

Chapter 1

Homework



Lucho Valdez looked at the little yellow bird singing happily in a tree on the other side of the classroom window.

‘It’s almost as beautiful as Eva Villa,’ he thought to himself.

Eva was sitting at the front of the class. Lucho could only see the back of her head, but he knew she was listening to every word their history teacher, Mr Parra, was saying.

‘The problem is that I don’t know anything about her,’ Lucho said to himself. ‘I don’t know what she does after school. I don’t know if she likes going to the cinema, if she likes pizza, or if she has a boyfriend. I don’t even know where she lives in Santa Marta! And I certainly don’t know what she thinks about me!’

‘And what do you think, Lucho?’

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David Morrison
Excerpt
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Lucho's name woke him from his daydream.

'Did you even hear my question, Lucho?' asked Mr Parra.

The students at the front of the class turned round to watch the show. They were all smiling. Eva Villa had turned to watch too, but she wasn't smiling. For a moment Eva looked straight into Lucho's dark, sad eyes and he could feel his face turning bright¹ red. Then she turned back to the front and said something to the girl sitting next to her. The girl laughed.

Mr Parra walked towards Lucho's desk. Lucho liked Mr Parra, although he didn't like history class. There was too much information to remember.

'Maybe you could tell us what I have been talking about for the last twenty minutes, Lucho, while you were looking out of the window,' said Mr Parra.



Lucho's heart felt heavy. He had no idea what to say. He looked down at his history textbook. The page was about 'The stolen past' and there was a photograph of a gold object² that looked very old. Next he looked quickly at the board and saw one of Mr Parra's favourite things: a mind map. Every time they had to write about something for homework, Mr Parra asked them to make a mind map.

The mind map had four empty circles joined by four lines to a bigger circle in the centre. In the centre circle Mr Parra had written the word 'guaca'. Lucho tried to remember where he had heard the word before.

They were all waiting. Lucho looked out the window for a second and saw the little yellow bird. Yes, that was it! *Guaca* was a word that his grandmother had used, but what did it mean? The class was still waiting for him to speak. Suddenly he heard the little yellow bird singing in the tree outside and he opened his mouth.

'We were talking about *guaca*, sir,' he answered.

'And what is *guaca*, Lucho?' Mr Parra asked.

'*Guaca* means "special object". An antique³ object that was made by South American tribes,⁴ usually from gold, sir.'

Mr Parra looked surprised. He hadn't expected Lucho to know the answer. Lucho felt strange. He had no idea where the words were coming from.

'The people who lived here in Colombia, before Christopher Columbus and the Spanish arrived, made lots of gold *guaca*. But many years later collectors⁵ all over the world became very interested in these objects and took the *guaca* out of Colombia.'

The girl next to Eva turned to look at Lucho again. The rest of Lucho's classmates had lost interest. Lucho felt better, but Mr Parra hadn't finished with him yet.

'That's correct, Lucho,' said Mr Parra. 'And what is today's

homework?’

Homework? Lucho hadn't heard Mr Parra talk about homework. He looked at the mind map on the blackboard again. Outside, the bird had stopped singing.

'I'm not sure, sir,' Lucho said quietly. He felt stupid. 'Is it something about *guaca*?’

His classmates laughed. Mr Parra turned to another student in the class.

'Can you help us, Pablo?’

Pablo Silva was every teacher's favourite student. He always knew the answer to every question. Some people didn't like him and laughed at his old-fashioned glasses, but Lucho thought he was OK and he sometimes helped Lucho with his homework when he hadn't listened in class.

'We have to write four hundred words by next Thursday about why *guaca* should be returned to Colombia, sir,' Pablo answered. 'But first we have to find out some information and organise it into a mind map like the one on the board.'

'That's correct, Pablo. Thank you. Give me your mind maps on Monday, and ...'

When they heard the bell for end of class, everybody started putting their things in their bags.

'Wait a minute, wait a minute!' shouted Mr Parra.

Mr Parra made a loud noise with his ruler. Lucho saw the little yellow bird fly into the air when it heard the noise.

'I'll check your mind maps in class on Monday. Remember, they are as important as the written work!'

Lucho put his books into his bag and walked towards the classroom door with the rest of the class.

'We can do this really quickly.'

The voice was Eva Villa's. Lucho turned and saw that she was standing behind him waiting to leave the class.

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‘Sorry?’ he said.

Lucho looked at Eva’s lovely dark brown eyes and her long black hair. Unfortunately, he turned red again.

‘I said that we can do this really quickly. We can do the mind map together tomorrow in the library. That way we won’t have to meet this weekend,’ Eva continued.

She could see that Lucho didn’t understand.

‘Don’t worry, you were probably asleep!’ she joked.

‘Mr Parra said we had to do the homework in pairs. I have to work with you,’ she explained patiently. ‘It’s Friday tomorrow so we have a free hour after English class. We can use the Internet in the library.’

Lucho wanted to shout with happiness. He was going to spend an hour in the library with Eva Villa. Eva Villa!

‘Um, yes, OK,’ Lucho replied. ‘Tomorrow morning, in the library, after English class.’

He had tried to sound cool but, when he walked out of the classroom, he could feel his heart beating hard in his chest.

