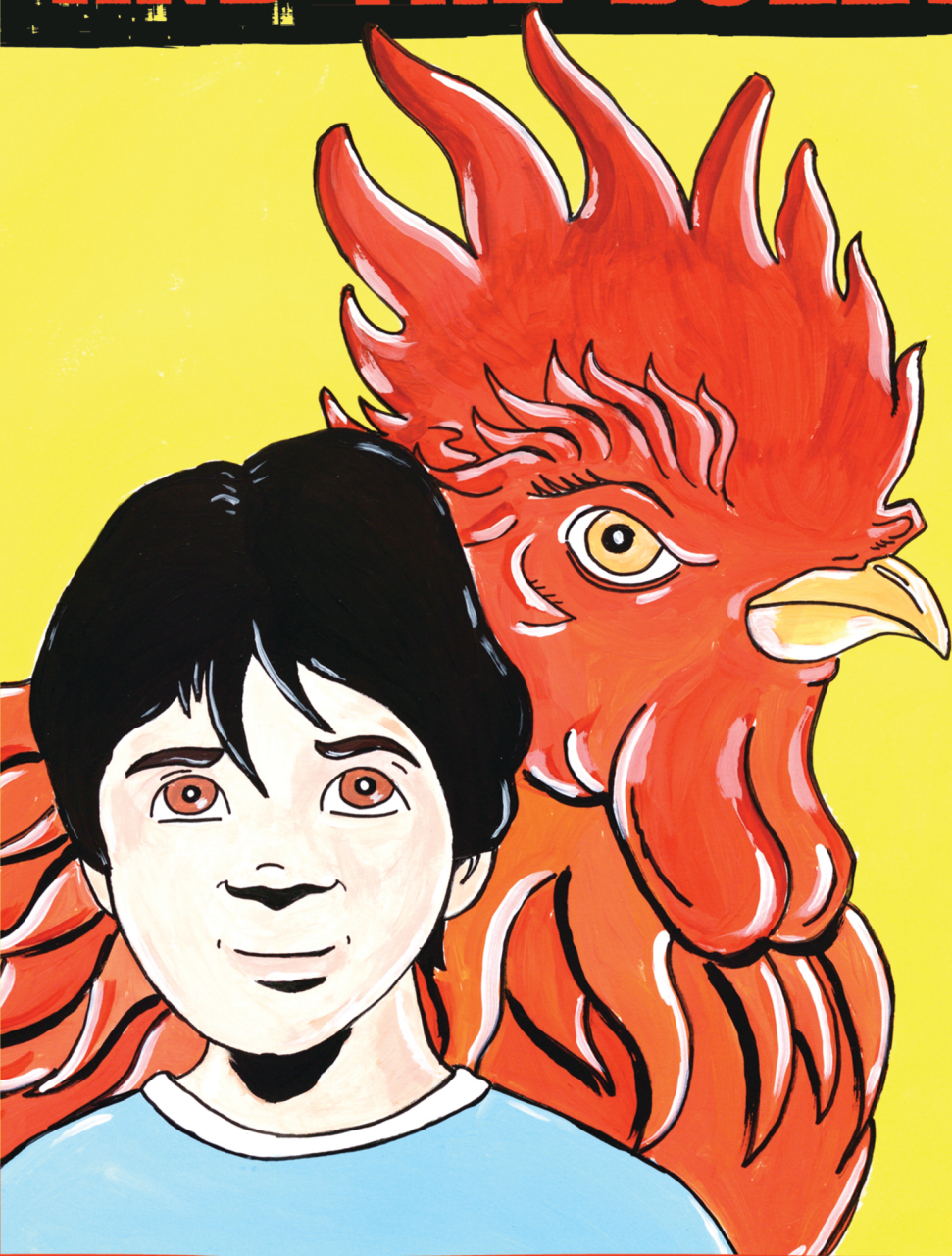


ROOSTER JOE AND THE BULLY



XAVIER GARZA

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to San Antonio artist, Joe Lopez, and all of the Gallista Gallery art community.



CHAPTER 1

YOU SURE DO DRAW ROOSTERS GOOD, JOE

You sure do draw roosters good, Joe,” says my best friend Gary as he leans over from his chair and looks at the drawing I just finished in art class. It’s a sketch of a rooster perched atop a barbed wire fence.

“It’s just a sketch,” I tell Gary.

“Pretty awesome sketch if you ask me, dude. Especially when you compare it to my drawing,” he says showing me his sketch featuring a misshapen stick figure riding atop an exaggeratedly long skateboard.

“It’s not that bad,” I tell him.

“You’re just saying that because I’m your best friend,” he tells me smiling. “We both know I stink at drawing, big time!”

“Maybe if you practiced a little more.”

“Not even if I carried a sketchpad with me everywhere like you do, Joe,” says Gary making reference to the fact that I am always carrying a sketchpad tucked under my arm and a pencil in my back pocket. You just never know when a great idea will pop in your head, and



I want to be ready. "I'm just not talented like you are," he adds as he continues flipping through the rest of my drawings. "Roosters, roosters and more roosters. Why do you love to draw roosters so much, Joe?"

Good question. Why do I love roosters so much?

"I don't know. Maybe because the first thing I ever drew was a rooster."

"It was?"

"It happened in the back of my grandpa Jessie's house."

"The one that is a famous artist?"

I nod.

"He raises roosters in his backyard. One day I just started drawing one of them. It was a beautiful red rooster with shiny feathers."

"Does he raise roosters for fighting?" asks Gary.

"No way," I tell him. "Grandpa Jessie hates the fact that some people make roosters fight. He says that a rooster is a proud animal and should be treated with respect. That it is among the bravest animals in the whole world."

"How can a rooster be brave?" asks Gary looking somewhat confused.

"You know what? I asked Grandpa Jessie that very same question when he told me that."

"What did he tell you?"

"He answered my question with another question. He asked if I had ever seen a rooster run away from a fight."

"Had you?"

"Nope," I tell Gary. "A rooster will never run away from a fight, even when the animal they are being

threatened by is bigger than them. They will stand their ground and fight if necessary.”

“Have you shown your drawings to Mrs. Dávila?” asks Gary, handing my sketchpad back to me. Mrs. Dávila is our brand new seventh-grade art teacher. She got hired after Mr. López retired last year. “If you haven’t, you should.”

“I’m not ready,” I tell him.

“Not ready for what?” asks Mrs. Dávila overhearing us from her desk.

“Joe makes the coolest drawings of roosters,” says Gary.

Mrs. Dávila stands up and walks over to our table.

“Can I see your drawings, Joe?” she asks me.

I open up my sketchpad and show her. “I still need to add more detail to some of them,” I tell her nervously. I’m not used to showing my drawings to teachers.

“You draw very well, Joe,” she tells me. “Keep practicing and one day you might truly grow up to become a great artist. Maybe even be better than your grandpa Jessie.”

“You’ve heard of my grandfather?”

“Who hasn’t?” she says smiling. “Everybody in San Antonio knows who he is.”

It’s true. Grandpa Jessie is a very famous artist. His paintings can be found on murals all around the city. Why, you can’t go five blocks into downtown without running into some of his art work. Back when I was very little, people told stories of how the reason my grandfather was such a good artist was because he had been born with a paint brush in his hand. When I actually asked him

if that story was true, he laughed so loud that he sounded like a rooster crowing.

Mrs. Dávila's compliment really means a lot to me. No teacher has ever told me that I could grow up to become a great anything before, let alone compared me favorably to one of the greatest artists in San Antonio. Her words make me feel pretty darn proud of myself.

"These are some very beautiful pencil drawings, Joe," she tells me. "Have you ever painted?"

"You mean like with paint? No, I've never painted before in my life."

"If you want to try to, I can give you a canvas to work on," she tells me. "If you do a good job it might not be a bad idea for you to enter it into the county fair in a couple of weeks."

"The county fair? Isn't that where they have contests for like cows and pigs?"

"They also have an art show competition, Joe. If I remember correctly, that's where your grandfather won his first art contest back when he was in junior high."

"You have to do it," says Gary. "You have to enter that contest, Joe."

"Maybe," I tell him.

It would depend on how good my painting turns out. But what if I can't do it? What if my attempt at painting turns out to be a total disaster?

Mrs. Dávila leaves and comes back with a blank canvas and hands it to me.

"Why don't you sketch on it over the weekend?" she tells me. "I can start teaching you how to paint with oils next week."

Did she just say teach me to paint with oils, not tempera paint? Not that there is anything wrong with using tempera paint. I mean, it's okay. But it's the kind of paint used by little kids. It says so right on the bottle . . . "perfect for little kids." But not oil paint. Oh no, to paint with oils is to use what the real artists use. It's what my grandfather uses. I can't wait to get started!

"Maybe your grandfather Jessie can help you over the weekend," she tells me. "He is not just a great artist, you know. He is also a pretty good art teacher."

"I will ask him," I tell her as I stare at the blank canvas in front of me. It's so full of possibilities . . . I can't wait to get started!