

WATER IN MAY



ISMÉE WILLIAMS

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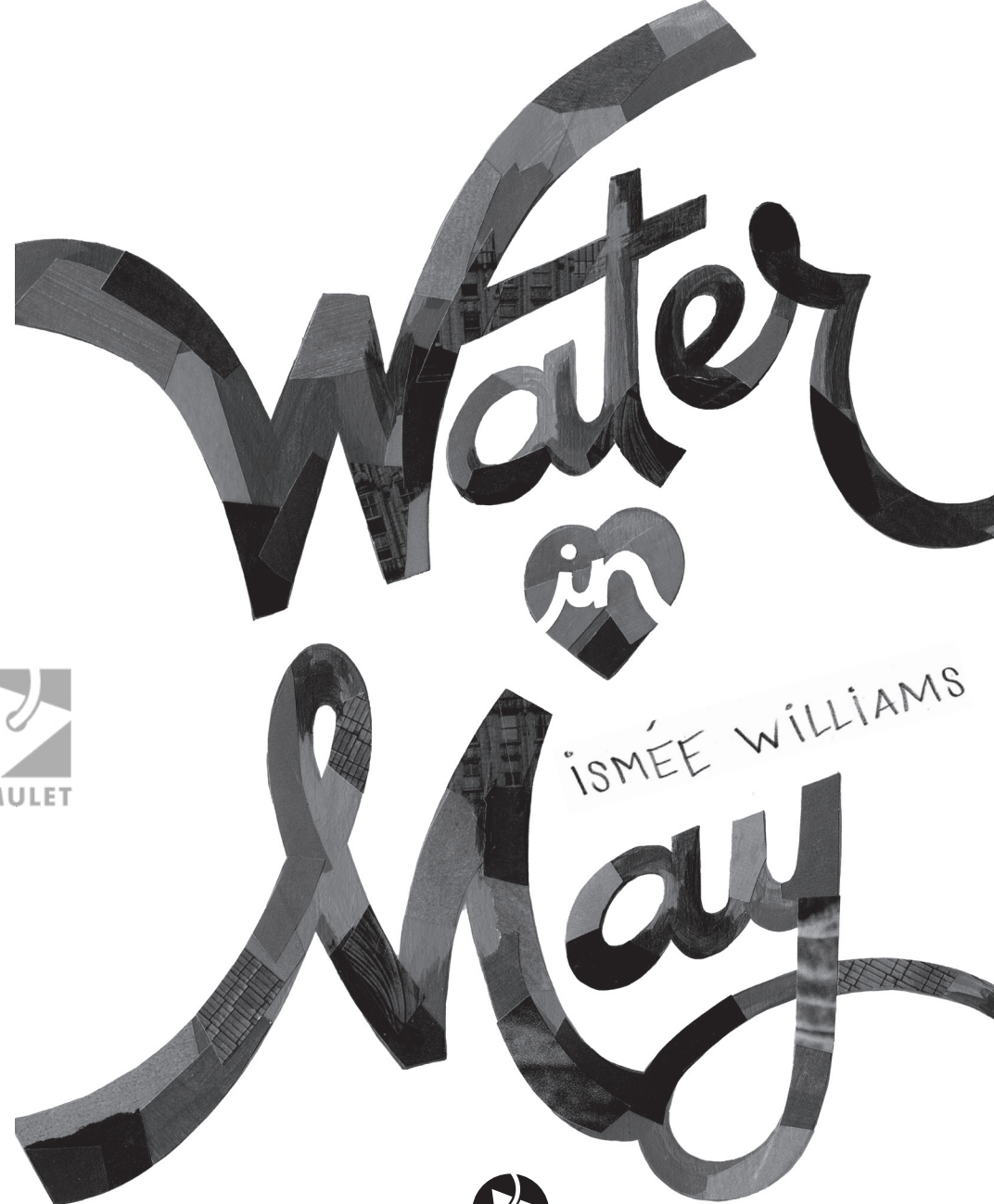
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# GLOSSARY OF DOMINICAN SLANG

**agitada** - Excited; in a state

**anda el diablo** - Damn

**anjá** - Wow

**alelao** - Someone who is stupid

**arrecho** - Erect

**asopado de pescado** - Soupy rice fish stew

**avión** - Easy woman, sexually

**baboso** - Idiot; a liar

**boca agua** - Impetuous person who speaks without thinking

**boca de suape** - Big mouth; someone who gossips

**brava** - Angry

**bugarrón** - Slur for a gay man

**cacata** - Tarantula; slang for an evil woman

**caché caché** - Cool; looking good

**canillas** - Skinny legs

**can** - Party

**carajo** - Hell

**chan** - Friend, bro

**cherchando** - Chatting it up

**chévere** - Awesome

**chata** - Flat-buttred person

**chichí** - Baby boy

**chin** - Little bit

**chopo** - Low-class person; very rude

**concho** - Oh my gosh!

**¿cómo?** - What?

**¿cómo te sientes?** - How do you feel?

**coño** - Damn

**cuero** - Slut

**culero** - Asshole (Mexican)

**¿dímelo?** - What's happening?

**¿dímelo-chan?** - What up, man?

**¡diache!** - Damn

**echate pa'ca** - Come here

**embarazada** - Pregnant

**enchulao** - In love

**fajar** - To fight; to beat up

**fo** - Bad smell

**freco** - Fresh; rude



**frío** - Cool

**furufa** - Ugly woman

**gallera** - Female expert on cock/rooster fights

**grajo** - Body odor

**¡guau!** - Wow!

**güebo** - Slang for penis

**la hada** - The cops (general Spanish)

**hijo de la porra** - Son of a bitch

**hijo de machepa** - Someone who has nothing; son of rotten luck

**hombre** - Man

**loco** - Crazy

**maldito** - Damn

**mande** - Excuse me/what? (Mexican)

**manin** - Brother; “bro”

**mano** - Brother; “bro”

**manso** - Cool; chilling; easy

**mayores** - Old people

**mala pata** - Bad luck

**medio pollo** - Coffee with milk

**mentiras** - Lies

**mira** - Look

**mofongo de ajo** - Smashed plantains with garlic

**moreno/a** - Dark skin

**morenito/a** - A person with a dark complexion

**nalgas** - Butt cheeks

**ñame** - Idiot

**nieto** - Grandson

**novio** - Boyfriend

**ofrézcome** - Damn

**orale** - Hey there (Mexican)

**oyé** - Listen up

**óyeme** - Listen to me

**pájara** - Lesbian

**papi chulo** - Good-looking guy

**parejero** - Someone who is vain

**pariguayo** - Dumbass

**patache** - Slang for a marijuana-filled cigar; a blunt

**peliar** - To fight, slang

**pelmaso** - Stupid

**pendejo** - Idiot



**perros y gatos** - Dogs and cats  
**pinta** – Short for *pintalabios*; lipstick  
**el pipo** - Damn  
**porquería** - Silly crap  
**porra** - Hell; bitch  
**puta** - Whore

**¿qué lo que?** - What's up?  
**¡qué cheposo!** - How lucky!  
**qué bolsu** - A person who doesn't know how to do anything;  
also a person with big testicles  
**qué mono** - So cute  
**quillao** - Mad

**rata** - Low person; scum  
**ratera** - Dirtball

**tato** - Slang for “esta todo”; everything is good; bye  
**tecato** - Someone strung out on drugs  
**te lo juro** - I swear it  
**to' ta frío** - Everything is cool  
**todo 'ta bien** - Everything is okay  
**tu ta'** - You are  
**tu ta' pasao** - You're crazy

**tu ta' cloro** - You're cool

**vaina** - Thing  
**¿veldá?** - Is it true?  
**ven acá** - Come here  
**vete pa'l carajo** - Go to hell

**yunque** - In a mood to fight



## TWENTY WEEKS

**H**is name ain't Dr. Love. *Coño*. You're messing with me, right?"

Yaz smacks me in the shoulder. She's doubled over, fingers clamping her mouth shut. Her purple silver-studded nails press dimples into her cheek. She's trying not to laugh.

"What?" I ask her. My cell slips as I shrug my shoulders. "They expect me to believe this guy's name is Dr. Love? A heart doctor? How stupid do they think I am?" I squat and snatch the phone. I wedge it back in the crook of my neck. "Like if Toto called for a penis doctor and was told the guy's name was Dr. Weiner he would believe them?"

Toto is Abuela's boyfriend. That's not his real name. It's just what my girls call him. Because his hairline's low. And he's bulky. Like one of them fighting dogs. And he's got these small hands and feet.

Yaz is gasping, cherry lollipop-colored lips pressed almost outta sight. Teri is giggling, fingers smoothing down long strands of inky hair. Heavenly's screen is three inches from her nose. She's probably browsing posts from her favorite designers.



She doesn't respond to my joke. But she thinks it's funny. I can tell.

"Your appointment with Dr. Love is scheduled for nine thirty on Thursday, September eleventh." The lady on the phone can't wait to get rid of me.

"Nine eleven? No way, José. Give me another date."

Yaz kicks me in the thigh.

"Hey!" I circle an arm around my belly, my finger pointed, already wagging. "Watch the baby!" I catch my phone as it tries to fall again.

"Like she was anywhere near your uterus." Heavenly rolls her eyes. Thick clumps of mascaraed lashes make everyone else look like a clown doll. On Heavenly, it looks good.

Phone Lady gives me a different appointment.

I hold the phone away from my face and turn to my girls. "Does Monday, September fifteenth, at ten work for *youz* guys?" I fix each of them with my you-better-be-there glare.

"Whatever you think, Mari." Teri's smiling like I just told her I won some money off those scratch cards at the bodega and I'm takin' them all on vacay. "I'll come," she says, as if her expression ain't enough. We was all excited when I found out about the baby. But Teri was the one who went out and got a book. And read it. Teri was the one who told me when it was time for my first doctor's appointment. Found the clinic I should go to.

"*Weez* guys will be ready." Yaz strikes the air above her with her fist, like Dazzler from the X-Men. She been doing that same dumbass pose since we chased Ricky Lopez down 173rd Street all the way to Broadway for her backpack. That was in the third grade. We been besties ever since.

Heavenly's acrylics tap-tap-tap on the face of her phone. It's the second one Jo-jo's bought her. As long as it texts and fits in the pocket of jeans that show off the curves of her *nalgas*, Heavenly don't care what logo it has or when it came out. But Jo-jo does. Only the best for his girl. I don't mind, seeing as I got to keep her old one. She's promised Yaz this one once it goes outta style. Heavenly's bottom lip slides out like she's gonna apply more *pinta*. But her eyes, they be smiling. "Ten on Monday? Perfect. I hate Mr. Sansone's English class."

Phone Lady's still talking. I can hear her squawks even with the phone a foot off my ear. I press it back into the space between my shoulder and cheek and catch the end of what she's sayin'. "And please arrive twenty minutes early to fill out all the necessary paperwork."

Twenty minutes? For paperwork? You gotta be kidding me. "*Coño*. Listen," I say, trying to be nice seein' as Yaz knows what I'm thinking and is giving me those lizard eyes. Like my swearin' is some bug she's fixin' to eat with that long tongue of hers. "I was just there yesterday seeing my baby doctor. She told



me I had to make this appointment. Don't you have all my info in some system?" I know they do, 'cause every time I go I have to stand there and wait for them to pull it up.

Silence. Then, "You have our number if you need to reschedule. Is there anything else I can help you with, Miss Pujols?"

*Miss Pujols.* I've gotten over the way white folks say my last name—*Poo-joe-ells*. It's actually better than how it sounds in Spanish—*Poo-holes*. Yeah, I won the instant scratch-off lottery with that one. But what I hate most is that they always call me "miss." I know I look young. But we're on the phone. She can't see me. And I'm making a pregnant-lady appointment. Shouldn't that make me a Ms. or a Mrs.?

"No." I wanna say something else. But Yaz, with that sharp lizard tongue of hers, is staring at me hard. My upper lip itches. I scrub at it. I need a nap.

Yaz mouths something at me, pointing to her dimples.

"Oh . . . And, uh, thanks."

I hang up.



I hear the music when we're still under the overpass. Fort Washington Park, squeezed between the river and the highway, is more parking lot than park. But summer nights, as long as rain hasn't flooded the river, all of Washington Heights squeezes into it. Families come. *Los mayores* in folding chairs play dominoes. Cans of Quisqueya sweat in their cupholders. Kids climb the playground like monkeys, stopping to shout for food. Next to the cars, grills smoke and a *mamá* or *tío* or *abuela* seasons and flips and shouts back to the playground, "*¡Un minuto más!*" One more minute!

Even if you have no family, this is the place to be. There's music and dancing, and you're surrounded by people who love the same music and dancing you do. You don't need no money to get in. Don't need no ID. All you need is your tribe. Your friends. When we started coming here, before even Heavenly needed a bra, I used to take Yaz's hand and close my eyes and let her lead me across broken-glass sidewalks and grass that was mostly dirt. I used to imagine that the *ba ba-da ba ba-da* was a real tambora drum. That the peal of horns came from real trumpets and saxophones. I even pictured an old man bent over



the rounded metal sleeve of a *güira*, brushing it with his pick. I never been to Santo Domingo. But my girls told me enough so I didn't mind opening my eyes and finding car stereos instead of bands. I know how real merengue is made, even if I never seen it done. When you dance, it don't matter how the music comes. If you can feel it, like a thrum inside you, it don't matter how it got there.

The first time I noticed Bertie, it was at this park. He was dancing with some *morenita*. A girl older than us. She didn't care that Bertie wasn't in high school yet. 'Cause he could spin her around. Lift his hand and ease her into a dip. Snap his wrist and bring her right back to him.

We were sitting on one of the rundown picnic tables facing the setting sun. The bench was broken. Splinters of wood separated Yaz's and my feet. And I watched that *morenito* dance the legs off a full-grown woman. We'd convinced Teri to come that night, even though she was afraid of partying, afraid of meeting boys and men. She was shaking like the A train hurtling from 125th to 59th. Living with two older brothers and a mama always at work taught Teri what made men get up in the morning. And she'd seen what Heavenly's mama's boyfriend had done to Heavenly's mama. It wasn't that the rest of us hadn't. We knew it was like some sorta power, getting men to look at us. Even if they was probably just looking at Heavenly and her *nalgas*.

Besides, we told Teri, not every man be like Heavenly's mama's boyfriend. Just gotta find one who'll treat you right.

Heavenly had three men circling that night. One on either side trying to keep her attention, another across the way at a different table, a girl already on his lap. Yaz and Teri and I were placing bets on who Hev would choose. My quarters were on the *chan* who was already taken. I remember the Mister Softee I bought myself with my winnings. I shared it with Bertie. Turns out, besides music and dancing, we also both love ice cream.

The smell of charred barbecue mixed with the warm dirt and the wet plant scent of the river reminds me of that night two years ago. Except that was the beginning of the summer and this is the end. School starts tomorrow. Other than a few weeks in the DR for Hev and Ter, I've had the whole summer with my tribe. But when school starts, all those folks I don't care about, half-friends, quarter-friends, and flat-out enemies, are gonna hear about my baby. Bertie's and mine. Can't wait.

We find ourselves one of the picnic benches by the water, one of the new ones made of that fake wood that'll never break. Just as we settle in, Hev raises her hand and calls out. Jo-jo's here, his too-cool leather jacket hanging off his too-broad shoulders—no matter it's warm enough for a tank top. Though the sun's nearly set, he keeps on his gold-rimmed shades 'til he's right in front of Hev. When he pushes them onto his hair, his dark eyes see only her.



Heavenly stares back at him, the curl of her mouth sly. He turns, and kisses all our cheeks.

“*Tato, chicas.*”

As she and Jo-jo head to the playground, we catcall them. Yaz hollers something about not corrupting the innocents. One of the nuns in Yaz’s after-school used to yell it at her all the time. Jo-jo snakes his arm around Hev’s waist, pulls her against him, and gives us a show. We whoop some more. Heavenly gives us the finger. Jo-jo grins.

Juan Luis Guerra croons from a car window. “*Ojalá que llueva café en el campo.*” It’s one of Bertie’s favorite songs. Even though he don’t like rain and he don’t like coffee. But he’s not in the throng of bodies making more dirt of the grass. He’s not tearing up the asphalt either. The lot’s full, the entrance blocked by an NYPD barricade. A royal-blue Mazda RX-7 zooms off the highway. Someone pushes the barrier to the side and the Mazda skates through.

Yaz has broken away and is *cherchando* with a guy whose open collar shows a larimar-stone necklace tangled in the chain of a thick gold cross. He doesn’t seem to mind that Yaz is snapping her peppermint gum at him or that you can see the wet glob of it between her teeth when she grins. He’s got those light gray-blue eyes that look good against golden Dominican skin. He’s gonna ask her to dance. Or at least get her a drink. Teri’s watching, half-fascinated, half-afraid.

I touch Teri’s hand to get her attention. I jerk my head toward where the Mazda parked. She nods and follows.

I slow as we get closer. Sergio Vargas has taken over where Juan Luis Guerra left off. I try to keep my hips steady. But the baby inside me loves merengue as much as I do. My papi loves merengue. That’s what Abuela says. So I guess it runs in the family.

My Bertie is leaning through the open window of the Mazda’s passenger door. I don’t know if he got out of it or if he’s been waiting, hanging with his *manin* by the trees or against the parked cars. His arm slips across to the driver. I imagine hands bumping, fingers snapping. Bertie stands. Did he slide something into his back pocket? *Coño*. The Mazda backs out. Teri tracks the car—now mostly afraid and only a little fascinated—as it zips from the lot. The engine revs as the Mazda skids onto the highway.

I think about going over there. Checking Bertie’s pockets. I think of finding the Mazda’s driver—I don’t want to say his name—and doin’ to him what I been doin’ to all the Ricky Lopezes in my life. You threaten my tribe, you threaten me.

I think of the baby inside me.

I grab Teri’s wrist, pull her toward the river. “Wanna dance?” I don’t want to be in a mood. I feel great. I’m not tired. Got no morning sickness, never did. No heartburn. Don’t even feel pregnant. I touch the small mound of my belly.



Yaz waves us over. The sparkly pink-orange of her nails is the current color of the sky. The guy with the larimar necklace is dancing with her. Yaz introduces us to Yefri and pushes him over to Ter. We help Ter out that way. She's so quiet, she'd get no action otherwise. Yaz tugs me a few steps away from them, and then we're both moving, arms and elbows up, hips sliding. "*Suavemente*" is blasting from a speaker someone's placed on the roof of a car. Yaz is kissing her fingers, circling her hands, mouthing the words at me as if I'm her long-lost lover. She's trying to turn my smile into a laugh. She knows that's what I need.

Hands take my hips. My back warms as someone presses against me. "Kiss me," Bertie sings to Yaz's lip sync. "Kiss me, slowly." My Bertie moves with me. We're so close, it's like we're one person. His arms encircle my waist. Gently, he turns me.

His eyelids are heavy. Maybe he's thinking about kissing me. Maybe he's trying to hide his bloodshot eyes. I can smell the *patuche* on him. I told him he can't smoke near me anymore 'cause of the baby. But he's not smoking. Not right now.

He takes my hand in one of his. His other holds my back. He nudges me away, then pulls me in. "*Echate pa'ca*," he breathes.

No one bumps me. We're surrounded by a wall of elbows and thighs, butts and backs. Bertie's careful. His arms are a cage around me. He gives me his lazy smile. His fingers graze my

stomach. He winks. He *is* a good dancer. I wonder if he's better than my papi.

Yaz is dancing with Teri. Guess Yefri wasn't all that. Too bad, 'cause his eyes were *manso*. Teri's watching me and Bertie. She's all fascinated. Not one bit afraid.

I tug Bertie close. I tell him, "Dance with her." Bertie holds my gaze, kisses my fingers. He takes Teri's hand. He twirls her, and she shrieks. She doesn't have his baby in her, so he don't have to be careful.

Yaz and I are back together. Her arms paddle the air, beating an invisible drum. She's left off lip-synching. She's crowing out the lyrics. Don't matter that she's outta tune. Sweat drips between my shoulder blades. The sun is five seconds from disappearing. A Jet Ski whizzes by—the music is so loud I can't even hear it. I get a whiff of roasted meat and my stomach snarls. The baby inside me's got an appetite. I feel warm, inside and out. I'm alive, alive, alive.

Teri shrieks again. Pure laughter. Soon, Heavenly and Jo-jo will find us. We'll go to the twenty-four-hour diner on Broadway and Jo-jo will buy us dinner. We'll have to drag Yaz, dancing and singing, the whole five blocks. Bertie will order me ice cream. Maybe I'll let him sneak me into his room after. I'll wake in the careful cage of his arms.

