

MARIA'S ROSE

by Ken Bradbury



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Maria sits alone eating her lunch. Josie enters. She looks around for a place to sit. There are none available except for a single seat beside Maria. After some further checking for another place, she takes a seat.

JOSIE: *(barely audible)* Hi. *(Maria looks at her a brief moment, not sure how to respond, then returns to her lunch) (after a long pause)* No place else to sit. Hope you don't care. *(Maria looks at her a moment, then shakes her head and begins eating. Another long beat as the two girls eat in uncomfortable silence, then)* You new? *(Maria is afraid to respond and simply nods her head Yes.)* Thought so. Hadn't seen you. *(another long silence, then)* You ever talk? *(She looks at Maria who is again caught in an awkward situation. She smiles a very small smile and shrugs.)* I mean, you don't have to. I was just wondering. *(a long beat, then)* Mexican? *(Maria nods.)* Thought so. I mean, that's okay with me. Hey, people are people, okay? *(Maria hesitates a moment then nods.) (another long pause, then)* You do speak English, don't you?

MARIA: *(with an accent and all the courage she can summon, she pinches two fingers together to indicate a small amount)* Little.

JOSIE: That's okay.

MARIA: Not good.

JOSIE: Heck, I don't either. *(a forced laugh) (a pause then)* Makin' any friends? *(Maria hesitates. How can she answer that?... she shrugs)* Hard, isn't it? *(Maria nods) (another pause as the two try deal with the awkwardness)* Hey! A rose in your hair! You don't se that too much in this cafeteria ... or the whole school, either. It's ... cute. Well, I gotta go. Been good knowin' you. Oh ... I'm Josie. *(she offers her hand. Maria looks at it a moment then takes it)* You?

MARIA: Maria.

JOSIE: Maria. Cool. See you 'round, Maria. *(As she leaves, Maria summons all the courage she can muster and puts her hand on Josie's arm. Josie stops, puzzled. Then Maria reaches into her lunch, pulls something out and offers it to Josie.)* Cookie? Hey ... thanks. *(she takes the cookie, chomps on it and leaves)*

MARIA: *(writing)* It is very hard, Papa. It is hard to be different from others. I feel a stranger.

JOSIE: (*writing*) Dear Diary. Cool day. Made cheerleading! Yes! Been wanting that so bad I could taste it. Joey spoke to me after math. I mean he came all the way across the hallway to do it ... not just like a “Hey” or something. That’s a good sign, diary. That’s an awesome sign! Oh yeah ... sat by a new Mexican girl at lunch. Don’t remember her name.

MARIA: (*writing*) I know you are busy working, but please come home when you can. I miss you very much. Mama works very hard and she does not complain, but I know she is very, very tired. I met a girl at lunch time. Her name is Josie. I pray tomorrow will be better. (*she begins to eat her lunch*
(*They both stand and turn backs to audience to indicate it is the next day.*)

JOSIE: (*entering with her lunch tray*) Hey! Here we are again! Can I sit? (*Maria nods*) This is pretty cool ... two days in a row, one seat left. I was meeting with the new cheerleaders. Did you know I made cheerleader? (*Maria shakes her head.*) Do they have cheerleaders where you come from? Look, I’m sorry. I forgot your name already.

MARIA: Maria.

JOSIE: Oh, heck yes. Sorry. Maria. They got cheerleaders in Mexico?

MARIA: I ... I think so.

JOSIE: I don’t suppose you ever cheered?

MARIA: I played soccer.

JOSIE: Now that is too cool! Who wants to cheer when you can play, right? So you’re like ... a jock?

MARIA: (*a pause, then*) Jock?

JOSIE: You play sports? Macho man stuff?

MARIA: (*the closest her shyness will allow her to come to a laugh*) I am a girl.

JOSIE: (*laughs*) Yeah. Yeah, I guess you are. I didn’t mean you looked like a boy. We don’t have a girls’ soccer team. So ... big family I guess. All Mexicans have big families I hear.

MARIA: Just four of us. Mama, Papa, my sister and Maria. Me.

JOSIE: I love accents, you know that? There’s lots of people think we all ought to speak alike but I think it’s pretty cool when people say things funny like you do. I mean ... I don’t think it’s wrong ... just different.

MARIA: Yes. Different.

JOSIE: Oh, shoot. I’m sorry ... uh ...

MARIA: Maria.

JOSIE: I'm sorry, Maria. The cheerleaders are motioning me over. I need to talk to them if you don't mind. We got this fundraiser for new uniforms.

MARIA: No.

JOSIE: (*standing with her tray*) Good seeing you, Maria. See! I finally remembered your name! See ya, Maria! Buenos dias!

MARIA: Adios ... uh ... good-bye.

JOSIE: (*writing*) One awesome day, diary. The cheerleaders met for the first time. And Joey spoke to me again and he walked all the way to the computer lab with me. You ask me, that means we're a sure thing.

MARIA: (*writing*) Papa, I do not want to go back to school. The most awful thing happened today.

JOSIE: (*writing*) And guess who got the best grade in American History today? Yours truly!

MARIA: (*writing*) I was humiliated, Papa.

JOSIE: (*writing*) I mean, I've had awesome days, but this was just the awesome-est!

MARIA: (*to herself*) I cannot send this letter. Papa will be sad. (*she tears it up and begins eating her lunch*)
(They stand, turn to indicate a day passing.)

JOSIE: (*entering, holding her lunch tray*) You know, this is getting to be a habit. (*she sits, then notices something*) You been crying? (*Maria turns her head away so Josie cannot see her face. Josie gently touches Maria's chin and pulls her head to see her tears.*) You have been crying. I'm sorry. What happened?

MARIA: Nada. Nothing.

JOSIE: That's a lie.

MARIA: I am sorry. I do not mean to lie to you. You are ... you have been kind to me.

JOSIE: But somebody's been mean to you?

MARIA: I am sorry to bother you.

JOSIE: You aren't a bother, girl. I just want to know what happened. And what happened to your rose?

MARIA: Rose?

JOSIE: Oh, come on now. Every day I've seen you, you've had this rose in your hair. It's gone.

MARIA: I ... I took it out.

JOSIE: Why?



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