



MONICA SILVA FIRST AWOKE THIS MORNING BEFORE IT was light, when her father got up. He went off to work and the child went back to sleep, here in the bedroom she shares with her parents. Her lazy summer days now at an end, she awoke again, at her mother's insistence, and pulled on her clothes — only to fall asleep again. But now she has to get up and get ready for the first day of school.

Monica slumps out to the kitchen of the Olneyville apartment, while her sister, Astrid, heads into the bathroom. On the kitchen table, next to corn husks awaiting transformation into tamales, lies a postcard addressed to Astrid, from her soon-to-be teacher: "*Bienvenido a Kindergarten.*"

Once dressed but still bleary, the sisters prop themselves up on the front-room couch, next to a girl who sleeps wrapped in a sheet. She lives

upstairs, says Monica; there's no room for her there.

For their first-day outfits, Monica and Astrid wear snug velour leggings and butterfly T's, given to them by a friend of their mother's. Mrs. Silva says the growing girls are pushing out of their clothes, but there's no money for new ones; the summer's rain has cut into her husband's landscaping work. The family hopes to move to Woonsocket, she says, where the rents are lower. Maybe there they could find a bigger, cleaner place — with no cockroaches, or mice.

In the front room (the neighbor has since gone home), Mrs. Silva neatens the girls' tousled heads. They pull on jackets and Barbie backpacks, admire their new notebooks, and troop out the door. "*¡Ab! Que linda para la escuela!*" says a man as they pass.

Our Times

PHOTO AND TEXT BY
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