

## Chapter One

- Esperanza and her father are walking through the vineyards on their ranch in Aguascalientes, Mexico.
- Esperanza's father explains to his daughter that their land is alive. If you lie down on the ground, you can feel it breathe and hear its heart beating.
- Adorable little six-year-old Esperanza doesn't think this is weird. In fact, she tells Papa she wants to hear the land's heartbeat, and she snuggles up next to him on the ground, like a little caterpillar.
- But she can't hear the earth's heartbeat. She's getting impatient.
- "Wait a little while, and the fruit will fall into your hand," Papa tells Esperanza. In other words, be patient.
- Finally, Esperanza hears the gentle "shoomp, shoomp" (not to be confused with "Shmoop, Shmoop") of the land's heartbeat.
- Esperanza can even feel that her heart beats along with the earth's—and with Papa's. Three hearts beating together as one.

## Chapter Two

### Las Uvas (Grapes)

- Fast forward six years. Papa hands Esperanza a knife so that she can cut the first ceremonial bunch of grapes in the harvest of 1930.
- All of the people who live and work at El Rancho de las Rosas, Esperanza's family estate, are gathered for the beginning of the harvest.
- Esperanza's parents, Ramona and Six to Ortega, encourage her towards the grapevines.
- She does it (success!) and brings the first bunch of grapes to Papa. He holds it up for everyone to see, and cries: "¡La cosecha!" "Harvest!"
- Esperanza loves watching the campesinos, or field workers, harvest the grapes. It's also her favorite time of year because, after the grape harvest is over, it's her birthday. And you know what that means—time to party.
- This year, Esperanza will turn thirteen. Sweet thirteen.
- Esperanza's friends Marisol, Chita, and Bertina will be at the party. Whenever these girls get together, they can't stop talking about the big parties they'll have when they turn fifteen: their Quinceañeras.
- The Quinceañeras are basically coming-out parties for the daughters of wealthy families. After these parties, the girls will be old enough to be courted, marry, and become the head of a household.
- Three weeks later, Esperanza is gathering roses in preparation for the big party. She pricks her thumb on a nasty thorn, and thinks, "bad luck."
- Papa has promised to meet her in the garden, but it's getting dark, and he still hasn't returned from working the cattle.
- But she knows the next day (the day of the party) will be awesome. First, Papa will serenade her with the traditional birthday song, "Las Mañanitas." Then she'll open her presents, which will surely include a porcelain doll from Papa and some embroidered linens from Mama.
- In the meantime, Esperanza and her mother worry about a report that there have been bandits in the area. Though the Mexican Revolution is over, there's still a lot of resentment against large landowners like Papa, because many poor people have no land at all. (Check out our discussion of "Setting" for more on the Mexican Revolution.)

- Sure, Papa is sympathetic to the cause of the poor and has given land to many of his workers. But the bandits probably don't know that.
- Esperanza goes in to have tea with her grandmother, Abuelita, who is starting to crochet a new blanket.
- Abuelita insists on teaching Esperanza the pattern to take her mind off of her worry about Papa. Bo-ring.
- Esperanza tries to copy Abuelita's movements, but her crocheting ends up looking kind of funky. Abuelita to the rescue. She unravels the yarn, telling Esperanza, "Do not be afraid to start over" (2.38). Uh... is it just us, or does it sound like she's talking about more than just yarn?
- Hortensia, the housekeeper, tells Mama not to worry. Alfonso, Hortensia's husband, and Miguel, their son, have gone to look for Papa.
- Miguel, who is sixteen, knows the ranch like the back of his hand because Papa always takes him out when he does work.
- Miguel and Esperanza have played together since they were babies. Esperanza once declared, "I am going to marry Miguel!"
- Eventually, though, Esperanza realized that she and Miguel could never get married, because she was the daughter of the ranch owner, and he was the son of a housekeeper.
- See, here's the deal: Esperanza imagines that there is a river separating her from Miguel. It's deep and wide and probably full of rapids and alligators and fish with sharp pointy teeth. There's no crossing it.
- One day, Esperanza explains her theory of the river to Miguel. Since then, he hasn't spoken to her much. Esperanza misses him, but she pretends not to care. As it goes with thirteen-year-old girls.
- Papa's stepbrothers, Tío Luis and Tío Marcos, arrive at the ranch because they've heard Papa is missing.
- Esperanza and Mama don't like the Tíos. They serve as bank president and mayor of the town, and they think they're pretty hot stuff. But Papa says they love money more than people.
- Tío Luis shows Ramona a silver belt buckle that one of the cowboys brought him. It's definitely Papa's.
- Esperanza gets really nervous. For the first time in her life, Tío Luis is being nice to her. Something must be really wrong.

- Finally a wagon comes up to the house. It's driven by Alfonso and Miguel. Papa's dead body is in the back of the truck.
- It's a new day! The sky is blue, the birds are singing, and it's Esperanza's birthday. She awakens to the sound of Papa serenading her with the traditional birthday song...
- Until she realizes that Papa has died. She was only dreaming.
- It turns out Papa and the men working with him were ambushed while mending a fence at the edge of the ranch.
- Esperanza goes downstairs and opens the door to Señor Rodriguez, who is bringing papayas for the party that was supposed to take place that day.
- Esperanza has to break the news to Señor Rodriguez that Papa has been killed. Then Hortensia puts the grieving Esperanza back to bed.
- Papa's funeral lasts for three days. Esperanza's best friend, Marisol, comes to mourn with her, but nothing can help.
- Esperanza and Mama are devastated.
- Esperanza avoids opening her birthday presents, but finally Mama insists on it. Papa's gift is a gorgeous porcelain doll in a white dress. It makes Esperanza so sad to think that this is the last gift Papa will ever give her. She can't bear to open any of the other gifts.
- Tío Luis and Tío Marco sort through Papa's papers in his office until it seems like they've taken over. They come to the ranch every day, and stay for longer and longer periods of time.
- The day the lawyer comes to settle the estate, Tío Luis says to Mama: "You don't look so good in black, baby. Let's get you out of those mourning clothes." Or something like that. Not cool, Luis.
- The lawyer tells Mama that Papa left the house and all of its contents to her and Esperanza. Sounds fair, right?
- But since it's not customary to leave land to women, Papa left the *land* to Tío Luis.
- Tío Luis offers to buy the house from Mama for an insultingly low price, but Mama refuses.
- So Tío Luis makes Mama another offer. She can keep living on the land—if she agrees to marry him.

- Tío Luis threatens Mama, reminding her that the house and the grapes are on his land, and that he can make life very difficult for her. What a charmer.
- Why does Tío Luis want to marry Mama anyway?
- The thing is, Tío Luis is running for governor, and he knows that with Mama's influence, he can easily win the election.
- The lawyer warns Mama to be careful. Tío Luis is a dangerous man.
- The grownups have a brainstorming session to decide where they will get the money to keep the house running.
- Abuelita has some money in the bank, but since Tío Luis is the bank president, that money is as good as gone.
- Since Esperanza's uncles are so powerful, they can make life very difficult for any family that tries to help them.
- Esperanza needs a break, so she goes outside to sit in Papa's rose garden.
- Abuelita has taught Esperanza that when you make tea from the green part of the rose, the rosehip, you drink the memories of the roses. Since these roses knew Papa, Esperanza wants to make rosehip tea tomorrow.
- As she's sitting there, out comes Miguel. He sits next to Esperanza and talks to her the way he used to, before things got all awkward with the whole river metaphor. He asks her to point out the roses that Papa planted for each of them when they were children.
- Miguel tells Esperanza that if Luis takes over the ranch, he and his family will leave for the United States to work.
- Miguel explains that in Mexico, he and his family will always be servants, no matter how hard they work. But in the United States they'll have the chance to become more than just servants.
- Esperanza is not happy with this news; she doesn't want to be left behind. Miguel takes her hand to comfort her, and this makes her heart skip a beat.
- Startled, she pulls her hand away. Uh oh. Now things are awkward again.
- Miguel's feelings are hurt. He tells Esperanza she was right—in Mexico, they will always be on opposite sides of the river.
- That night, Esperanza clutches her new doll and vows never to leave El Rancho de las Rosas. Where else would she go, anyway?

- Why did Papa have to die? she thinks.
- Esperanza tries to find the dream she has of Papa singing her the birthday song, like she does every night.

### Chapter Three

#### Los Higos (Figs)

- Instead of dreaming of the birthday song, Esperanza dreams she's being suffocated by a bear.
- Suddenly, Mama is shaking her awake—the house is on fire! Esperanza grabs her doll, and everyone runs to escape the burning house.
- But no one knows where Abuelita is. Like a boss, Miguel runs into the house to look for her, and out he comes, carrying Abuelita.
- Miguel's shirt is on fire, and Alfonso tackles him to put it out. Abuelita is okay, too, but her ankle is injured and she can't walk.
- So where was Abuelita, anyway? Oh, she was just looking for her crocheting.
- They watch as the fire consumes the entire house and the vineyards.
- Mama, Abuelita, and Esperanza sleep in the servants' cabins.
- They are sure that the uncles sent someone to start the fire. (And boy do we believe it.)
- At dawn, Esperanza goes to examine the rubble, hoping to save something. No such luck. Everything is black and sooty and all burned up.
- The evil uncles arrive at what used to be the ranch, supposedly to offer their condolences for this "bad luck."
- Tío Luis repeats his offer of marriage to Ramona. If she agrees to marry him, he'll build a bigger, better house, and replant all the grape vines.
- Otherwise, she can keep living in the servants' quarters... provided nothing else bad happens. He also points out that if Ramona refuses to marry him, all of the employees of the ranch will lose their jobs, since there's no house or vineyard to work in.

- Mama reluctantly says she'll think about it, but Esperanza is outraged. She screams, "I hate you!" to Tío Luis.
- To top it all off, Tío Luis tells Ramona that he's going to send Esperanza away to boarding school.
- By the time the uncles leave, Esperanza is crying. But Mama tells her not to worry—she has a plan.
- Everybody crowds into one room for an emergency meeting. Mama consults her advisers.
- Alfonso tells her that if she doesn't plan to marry Luis, she's got to leave. Otherwise, Luis will burn down the servants' quarters.
- They could move to another part of Mexico, but they'd have to live in poverty. After all, Tío Luis has a lot of influence in this country.
- So here's a crazy idea: what if Mama and Esperanza go with Hortensia, Alfonso, and Miguel to the United States? Alfonso's brother is arranging jobs for them at a big farm in California.
- Abuelita says she could go later, once her ankle has healed.
- Abuelita says her sisters, who are nuns in a convent, can get duplicate papers for Ramona and Esperanza, since theirs were destroyed in the fire.
- It's all sounding okay, but Alfonso warns Mama that the only work in California is fieldwork. No problem—she can handle it.
- Abuelita tells Esperanza about how she immigrated to Mexico from Spain when she was a girl. It wasn't easy, but it sure was exciting.
- Then it's time to wax poetic: Abuelita says that they are like the phoenix, rising from their own ashes to start a new life. This lady's pretty good at putting things in perspective, wouldn't you say?
- Esperanza envisions the beautiful home that she's sure they'll have in California, where Hortensia, Alfonso, and Miguel will take care of them.
- Esperanza also announces that she, too, can work. For some reason, everybody thinks this is funny.
- Abuelita's nun sisters come to pick her up and take her to the convent, where she'll recover.
- Abuelita gives Esperanza her zigzag blanket to finish for her while they're apart. She

explains that the zigzags, which look like mountains and valleys, represent the obstacles that Esperanza will overcome by the time they see each other again.

- The nuns leave behind a box with new papers for Mama and Esperanza and clothes donated for the poor. Mama has to explain to Esperanza that the clothes are for them.
- Señor Rodríguez is their super-secret agent who helps the family plan their escape. He always arrives with a basket of figs to disguise his real reason for visiting.
- At the end of the week, Tío Luis comes back. (Boo!) Mama tells him that she'll marry him, eventually, for the sake of the servants. But wait—she has a few conditions. Most importantly, Luis has to start rebuilding the house and replanting the vines immediately because the servants need jobs.
- Tío Luis says he'll announce the engagement immediately, and—surprise, surprise—he's acting all smug since Ramona has agreed to marry him.
- Esperanza knows better, though. She smirks because she knows he won't look so proud when he discovers that they've run away
- Mama wakes Esperanza in the middle of the night, and they leave with only what they can carry. Esperanza has a valise containing some clothes and her doll.
- It's too dangerous to walk along the road, so they sneak through the rows of grapes towards Señor Rodríguez's land.
- When they come to the edge of Papa's property, Esperanza stops. She feels like she's leaving Papa. But Mama reassures her that Papa's heart will find them wherever they go.