training kicked in as he applied pressure to the wound. After two calls for help, older kids from the other side of the park came running over. One identified himself as the boy's older brother and soon all the kids were off to their homes, always traveling in what appeared to be

groups of three. Just like that, six groups of three people ventured out onto their next adventure, leaving each side of the park with nine fewer inhabitants.

Xavier slowly made his way back to the bench, thankful the excitement was over. There had been no one thanking him for checking on the boy. That was fine with Xavier; he was an advocate for leading by example and didn't help others for the recognition—that's not the purpose of assisting others. Someone was in need, so he stepped in, and he wished that the rest of society would start doing the same, worrying about those around them and aiding others instead of just themselves.

Sinking into his former position, Xavier slowly cooled down from his internal rant as the soft hum of insects and the gurgle of the stream crept into his ears. The sun had finally gone to sleep and the soft glow of the moon shone among the remaining park-dwellers, complimented by the speckles of stars—freckles in the night sky. Pair by pair the couples began leaving the park. As Xavier watched, he noticed that when a pair left from his side of the park, another pair appeared to depart from the other side of the park at the same time. "They must be off to dinner," Xavier remarked to himself, noticing the time. It seemed that every couple was making an exodus from the park, leaving Xavier to observe the four other people dispersed throughout his side of the park, as well as the four across the bridge.

The rustling of the branches above Xavier allowed himself to relax, a sense of calm blown in by the night breeze. Over the rustling, he heard the crunching of leaves as footsteps approached and left: one fewer person on this side of the park, mimicked on the other side as well. One after another, phones rang, beeped, and buzzed, summoning the remaining park-dwellers to whatever evening activities they were off to enjoy, leaving the park barren, save

Xavier. It was finally a chance for him to relax and allow himself to be enveloped by the serenity. Insects hummed while the creek continued to roll behind him. Though he was alone, the night around him radiated a calm life.

Desiring to take the beauty in completely, Xavier stood and began meandering about the park, his footsteps crunching beneath him. He was about to cross Equals Bridge when he noticed a family of seven pairs of beady eyes staring at him from the other side. In the soft glow from the moon he could see the dark bands distinguishing the often despised animals. Despite his prior views, Xavier couldn't help but admire the raccoons; the protective nature of the parents caring for their young in conjunction with the soothing air made them appear less menacing. He decided they must not be as bad as everyone proclaimed and determined they would be his friends, as no one else wanted to accept them. Xavier lowered himself to the ground next to the bridge, deciding to stay and admire his new friends.

The grass was soft and cool as it wove its way between his fingers. With his back resting against the first post of the bridge, Xavier let out a deep sigh while he took in the beauty surrounding him. At first, the new friends simply stared at him, their glassy eyes searching for an explanation of whether the giant across the bridge was a friend or a foe. Seeing Xavier make no movement, they resumed their activities. He watched the younger raccoons wrestle and play, with the same energy the children before had demonstrated. The cool breeze fluffed the mother's fur as she observed her kits's antics. Despite society's negative view of the animals, Xavier simply saw a family of creatures full of life, enjoying each other's company. He didn't care what others had said about the creatures, Xavier could make his own judgements based on his own interactions.

So there he sat in the calm of the night—Xavier, or X as others called him, Equals
Bridge, and his seven new friends.

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