

A Mummy in Her Backpack

James Luna

Spanish translation by Gabriela Baeza Ventura



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Summary: Flor returns to school from a vacation in Mexico, only to find she brought back a small man with dark yellow skin and thin, stringy hair, who emerges from her backpack and introduces himself as Rafa, a mummy from the famous museum in Guanajuato.

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To Brenda who went on a trip and brought me an idea.

To Flor who let me borrow her name.

To my students who inspire me every day.



“I t’ll be okay,” Flor said to her little brother, Adrian, as she walked him to his first-grade class. After being out for two weeks, Adrian was a little scared about going back to school. “See? There’s Gabriel,” she said, pointing to a boy walking with his sister. Adrian ran up to Gabriel, and together they went into the classroom. Flor walked up to the girl, her best friend, Lupita.

“Finally!” Lupita said when she saw Flor. “When did you get back?”

Flor tucked her long brown hair behind her right ear. “Last night,” she answered. “Super late. We were so tired that I fell asleep on the ride from the airport. My mom said that I could stay home an extra day, but I wanted to get back to school.”

Lupita shook her head and wagged her finger at Flor, “You can’t be absent for two weeks again! I had no one to play with, and Sandra is so annoying!”

“Promise,” Flor said, laughing. She reached into one of the side pouches of her backpack. “I brought you this.” She handed Lupita a cloth bookmark with

a rainbow design and the word “Guanajuato” woven in white over the colors. “I got one for myself too, so we can use them when we read.”

“Thanks!” Lupita said.

The bell rang, and the girls walked to their class. As they entered the room, Lupita told Miss King, “Flor’s back from her trip to Mexico.”

“Welcome back to school, Flor,” Miss King said. Flor smiled and sat down at her desk. “Did you have a nice trip?” Miss King asked.

“Yes,” Flor answered. “I brought you something,” she said as she reached into the other side of her backpack. She pulled out a small ceramic sun that also had the word “Guanajuato” in dark blue letters.

“Thank you.” Miss King looked at the letters on the sun and tried to say it, “Ju won . . . Wanna toe . . . Oh! I’ll never be able to say that.”

Lupita giggled. Flor smiled. Her teacher couldn’t say a lot of things in Spanish, but that was okay.

“It’s good to have you back,” Miss King said.

“It’s good to be back,” Flor answered. She and Lupita went to their desks, hung their backpacks on their chairs and compared their bookmarks. Slowly the other students in the fourth grade also took their seats while Miss King started taking roll.

“Class, please take out your homework,” Miss King announced. Then, turning to Flor she added, “Flor, I hope you did the homework I sent with you for the two weeks you were gone.”

“I bet she didn’t,” Sandra said.

Miss King turned to Sandra. "That wasn't very nice, Sandra. Oh, and now that Flor's back, I won't need you to help collect homework."

"But, Miss . . ." Sandra said.

"Thank you, Sandra," Miss King said. "You can sit down now."

Sandra glared at Flor as she went back to her desk. When the teacher wasn't looking, she made a fist at Flor.

Miss King asked Flor, "Will you be our homework collector again, after you give me your homework?"

Smiling, she nodded.

As the teacher walked down the rows of desks, Flor turned to her backpack and unzipped it. When she put her hand in the backpack she felt something cold and dry. She looked at the boys who sat behind her to see if they were playing a joke, but Jason and Matt were trying to explain to Miss King why they didn't have their homework. *I must have imagined it*, Flor thought. Slowly, she reached in again. Once more, she felt something cold. Pulling her hand out she tried to scream, but nothing came out. Flor stared at her backpack. It had now fallen on the floor and was moving on its own!

Wait, she thought. *It must be those dumb boys.* They always played tricks like that. She remembered how they had thrown paper balls into her backpack like it was a basketball hoop.

I'll show them, she thought. I'll just open my backpack and show Miss King whatever those boys put in there. Flor opened the backpack.

Two yellow eyes smiled back at her.

"Are we there yet?" A voice called from inside her backpack! Flor put her hand to her mouth. She wanted to scream, but nothing came out.

"Did we make it to *los Estados Unidos*?" the voice inside her backpack asked. "I thought I heard English."

Flor looked at Miss King, then at the kids around her to see if they heard the voice. Her classmates were searching their backpacks for their homework. Lupita was re-writing the numbers on her math pages so they looked perfect. Armando was explaining to Miss King how he lost his homework at soccer practice, and Sandra was copying answers off Miguel's paper.

Flor quickly zipped up her backpack. She walked quietly up to her teacher and whispered, "Can I go outside? I think I left my notebook on the playground."

"Okay," Miss King said. "But use the buddy system. Take someone with you."

"Can Lupita go with me?" Flor asked.

Miss King agreed, so Flor got her backpack and dragged Lupita outside.

Flor led Lupita between two classrooms. Lupita protested, "Why are we outside? What did you lose? I walked with you to class, and you didn't even take anything out of your backpack before the bell rang."