Chapter 2. The secret door

When her mother came home from work at almost seven o'clock that night, Luz was sitting on the front porch step. For one moment Luz considered telling her about the mysterious library, but the idea vanished. It was her very own mystery, and she wasn't going to share it.

“What are you doing out here?” her mother asked. “It’s almost dark. You know I don’t like you waiting outside in the evening when I’m not home.”

“I feel better out here. I told you I don't like this house.”

Her mother raised her hand wearily and motioned for her to stop. “Don’t start with me.” She took a deep breath and sat beside Luz on the step. “Look, I know very well what you don't like. I also know what pleases you. Did you finish your homework?"

"I did it at school."

"Good, so why don’t we go out? I'll change my clothes, and then we can get something to eat and stop at the mall. Do you still want that top at Macy’s?”

“But you said it cost too much.”

“I think I can work it into the budget. Especially if it will make you happy.” Luz was surprised. “Will it? Will it make you happy?”

“Yes,” Luz said, though she knew this wasn't the truth. Nothing was going to make her happy until her mother came home on time. Still, when they got to Macy's, she asked her mother to buy her a pair of shorts to go with the top.

The next morning, Luz wore her new outfit to breakfast. “You look so nice,” her mother said.

Luz saw a mug on the table. “What's that?” Then she noticed the *molinillo* on the counter. Her mother had made her favorite drink: cinnamony *chocolate de leche*.

“I thought you might like this," her mother said. "I haven’t made it in a long time.”

"Mom, it's going to be over 100 today. You know I like it, but it's too hot to drink today." Luz sat at the table. "Just come home on time.”

“I will,” her mother said.

“Today?”

“No, not today. I can't make my boss mad. It wouldn’t be good for me to tell him I have to leave early.”

“But it’s not early, Mom. It’s the time you’re supposed to leave. He’s making you stay late.”

“I can’t get ahead if I’m not there. Can you understand? But things will change." She sighed. "I know it’s too hot to drink this. I shouldn’t have made it, but I wanted to do something nice for you. What if you put some ice in it?”

“I don’t have time,” Luz said. “I have to do some work in the library before school starts.”

==========

Luz hurried to school that morning. She hoped that Dwight and Max would be waiting for her outside the school library, but the hallway was empty when she got there. She was going to have to face Mrs. Norolla alone.

As Luz entered the library, Mrs. Norolla looked up from her desk and smiled at her. Luz tried to smile back. She told herself that there was nothing to dislike about the librarian. After all, she was young and pretty, and she could be very nice. But Luz thought she was strange. For one thing, she always looked as if she were going to a fancy party. That day she was wearing a pale green dress, a small pearl necklace, high heels, and white gloves.

The white gloves attracted everyone's attention, because she wore them every day. Whenever Mrs. Norolla was asked about them, she told the children, "My gloves are my uniform. I can't imagine being a librarian and not wearing them. I want to make sure that the books in my library are clean." Then she went on to discuss the rules that were important in her library. "Now remember the First Rule! The First Rule is: Read With Your Eyes, Not With Your Pencil. And please don't even think about bringing a pen into my library. The Second Rule is: Books and Pens Are Like Oil and Water—They Do Not Mix! The Third Rule is a Combination of Rules One and Two: Eyes Don't Leave Marks, But Pens and Pencils Do. They are terrible tools to have around books."

Luz hoped she wasn't breaking a rule that morning as she headed for the computer catalog. She typed "secret code" in the keyword search box. In a moment, a list of three books appeared on the screen. By then, Max and his half-hidden face had quietly joined her.

She clicked on the title of the first book to find the call number and saw that its status was On Reserve. She clicked on the other two books. The screen told her that they were also On Reserve.

"What does that mean?" she whispered, pointing to the words on the screen.

Max shrugged. Then he nodded in the direction of Mrs. Norolla.

“Why me?” Luz whispered.

Max's mouth grinned.

Luz jotted down the call numbers and walked to Mrs. Norolla’s desk. She looked very busy. Next to her were a stack of library books and a large bottle of imported spring water. That was another strange thing about her, Luz thought. Mrs. Norolla was the thirstiest person she had ever met; she carried her water bottle everywhere. She sipped it whenever she read a book aloud or taught the children about library research. Often she would finish the entire bottle and have to get another.

Luz stood quietly, watching Mrs. Norolla select the top book and place it carefully in front of her. Then she opened it and began to turn slowly, page by page, through the entire book. She wiped each page with a clean white cloth.

“Oh, no,” she said, finally aware that Luz was waiting to ask her a question. “Someone has made a pencil mark here! This is a fine kettle of fish and chips!” She took a large rubber eraser and lightly removed the mark. Then she wiped the page clean with the cloth. Only then did she raise her eyes and glance up at Luz.

“One more moment. I must find the Rembrandt who decided to turn my poor little library book into nothing more than a personal sketch pad!” She turned back to the book and scanned its barcode, then checked her computer monitor. “After only three weeks of school, I’m giving my first one-month suspension of library privileges. Unfortunately, it won't be the last!” She pulled a pink sheet of paper from her desk drawer and wrote a name. “This young man has gotten himself into quite a jam of his own marmalade! Oh, I’m absolutely parched this morning. Does it feel dry to you?” She sipped her bottled water and swallowed carefully. “That's better. Now, then, what can I do for you?”

“Max and I were looking for some books, but the ones we find all say that they’re On Reserve. What does that mean?”

“That means that I have them put away in the reserve area. They can’t be checked out.”

“Why not?”

“Because these books have feet. Have you ever seen a book with feet?”

Luz shook her head.

“Oh, books with feet! They put on a pair of flip-flops or sneakers--and they walk right out the door and never return.” Mrs. Norolla chuckled. “Some books like to do that—especially if they have a human friend. But I don’t like escapees!”

Luz was confused. “So we can’t look at them?”

“Of course you can, as long as you use them in the library."

"But where are they?"

"I will have to get them for you. Reserve books are kept in my office." She smiled. "Now, what are you looking for? A book of world records?”

“No,” Luz said. “Secret codes. Do you want the--?”

“Secret codes?” Mrs. Norolla squinted at Luz as if her face had suddenly gone blurry. “Are you having a surprise party or a treasure hunt party? Secret codes come in quite handy for those.”

“No,” Luz said, “Someone gave me a code that I want to figure out. And I don’t know how to do it.”

“A love letter, I imagine?” Mrs. Norolla asked.

“No,” Luz said, a little too strongly. “It’s not that.”

“Then what kind of code is it?”

“It’s…it’s….” Luz had no intention of telling Mrs. Norolla anything about the code. “It’s private.”

Mrs. Norolla drew back, then smiled as sweetly as ever. “Well, of course it’s private. That’s why it’s a code.” She turned her attention to Max who was still standing by the computer catalog. She pointed her arm and waved a finger at him.

“I can tell those aren’t my library books,” she said. He was holding two books from the Luna Drive Library. He looked down at the books, quite confused. “I can see from here that the Dewey numbers on those spines are not as nicely printed as mine, and those books don’t have dust jackets,” she explained. “Remember the Seventh Rule: Dust Jackets Keep Books Cozy And Clean!”

She picked up her bottle of spring water and took another sip. “So which library do you like better than mine?” she asked. “I can see I’ve failed as a librarian, if you’ve had to go somewhere else. Which library was it?”

Max tugged on the brim of his cap.

“I do not like looking at your baseball cap,” she said. “Aren't caps against school rules? I may be new here this year, but I believe I read that in the student handbook.”

“He <u>needs</u> to wear his hat,” Luz replied.

“You mean the nurse gave him permission?” Luz nodded at her. “I would still like you to look at me when I’m speaking to you.”

Without moving his hat, Max tilted his head backwards and sideways as far as it would go. He stared at her as if she had just stepped off a spaceship from another planet.

“That’s much better,” she said. “Now I know that you have eyes after all. But what about some vocal chords? Where did you get those books?”

She took another sip of water.

“The Luna Drive Library,” Luz explained for him.

Mrs. Norolla almost choked at the mention of the name. She put her right hand up to her throat and swallowed hard.

“The Luna Drive Library? But that place—“ Mrs. Norolla stopped a moment and then asked, “When were you there?”

“Yesterday,” Luz said.

“Did you meet…the librarian?”

“No.”

Mrs. Norolla marched over to Max and leaned down toward him, so close that her lightly powdered nose was almost touching his chin. She looked up at his eyes, but they had rolled backwards into his eye sockets. “And you like that dusty old fire trap better than my modern up-to-date school library? There's technology at work here!”

Max squirmed.

“I…am…speak…ing…to…you,” Mrs. Norolla said slowly, as if she were addressing a young child. “Now it is <u>your</u> turn to answer <u>me</u>. Did you prefer the Luna Drive Library? Not to answer me is a sign of disobedience, not to mention a sign of disrespect.”

“No, it's not,” Luz said.

"What?" Mrs. Norolla stood up then and looked at Luz. “Are you contradicting me?”

“No, I mean, we don’t like the Luna Drive Library better than this one—your library.”

“I imagine that’s where you found your secret code,” Mrs. Norolla said. She raised her eyebrows as if she had just looked into their brains and found the right answer. “You should have looked for a code book there. Not that it would have done you any good.”

“We didn’t have time,” Luz said. “Well, actually, we didn’t have the code until….” Luz stopped. She had said more than she intended.

“Until what?” Mrs. Norolla asked.

“Until the library was closed.”

Mrs. Norolla looked puzzled. “I see. Of course, if you’d like me to help, I’ll need to see the code. Let me see it please,” she ordered.

“Okay,” Luz said, without thinking. She unzipped a small pocket on the front of her backpack and removed the envelope.

Mrs. Norolla took it from her and said, “It looks like an invitation.” She studied the envelope. “But it's not addressed to anyone.”

“It has my name on it,” Luz said.

“I think that you are mistaken. There’s no name here.”

‘Yes, there is. It’s on—“ Luz looked at the front of the envelope. Her name was not there now. “But my name was here and—“ she stared hard at the envelope “—inside, there was a message in secret code.”

“This envelope hasn’t been opened,” Mrs. Norolla said.

“But I opened it.”

“Then you are twice mistaken,” Mrs. Norolla said, returning the envelope to her.

“Well, maybe it got stuck closed again.”

Luz slid her finger under the envelope’s flap. Inside, she felt the same heavy card. But when she pulled it out, she was surprised to see that the message was missing.

“Is this the right envelope?” Mrs. Norolla asked.

“I don’t know,” Luz said. “I thought it was. It has to be.”

“Maybe you have a magic envelope with a magic code—or perhaps a secret admirer who writes in disappearing ink.”

“I don’t think so. Max got one, too.”

“What? You both found an envelope? Well, why didn’t you tell me? May I see yours?” Mrs. Norolla asked Max, holding out one of her white-gloved hands.
Max didn’t move. Mrs. Norolla rubbed her gloves together and waited. “I am asking again: Does this boy have a voice?”

“He doesn't talk,” Luz told her. “Ever."

Mrs. Norolla lowered her head and peered beneath Max’s brim. “I think you’re pulling a fast one. I think you’re a talker, and a big one at that, and this is your idea of a joke. Well, I don't find it funny. So if I ever catch you talking, whether it's in here or anywhere else, you'll be in a pickle of a pepper jar!"

“But he’s not joking,” Luz explained.

“Then let me see your envelope!" she snapped.

Max slowly pulled the envelope from one of his new library books. Mrs. Norolla saw immediately that the envelope was unaddressed. Inside the card was blank, too. “This won’t do us any good, now, will it?”

==========

As Mrs. Norolla handed the card back to him, Dwight burst into the library.

“Sorry…I’m late--” he was panting “--I--I got up late…I--I had to run all the way.”

“Shhh!” Mrs. Norolla warned. “You’ll need to get yourself under control, if you plan to be in my library. Remember the Fifth Rule, Version One: An Open Mouth Cannot Read. And the Fifth Rule, Version Two: The Only Place for Noise in a Library Is In the Dictionary!”

He stopped and tried to catch his breath.

“And were you at the Luna Drive Library, too?” she asked. He nodded, surprised. “Then maybe you’ll be the lucky one. Why don’t the three of you have a seat at this table? While you do, I’ll see if I can find a nice book of codes from the reserve area."

Luz raised her hand and said, "I have the call numbers." She held out a small piece of paper.

"I don't need call numbers," Mrs. Norolla said and laughed. "Any librarian worth her salt and pepper knows the Dewey numbers backward and forward. Have a seat, and I’ll be right back.”

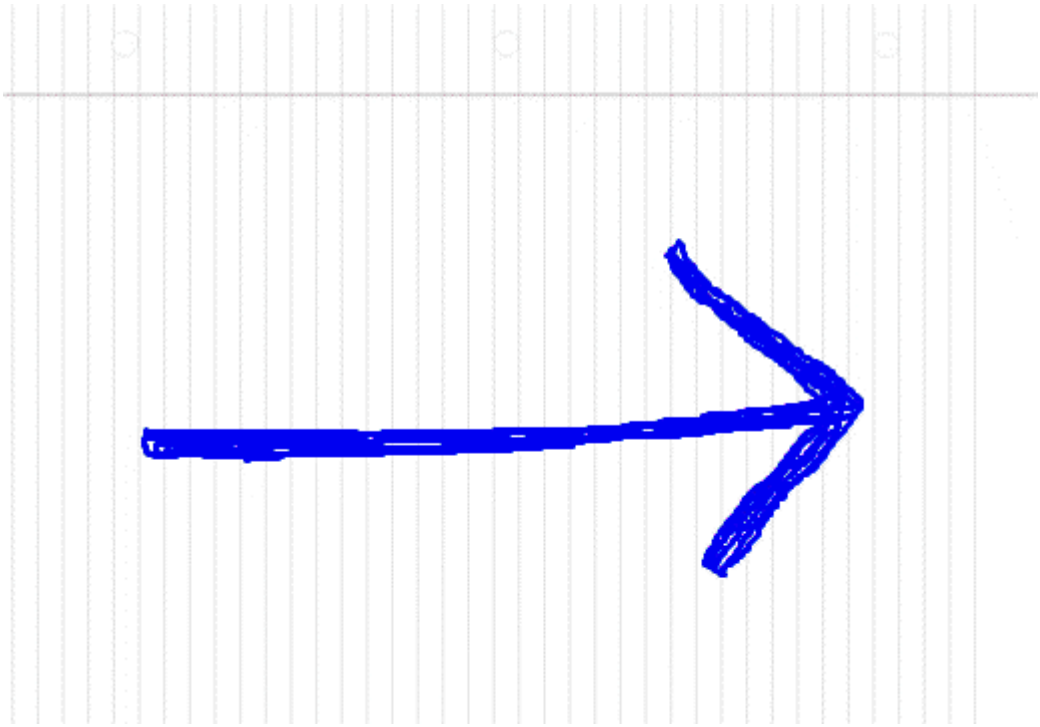
Dwight placed his backpack on the table and sat down. Luz and Max joined him.

“We have to talk to you,” Luz whispered to Dwight. “Look,” she said, holding up her card, “the writing disappeared. Everything disappeared.”

Max showed his blank card, too.

“What?" Dwight tipped his chair forward and leaned closer to look. "How did that happen?”

“We don’t know,” Luz whispered. “We--“ Luz stopped when she noticed that Max was writing something. In a moment, he slid a piece of notebook paper in front of Dwight and Luz.



The arrow was pointed toward Max. He was holding up an index card with the code printed on it.

“Rule, please!” Mrs. Norolla’s voice boomed throughout the library. The three children jumped, and Max quickly tucked the index card into his pocket. “What is the Tenth Rule in here? You!” She pointed a thin white-gloved finger at Dwight.

Bewildered, Dwight looked at her. “Huh?”

“The Tenth Rule is: Six Legs On The Floor! Six Legs On The Floor!!” Mrs. Norolla marched over and pushed Dwight’s chair back onto the carpet. “You know better than this. I’ve already spoken to you twice about this. I’m afraid you have after school detention for this!”

“But I just—“

She bent down and stared him in the face. “Do not argue with me. Or you will regret your ill-considered decision.”

Dwight gulped.

“Where is your secret code?” she asked.

“I don’t have one.”

“Why not?’

“Because I didn’t get one.”

“And why not?”

“Because I didn’t check out a book,” he said. “Or I think that’s why. I don’t really know.”

Mrs. Norolla walked to her desk. “I don’t think any of you have been to the Luna Drive Library. I think you are wasting my time with blank cards and library books. I have so many books to clean before classes come in this morning. And you,” she said, pointing at Dwight, “you will be coming in after school. Don’t ever forget the Tenth Rule again: Six Legs on the Floor. Now, you had all better get yourselves to class.”

==========

By the end of the morning, Max, Luz, and Dwight had made a plan. They would go back to the school library during lunch, when Mrs. Norolla was in the teachers' room. The only person watching the library then would be Miss Tracy, one the teachers' aides.

“What if she comes back?” Dwight asked. "I don't want to get in trouble again."

“We’ll be fast,” Luz said. “And if she catches us, I’ll just explain. She went to look for the books herself, didn't she? Except for how you messed up on Rule Number Ten, we didn't do anything wrong.”

"Do you think Miss Tracy will help us?"

"She's nice," Luz said. "She doesn't act like a teacher."

Luz led them into the library. The room was empty, except for Miss Tracy who sat at the counter and seemed to be reading a large book.

“Hello, Miss Tracy,” Luz said, but Miss Tracy was plugged into her portable CD player and couldn't hear anything. Her eyes were closed, and her head was bouncing in time to the music. She looked up when Luz bumped the counter.

"I didn't think anyone would be here so soon," she said as she removed her headphones. "I've got to get my homework done before I go to class tonight," she said. "Okay, you guys, what do you need? Tell me quick. I've got work to do."

“We need some books," Luz said. "Mrs. Norolla has some books about secret codes, and we need to use them.”

“Aren’t they on the shelves?” Miss Tracy asked.

“That's just it. She keeps them in the reserve area,” Luz explained. ”I think that's in her office."

“In there?” Miss Tracy motioned to the darkened room behind her. Luz nodded. “I can't go in there. She's kind of picky about it.”

Then Dwight added, “But she said we could look at the books.”

“She did?”

Max nodded.

“Miss Tracy, you know Mrs. Norolla,” Dwight said. “She's the Boss, the Queen of the Library, the Number One Book Lady. She's got rules—we all know she's got rules--but her <u>real</u> Number One Rule is helping kids do research."

“Yeah, that’s true, I guess,” Miss Tracy said.

Dwight continued, "And we’re doing research! Big Time!”

“I wrote down the call numbers,” Luz added.

“Okay, you guys, I’ll take a look for you,” Miss Tracy said. “I just hope this is all right with her. She can get a little wacky if things aren’t done her way. I mean, have you seen her white gloves? I probably shouldn't say this, but she's weird!”

She clicked on the light and stepped into the room behind the frosted glass window.

“We’ll stand outside,” Dwight told Luz. “Just in case the Book Lady comes back.”
He pushed Max, and they headed out the door.

In a few moments, Miss Tracy returned and handed Luz the books.

“I think these are the right ones. Now you know that you’ll have to use them here. These must be very valuable books if she keeps them in her office. So you and your friends will have to take good care of them.”

Friends? The word sounded odd. Luz hadn’t even thought about Max and Dwight being friends. Friends? Maybe one day, Luz thought, but they weren’t friends yet.

She walked over to the door and motioned through the window. As Dwight and Max walked into the library, Luz handed each boy a book. Then Max gave them a copy of the code.

The funny thing was that Luz wasn’t thinking about the secret code now. As she sat at the shiny new table in the school library under the bright glare of fluorescent lights, she suddenly wished that she were in the Luna Drive Library. She wanted to sit at one of its old wooden tables. She wanted to pull a chair from under the table, scraping its legs across the wooden floor. When she remembered their adventure in the library yesterday, she could sense that time drifted backwards. In her mind, she could see the big clock with its silent swinging pendulum, the old shelves filled with books, the spiral staircase that led upstairs, and…she remembered the face that she saw—that she thought she saw, she reminded herself—in the upstairs window.

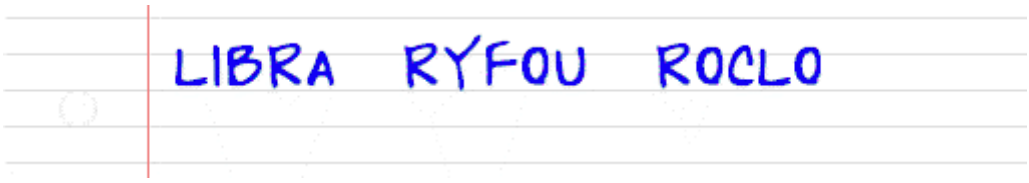
Suddenly the library door opened, and Luz quickly turned to see if Mrs. Norolla was back. She sighed in relief. Two third-graders were looking for a book. A second later, she opened her book about secret codes and started to read.

==========

Max was already in the middle of his book. Nothing seemed quite right. He had skimmed a few chapters about simple codes, like the one he had learned in Boy Scouts. In that code, A=Z, B=Y, C=X. But when he tried to decipher their library code using it, the jumbled letters didn't turn into words.

Then he found a chapter on the key word code. The book explained that, to help someone crack a key word code, the code writer had to give a key word or password. Max frowned. This wasn’t the type of code they had, he thought. He started to flip past the chapter. Then he stopped. What if, he wondered, what if they did have a key word? What could it be? Could their names be key words? He decided they weren’t. After all, the secret code in both envelopes was the same, which meant the same key word would have been used. And then he remembered the only other word in the envelopes: Solve! What if that was the key word? he wondered.

As he began to work through the code, the letters began to make words:



He tapped his pencil on the table.

“What?” Luz asked.

He pointed at the letters.

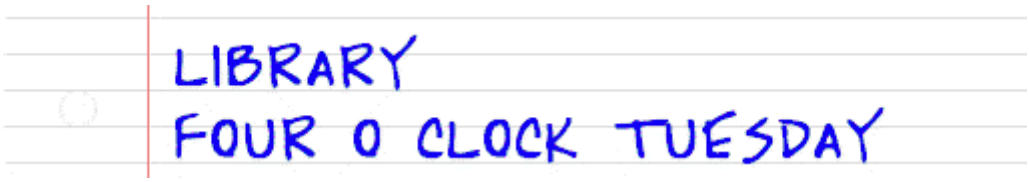
"Libra?" Luz said.

Then Max circled some letters.

“Dwight, look at this,” Luz said. “Max has part of the code. It says Library and Four.”

“O’clock, I bet,” Dwight said.

Max took another sheet of notebook paper and rewrote his discovery, this time adding more:



“That’s today,” Luz said.

“Or is it next Tuesday?” Dwight joked. “Or the Tuesday after that? Or a Tuesday during the Middle Ages? Or the Dark Ages, when no one could see what a dumb library it was?”

“It can’t be last week,” Luz said, ignoring his sarcasm. “We didn’t get the envelopes until after then.”

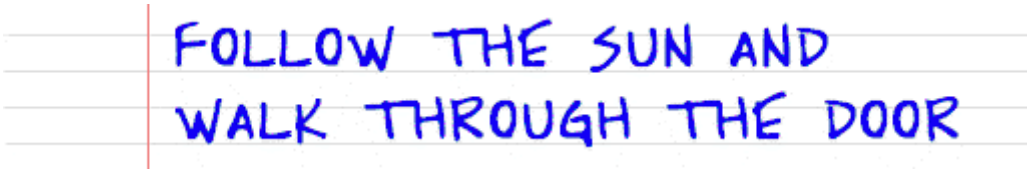
“Look,” Dwight said, “if you know how to figure out the code, let’s get out of here before Mrs. Norolla comes back.”

Max nodded.

They handed Miss Tracy the three books and went outside.

==========

In a shady corner of the covered walkway to the gym, Max worked on the remaining words. Luz and Dwight watched him write:



“This doesn’t make any sense,” Dwight said. “What kind of sun? I know, one of the Phoenix Suns?”

“Nothing about this makes any sense,” Luz agreed.

“You don’t think it’s a pun, do you?” Dwight asked. “You know, like someone’s son—or daughter. Like the Son of the Door Knob on the Door?”

“Stop it, Dwight.”

"Oh, I almost forgot, speaking of the Phoenix Suns," Dwight said. "Look what I brought you, Max." He pulled an Arizona Diamondbacks hat from his back pocket. "You should be wearing this. People don't want to see a Yankees hat in Phoenix. You won't make any friends that way."

Max wasn't looking.

"Here, Max, take it," Dwight urged.

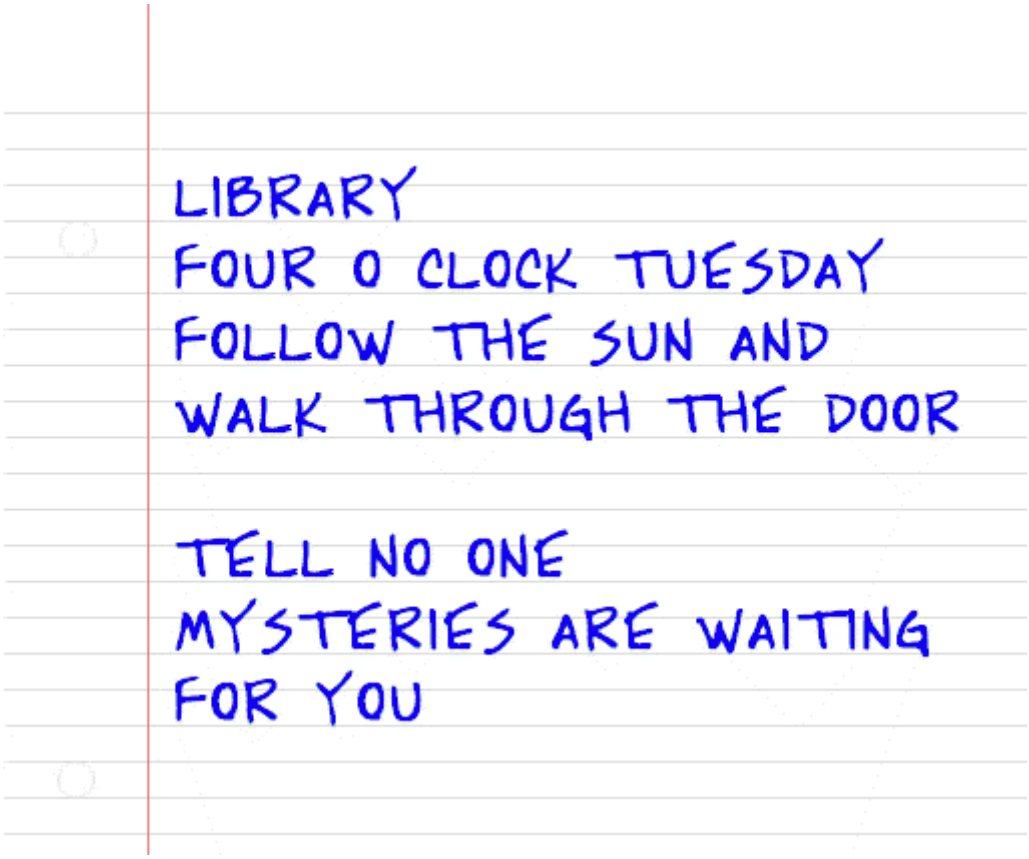
"Leave him alone," Luz said. "He's busy."

"Well, it's your funeral," Dwight said.

At that, Max glanced at Dwight. His lips were clenched as he shook his head.

"Okay, okay," Dwight said. "I get the message."

Max got back to work. In a few more minutes, he had completed the message. They read it again and again, as if the simple words were a new language:



“You’re not going, are you?” Dwight asked.

“I don’t know. Are you?”

“I’ve got detention.”

“So?” Luz asked. “She won’t keep you past 3:30.”

“I don’t know. What about you?” he asked Max.

Max turned the brim of his hat to the side and looked at Luz. Then he nodded once.

The bell was ringing to end the lunch period.

“Do you want to go to the Luna Drive Library after school?” Luz asked Max.

He nodded.

“Do you have to go home first?” she asked.

He shook his head.

“Neither do I. Nobody’s home,” she told him. “So we can go together, and Dwight can meet us. Right?”

“There’d better be somebody in that library this time,” Dwight said, “or I’m not going in. That place creeps me out.”

“See you after detention,” Luz said. "And don't break any more rules!" Then she smiled.

==========

That afternoon was different, as Luz and Max walked to the library. The sky was a solid blue; the air was hot and still. The wind chimes were silent. They followed the path through the vacant lots to the library. They slowly climbed the concrete steps and stood in front of the double doors. They could see lights inside.

“I hope this is fun,” Luz said.

Inside, the library was empty again. The same note was propped on the circulation counter. The ceiling fans spun quietly.

They sat at a table and waited. Luz adjusted her chair, scraping its legs against the floor. In the silent room, the noise seemed too loud. Max watched the pendulum of the wall clock until he felt dizzy. The minute hand moved ever so slowly. He put his head down on the table.

“Don’t go to sleep now,” Luz said. “Dwight should be here.”

He tried to stay awake.

“Do you eat lunch at school?” Luz asked. “Except for today, I don’t ever see you at lunch.”

Max yawned. He shook his head.

“Why not? Do you go home to eat?”

Max shrugged.

“I don’t like going home,” she said. “My mother works too much and doesn’t come home on time. Whenever I go home, I’m by myself.”

He couldn’t look at her now. He couldn’t tell her anything.

“You know, Max,” Luz said, trying to make him look at her, “you’re worse than this secret code. I can’t figure you out at all. I don't want to sound like Mrs. Norolla or anything, but do you ever talk?”

His hat shook slowly.

“Were you born this way? Or did you ever used to talk?"

His hat nodded.

“You did? You used to talk? Did you have an accident?"

His hat didn't answer.

"I'm sorry. I feel like I’m playing Twenty Questions with you.”

She stopped, and they sat in silence.

==========

At three fifty-eight, Max walked to the front door and looked outside.

“Don't worry. Dwight will be here,” Luz said. “Even if he has to run.”

Max opened the door.

“Don’t go out there,” Luz said. “You shouldn’t wait outside the library. You have to be inside the library. It has to be right here.”

Max closed the door and stared through the window, hoping that Dwight would appear on the library walk.

“Come back over here,” Luz called. “We only have a minute till it’s four o’clock.”

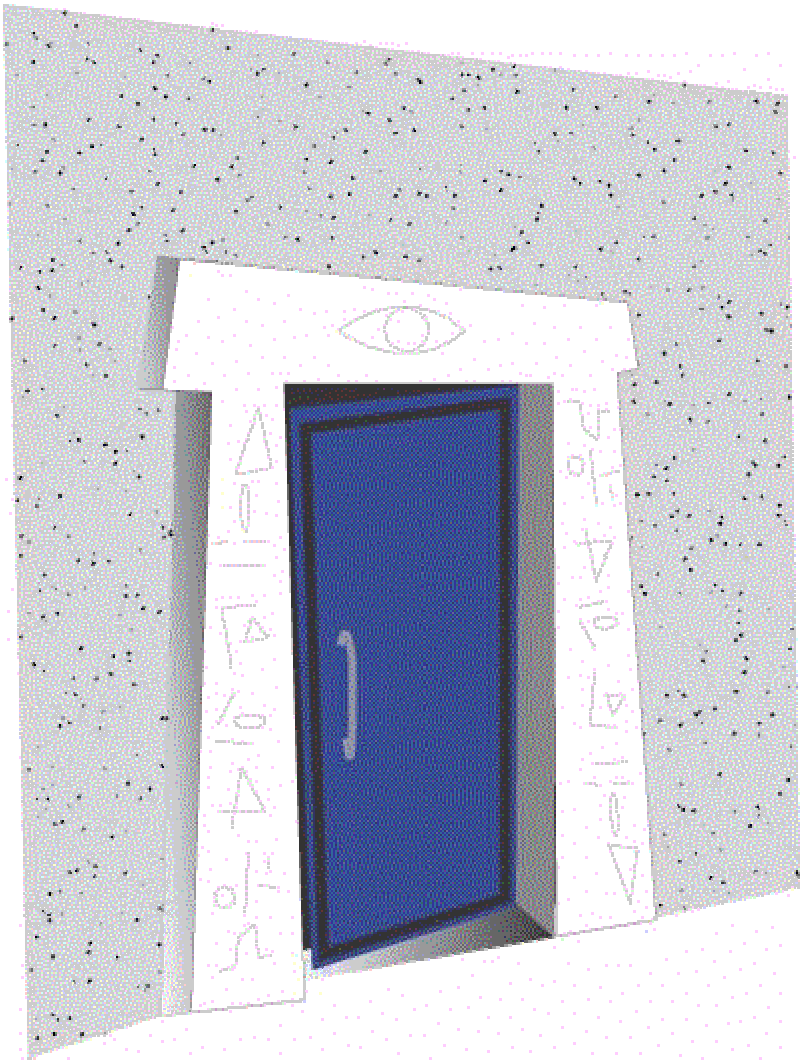
Max returned to his chair. Together they scanned the room, searching for anything that would solve the code.

Then, as the minute hand neared four, they saw something.

A ray of sunlight entered the top window in the tower. The light bounced off the window and cascaded down to the next window, then to the next, all the way to the bottom window in the tower, where the bright beam of light shot down to the first floor and landed on the portrait of Calvin Coolidge. Then the glass that covered the portrait reflected a tiny glare of sunlight onto a wall on the far side of the library.

Max stared. Luz blinked.

Suddenly they saw a door. It hadn’t been there before. Or had it? Luz wondered. The door was blue and looked like metal with little designs around the outside. It was fading into view from the wall, wavering as if it were a watery mirage a mile down an asphalt highway on a summer’s day in Phoenix.



The library clock began to chime.

Max tilted his head back and looked at Luz. They knew exactly what they had to do: they were heading for the door.

The clock was chiming two as Max grabbed the door handle and pulled. All he felt was cool metal in his hands. All he saw was darkness behind the door.

Another door opened as the clock chimed again.

“Wait!” he heard Dwight call.

But there was no time to wait. The fourth chime was sounding.

“Quick,” Luz said, pulling him inside with her.

Dwight reached the secret door as it swung closed.

Four o’clock had struck.

==========

Dwight tried to grab the handle, but it disappeared in his hands. Now he touched only air.

“Where are you?” he tried to call to Max and Luz but his voice sounded different. “Wherrrrrrrrrrrre arrrrrrrrrrrrrre youuuuuuuu,” his mouth said. The words were stretched out and slow.

He was going to get help. He turned his head, trying to run to the library door, but his body couldn’t obey his brain. He could not turn his shoulders. He could not lift his legs or his arms. He felt as if his body had been surrounded by invisible concrete.

Now he couldn’t even move his head.

Only his eyes seemed to be working. The last thing he noticed was the pendulum on the wall clock. It was swinging to a stop.

His eyes stopped moving. His brain went blank. He was completely frozen in place. Later, he would not remember this feeling. He would only remember that Max and Luz had disappeared behind the secret door.

==========

Want to find out what happens next?

Chapter 3 will appear online on December 1.

In the meantime, you can crack this code to get a preview of Chapter 3:

What shocking change happens to one of the characters in Chapter 3?

ANSWER: MXPAS ASEK