



Secrets are, by nature, phenomenally interesting. (Also, they're far better when they belong to someone else and you overhear them.) It's why we love James Bond and Alex Rider and Sydney Bristow and Jason Bourne...secrets are their livelihood. It's also why we love novels, because the act of reading fiction in itself is a form of spying, at least in part. I like a character with a secret, and I like it more when it's something unexpected. Usually revealing a narrator's secret in a review would be called a spoiler, but in the case of Eddie Corazon in **MUCHACHO**, passing on his secret will only do one thing: make you want to read this book more. Eddie Corazon, juvenile delinquent, is a secret reader.

If somebody asks me do I like to read, I say, "Yeah," and then I give them a look that tells them they better not ask me what I like to read because this ain't Oprah's book club.

Eddie lives in small-town New Mexico with his family, which includes a large group of cousins, some of which are in and out of jail on a regular basis. His family has lived in New Mexico for three hundred years—his

abuelo says, "We didn't cross the border, *mijo*. The border crossed us." He's had some issues with the school system, and he's enrolled instead in Bright Horizons alternative school, where the students pride themselves on getting rid of teachers in record time. The lure of his cousins' illegal lifestyle is strong, but he's promised his mother he will get a diploma. While Eddie privately devours *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and the collected works of Sherman Alexie, he feigns apathy in his classes and refuses to engage, even though his mind is constantly wrestling with the issues he'll face once he graduates. What kind of future can he possibly achieve when even the brightest kids from his neighborhood can't go to college? Why bother getting a minimum-wage job when he could make easy money now selling with his cousins?

Everything changes on the day Eddie starts taking ballroom dancing to fulfill his fine arts credits, and because his teacher tells him, "You'll meet lots of girls." He is partnered with Lupe, a new girl at Bright Horizons, and he is initially drawn by her looks and the sweet smell of her hair, but upon speaking with her over lunch, he discovers she is brilliant, and funny, and unlike any other girl he's ever met. Lupe dreams of being a doctor, and slowly, Lupe's own desires for a future of her own choosing fuel Eddie's passion to be more than what he is. He decides to write her a poem: *I wish I could be Lupe's rosary/ so she could hold me in her hands/ and tangle me up in her fingers/ and press me to her lips/ and pray me into being a good man/ one bead at a time.*

Eddie is no longer simply a secret reader; he becomes a secret writer. His poems are scattered throughout **MUCHACHO**, and they lend a wonderful intimate quality to the story. What I love about Eddie's character is that despite the front he has to maintain for his peers, his family, and sometimes even for Lupe, as we read his story from his point of view, he's actually being open with us. His voice is sincere, and he bares his thoughts and emotions to us as readers, because he can't bare them to anyone else in his world. We become his confessional, and it is a privilege to spend time with him on the page. His journey is not an easy one, and a misstep with his cousin leads to confrontation with Lupe's father, and Eddie is faced with a choice about the kind of man he wants to be. Without revealing any crucial plot elements, I will say there are a few wonderful scenes in the book set at Black Cat Books and Coffee, which is a real independent bookstore in Truth or Consequences, NM. My hope is that teens and adults alike will read **MUCHACHO**, because Eddie's story is so compelling, and its telling so lovely, that it shouldn't be missed. There is so much beauty revealed in the midst of his chaos, and there are amazing connections to be made across social and racial boundaries.

This is exactly the sort of book that should be read in 11th and 12th grade, but very rarely is. This is the kind of book that Eddie himself would like to read, and one that librarians and teachers and parents and volunteers should slip into the hands of the secret readers in their lives.