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Please enjoy this translation and take your bigotry elsewhere :) Cardboard Boxes (Cajas de Carton) by Francisco Jiménez(from Mexico) First Part The end of the harvest It was the end of August. Ito, the contractor, had long stopped smiling. This was natural. The strawberry harvest had ended, and the workers, most of whom were day laborers, did not gather as many boxes of strawberries as they had gathered in June and July. Every day the number of day laborers diminished. On Sunday only one worker- the best- came to work. I liked him. Sometimes we would talk during our half hour lunch. This is how I learned that he was from Jalisco, my homeland. This Sunday would be the last time I would ever see him. When the sun set behind the mountains. Ito signaled to us that it was time to return home. "It's time," he yelled in his broken Spanish. These were the words that I waited for anxiously twelve hours a day, every day, seven days a week, week after week, and to think that I would never hear them again saddened me. On the way home, Papa did not say a word. He watched the road intently with his two hands on the steering wheel. Roberto, my older brother, was also silent. He threw back his head and closed his eyes. The dust that seeped in from outside made him cough repeatedly. It was the end of August. When I opened the door to our shack I stopped. I saw that everything we owned was packed in cardboard boxes. Suddenly I felt the burden of the hours, the days, the weeks, the months of work. I sat down next to a box and my eyes filled with tears at the thought of having to move to Fresno. The Move That night I could not sleep, and a little earlier than at five that morning, Papa, who had apparently not shut his eyes either, woke us up. For a few minutes, the joyous cries of my little brothers, for whom the move was a great adventure, broke the silence of the dawn. The barking of dogs soon accompanied us. While we packed the dishes, pots, and pans from breakfast, Papa left to start the "Caranchita". This was the name that Papa gave to his old black Plymouth '38. He bought it in a used car agency in Santa Rosa in the winter of 1949. Papa was very proud of his car. "My Caranchita," he called it affectionately. He had the right to feel this way. Before he bought it, he spent a lot of time looking at the other cars. When he finally chose "Caranchita", he examined it inch by inch. He listened to the motor, tilting his head from side to side like a parakeet, trying to detect any sound that could indicate mechanical problems. After satisfying himself with the sounds of the car, Papa insisted that he know who had been the owner. He never found this out, but he bought the car anyway. Papa thought that the owner must have been somebody important because, in the backseat, Papa found a blue tie. Papa parked the car in front of the shack and left the motor running. "Ready!" he cried. Without a word, Roberto and I began carrying the cardboard boxes to the car. Roberto carried the two larger ones and I carried the two smaller ones. Papa carried the mattress and secured it onto the roof of the car with ropes so that it wouldn't fly off. Everything was packed except for Mama's big cooking pot. It was an old pot that Mama had bout in a secondhand shop in Santa Maria the year I was born. The pot was dented and scratched, but the more dented it became, the more Mama loved it. "My cooking pot," she would call it proudly. I kept the door of the shack open while Mama carried out her pot carefully, grasping it firmly by its two handles so that she would not spill its contents: cooked beans. When she got to the car, Papa stretched out his hands to help her. Roberto opened the back door and Papa carefully placed the pot on the floor next to the seat. We all got into the "Caranchita". Papa sighed, wiped the sweat from his forehead with the sleeves of his shirt, and said tiredly: "That's all." As we were leaving, I got a knot in my throat. I turned and looked at out shack one last time. The Arrival in Fresno At sunset, we arrived at a work camp next to Fresno. Since Papa did not speak English, Mama asked the foreman if they needed more workers. "We don't need anybody," he said, scratching his head. "Ask Sullivan. Look, continue on this road until you arrive at a white, large house with a fence. That's where he lives." When we arrived there, Mama walked toward the house. She walked through the fence, through rows of rose bushes, and up to the door. She rang the bell. The porch lights turned on and a tall, heavy-set man came outside. They talked briefly. When the man went back inside, Mama hurried to the car. "We have work! The man let us stay for the entire season," she said, a little choked up with pleasure, and pointed at an old garage next to the stables, where we would live. The garage had been run down by the years. The walls had been eaten away by termites and they barely held up the torn roof. There were no windows and the floor was a dirt floor covered by dust. That night, by petroleum gas light, we unpacked our things and began to make the garage livable. Roberto swept the floor with energy; Papa filled the holes in the walls with thin sheets of tin. Mama gave my little brothers something to eat. Papa and Roberto brought the mattress and put it in one of the garage corners. "Viejita," he said to Mama, "you and your little ones can sleep on the mattress, and Roberto, Panchito, and I will sleep under the trees." Second Part Working in the Vineyard Very early the next day, Mr. Sullivan told us where the vineyard was and, after breakfast, Papa, Roberto, and I went to the vineyard to pick. Around nine o'clock, the temperature climbed to one hundred degrees. I was soaked with sweat and my mouth as dry as if I had been chewing on a scarf. At the end of the row, we would open the jar of water and drink. "Don't drink too much- you'll get sick!" Roberto yelled at me. He had not finished warning me when I felt a sharp pain in my stomach. I fell to my knees and the water jar slipped from my hands. I could only hear the buzzing of the insects. Little by little I began to recuperate. I splashed water onto my face and neck and watched the black mud seep down my arms and boil when it hit the earth. I still felt sick at lunchtime. It was two in the afternoon and we sat under a large walnut tree that was at the side of the vineyard. Papa wrote down the number of boxes that we had filled. Roberto was tracing designs in the earth with a stick. Suddenly, Papa grew pale. He had been watching the road. "School bus," he whispered in alarm. Instantly, Roberto and I ran to hide ourselves in the vines. The yellow school bus stopped in front of the Sullivan house. Two very clean, well-dressed children got off. Roberto and I left our hiding spot and returned to where Papa was waiting. "You must be careful," he warned. After lunch, we went back to work. The pungent scent, the buzz of the insects, the sweat and the dust made the afternoon seem eternal. Finally, the mountains surrounded the valley and swallowed the sun. An hour later, it was too dark to continue working. The grapevines covered the grapes and it was very difficult to see them. "Let's go," said Papa, signaling that it was time for us to go. He took a pencil and began to calculate how much we had earned the first day. He added numbers, erased them, and wrote more. He raised his head without saying anything. His eyes were sad and sunken, and wet with tears. When we came home from work, we washed ourselves outside with cold water from a hose. Then we sat at a table made of wooden crates and hungrily ate a soup of noodles, potatoes, and fresh flour tortillas. After dinner, we lay down to sleep, ready to begin a new day of work with the arrival of the sun. The second day, when I woke up, I felt beaten; my whole body ached. I could hardly lift my arms and legs. Every morning that I woke up I felt the same way until my muscles got used to the work. School It was Monday, the first week of November. The grape season had ended and I could go to school. I woke up early that morning and stayed in bed watching the stars and savoring the thought of not having to go to work and of getting to start sixth grade for the first time this year. Since I could not sleep, I decided to get up and have breakfast with Papa and Roberto. I sat with my head down in front of my brother. I didn't want to look at him because I know that he was sad. He would not go to school today, nor tomorrow, nor the following week. He would not go until the cotton season was over, and that would not be before February. I rubbed my hands together and watched the dry, acid stained skin rub off and fall to the ground When Papa and Roberto left for work, I felt a great relief wash over me. I went to the top of a slope and watched the "Caranchita" disappear into a dust cloud. Two hours later, around eight, I waited for the school bus. Finally, it came. I climbed into it and sat alone. The children were all playing and yelling. I was nervous when the bus stopped next to the school. I looked out the window and saw a crowd of children. Some carried books, others carried toys. I got off the bus, put my hands in my pockets, and went to the principal's office. When I entered I heard the voice of a woman asking me: "May I help you?" I was startled. Nobody had spoken to me in English for months. For a few seconds I was unable to answer. Finally, and with a lot of effort, I managed to tell her in English that I wanted to enroll in the sixth grade. The woman asked me a few questions that seemed to me irrelevant. Then she walked me over to the classroom. Mr. Lema Mr. Lema, the sixth grade teacher, greeted me cordially, assigned me a desk, and introduced me to the class. I was so nervous and so afraid in that moment when everybody was staring at me that I almost wished that I could be with Papa and Roberto picking cotton. After taking roll, Mr. Lema gave work to the class that we had to finish in the first hour. "The first thing that we have to do today is finish the story that we began yesterday," he said enthusiastically. "We're on page 125," he told me. When I heard this, all of my blood rushed to my head and I felt dizzy. "Would you like to read?" he asked me in a querying tone. I opened my book to page 125. My mouth was dry. My eyes had begun to water. Mr. Lema asked another boy to read. During the rest of the hour, I was angry with myself. I should have read that, I thought. During recess I took the book to the bathroom and opened it to page 125. I started to read quietly, pretending that I was in class. There were many words that I did not know. I closed the book and returned to the classroom. Mr. Lema was sitting at his desk. When I entered, he smiled at me. I felt much better. I walked up to him and asked him if he could help me with the unfamiliar words. "With pleasure," he answered. For the remaining month I spent my lunch studying English with the help of the kind Mr. Lema. The Trumpet One Friday during lunch, Mr. Lema invited me to accompany him to the music room. "Do you like music?" he asked me. "Yes, very much." I answered with enthusiasm, "I love Mexican folk songs." He picked up a trumpet, played it a little and gave it to me. The sound of the trumpet made me tremble. I loved that sound. "Would you like to learn to play this instrument?" he asked me. He must have understood my expression because, before I could reply, he added: "I will teach you to play this trumpet during lunch." That day I couldn't wait to get home so I could tell my family what had happened. I got off the bus and saw my little brothers yelling and jumping about with joy. I thought that they were happy to have me come home, but when I opened the door of our shack, I saw that everything we owned was packed in cardboard boxes... Chapter Summaries & Analyses