

Yesenia glanced at her watch. Time seemed to be moving in slow motion as she waited for the bus. She bounced nervously on her heels, thinking of the homework she still hadn't done.

"Hey!"

She jumped about a foot in the air, turning around to see who had tapped her on the shoulder. His face looked familiar, and she'd be the first to admit she stared, trying to figure out how she knew him.

He took her silence as acknowledgement, "You're *her* right? The girl who read the poem?"

Oh. *That's* how she knew him. No more staring for her, she put her head down and avoided eye contact. She loved writing and sharing that part of herself but it made her vulnerable in ways she wished she could (and tried to) avoid. "I...yeah. That's me." She tried for a laugh but it came out as more of a cough. Yesenia looked at her watch again, hoping maybe he'd get the hint.

"It was really good!"

Or maybe not.

"Thanks, um..."

"Ricky."

"Thanks, Ricky."

They stood in silence for half a minute before she figured she wasn't getting out of this conversation anytime soon. "I'm Yesenia." Straightforward, terse, not leaving much room for a reply. The perfect response.

"That's a pretty name.

Or not.

"I guess." *Keep it aloof, Yesenia.*

Ricky nodded, "Have you ever read your poems aloud before?"

*In my room. In front of my mirror. To myself.* "No."

"You did a really good job. I swear I got shivers," he reached out and grabbed Yesenia's hands, "See? Still shaking."

She tensed and pulled back, checking her watch *again*. The bus had to show up soon, right? The universe wasn't just conspiring to leave her stranded and stuck in a conversation that she really didn't want to have. She shouldn't have read that poem. If there was anything Yesenia hated more than reading her own writing it was reading it out loud and then discussing it with a stranger when all she really wanted was to go home and do homework. The fact that this experience made her want to do homework was perhaps its biggest crime.

"Have you ever read Sandra Cisneros?"

She shook her head. No more talking until she was safely on the bus listening to sad indie music and staring out the window.

“Oh really, you should check it out, it reminded me a lot of your poem but better?” Yesenia stiffened and Ricky went on, “I think it gets its ideas across in a more clear fashion, but same general idea as what you wrote, just executed in a way that won’t take no for an answer.”

She didn’t want to break her self-imposed no talking rule but this stranger had just complimented and insulted a representation of some of her deepest feelings in the span of maybe two minutes. “Poetry isn’t exactly supposed to be clear, it’s about the emotion. It’s how I felt while writing it.”

Ricky laughed and Yesenia narrowed her eyes. She did not enjoy being laughed at. “Well, yeah, but it’s not going to *do anything* if no one can understand it. It needs a message that people can rally behind. That’s not pure emotion, that’s deliberate.” He snapped, “*That’s what I’m trying to say. You need to be more deliberate. Less throw words on the page in time with my heartbeat and more I am intentionally placing this word here to elicit a reaction.*” Yesenia opened her mouth, but Ricky wasn’t done, “Don’t get me wrong, you have a lot of potential. It was really good for a new writer--”

“I’m not a--”

“--But you could definitely improve.”

He took a breath and, before he could say anything, Yesenia stood up straighter and clenched her fists at her sides, “Listen. I don’t--” And then she saw lights out of the corner of her eye and watched the bus she’d been waiting for slow to a stop. Her savior. She spared a glance at Ricky and started walking towards the doors. Time to make her escape.

“We’re not done here, but I have to go. Homework, school, parents, you know how it is.” She gave Ricky as sarcastic a wave as possible, “Nice talking to you, Ricky. We’ll finish this later.” And she climbed on the bus.