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HUÉRFANO: A MEMOIR: THE STORY OF A MOTHER, HER SON AND LIVING IN  
FOSTER CARE

A Thesis  
by  
MAURICIO GARCIA

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major Subject: Creative Writing

University of Texas Rio Grande Valley  
May 2022



HUÉRFANO: A MEMOIR: THE STORY OF A MOTHER, HER SON AND LIVING IN  
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May 2022



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## ABSTRACT

Garcia, Mauricio, Huérano: A Memoir: The story of a mother, her son and living in foster care.

Master of Fine Art (MFA), May, 2022, 130 pp., 3 figures, references, 26 titles.

If you look hard enough, there are stories of children in foster care. Tales of their plight, longing for love, the love of their parents, love from the foster care system, or a foster care family. However, despite their existence, so much is left in the unknown. The story of how this child's life came into the world, what outcomes transpired for a parent to give up a child, and the journey the child may have to take for closure.

But this isn't only the story of a former foster youth, but also the story of a mother who made the choice of letting a family go. Surviving depression, exile from her family, and immigrating to the United States. All under the age of 19.

Both stories are divergent from one another but are united through a survival journey that is unique to both individuals.





## DEDICATION

I'd like to dedicate this story to Monica Amaro; my mother. Arturo Garcia and Elva Garcia for being my parents by adopting me. Rosa Idelia Saucedo for supporting me during the hard days, and my friends for helping me stay the path.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will always be grateful to Dr. Jean Braithwaite for assisting me every step of the way into graduating. From recommending books to help improve my craft, listening to my story, communicating how I can improve my work, and being my friend throughout my MFA career. Dr. Britt Haraway for helping me enter the MFA program when I didn't know if I could enter. Dr. David Carren for reading my early scripts and providing me honest feedback.



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## CHAPTER I

### CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

#### **Introduction**

I've always loved comic books. From the discovery of an amazing cover featuring a character that has grasped your interest or picking up a single issue featuring your favorite character(s) and getting to know them from their inner dialogue, exchange with fellow heroes or villains. You connect with the character; you feel for them and read intently little by little taking parts of them and blending them with your own identity. Comics help us escape the real world sometimes. They help us forget the problems that surround us. During war, during a recession, during a separation, a break-up, finding a comic and thrown into several panels with text coming at you from all angles with onomatopoeia placed in just about every moment of action is so visually appealing. It's an art that has overcome so many obstacles and is used today to do more than sell comics, it's a medium to telling our stories.

When I was younger, I always wanted to make a comic book. Create a superhero that I based slightly on myself. He would fight evil and look for his missing mother. He would be sarcastic and intelligent like Calvin from *Calvin & Hobbes* and fight like Batman in *Batman the Animated Series* but also say catchy phrases like *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. I would draw panels trying to combine all these interests I had. I convinced myself that buying action figures and comics along with my obsession with cartoons on television was research that will help me in achieving my pursuit to make comic book characters. Then, as I formed my plot, I'd start

adding elements of reality. If in my personal life I was depressed or having difficulty in school, so would my characters. I tried to make my imaginary world as real as my reality.

But I grew up. I came to the mental maturity of believing that these hobbies were not a pursuit that would help me down the line as I matured. Comics were simply entertainment and not a form of literature that one discusses beyond their years in high school. I stopped reading comics around the final years of my high school education. Preparing myself for higher education that would assist me in obtaining a career that would allow me to survive on my own.

When I entered the university stage of my education career, I pursued what was perhaps the safe approach to a career. I began taking courses like computer science to land a balanced job that would basically pay the bills. From there I went to possibly going down the career path of being an educator in History. Somewhere down the rabbit hole of basic level courses, I had enrolled in English courses over a summer semester. I had always detested English. I enjoyed reading literature occasionally, but I disliked writing essays about it, interpreting someone's work, or doing research to talk about a topic that in my mind was discussed to the point of boredom. I began taking psychology courses and some philosophy along with my English courses because the required readings were simply too dull for my interest.

I started my career as a student at the same time I began working at the University Bookstore. This was a time when the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley went by the name University of Texas Pan American (UTPA) and the bookstore was across the street from campus. It was there that I would stock the inventory for the upcoming semesters, seeing what readings were required for classes, occasionally browsing through books to find something that I would find interesting. One day while I was stocking books for English courses, I saw something that

left me baffled. There were comics as required readings. *Watchmen*, *V for Vendetta*, *Arkham Asylum*, and *Maus* were all on the order list for an upper-level English course. I was a psychology major at the time and did not have any intention of taking any English classes outside of English 1302: Rhetoric and Composition. I decided to read without buying one of the required readings for an English class, *Stitches* by David Small. I “worked” my entire shift reading that book as I directed customers to the section their books were located while I intently read a story that after I was done reading, had me in awe. I had known slightly about comic books having mature themes implemented in them, but I never knew they could leave such emotions in not just its words but in its art as well. *Stitches* gave birth to my interest in comics outside of entertainment, it introduced me to a different perspective of what comic books can do, it can make you feel. I made the decision to change my major and move my schedule so that I could take the classes that made comic books required reading. So, after a conversation with my advisor and moving around classes I started to take higher education courses with comics.

I didn’t really believe it. As an undergrad I was still by many means a freshman despite having several courses under my college career. I bought every title required for reading that semester, probably the first time I ever did buy every title even the recommended readings. I fancied myself a comic book expert, but I was so very wrong going into Professor Jean Braithwaite’s course which was in a math building of all places. The very first required reading was *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud which I didn’t feel like reading immediately because I believed I already understood comics, probably better than all my fellow classmates. I was proven wrong again. We moved on to *The Best American Comics 2015* which reminded me of my love for Sunday comic strips, and I was introduced to Lynda Barry’s extensive work. *Syllabus: Notes from an Accidental Professor* was the most challenging reading I had to do. To

understand her methods, her art, and answering the same two questions she struggled with about my own work.

After taking several English courses, I had to ask myself what I am doing this all for. Why am I taking courses with graphic literature as required reading if I did not believe that I could possibly have a future myself in the creation of such graphic novels. What was my end goal? I felt discouraged in taking so many English courses with no means of utilizing them. So, I did what any foolish student with an existential crisis would do, I changed my major. I had my bachelor's degree in English completed at the time and took English courses to fulfill my internal need to further educate myself in comic books and all forms of literature done so with the combination of words with pictures. I decided to simply finalize my history degree and begin training to start a career as an educator for middle to high school level education. The last English course that semester was Britt Haraway's course which utilized the book "*the making of a story*" *A Norton Guide to Creative Writing*. I enjoyed doing my creative writing assignments, but that was the first time I had ever written creative work based on my childhood and implemented trying to make what I thought was an ordinary story extraordinary.

It was the beginning of wanting to be a creative writer, and I knew that I wanted it to be done in comic book style just like David Small did. Around this time, I came across *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. Its theme of identity and inner discovery merged with my current curriculum educating me on Mexican American History, motivated me to learn about comic book characters that are Hispanic American and/or Latinx American, and maybe these characters use their native language outside of a stereotype catchphrase single word. My newfound passion for creative writing, combined with my education on graphic literature and

Mexican American History I knew that I wanted to blend all these forms of education and use them as tools to develop a graphic literature comic with a Mexican hero not so different from what I had once attempted in creating when I was younger.



Figure 1. Marvel's Voices: Comunidades

<sup>1</sup> In *Marvel Voices*, Robbie Reyes takes on white extremists. I really enjoyed the addition to his reply to their hate speech but would have liked further commentary or dialogue from the writer explaining how the land Robbie is talking about was taken from Mexico. Putting a stomp on hate isn't enough, I think there is opportunity to inform the reader of Mexican American history.

I joined the MFA program with the intent to discover further readings on Mexican/Latinx graphic literature. With this information, I hoped I would be that much closer to learning what makes a good graphic novel, what is representation in graphic literature, and how can I join the ranks and be a part of the conversation of creating Mexican/Latinx heroes not so different from characters such as White Tiger (Hector Ayala), Blue Beetle (Jaime Reyes), Ghost Rider (Robbie Reyes), Spider-man (Miles Morales), Green Lantern (Kyle Rayner), and so many more. While

<sup>1</sup> Mercado, Yehudi (2021) *Marvel Voices*

developing ideas for making my own hero I researched Latinx superheroes in mainstream comics using suggested readings by Dr. Braithwaite. She directed me to get familiar with the work of Frederick Luis Aldama. Aldama authored many books on Latinx representation in a variety of mediums. My focus was on his work in Latinx representation in comics, and while reading his research in his book *Latinx Superheroes in mainstream comics* I landed on a topic I never really paid much attention too. A lot of the characters that identify as Hispanic/Latinx umbrella are not very mainstream. Many of them have gained some notoriety using the persona of an already established character.



Figure 2. Drawing on Anger

<sup>2</sup> Had Superman stayed hidden because of his immigration status, he wouldn't be the iconic hero he is today. Aside from my love for Batman, I had come to appreciate the significance that Superman represents. He is an undocumented alien who was adopted by the Kents and became a citizen of the United States growing up in Smallville, Kansas. His eventual discovery of learning where he and his biological family came from (Krypton) leads him to identify as a citizen of two worlds, loving both equally.

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<sup>2</sup> Garcia, E. Drawing on Anger. Pg.111

Although Aldama calls out the censorship of minorities in comics, he doesn't bring up how the characters that exist in comics are straddling of the intellectual property of an already popular superhero. Something I wished for Aldama would address is how many Latinx heroes piggyback of an already established hero. As wonderful as it is to see Hispanic/Latinx representation, I find it hard to swallow the lack of effort to make original Hispanic/Latinx heroes. Although Miles Morales and Ronnie Reyes are amazing portrayals of Spider-Man and Ghost Rider, it always exists in the back of our idea of the character that Peter Parker and Johnny Blaze are those two characters first, and often are what comes to mind when the discussion of those characters is occurring. It's great to see representation, but now there is a need to do representation at the next level, and have it done tastefully and without stereotypes and tropes.

### **Representation**

I found this issue in need of attention. I spoke about it frequently in my MFA courses, and in my pursuit for creating a discussion on the topic I was informed of an opportunity to speak on the subject at a seminar in Albuquerque, New Mexico. At the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association, I was to present and discuss the topic of Latinx/Hispanic representation in popular superhero comics. Upon my research, I saw a great deal of examples of "representation for the sake of representation. Changing a character's race so that the superhero genre is more inclusive." (Garcia, 3) Although these changes are done with good intentions, it does little to bring Hispanic/Latinx heroes into mainstream attention. So, at the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association I brought up examples of superheroes being changed by either their race, gender, or sexuality. Some of these changes being done tastefully, others however fall short and do more harm than good in representation.



I argued that no creativity is being used for the creation of new original characters to represent said race/gender/sexuality, instead the use of already existing IP's is implemented to provide a visible addition to the diversity in need of being included. I verbalized that it's great to see diversity in our comic heroes, it's a great change long overdue for there to be characters that people of minority can identify and relate too. I argued it is important to see ourselves in the characters we idolize not just in virtue or principles, but in our racial identity and sexuality. But to change an established hero that will only exist in a different race/gender/sexuality in a comic, limits the representation of ever seeing that representation beyond the panels of a comic book.

Aldama lit the flame in me to make original characters that represented the same minority I was, and so I continued my education on discovering further information on the various representation that comic books have. So, my attention went on to creators that were also under the minority umbrella as I was.

I continued reading Aldama's work in *Tales from La Vida: A Latinx Comic Anthology* along with *Latino U.S.A: A Cartoon History* Illustrated by Lalo Alcaraz. Although my education in history is above standard, seeing history through the lens of a Latinx creator was a push I genuinely needed to feel the confidence that I also can create a comic book using elements of Hispanic/Latinx representation. Aldama's work *Tales from La Vida: A Latinx Comic Anthology* showed me how creative and celebrated Latinx comic creators are, and I sought out to be included in that celebration. I wanted to write comics like Grant Morrison, make characters like George Perez, and perhaps show Aldama that we may be getting started in having representation, but the next step should be to have us blaze our own trail with original characters that add

Hispanic/Latinx elements without forceful stereotypes or tropes, that combine a proudness of where we or our ancestors come from and a pride in where we call home.

### **Origins**

Going into the creation of a comic book character did not convince me that it would be the best route to take upon completing my education at UTRGV. As I was brainstorming how to make a comic book, my enrollment in script writing gave me direction on how to make a comic book and put my ideas on something more concrete and tangible. Using Dr. Carren's instructions, I used comic book templates to write comic book scripts and share my idea of an original comic character. Along with this assignment, I was still making some ground into doing a creative piece on my very own origin along with my biological mothers. I originally believed that I would only do some artistic illustration of this work but as time passed, I found that work to be most important to be written. With the release of the book *American Dirt* by Jeanine Cummins, I felt a moral obligation to tell not only my mother's story but my own. I found *American Dirt* to be impersonal and using a trope of leaving Mexico for an escape from violence. And although that is the case for some, often many flee Mexico for a better life for themselves and for their children which was the case of my mother. And perhaps the intentions of Cummins to bring awareness to the plight of many undocumented immigrants is genuine, a more personal touch can help these stories flourish at greater levels. I view *American Dirt* as something of a anti-model of what not to do, and show respect to Latinx representation and steer away from stereotypes.

## Literature of Orphans

I before never gave it much attention, but as I was trying my best to not duplicate my comic book character from all other existing characters, I found that there was something we all had in common; we were orphans. Superman was found and adopted by his parents; the Kents. Batman's parents were killed, Spider-Man's parents died in a plane crash, and Shazam who was put in foster care. I overlooked my obsession with comic book characters as just me looking for entertainment, but I identified with them on a deeper level.

With the encouraging words of Dr. Braithwaite, I made the decision to write my story along with my biological mothers. To tell the story of a pregnant immigrant crossing the U.S border, and myself an Anchor baby living in the foster care system. And so, my journey to developing this story not only written, but in graphic literature form was the endeavor I chose for myself.

To start this journey, I asked for material that I could use to assist me in developing this work to stand as my thesis. The first book I used as a foundation was *House built on ashes* by Jose Antonio Rodriguez. Then I returned to what started my library of reading graphic literature, *Stitches*. Along with that reading, I also dived into his other work *Home After Dark*, which was not autobiographical like the former title, however still demonstrated to me how to blend both fiction with non-fiction elements. To get a stronger grasp of how an autobiographical graphic novel is illustrated, I took on the task of reading *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi. Although my story was nowhere as chaotic and grand as Satrapi, how she provided dialogue for a variety of characters outside her own dialogue gave me the idea of doing the same in my thesis.

Afterwards I included the reading of *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* by Alberto Ledesma. Although his form of art and writing was not the direction I was intending of joining, it gave me purpose and helped me believe that the writing I was doing should be told, it is important, and can be a helpful read for any individual who had some similar identity as my own. Be an orphan, an anchor baby, or even living in the U.S border, finding representation can make a great difference. I tried to add humor and some elements of *Hyperbole and a Half* by Allie Brosh, however I found that including this type of writing was not beneficial to the thesis and left out the inclusion of it. The idea of breaking the fourth wall, or poking fun of the situation and maybe even making light of the story took me away from the direction I wanted to tell the story, however I did decide to make the changes to add a sense of humor to the areas where humor could be implemented with no harm done to the tone of the story. Allie Brosh's work assisted me in a different way by helping me keep my mental state in check, and re-reading her work reminds me that sometimes we need to laugh at our pain.

### **Challenge**

Writing about the dark times of my youth along with the collective stories and faded memories of my biological mother, it can get really depressing and exhausting to put those stories and thoughts into words. As I often hesitated to include certain topics into the story, I wanted to omit certain details that might be hurtful and damaging to my own mental health. I found that, reading *Hyperbole and a Half* for some odd reason helped me put those dark memories on paper. Because if Brosh can laugh at her depression and sad moments, I wanted too as well. I still omitted certain details that occurred as I felt they did nothing for the story, but I included some harsh moments because I wanted to demonstrate how resilient both my mother

and I along with my brother were. I found that it was challenging to find the middle ground of moments of rest to moments where there are consistent problems that impact us. I read my thesis now and feel that I need a break at times. I found this to be a strength in the thesis and that strength is a duplication of another work that tells the story of a child surviving a harsh upbringing.

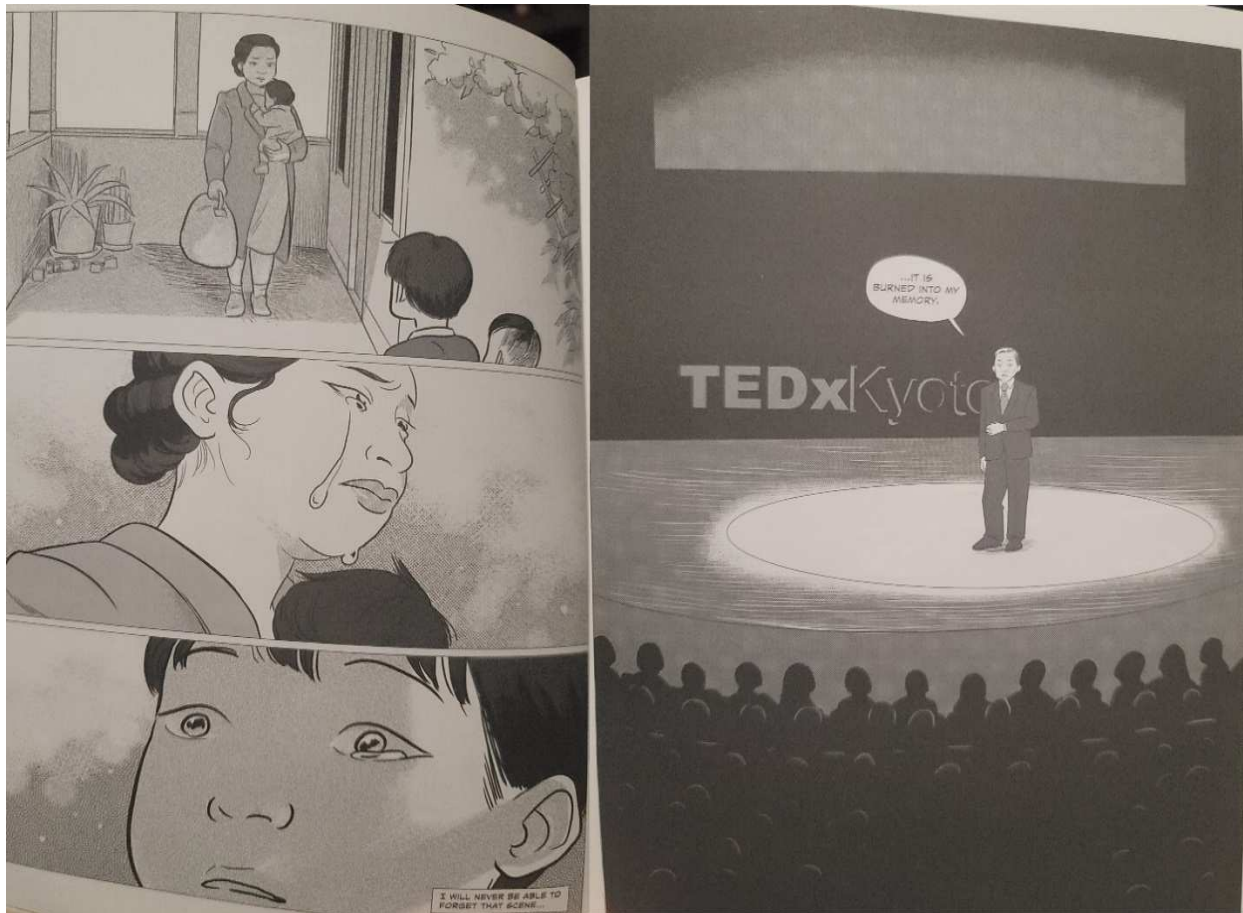


Figure 3. They Called Us Enemy

<sup>3</sup>Takei educated me on not only his family's story, but how to tell their journey. Unifying how to craft a tale that connects the past with the present. I found this book to be a comfort to assist me on the days where I felt that my work was struggling to find its shape.

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<sup>3</sup> Takei, George. (2019) They Called Us Enemy.

*They Called Us Enemy* by George Takei is perhaps the ideal version of what I would like my thesis to create in the future. Everything from the art style, the CAPTIONS, the pacing and transition from going back and forth in time, and the dramatic elements all to me created a perfect template of what my thesis can look like. Despite this somewhat bible that assisted me in the development of my thesis, I tried my best not to duplicate it too much.

I wanted to make my mother as much as a main character as myself but found it hard to do at the same level as George Takei because he had the opportunity to communicate with his father about their journey, where I could not do the same. To remedy this problem, I filled in what I could remember she did based on her actions during her time on this world. It wasn't the most ideal way to resolve the problem of writing for a character that is not a form of fiction but using the most impactful moments of her life along with recollections of her limited time as my mother it was enough to create a person who was hardly there at all.

The other challenge for my thesis was the documentation of my existence in the foster care system. Had I begun this thesis at an earlier age I would have recollected more details of my time in and out of parental visitation, what it was like going to school known as the orphan, and essentially being raised in a foster home with adopted parents that stayed foster parents throughout their career raising other people's children while you watched from the sidelines. Although I am thankful for their selfless act of taking in and adopting two boys that were not their own, I had to make peace with the fact that I was not their priority, the newest foster child was. Documenting this and including it to the thesis would of in my opinion stepped away from the core of the story, and although my adopted parents are an important factor to that story, I did not want to add to the story the life of a foster parent along with everything else.

Another obstacle I faced was how to add the topic of depression, anxiety, and other symptoms that exist as a result of mental illness. Often, I found it difficult to communicate these emotions due to the stigma that males and even more so Hispanic males are looked down upon for verbalizing their emotional pain. I would say that an admittance of being mentally ill, an admittance of being a victim, and understanding that the individual is not to be blamed for these circumstances is a goal I hope the reader of the thesis comes to, like how I came to a similar sense of peace after reading *Stitches*.

### **Artistic Struggle and forming a design**

Beyond these challenges the biggest I am still trying to overcome is grasping whose story I want to tell. Although I know I can speak for myself and provide detail and insight into how my story developed, I am not able to fully speak for the second most important character. Filling in the small things that make the larger moments far more detailed without being able to obtain from the source has been a struggle. I try using the “artist” or writer in me to fill in these missing parts, but it comes across melodramatic and unrealistic. I can’t explain how my mother felt I can only speculate. I instead express my own thoughts to the story she has told me throughout a series of phone calls and visitations. During the times her and I would interact, I would have to be selective to the topic of her youth and my birth. Depending on her mood she would either completely cut off the topic, or openly express what happened and how she believed she felt at that time. During the moments she told her tale, she always defended and justified what happened; no matter how horrible, because it gave her two sons.

As I was recreating the interaction my mother and I had, I know that there were areas that could not be added due to my lack of knowledge and firsthand experience of what occurred.

Even though I wasn't there when my mother crossed the Rio Grande River for the very first time, her explanation and honesty to how horrible the experience was giving me a means to attempt and capture her story. My pursuit for the gaps in my life along with hers in motion with the obstacles overcome was a way I could keep us both as the protagonist of this journey. Part of this was how I came to the decision of choosing a graphic novel early on after my discussions with Dr. Breithwaite, where we believed that the story as I would like to tell it could shine best in a graphic novel layout. A graphic novel would bring nuance and hold more volume to the emotional moments that I or my mother had because we couldn't do it with words alone. I admire the complications of graphic literature, to be able to give a reader both visuals and text making a unique experience. Many of the books I have read that are graphic novels deal with the topic of family dynamics, it seems fitting I would be drawn to mimic their style.

I often would return in reading *They Called Us Enemy* by George Takei and *Stitches* by David Small because both titles had parental characters and the author spoke for them. However, Takei had a relationship with his parents, and Small's family only added to his story but were not as important as he himself was in the plot. I'd like to do the same with my mother, however she is too involved into my story that to limit her to simply appearing as an addition or extension of myself rather than a whole being diminishes what I always wanted to do; tell her story. I had always wanted to share her life as little of it as I knew. Because I felt it was my duty to do so for those that possibly have lived similar lives to hers.

I still struggle with this, finding an equilibrium between sharing my story and hers, without one overshadowing the other. But as I have revised my thesis, I find that I must change this mentality and make peace that I will never be able to fully tell her story, and that by telling



my own I will not do her a disservice. The gaps and mysteries that remain are part of my story, as I am not meant to know why, but understand that they are a part of me. I simply would have to allow her to exist in my thesis as an extension of myself.

## **Genre**

When I was brainstorming what my thesis would become, I originally thought that I should do it on Hispanic/Latinx representation in superhero comic books. And although it would be too similar to Aldama's work, I felt I could add more to the conversation. Within that train of thought I perhaps wanted to just do Hispanic/Latinx graphic literature. Create an original idea that had focus on Hispanic/Latinx identity. Essentially, I wanted to make my own superhero that speaks English and Spanish, lives on the border of two nations, and deals with both anxiety and depression. The more I made this idea on paper the more I saw that it was turning more into a story about myself pretending to be a hero, and so I decided to make a memoir instead. I chose a memoir instead of an autobiography because I wanted to make it about two different people, my own life has not concluded, and I do not have all the facts and entire history of my mother. The first being myself and the second my mother. So, I have decided to make the genre of memoir. But a memoir that tells the story from my experience in discovering my mother's history along with my own. Recollection of memories and being informed of what happened when I had no way of discovering the information on my own. To illustrate her story from how she told it to me from our few times together and phone conversation.

Despite my thesis being a memoir, I hope that it fulfills so many other ambitions that I wish to be discussed with my work. I chose the comic/ graphic literature medium because it's a format that can span a variety of topics and can be inclusive to so many elements that a story like

the one, I wish to tell can express. Examples are that I hope that it also functions as something for Hispanic/Latinx representation, that it brings attention to orphan literature and life in the foster care system. That my thesis can lead to the discussion of Hispanic/Latinx representation in comic books, and awareness to problems of mental illness among the Latinx/Hispanic community.

Overall, I hoped to make my life into art. Not art in the sense of the graphic literature illustration alone, but art in the definition of expression and human potential both bad and good. And although I did not intend to mimic the origins of established hero orphans, I by default must because I share their foundation. I understand that the goals I want my thesis to achieve is an extensive web that probably won't reach every goal I set out for it to achieve, but I hope that with it I can stride into other realms of work to not only make this autobiographical novel come to life, but also fulfill that long ago mission of making a superhero. But not just any hero, a hero that will be original, won't fall under stereotype and tropes attached to other Latinx/Hispanic characters, a hero that will be a representation of Latinx/Hispanic community, and a hero that survived because of foster parents.

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## APPENDIX

## APPENDIX

### HUÉRFANO: A MEMOIR

Written by

Mauricio Garcia

**PAGE ONE**

PANEL: A YOUNG MAN SITTING ON A BENCH UNDER A TREE. HE APPEARS TO BE  
LOOKING AT A PAPER

PANEL: A CLOSE OF THE PAPER SHOWS THAT IT IS AN ESSAY ASSIGNMENT

PANEL: THE BOY IS SITTING DOWN ON A DINNER TABLE LOOKING DOWN AT A  
PLATE OF FOOD HARDLY EATEN.

PANEL: WE SEE TWO OLDER ADULTS ARE IN FRONT OF HIM. THE OLDER MAN IS  
TRYING TO FIX SOME ELECTRICAL DEVICE, THE MOTHER LOOKING OVER A  
KITCHEN COUNTER CUTTING A VEGETABLE.



**PAGE TWO**

PANEL: THE YOUNG BOY LOOKS UP AT THE OLDER MAN.

MAURICIO:

So, dad, I have this school assignment I need to do for class and was hoping I could get some help with it.

PANEL: FATHER FOCUS IS KEPT ON THE ACTIVITY HE IS WORKING ON.

FATHER:

Yea, what kind of help do you need?

PANEL: THE YOUNG BOY PLACES HIMSELF DEEPER INTO HIS CHAIR.

YOUNG BOY:

I must write this essay on my childhood and talk about my family. It's a silly assignment but I gotta do it as a final grade.

PANEL: THE FATHER DOESN'T KEEP HIS ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE TASK IN FRONT OF HIM.

FATHER:

Ok, so what do you want to know? I can tell you everything about your family right now.

**PAGE THREE**

PANEL: THE YOUNG MAN LOOKS TO THE SIDE.

MAURICIO:

Actually, I was hoping to learn more about my biological family if that's  
ok. I kind of like to bring up both.

PANEL: THE MOTHER HAS TURNED AROUND AND THE FATHER MOVES HIS  
ATTENTION TO THE YOUNG MAN INSTEAD OF HIS ACTIVITY.

PANEL: THE FATHER IS GRABBING A GIANT BOX FROM A CLOSET.

PANEL: THE FATHER PUTS THE BOX ON THE KITCHEN TABLE.

MAURICIO:

Wow that's, a lot of paperwork.

FATHER:

Listen Mauricio, you're going to learn somethings that will be difficult to  
read. I suggest that if you want some additional answers, you call Monica  
if you can.

## **PAGE FOUR**

PANEL: MAURICIO IS GOING THROUGH THE BOX.

### **CAPTION:**

In many ways, I had always known I was an orphan. Early on I was left abandoned or rejected by my mother. If nature had its way, I would have been left to the wolves of the world. Going through the folders and piles of paperwork with extensive details of my childhood filled in many of the gaps I perhaps blocked from my memory

PANEL: MORE FOLDERS ARE BEING REMOVED FROM THE BOX

### **CAPTION:**

Where I was or where I was born remained a mystery to me. My birth certificate has been modified to fit my situation not my origin. So that document was worthless in my journey to get answers about my past.

PANEL: A CHILD ALONE WALKING DOWN THE STREET OF A NEIGHBORHOOD  
ALONE.

## **LOCATION: AN UNKNOWN LOCATION IN TEXAS**

PANEL: SIDE VIEW OF CHILD AS WITH HOUSES IN POOR CONDITION IN THE  
BACKGROUND. SUN BEAMING DOWN.

**PAGE FIVE**

PANEL: A COP CAR IS BEHIND THE CHILD. WE SEE THE OFFICERS SILHOUETTE  
CALLING ONTO HIS RADIO

CAPTION:

As fortune would have it, during my quest to find my mother, who could have been anywhere at the time, I was found by a police officer who got a report of a child alone on the streets.

OFFICER:

Hey, I got a child out on the street alone. It's 98 degrees out here and he is barefooted. Possibly the call we got earlier.

PANEL: THE OFFICER IS STEPPING OUT OF THE VEHICLE APPROACHING THE  
CHILD THAT IS STILL WALKING ON SIDE OF ROAD.

PANEL: TWO CHILDREN IN THE BACK OF A POLICE CAR.

CAPTION:

Immediately I was taken away along with my 2-year-old brother. They found him in the care of an older man who was a friend of my mother's family. But he made it clear to tell the officers that he had not seen my mother for quite some time.

PANEL: TWO CHILDREN IN A PLAYROOM USING TOYS. AS THEY SEEM TO BE PLAYING, THEY ARE BEING OBSERVED THROUGH A MIRROR BY TWO CASE WORKERS.

CASE WORKER:

We can't seem to find the mothers location. The man at the home said he wasn't the father. We are going to have to find some place to keep them in the meantime.

SECOND CASE WORKER:

Well, we can't keep them together for the time being. We will give it a day and if the mother does show up or anything we will have to put them in separate homes for now.

**PAGE SIX**

PANEL: SEE THE MAURICIO BEING TAKEN AWAY FROM THE PLAYROOM

CAPTION:

Foster homes only existed as a placement until information about my mother or family became available. After some time has passed, it was obvious that no one came forward for me and my brother.

PANEL: THE BACK OF BOTH THE MAURICIO AGE 5 AND THE CASEWORKER AS THEY WALK TOWARDS OPEN DOORS LEADING TO OUTSIDE.

CAPTION:

Eventually I was placed in a group home. Where for the first time I heard my name. I was always referred to as mijo or nino, I didn't understand what Mauricio was I felt it was a saying.

PANEL: SOCIAL WORKER AND GROUP HOME EMPLOYEE STANDING SIDE BY SIDE AS A YOUNG MAURICIO LOOKS TERRIFIED AT WHAT HE SEES

GROUP HOME EMPLOYEE:

Everyone, this is Marizio. He will be staying with us for a while so everyone, make him feel at home.

PANEL: Mauricio being introduced to a group of children. Almost classroom like setting.

## **PAGE SEVEN**

PANEL: A SPANISH HANDSOME ACTOR ON A TELEVISION SCREEN.

CAPTION:

I learned eventually that my name came from a Spanish soap opera actor, whom my mother thought was extremely handsome. I never cared for my name, and during my youth living among American/English names I felt discouraged me to use it in any public forum. I simply went by Moe or Mowy.

PANEL: A SMALLER VERSION OF MAURICIO BY HIMSELF ON A CHILD SWING WITH CHILDREN PLAYING TOGETHER OF THE DISTANCE.

CAPTION:

I remembered my time at the group home vaguely. Because I felt alienated due to my name being ridiculed by the other children who I had no way of communicating with because I at the time only spoke the Spanish Language.

PANEL: MAURICIO PACING ALONE INSIDE THE GROUP HOME.

CAPTION:

Lost in translation, in my environment, and abandoned by my primary caregiver, I would have written myself off if the possibility presented

itself.

PANEL: MAURICIO SITS DOWN IN FRONT OF A TELEVISION HAND ON DIAL.

CAPTION:

In the group home, there were children of a variety of ages, along with a few supervising adults. When there are more children than caretakers the most reliable source of keeping one entertained was frequently used to keep me stagnant in hopes that I would not interrupt the other children, television.



## **PAGE EIGHT**

PANEL: BACK OF MAURICIOS HEAD WITH TELEVISION IN VIEW. TELEVISION CHANNEL BEING CHANGED.

CAPTION:

However, it could only keep me engaged for so long. Not only could I not speak the English language but understanding or reading it was even further from imaginable.

PANEL: MAURICIO LOOKING BORED AS HE CHANGES CHANNEL AGAIN.

CAPTION:

While left alone one day in front of the television, I searched for any programming that would fit my limited vocabulary at my age. And it was then that I stumbled upon it.

PANEL: MAURICIOS EYES ARE GLISTENING AT THE IMAGE ON THE TELEVISION IN FRONT OF HIM.

CAPTION:

I've seen cartoons before but nothing like what was in front of me at that time. Four green humanoid characters distinguishable by both the color of their attire and weapon they each used.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS IN FRONT OF THE TELEVISION, WEARING DIFFERENT CLOTHING. IMPLYING A DAY HAS PASSED. AND WAS ABLE TO FIND THE CARTOON AGAIN.

CAPTION:

I was mesmerized by the entire show. Everything from its language to the bond all four of them had. I have discovered that they were called Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles.

CAPTION:

I had no idea what they were saying, why they were fighting men in purple suits, why did they wear such bright colors if they were ninjas?

CAPTION

And yet I could not look away. I wasn't sure if I ever had pizza before but seeing TV pizza just makes you want to try it. Whatever the Ninja Turtles were marketing at that time it worked.

**PAGE NINE**

PANEL: MAURICIO IS IN FRONT OF A CARETAKER PUZZELED ON HOW TO COMMUNICATE. POINTING AT THE TELEVISION.

CAPTION:

It was then that for the very first time I asked one of my caretakers for assistance. My simple request was to watch more of the ninja turtle cartoon. And after a few days one caretaker returned with VHS tapes of the cartoon I desired.

PANEL: MAURICIO ONCE AGAIN IN FRONT OF TELEVISION WEARING A TMNT T-SHIRT.

CAPTION:

I would watch Ninja Turtles constantly while in the group home. So much so that unknowingly from my excessive viewing of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle cartoon, I absorbed a lot more than a desire for Pizza.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS TRYING TO MIMIC WHAT HE HEARS ON TELEVISION

CAPTION:

I began speaking English. Broken English and I used the words incorrectly but I was slowly getting more vocal. My linguistic skills were not developed ideally, and I code-switched frequently from Spanish to English just to get across

the most basic needs.

MAURICIO:

LA Tortuga... Is, TURTLES?

PANEL: MAURICIO IS EATING A SLICE OF PIZZA WITH OTHER CHILDREN.

CAPTION:

Although my English consisted of TMNT terminology, I used their words to communicate, express, and be treated like a member of the home. I wanted nothing more than a similar bond that those four turtle brothers had. Even at that early age, I understood that my situation was not normal.

**PAGE TEN**

PANEL: MAURICIO WATCHING NINJA TURTLES WITH OTHER CHILDREN.

CAPTION:

So, for a time the Turtles were my educators, my friends, and my family.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS TAKEN ASIDE BEING SPOKEN TOO.

CAPTION:

Of course, my situation would eventually change. During my time living at the group home, my mother made contact with whom she needed to for a chance at a reunion with her children.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS IN SIMILAR ROOM AS BEFORE WHEN HE WAS LIFTED FROM THE STREETS. WITH MOTHER PRESENT AND BROTHER AS WELL. MOTHER IS HANDING MAURICIO A STUFFED ANIMAL. A HORSE.

CAPTION:

This was the beginning of parent visitation. Meeting in a room with a large one-way mirror, a box of toys, and a stranger walking us in for a brief period with our mother. I tried once to take one of the toys with me. Knowing this, my mother gave me the only gift I had ever received from her until I was settled into a foster home. A stuffed animal in the shape of a horse/mare. I've kept it with me always.

CAPTION:

Although I was never fond of stuffed animals, I wondered why she chose that animal and that item for me, it made no sense because I was certain I spoke to her only about Ninja Turtles since they have taken over my entire mind. But it was in a way her first successful attempt at being my mother that I could remember, and although that stuffed horse was at the time of little importance, I held it dear till this very day.

PANEL: MOTHER IS CONVERSING WITH CASEWORKERS.

CAPTION:

Because of my mother's current state of residence, both national and domestic, we were required to be relocated so that both my brother and I could stay together. The hope the State had of keeping this family unified would be a laborious undertaking.

**PAGE ELEVEN**

PANEL: MAURICIO IS LEAVING GROUP HOME. HAS HIS FEW BELONGINGS IN A BLACK TRASH BAG.

CAPTION:

It was then that my brother and I were united and placed under the care of various foster parents, few that I can recall.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS IN A SMALL ROOM. LOOKING OUT THROUGH A BABY GATE.

CAPTION:

My memories consist of being barricaded in a room with toys but never knowing the face of my caretakers.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS IN ROOM USING A TOY CAR WITH A PLATE OF FOOD BEING PUT IN FRONT OF HIM ON THE GROUND.

CAPTION:

There were never any other children. From being surrounded by a diversity of youths to none at all, it was difficult for me to understand. I was deprived of communication, and my haven of television searching for more opportunities to spend time with my Turtle family.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS STEPPING OUT THE FRONT DOOR OF A HOME WITH A

BLACK TRASH BAG IN HAND. SECOND CHILD BEHIND HIM. A CASEWORKER  
STANDING BY A VEHICLE WAITING FOR HIM

CAPTION:

Then, we were relocated once again.



**PAGE TWELVE**

PANEL: MAURICIO IS LOOKING OUT A VEHICLE WINDOW, WITH A HOME BEING REFLECTED OF THE SAME GLASS.

CAPTION:

I remember the house when I first laid eyes upon it. A yellow home with grand windows. It wasn't extraordinary by any means, but it was a vast improvement from everywhere else we had been before.

PANEL: BOTH CHILDREN ARE IN FRONT OF TWO ADULTS. THEIR CASEWORKER BEHIND THEM.

CAPTION:

Then and there I met Arturo and Elva. They had been foster parents for a short time. Taking care of a few groups of children. I doubt either of us knew what would become of us during our time together, but they did not concern themselves with my brother and I's past. They were aware that we were meant to be a temporary placement until our mother rehabilitated herself.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS BLINDFOLDED SMILING GETTING READY TO STRIKE A PINATA.

CAPTION:

I celebrated my birthday for the first time at this foster home.

PANEL: BOTH CHILDREN ARE ENJOYING OPENING BRAND-NEW TOYS.

CAPTION:

I was given toys that were my own.

**PAGE THIRTEEN**

PANEL: MAURICIO IS PUTTING ON A BACKPACK AND IS WELL DRESSED.

CAPTION:

I went to school for the first time.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS IN BACK OF CLASSROOM LOOKING AT THE BOARD. THE LETTERS SEEM WARPED AND UNUSUAL.

CAPTION:

My language consisted of both English and Spanish, both grasped imperfectly. Never getting any form of education from my mother or the foster care system prior to Arturo and Elva, I went into school already behind most of my classmates.

PANEL: A PROGRESS REPORT IN A PERSONS HAND. MAURICIO IS SITTING IN WHAT IS A THERAPY ROOM. IT IS A THERAPIST HOLDING THE PROGRESS REPORT.

CAPTION:

I performed horribly in all my academics. I was taken to therapy to make sense of my mental state.

PANEL: THERAPIST IS GIVING HIS DIAGNOSIS TO THE FOSTER FATHER.

MAURICIO IS LOOKING UP AT THEIR INTERACTION.

CAPTION:

ADHD, Dyslexia, with signs of anxiety and depression. Mild obsessive-compulsive disorder and some post-traumatic stress disorder.

**PAGE FOURTEEN**

PANEL: BOTH FOSTER PARENTS ARE HAVING A DISCUSSION WITH MAURICIO WHILE COMFORTING HIM ATTEMPTING TO DO HIS SCHOOL WORK.

CAPTION:

Had my parents been lesser people, id imagine they would have written me off. Why put time and energy into a child from an immigrant mother that makes little effort to see him? A mother who had been written off herself.

**PAGE FIFTEEN**

PANEL: FOSTER FATHER COMFORTING MAURICIO OUTSIDE OF A CLASSROOM DOOR.

CAPTION:

Despite my handicaps in my means of getting educated, I prospered due to a contract with my foster father. He promised me that if I performed well in school, he would gift me a toy for every “A” I received in school. This contract motivated me to put in effort unlike I ever had before and excel in school.

PANEL: MAURICIO HOLDING A REPORT CARD WITH AN “A” WITH A TOY ON OTHER HAND.

CAPTION:

For every “A” I received in a spelling test I was taken to Toys R’ Us and able to select a toy of my choice. The very first figure I received was a Michelangelo Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle action figure. A brand-new toy that was earned by my hard work. Before I knew it, I was collecting an entire toy chest of figures.

PANEL: MAURICIO LOOKING AT A BOOK. THE LETTERS REVERSED OR MIRRORED.

CAPTION:

I still suffered in reading, and despite my skills at spelling in both English and Spanish I could not read entire sentences without struggling.

PANEL: MAURICIO OUTSIDE A MOVIE THEATRE. LEAVING WITH A BATMAN POSTER IN THE BACKGROUND.

CAPTION:

One day My foster father decided to take me to the movies. There I was fully introduced to Batman. I did not understand the plot of the film at all, but the character's design, gadgets, and vehicle mesmerized me. I resonated with the Bruce Wayne character because he too was an orphan under the care of an older man just like I was when I lived with a man named Mr. Lopez. A friend of my mothers who was “taking care of me” the day I was found by police.

CAPTION:

I had no idea who my father was and had not heard from my mother for what seemed like forever. I believed that I was the same as Batman.

**PAGE SIXTEEN**

PANEL: MAURICIO LOOKING AT A COMIC RACK AT A GROCERY STORE.

CAPTION:

After the film, I asked for more Batman content. I had no idea the character came from comic books. At a grocery store, I found Batman comics and purchased them with the little allowance I had at that time. It was right there that I began to learn to read in English. I would read the same issue over and over to make sense of the story. Trying to comprehend the complex plot of why Batman is fighting the villain he is. Attempt to understand the large words.

PANEL: BOTH CHILDREN AT A KITCHEN TABLE DOING THEIR SCHOOL WORK WHILE FOSTER MOM GIVES THEM FRUIT.

CAPTION:

I believed that I was finally becoming normal at that time. My foster family cared for me, clothed me, educated me, and made me feel loved. But I still longed for my real mother. I continued to believe that she would return, and we would be together again. My brother was much too young to understand at that time and was convinced that our foster parents were his parents. I could not blame him as they cared for him at such a young



age that he imprinted on them and did not have any desire to leave. And  
for a brief time, it seemed we never would.

PANEL: FOSTER FATHER TAKING BOTH CHILDREN TO TOY STORE.

PANEL: FOSTER FATHER WITH BOTH CHILDREN AT A FAMILY COOK-OUT.

**PAGE SEVENTEEN**

PANEL: FOSTER MOTHER CUTTING HAIR.

PANEL: FOSTER MOTHER GIVING THE CHILDREN EXTRA TREATS.

CAPTION:

My foster parents were extraordinary people. They cared for multiple children before my brother and I and years after. They could never turn a child in need away. My foster father came from an amazing family who enjoyed having us at family events. My foster father was truly kind and charming and was adored by people. My foster mother was the discipline one but always took extra leniency when it came to us. A hairdresser as well as a foster parent, she had an extremely large family. Amazing parents, that loved us as if we were theirs. In many ways, we were the moment we moved in. They always referred to us as their sons never discussed that we were in foster care or anything that would reveal our dirty background.

PANEL: BIOLOGICAL MOTHER HAVING A VISIT WITH THE TWO CHILDREN.

CAPTION:

My mother eventually contacted the social workers handling our case, she arranged visits and kept her appointments. She had gotten clean and was now living with a man she believed she was going to eventually marry.

She lived in Rio Grande City, and so after months of visitation and establishing a relationship with my brother and me, we were set to be returned to her custody and finally become the family we were supposed to be.

PANEL: THE TWO CHILDREN ENTERING A VEHICLE.

**PAGE EIGHTEEN**

PANEL: THE FOSTER PARENTS SAYING GOODBYE.

**PAGE NINETEEN**

PANEL: MAURICIO ON A PHONE WITH PAPER IN FRONT OF HIM. THE BOX STILL BESIDE HIM.

CAPTION:

Before I dived into the time after living with my foster parents, I wanted to get some answers from the one person who could fill me in with things that the box did not have.

PANEL: MAURICIO PAYING ATTENTION TO A DOCUMENT TITLED RIO GRANDE CITY.

CAPTION:

Briefly I was terrified that my entire life up to that point fit into a single box. Although it had more paperwork than anything I had seen at that point in my life, it both bothered and fascinated me. How many people can say that they had so many documents detailing their life at such a young age? But it also made me feel uneasy, like I was a case number and nothing else.

PANEL: MAURICIO'S EYES DIALATE AS HE HEARS A HELLO ON THE OTHER LINE.

PERSON ON PHONE:

Hello?

MAURICIO:

Hello, mom. Monica?

PANEL: MAURICIO TAKES A SEAT.

**PAGE TWENTY**

**PANEL:** THE RIO GRANDE RIVER, THE WATER APPEARS TO BE RUNNING AT A  
HIGH SPEED. A STORM ON THE HORIZON.

**LOCATION:** RIO GRANDE RIVER, MEXICO SIDE. END OF DAWN.

CAPTION:

She said it was both scary and beautiful.

CAPTION:

For her, it was the largest body of water she had ever seen. She had heard  
stories of how just across the other side she would find freedom. A  
concept she didn't understand at the time.

**PANEL:** A LARGE YELLOW SIGN WITH CAUTION IN BOTH ENGLISH AND SPANISH  
OF A FIGURE DROWNING.

CAPTION:

Even though she had never dreamed she would tackle such a dangerous  
endeavor; she believed the stories of a better world was beyond the river.

CAPTION:

The chance to save her life was across the Rio Grande River.

**PANEL:** THE BACK OF A WOMAN HOLDING A SMALL BLACK TRASH BAG. SHE APPEARS YOUNG AND IS STARING AT THE RIO GRANDE RIVER AND AT THE DISTANCE THE UPHILL AREA SHE NEEDS TO GET TOO.

CAPTION:

Why she felt that her only hope for staying alive was putting her very own life in danger was beyond me. I believed that she did it for the same reasons others cross.

**PANEL:** Close up of young girl's face. She looks. A plain expression with hair slightly covering her face. Eyes looking red slightly and squinted lightly. It is a look of exhaustion, the end of a long cry, fear, and determination.

CAPTION: ...I was mistaken.



**PAGE TWENTY-ONE**

PANEL: An older woman is seen with the young girl we saw looking on at the Rio Grande River. the older woman is standing while the young girl sits on a chair by an open window. the older woman stands only a few feet away from the young girl. one hand on the top of her head and another holding on for support from a table nearby.

**LOCATION: A SMALL HOUSE, IN BAD CONDITION. ALMOST 6 MONTHS  
EARLIER.**

CAPTION:

I knew very little of my mother's childhood, only that it was not a pleasant upbringing. I only got fragments of what it was like from faint stories she shared during our time together.

CAPTION:

It did not help that she was pregnant with me, and with that the end of her adolescence meant to her family that she was mature enough to take care of herself. I wondered what could have happened if she was given family support. How different her life could have been if they only did the most basic animal behavior of caring for their young.

OLDER WOMAN:

(Spanish) how can you...what do you mean you are pregnant!?

PANEL: A CLOSER SHOT OF THE OLDER WOMAN'S FACE IN COMPLETE ANGER.

CAPTION:

I suppose I wouldn't be able to understand how a parent could be emotionally absent. When she told me the story it almost felt like it went against nature. To ostracize your own child.

CAPTION:

I felt the guilt she had in her words. The shame of being considered a disappointment.

OLDER WOMAN:

(Spanish) do you understand how embarrassing this is to our family?!  
you're 13 years old! a 13-year-old should not be pregnant!

PANEL: THE YOUNG GIRL IS LOOKING OUT OF A WINDOW, A SLIGHT TEAR DEVELOPING. HER FACE APPEARS IN DESPAIR.

CAPTION:

My mother did not know at that time that she was suffering from bi-polar disorder, and because of this she struggled with many things. Living with a mental health condition will always be a setback. Especially when it came to understanding love.

OLDER WOMAN:

(off PANEL): how could you be so stupid?! such a slut. all you were supposed to do was clean the house.

PANEL: THE YOUNG GIRL IS LOOKING AT HER MOTHER NOW, HER TEARS GONE...  
A LOOK OF ANTICIPATION FOR SOMETHING BAD TO BE SAID.

OLDER WOMAN:

(off PANEL) we have no room in this house to care for a child. this is now the father's responsibility. you and it are his responsibility.

**PAGE TWENTY-TWO**

PANEL: OLDER WOMAN IS NOW CLOSER TO THE YOUNG GIRL. APPEARING  
ASSERTIVE AND GROUNDED.

OLDER WOMAN:

What you can carry, you take with you. I need you to get out.

**PAGE TWENTY-THREE**

PANEL: YOUNG GIRL IS PACKING FEW CLOTHING INTO A BLACK TRASH BAG. THE ROOM APPEARS SMALL AND UNKEPT WITH THE EXCEPTION OF A SMALL BED AND A STUFFED ANIMAL ON TOP OF IT.

CAPTION:

She believed she was always a burden on her family because of her “condition”.

PANEL: THE YOUNG GIRL IS OUTSIDE THE HOME; IT IS GETTING CLOSER TO NIGHTFALL. OLDER WOMAN IS STANDING AT DOOR.

CAPTION:

It seemed she was always resented. Hated. So, when she finally received some affection, she didn't understand that it wasn't genuine. All she had know was anger and hate.

PANEL: YOUNG GIRL'S EYES APPEAR PUFFY FROM CRYING. SHE IS FACING HER MOM

YOUNG GIRL:

(in Spanish) Mom...please... this isn't my fault. I did not know what to do. I was just trying to make him happy. I did not want to get fired

PANEL: OLDER WOMAN'S FACE IS HALF COVERED FROM THE SHADOW OF HER HOME.

CAPTION:

...I couldn't understand why she did what she did, but I also couldn't blame her.

OLDER WOMAN:

Monica...don't ever come back. the world has enough children, enough burdens. I know you aren't going to be anything special, but you aren't going to make my life harder either. just because his wife is sick, doesn't give him an excuse to force struggles on me. just leave Monica... come back only if this has been taken care of.

## **PAGE TWENTY-FOUR**

PANEL: MONICA IS STANDING IN THE SAME SPOT, HER BACK SHOWN AS THE DOOR IS NOW CLOSED. SHE HOLDS ONLY HER TRASHBAG IN HAND

### **LOCATION CHANGE**

PANEL: A NEW HOME. MUCH LARGER. WHITE AND IN A WEALTHIER COMMUNITY IN MEXICO.

CAPTION:

Despite the limited knowledge I have of my mother, I knew even less of the man considered my biological father. even in my deepest needs to learn about myself through my lineage, it is a difficult burden to accept that you've come from an individual that can be defined as a rapist.

PANEL: MONICA IS IN FRONT OF DOOR OF THE LARGE HOME.

CAPTION:

They used to say that a child conceived in love had a greater chance of happiness.

CAPTION:

regardless of how twisted the outcome that led to my birth was, she still believed that I was a product from a shared love. Because of this, my

biological father took advantage of her in his moment of...vulnerability.

PANEL: A MAN STANDING IN THE SHADOW OF THE DOOR ANSWERS THE KNOCK.

CAPTION:

There was nothing endearing about him. I was the bastard child of a man with a family, a man three times my mother's age at the time she was impregnated. What possibly damaged us both the most, was how he took no responsibility for his actions.

MAN:

(In Spanish) Why are you here?



**PAGE TWENTY-FIVE**

PANEL: MONICA IS SITTING ON A CHAIR WHILE MAN SITS ON A COUCH. HE HAS AN ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGE IN HIS HAND.

CAPTION:

Of course, to my mother the man loved her. She still defended him even though he was off-putting to her visitation. She genuinely believed even as she tells me this story that he loved her.

MONICA:

(In Spanish) I...have nowhere to go. I am pregnant. I...thought you could help me.

THE BABY'S FATHER:

(In Spanish) Listen, I need you to make this go away. I'm going to give you some money. I'm going to get you into the United States. There is a doctor there you're going to see.

PANEL: THE BABY'S FATHER STANDS AND LOOKS TOWARDS A FAMILY PORTRAIT HE HAS ON TOP OF HIS BOOK CABINET.

CAPTION:

I perceive it completely different. Maybe it was true, maybe he could have

loved her. But I could not accept that this man had any respect or even valued my mother at any capacity.

THE BABY'S FATHER:

I have a family already Monica. I have a wife. What happened between you, and I was just passion. I was grieving for my dying wife. But I am still married. My children can never find out about this. And I am much too old to be a father to a baby now. I'm about to turn 50. Please, take my money. See this Coyote, he will help you see a doctor who can help us get rid of this.

**PAGE TWENTY-SIX**

Location: Edge of town. Street corner.

PANEL: MONICA IS HOLDING HER BLACK BAG WITH BELONGINGS WALKING TOWARDS A MAN STANDING OUTSIDE A SMALL RUSTED RED TRUCK.

THE BABY'S FATHER:

(caption of panel) "You will need to travel. It's going to be dangerous but, this will make it go away."

RED TRUCK OWNER:

niña, its time.

Location Change: Out in the wilderness close to the Rio Grande River.

PANEL: MONICA IS FOLLOWING THE MAN THROUGH A SERIES OF BRUSH AND TREES.

RED TRUCK MAN:

The man paid a lot of money to get you across so suddenly. I like to wait to do this in the morning and not at this late hour. At night, the current is stronger, and it looks like it's going to rain. As you can see, there's a storm on the horizon.

PANEL: RED TRUCK MAN IS NOW STANDING NEXT TO A ROPE THAT IS TIED ON TO A TREE, THE ROPE GOES ACROSS INTO THE RIO GRANDE RIVER AND ON TO ANOTHER TREE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER.

RED TRUCK MAN:

You hold on to the rope. Follow it and do not let go. If you can't hold on to your belongings, they aren't worth it. They aren't as important as your life. You can drown.

PANEL: MONICA BEGINS TO GO DOWN TO THE RIVER PASSING A SERIES OF BRUSHES HOLDING ON TO THE ROPE WITH ONE HAND AND BELONGINGS IN ANOTHER.

RED TRUCK MAN:

Good luck. Someone should be there on the other side to pick you up.  
Wait maybe one to two hours.

PANEL: MONICA IS NOW HALF WAIST IN THE WATER. THE MAN LOOKING AT HER GO IN AS HE IS TURNING AWAY.

**PAGE TWENTY-SEVEN**

PANEL: MONICA IS STROKING THROUGH THE RIVER WITH THE SAME HAND SHE IS HOLDING HER BELONGINGS WITH. THE OTHER FIRMLY GRABBING THE ROPE.

CAPTION:

I remember reading once how there was a time when the Rio Grande was a key resource in the lives of Native American tribes like the Coahuiltecan, Jumanos, Lipan Apache, and Comanche.

PANEL: MONICA ALMOST LOSES HER BELONGINGS AND AS THEY SLIGHTLY DRIFT AWAY, SHE REACHES OUT FOR THEM. THE CURRENT APPEARS STRONGER WITH MORE MOTION OF RAPID WATER AROUND HER.

CAPTION:

It was in 1536 that the Río Bravo appeared on a map, drawn by Spanish explorers. Around the 1830s, the river becomes the center of the border dispute between South Texas and Mexico. It then transforms into a common escape route for Texan slaves after Mexico abolished slavery in 1828. In 1884, The Rio Grande officially becomes the border between Mexico and the US.

PANEL: MONICA ENDS UP LETTING GO OF THE ROPE AND BEGINS SINKING.

CAPTION:

I think of this as she tells me the horrifying details of her crossing the Rio Grande River.

PANEL: MONICA IS ONLY SLIGHTLY ABOVE WATER WITH THE SUPPORT OF HER BELONGINGS. THE CURRENT IS TAKING HER AWAY.

CAPTION:

How perhaps my ancestors were forced to cross this river long ago fleeing what is now Texas into Mexico. And here she is returning to a land that was once Mexico. And if things were different, she could have avoided all of this.

**PAGE TWENTY-EIGHT**

PANEL: MONICA'S BELONGINGS SINK DOWN WITH HER.

CAPTION:

That border could have been the flicker of a difference to how my mother's life would have turned out. Had her own mother braved the current of the Rio Grande like so many have done before.

PANEL: THE BELONGINGS RISE ON THE WATER TAKE AWAY. A FEW BUBBLES APPEAR NOT TO FAR AWAY FROM WHERE THEY SURFACED FROM.

CAPTION:

Perhaps she could have had a good life. Lived a humble life, struggled to do what thirteen-year-old girls should be doing. Instead, life challenged her to fulfill so much more.

PANEL: RIO GRANDE RIVER FROM A SIDE VIEW. THE ROPE NOW OFF TO THE DISTANCE.

CAPTION:

I don't know where my mother got her courage, her faith, or her resolve to take on the physical manifestation of a border between two nations.

PANEL: RIO GRANDE RIVER FROM A TOP VIEW. NOTHING AROUND BUT TREES

AND BRUSH.

CAPTION:

I wondered if her desire to abort me was that strong. Due to fear of who I will become. Like her, like my biological father, or the worst of them both.



**PAGE TWENTY-NINE**

PANEL: A FURTHER DISTANCE OF THE RIO GRANDE. THE ROPE NO LONGER  
VISIBLE.

CAPTION:

She believed that she was going to die right there and then. She tells me  
that she thought about letting the river take her down. That she would have  
been better off dead. WE would have been better off dead. Letting its  
strength overpower her and do what she was always prepared to do.

PANEL: MONICA APPEARS IN THE RIO GRANDE SURFACING ALMOST REACHING  
FOR THE SKY AS SHE GASPS FOR AIR.

CAPTION:

...and yet her will to live at that moment, was stronger than The Rio  
Grande River.

**PAGE THIRTY**

PANEL: CHILDREN'S BIOLOGICAL MOTHER IN HER YOUTH. IN CRAWLING POSITION ON A PATCH OF MUD AND GRASS.

PANEL: MONICA STANDS AND IS STEPPING AWAY FROM THE RIO GRANDE RIVER.

CAPTION:

My mother walked for what seemed like hours under peak heat.

PANEL: YOUNG MONICA IS A DISTANCE AWAY FROM A ROAD WITH NOTHING BUT MOUNDS AND DRY LAND ALL AROUND HER

CAPTION:

She would eventually find something like a road. It was a dirt path with grass growing at the center.

PANEL: IT IS NIGHT AND WE SEE MONICA FROM SKY VIEW ARMS ACROSS HER CHEST.

CAPTION:

She spent her night freezing.

PANEL: MONICA IS AWAKENED BY A GROUP OF PEOPLE. THEIR VEHICLE IN THE NEAR DISTANCE.

**PAGE THIRTY-ONE**

PANEL: MONICA IS AWAKENED BY A GROUP OF PEOPLE. THEIR VEHICLE IN THE NEAR DISTANCE.

PANEL: MONICA IS SLEEPING ON A COUCH WHILE THE MAN WHO PROVIDED HER A RIDE IS TALKING TO WHAT APPEARS TO BE HIS WIFE.

CAPTION:

It wasn't until a day passed that she was discovered by a group of people driving by.

CAPTION:

She was given a ride and shelter for a day with a fresh set of clothes.

PANEL: MONICA IS EXPLANING HER SITUATION TO THE KIND STRANGERS.

CAPTION:

Her opening up to them about why she crossed the Rio Grande alone made them take pity on her even more. She was alone, and in need of medical attention.

PANEL: MONICA IS SITTING ON THE BACK OF THE FAMILY'S TRUCK WITH THE MAN'S WIFE COMFORTING HER.

CAPTION:

She would be taken to her destination after another day had passed.

**PAGE THIRTY-TWO**

PANEL: THE TRUCK IS DRIVING PAST SEVERAL ANTI-ABORTION SIGNS. IN ENGLISH AND SPANISH.

CAPTION:

The trip to the doctor's office had several billboards doing everything in their power to discourage soon-to-be mothers from terminating the life growing inside them.

PANEL: MONICA LOOKS AWAY TO THE BILLBOARDS. ALMOST ANGRY AT THEIR APPEARANCE.

CAPTION:

I ponder what could have been had she of gone through with the choice my father thrust upon her.

PANEL: THE WOMAN IN THE BACK OF THE TRUCK WITH MONICA IS SPEAKING TO HER BUT IT IS JUST FALLING ON DEATH EARS.

CAPTION:

Her entire life, others have told her what to do. The opportunity to make a decision all on her own had presented itself in the form of keeping a life or ending it.

**PANEL:** MONICA IS SITTING ON A CHAIR WITH A DOCTOR AND NURSE IN FRONT OF HER.

**PAGE THIRTY-THREE**

PANEL: MONICA IS IN TEARS AS THE DOCTOR APPEARS TO BE EXPLAINING  
SOMETHING TO HER.

DOCTOR:

Miss, I'm sorry, but you are about 3 months. Given your size and health  
and the amount of development the baby has had, it is not possible to  
terminate this pregnancy.

Nurse:

(translates in Spanish)

PANEL: A FOCUSED SHOT OF THE DOCTOR'S FACE AS HE ADJUSTS HIS GLASSES.  
NURSE BEHIND HIM.

DOCTOR:

Why do you want to terminate this pregnancy miss?

NURSE:

(translates in Spanish)

PANEL: MONICA CRYING. HAND ON HER STOMACH THAT IS SLIGHTLY LARGE.

MONICA:

(Responds in Spanish)

NURSE:

She says she is scared that the baby will be sad like her, that it will be sick like her.

PANEL: MONICA STILL CRYING. HANDS IN PRAYER AS SHE IS PLEADING TO THE DOCTOR.



**PAGE THIRTY-FOUR**

CAPTION:

My mother's feelings about passing on what she deemed “her curse” along with my father's directions to terminate her pregnancy motivated her throughout her journey.

PANEL: A SLIGHT FLASHBACK OF MONICA AS A CHILD. A LITTLE GIRL WITH A DIRTY FACE AND MESSY HAIR.

CAPTION:

To bring a child into this world burdened, to give life to something that would struggle throughout its existence. Giving little possibility of happiness.

PANEL: MONICA AS AN ADULT GETTING A CAP AND GOWN.

PANEL: MONICA GETTING MARRIED

PANEL: MONICA PLAYING WITH A CHILD.

CAPTION:

How could I blame her for not wanting me? To save me; for her, was to prevent my existence. And in doing so perhaps, she could have become something. Get an education, married, own a home, become a

grandmother. What possible future could she have had, had she shown up one month or a week earlier?

## **PAGE THIRTY-FIVE**

PANEL: MONICA BACK IN THE DOCTOR OFFICE. IS AT THE END OF HER CRYING.

PANEL: MONICA LOOKS DOWN ON HER STOMACH MORE ATTENTIVE.

CAPTION:

And yet, knowing that she had to have the baby gave her a born-again feeling. After being consoled by the nurse and doctors, she spoke to them about her newfound faith.

## **TIME PASSES**

PANEL: MONICA WITH A SMALL CHILD IN A SMALL ROOM.

CAPTION:

Somewhere between my mother's visit to the doctor and my birth, she stayed in the U.S with a family member. An older gentleman who was related to my mother's family somehow. She also developed a friendship with an older woman and her family.

PANEL: SMALL CHILD ALONE IN A BASCINET. TOP VIEW OF HIM ASLEEP.

CAPTION:

When I was born, I was given no attachments to my biological father. No shared name of any kind. Instead, I was given the last name of the family

friend so to avoid any confusion. While living in the states, my mother continued her work as a maid for households while I was taken care of by her friend named Licha and the older man whom I came to know as Mr. Lopez.

**PAGE THIRTY-SIX**

PANEL: MONICA IN LINE OF SOCIAL SECURITY OFFICE.

CAPTION:

Taking an opportunity to not live always looking over her shoulder, my mother took the opportunity to pass herself off as a U.S citizen.

PANEL: MONICA SLIGHTLY TERRIFIED AS SHE APPROACHES CLOSER TO THE HELP DESK.

PANEL: MONICA TALKING TO SOCIAL SECURITY EMPLOYEE.

CAPTION:

Instead, she took the opportunity to take my social security number and make it her own. How she managed this was a mystery to me. I suspected they took pity on her, but when she told me the story she claims that it was an easy transition since she had been using it for everything. And so, for a time two individuals used the same number as their identity. This made it possible for her to exist in the U.S and return to Mexico, which is what she did.

PANEL: MONICA AT THE U.S AND MEXICO BORDER WITH A MAURICIO ON A STROLLER. ON THE OTHER SIDE A MAN STANDING NEXT TO A VEHICLE.

**PAGE THIRTY-SEVEN**

**TIME PASSES**

**CAPTION:**

After eight months of living in the U.S, she returned to Mexico in hopes to repair the relationship between her mother, and my father.

PANEL: MONICA AT THE U.S AND MEXICO BORDER WITH MAURICIO ON A STROLLER. MONICA SHOWING SIGNS OF PREGNANCY. ON THE OTHER SIDE NO ONE IS THERE FOR HER.

**CAPTION:**

I've never discovered what happened during that brief period my mother lived in Mexico after my birth. During her time there, she found herself pregnant again by my father. Perhaps it was this moment that completely ended her relationship with her mother. That she would allow herself to be involved with him once again.

PANEL: MONICA WITH TWO CHILDREN. ONE INFANT SHE IS HOLDING THE OTHER BY HER FEET.

**CAPTION:**

She returns to the United States and gives birth to my brother. Again, returned to Mr. Lopez for assistance. And resumed her friendship with

Licha. She would frequently return to Mexico to consult with my brother and I's father. He may have believed that if he continued to pay my mother with the means to care for herself along with his two unplanned children, she would distance herself from complicating his life.

PANEL: THE CHILDRENS BIOLOGICAL FATHER HANDING MONICA MONEY.

PANEL: THE BIOLOGICAL FATHER IN AN EMPTY HOUSE ALONE.

**PAGE THIRTY-EIGHT**

PANEL: THE TWO CHILDREN IN A ROOM ALONE.

CAPTION:

By this time, his wife had passed, and all his children had moved away.

All grown and involved in their profession.

PANEL: MONICA PURCHASING DRUGS.

CAPTION:

We were prominently living in the U.S at this point. Always near the few acquaintances my mother had. Mr. Lopez, and Licha.

PANEL: MONICA ARGUING WITH THE CHILDRENS BIOLOGICAL FATHER.

CAPTION:

Licha had older sons, who were always in some trouble. Sometime while living in Mr. Lopez's home, my mother started to disappear frequently. What had been occurring is her discovery and abuse of substances. This began to affect her means of income from our biological father, who cut her off completely financially.

PANEL: MONICA LEAVING A ROOM. THE TWO CHILDREN SITTING ON A COUCH WATCHING TELEVISION. A SHADOW FIGURE IN FRONT OF THEM.



**PAGE THIRTY-NINE**

CAPTION:

The substance abuse left my mother in need of a caretaker for her two children. If she could not dump us on her younger sister or our father in Mexico, or Mr. Lopez in the U.S then she would leave us under the care of Licha and her son who did not live too far away from Mr. Lopez's home her main place of residency.

PANEL: MONICA ASLEEP ON A BED, SHE APPEARS UNHEALTHY.

PANEL: ONLY MAURICIO ON A COUCH .

CAPTION:

While my mother fought her inner demons by creating new ones, we were under the care of external monsters.

PANEL: THE CHILD ON THE COUCH LEAVING

PANEL: THE CHILD WALKS THROUGH FRONT DOOR.

CAPTION:

Licha's son took to my younger brother in a manner that was inappropriate. His abuse could have gone forever had my mother not disappeared and caused me to leave the unsafe environment of what was

our home and walk out into the treacherous streets searching for her. She told me this led to her disconnect from Licha, but did not know what direction to take for the actions of her son. So she simply tried to forget it happened. How my desperate need for her led me to be discovered by a police officer, which began our journey into foster care.

**PAGE FOURTY**

PANEL: THE TWO CHILDREN OUTSIDE AN UGLY HOME.

CAPTION:

My brother and I moved to Rio Grande city now living with our biological mother and her now husband. I was seven and my brother Oscar was five. This was perhaps the first time I knew where I lived. Outside of living with my foster parents in south Texas, I do not know where my biological father lived or where Mr. Lopez residence was. By this time, my mother had grown distant from her friend Licha.

PANEL: THE CHILDREN IN FRONT OF A TELEVISION. THEY LOOK THINNER. HAVE SIGNS OF BRUISES.

CAPTION:

Life in Rio Grande City with my new stepfather was anything but pleasant. He was an abusive man who took pleasure in striking me and my brother for any inconvenience we gave him. He was under the impression that we were not my mother's children but her nephews whom she promised to care for. I learned of this much later throughout one of my mother's stories. We were living next door to us was his mother who disdained us.

PANEL: BIOLOGIAL MOTHER LOOKING ILL AGAIN. ALSO HAS BRUISES AND IS

SMOKING.

PANEL: OSCAR ALONE OUTSIDE A SCHOOL.

**PAGE FOURTY ONE**

PANEL: A COOKIE CONTAINER. SLIGHTLY OPEN.

CAPTION:

My stepfather reintroduced my mother to drugs. And she relapsed back into a lifestyle that was destructive to her and her two children. Her drug use grew to such extremes that she would fail to feed us, pick up my brother from school, or even have the means to defend us from our stepfather's abuse. She only cared for a container that is used for cookies or sometimes sowing items. Instead, this container held all the drugs they would use every day as they placed it under their bed after every use. At my young age, I believed it to be cigarettes only to find out later that it was marijuana and other drugs my mother wished not to disclose.

PANEL: BIOLOGICAL MOTHER PREGNANT GOING GROCERY SHOPPING WITH TWO BOYS.

PANEL: BIOLOGICAL MOTHER IS USING FOOD STAMPS.

PANEL: BIOLOGICAL MOTHER SELLING FOOD STAMPS FOR INCOME.

CAPTION:

He would eventually be arrested for driving under the influence, leaving my now pregnant mother alone with both me and my brother. Now at the

age of 19, with a 6- and 4-year-old, it was difficult for her to be a parent at such an early age. At that age she should have been beginning her life and enjoying her youth, not responsible for two children with one more on the way. As much as she tried to be a good parent she was trained and conditioned by the worst people on how to be one.

**PAGE FOURTY TWO**

PANEL: BIOLOGICAL MOTHER CARRYING A WATERMELON. OLDEST CHILD  
BEHIND HER ALSO CARRYING A WATERMELON.

CAPTION:

We made our income working on a watermelon field. My mother would take both my brother and I and pick watermelons for a local farmer. I was employed at the age of 6 not knowing any better other than my mother told me to follow her instructions and do as she did. And so that would be our lives when I was not at school.

PANEL: THE TWO CHILDREN ADMIRING A CHRISTMAS TREE WITH PRESENTS.

CAPTION:

I knew I was unhappy with my mother on Christmas day. Where before under the roof of my previous foster parents we were given presents and food, and celebrated Christmas with a tree and decorated the home with lights and stayed warm under heavy blankets enjoying holiday films.

PANEL: THE CHILDREN LOOKING AT A HOUSE ACROSS THE STREET WITH A  
CHRISTMAS TREE.

CAPTION:

Living with my mother in Rio Grande City that Christmas had none of

those things. A single gift was given to us out of charity from one of the neighbors. I missed my foster family. As much as I loved my mother, I had to make peace with my situation that she could not care for me and my brother. She tried but did not have the maturity to be a parent.



**PAGE FORTY THREE**

PANEL: FOSTER PARENTS OUTSIDE OF RIO GRANDE HOME. THE TWO BOYS RUNNING TOWARDS THEM.

CAPTION:

Despite our move to a new city, my foster parents made it a point to visit us on occasion. Bringing us gifts and following up on how we were doing with school and our health. They of course had concerns seeing the state of our lifestyle. But my mother assured them that everything was going well, and her husband would be returning from incarceration very soon.

PANEL: THE TWO BOYS LOOKING OUT THE DOOR AS THE SILOUETTE OF A PERSON IS ON THE OTHER SIDE OF IT.

PANEL: BIOLOGICAL MOTHER CRYING COVERING ONE EYE.

PANEL: MAURICIO HITTING MAN WITH A 4X4.

PANEL: MAN GRABS OLDEST BY HAIR.

## **PAGE FOURTY FOUR**

CAPTION:

When our stepfather returned, so did the wicked behavior. Things got worse as time passed. His abuse escalated to higher levels of anger and physicality. Despite my mother carrying his child, he would continue to strike her if she stepped out of line. In my attempt to defend her one day after her crying made my brother cry as well, I made an attempt at striking him with a board that was going to be used to keep the back door closed properly.

PANEL: MAN DRAGGING OLDEST CHILD BY HAIR.

PANEL: MAN THRUSTS OLDEST CHILD THROUGH A DOOR.

PANEL: MAURICIO ON GROUND. BLOOD ABOVE HIS HEAD.

CAPTION:

When I struck him, it did little to him physically but increased his anger even more. He took the piece of wood off my hands, proceeded to grab me by my hair and drag me towards the small living room we had, and threw me through a wood-framed screen door. My head was bleeding from the impact as I laid face down on the dirt. When I rose, the combination of dirt and blood made a pool of mud all around me.

PANEL: MOTHER NURSING OLDEST. BANDAGING HIS WOUNDS.

CAPTION:

My mother helped me to my feet and patched me together, my stepfather was nowhere to be found.

CAPTION:

As I remember this part of my life, I think back to all the heroes that motivated me to act the way I did that day. How the Ninja Turtles and Batman perhaps were the ones that motivated me to act. And maybe they did, but I also think that I did it cause I; despite my upbringing up to that point, am a genuinely good person. I always looked up to heroes in comic panels, and now I too exist in a panel trying to be a hero for her, and although I could not save her that day I like to believe that I eventually would make her proud making heroes of my own.

**PAGE FOURTY FIVE**

PANEL: BOTH BOYS ARE WATCHING TELEVISION

PANEL: POLICE VEHICLE OUTSIDE OF HOME.

PANEL: OLDEST ANSWERS DOOR.

CAPTION:

That night, as I watched television with my brother with a bandage around my head, a familiar light passed through our window. There were police officers outside our home.

PANEL: THE TWO CHILDREN ARE ESCORTED TO A POLICE VEHICLE.

PANEL: THE MAN IS ALSO BEING PUT IN A POLICE CAR.

PANEL: THE TWO CHILDREN LOOK AT THE UGLY HOME ONE LAST TIME.

CAPTION:

The officers entered the home when I opened the door for them. They located my stepfather next door at his mother's home and proceeded to arrest him. Upon searching the home, the officers found under the bed a collection of narcotics. I later discovered that my mother contacted those officers herself and told them where the drugs were hidden. She wanted to have my stepfather arrested after that day. The last time I saw him, he was

being put inside a police vehicle as all the neighbors watched. My brother and I put in another police car ready to be taken away again.

**PAGE FOURTY SIX**

PANEL: BOTH CHILDREN AT POLICE STATION SITTING ON A CHAIRS NEXT TO PHONE BOOTH. CASE WORKER USING PHONE.

CAPTION:

We stay at a police station until a caseworker comes to our aid. She makes a few phone calls, and we then get in her vehicle and head to an unknown location. We arrive at our destination at around 4 AM. As I awaken from the sudden stop of the vehicle, I looked out the car window and see my foster parents again.

PANEL: OUTSIDE THE HOME OF ARTURO AND ELVA'S HOME FROM THE DRIVEWAY DISTANCE. A DOOR LIGHT ILLUMINATING THE FRONT DOOR WHERE THERE APPEAR TO BE PEOPLE.

PANEL: TWO ADULTS AND THREE CHILDREN OUTSIDE THE FRONT DOOR OF THE HOUSE. THE LIGHT NOW SHOWING THEM CLEARER

PANEL: BOTH BOYS IN THE CAR ARE LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW.

PANEL: THE OLDEST HAS A GLEE LOOK ON HIS FACE. EXCITED AND HAPPY TO SEE HIS FOSTER FAMILY.

**PAGE FOURTY SEVEN**

CAPTION:

My foster parents at the time had four other boys in the home with them, making a total of eight people in the house including them. But they could not turn us away and pleaded with the caseworkers to have us return to them despite their household maxed with the number of children they were allowed to have.

PANEL: A KITCHEN TABLE WITH A TOTAL OF SIX BOYS ALL EATING BREAKFAST.

PANEL: FIVE BOYS STANDING AT END OF DRIVEWAY DRESSED FOR SCHOOL.

CAPTION:

The following morning, life resumed as if we never left. This time, I had four more brothers. We were given a cooked meal, haircuts, a physical, and everything else to transition us back to a healthy environment. We prepared to return to school and start fresh again.

PANEL: MONICA HOLDING AN INFANT CHILD.

PANEL: MONICA IN A ROOM WITH HER NEWBORN. HER TWO SONS ON THE FLOOR PLAYING WITH TOYS. CASE WORKERS LOOKING THROUGH A GLASS WINDOW.

**PAGE FOURTY EIGHT**

PANEL: MONICA SPEAKING TO THE SOCIAL WORKERS.

PANEL: THE NEWBORN BEING GIVEN TO ANOTHER PERSON.

CAPTION:

After some time has passed, my mother gave birth to my new younger brother, Edgar. We once again planned for family visitation. My new little brother would join us from time to time. However, my mother could not keep herself clean from the years of drug use she had come to miss. Eventually, my little brother would be handed to his grandmother, my stepfather's mother. That was the last time I saw or heard about him.

PANEL: ALL SIX FOSTER BOYS PLAYING IN ONE ROOM

PANEL: NOW ONLY FIVE PLAYING.

PANEL: THEN ONLY TWO.

CAPTION:

The visitation would continue to happen only spaced put further and further from one another. Eventually, my fellow foster care brothers would return to their parents except for my brother and me. It was then with an almost empty home that my parents decided to take in a much older foster youth.



**PAGE FOURTY NINE**

PANEL: MAURICIO IN A ROOM ALONE HIS BACK TURNED. A SHADOW FIGURE APPEARING NEXT TO HIM.

CAPTION:

I would unfortunately follow in my brothers' torment and suffer the torment of wrongful actions from an older individual. In my maturity, I blocked out the memories of these abuses.

PANEL: THE MAURICIO CRYING IN A BED.

CAPTION:

I would never see this person again after her time living with my foster parents.

PANEL: MAURICIO SITTING IN A THERAPY ROOM.

PANEL: MAURICIO SITTING ACROSS A THERAPIST.

PANEL: MAURICIO HAVING A BLANK STARE AS THERAPIST LECTURES.

CAPTION:

I never spoke about this to my foster family, out of fear that I would be removed from their care. Despite the number of therapy sessions I was required to attend to provide an analysis of the traumatic experiences I've

had to endure. From the abandonment of my mother, the enigma of not knowing who my father was, the relocations, the physical abuse, combined with the expert diagnosis of having ADHD, Dyslexia, and PTSD. Combined with the knowledge that my mother had herself been diagnosed with Manic Depression, I was simply destined to carry that very same burden that she feared I would have before my birth.

**PAGE FIFTY**

PANEL: MAURICIO SITTING IN A CHAIR WITH NOTHING AROUND HIM. SAME BLANK STARE.

CAPTION:

But I never spoke about it, and I never desired to ever go down that path. Like a scar that never heals you learn to live with it and accept how it deformed you, it blends in so well with every other mark there is no need to distinguish it.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS COMMUNICATING TO THERAPIST. WITH HAND GESTURES.

PANEL: MAURICIO HOLDING A PHOTO OF HIS MOTHER.

PANEL: MAURICIO IN A CLASSROOM. SMILING.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS EXCELLING IN SCHOOL GETTING HIGH MARKS ON HIS REPORT CARD.

CAPTION:

Therapy revealed a great volume of things about me. Despite the troubled past I had, I gravitated towards good. I understood concepts of good and evil and had an inherent desire to see good prevail. (I genuinely believed that TMNT and BATMAN were the primary influencers to this attribute) I carried compassion as a badge of honor and communicated that despite

my love for my foster family, I still loved my mother and wished to be with her. A savior complex in its early stages of development. And although it was discussed that I had a number of diagnoses that would hinder my mental maturity, I was seen as a promising case. A result of the system working to repair something broken. Despite all the biological and external factors that plagued me, I had the possibility of hope.

**PAGE FIFTY-ONE**

**TIME PASSES**

PANEL: THE FOSTER PARENTS ARE SITTING ACROSS THE TWO BOYS.

CAPTION:

I would go for long durations without seeing my mother. Many weeks or months would pass. It was clear that the possibility of being reunited with her was fading into obscurity. Years pass and I am informed that my brother and I are being put up for adoption.

PANEL: THE FOSTER PARENTS LOOKING HAPPY.

CAPTION:

My foster parents, knowing that my brother and I could be separated, were happy to adopt us as their children.

**PAGE FIFTY-TWO**

PANEL: THE YOUNGER BROTHER LOOKS HAPPY. THE OLDEST SLIGHTLY SADDENED.

CAPTION:

As happy as my brother was to this news; always under the impression that our foster family was our real family, I did not take the news so well.

PANEL: THE OLDEST SITTING ON EDGE OF BED. LOOKING SLIGHTY ILL.

CAPTION:

My sadness grew, and I believed that I would have to fully come to grips that I would never see my mother or know her love ever again. I question the value of my worth, trying to understand what defects I had to not make her fight for me.

PANEL: SAME VISITATION ROOM. MONICA ON ONE KNEE SPEAKING TO THE OLDEST CHILD.

CAPTION:

On what ended up being our last visitation, my mother informed me that the adoption process is not final and that she would make a case in front of the judge to keep visitations open so that she could take her children back. This flicker of hope caused friction with both my foster parents and my

brother. Who knew that my fantasy of being with her was just that.

**PAGE FIFTY-THREE**

PANEL: AN OVERALL VIEW OF A COURTHOUSE.

PANEL: THE SET OF STAIRS LEADING TO A COURTHOUSE WITH THE OLDEST BOY SITTING AT THE BOTTOM STEP.

CAPTION:

On court day, I was present with my foster family and my brother. I waited by the stairs of the courthouse looking out for my mother to appear. After a while, it seemed obvious that once again she would disappoint me with her absence.

PANEL: THE INSIDE OF A COURTROOM. A JUDGE AT CENTER WHILE BOTH FOSTER PARENTS AND BOTH BOYS ON THE LEFT SIDE. THE RIGHT SIDE EMPTY.

CAPTION:

Inside the court room, I was asked if I was interested in changing my name. The name that my mother gave me, the name of an actor she adored, the name that caused me so much disdain growing up. But when the opportunity presented itself, I could not bear to part with it.

PANEL: THE ENTIRE FAMILY NOW INSIDE A CAR. BOTH CHILDREN IN BACK. THE NOW OFFICIAL PARENTS IN FRONT LOOKING HAPPY.

CAPTION:



My last name was changed to solidify my relationship with my foster parents. Although their last name was Garcia, they prominently spoke English but encouraged the use of Spanish as they were very well versed in the language. No longer did I carry the name of a man whom I don't remember or had any connection with. As we exited the courthouse, we celebrated the creation of our family.

**PAGE FIFTY-FOUR**

PANEL: OLDEST CHILD ON PHONE CALL.

PANEL: MONICA ON PHONE CALL.

CAPTION:

When we arrived home, my biological mother called to congratulate my parents. She thanked them for their selfless act of taking in children that were not their own. For raising her children, caring for them, providing shelter, clothing, and education. Every standard parent responsibility that she was unable to provide.

PANEL: MONICA IS BY A PAYPHONE.

PANEL: MONICA WALKING DOWN STREET ALONE.

PANEL: MONICA CHECKING INTO A REHABILITATION CENTER.

CAPTION:

When she spoke to me on the phone, she apologized for not being present at the courthouse. Informed me that her substance abuse has not slowed down and that her mental stability was always causing her to enter and exit rehabilitation. She was not in a good place, and in retrospect, she had never been up until that point.

**PAGE FIFTY-FIVE**

PANEL: MAURICIO STILL ON PHONE.

PANEL: A FANTASY VISION OF OLDEST CHILD PICTURING HIS LIFE WITH HIM  
AND MONICA ALONG WITH HIS YOUNGER SIBLINGS.

PANEL: THE FANTASY BECOMES HAZY

PANEL: THE FANTASY IMAGE HAS FULLY WITHERED AWAY.

CAPTION:

She told me my new parents were what was best for us. Not just for my  
brother and I but for her as well. She needed peace knowing that we were  
going to be taken care of. We cried, and said our goodbyes, and as before  
she promised to make sure to visit and call to keep us informed to her  
status and location.

PANEL: THE NEW FAMILY ON A VACATION.

PANEL: THE FAMILY SITTING TOGETHER ON A KITCHEN TABLE.

PANEL: MAURICIO EXCELLING AT SCHOOL. HE IS GIVEN A DOCUMENT SAYING  
HE IS NO LONGER CONSIDERED ADHD. WITH A REPORT CARD SHOWING PASSING  
GRADES.

**PAGE FIFTY-SIX**

PANEL: MAURICIO TRYING TO APPLY TO A JOB AND SEEING HIS MOM'S NAME  
INSTEAD OF HIS OWN.

CAPTION:

I heard from her 5 times over the next 9 years after our adoption. In that time frame I discovered her theft of my social security number, her having an additional child whom I have never met and settling down and getting clean. On occasion she would have her moments of darkness, those few times I heard from her was simply an outlet for her to express her anguish and depression. Perhaps she understood that it was something we shared and only I could comprehend what emotions she was feeling.

**PAGE FIFTY-SEVEN**

PANEL: MAURICIO NOW MUCH OLDER AROUND 17 ON PHONE WITH MONICA

CAPTION:

She would tell me that my grandmother passed away. A woman I have never met, and it was in that conversation that led to my most freighting journey.

MAURICIO:

I've taken an interest in Music, and I think I would like to become a teacher when I get older.

MONICA:

Wow you are just like your brothers and sisters.

MAURICIO:

What brothers and sisters? I only have Oscar and Jay the other adopted kid here with Arturo and Elva.

MONICA:

I'm talking about your other brothers and sisters. From your father's side of the family. They are all teachers or musicians. Your father was somewhat of a musician as well.

PANEL: MAURICIO GOING THROUGH A BOX FULL OF DOCUMENTS.

CAPTION:

After that conversation I suffered from an intense moment of existential crisis. I felt unoriginal, a carbon copy of someone whom I shared nothing but DNA with.

MAURICIO:

Mom? I have to ask, why do you never talk about him? I mean, he's a piece of shi...

MONICA:

Don't speak ugly about your father. He is a good man and he loved you and me very much

MAURICIO:

Mom, come on "love" isn't the word I would use. I mean you were so young, and he never cared about me or even Oscar.

MONICA:

No. your father is a good man, he had a family, and he did what he had too. You don't understand because you are young, but someday you will know what love is. And what we had was love.

CAPTION:

I genuinely wanted my mother to hate my biological father at the same level as I did. She would always defend him; she would always say that i would never understand. And perhaps I never will. I can't fathom the idea of loving someone who has hurt you so much and took so much. He took away her youth, her innocence, ignored the children he had with her, and did it all with his "real" family perched up in a pedestal and had no ambition to find me or my brother.

CAPTION:

I'll never understand. It's a painful thing to accept. It will forever be a mystery to me how she continued to come to that conclusion in her life, that her loved her and her in return. But as I matured, I've gotten a flicker of understanding that warped kind of love she had for him. Sometimes no matter how much harm someone we care for does to us, no matter how much wrong they have done to us we somehow find it within our deepest generosity and act of forgiveness to still love that person unconditionally.

**PAGE FIFTY-EIGHT**

PANEL: MAURICIO LOOKIND DOWN AT A SERIES OF DOCUMENTS.

CAPTION:

But at that time, because of that love she had for him, it drove me to learn about the other part of who I was, and where I came from.

CAPTION:

I had often struggled with that part of me. The knowing that I came from a man who in my mind raped my mother. She genuinely believed that she was in some distorted version of the word “In love” with him. I did not want to become my genes and believed that I was succeeding in that battle. It seems you can't fight your genes no matter what forced fate you try to direct them to.

PANEL: MAURICIO WITH A BACKPACK ON.

PANEL: MAURICIO IS OUTSIDE A BUS STATION.

CAPTION:

After this revelation, I took it upon myself to find my biological father and discover that other side of myself. Despite having little to no information on my mother's side of the family, as long as I had her in the picture even as limited as it was, I needed that other half of me to be discovered.



PANEL: MAURICIO IS NOW IN A BUS.

PANEL: HE IS LOOKING AT A PHOTO OF HIS MOTHER WITH ALL THREE OF HER CHILDREN.

**PAGE FIFTY-NINE**

PANEL: BEHIND THE PHOTO IS A DOCUMENT WITH AN ADDRESS HIGHLIGHTED.

CAPTION:

I was 19. I purchased a bus ticket to some part of South Texas close to the Rio Grande further north of the panhandle. I discovered his location from documents stored away by my adopted parents that had hundreds of documents. Everything from therapy sessions to names of all individuals involved in my origin. And within those files an address.

PANEL: BUS ON A ROAD WITH NOTHING CLOSE BY.

PANEL: THEY PASS THE AREA THAT MONICA SLEPT WHEN SHE CROSSED THE BORDER.

CAPTION:

It was the most frightening trip I had ever taken. I left for my biological father's location alone. I constantly questioned my motives or my verbal exchange with the man. I had so many questions but also so much anger towards him. To confront someone, you are required to love but I only saw a criminal and an extremely flawed individual. I did not want him in my life, but I wanted him to know that I had lived, I had grown and was beginning my college career. That his stain to his family legacy was anything but.

PANEL: MAURICIO OUTSIDE A HOME.

## **SIXTY**

PANEL: OLDEST HAVING A VERY LOW VIVID MEMORY APPEAR TO HIM

PANEL: HE IS REMEMBERING THAT HE ONCE STAYED AT THAT VERY HOME  
WHEN HE WAS A CHILD.

CAPTION:

When I arrived at the address, I froze outside the property. I slightly  
remembered it. It struck me that I had been to this home sometime during  
my childhood. It made the approach to the door so much more difficult.

PANEL: HE IS NOW IN FRONT OF A DOOR.

PANEL: HE KNOCKES.

PANEL: A MUCH OLDER LOOKING VERSION OF MAURICIO ANSWERS THE DOOR.  
MAURICIO HAS A TERRIFIED LOOK ON HIS FACE.

PANEL: THE OLDEST IS SPEAKING TO THE YOUNGER BOY.

CAPTION:

When I knocked a slightly older man answered the door. I asked for my  
biological father by name, Miguel. He informed me that he was that name.  
I understood that he was my half-older brother, and my biological fathers  
oldest. We both realized that I was looking for our father. He explained to

be that his father had passed away, just 4 years ago.

**PAGE SIXTY-ONE**

PANEL: MAURICIO IS PAYING ATTENTION TO A PICUTE BEHIND THE MAN. HE CAN SEE THE IMAGE OF A MAN ALONG WITH FIVE PEOPLE ABOVE HIM. NEXT TO THAT PHOTO A PHOTO OF A WOMAN.

CAPTION:

I slightly looked inside the home and saw on a shelf a family portrait of him on a chair with what appeared to be 5 adults above him. three men and two women. It was him with all his children. Well, almost all his children. He didn't take account for both Oscar and me. Next to that photo was a photo of his wife and mother of his children. Almost all of them.

PANEL: MAURICIO SMILES AND BEGINS TO WALK AWAY.

PANEL: MIGUEL JR WAVES AWAY AND BEGINS CLOSING THE DOOR.

CAPTION:

I apologized for interrupting the man's day and began to leave. I think for a moment upon our last moment of eye contact, that he knew who I was. That he knew I was the mistake that plagued his family. The embodiment of his father's infidelity to his mother. I felt that no matter what connection could have been made with my estranged family they never were my family, my family was back in south Texas. Oscar, Arturo, Elva, they are my family. I was looking for a family when I had one already. They never

looked for me before, and they went on with their lives just fine, I see no reason to interrupt that. And just like that, my connection to my father concluded.

**CAPTION:**

And so, my journey ended, and I made my way back home. MY journey started driven by hate, hate for who my father was and the part of myself that came from him. Motivated by the love I had for my mother and to get some type of answers or justice for her suffering. And it concluded with learning to forgive and let go. And so I did.

**TIME PASS**

**PAGE SIXTY-TWO**

PANEL: THE ABOVE VIEW OF A CHURCH.

PANEL: A NOW OLDER VERSION OF THE BOY WHO IS NOW A MAN. WALKING  
TOWARDS THE CHURCH.

PANEL: HE SEES AN OLDER VERSION OF MONICA.

PANEL: THEY ARE BOTH SITTING ON THE EDGE OF A WATER FOUNTAIN.

CAPTION:

I would not see my mother again until the year 2013. I was about 25 then.  
She had come down to visit the Basilica of the National Shrine of Our  
Lady of San Juan del Valle. She had found religion to make peace with  
her past and used her newfound faith to combat her depression. Saying  
that God helps fight her inner demons and gives her the will to stay alive.  
She hadn't tried at taking her own life for a long time. Something she often  
had tried during our separation. We spoke about her faith, her apology for  
not being a mother, and that she was proud of me for not ending up like  
her; Broken.

PANEL: MAURICIO GRADUATING COLLEGE.

PANEL: MAURICIO SEES THAT HIS NOW PARENTS ARTURO AND ELVA ARE  
APPLAUDING HIM.



PANEL: WE SEE THE PARENTS OLDER AND HAPPY. THE YOUNGER BOY NOW  
OLDER ALSO NEXT TO THEM.

**PAGE SIXTY-THREE**

PANEL: WE SEE THE OLDER BOY SITTING ON A PARK BENCH BY HIMSELF.

CAPTION:

One year after I graduated college my biological mother passed away.  
How she passed was never told to me, only that she was struggling often  
to overcome her bi-polar disorder. She would eventually pass away at the  
age of 40. Despite her resolve, despite all she had endured, she could  
never outrun her inner demons.

PANEL: WE SEE A YOUNG VERSION OF THE OLDER BOY AGAIN. WITH A CASE  
WORKER CONSULTING HIM. HE IS SITTING ON A CHAIR.

PANEL: WE SEE A YOUNG VERSION OF THE OLDER BOY BEING CONSULTED BY A  
THERAPIST.

PANEL: WE SEE THE YOUNG VERSION OF THE OLDER BOY BEING CONSULTED BY  
A FOSTER PARENT.

PANEL: WE SEE THE YOUNG VERSION OF THE OLDER BOY STAND UP FROM  
CHAIR.

PANEL: THE YOUNG BOY STEPS FORWARD.

**PAGE SIXTY-FOUR**

PANEL: THE YOUNG BOY IS WALKING TOWARDS A BLANK PAGE.

CAPTION:

It took me a long time to realize how fortunate I was. To have been saved from staying in the foster care system. To being found, and taken in. So many children have come and gone into my family's home and often many of them would not be as fortunate as I. Despite the close possibility of not being born into this world, I know now deep down that even on my darkest days I would have a hard time leaving it.

**End of Script.**

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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