

## Our Hearts Stopped

“Ma, he has no pulse,” Max called to his mother from the other room, his shaky voice cracking slightly.

“What! No pulse?” Yvette said as she rushed into the room. She set down her mug of chamomile on one of the boxes, spilling the tea everywhere.

Max was helping his mother move into her new apartment since he was going off to college. The apartment was barren, white walls surrounded half open boxes with random books and kitchen supplies scattered throughout. The chaotic mess contrasted with the sunlight bouncing of the freshly painted sterile walls.

“He’s not breathing, and he has no pulse,” Max said.

“Oh God, I thought he was sleeping! What do we do? Should we take him to the hospital?” she said, pushing a box out of her way.

“I don’t know,” he said.

Max started breathing into Sparky. His tiny chest raised slightly with each breath. Yvette kneeled down next to them and pulled out her phone as Max began compressions. Two breaths, more compressions. Nothing.

“Get your keys and get to the car, we’re going to an animal hospital. Now.” he said.

Max lifted Sparky and stumbled with the weight, rushing out of the room. He carried the dog through the hall and out of the apartment, kicking empty boxes as they went. The small frame in his arms was limp.

Rough pavement dug into his feet as he struggled over to the parking lot in his socks, trying to avoid bits of broken glass. Yvette ran across the parking lot as she fumbled with her purse and keys, unlocking the car. The small Fiat was the color and shape of a coffee bean. Max’s heart felt as if he had just downed three shots of cafecito.

“Let me help you,” she breathed, as she reached over to Max.

“I got him, just unlock the hatch and fold down the back seat!” he said.

Yvette pulled up on the hatchback, raised it over her head, and folded down the seats. Max climbed in and scraped his knees on the rough bumper. She slammed the car shut, yanked

open the driver's side door, and jumped in. She jammed the keys into the ignition and after fighting with the clutch, skidded out of the parking spot.

“How is Sparky doing?” She said, as she gripped the steering wheel with white knuckles.

“He’s still not breathing, ma” Max said.

He brushed the dog's floppy ear back against his brown fur, cupped his snout, and breathed into his nose again. More compressions, more breaths. Yvette shoved her phone into the dashboard and jabbed at the screen.

“Ok Google, navigate to nearest animal hospital,” she said.

After a few seconds, the robotic voice answered.

“Family doctor. Is that correct?” it said.

“Damn phones,” Yvette griped, hacking at the screen.

The engine hummed and cars whizzed by in a blur of colors. She weaved in and out of traffic, barely making a yellow light before it changed. She grabbed a hair tie from around the stick shift and quickly pulled her long brown curls into a sloppy bun. Grabbing the stick once more, she shifted into another gear. The transmission lunged, and Max bangned his head against the glass.

“Dammit,” he said wincing.

“Sorry, you ok, mijo?” she said looking back at them.

Up ahead, a large black pickup truck merged into their lane without using a turn signal.

“Ma watch the car!” Max said.

Yvette swerved out of the way immediately.

“Carajo! Get out of the way,” she spat at the driver. “Learn how to drive, pendejo!”

The phone lit up.

“In point five miles your destination will be on the right,” the phone repeated in a cold voice.

Reaching the entrance, she turned, screeching the tires. Max saw a building across the parking lot. The blue and red paint signaled them in the distance.

“Back there, ma,” he said, pointing to the back of the lot. He continued his breaths and pressed on Sparky’s torso.

They pulled up to the Petsmart and Yvette bumped the curb. Climbing out she pulled the hatch over her head once more. Max squirmed out of the back trying to pull Sparky out with him.

“Ma, this isn’t an animal hospital.” he said as he looked around.

“They have one in the back of the store, I checked,” she said.

“Okay, go inside then and get a veterinarian, I’m coming,” he said, breathing heavy.

Yvette ran inside while Max climbed out and picked up the dog. He felt heavier than before. Max walked in quickly, trying not to slip on the smooth tile of the store with his socks. The bright lights stung his eyes. He passed startled customers looking around for his mom. She waved at him from the back as a vet tech with long blonde hair, glasses and a blue scrubs joined her, handing Yvette a clipboard. Once he reached them the tech grabbed the dog.

“He’s not breathing,” Max said. His hands were shaking.

“I know, we’ll do what we can. Just have a seat and let us work,” she said.

She backed into a door and took the dog away. Some commotion escaped the back room. Max stared at the swaying door, and after a moment, grabbed his mom and sat down next to her as she filled out the white forms.

The clock seemed to drag on forever. The black hands ticked by, ten minutes, twenty minutes. Max got up and rubbed his neck while he looked around. The walls of the cavernous store seemed oddly tall for a store full of goldfish, pet food and toys. He looked over at a tank full of fish, the gold and silver flying by. They had always creeped him out, all slimy and bloated. A few of them floated on the top of the water, some were stuck to the filter.

Yvette tossed the clipboard into a nearby chair. Max and a few customers jumped.

“I told you to watch him,” she said, as she rubbed her forehead.

“What do you want from me? How do you expect me to always take care of you and the dog?” Max said.

“All I did was ask you to feed him!” A few customers backed away.

“Well I can’t do everything ma!”

“What are you talking about?” she said.

“I’m always taking care of you. What are you gonna do when I leave for college, huh? I won’t be around anymore,” Max said.

“Don’t talk to me like that! I know you’re leaving, and now all I have is Sparky,” she said, cupping her hands to her face. A few tears escaped her eyes.

Max exhaled and walked up to his mother. He wrapped his hands around her and put his chin on her head. His rough facial hair rubbed against the thick curls of her scalp. They sat back down. Max stared at his dirty socks and picked at his sweaty shirt. Yvette wiped her face and adjusted her lopsided bun.

Suddenly the door opened, and the sound of barking dogs escaped the back room. The blonde vet tech waved for them to follow her. She walked quickly and shot them a few words, but they could not hear her over the sound of the dogs, scratching at their cages. They entered the room, and saw a few other techs at a table. Max and Yvette could barely make out Sparky’s brown fur through the limbs working around him. As Max got closer, he saw Sparky’s paws move.

“What was that?” Yvette said to the tech.

“I said he is a little tired, but he’ll be okay,” she said. “Seems like he just choked on some dog food. It’s a good thing your son did some doggie CPR,” she smiled.

They went over to the table, and Sparky lifted his head up, wagging his tail, excited.

“You scared the crap out of us you little stinker,” Max said, grabbing his head and kissing him.

“My Sparky!” Yvette squealed as she bent over and gave him a little squeeze.

“We’ll keep him for a few hours, but he should be fine.” the tech said.

“That’s a relief,” Max said with a deep breath. “Ma, I’ll go out to the car and grab some sandals.”

“Okay mijo,” she smiled.