

ART SEEN



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Chapter 1

It Wasn't Me

Marta Lopez sat with her head down. Her long dark hair fell around her face. If nobody could see her, she wasn't there. She gazed at a loose thread on her sleeve. Suddenly she felt a nudge.

"Huh?" She looked up.

"Are you listening?" her mom asked. "Mr. Dalton is talking to you."

Mr. Dalton was the principal of Stone Brook High School. "I have witnesses," he said. "They saw you do it."

He put his phone in front of Marta and her mom. "And I have more proof."

Someone had taken a picture of a drawing. It was a donkey with words scribbled under it.

Marta shook her head. Seriously? She loved to draw.

But not on bathroom walls. That was kid stuff. Not something a 15-year-old would do.

And she would never call Mr. King an ass. He was the art teacher. Art was the only class she liked. Besides that, the drawing was bad. If she *had* done this drawing? It would have been good.

"I promise you," Mrs. Lopez said. "My daughter would never do that. She knows better." She moved Marta's hair from her face.

"Stop, Mom." Marta pulled away.

"Tell me you didn't do this," Mr. Dalton said.

Marta knew the truth. But she wasn't talking.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Lopez. It's important that your daughter learns a lesson." He looked at Marta. "I'm suspending you for three days. I've told your teachers. They will email you any homework. And this will go on your record. Do you understand?"

"Yes," she mumbled.

"And, Marta," he said. "There are only a few weeks until summer break. I urge you to make the rest of the year count. Do your best. And try to stay out of trouble."



The meeting with Mr. Dalton was over. But the drama was just beginning. On the drive home, her mom did most of the talking.

“I swear on all that is holy. I don’t know what to do with you. Or what to say.”

“Then don’t say anything,” Marta said softly.

“Shut your mouth!” her mom shot back. “Don’t you dare say another word. I missed work for this. That’s half a day’s pay. And for what? To hear good things? No. To hear that you’re a vandal.”

Here we go, Marta thought. There was nothing she could do. Her mom was not going to stop.

“Your dad and I have tried to be patient. But we’re tired of your moods. The way you mope around. You don’t even talk to us. All you do is sit in your room and draw. Draw, draw, draw. In that little notepad. Thank God for the A in art. At least you have one good grade.”

Marta stared out the window.

“There’s no excuse. You’re a smart girl. And so pretty. Why do you hide it? Just look at your clothes. That big shirt and baggy pants. And your hair. You never comb it. No wonder you have no friends.”

That last comment wasn’t fair. It was true that Marta didn’t have friends. But it wasn’t her fault.

For most of her life, her parents had been farmworkers. That meant they had to move a lot. Her dad had a phrase for it. *Following the harvest*. They picked onions in Texas. Lettuce in California. Berries in Michigan.

With each move, it was like starting over. She was the new girl all over again. It was hard to make friends.

It took time, but her parents got better jobs. Now they worked at a factory that canned fruit.

Both worked the canning line. They washed and peeled fruit and filled containers. Her dad made sure the line was set up properly. He also cleaned the equipment.

The factory canned other foods too. The work was year-round. So far, they'd had the same day shift. But that could always change. It depended on when crops came in. Sometimes one or both of them worked overtime.

Even with extra hours, it didn't add up to much money. But the family could stay in one place. It was a better life for their daughters. "More normal," they had said.

Marta struggled with the idea of "normal." What did that even mean? For her it was still a lonely life. She wasn't able to make friends. But she didn't try either.

Her mom's voice broke through her thoughts.

"Your grades have to get better. Do you hear me?" she said. "It's your only chance for a good life. Don't you get that? Or do you want to work in the fields? I know I don't want that life again."

No, Marta didn't want that life. But she couldn't picture what her life would be.

Chapter 2

House Arrest

The ride home had been one long lecture. The car pulled into the driveway.

Finally!

They got out of the car. Marta hurried ahead of her mom into the house. She just wanted to get to her room and be alone.

Most of the time that was impossible. The room wasn't just Marta's. She was forced to share it with her sister. Elena was 12. Her side was done completely in pink. She thought she was a princess. No room was big enough for the two of them.

A teen Marta's age should have her own bedroom. It was that way in other families, wasn't it?

On her way down the hall, Marta saw Elena. She was at the bedroom door and about to go in.

“Get out of there,” Marta shouted. She pushed Elena out of the way. “I have to study.”

“Hey!” Elena shouted back. “It’s my room too.”

“Stay out!” Marta slammed the door and locked it. She fell onto her bed.

Her sister was now crying. Any minute their mom would be at the door.

Marta was used to people being mad at her. Usually they were right. But this time was different. She was in trouble for something she didn’t even do.

“You are a vandal,” Mr. Dalton had said. She couldn’t tell him the truth. That Tina Barber was the real vandal. She drew on the bathroom wall and blamed Marta.

Tina was the most popular girl in tenth grade. Nobody would believe Marta over her. Not even Mr. Dalton.

Saying something would have only made things worse. Tina would find a way to get even. She always had to have the last word. That’s how bullies were.

Once, Marta tried to stand up to Tina. But it was hard without friends to back her up. So she decided to just ignore her.

Tina didn’t like that either. That’s when she became

Tina's target. The drawing in the bathroom was payback. And it worked.

She pulled a little notebook from her back pocket. It was always with her. Kind of like a best friend. Her mom had gotten it for her. She knew Marta loved to draw. Then why had she complained about it in the car?

"All you do is draw," she'd said.

Marta ran her finger across the cover. It gave her a feeling of comfort. That must be how it felt to have a real friend.

She put her hair in a ponytail and opened the notepad. Her pen moved quickly over the page. A line of tall buildings stretched across the paper. It was the scene of a city she didn't know.

"Let me in!" Elena yelled. She started pounding on the door.

Marta kept drawing.

The doorknob turned. "Marta!" her mom yelled. "Open this door right now! Let your sister in!"

"I'm trying to do my homework!" she yelled back.

She turned the page and drew even faster. There were the same buildings as before. But she also drew docks and water. It didn't seem like her work. There were details she'd never even thought about.

"You're being punished, remember? For the next

three days,” her mom yelled. “You will keep up with your homework. And when that’s done? You will clean this whole house! Every room. From top to bottom. Do you hear me? Now open this door!”

It was going to be a long three days. Marta stared at the drawing. Was this a real place? She wished she could go through the page.

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Marta loves to draw. It's a way to take out her frustrations. The drawing of a school bully on fire was only a joke. Who knew it would come true? Then there was the bomb threat. But that had to be a coincidence. Soon it seems all of Marta's drawings are coming to life. When she draws a mysterious place over and over, she's sure that it's a sign. Nothing will stop her from finding it, whatever danger she may face. Her best friend's life may depend on it.



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