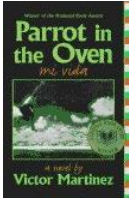


Passages

Reading Level 7



Title: Parrot in the Oven

Author: Victor Martinez

Sample From The Book

At first Nardo didn't want to go the fields. Not because of pride, although he'd have used that excuse at the beginning if he could've gotten away with it. It was more because, like anyone else he didn't like sobbing out tears of sweat in 110-degree sun. That summer was a scorcher, maybe the worst in all the years we'd lived in that valley desert, which our town would've been if the irrigation pumped in from the Sierra were turned off. I could tell how searing it was by the dragged-out way my mom's roses drooped every morning after I watered them. The water didn't catch hold. The roses only sighed a moment before the sun sucked even that little breather away.

Although it was hard for Nard to duck my mom's accusing eyes, especially when Magda, my sister, came home slumped from the laundry after feeding bedsheets all day into a steam press, he was refusing to work anymore. Whether one tried threats, scoldings, or even shaming, which my mom tried almost every other day, nothing worked. We all gave it a shot, but none more vigorously than my dad. He'd yell and stomp around a little space of anger he'd cut in our living room, a branch of spit dangling from his lip. He'd declare to the walls what a good-for-nothing son he had, even dare Nardo to at least be man enough to join the army. He vowed to sign the papers himself, since Nardo wasn't old enough.



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