

## THE POET X

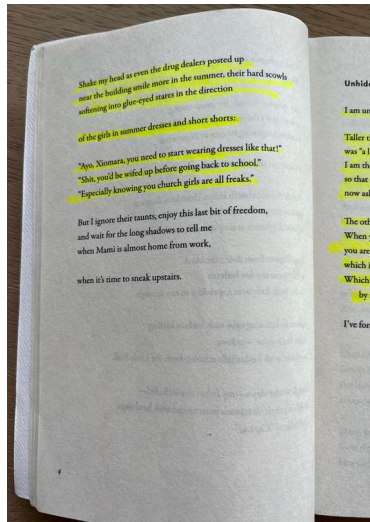
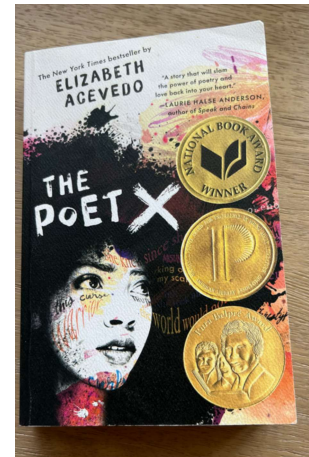
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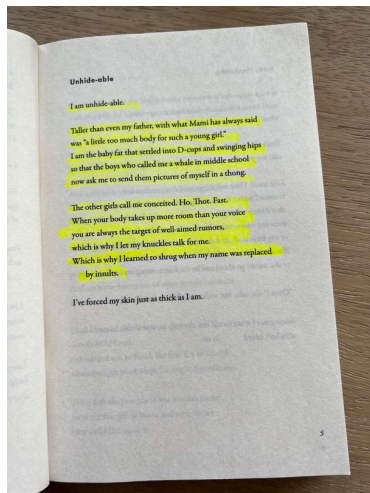
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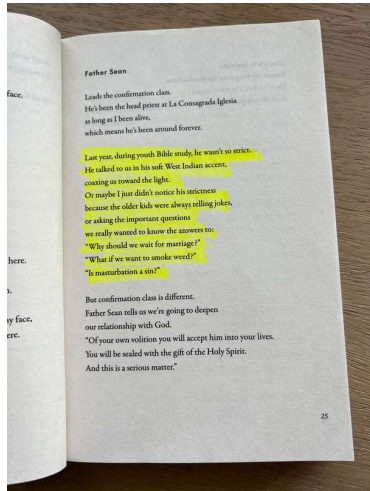
### PAGE 4

Shake my head as even the drug dealers posted up near the building smile more in the summer, their head scowls softening into glue-eyed stares in the direction of the girls in summer dresses and short skirts: "Ayo, Xiomara, you need to start wearing dresses like that!" "Shit, you'd be wifed up before going back to school." "Especially knowing you church girls are all freaks."



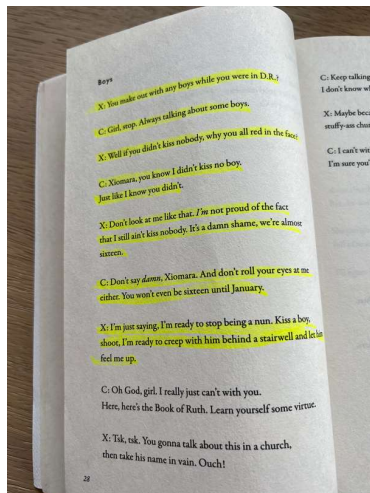
### PAGE 5

Taller than even my father, with what Mami has always said was "a little too much body for such a young girl." I am the baby fat that settled into D-cups and swinging hips so that the boys who called me a whale in middle school now ask me to send them pictures of myself in a thong. The other girls call me conceited. Ho. Thot. Fast. When your body takes up more room than your voice you are always the target of well-aimed rumors, which is why I let my knuckles talk for me. Which is why I learned to shrug when my name was replaced by insults.



## PAGE 25

Last year, during youth Bible study, he wasn't so strict. He talked to us in his soft West Indian accent, coaxing us toward the light. Or maybe I just didn't notice his strictness because the older kids were always telling jokes, or asking the important questions we really wanted to know the answers to: "Why should we wait for marriage ?" "What if we want to smoke weed?" "Is masturbation a sin?"



## PAGE 28

X: You make out with any boys while you were in DR.?

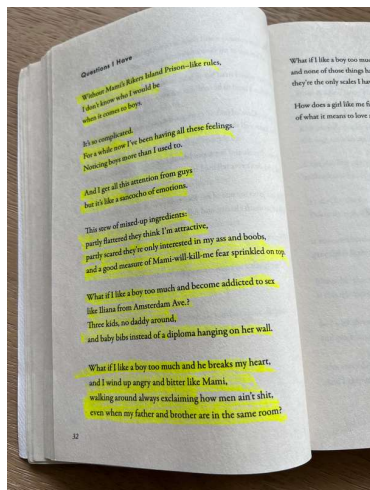
C: Girl, stop. Always talking about some boys.

X: Well if you didn't kiss nobody, why you all red in the face? C: Xiomara, you know I didn't kiss no boy. Just like I know you didn't.

X: Don't look at me like that. I'm not proud of the fact that I still ain't kiss nobody. It's a damn shame, we're almost sixteen.

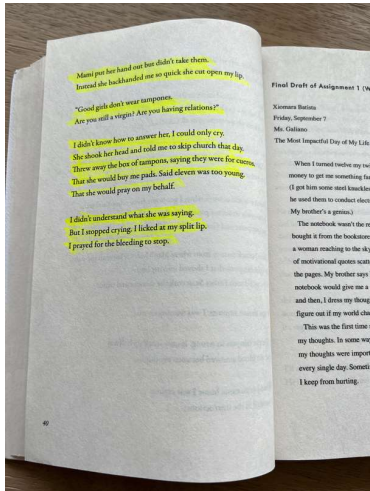
C : Don't say damn, Xiomara. And don't roll your eyes at me either. You won't even be sixteen until January.

X: I'm just saying, I'm ready to Stop being a nun. Kiss a boy, shoot, I'm ready to creep with him behind a stairwell and let him feel me up.



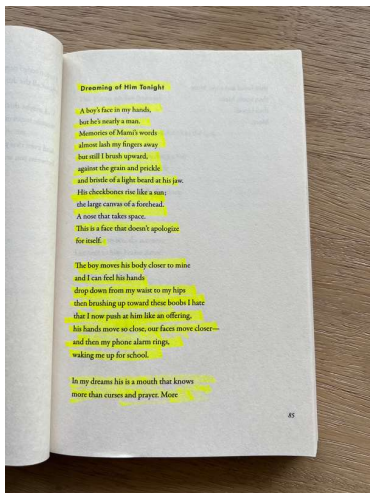
## PAGE 32

And I get all this attention from guys but like a sancocho of emotions. This Stew of mixed-up ingredients: partly flattered they think I'm attractive, partly scared they're only interested in my ass and boobs, and a good measure of Marui-will-kill-me fear sprinkled on top. What if I like a boy too much and become addicted to sex like Iliana from Amsterdam Ave. ? Three kids, no daddy around, and baby bibs instead of a diploma hanging on her wall. What if I like a boy too much and he breaks my heart, and I wind up angry and bitter like Mami, walking around always exclaiming how men shit, even when my father and brother are in the same room?



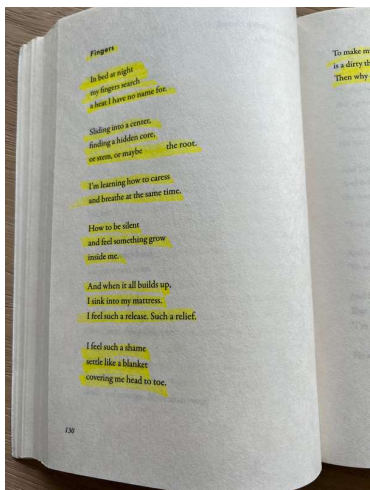
## PAGE 40

Mami put her hand out but didn't take them. Instead she backhanded me so quick she cut open my lip. "Good girls don't wear tampones. Are you still a virgin? Are you having relations?" I didn't know how to answer her, I could only cry. She shook her head and told me to skip church that day. Threw away the box of tampones, saying they were for cueros. That she would buy me pads. Said eleven was too young. That she would pray on my behalf. I didn't understand what she was saying. But I stopped crying. I licked at my split lip. I prayed for the bleeding to stop.



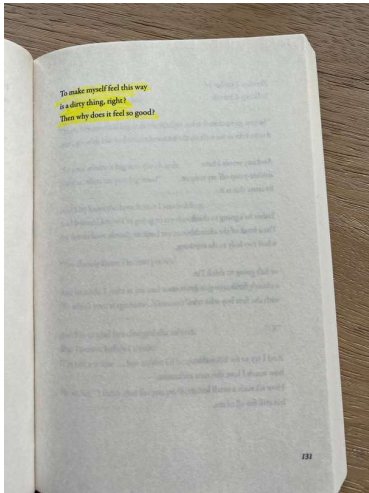
## PAGE 85

A boy's face in my hands, but he's nearly a man. Memories of Mami's words almost lash my fingers away but still I brush upward, against the grain and prickle and bristle of a light beard at his jaw. His cheekbones rise like a sun; the large canvas of a forehead. A nose that takes space. 'This is a face that apologize for itself. The boy moves his body closer to mine and I can feel his hands drop down from my waist to my hips then brushing up toward these boobs I hate that I now push at him like an offering, his hands move so close, our faces move closer— and then my phone alarm rings, waking me up for school. In my dreams his is a mouth that knows more than curses and prayer.



## PAGE 130

In bed at night my fingers search a heat I have no name for. Sliding into a center, finding a hidden core, or stem, or maybe the root. I'm learning to caress and breathe at the same time. How to be silent and feel something grow inside me. And when it all builds up, I sink into my mattress. I feel such release. Such a relief. I feel such a shame settle like a blanket covering me head to toe.



**PAGE 131**

To make myself feel this way is a dirty thing, right? Then why does it feel so good?

**PAGE 64**

Papi was a mujeriego. That he would get drunk at the barbershop and touch the thigh of any woman who walked too close. They say his tongue was slick with compliments and his body was like a tambor with the skin stretched too tight. They say Papi was broken, that he couldn't get women pregnant, so he tossed his seeds to the wind, not caring where they landed. They say Twin and I saved him. That if it wasn't for us Mami would have kicked him to tomorrow or a jealous husband would have shanked him dead.

**PAGE 321**

"In Aman's arms I feel warm.  
 In Aman's arms I feel safe.  
 In Aman's arms he apologized.  
 In Aman's arms I apologize.  
 In Aman's arms I want to forget.  
 In Aman's arms my mouth finds his.  
 In Aman's arms my hands touch skin.  
 In Aman's arms my shirt comes off.  
 In Aman's arms I am shy for a moment.  
 In Aman's arms I am beautiful beautiful beautiful.  
 In Aman's arms I feel beautiful.  
 In Aman's arms my jeans unsnap.  
 In Aman's arms I show myself.  
 In Aman's arms naked skin rubs against mine.  
 In Aman's arms kisses and kisses. My neck and ear.  
 In Aman's arms fingers touch my breasts. In Aman's arms I feel good. So good."

**PAGE 326**

We have to stop. Because now we're lying on the couch and he is on top of me. And his kisses feel so good, everything feels so good. But I also feel him pressed against me. The part of him that's hard. That's still an unanswered question I don't have a response for. And when his hand brushes my thigh and then moves up— I know why island people cliff dive. Why they jump to feel free, to fly, and how they must panic for a moment when the ocean rushes toward them. I stop his hand. I pull my face from his kiss. He is breathing hard. He is still kissing me hard. He is still bumping up against me. Hard. "We have to stop."