

from *Confetti Girl* by Diana López

Mom always had after-school projects waiting for me. “Can you help decorate cookies?” she’d say. Or, “Go outside and pick some flowers.” Or, “Fix my nails, please.” She loved to paint them, but since she wasn’t coordinated with her left hand, her right-hand nails looked like a preschooler’s coloring page.

I guess these projects were chores, but they were fun, too. Now when I come home, I’ve got to sweep, fold towels, or scrub the bathroom sink. Dad helps, but sometimes he makes a big mess.

Like today. He’s got flour, potato skins, and crumpled napkins on the counter. The pot boils over with brown scum. And I don’t want to talk to him because I’m still mad about the volleyball game, but I have to know what he’s up to.

“What are you doing, Dad?”

“Making dinner. Thought I’d give you a break.”

Except for game nights, dinner’s my responsibility. I cook while Dad cleans— that’s our rule. And even though I don’t cook as well as Mom did, Dad never complains.

“What are you going to make?” I ask.

“Carne guisada and papas fritas.”

“You need a recipe for that?”

“Are you kidding? I need a recipe for peanut butter sandwiches.” How mad can a girl be at a man who makes fun of himself and wears a green frog apron that says KISS THE COOK and tube socks over his hands for potholders?

We clear space on the table. Dinner’s served. The beef’s tough and the papas are mushy, but who cares? I pretend it’s delicious because my dad lets me blabber about the Halloween carnival. He laughs out loud when I describe Vanessa’s potato baby and Ms. Cantu’s creative cascarones¹, so I don’t complain when I notice he served ranch-style beans straight from the can instead of heating them up first.

Everything’s great until he asks about my English class.

“Any new vocabulary words?” he wants to know.

“I guess. Maybe. Super . . . super . . . super something. Can’t remember.”

“Was it supersede?” he asks. “Supercilious? Superfluous?”

“I don’t remember, Dad. It could have been super-duper or super-loop for all I care.”

¹cascarones—hollow eggs filled with confetti or toys

He gets sarcasm from his students all the time so he's good at ignoring it.

"Remember that super is a prefix that means 'above and beyond,'" he says. "So no matter what the word is, you can get its meaning if you take it apart."

"Okay, Dad. I get it. So did I tell you we're having a book sale for our next fundraiser?"

"What else are you doing in English?" he asks. "Reading any novels?"

I sigh, bored, but he doesn't get the hint. He just waits for my answer. "Yes," I finally say. "I don't remember the title, but it's got a rabbit on the cover."

"Is it Watership Down? It's got to be Watership Down."

"Yes, that's it. But I left it in my locker. I guess I can't do my homework."

"Nonsense. I've got a copy somewhere. Let me look."

He leaves the table to scan the bookshelves, and all of the sudden, I care about the tough beef, the mushy potatoes, and the cold beans. Why should I eat when my own father has abandoned his food? Nothing's more important than his books and vocabulary words. He might say I matter, but when he goes on a scavenger hunt for a book, I realize that I really don't.

I take my plate to the kitchen, grab my half-finished soda, and head to my room. When I walk past him, he's kneeling to search the lower shelves. He's got a paper towel and wipes it lovingly over the titles as if polishing a sports car. He doesn't hear my angry, stomping footsteps. I catch the last part of his sentence.

". . . a classic epic journey," he says as if he were in class with a bunch of students. I can't stand it. I just can't stand it. I'd rather have Vanessa's crazy mom.

Later, just as I write I love Luís for the three-hundredth time, my dad peeks through my bedroom door.

"Found my copy of Watership Down," he says, handing me a paperback whose spine's been taped a dozen times. "How far do you have to read tonight?"

"The first four chapters," I say.

"That's a lot. You better get busy."

"Sure, Dad. I'll start reading right away." But I don't. As soon as he leaves, I put the book on my nightstand and use it as a coaster. The condensation from my soda makes a big, wet circle on the cover.

from Tortilla Sun by Jennifer Cervantes

Clang cla-clang, clang clang. The next morning, I found Mom in the kitchen with a chisel and hammer, chipping away at the kitchen counter. Little flecks of white flew through the air like ceramic snow, landing softly on her olive-colored cheeks.

I ducked as a piece of tile flew at me. "Hey!"

She turned toward me with a look of surprise. "Morning, Izzy. I didn't see you standing there."

"Wha . . . what are you doing?" I asked.

She stepped back and surveyed the half-demolished counter the way someone stands back to study a newly hung photograph. Wiping her cheek with the back of her hand she said, "There was this"—she searched the mess on the floor— "this one broken tile poking out and I thought I should fix it and . . ."

I pushed past her to get the broom but she grabbed me by the elbow. A feeling of nervousness swelled inside me.

"Izzy, wait. I have something to tell you."

There it was. My heart buckled in my chest. Something was wrong.

Mom leaned back against the counter and sucked in a great gulp of air. "It's strange actually. I wasn't expecting it, but then at the last minute the funding came through." She folded her arms across her waist. "I'm going to Costa Rica to finish my research."

Her words buzzed around me like a swarm of confused bees. "When? For how long?"

"I'll be gone for most of the summer. I leave Tuesday."

Mom wouldn't leave me. We'd go together. Right? "But that's only three days away." I stepped away from Mom and the shards of tile.

"I don't have a choice."

"But what am I supposed to do? That's three whole months."

"Two. I'll be home at the end of July. And after this I can finally graduate. Our lives will change then." She reached over and stroked my hair. "For the better."

I rolled those three words around in my mind: for the better.

Suddenly last night's phone call made perfect sense. I inched closer and pushed at the broken tile with my toes.

"Are you sending me to Nana's?" I asked. "In New Mexico?"

A flash of surprise crossed Mom's face. Like she knew I had heard her phone conversation. "She's so excited to have you and . . ."

"What happened to all your talk about you guys not seeing eye to eye?" I asked.

"It's not that we don't see eye to eye. We just don't see the world the same way."

"Why can't I go with you?" I said.

"Izzy . . ."

"New Mexico is worlds away from California. And what am I going to do for two whole months with someone I haven't seen since I was six? That was half my life ago. She's a stranger!" I felt a sudden urge to bolt for the front door and run.

Mom rolled her eyes. "Oh, Izzy. She's hardly a stranger. She's family. I already have your ticket. You leave Monday." Mom opened the refrigerator and took out a diet soda, pressing the cold can against her face before opening it.

I stared at the mess on the floor. "Why can't I stay here? Alone." My voice quivered.

Mom took a swig of her soda, then closed her eyes and took a deep breath. When she opened them, she spoke slowly and deliberately.

"You're going to New Mexico and that's final." I swallowed hard and tried not to cry. "Why do you always get to decide everything? We just unpacked and I—I had plans."

She raised her eyebrows, surprised. "Plans?" Mom was always bugging me to make friends, which I didn't see the point of, considering we moved every few months. And we moved for all sorts of reasons: closer to the university for her, better school for me, quieter, prettier, bigger, smaller.

"I was going to try and find some girls my age here in the complex so I wouldn't have to be the new kid in school again," I said, trying to sound believable.

"Honey, you can make friends at your new school in the fall. Besides, this is a wonderful opportunity for you."

"Opportunity? For me? Or for you?"

I stormed off to my room and threw myself onto my bed. I ached inside. Like the feeling you get watching a lost balloon float far into the sky until it becomes an invisible nothing.

I reached for a story card and scribbled: Gypsy was sent to prison for stealing the magic ball. And when she was tossed into the dungeon below the castle she found the word "opportunity" written across the stone wall.

Staring at the card, I wondered what should happen next. Maybe a daring escape or a sorceress could rescue her. When nothing came to me, I scratched out the word opportunity until it was a big blob of blue ink and tossed the card on the floor.

I heard Mom's footsteps coming toward my closed bedroom door. I held my breath, hoping she wouldn't knock.

Tap. Tap.

Silence.

"Izzy?" she spoke quietly.

My hands wandered beneath my pillow and gripped the baseball I had hidden there. I squeezed my eyes closed and whispered, "I wish I didn't have to go. I wish I didn't have to go."

"I've brought your suitcase." She stood outside my door for what seemed like forever. I pictured her on the other side, arms crossed, head down.

"I think you're going to like the village." Her voice became a little muffled now, like her mouth was pressed right up against the door. "It's strange and beautiful at the same time and a perfect place to explore. You just might be surprised what you find there." She paused for a moment then continued. "Would you please talk to me?"

I burrowed my head under the pillow with the baseball. A tiny piece of me felt guilty for stealing it, but it belonged to my dad and that made it special. That made it a part of me.

"I'll just leave the suitcase here for you," she said. Her bare feet slapped against the tile and carried her away. Used with permission of Chronicle Books LLC, San Francisco. Visit ChronicleBooks.com.

Imagine we were going to write a quick essay on this:

In the passages from *Confetti Girl* and *Tortilla Sun*, the narrators have points of view different from those of their parents. Write an essay analyzing how these differences in points of view create tension in both stories. Remember to use details from both texts to support your ideas.

What steps do you think we should take in order to get started? What sorts of prewriting would we want to do in order to write an organized piece?

Use the space provided to prewrite for this essay and then create a SIMPLE outline for the essay you would write.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the student to prewrite and create a simple outline for the essay.