

## Chapter Six

Saturday morning I woke up feeling like my face has been kissed by a freight train. At the same time when I run my hand across the top of my head I find that it is completely covered in lumps. At this point, even thinking about getting out of bed makes my body hurt all over. Downstairs, my mom and dad are talking in the kitchen. I can tell by the tone of the conversation that they're really upset about what happened last night. My mother is saying how we should go to the police, but my dad is having nothing to do with it.

Without hesitating, he tells her, "Those First Street Boyz, have done drive-by shootings all over town. Remember what happened to Joey Galvan. He lost his eye last year in a shoot-out with the Latin Kings. It happened on the corner of 1<sup>st</sup> Street and West Main Avenue. If we stay calm, maybe they'll forget about Tyrell, and this will pass."

It doesn't take a genius to figure out that my mother is having a difficult time with what had transpired in Middleton Park.

Especially, when she replies, "I just hope you're right, papa."

I spent the entire weekend cleaning carpets with my dad.

Monday morning, when it's time to go to school, I get up and glance in the mirror and can hardly believe what I'm seeing. My face looks like it has been used as a tether ball, and every place I touch still hurts. One by one, I remove each of the bandages, further exposing my two black and blue eyes, bruises, and swollen nose. When I finish redressing my wounds, I put on my clothes and head downstairs.

Just as soon as I reach the bottom of the stairs I see that my mother is busy making pancakes for breakfast, which is great because I'm starving. Then as I sit down at the breakfast table I begin having second thoughts about going to school. This is because I am embarrassed about

getting beat up and don't really want to go to school with the guys that did it. On the other hand, if I don't go to class, and I fail algebra, my life is over, and I'll never make it back to Patterson High. It's at this time that my mother takes a break from cooking pancakes and takes a long look at my face. Almost immediately, tears well in her eyes.

I said, "Don't worry, mama. Everything will be alright. I can take care of myself."

Just the sight of her crying makes me feel awful, but at this point there is nothing that I can do about the way I look.

Shortly after she places a plate in front of me, my mom says, "Tyrell, your dad and I are wondering if you would like to invite your math study group over to our house tonight, so that you all can study for your mid-term algebra test. We'll supply pizza and soft drinks."

Inviting my algebra study group over to the house is a real surprise. It's a surprise because my mom thinks that only gang members go to Del Cielo High. This is complicated by Mrs. Purdy, who loves to come over to our house to share the latest gossip with my mother. I'm sure the kids in my algebra study group have been pre-approved by Mrs. Purdy. None of them are gangsters except for Eddie. Gangsters don't need algebra. They think that they're going to make a living dealing drugs and robbing people.

Finally, after my stomach is almost full, I replied, "Why thank you, mama. They're the best students in the whole school. It's about time that you met some of them. Not all of the students that go to Del Cielo High are bad, mama."

"Isn't your new girlfriend, Katrina Cortez, in your study group?" she utters, "Mrs. Purdy says that she's a real beauty. We've heard you talking about her since she arrived in Patterson and we really want to meet her."

"Mama, I don't know if Katrina is my girlfriend. It's different than what I had with Leticia Lopez. Leticia spoke English. Katrina and I can barely talk to each other without a translator. Honestly, mama, I really don't know her very well. Mostly we just stare at each other."

Out of the corner of my eye, I can see that my dad is sitting on the edge of

his seat waiting for an opportunity to jump into the conversation.

He wastes no time reaffirming what my mother is saying, “Well, nonetheless, you're spending a lot of time with Katrina these days and we would like to meet her.”

Now, I'm not so sure that I want to invite Katrina to the house. It would take our relationship to another level, and I don't think that I'm ready for another commitment. The truth is it hurts when you get dumped, and I am just barely getting over Leticia giving me the boot.

Finally, after thinking about it a minute, I smile and reply, “I think that you will really like Katrina. Do you remember Dalton McCoy? He just enrolled at Del Cielo High. He was on my Little League team. He's really grown. You better get 2 pizzas. All teenagers like to eat pizza.”

Then when we get in the van for the ride, my dad doesn't say a word all the way to school. Once inside the main room I'm surprised when I find that only Veech and Katrina have arrived. They are both busy eating breakfast in the school kitchen, so I sat down next to them. Directly across the room, Mrs. Purdy is standing behind her desk with the telephone in her ear, and she is talking so loudly that everyone can hear what she is saying. She has a parent on the phone whose son hasn't come to school in a few days.

“And what day do you expect him to get out of juvenile hall?” she asked.

At this time, I notice that Mr. Phish and Mr. Ortega are standing in front of the trophy case glaring at our giant new trophy. Mr. Phish has placed it in the middle of the case where everyone can see it. I have never seen Mr. Phish look so proudly, but even with the huge trophy, the case looks empty. Then as the school day begins, and the students and staff are entering the school, Mr. Ortega is telling anyone who will listen about how great the win is for the school. They are so busy gloating that they haven't noticed my battered face. Then as the bell is about to ring, and classes are about to start, I take a quick look around the school, and find that Mambo is nowhere to be found.

During both history and English class, it is hard for me to focus because of my injuries. By the time my algebra class starts, I quickly forget about how badly I hurt. This is because we are reviewing for tomorrow's huge mid-

term. Right now, I am in uncharted territory because I have always flunked out before I have gotten this far. Up until now, I have turned in every homework assignment, and for the first time in my life I think I understand everything. Then just before the class is about to end, I invite Wendell, Veech, Eddie, Dalton, and Katrina, to come over and cram for the test.

Without hesitating they all tell me, "Yes." It's at this time that Dalton and Wendell start asking me about my wounds, but I'm hesitant to give them an answer.

Evidently, they too fear failing, and they think that it is a good idea to do a group study.

I said, "My mom says that she'll provide pizza and soft drinks."

Just as soon as I find out that they are coming, I call my mom to tell her the news. Then when school lets out, the six of us gather in front of the school, for the walk over to my house. At first, we are barely moving along because we're all reading our text messages. Soon after everyone puts their cell phones away, we pick up speed and cross through Middleton Park. It's at this time I start to get nervous. Suddenly, being there brought back the entire ugly episode.

There are small parks all over Patterson, and at times there are problems in each and every one of them. However, Middleton Park is the closest one to our house, and it has always been a safe place. My family celebrates birthdays and special occasions over there, and I have spent a good portion of my life playing on its slides and swings. Now, I'm a nervous wreck when I enter it, and when a Chevy lowrider cruises by I'm ready to run for my life.

Soon after we exit Middleton Park we turn on to my street, Road Runner Avenue. Our house is the third one on the left. The street hardly has a car on it. This is because almost everyone in our neighborhood works in the Bay Area. Our house is easy to spot because it has our blue 4 door Chevy Malibu in the driveway with 2 flat tires. It is also the only yellow house on the street.

When we arrive, my mother is waiting at the door, and she greets everyone

at the door with a handshake. Then when it is Katrina's turn, she gives her a kiss on the cheek, and a big hug. It makes Katrina very happy, and she responds with a huge smile.

Glowing with joy, my mother says, "I just put the first pizza in the oven. I hope you all like..."

Wendell knew the answer, "Pineapple and Canadian bacon. I'd know that smell anywhere. My parents own the Chop Chop Chinese Restaurant downtown. It's across the street from Wilbur Garcia's Taqueria. I spent the summer washing dishes and dreaming about Wilbur's pizzas. I think he makes the best pizza in town and his burritos are just to die for."

My mother smiles, and then responds, "This pizza isn't from Wilbur Garcia's. It's a take and bake and it will be ready in about ten minutes. It's so nice to finally meet you all. Tyrell has told me so much about you kids. Why don't you all sit down at the kitchen table, and make yourselves at home."

We quickly took our places, and got right to work. Mr. Phish has been very explicit about what we need to know if we want to pass. After a brief discussion, we decide to go over one problem at a time, and not proceed until we all know how to do the problem. Katrina's algebra book is the same as our book but written in Spanish with English translations. Fortunately, much of the vocabulary is similar. Shortly after we get started, things begin to bog down when we realize that we will have to memorize the Pythagorean Theorem.

Finally, the first pizza is done, and our jaws drop when my mother opens up the oven and remove the pizza. Just as fast as she can she starts slicing. The smell is heavenly and it makes our empty stomachs growl. Our mouths are wide open as we watched her place two pieces on each plate. Then, finally she hands a plate to each of us.

In her sweetest voice, she insists, "Go ahead and get started eating."

In unison, they reply, "Thank you, Mrs. Walker."

Then just as soon as we start eating, I realize that Dalton is staring at the bandages on my face.

Once more, Dalton asks, "Tyrell, what happened to your face?"

I finally gave in and told them what happened.

I said, "Mambo, Tiny, Joey, and Jesus Reyes jumped me last night in Middleton Park. I was on my way home from the Rosehaven Volleyball Tournament. I tried to run, but there were too many of them, and they had Joey's car. Thank God my dad came looking for me. You should have seen him swinging a shovel at Mambo's head. My dad saved me."

At that moment the entire table gasps, and no one can believe what they are hearing.

It's at this time that Eddie interjects, "They would have killed you, Tyrell. Everybody in town knows that Mambo hates you. He hates you because you kicked his rear in front of the whole town at the city skateboard championships."

Just as soon as Eddie finishes Dalton says, "I guess that means that they want me dead too, Eddie."

Eddie has been around Patterson his entire life, and like everyone else in town he has had several run-ins with both the First Street Boys. He is visibly angry.

I tell Eddie, "I didn't have a choice. If I had let them hurt Sunny, I never would have stopped hearing about it. Sal has always been there for me like a brother."

Dalton looks like he is about to explode.

He asks, "Did you call the police? You know that those guys carry guns."

"Del Cielo High is their school. I just want to go back to Patterson High. They won't take me back if I cut classes or don't pass algebra. This is the third time I've taken algebra. I have to pass this time."

Before I can go any farther, tears start welling up in my eyes. I didn't want them to see me like this. I am so embarrassed.

Dismayed, Wendell hands me a napkin to dry my eyes, and then tells me, “Don't worry, Tyrell, I'll help you get through algebra. I want to go to Patterson High myself next year. I want to play on the tennis team.”

Katrina barely has a clue about what is being said, but she can see the bandages on my face. Little by little, Veech translates what I am saying. It's at this time that she takes my hand and holds it as firmly as she could. At first I like the attention, but the test is tomorrow and we all need to study. Even worse, we are running out of time. At that point I didn't want to talk about it anymore. I am more determined than ever to pass algebra. It took me the entire next hour to memorize the theorem. Finally, we all decide to take a break.

Then as we all took a break around the table, Veech said, “I didn't know how to tell you guys, but it looks like I'm going to Zamora, Michoacan, Mexico, to live with my grandparents. They're my mother's parents, and they don't want me being raised in a foster home. They want me to live with them. I've spent my entire life in Patterson and all my friends are here. I want to stay here. My dad is going to be in prison for the rest of his life for what he did to my mom. My mother always said that she wanted to retire in Zamora. It was her dream. I guess I'll give it a try.”

I can't believe what Veech is saying.

Shaking my head in disbelief, I tell him, “Veech, all of your friends are here. You can't be serious.”

It is clear that he wants to talk.

Abruptly, he continues, “They're the only family that I have. I've got a ride to Zamora with a family that lives in Walnut Acres Camp. It takes 55 hours to drive all the way to Michoacan. I hear that Katrina and her family are also returning to Zamora, next week.”

I can't help but be startled. My entire life I have gone to school with migrant students who leave and never come back.

I said, “What are you saying? You're saying that Katrina is leaving.”

What he is saying makes my heart stop because she hasn't said a thing about leaving.

I glared into her eyes, almost too afraid to ask, "How long are you going to be gone?"

Veech knew that he had let the cat out of the bag.

Katrina shrugs her shoulders and then says, "¿Quien sabe?"

Veech translates, "She said, "Who knows!" It's up to her parents. I know one thing. If they are returning to Patterson, then they will be back by the first of March."

"March," I declared, "I can't believe what I am hearing. This is November. March is a lifetime away."

I didn't know what to think. It seems like everyone in town has family in Mexico except for us. It also seems like everyone likes it in Zamora because they're clearly not in any hurry to return. Neither Veech nor Katrina knows how long they will be gone. Christmas vacation in the Patterson School District is always 3 weeks because of the annual migration to Zamora. The only thing that I know for sure is that I am already missing both of them.

We studied until it is almost 9:00PM. At this time we are all convinced that we can pass the test. Soon after we are finished studying, my dad drives everyone home so that there won't be any more episodes. I guess I'm growing up because this is the first time in my life that I have studied this hard. My brain is tired and worn out.

The next morning I wake up early with butterflies in my stomach. If anyone ever had a phobia of math, it'd be me. I eat my breakfast as fast as I can, and then race to school so I can review my math notes before the test. Soon after the first bell sounds, Mr. Phish starts lecturing on the Great Depression. He is telling us about how Wall Street had crumbled under wild speculating. I have no idea what "speculating" means. The entire time he is speaking it is difficult listening because of the looming algebra test.

Just as soon as algebra class starts, sweat immediately pours from my



forehead, and my heart races. This lasts until Mr. Phish finally places a copy of the test on my desk. Then as I look the test over I am pleased to see that there are no surprises. It is all there the way Mr. Phish said it would be. One by one I work out the problems until I am the last one in the room. Soon after I have double checked and triple checked for errors, I get up from my desk and walk to the front of the room to turn it in. Mr. Phish has been patiently waiting for me to finish.

“How do you think you did, Tyrell?” he asks.

“I think I passed, Mr. Phish. How about grading my test for me?”

Mr. Phish got a big kick out of me wanting the results so quickly.

Then, as he sat there exposing the gap in his front teeth, he says, “You mean right now? Let's get this straight. You're willing to miss part of your lunch period for the results of a math test? I'm amazed, Tyrell. Please take a seat. This will only take a few minutes.”

Mr. Phish opens his top desk drawer and takes out his answer key. Then, one by one, he checks all of my answers before breaking out in a big grin. On the surface, he appears a bit surprised, even grinning further.

Finally, his mouth drops wide open, and he utters, “I can hardly believe what I'm seeing. Tyrell Walker got an “A” on an algebra test.”

I can't believe it.

I started shouting, “Yes, yes, yes!”

I'm sure that I they can hear me all over Patterson, but I don't care. For the first time in my life I've gotten an “A” on a math test. During what remains of the lunch break, I decide to call home to tell my mom about what I had done. She is really excited. Then as soon as she hung up, I called my dad, who is even more excited.

It's at that point that I decide to take the afternoon off from my studies and celebrate by going to the skate park after school. When the last school bell finally sounds, my dad is waiting for me in front of the school. Just as soon as I get in the van he tells me how proud he is of me. I've never seen him

so excited.

He said, "I told you, you could do it, Tyrell. You just needed to make up your mind. Now all you have to do is keep this up until the end of the year."

"Do you think that you can give me a ride to the skate park? I haven't had a chance to get on my new skateboard since the tournament."

He didn't reply, but after I ran in the house and got my board, and then return to the van for the ride to the park I can see that he is worried. Then as we drive toward the park, I can tell that he doesn't like the idea of leaving me there.

He says, "If you have any trouble, I want you to call the police."

I know he's scared.

Without hesitating I nod my head in agreement, "I will, dad. I've got my phone."

There are about a dozen kids skating when we arrived, and most of them are a lot younger than I am. I spent the next half an hour going off of the mega ramp before Sal Marquez and Sunny Luna surprise me and pull up in his parents' black Buick SUV. Just as soon as he turns off the ignition, the two of them get out of the car. They seem very excited as they hurry in my direction.

"Tyrell, I have good news," Sal said, "I just got released by my doctor to play next week in the last game of the season. It's against first place Escalon."

"That is great news, Sal. The team hasn't played well without you. Escalon is a real powerhouse this year, and they're going to be tough to beat. Most of Patterson thought that your season was over."

Suddenly, I realized that he was staring at the wounds on my face.

He asked, "Who beat you up, Tyrell?"

"Mambo and the rest of his creeps jumped me in Middleton Park on the

way home from the volleyball tournament.”

Sal shook his head.

“They did this because of what happened in the skate park during the championships. How many of them were there, Tyrell?” he asked.

“Four, Mambo and three of his First Street Boyz.”

Sal said, “You kicked his butt fair and square at the tournament. He's such a loser. You need to get out of that school, Tyrell. You don't belong there.”

“Sal, I'm doing everything that I can. Can you believe that I'm passing algebra?”

“I told you that you could do it, Tyrell. That's good news because next year we can win the league if we have you on the team.”

Sunny grinned, and asked, “Who is this new girl you're seeing, Tyrell? The guys on the football team say she's pretty.”

“Katrina Cortez.”

Sal said, “It's about time that you got another girlfriend. It's been a long time since you and Leticia broke up.”

“I'm throwing a party to celebrate Sal's return to the team,” Sunny said, “We want you there. We've invited the entire team. You should bring her to our party. We'd love to meet her.”

“Thank you for asking me, but I'm afraid that Katrina can't come because she's returning to Mexico for Christmas vacation.”

“The party is a week from Saturday night.”

It was time to change the topic. I knew that anything I said was going to go straight to Leticia. She and Sunny were as close as sisters.

“Are you here to skate, Sal?” I ask.

“I'm not quite ready to skate yet, Tyrell. The doctor says that I need to stay off the board for another week. The x-rays are pretty good, and my ribs look like they are healed up.”

It made me happy to see Sal up and moving so soon after getting crushed. Then as I watched as the two of them walk away, I thought about how I am finally doing well. Sal wants me on the football team, and I needed to hear that from him. It gave me back some self confidence that I have lost. My family hasn't gone to a game since Sal got injured because without him the team is just plain lousy.

Tomorrow is the Suarez Quinceanera, at the Walnut Acres Conference Center. I'm a little nervous about it because this is the first time that both families have met. At the same time, it may be the last time that I will get to see Katrina. The next morning my mother made us both put on our Sunday church clothes. Lavonne protested because she doesn't like wearing a dress. My mother wants us to put on our best impression. She tells Lavonne that everyone wears a dress to a quinceanera. I have never been to one so I had no idea if they did or didn't.

Mrs. Suarez is happy to see us when we arrive, and she immediately introduces us to her daughter Luz Maria Suarez. Luz Maria looks beautiful in her white quinceanera dress. The moment we are introduced, my mother hands her our present. Luz Maria then takes it over and places it on a table that is already filled with presents.

The moment Luz Maria took our present, I spotted Katrina standing in the far corner talking with some of her girlfriends. It is the first time that I had seen her in a dress, and she looks amazing. I marveled at how she has been in town just a short time and already has made a lot of friends.

Just as soon as she spots me, she wants me to meet her father, Pedro. Without hesitating, Katrina grabs me by the arm and takes me over to meet him. Then just as soon as I shook her father's calloused hand, I realize how hard he must work. Soon after we are introduced, the Mariachi band starts setting up.

After I finish shaking his hand, Mrs. Suarez announces that the food is ready. The food looks delicious, and I probably took too much, but I love enchiladas, tacos, and tamales. My family then joins Katrina's family at

their table. After we have all eaten, Katrina pulls me outside just as the Mariachi band starts playing. Once outside, we sat down on a bench and for the next few minute, we can't leave each other alone.

Then after a few minutes she surprises me when she says in broken English, "We will be back in Patterson by the end of February."

Without hesitating, I reply, "I will be waiting for you."

Friday night's game is against Escalon High. Escalon is 50 miles east of Patterson, and they are crazy about their high school teams. Escalon always has a great football team, and they are last year's reigning Division D State Champions. The newspapers are saying that they have the best defense in the league. They have also allowed the fewest number of touchdowns.

Friday afternoon my dad gets home early, and he is as excited as I am to see Sal play. Soon after leaving the city limits it starts to rain, and never stops all the way to Escalon. The entire way there I focus out the window in disbelief at the torrential downpour.

When we arrive attendance in the stadium is sparse. It appears that a lot of people have been scared away by the rain. Only about half of the bleachers on the Escalon side are filled. The Escalon fans are wearing yellow and green in ponchos, and the Patterson fans are wearing red and gray ponchos. There are less than 100 Patterson fans sitting in the stands, and most of them are family members of the players.

Patterson wins the toss, and chooses to kickoff. Chad Campbell kicked the ball deep into their end zone, and they got the ball on the 20 yard line. During the first set of downs, it was raining so hard that the receivers couldn't hold on to the ball. Complicating matters, the players are covered from head to toe in mud, and they are so muddy that it is difficult to tell which side they are on. Then when we get the ball, we immediately encounter the same problems. Sal passes the ball and our receivers have trouble holding on to it.

During the first half, the ball is punted six times on fourth down. The half ends with the game scoreless. Sal has only completed 4 passes.

During the half time break the rain finally stopped. The result is a better playing field. They kick the ball into our end zone, and we return it to our 30 yard line. Sal quickly connects on a series of passes, until we finally find our way into the end zone. Our extra point kick is wide.

We are now ahead of the reigning state champions 6-0. However, Escalon is known for being tough and they aren't about to let down the home crowd. The very next possession they march down the center of the field in a carefully executed series of short running plays until their star running back races into the end zone. Their coach elects to go for 2 points, and again we can't stop the run. They are ahead, 8-6.

On the very next set of downs Sal trips and fumbles the ball and Escalon recovers. This time Chad Campbell and the Patterson defense manages to hold them at the goal line and force them to kick a 20 yard field goal. We are now down, 11-6. This time Escalon's kick went out on the 35 yard line. We are all panicking because the clock is quickly running out. Only Sal isn't about to let anybody wreck his return. He takes the snap, tucks the ball under his right arm, and takes off running as fast as he can towards the end zone. He dodges one Escalon tackler after another until they take him down on the 2 yard line. The Patterson fans are going crazy.

All we need is 2 yards, but Escalon isn't about to let it happen. The first two plays result in incomplete passes. Then on the third down Sal tries to run the ball in, but they stop him dead without a gain. All of a sudden, it looks hopeless, and the clock is winding down. Their defense is just too good.

Coach Long has paced back and forth the entire night, and now he really looks desperate. Then suddenly, when there is under a minute to go, he starts waving his arms and screams at the referee, "time out ref, time out." The entire game has come down to this play.

It is at that moment that we all realize that he is putting in our 6 foot 6 inch, 320 pound defensive lineman, Chad Campbell in at running back. Then as the huddle breaks, Sal calls for the snap, and lays it right into Chad's hands. Chad wastes no time. He dashes straight into the Escalon defensive line, bursting into the end zone just as the clock ran out. The Escalon fans are stunned, as we win 12-11. The moment the game ends we all rush on to the field to congratulate the team. My dad says that it is the first time that we have ever defeated Escalon in Escalon. I don't doubt

it. My entire family ran down on the field to congratulate Sal and the team.

The second I see him he asks, "What a great game! You're coming tomorrow night to our party, aren't you?"

Just as fast as I can I reply, "I wouldn't miss your and Sunny's party. The team looked great tonight, Sal."

There is no way that I would not go to Sunny's party tomorrow night. Her family owns a dairy on the outskirts of town and they have a really nice home with a swimming pool. Sunny's parents are really cool, and they like to entertain. It seems like I have been to her house for a party every year since I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The next evening, when it is getting close to the time to go, I put on the best clothes that I own, and make sure that my hair is perfect because I knew that Leticia would be there.

Unfortunately, my dad gets home late and he can't take me to Sunny's house until 8 o'clock, and from the look of the crowd I am the last one there. Most of the players are sitting around the swimming pool, and I haven't been inside her house for 5 minutes before I hear a voice that I recognize.

"Hello, Tyrell. How are you doing?" says Leticia Lopez.

My heart skips a beat the instant I hear her voice. Leticia is dressed in black spandex pants and wearing the highest spiked heels that I have ever seen.

"I'm doing great, Leticia. How are your mom and dad?"

"My mom and dad are fine, Tyrell. I know you don't like them. I haven't had a chance to thank you for smacking that Mambo at the city skateboard championships. I'm sorry that they tried to arrest you."

"You're welcome Letty. Sal would have killed me if I had let that slime bag Mambo harm Sunny."

"I thought that you were protecting me, Tyrell."

"Tell your parents that I'll be back at Patterson High next year. My grades

are good, and I'm passing algebra.”

“Tyrell, you can't be mad at my parents the way you were headed downhill. I tried to get you to go to class, but you wanted to go to the skateboard park. What kind of future is there in skateboarding? You can't possibly blame them. Besides everybody knows that Del Cielo High is where all of the gang members go.”

“I'm not ever going to be in a gang, Letty. I know that I made some mistakes in the past. I want to return to Patterson High and play football. Then, I want to go on to college and play more football.”

No sooner have I finished defending myself when the Chainsmokers' song “Closer” came over the speakers, and all at once everyone starts dancing. The sound system at Sunny's house is really good. Without hesitating, Leticia grabs my hand and we started dancing like it was old times.

After the song ends, I ask, “Where's your boyfriend, Collin?”

At first there is silence. It is obvious that she doesn't want to answer.

Then finally she tells me, “He got started drinking early. Right now he's passed out in Sunny's bed.”

I can't help but crack up, but before I have a chance to get hysterical another great dance tune came on and once again we swing out to the middle of the dance floor. It is at this time that Leticia grabs me by my right hand, and pulled me closer. For a moment it seems like old times.

Over the music she asks, “I hear you have a new girlfriend, Tyrell.”

“You mean, Katrina Cortez?”

“Tyrell, they say she's a really beauty.”

I smile, and then really get down on the dance floor, using all of my best moves. The entire time Leticia is staying right with me. Finally after I have been at the party for a half an hour, we both take a break when Sal and Sunny made their first appearance. Sal has already spotted us on the dance floor.



He gives me a hug, and above the blaring music he says, "How are you, my brother?"

"That Escalon game was something else, Sal. Chad was unbelievable. He's a one man army. Beating Escalon is huge."

"Thanks, Tyrell. I wish I hadn't gotten injured at Modesto High. It hurt my chances for getting a scholarship. The season was real disappointing. I heard that they might even fire Coach Long. Come outside to the pool so I can introduce you to the new guys on the team that you don't know."

One by one Sal introduces me to the new guys. Many of them are sophomores who are playing varsity level for the first time. I did my best to remember everyone's name, but all I could think about was Leticia. Then when I looked around for her, she was gone.

Out of the corner of my eye I can see Chad Campbell watching Sal make the introductions. Today's Patterson Irritator newspaper has a picture of him scoring the winning touchdown on the front page. I can't help but grin at his demeanor.

Then when the opportunity is right, I tell him, "Chad, I went to the Escalon game and you were amazing."

"Thanks, Tyrell. I wish the other games had gone like that one. Sal tells me that you are going to play football with us next year."

"I sure hope so Chad, my grades are good. It's up to Dr. Davis to let me back in to Patterson High."

He said, "We need height and size. Most of our guys this year were too small and they had a hard time protecting Sal. If we're going to win the championship next year, we're going to need some bigger guys like you, Tyrell."

I never saw Leticia the rest of the night. I am really disappointed, and at the same time I'm sure she is with Collin. I decided to call my dad and have him pick me up.

The second that my dad pulls up, and I get into our van, he asks, "Did you have a good time, son?"

"I sure did. Sal introduced me to all of the new guys on the team."

"Those are the guys you should be hanging out with, I bet that they're all going to go to college," my dad said.

When Christmas vacation finally arrives, I thought that I would be able to spend all three weeks hanging out with my friends, but instead I have to work for my dad cleaning carpets. This is because my dad needs my help. Also, I still owe them for the Patterson Elementary Petunia Garden bill that Mrs. Sousa had sent. I didn't go to the skate park once the entire vacation. Not only did I not have the time, but I think that Leticia's lecture had an effect. Maybe she is right about what she is saying, and it's time for me to grow up.

The entire vacation I never heard from Katrina, and for all that I knew she was in Arizona or New Mexico picking fruit. The fact that she hasn't made an effort to contact me dug on my mind. I am working so hard during Christmas vacation that I am looking forward to school. From what I can tell, making a living is very difficult.

The first day back to school, after Christmas vacation, is pretty ordinary. Our classes are pretty small because none of the students who have left for Mexico have returned. The second the first period ends, I walk over to the restroom and use the facilities. Not long after I finish going the bathroom I stop outside Mr. Phish's classroom to talk to my buddy Wendell about his Christmas vacation. Soon afterward, class is starting and Mr. Phish waves at us to come inside and sit down.

Only a minute after I sit down, Eddie Cruz also returns to the classroom after using the bathroom. His eyes are focusing straight ahead into his Iphone as he sits down. The second he sits down, Mambo Rosas gets out of his seat and begins pounding Eddie's head with his bare fists. Eddie is caught completely off guard, and in a futile attempt to save himself he rises out of his seat and begins returning punches. At this time, everyone that doesn't want to be in the middle of the fracas runs to the corner so that they won't get caught in the crossfire. There is no way we are going to get in the middle of a fight between the leaders of the Latin Kings and the First Street

Boyz.

In an instant, Mr. Phish leaps out from behind his desk, and grabs them both by the collar, and as he tries to take control of the situation, Chili whacks him in the back of the head with a large dictionary. Mr. Phish hits the floor face first with a big thud. He is out cold.

It is at that moment that the members of both gangs start fighting, and the room erupts into total pandemonium. The fight is unfair right from the very beginning because our class is largely made up of First Street Boyz. However, it doesn't deter the Latin Kings, and they, for the large part held their own.

Just as soon as the chairs started flying in all directions, all of the pregnant girls flee for their lives. Then without any warning, the biggest book case in the room crashes to the floor. Finally, Mr. Ortega busts into the room with a fire extinguisher in his hands pleading with them to stop.

He shouts, "Stop fighting right now. I'm talking to all of you."

When he realizes that they're not listening, he begins spraying fire retardant in the direction of those who are throwing punches. The fire retardant quickly puts an end to the war. Soon afterward, Mr. Phish opens his eyes, and slowly gets back on his feet. At the same time Wendell and I rush over to help him stand.

I ask, "Are you alright, Mr. Phish?"

At first he didn't answer.

Then finally, he says, "I'm OK."

"You don't look OK," I reply, "I think you need to sit back down."

At the same time, Mr. Ortega orders all of the First Street Boys to go to the main room and take a seat, and he instructs all of the Latin Kings to sit on the outside lunch tables. He is afraid that things would erupt again. Then, after a quick discussion with Mambo and the First Street Boyz, Mr. Ortega meets with the Latin Kings.

He says, "I sent the First Street Boyz home. I'm going to give them a 15 minute head start before excusing you. I'm suspending Mambo for 5 days for starting the fight. Anyone who participated in the fight gets an automatic 3 day suspension. Also, if I find out who knocked out Mr. Phish, then I'm going to expel them. School is canceled for the rest of the day because of the bodily fluids in the classroom. According to state law, the classroom has to be cleaned and disinfected for AIDS before I can't legally let you back in."

Mr. Ortega suspended all of the participants for 3 days. The result is that there are a lot of empty seats in the classroom. Three weeks later, we got our report cards for the semester and I got a B+ in algebra, which in my world is extraordinary. I passed every class. The new semester starts next week. This semester in Mr. Phish's CORE class we are going to study American Government instead of United States History. At the same time, we will be playing softball in PE. Softball season is the best time of the year at Del Cielo High. I keep saying to myself that all I have to do is survive until the end of May.

# Tyrell Walker Chapter Six Questions

Answer using complete sentences

1. Why is Tyrell surprised by his mother's invitation to his algebra group?
2. Why is Tyrell hesitant to invite Katrina to his house?
3. How does Wendell know that the pizza is Canadian bacon and pineapple?
4. Why is Veech going to Zamora, Michoacan, Mexico?
5. What is Sal's good news?
6. Why do both football teams have trouble moving the ball?
7. How does Coach Long win the game?
8. What happens when Tyrell encounters his old girlfriend Leticia Lopez at Sunny Luna's house?
9. How does Tyrell spend his Christmas vacation?
10. What happened when the First Street Boyz and the Latin Kings returned from Christmas vacation?