# Seconds ‘til the Revolution

1968\. East L.A.  
  
Dorita sits at her desk, a bundle of nerves and impatient feet. The heels of  
her shoes squeak on the linoleum tiles as she taps her toes to the rhythm of  
the clock's ticking. Sweat drips down her back. She imagines an entire colony  
of ants crawling beneath the fabric of her blouse. They collect on the elastic  
waistband of her skirt and soak through, making her twitch in her seat.  
  
Around her, several others betray their nerves too. Fingers pull at hair,  
pencils tap furiously against desks. Mr. McDonald stands at the front of the  
classroom, chalk squeaking on the blackboard. He blabbers on about the Civil  
War.  
  
Dorita closes her eyes and breathes. She starts to wonder if maybe she should  
just remain in class after all, and be a good student. Sit here and make her  
parents proud.  
  
\_Or \_she could walk out.  
  
The words reverberate within her head, syllables splitting and reproducing  
like cells--infinite. \_Walk out, walk out, walk out\_.  
  
Her boyfriend Emmanuel had dropped out of school last fall. The palms of his  
hands had still been bright red from where his teacher had brought down the  
ruler with a vengeance.  
  
He had forgotten the word 'escalate.' His teacher had asked, with an impatient  
urgency, "Come on, Emmanuel. What are you trying to say?"  
  
"It had grown! Ugh." He had pulled at his hair, trying to yank out that darn  
word that just wasn't there. "How do you say it? \_Esalar. " \_  
  
The Spanish escaped him, an honest mistake. It was what one did when trying to  
remember a word. One simply spoke it in another language, hoping the brain  
could translate. But a bit of Spanish meant punishment and the ruler was  
promptly pulled out from a drawer in the teacher's desk.  
  
He was painting a mural now, up Eagle street. One of many, he said. His  
biggest dream was to become an artist and make East L.A. feel like home. Home,  
sweet home.  
  
"You know, this place is \_de la raza\_." He'd tell her. "I just want to make  
it \_look\_ like it."  
  
Dorita knew what he meant. If Los Angeles were alive, its heart would be here  
in the East side. This is where the streets call out to her in English and  
Espańol. Where the wide sun-baked roads are full of the symphonic sounds of  
rumbling cars and voices shouting out in accents, their English still thick  
with their native tongue. The Santa Ana winds in this part of the city carry  
with them the smells of sizzling meat from the taco stand in the corner, of  
fabric softener from the laundromat, of the thick scent of oil from the auto  
shops. Palm trees stand at the edges of the sidewalks, their green leaves  
exploding out like fireworks against the sky. This was a heart that beat with  
the rhythm of a thousand tambores and it pumped pure Chicano blood.  
  
Dorita fidgets in her chair as the clock strikes the hour. Time was at it  
again with its usual tricks, flowing too fast but ticking too slowly. She  
wants to spring from her seat and try to ease the nerves itching beneath her  
skin.  
  
East L.A. is also home because, well, she lived here didn't she? She pictures  
her house and its Virgen de Guadalupe standing sentinel in the front yard. Her  
parents' faces peer at her from the front porch, their smiles soft and sad.  
They loved this city. Her dad's skin was proudly tinged with the "East L.A.  
sun," as he called it, and her mama loved rolling down the windows of their  
Buick as they drove through the city at night, letting the cool breezes blow  
the day's work off of her skin.  
  
They'd be furious if they knew what she was about to do.  
  
Dorita scratches at her scalp. The sweat was dripping now in nervous rivulets,  
collecting behind her ears and rolling down into her eyes.  
  
Her parents had followed the monarch butterflies down to the city of Angels,  
and had stayed here, hoping that the city would find them as beautiful as they  
found it.  
  
But did it?  
  
She had been six, at the grocery store with her parents when a white man had  
slammed his shopping cart into theirs. He had stared them down and had tossed  
slurs into her father's face, words that smacked into him like eggs, cracking  
over his skull, sinking into his flesh.  
  
Back home, while mama cried into the brown paper grocery bags, dad had kneeled  
down and spoken into her little face. "Forget what that man said." He smiled,  
the slurs still dripping down his face like yolk. "Those were simply the words  
of an ignorant fool."  
  
"He told us to go back to our country." Dorita had said. "Do we not belong  
here?"  
  
"Of course we do." Her dad said. "This is our home now. Your mama and I, we  
made our mark by having you. Soon enough, it'll be your turn."  
  
"To leave my mark?"  
  
"Exactly." He chuckled. "But you? You're not only gonna leave a mark. You're  
going to change the world."  
  
\_Walk out\_.  
  
Those words again. They tug at her, daring, taunting.  
  
Emmanuel is an artist. Her father is a mechanic, her mother just a lady who  
cleans houses. But what about her? Who was she? And what mark would she leave?  
  
\_Walk out. \_  
  
A guidance counselor had once laughed in her face after Dorita had asked her  
how she could become a teacher.  
  
And Emmanuel had looked at her funny. "A teacher? After all they do to us, you  
want to become one of them?"  
  
\_Walk out. \_  
  
Yes. A teacher. One who taught others to change the world and leave their mark  
as well.  
  
"Dora?" Mr. McDonald calls out to her, striking his desk with the palm of his  
hand. "Dora, are you listening?"  
  
She stares at the vein pulsing in his forehead. Her heart hammers within her  
chest. But before she can speak, a tidal wave rises and roars from the  
hallway, becoming louder and louder until it hits their classroom door with  
kicks and pummeling fists.  
  
The wave shouts, "Walkout!"  
  
And Dorita rises, knowing East L.A. would thank her for what she was about to  
do.