

DISTRICT 13

NO
EASY RACE

1

Victor smiled. He won the race! He always did. “Ivan, you’re getting faster!” he joked.

Ivan tried to catch his breath. His hands were on his knees. “You really think so?” he joked back.

“Yes! You were close! Wasn’t he, Carlos?”

Carlos shook his head. He bounced a soccer ball on his knee.

“Too bad you can’t handle a soccer ball, Victor. Such a waste of speed.”

“I use my speed,” Victor said.

“When the ladies chase me!”

“You got the looks, Victor. I’ll give you that,” Ivan said. He was still panting. “But not the brains.”

Victor stopped smiling. That was low. Ivan knew it. Victor grabbed the soccer ball from Carlos. He threw it at Ivan. Ivan turned quickly. The ball hit his hip and rolled away.

It was hot in the park. The September sun was strong. Victor walked to the shade. Carlos joined him. Ivan walked to the soccer ball.

Carlos lit a smoke. He passed it to Victor. Carlos always shared.

Ivan returned with the ball.

Victor handed him the smoke. It was his apology for throwing the ball. Ivan accepted.

“So it is true?” Carlos asked. “About your sister Angela and Marcos?”

“It could be true,” Victor said. “But she hasn’t told my dad. So I don’t know.”

“Who is Marcos?” Ivan asked.

“You know,” Carlos began. “That Puerto Rican. The student council guy.”

“Oh,” Ivan said. They all sat still. Ivan passed the smoke to Victor.

“Look on the bright side,” Ivan said. “It’s better than another white guy. Right, Victor?”

Victor took a long drag. “Barely,”

he said. “Let’ s go. I can’t be late for dinner.”

2

The boys walked to Central Avenue. The stores there had Spanish signs.

Carlos could read them. Victor could not. He wanted to. But it was too late. He was seventeen. And he was flunking English. One language was enough.

Carlos and Ivan lived in the same building. Victor lived a few blocks away.

“Hasta mañana,” Carlos and Ivan said.

“Hasta mañana,” Victor replied.
“See you tomorrow.”

Victor walked home for dinner. His mom made a roast. The kitchen was so hot! They sat down at the table. Victor’s dad said grace. Angela started right away.

“Guess what!” she said. “Marcos asked me to the dance! He’s on student council!”

Their dad’s fork stopped. “Good grades?” he asked.

“Very good grades! He’s going to college, too!”

“He sounds great, Angie,” their mom said. She tucked her blonde hair behind her ear. “But aren’t you

still seeing Edward? Did something happen?”

Angela didn't reply right away. Victor noticed. His fork stopped too.

“No, nothing. I just don't like him anymore. That's all.”

“Dances are expensive,” their dad said. “And you're already in cheerleading. I'll think about it, okay? Bring Marcos to meet the family first.”

Angela beamed. “Thank you, Dad! You will love him. I know it!”

“Let's hope so,” he said. “Speaking of grades. How's school so far, Victor?”

“Fine,” Victor snapped. He didn't want his dad's opinion. Or a crummy job like his either. An airport

translator? No way. Victor was going to work construction. Just like his grandpa had.

“I want you to graduate, Victor. That means no fights. And no Ds.”

“I got it,” Victor said. He stared at his plate.