

Contents

1	<i>Lupe</i> : Thursday, History Class	1
2	<i>Tyler</i> : Friday, Lunch Break	9
3	<i>Lupe</i> : Saturday, Study Date	18
4	<i>Tyler</i> : Monday, History Test	31
5	<i>Lupe</i> : Monday, After the Test	37
6	<i>Tyler</i> : Monday, At the Park	41
7	<i>Lupe</i> : Monday, Walking Home	49
8	<i>Tyler</i> : Tuesday, New Secret	54

Chapter 1

Lupe: Thursday, History Class

Qué aburrido. How boring. No matter if I think in Spanish or English, it's the same. This class will never be over.

Outside the window, I can see palm trees swaying in the wind. I know that escaped parrots sometimes roost in them, but I've never seen one. I hear someone tapping my desk with a pencil. I look up, startled. I see Ms. Chandler staring at me.

"Pay attention, Lupe," she says. "That goes for the rest of you, too." But most of us are tired. Some of us have jobs after school. Some of us help out with our younger brothers and sisters. Some do both. We all have a lot on our minds, but Ms. Chandler wants our full attention.

Ms. Chandler waves a stack of papers.

Oh, no, I think. Skye, who sits next to me, nudges me. She's wearing a tight blouse with rhinestone buttons and a very short pleated skirt. My mamá would not let me wear something so flashy to school. I try to blend in with skinny jeans and a large plaid shirt of my brother's.

Skye leans over and says, "The tests. I bet I bombed mine."

"That's right, Skye. The history tests from last week," Ms. Chandler says. Her hearing is extra sharp, or else she can read lips. And forget about passing notes or texting during class. If she catches you, Ms. Chandler reads them out loud. *Not* cool!

I feel panicked. I have to get the best grade on the test. I made a mental promise to Papá that I would be the best student in our sophomore class, no matter what. Mamá says I shouldn't put that much pressure on myself, but

it's the only gift I can give him, now that he's gone.

I hear Skye jabbering at me. I wish Skye would not talk to me in class. She reminds me of those chirping parakeets we used to keep in Mexico City.

In the back row, Ms. Chandler gives Tyler his test. I bet he'll try to attract attention. I bet right. Tyler, a showoff, not only groans but leans back in his chair so quickly that he falls backward. There's a huge crash. I roll my eyes. *El payaso*, the clown.

"I'd be groaning, too, if I were you," Ms. Chandler says to Tyler. "You obviously need to spend more time with books instead of basketballs."

Most of the kids look upset when they look over their tests. My hands feel damp with sweat as I wait for mine. I need a scholarship to get into college. I need to make my parents proud, even though only one of them is here.

When Ms. Chandler reaches me,

she smiles. She says, “Ms. Martinez, I wish I had a whole classroom of bright young ladies like you.” I blush, hoping no one hates me for what she said. One way *not* to make friends, I’ve found, is getting a lot of positive attention from a teacher. Then again, they won’t be my friends once I’m in college. Who cares if I’m lonely now?

Two minutes before the buzzer, Ms. Chandler walks to the front of the room. She has long dark hair that is always pulled back and she wears suits every day, as if she were a banker. She says sternly, “We’ve been over this material a *hundred times*. We need to pass these practice tests to get ready for the state tests this spring. Why is Ms. Martinez the only one who seems to do well on them?”

“Because she learned everything in Mexico first, just to make us look stupid!” Aiden Miller jokes. Aiden always wears a sports jersey—usually

a Warriors jersey. His dad is a trainer for the pro basketball team, and Aiden brags about it every chance he gets. The kids all laugh at Aiden's joke. I blink back tears of embarrassment and let my hair fall over my face.

Ms. Chandler raps the desk with her pencil again. I hear her say sternly, "She didn't move here from Mexico for the sole purpose of making you look stupid, Mr. Miller. See me after class."



After the buzzer rings, I pick up my books and go to the hallway. I'm still shaky. Near my locker, Taliah, Aiden's girlfriend, is talking to Tyler and some other cool kids. I don't trust them. They're popular, even though they don't seem to care about anything except making fun of people.

Maybe if I keep my head down they won't notice me. Then Aiden comes out of the class and walks toward me.

“Hey, Martinez!” Aiden says. I twist a strand of hair nervously.

“Why do you make us look bad in Chandler’s class?” he asks.

I don’t answer. I wish I could instantly disappear.

Then Tyler walks over. I try to walk away, but I’m not fast enough. “You got it wrong, Aiden,” Tyler interrupts. “It’s your *jersey* that makes you look bad.”

I don’t laugh because Tyler *el payaso* is just as bad as Aiden. They’re best friends, but all they do is make jokes at other people’s expense.

The kids laugh at Aiden now, they have forgotten all about me. People can be so shallow and cruel. Even Taliah laughs, because her boyfriend is pretending to punch Tyler.

I gather my coat and backpack and head toward the exit. *Oh, no.* Tyler is calling to me. “Hey, wait up,” he says. I’m almost to the front door, but Tyler runs up to me.

He holds the door open for me, but I don't trust him.

"I like your cross necklace," he says. "Is it real gold?"

"Yes. I got it for my *quinceañera*." I say the word with pride, wanting Tyler to know I'm proud of my culture.

"What's a *quinceañera*?" he asks. His pronunciation is terrible, but at least he tries.

"It's a ceremony for fifteen-year-old girls." I don't tell him it's a rite of passage for becoming a woman. He would just tease me. "I have to catch the bus," I add.

I look up at Tyler. I am short for an American girl, only five feet two. He must be a foot taller. He looks serious. I wonder if he's setting me up for a joke.

"It's pretty," he says. "It looks nice on you."

I blush. I can't believe he said that! Does he mean it? I'm almost late to catch the bus. I rush out because my shift at the

restaurant starts in an hour. I don't turn around to see if he's watching me. On the bus, I look up at the palm trees and the fog coming in from the ocean. I feel the tiny gold cross around my neck and remember. I loved the church ceremony and the *quinceañera* party after. I was sad at the party, though, because I couldn't waltz with Papá. I waltzed with my brother instead. I sigh. I still miss Papá so much.