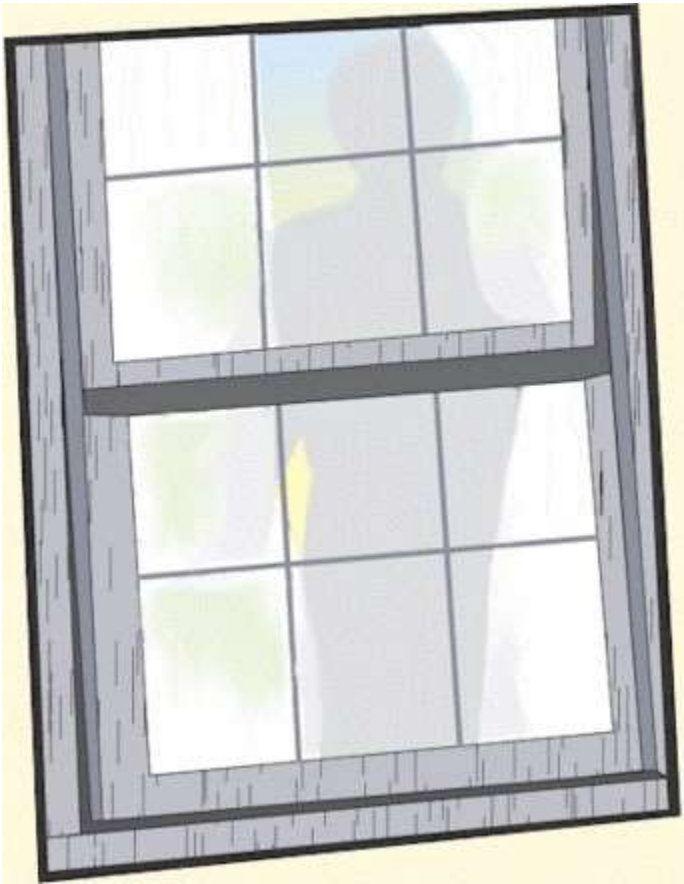


## Chapter 5. Ghost Hunting



The strange man stared down at last Tuesday's Luz. She was sitting on the porch step reading a book, unaware that the man was behind her. Dwight, Max, and Luz were frozen in place, too stunned to move.

Luz held herself perfectly still. "Did you see that?" her voice whispered in the boys' heads.

"Yes," their voices whispered back.

"Is he a ghost?" Luz's voice asked quietly.

"Uh-huh." Dwight's voice could only squeak the sound.

Slowly, Luz turned her head until she saw the boys' faces. Their eyes studied hers.

"What do we do?" her voice asked.

"Can it hurt us?" Dwight's voice asked.

"Ghosts don't hurt people," Max said.

"How do *you* know?" Dwight asked.

"He's watching the other Luz, not us," Max's voice replied.

“Then we should move and do what we want,” Luz concluded.

“But what if--?” Dwight said.

Luz turned toward the strange man. His eyes were gazing at last Tuesday’s Luz.

“He doesn’t look like a bad person,” Luz’s voice said.

“Maybe, but why is there a ghost in your house?” Dwight asked.

“I don’t know,” Luz said, “but my Aunt Rosa thought the house was haunted. She told me the first time she was here.”

Max glanced at the man. “Maybe he’s not a real ghost,” he said.

“What do you mean?” Luz asked.

“I mean, maybe he’s a ghost like us—with a blue stone in his hand.”

“You think he’s traveling through time?” Luz’s voice asked.

She stepped behind the strange man. His arms hung on each side, his hands curled into fists. She peered closely at his fingers.

“I can’t tell,” she said.

Max slid beside Luz. “Do you think my hand will go through him?”

“Not if he’s a ghost,” Dwight said. “And he’s a ghost.”

Max pointed his index finger at the middle of the man’s back. “Should I?”

“Go ahead,” Dwight’s voice said. He suddenly pushed Max’s arm forward.

“Ouch!” Max’s voice yelled when his finger bent. “That hurt.”

“Does he know what you just did?” Luz asked.

She leaned forward warily and looked around at the man’s face. She half expected him to jump toward her, but Max’s finger hadn’t seemed to register.

“Watch,” Max said. He moved his finger toward the man’s back again, but it simply stopped at an invisible barrier that encircled the man.

“He’s definitely some kind of ghost,” Max said, tapping his finger against the barrier.

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Just then the strange man leaned forward and seemed to pat last Tuesday’s Luz on the head. Max and Luz quickly jumped aside, as the man turned and walked through the wall into the house.

“Follow him!” Max’s voice commanded.

The children twirled through the wall. By the time they stopped, the man had crossed the living room and was headed down the bedroom hallway.

As the three hurried after him, he entered the room at the end of the hall.

“That’s my room,” Luz’s voice said.

At the bedroom door, they glimpsed the man walking into Luz’s closet.

“Quick!” Max’s voice yelled.

He raced to the closet and peered inside.

“He disappeared,” Max’s voice said.

“Maybe he went through the wall,” Dwight’s voice suggested.

“Then he’d be in the backyard,” Luz said.

“I don’t think so, but just a second,” Max said.

Carefully, slowly, Max pushed his head through the back wall of the closet. Just as carefully, he pulled it back again.

“He’s not out there,” Max said. “I just see your backyard. He definitely disappeared inside the closet.”

“Why would he go in my closet?” Luz’s voice asked.

“And who is he?” Max’s voice added.

“Just another ghost from this crazy neighborhood,” Dwight joked.

“Hey, what time is it?” Max’s voice asked. “We have to get going.”

“Your alarm clock says 6:17,” Dwight said.

“Then we’d better hurry,” Luz’s voice said.

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In a few minutes, they were standing outside Dwight’s house.

Even in darkness, Luz could tell that his house was old—and very odd, too. A one-story wooden bungalow, it was attached to a much

taller garage. Luz studied the front of the barn-like garage. It looked as if it had been standing forever. Its gray wood was weathered and bowed; its small dark windows were cracked. The entire structure seemed to lean slightly against the house, as if it were tired of standing alone.

“What do you use the garage for?” Luz’s voice asked.

“Nothing,” Dwight’s voice said. “The landlord said we’re not supposed to go in there.”

“But why did you go in there last week?” Luz asked.

“Because I heard noises,” Dwight explained.

“What kind of noises?”

“Strange noises. Creepy creaking noises.”

“And you went in there?” Max’s voice asked him.

“Well, I didn’t know it was a ghost,” Dwight’s voice explained. “I just wanted to see what was making the noises.”

“Hey, it’s starting to rain,” Max’s voice called.

Dwight held out his arm and watched tiny raindrops fall right through his skin onto the pavement below. “It feels funny, but not like walking through walls!” Dwight’s voice said. He stretched his arms like an airplane and ran across the front yard. “It rains right through us!”

The rain grew heavier.

“You guys can stay out here, but I’m going inside,” Luz said. “I want to see where you live.”

“Hey,” Dwight’s voice called, “I didn’t say you go in my house and snoop around.”

“I don’t want to snoop,” Luz said. “I just want to look.”

“Well, what if I was in the bathroom or something?”

“Believe me, I won’t go in the bathroom,” Luz said.

“It could get embarrassing,” Dwight said. “Anyway, there’s nothing to see in my house.”

“You never know. Maybe I’ll uncover a clue. Okay?”

Dwight stopped running. “All right. Just call me when it’s time to see the ghost.”

“Me, too,” Max said.

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As Max and Dwight raced across the front yard in the rain, Luz spun through the wall into Dwight’s living room. She could have gone through the door, but slipping through the wall seemed like much more fun. Traveling through time, she had decided, was an unbelievable adventure. In fact, it was so unbelievable that she couldn’t even begin to describe the experience, not that she was planning on sharing it with anyone. Her mother would never understand what she had done and where she had gone.

When she stopped twirling, Luz found that she was standing in the middle of Dwight’s sofa. Last Tuesday’s Dwight was sitting next to her. An older woman sat in a nearby armchair watching the news on TV.

Luz studied last Tuesday’s Dwight. He was resting his head against the back of the couch, staring at the ceiling. Then he rolled his head to the side. He pulled back the curtains and watched the rain pour off the front porch roof. To Luz, he looked either very bored or very

worried. In a moment he got up and went to the kitchen. She tagged along as he spooned out some macaroni and some green beans onto a plate. Next he speared a piece of chicken from the oven. Then he brought the plate of food into the living room and handed it to the woman.

Luz followed last Tuesday's Dwight back to the kitchen. He filled another plate with food and sat at the small kitchen table to eat his meal. Luz wondered why the woman didn't join him. Then she noticed a metal walker standing near the woman's chair.

When he was finished, he placed his plate in the sink and headed down the only hallway.

Luz hurried after him. Last Tuesday's Dwight passed a bathroom and a bedroom with fluffy pink rose pillows. Luz decided that the woman slept there. He entered the room across the hall and switched on a small light.

Even now, Luz was feeling chilled. The room had a high ceiling and cracked plaster walls. Dwight's bed sat in one corner. A rocking chair stood beside a small dresser. Four dark rectangular areas shaded the wall where pictures had once hung.

Last Tuesday's Dwight sat on the bed, but his eyes kept darting to a door on the far wall of his bedroom. She guessed that he was hearing noises. Luz decided that it was time for Dwight and Max to be there.

"Hey, Dwight! Hey, Max!" Luz's voice called.

She hurried to the front door and spun herself outside.

"I think you're going to see the ghost," Luz told them. "You're in your bedroom."

"All right, all right," Dwight's voice said. He headed through the front door. Max and Luz followed him inside and down the hall.

Last Tuesday's Dwight was still sitting on his bed.

“Does that go to the garage?” Luz’s voice asked Dwight.

“Yes,” he said.

Just then, last Tuesday’s Dwight got up from the bed and walked to the door.

“What’s happening, Dwight?” Max’s voice asked.

“It’s the noises. They’re driving me crazy.”

“Does it happen all the time?” Max wanted to know.

“No. Just sometimes, but it gets worse when it rains. I hate the rain.”

“What’s going to happen?” Luz’s voice asked.

“I’m going to open that door and kill a ghost.”

They watched as last Tuesday’s Dwight unbolted the lock, turned the knob, and pulled the door open.

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The garage was completely dark.

Last Tuesday’s Dwight reached his arm around the doorframe and into the garage, feeling for the light switch. Only when he had turned on the light did he enter the garage. The children followed him.

The garage was two stories tall and looked more like the inside of an old attic, Luz thought, with its unfinished walls.

“This is so weird,” Dwight said. “I can’t smell anything, but the garage smells like mildew when you’re really there.”



Luz walked to the center of the room. She scanned the room slowly to take it all in: the two sets of extra tall garage doors; the wooden boxes and crates stacked against the two side walls; the paintspattered workbenches along the back wall; the narrow steps leading to a small loft. Most of all, she felt the presence of the shadows that hung from the corners of the garage like the blackest cloth.

“Are you afraid?” Max’s voice asked. “Being here now?”

“Not really,” Dwight’s voice replied. “I know what happens. It’s like watching a scary movie for the second time.”

“Yes, but we haven’t seen this movie,” Luz’s voice added.

“Just watch,” he told her.

Last Tuesday’s Dwight slowly walked toward the stairs. He paused at the bottom and scanned the loft. His eyes quickly moved back and forth, as if he were reading an invisible note in his brain.

“Are the noises coming from there?” Max asked.

“I didn’t know,” Dwight said. “I couldn’t tell, but I thought so.”

Then last Tuesday’s Dwight began to climb the stairs. Step by step, gripping onto the wooden handrail, last Tuesday’s Dwight inched closer to the top. The children followed behind him.

“You were brave,” Luz’s voice told Dwight.

“I was scared,” he said.

As they climbed the stairs, Luz could see a row of tall wooden cabinets lining the side wall of the loft. They were buried in deep shadows and hard to see.

Last Tuesday’s Dwight stopped and hesitated on the top step.

“Come on,” Luz’s voice said. She stepped right through him onto the floor of the loft. Max followed her. From their vantage point, they were ready to watch whatever happened.

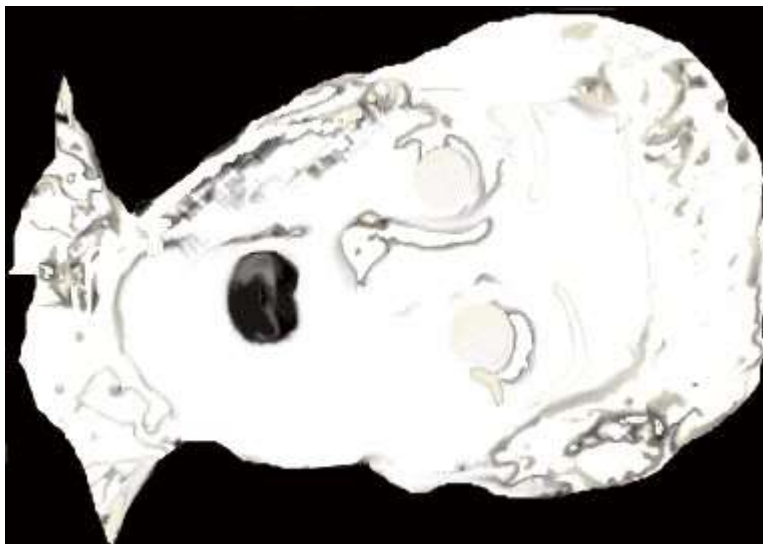
“Get ready,” Dwight said. He had only walked halfway up the stairs, but he didn’t need to see this part again. He sighed, crossed his arms, and waited.

Suddenly, last Tuesday’s Dwight yelled. Luz couldn’t hear his voice, but she could see his mouth release a huge scream. He took two quick steps forward and pushed against the closest cabinet. The cabinet tipped back, then rocked forwards. The cabinet door fell open, and what looked like a white giant fell out.

Luz blinked; it was happening too fast.

The giant tipped to the right, crashed through the rail along the edge of the loft, and slammed over the side.

Last Tuesday’s Dwight didn’t wait to see what happened. Shaking and screaming, he ran down the stairs. Luz and Max peered over the edge. Below them, they saw the smashed and crumbled body of the white giant. Last Tuesday’s Dwight ran past the dead giant, turned off the light, and escaped into his bedroom.



“That’s my ghost,” Dwight’s voice said.

He was walking down the stairs now toward the broken giant.

“I don’t like the face,” Luz’s voice said.

The giant’s head hadn’t been damaged at all. It was lying face up now, its eyes closed, its mouth in a silent scream. Luz could see the face of a man as if it been carved from white stone.

“Is it dead?” Max’s voice asked.

“Yeah, or is it like one of those scary movies when you think the creature’s dead, only it opens its eyes at the end,” Dwight’s voice added, “and grabs you!”

“I think it’s dead,” Luz said, as she and Max joined Dwight.

“Maybe we should check to see if it’s a ghost,” Max said. He walked over to the giant’s head and attempted to touch it. His hand passed right through the head. “Not a ghost,” his voice confirmed.

“Or maybe it never was alive,” Luz’s voice said. “It looks like a statue, except I never saw a statue with a face like that before.”

“Whatever it is, where is it now?” Max’s voice asked.

“The garage, I guess,” Dwight’s voice said. “But I never went back in there after that night.”

“Have you heard any more noises?” Max continued.

“For a few days,” he said.

“Weird,” Luz said. “Did your mother believe you?”

“What?”

“Your mother—“

“What do you mean—my mother?”

“Well, wasn’t that—?”

“That’s my grandmother.”

“Oh, I thought—” Luz stopped, then tried again. “Then where’s your-?”

“Don’t even ask,” Dwight’s voice warned. “You told me you wouldn’t snoop.”

“But I didn’t,” Luz’s voice protested. “I just saw you make dinner for that woman. I thought she was your mother.”

“You need better eyes. My grandma broke her hip in July, and now she can’t walk so well. So I’m taking care of her instead of the other way around.”

“You cook dinner every night?” Max’s voice asked.

Dwight nodded. “And do the laundry and whatever else my grandma says. I hate it, but there’s nothing I can do. And I didn’t tell her about this. Are you crazy?”

“I know what you mean,” Luz said, trying to make Dwight feel better. “I live with my mother, and she’s really annoying sometimes.”

Luz looked at Max, hoping he might offer some sympathy.

Instead, he shrugged, and his voice said, “I live next door.”

Dwight had heard enough. “Come on, Max, let’s go back outside in the rain.”

“Shouldn’t we go back?” Luz asked. “Won’t Miss Moon be expecting us?”

“Why should we go back now?” Dwight said. “I want to have some fun. If she stopped time, then we can stay as long as we want, and it’ll still be the afternoon when we get back. That’s not a bad deal.”

He started running toward the garage doors. Just before he reached them, he curled himself into a somersault and rolled through the doors.

Max waved at Luz before he spun through the door.

For a moment, Luz considered dropping her blue stone to go back to Miss Moon. But she didn’t really want to return to the present. No, she had a better idea, especially if Max and Dwight were busy. Without them around, she was free to do some exploring and perhaps solve a mystery.

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A few seconds later, Luz twirled through the wall of Max’s house.

She discovered last Tuesday’s Max alone in the living room, watching a baseball game on TV and wearing his Yankees hat. Luz hated baseball and didn’t know the first thing about it, but she noticed that Yankees were playing Boston; the score was 7-2.

Luz walked into the kitchen. No one was there, but the counter was filled with dirty dishes. A large pot stood on the stove filled with dried spaghetti. She headed to the other side of the house and down a hallway.

Her first stop was Max’s room. Yankees’ pennants stretched across his walls. A computer monitor with a Yankees’ screensaver sat on his

desk. Then she noticed a watch on top of his dresser. It wasn't just a watch; it was An Important Watch, for it was enclosed in a Lucite box as if it were a trophy. What surprised Luz most was that the watch didn't look special at all. It was bent and rusted, and the crystal over its face was cracked. Its time had stopped at 10:24.

She wondered why it was so important.

She stepped out of the room and continued down the hall, into a spare bedroom, into a bathroom. The last room was the largest bedroom. Luz knew it must belong to Max's parents.

She gave the room a quick glance and was ready to leave, when she noticed that someone was in the bed, lying under the comforter. Luz drew nearer and saw a woman, curled on her side. Her hand clutched a folded tissue. Luz looked carefully. The woman was crying.

*What's wrong with her?* Luz wondered to herself.

Then she noticed a large framed photograph sitting on the nightstand next to the bed. A man was smiling in the picture. Luz noticed a smudge on the glass. She kneeled to examine the photo and realized that the smudge was actually the imprint of someone's lips. Someone had kissed the glass.

Luz shivered at her discovery. She walked to the door and glanced back at the woman. She was still crying as Luz left the room.

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Luz was more confused than ever. She had tried to solve one mystery, but it had turned into an even bigger mystery. She knew what she had to do now. She was going outside and tell Max what she had seen. Then she was going to ask him what was wrong.

Luz spun through the front door, but the boys weren't in the front yard. She ran next door and twirled into Dwight's house. Last Tuesday's Dwight and his grandmother were watching TV.

"Dwight! Max!" her voice called, but they didn't answer.

She decided to check the garage. She walked into Dwight's bedroom, then whirled into the garage. It was dark and still. She wondered if they were playing further down the street.

She spun herself through the garage door to the sidewalk and stopped.

Her mouth fell open.

She was standing face-to-face with Mrs. Norolla.

Luz was so shocked that she didn't know what to do. *What is she doing here?* she wondered. Confused and panicky, Luz couldn't think about what to do next. Instead, she dropped her blue stone and disappeared without a word.

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In the seconds that it took her to reappear in the Memory Machine, Luz had many doubts. *Maybe I didn't do the right thing*, she thought. *Maybe I should've looked for Max and Dwight. Maybe they'll start looking for me and get worried if they don't find me. Maybe they'll run in to Mrs. Norolla. What was she doing there? Why did I drop that stone?*

When she materialized in the basement of the library, she remembered to step out of the Memory Machine. Then she surveyed the room and the hallway to the elevator, hoping that she would see Max and Dwight.

No one was there, not even Miss Moon. Luz even walked around the circular room, looking for any messages she might have written. Then she stopped in front of the red door.

It was slightly ajar.

“Miss Moon?” Luz called.

She listened carefully.

“Miss Moon!” Luz said in a louder voice. “It’s Luz.”

Still no one answered.

Hesitantly, Luz placed her fingers on the red door. The metal was cold. Her heart was pounding loudly as she slowly pushed it open.

She saw Miss Moon right away, sitting with her back to the door at a round table in the center of the room. A bright circle of light fell on the table, but the rest of the room was in darkness.

“Miss Moon? It’s Luz. What’s the matter?” Luz asked, walking toward her. “Are you all right?” she asked.

Luz reached out and touched Miss Moon’s shoulder.

Miss Moon jumped and turned her veiled head.

“Oh, Luz,” Miss Moon whispered hoarsely.

“Are you sick?” Luz asked.

“A little trouble...,” she seemed to gulp for air, “...breathing.”

“Can I help?”

“Nothing you can do,” Miss Moon explained. “It’s the air.”



“You have asthma? From the pollution? My cousin does, too. Do you have an inhaler?”

“No,” Miss Moon said. She tried to take a deep breath, but she began to cough. Luz leaned closer, as Miss Moon continued in her breathless voice, “Hard to breathe here. Much better when I go to the past.

“I don’t understand,” Luz said.

“Where I’m from,” Miss Moon said.

“You mean you traveled here?” Luz exclaimed. “You traveled *forward* in time?”

Before Miss Moon could nod, Dwight’s voice boomed from the doorway. “You traveled *forward* in time?” he repeated. “That’s awesome!”

“Really awesome,” Max said.

“Stop it,” Luz told them.

“But I want to go ahead in time,” Dwight continued. “I’ve been thinking about this. We could see what’s going to happen tomorrow. We could go forward and check out the lotto numbers on Saturday and then go back and play them. Then we could be millionaires. Or if we couldn’t do that, we could see the test that we’re having next week and then do a good job on it!”

Miss Moon grabbed onto the edge of the table and pushed herself up. Then she turned to face the boys.

“No,” she said, shaking her finger at them. “Never.”

“Why not?” Dwight asked.

She cleared her throat and tried to speak in a louder voice. “Because once you have gone ahead, you can never go back to your own time.

I can never continue my life.”

“But you travel backwards all the time,” Luz said.

“Yes, but I can never go back to the moment that I left my own time.”

“Are you a ghost then?” Max asked.

“No, I am someone—” she began coughing “—someone who lost her place in time.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter,” Luz said, trying to be helpful. “Because we’re here, and we can help you.”

Miss Moon motioned for the boys to draw closer. “So you all must be careful and never for a moment think about going forward in time. Solve the mysteries of the past, but don’t jump forward.” She took a raspy breath, then coughed. “My only pleasure now is traveling back to special times in my life—and helping the Mystery Club.”

“The Mystery Club!” Luz exclaimed. “I almost forgot. You won’t believe what we saw! Ghosts, real ghosts.”

“Yeah, there’s a ghost that lives in Luz’s house,” Dwight said. “He walked right through the wall. I was so scared I couldn’t move! But it turned out that he really wasn’t scary, only we don’t know why he’s there.”

“And,” Max added, “we saw the dead ghost in Dwight’s garage, except that it looked more like a statue than ghost.”

“And—” Luz looked at Max. She had many questions she wanted to ask about what she had seen at his house, but she knew that would have to wait for another time. She decided to share another piece of information instead. “And you’ll never guess who I saw outside your garage,” Luz told Dwight. “Mrs. Norolla.”

“No way! What was the library lady doing at my house?” Dwight asked.

“Maybe she was walking down the street,” Max said. “Maybe she lives in the neighborhood.”

“I hope not,” Dwight said.

The two boys had crowded around Luz, blocking her view of Miss Moon.

“No, she was standing outside your garage,” Luz said. “I think she was trying to look in the window.”

“Why would she be looking in my garage?” Dwight asked.

“I don’t know because when I bumped into her—“

“You did what?” Dwight interrupted.

“I bumped into her and then—“

“Like a real bump?” Dwight asked.

Luz stopped and realized the meaning of her words.

“I don’t know,” Luz said.

“Just a minute,” Max said. “Was she standing in the rain?”

“Yes—we both were,” Luz said.

“Then did she have an umbrella?” Max continued.

“Come on, Luz, was she getting soaked?” Dwight asked. “Or was the rain falling right through her?”

“I really didn’t notice,” Luz replied quickly. “It all happened so fast.”

“Think about it, Luz,” Max urged her.

Luz closed her eyes and tried to imagine Mrs. Norolla's face as she stood on the sidewalk facing Dwight's garage.

"She didn't have an umbrella," Luz said. "I saw her hands. She was wearing her white gloves, and she wasn't holding anything."

Then Luz remembered. She opened her eyes and looked at Dwight and Max.

"Our library lady is a ghost, isn't she?" Dwight asked.

Luz bit her lip and nodded.

"But how could Mrs. Norolla be a ghost and work at our school?" Max asked. "That doesn't make sense, does it, Miss Moon?" He turned around, expecting to see Miss Moon at the table, but she was gone. "Where's Miss Moon?"

Dwight and Luz glanced around the room.

"I'm over here," her voice called from the darkness at the edge of the room.

"Are you feeling better?" Luz asked.

"It's time for the ticking to begin again," she said.

"What?" Luz said. "But we want to talk about Mrs. Norolla."

"How can that lady be a ghost?" Dwight asked.

"Yes," Max agreed, "and what was she doing outside Dwi—" Without warning, Miss Moon started time again.

Max was the first to feel it. Every question that he had about Mrs. Norolla evaporated from his mind. He glanced nervously around the room, trying to remember where his hat was.

Dwight noticed the darkness and felt scared. "Hey, I've got to get going," he said. "How do I get out of here?"

Luz suddenly craved a candy bar and wondered how late her mother would be that night.

Just then, Miss Moon stepped out of the shadows. She wasn't wearing her veil. And her face was as white as the dead ghost in Dwight's garage.