

the  
**WIN OVER**

Jennifer Torres



Scholastic Press / New York

# To my tías with love and gratitude

Copyright © 2023 by Jennifer Torres

All rights reserved. Published by Scholastic Press, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC, SCHOLASTIC PRESS, and associated logos are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

ISBN 978-1-338-81890-1

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1    23 24 25 26 27

Printed in the U.S.A. 37

First edition, February 2023

Book design by Stephanie Yang

# 1

At first Lucinda Mendoza thought her sister was exaggerating. Raquel could be a little dramatic that way. But maybe it was true. Maybe there *weren't* any stories worth digging into at Dad's house in the middle of California farmland. Was that really such a bad thing? Wasn't the calm kind of . . . nice? Especially after months of chaos.

Lucinda sat on the grass, her legs stretched in a wide V. She leaned over the left leg, reaching for her toe, and watched Juliette dip a white T-shirt, its front a constellation of knots and rubber bands, into a bucket of bright pink water.

Raquel, Lucinda's twin, knelt next to Jules, notebook open to a clean, blank page, pen raised and ready to make note of anything that happened. Anything at all.

Nothing did.

Jules swirled the shirt in the water with a stick she had pulled off one of the oak trees that Dad's small ranch, Los Robles, was named for. "I'm not sure how long it's supposed to sit in there," she said, frowning into the punch-colored stew.

Raquel peeked over the edge of the bucket. "Let's start with a few questions while we wait," she said. She tapped her pen against her teeth. "What gave you the idea to tie-dye your clothes in beet juice in the first place? Is it a *trend*? Are kids our age trying to get back to the basics? Reviving old-school, all-natural techniques? Giving up fast fashion?"

She sat up on her knees. Her eyes glimmered. Lucinda recognized the flash of a new idea.

"That could be a great angle, actually," Raquel continued, scribbling furiously into her notebook. "Are you doing this...beet juice thing...for environmental

reasons?” She inched closer to Jules. “To make your own clothes and take action against a system that creates millions of tons of textile waste each year?”

This was getting desperate, even for Raquel, who, as editor of their school news site, the *Manzanita Mirror*, charged toward stories with a stubborn persistence that could be a little intimidating if you weren’t used to it. Lucinda met Jules’s nervous glance, rolled her eyes, and stretched over the other leg.

“I *guess*?” Jules answered finally. “I mean, honestly, I just thought it would be cool to see how it would turn out. Since we have all those beets and everything. I didn’t want them to go to waste. That’s good for the environment, right? Reducing waste?”

Lucinda laughed, her brown curls tumbling into her face.

Raquel slumped and tossed her notebook and pen beside her.

“Don’t be mad,” Jules said, her cheeks turning as red as the beet water. “I *do* care about the environment. It’s just that I didn’t know all that stuff you were talking

about. Let me read about it tonight, then we can do the interview tomorrow.”

Raquel pulled a clump of crabgrass out of the dirt. “That’s not how it works,” she said. “I have to *find* a story, not create one.” She raised her eyes and shrugged. “But I’m not mad. And even if it’s not a story, this is fun to watch.”

Jules’s shoulders relaxed. The nervous lines between her eyebrows disappeared. She reached into the bucket and lifted out the shirt. It emerged, dripping, a vibrant flamingo pink. She held it up with a squeal of surprised delight, not seeming to mind that it was staining her fingers.

“Whoa!” Raquel exclaimed, whipping out her phone and snapping a picture.

“I love that color!” Lucinda added. And she meant it. “Maybe you can do one of my headbands next. Or my laces! I’ve always wanted to have ice skates with pink laces.”

Juliette smiled and wrung out the shirt over the bucket. She took it to the laundry line that was strung

across the patio and clipped it up with two clothespins to dry. She took down one of Dad's white T-shirts.

"How do you think Marcos would like a tie-dyed shirt?" she asked, her eyebrow arched.

"Do it!" Lucinda said. "He'd look great in pink."

Jules held the shirt out in front of her and tilted her head. "Nah, on second thought, I think I'll wait and make another batch with black beans," she said. "Or onion skins. I heard you can get a nice golden yellow with onion skins."

"First beets, now black beans and onions?" Raquel said. "It sounds like you're working on a chili recipe, not tie-dyeing clothes. Will you be able to get the smell out?"

Lucinda coughed to disguise a giggle. She knew Raquel was joking, but she wasn't sure Jules did. It had been almost four months since Jules and her mom, Sylvia, had moved into Dad's ranch house. After a rough beginning, the girls, all about to start seventh grade, were closer than they had been at first. They trusted one another. Mostly.

But other times, Lucinda thought, it felt like they were

still stuck back in that old nervous getting-to-know-you stage.

She didn't want Jules to think they were laughing *at* her.

And yet, she couldn't help but agree with Raquel on this one.

“Seriously, Jules,” she said. “It seems like a project our mom would cook up.”

“Where do you think I got the idea?” Jules said, twisting rubber bands around a pair of long gym socks. “When I messaged her to say I was going to try it, she gave me that tip about using vinegar to help set the dye. I miss your mom. She's the only one who really *got* me.” Jules sighed and pressed the back of her hand to her forehead in pretend despair.

Of all the things that had changed over the past months—and so much had—Lucinda thought that Mom starting a web series was probably the most surprising.

Last spring, when it felt like the whole world stopped to slow the spread of a new virus, Mom and Dad had thought it would be safer for Lucinda and Raquel to spend the lockdown at Dad's ranch in the country rather



than at Mom's apartment in busy Los Angeles. Lucinda hadn't wanted to go at first. Hadn't wanted to leave behind their home, their neighborhood—and especially not the ice rink. But Raquel had talked her into it. Like she always did. They had thought that if they convinced Mom to stay there, too, it would be a chance to bring their parents closer together again.

Until they discovered that Dad's girlfriend, Sylvia, and her daughter, Juliette, were already living at the ranch.

Lucinda's stomach still tightened when she thought about the whole mess and what a disaster it could have become—and almost did. But now, just as the world seemed to be settling into a new kind of normal, so was her family.

Well, as normal as they ever were.

Away from LA for the summer, Raquel was supposed to be taking a break from the journalism club. Yet she was still as determined as ever to find a good story.

Jules was back to practicing with her track team three days a week. And even though their sports were different, she made a great training partner. Every morning,

she and Lucinda met before breakfast to jog around the ranch.

And Mom had started her web series. It was Sylvia's idea, actually, which was a little strange to think about. Sylvia worked at a marketing agency and told Mom that, with all the salons closed, people would love to see videos featuring her at-home haircut tips. She was right. People did. Tens of thousands of people. Since then, Mom had expanded the series with tutorials on some of her favorite DIY projects. Like "Clean-Out-Your-Kitchen Tie-Dye."

The projects didn't always turn out the way Mom planned, but that only seemed to make people even more excited to click on her videos. *And* more excited to book an appointment with her at the salon. She had a little extra money now and was using some of it to pay for an advanced hairstyling course in New York. That's why everyone thought it was a good idea for Lucinda and Raquel to stay up in Lockeford full-time while school was out.

At least it was *partly* why. There was also the other big change. The *biggest* change. Dad and Sylvia were getting

married. They had decided during those months of shut-downs and stay-at-home orders that they worked best as a team. It had been fast, but as Sylvia said, “What’s the point of waiting around when you’re sure?”

She and Raquel were alike in ways that sometimes made Lucinda nervous.

This summer, before Lucinda and Raquel went back to LA to start school, was supposed to be their opportunity to be together, as a new family.

Lucinda didn’t mind. There was an ice rink in Stockton, not too far from Dad’s ranch, and he drove her to practice there the first day it reopened. She had even joined a synchronized skating team after Sylvia brought home a flyer. Her agency had designed it.

Lucinda had never been on a real team before. During the school year, Raquel had talked her into joining the journalism club, but skating was different. Skating was hers.

Lucinda stood and dusted the dirt and grass off her leggings. She tightened the sweatshirt she wore around her waist and glanced at Raquel.