

ESPERANZA RISING CHAPTER SUMMARIES (1-8)

Chapter 1: 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 Sixto 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!" Woo! (Sorry, we're getting into it over here.)

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.

But... let's not think about that right now. Esperanza never wants to leave her Mama and Papa and El Rancho de las Rosas. And anyway, boys have cooties.

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." Superstitious much?

Papa has promised to meet her in the garden, but it's getting dark, and he still hasn't returned from working the cattle. Hmmm.

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. Jackpot.

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!" Aww.

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.

Oh no.

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.

And—you might want to be sitting down for this—Papa's dead body is in the back of the truck.

Chapter 2: Las Papayas (Papayas)

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.

Uh oh. This can't be good. Tío Luis is a big jerk, so we know he's not going to be a very nice landlord.

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.

No. Way. 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? (We mean, aside from the fact that she's totally gorgeous, smart, kind and talented. Mama is the total package.)

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. Hmmm.

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. Cool, huh? Since these roses knew Papa, Esperanza wants to make rosehip tea tomorrow.

As she's sitting there, out comes Miguel. (Swoon!) 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. Right on cue, she blushes.

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. Ouch.

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. It's a comforting one, that's for sure.

Chapter 3: Los Higos (Figs)

Instead of dreaming of the birthday song, Esperanza dreams she's being suffocated by a bear. Not quite as good.

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. Talk about heroic.

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. Because, you know, that's worth risking your life for.

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." Yeah, right.

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. (Insert evil chuckle here.)

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. What a slimeball.

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.

Yikes. Moving to a big country—this is a big stinkin' deal.

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. Go figure.

Abuelita's awesome nun sisters come to pick her up and take her to the convent, where she'll recover. (We really like the idea of nuns conspiring to trick Tío Luis.)

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. Is Abuelita always this deep? (Yes.)

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. Tricky.

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. (Insert not-so-evil cackle here.)

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.

Chapter 4: Las Guayabas (Guavas)

They arrive at a barn, where Señor Rodríguez is waiting with a wagon and lots of crates of green guavas.

Here's the plan: The men have built a false floor in the wagon. The women will lie down in the space between the floors, so that no one will see them leaving town. They'll take the cart to Zacatecas and catch the train there.

It looks a little claustrophobic to Esperanza, and she wants to sit in the front with Miguel and Alfonso. But it's just not safe.

Off they go. The women lie down and the men cover the floor with guavas. If anyone sees them on the road, it will just look like a farmer and his son are taking a cart of guavas to market. No big deal.

To distract Esperanza, Hortensia tells the story of how, when she was small, they had to hide from some bandits who broke into the house.

Here's the story:

Miguel, Hortensia, and Esperanza hid under the bed, but what they didn't know was that Miguel had a mouse in his pocket. Great.

The bandits were searching the bedroom when a pin poked Esperanza and she made a noise. No!

But quick-thinking Miguel pushed the mouse out from under the bed, and the super-scary bandits figured the noise had come from the mouse. They left, and Hortensia, Esperanza, and Miguel were safe.

To reward Miguel for protecting his most prized possession (his daughter), Papa asked Miguel what he wanted as a reward.

Money? Toys? A lifetime supply of jelly beans? Nope. What Miguel wanted most was to go on a train ride.

And that's the end of Hortensia's part of the story. Esperanza picks it up from there, though, remembering the train ride that Miguel earned as his reward.

Miguel was eight, and Esperanza five. They had taken a day-long train ride from Aguascalientes to Zacatecas.

The children wore their best clothes, and we're pretty sure Miguel looked ridiculously cute in his little bow tie.

Their car had soft leather seats, and the dining car had white linens, silver, and crystal. When the waiter asked if he could bring them anything, Esperanza responded, "Yes, please bring lunch now." Well that's blunt.

Papa, Miguel, and Esperanza had been the image of a doting father and two privileged children.

In Zacatecas, a woman boarded the train carrying carved mangoes on a stick that looked like exotic flowers. Papa bought one for each of them.

Back in the present, Esperanza wishes they could travel to Zacatecas in comfort, like they did that day when she was five.

No can do this time. Now they have to take back roads, with the women hidden under a giant pile of guavas. Not exactly first class.

It takes them two days to travel from Aguascalientes to Zacatecas in the wagon. When they arrive, they hide the wagon in a thicket of shrubs and walk into town.

Esperanza is looking forward to a comfortable train ride, but they sure don't board the fancy car with leather seats. Instead, they board a car with wooden benches, crowded with peasants. It's dirty and smelly.

Esperanza has never been around peasants before. She tells Mama that they can't ride in this car—it's not clean, and she doesn't think the people look trustworthy.

Mama tells her daughter to check herself before she wrecks herself. This is all they can afford now.

Esperanza sulks. Turns out being poor is no fun.

She opens her case to check on the doll, and a little barefoot peasant girl runs over to see it. Esperanza quickly jerks it away—she doesn't want a dirty peasant girl touching her doll.

Mama apologizes to the peasant girl's mother for Esperanza's bad manners, but Esperanza is appalled. She and Mama shouldn't even be sitting in this car—why is Mama apologizing to a peasant?

Esperanza is in for a major lecture from Mama. She's acting like a spoiled brat.

Mama tells Esperanza that being rude to people because they're poor is like being rude to her friends Hortensia, Alfonso, and Miguel. She needs to cut it out, and quick.

Esperanza feels ashamed and sulks in the corner.

The little peasant girl is still crying so Mama gets Esperanza to help her make a doll out of yarn. She gives it to the little girl, who is pleased as punch.

It seems to Esperanza like the train ride is never-ending. And whenever they stop, Miguel and Alfonso get off the train with a mysterious package. Hmmm.

Not surprisingly, Esperanza is super cranky. Miguel keeps chattering on about trains and how cool they are, and she wishes he would be quiet already.

Miguel dreams of working for a railroad. Papa was going to get him a job, and Miguel gets misty-eyed just talking about it.

Apparently, in the United States, you can get a job on a railroad without having connections. So hey, maybe he can make his dreams come true.

On the fourth day, a woman gets on the train with six chickens. She sits down next to Mama and Hortensia, and the three women quickly warm up to each other.

The woman's name is Carmen. She explains that she is poor, but she has everything she needs to be happy: her children, a rose garden, her faith, and the memories of her loved ones who have died.

Mama finds this woman really inspiring. Soon enough, she loosens up and tells Carmen all about her troubles.

Esperanza is really confused. Before Papa died, Mama would never have been this open with a peasant woman.

She tries to tell Mama not to tell a peasant all their personal business, but Mama says it's all right—now they are peasants, too.

When Carmen gets off the train, Mama gives her three of the lace doilies she has made, and Carmen gives Mama two chickens. They hug goodbye like they've known each other forever.

In front of the station, a crippled beggar holds her hand out to a group of wealthy men and women. They ignore her, but Carmen gives the beggar some tortillas and a coin.

Miguel points out this selfless act to Esperanza: "The rich take care of the rich and the poor take care of those who have less than they have" (4.96).

Esperanza doesn't understand why Carmen has to help the beggar at all. After all, right next door is a market with all sorts of fresh food.

Miguel can tell that Esperanza doesn't get it. He tells her that in Mexico, people with Spanish blood and light complexions are the wealthiest, and people with dark skin are poor. Esperanza feels guilty that she's never noticed this before.

But she doesn't have to worry about that now—they're going to the United States, where she won't have to worry about pesky problems like racism and poverty. Right?

Chapter 5: Los Melones (Cantaloupes)

Finally the train reaches the border between Mexico and the U.S. It stops in the city of Mexicali, where the passengers must disembark in order to pass through immigration.

The wealthy people in the nice cars get to go to the shortest lines and pass through quickly. Everyone else has to wait in long, smelly, sweaty lines.

The immigration official is intimidating, and asks lots of scary questions. But Mama stands up tall and looks him right in the eye. She insists that everything is in order.

The man stamps their papers with the words "Mexican National," and lets them pass.

While Esperanza and Mama wait for everybody else to pass through, they notice several groups of people being directed onto another train headed back to Mexico.

Mama explains why those people may have been turned away: no papers, false papers, or no proof of work. Or maybe there was a problem with just one person's paperwork, but the entire family decided to go back instead of being separated.

In other words, Esperanza and her mom are super lucky to have made it through immigration with no problems.

They nervously wait for Alfonso, Hortensia, and Miguel. Hortensia eventually shows up, but Miguel and Alfonso only jump on the train at the very last minute, as it's pulling away.

Turns out they were watering their mysterious package. Hmmm.

On a Thursday, they finally arrive in Los Angeles and meet Alfonso's family: Alfonso's brother Juan and his wife Josefina, and their children Isabel and the twins.

Isabel, who is eight, seems to know a lot about Esperanza already. Guess Miguel has been writing about her in his letters. Um, we hope he only said nice things.

Everybody piles into a rickety old truck and they set off.

On the ride to their new home, Isabel explains to them that they will be living in a town called Arvin in a company-owned camp. Rent is \$7 a month, and it includes running water, electricity and a kitchen.

This camp is way better than the one Isabel's family used to live in, where they had to stay in a tent. In fact, there's even a school where Isabel will be learning to read and speak English.

Finally, the group stops for lunch. Esperanza promptly wanders away from everyone else.

She stops on an overlook, and wonders if she can hear the heartbeat of the valley, the way she could at home. Esperanza lies down on the land, but she can't hear the earth's heartbeat. She loses her patience and begins to cry.

She starts to feel like she's floating upward into the sky. She can't feel her connection to the earth anymore, and she feels like she is falling. Suddenly, the world goes black.

Yikes.

Esperanza must look pretty bad because Miguel hovers over her and asks if she's all right. He holds her hand and tells her that he's feeling all the things she is feeling. He misses Esperanza's Papa, too, and the ranch, and Mexico.

This time, Esperanza doesn't let go of Miguel's hand.

The truck enters the San Joaquin Valley. And what an impressive sight it is; farmland stretches into the distance as far as the eye can see.

Juan stops the truck a couple times. First, they make a stop at a field that's already been harvested so they can collect leftover melons.

Then they stop to pick up a girl that the family knows. Her name is Marta, and she is obviously checking out Miguel.

When Marta finds out that Esperanza used to be rich, she isn't very nice to her.

To try to change the subject, Isabel points out groups of workers from the Philippines and Oklahoma. She says that the farms keep the groups separate—they don't work or live together.

Marta explains that the farmers don't want the workers to band together to bargain for higher wages or better housing. See, the workers negotiate better conditions on the farms by going on strike (i.e., joining together and refusing to work).

Esperanza isn't a huge fan of Marta—she kind of wants to toss her out the back of the truck.

Chapter 6: Las Cebollas (Onions)

Home sweet home... ish. They've made it.

The Mexican camp consists of rows of white cabins that look about as nice as the horse stalls on Esperanza's old ranch.

Marta jumps out of the truck and runs to speak to some of her friends in English. They all look at Esperanza and laugh.

Hmm. It looks like Esperanza had better learn English.

Esperanza is dismayed to see that the whole camp shares communal toilets. But Isabel says it's better than some camps where they have to go in ditches. Yep, communal toilets it is.

The foreman shows Alfonso which cabin is theirs, and Mama and Esperanza walk into the tiny two-room structure.

Esperanza assumes this is the cabin for her and Mama. But Mama tells her they have to share it with Alfonso, Hortensia, and Isabel.

This is a family camp, and each family must have a male head of household. There's no housing for single women, so they'll have to pretend that Alfonso and Mama are cousins.

Mama sings while she unpacks, and Esperanza flips out. How can Mama sing at a time like this?

Mama shuts the door and tells Esperanza to sit down. Uh oh. Esperanza is in for a lecture.

They have two choices, Mama explains. To be together and be miserable, or to be together and be happy. In Mexico, they wouldn't have had that choice. They would have been separated by Tío Luis.

This smart lady tells Esperanza to be grateful. Many people come to this area in search of work and have to wait months to get a job. They are lucky to have work and a place to live.

Noted.

A few minutes later, Isabel comes into the room and asks Esperanza to tell her a story. She wants to know what it like was to be rich.

Esperanza tells Isabel that she still is rich. Soon Abuelita will arrive with all her money, and she'll take Esperanza away from all of this!

(Hmm, not the answer we were looking for.)

This girl is miserable.

Next thing you know, Esperanza smells breakfast. She's slept through dinner and the entire night, and now it's the first day of work.

Esperanza and Isabel will watch the babies while the men pick grapes and the women pack grapes in the sheds.

Esperanza will also get paid to sweep the wooden platform in the camp every afternoon.

Miguel has gone to Bakersfield to look for work at the railroad.

Mama looks a bit different that day. She's wearing her hair in a long braid down her back, like a peasant. Esperanza doesn't like it, but Mama points out that it's more practical.

Esperanza goes next door to help Isabel with the twin babies, Lupe and Pepe. The girls clean them up and then Isabel shows Esperanza the camp.

On the tour, a little girl runs up and takes Isabel's hand. Isabel introduces her as Silvia, her best friend.

Silvia grabs Esperanza's hand. At first, Esperanza wants to pull her hand away and wash it. But then she remembers Mama's kindness to the peasant girl on the train, and she realizes it must be difficult to stay clean in a place like this. So she squeezes Silvia's hand and tells them about her best friend Marisol in Aguascalientes.

Next up, Esperanza meets Irene and her daughter Melina. They've already heard about Esperanza's family.

Melina says her husband used to work for Señor Rodríguez in Aguascalientes. Esperanza asks if he knew Marisol, Señor Rodríguez's daughter. Melina laughs and says no—her husband is un campesino, a field servant. He wouldn't have known the family.

Esperanza asks Isabel how Irene and Melina know all about her already. Easy, says Isabel. In camp, everybody knows everybody else's business. Well, then.

It quickly becomes obvious that Esperanza isn't much of a housekeeper. In fact, she doesn't know the first thing about housework.

Soon, Esperanza is getting lessons in keeping house from Isabel. Who, may we remind you, is only eight years old.

Little Isabel has to show her how to wash the babies' diapers.

But Esperanza still has a long way to go. When she goes out to sweep the platform, we suddenly realize that she doesn't know how to use a broom.

This is just embarrassing.

She's so focused that she doesn't notice when several trucks pull up, bringing workers back from the fields and the sheds.

Esperanza hears laughter, and she sees Marta and a group of women pointing at her. Marta calls her "La Cenicienta, Cinderella."

How humiliating. Esperanza drops the broom and runs back to the cabin.

Isabel finds Esperanza in her room, sitting by herself. Yup, the whole camp is talking about this.

Miguel walks into the room, carrying the broom and dustpan. He shows Esperanza how to sweep, and calls her "mi reina, my queen"—just like he used to.

Miguel hasn't been able to find work at the railroad. Even though he's a gifted mechanic, they will only hire Mexicans to dig ditches or lay tracks.

Isabel asks for another story. Esperanza promises to tell her all about her luxurious former life if Isabel will teach Esperanza how to do housework.

It's a deal.

Chapter 7: Las Almendras (Almonds)

Working in the sheds is tough. Mama and Hortensia complain about their aching bodies, but Josefina reassures them that they'll get used to it.

After a long, hard day at work, it's family dinner time.

After dinner, Miguel and Alfonso disappear on a mysterious mission. Those two are always up to something.

Just before sunset, Miguel comes back and asks Mama and Esperanza to follow him.

Are you ready for the big reveal? Behind the cabin, Miguel and Alfonso have planted a rose garden.

But these aren't just any roses. These are roses that they have managed to save from Papa's old garden in Aguascalientes. So sweet.

Esperanza is moved to tears. Mama tells her, "Didn't I tell you that Papa's heart would find us wherever we go?"

The next day is the big camp-wide party, called a jamaica.

The women all gather in one cabin to take baths. Esperanza expects Hortensia to bathe her, like she has since Esperanza was a baby. She stands awkwardly near the tub, waiting for Hortensia to undress her. She's forgotten that things are different now.

This could potentially be really embarrassing, but fortunately Hortensia is a tactful lady. She doesn't make Esperanza feel bad for expecting some help and says now they can all help each other.

Once they're all clean and pretty, Isabel and Esperanza go outside to shell some almonds for Josefina.

Isabel tries to convince Esperanza to go to the party that night. But Esperanza is so not feeling it.

After all, Marta and all her friends will be there.

Isabel tells Esperanza a little more about Marta. She and her mother were both born in the U.S., so they're citizens. They've never even been to Mexico. Marta's father came from Mexico during the Mexican Revolution.

Juan doesn't like it when Marta and her friends come to the jamaicas, because they're always talking about striking.

So yeah, the mean girl brigade will probably be there. But Josefina is going to make flan de almendra, almond flan.

Hmmm: potential humiliation on the one hand, almond flan on the other...

That settles it. Esperanza is definitely going to the party. She never says no to a good flan.

At the party, Isabel drags Esperanza over to check out—wait for it—a box of kittens. (Yes, this is our idea of a perfect party.)

By the time Esperanza is finished convincing Isabel's mom to let them keep one, a crowd has gathered.

It's Marta and her friends. They're trying to convince the workers to join the strike. Don't be like meek little kittens, she tells the crowd. Be ferocious tigers.

The workers kick Marta and her friends out of the party.

On the way back to the cabins, Esperanza asks Josefina what Marta's deal is.

Marta and her mother are migrant workers, which means they travel all over the state looking for work. The migrant camps are the worst.

The company camp where Esperanza is living now is one of the better camps. That explains why a lot of the people who live there don't want to join the strike. They don't want to risk losing their jobs.

The strikers want higher wages for the people who pick cotton. Right now they only make seven cents for every pound of cotton they pick.

And in case you didn't think things were complicated enough already, lots of people are moving to the San Joaquin Valley from places like Oklahoma. That means if the Mexican workers lose their jobs, there are plenty of new workers to take their place.

Esperanza tells Isabel a bedtime story about her old life in Aguascalientes, but it feels weird talking about luxurious parties after hearing about Marta and her family.

When Esperanza's Mama comes home, they lie in bed and talk about the things they miss and the things they are going to pray for in church the next day. Esperanza's Mama says she will pray that Esperanza can be strong, no matter what happens.

Chapter 8: Las Ciruelas (Plums)

It's the first day of school. Esperanza walks Isabel to the bus stop, while Isabel gives her last-minute instructions on how to take care of the babies.

At home, Esperanza watches the twins and puts on the stove a big pot of beans that Hortensia had prepared. Next up, she feeds the babies plums for lunch and then puts them down for a nap. Looks like she's got everything under control.

Or not. When the babies wake up, they have diarrhea. Eww.

While Esperanza is trying to deal with all the dirty diapers, the beans on the stove start to burn. This is very quickly turning into a disaster.

What would Hortensia do? When Esperanza had a tummy-ache, Hortensia always used to give her rice water... jackpot.

Somehow, Esperanza figures out how to make rice water by herself. Then she feeds it to the babies and waits for Isabel to come home to help her deal.

When Isabel gets home, she congratulates Esperanza on the rice water strategy. That was exactly the right thing to do. Booya.

That night, no one mentions all the diapers hanging out to dry or the fact that the beans are a little burnt.

Esperanza goes to bed early. It's been a rough day.

The grownups have to work every day now, because the grapes need to be harvested. That means it's go time.

Esperanza gets used to the whole housekeeping thing after a while. The babies adore her, and Esperanza knows how to wash diapers like a pro.

One day, Melina and Irene come over. They sit outside, talking about the strike that is supposed to go down that day, when suddenly the weather gets really crazy.

A hot blast of wind hits them, and the sky in the east looks brown. It's a bird! It's a plane! Nope. It's a dust storm.

The women run inside with the babies and shut all the windows.

All the dirt in the air makes it impossible to see out the window. Dirt and sand fly against the windows, and dust seeps in under the doors.

Man, if it's this bad inside the house, things must be terrible for all the poor people in the sheds and fields.

Esperanza hears a meowing at the door, and opens it to find Isabel's orange kitten covered in brown dirt.

When the wind stops, Irene and Melina run home with Melina's baby covered by a blanket. The air is still full of dust.

Isabel gets home from school, worried about her cat.

Then the women get home from the sheds. Mama is coughing, and the women have so much dirt on their faces, they look like raccoons.

As it turns out, the trucks couldn't get to the workers in the sheds or the fields. When the men get home, they are completely caked in dirt.

Alfonso tells the family that the strike failed because of the storm. All the cotton is now buried in dirt. Tomorrow, none of the strikers will have a job.

The grapes, on the other hand, are higher off the ground and still in need of picking. That means Esperanza's family will go back to work.

The next day, everyone goes about their business as if nothing unusual had happened.

The only thing that seems to have changed is Mama. She never stops coughing.

A month later, Mama still isn't better. She's pale, and she has lost weight. Hortensia thinks she should go to the doctor, but Mama refuses—after all, doctors are expensive.

Mama lies down to rest, but when Esperanza tries to wake her, she's burning up with fever.

They call a doctor for Mama. He's blond and American, but he speaks perfect Spanish. The doctor says that Mama has Valley Fever, a disease of the lungs caused by dust spores. If Mama survives, it might be six months before she's well again.

That really freaks out Esperanza. She's already lost Papa, and Abuelita is still so far away—she doesn't know what she'd do if she lost Mama.