

ROOSEVELT HIGH SCHOOL SERIES

Tyrone's Betrayal



Gloria L. Velásquez

Books in

**THE ROOSEVELT HIGH
SCHOOL SERIES**

Ankiza

Juanita Fights the School Board

Maya's Divided World

Rina's Family Secret

Teen Angel

Tommy Stands Alone

Tyrone's Betrayal

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SCHOOL SERIES**

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*For the Male Voices Project
and
my special friends, Rudy Santos Gutiérrez,
Pedro Arroyo, and Jerry Burge, in acknowledgment of all their
hard work and for serving as positive role models to our
underrepresented male youth.*

ONE

Tyrone

They're at it again, I think to myself, pulling the blankets over my head, hoping to drown out the angry voices coming from downstairs. But the voices keep on getting louder until there is a crashing sound that worries me even more. Bewildered, I come out from under the covers, carefully opening the door and making my way out into the dark hallway.

"I can't take this anymore. I have to go," Dad says gravely as I watch in silence from the top of the stairway. He is standing at the edge of the living room facing Momma, who is wearing her faded purple housecoat. Momma's favorite porcelain rooster is lying on the floor in pieces next to the overturned table that once held Momma's collection of farm animals.

Reaching out for Dad's arm, Momma cries, "No, Jerry, please don't go. Please wait. I know they'll give you a better job soon."

When Dad lifts up his face, the lamplight shines on his glazed eyes, and I know that he's had too much to drink.

"How long have they been saying they'd hire me full-time? It's going on two years now, Margaret. Well, I've

done had it. I'm sick of their promises! I ain't gonna do this no more."

Jerking his arm free from Momma's grasp, Dad turns around, but Momma quickly steps in front of him, begging, "Jerry, please don't go. Do it for the kids . . . please."

With a muffled cry, Dad turns away from her, then the next thing I hear is the front door as Momma slumps to the floor, sobbing. I want to run downstairs to comfort Momma, let her know that I'm here for her, but there's a nervous confusion in my mind that won't let me think clearly. Turning to go back to my room, I catch a glimpse of Zakiya, who stares at me sadly through her cracked bedroom door.

As I climb back into bed, my ten-year-old brother, Jerome, calls out to me from the small bed where he sleeps next to the closet.

"What were you doing?" he asks sleepily.

"Nothing," I answer. "Go back to sleep." I stare into the darkness, wondering if Momma is still on the floor crying or if she's gone to bed.

The next morning, Zakiya's loud, annoying voice awakens me through the opened door. "Momma says it's time to get your black butt out of bed!"

Jerome's empty bed tells me that I've overslept. I quickly grab some clothes, then hurry down the hallway to the bathroom, hoping Rudy is late to pick me up.

Once I've showered and dressed, I splash an extra dose of Old Spice on my face, thinking I better shave by tomorrow or Maya won't like it. Maya and I have been together since she first came to Roosevelt during my sophomore year. It's never bothered her that I'm Black. When we first

started dating, I was the one who had problems with her being a Chicana, but now I'm cool about it.

Downstairs, Momma is seated at the kitchen table drinking coffee while Jerome is finishing up a bowl of cereal. Momma's eyes are red, and she looks as if she hasn't slept. "We're out of milk," Momma says in a hollow, lifeless voice.

I want to ask her about last night, about Dad, but I can't. Not in front of Jerome. As I reach for a Coke from the fridge, a horn honks, so I mumble good-bye to Jerome, who is bothering Momma about why he can't have a Coke for breakfast.

Outside, I slide into the backseat of Rudy's car as Tommy, who is sitting in the passenger seat, asks, "Are we picking up Maya this morning?"

"Yeah, *buey*, are we?" Rudy asks, steering the car away from the curb in the direction of Roosevelt High, which is only about a mile from our apartment complex. These days, Rudy likes to call everyone *buey*. Maya says it's supposed to be funny because it literally means an ox.

"Maya and Ankiza left early because they had a senior class meeting," I explain. "That must've been why Juanita wasn't home when I called her," Rudy says as he turns up the radio.

I guess you can say that Tommy, Rudy, and I have been best friends since junior high. We respect each other like brothers. We've always watched each others' back and done things together. Now we're all bad-ass seniors.

As we approach campus, Rudy rolls his window down so he can check out a group of freshman girls. Whistling like a coyote, he yells out, "Hey, baby dolls!" When one of

them gives him the finger, Rudy laughs back at her, rolling up his window with a sleazy grin.

Tommy frowns at Rudy. “Better not let Juanita catch you doing that.”

“Nothing wrong with lookin’, right, Ty?” Rudy asks, staring at me in the rearview mirror.

“Yeah, sure,” I agree, knowing too well that Maya wouldn’t like it if I talked smack like that with other chicks.

Aware that something is bothering me, Tommy turns around to ask, “What’s up with you, Ty? You’re too quiet.”

Rudy flashes me another sly grin through the rearview mirror. “Leave him alone. He’s thinking about those cute baby dolls we just saw.” Rudy chuckles, rolling his window back down so he can check out some more girls.

After we’ve parked the car, we take a shortcut across the football field to the main building. Roosevelt High is an okay school, no gang shootings or stuff like that, but it is kind of snobby, like the rich people who live in Laguna. Sometimes I wished I lived in San Martin or one of the surrounding cities. They seem more like the real world, unlike Laguna where you don’t see very many Blacks or Chicanos, mostly white kids, some Asians, and a few Middle Easterners.

At my locker, I grab my books for my classes. Then I join Tommy at the end of the crowded hallway and head to the Math building for first period algebra. When we get there, Mr. Bukowski, or Mr. B. as we all call him, is at the chalkboard writing our daily problems. As I walk through the middle row to my desk, I accidentally trip over Cal Romero’s backpack, which is blocking the aisle. Apologiz-

ing, Cal reaches down for his backpack, but not before I give it a swift kick under the next seat.

Startled, Cal frowns, "What'd you do that for?"

Then Jonathan, the class jerk who is sitting next to Cal, snickers loudly. I reach over and grab Jonathan by the collar, raising my fist in his face. "What's your problem, jerk?"

One of the girls behind me screams as Cal jumps to his feet to separate me from Jonathan. Tommy rushes to my side, but by now, Mr. B. is there pulling me away from Jonathan, whose face is flushed with fear.

"That's enough," he demands. "Go back to your seats and get started on today's assignment." Then Mr. B. takes me out to the hallway. His bulging blue eyes drill into me. "What in the Sam Hill got into you, Tyrone? You know fighting isn't allowed at our school. You could get expelled for this. Have you forgotten this is your last year at Roosevelt?"

There is a sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach as I realize how much I've disappointed Mr. B. He's always been one of my favorite teachers at Roosevelt, even though I've had problems with math since I was in junior high. But Mr. B. is one of those teachers who really cares about his students. Mr. B. is always around after school, and he never talks down to us.

"I should report this to the dean of students, but I'm going to let you slide just this once. Understand this," Mr. B. threatens as I avoid his eyes, "if it happens again, there'll be consequences. Now, what just happened?"

Shaking my head, I wait for another lecture from Mr. B., but he orders me back into the classroom. Everyone

stares as I quietly take my seat. The minute the bell rings, Tommy follows me out of the classroom. “Are you okay, Ty?” he asks as we continue down the hallway.

“Yeah, I’m cool. Don’t know why everyone got so excited.”

I shrug as we part ways for our next class. When I get to economics and I open my book, all I can think about are Momma’s swollen eyes and the crushed look on her face. I don’t hear a single word of the teacher’s lecture as I think about what happened last night.

At noon, Maya’s waiting by my locker. Her face is rigid. “Ty, I heard you almost got into a fight,” she begins. “What was that all about?”

“Nothing, baby,” I reply innocently as I open my locker, wondering why Maya thinks she can run my life. Maybe it’s because we’ve been together for such a long time. We’ve only broken up once, when Maya was having problems with her parents’ divorce, but that still doesn’t give her the right to be so pushy.

“Come on, Ty. What’s up?”

“*Nada*,” I repeat in my bad Spanish pronunciation, slipping my arm tightly around her waist and pushing her up against my locker so I can give her a kiss.

“Stop it, Ty,” Maya demands. “We have to go. Everyone’s waiting for us.”

“Come on, babe. Let’s eat alone for a change,” I whisper into her ear, but Maya pushes me away, insisting this is our last year to eat with our friends.

When we get to the bleachers, we find a spot next to big-mouthed Rina, who is teasing Sheena about her peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich. Sheena’s the only white

person that hangs with us, but she's cool. When Tommy tells Rina to shut up and eat her bean burrito, she starts in on him. Sheena jumps in to defend Tommy and it gets even louder.

Noticing that Juanita is missing, I ask Rudy, "Where's your girl?"

Smiling, Rudy says, "She's with Ankiza. They went to see their counselor about college applications. Me, I'm gonna get a job."

Then Rina throws her empty bag in my face. "Heard 'bout the fight with Mr. Macho. Did you hurt him?"

I answer with a shrewd grin, "No, but I wanted to."

Sheena frowns. "Watch out. You wouldn't wanna get kicked out senior year."

"So what?" I reply.

Maya pokes me in the ribs with her elbow. "Don't say that, Ty. You know how much your parents want you to graduate, especially your mom."

My momma's voice echoes in my mind, always talking to me about finishing high school and doing the things she couldn't do. I'll never forget the time I asked her where I'd gotten Paul for a middle name. We didn't have any Pauls in the family, and it didn't go with my first name at all. Momma's tired eyes brightened as she explained she'd named me after Paul Laurence Dunbar, the African-American poet who educated himself and became a famous writer, even though his parents were slaves. It's funny about Momma, how she only went to eighth grade, yet she reads all this poetry and stuff. Then Momma recited some lines from his poem, "I know why the caged bird sings," emphasizing how this poem captured the hope and strength

of African Americans who had to survive the horrors of slavery and prejudice. I didn't think about what Momma said until the day Mrs. Burrows passed out copies of *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou, explaining that the title came from Paul Laurence Dunbar's famous poem. I guess Maya's right. Momma would care if I got kicked out for fighting because she wants me to be somebody like Dunbar.

I'm pulled away from my thoughts when Rudy cries, "*Híjole*, will I be glad to graduate. No more school!"

"Hey, I'm glad I'm going to San Francisco State," Tommy says. "I can't wait to get away from my dad."

Sheena nods. "Me, too, I can hardly wait to get a job and move out. Mom's ragging on me all the time."

When Rina starts to make fun of the new U.S. government teacher, we drop the college talk and compare notes on our teachers.



After school, Rudy drives me home, and as soon as we pull up to the curb, I look around for Dad's car. It's not there. Jerome is in the living room doing his homework while he watches "Tomb Raiders."

"Where's Momma?" I ask cautiously.

"She's upstairs. Said she's not feeling good. Can you help me with my homework?" Jerome asks as I head for the stairway.

"Later," I answer back, taking the stairs two at a time straight to Momma's room. Knocking lightly, I push the door open and go inside.

Still dressed in her purple housecoat, Momma is lying in bed, and her eyes look puffier than this morning. "Hi, baby. I got a bad cold."

Moving closer to her, I reply, "Don't lie, Momma. I know what happened last night. I know Dad walked out on you and that he ain't coming back."

Collapsing against her pillows, Momma's eyes widen in fear. "Son, who told you that lie? Your dad's coming back. I know he is. He just needs a few days to think. That's all."

"Stop lying, Momma!" I shout back, my voice quivering with anger as Zakiya comes in the room.

"Who's lying about what? What's wrong, Momma?" Zakiya asks, rushing to her bedside.

Watching the two of them together, I realize how much Zakiya looks like Momma: the same coffee-colored skin with wide-set eyes and round cheekbones.

When Momma bows her head, I holler, "Tell Zakiya the truth, Momma. Tell her that no good Dad of ours ran out on us."

"It's not true. Is it, Momma?" Zakiya gently asks.

Momma sobs and covers her face with her hands.

I storm out of the room.