

PROLOGUE

TO A FATHER AND SON

The world will come between you.

But for now, for this photographic moment, you are father and son. Embraced. Two together there in the early nineties. The soft eyes looking forward, what looks to be soft skin, what is difference of skin. Father's hands clasp the son's, man holding child, loving tenderly. Both are seated on the couch belonging to the son's grandmother. This is not the father's mother but a woman through time he will come to know well. He, like her, a far-flung soul, a weary body, she from the beaches and waters of the Caribbean and he from the mountains and lakes of Mesoamerica. Hundreds of years of history, conquest, migration, and survival coming together to form a point of convergence in a small town in New Jersey. One photograph can tell so much.

Who takes the photo? No one seems to know, and no one can remember. All there is of a time and place and moment is a photograph. Two bodies in a photograph who I don't even know, strumming my fingers twenty years or so later across an image of my father and my younger self hoping to recall the moment, for memory to activate. But from this still life all

I get are fantasies. Imagining moments on that couch, held, napping away summer afternoons. Laughing on his back as he does push-ups on wintry morning days. Contemplative stares into brown eyes during cool spring nights.

I think of all this past that is and is not mine as so ordinary. Just life, just living. Because if I do not, if I do not stretch a photograph beyond its frame, into language, into story, into feelings, then you two are lost to me forever. If I do not push to remember again, remember anew, then I relegate you to the dustbins of history, to the narrative of pain and disconnection perpetrated by the world outside. I know how the world will tell me how to think about the father and son. How the world will tell me how to think about the father, of his skin, his place of origin, his condition of being in these Americas. How the world will tell me how to think about the son, of his body and mind, to hate and despise all that he is, all that he comes from. I know how shame and internalized hatred will define how I think of you two for so long. I know how your story will unfold, which is why looking at this photograph is that much harder to do.

I don't know you two anymore. Maybe I never really knew you to begin with. So this is a letter addressed to two people who reside in an image, which is to say, this is a letter to no one, and a letter to no one is a letter to anyone. To all the anyones we never got to be, all the anyones denied us, to all the anyones who need to live again. What I know I take from

the photographs of those early years of the boy's life. Each in their context, in their place, bearing their particularities. I look through them, glide fingertips across their surface, hoping to know some concrete story, wanting epiphanies and revelations, but instead I am met with daydreams and musings, mourning and loss. In these photographs I wander in the fulfilling nothingness of the what could have been.

The writing in these pages will take many shapes. Reminiscences, speculations, and reckonings. They will be letters like this one, addressed to you and to others. They will be displacements in the third person of my childhood self. They will be monologues and ruminations from this person who I am today. They will be present tense wanderings. Above all, these are words reaching out to the two in this photograph, to their many selves across time and space, where past becomes present becomes future all at once, reaching out to the many lives they are connected to, known and unknown, words reaching out across the vastness of time and space.

The world will come between you. Father and son. Boy and man. Kin and kind. But for now, for this photographic moment, you are father and son, smiling and embraced, telling a different story from the one you both carry the burden of having to know.

PART I

**PEDRO ON MAIN
STREET USA**

I

GROW UP, PEDRO

Sunlight. Treetops garlanded by a cotton candy–like mass of white, the sagging pouches of it skimming the heads of passersby. Little bodies wriggle in the white-webbed splendor, trying to break free, trying to plummet to the ground in order to feed. It’s the season when a great migration settles in a backyard. A mass metamorphosis on the horizon.

A boy contemplates down below. A thought on the butterfly-to-be, then another on the voyage south, the journey through the Americas, these thoughts strung together concerned over the brief life of the butterfly. A net is in his hand. He wants to catch one to look closely at the features of it. Then, as quickly as he captures it, he will let it be free.

In the distance a woman’s voice. Familiar to him. “*Marcos, ven a comer! Marcossss!*” She is calling him home to eat. He walks and he will pass through his neighborhood. There down the street are his sister and brother playing basketball with their high school friends. There on the corner of the block is the old Puerto Rican couple who breed rabbits. There is his mother on the other road gossiping with the neighbor. There down

the street men outside on lawn chairs drinking beers, mariachi music playing, men with field dust all over their clothes and hair crooning off-key. There's his father in his brown truck driving a friend to his house in the trailer park nearby.

The boy gets home within a few minutes. His grandmother is at the front gate. "*Que andariego tu eres . . .*" she says to him, playful and stern. She thinks he wanders the street too much, thinking this boy is too bold, too in the world. She will say this to the boy even into the days when he becomes a man, andariego

andariego

andariego

andariego,

saying this word to him as he travels across the Americas, the Americas she has traveled herself, saying this word until the end of her days, until he must be an andariego all alone.

The setting sun shines upon her thick-lensed glasses. She smiles. A wrinkle there, a wrinkle here, she wears her age upon her face with resplendence. They go into the house together, and the screen door closes behind them.



THERE'S NO BETTER storyteller than a child. Broke one of the fancy plates in the kitchen? Cousin Juan did that when he was running through the house dribbling a basketball and blah blah blah. What did you do at school today? I made a book and wrote a whole story about a mermaid princess who blah blah blah. Any situation becomes an opportunity to prove one's skills at imagining a world a bit larger, a bit more magical.

I don't know how to tell such stories as a kid. I am blamed for something and I just say no I didn't do it, the waterworks ensuing. I come home from school and tell no one of my day. As a child, I don't feel myself as having a language in which to tell these stories. Speaking both Spanish and English, I live in a dual world, a world divided, a dizzying world. Spanish is spoken with my grandmother and father, with my siblings it is English, with my mother English and Spanish, and in school it is only English. Words zigzag in my brain with no pattern to their movement. I speak and I don't know exactly how these words are forming, how the meaning is coming across, if I am articulating myself at all.

As an adult I struggle to tell stories, to know what language I can tell these stories in. Who is the boy there in the photo smiling in front of his birthday cake? How can he smile with so much strife behind those brown eyes? I struggle to articulate childhood Marcos, the matter of his history, his being in a small town in the United States. His 1990s self is and is not a presence in this second decade of the twenty-first cen-

tury. Awaiting the day his story, his many stories, can find a language in which to be told, in which to be communicated. Waiting . . . and waiting . . . waiting as he has been doing for a lifetime . . .



COLORED BLOCKS ON the floor, the grind of the pencil sharpener, alphabet posters on the walls. Children's voices rising and falling. The boy is stimulated by all this newness. These are not the children of his neighborhood. He marvels at a Rebecca's platinum blonde hair, the blue of a David's eyes, the pigmentation of an Abigail's skin. They are foreigners to him.

He contemplates but soon enough there is an interruption. The teacher looks at him from the chalkboard. Her face is pinched, her teeth gritted, her eyes blue and sinister. The teacher descends upon him, a bony colossus. Everyone is watching. "*Do not speak that language here. Am I making myself clear?*" That language? *Lang-uage. Lan-g-uage.* He tries to say the word but trips over the syllables. He does not know what she means by that word. All he knows are the eyes upon his body, a shame and a guilt he cannot find the source of, the difference he feels himself to be.

He does not speak again until sometime in the first grade.



NEW EGYPT, NEW Jersey, is the small place on the map I have the privilege of calling my hometown. Mostly a farming town, which is why my family came here to begin with, but now it's a middle-class haven of housing developments. There are four schools, a primary, an elementary, a middle, and a high school, which are where I spend most of my time from the ages of five to eighteen. The center of the town is Main Street. The road well-paved, the mom and pop stores, the potted plants hanging from the lampposts. There's a grocery store where the local people can buy their goods without having to leave the parameters of the town. There's one Chinese restaurant, a little Mexican grocery store, and that's about as far as cultural diversity goes. This town is its own self-contained universe because that's what the people who live there want for themselves. Towns like this one all across the United States wanting something secure, something quaint, something all their own without the threat of difference entering. Why would you ever want to leave?

On the outskirts of the town is the neighborhood I grow up in. I am raised here by my parents, my grandmother, and my older brother and sister. My grandmother has her own house, which is where I spend most of my time, and my mother is the renter of various homes a minute walking distance away throughout the years. My father and mother argue frequently, which culminates in my father getting kicked out. Sometimes he's gone for days, sometimes weeks, and other times months. My brother and sister are ten years older than me, where I'm the

youngest, and they have a different father than mine. Their father was my mother's first love, a Puerto Rican chulo from Florida. My brother is the jokester of the family, six-foot-something, charming, and the very definition of masculinity. He always has a big smile on his face, an affectionate smile, which does a great job of masking the hurt he carries with him over his father leaving him when he was little. My sister is the bossy oldest sibling, always wanting to be in charge.

The little boys and girls who are my classmates growing up call this neighborhood "the Mexican ghetto." They call this place a ghetto because my neighborhood houses the new wave of Mexican, Guatemalan, and Honduran immigrants who are working the fields in the area. According to them, this ghetto is a place of lawlessness. Where children run the streets naked and dirty. Where we hang our wet laundry to dry because we cannot afford dryers. Where the people don't take showers. Where drugs are sold and drunks spill out on the street. Where music-playing rancheras and mariachis blare out at all hours of the day. Where women give birth to children when and how they want. Where immigration authorities and cops stake out our houses on the regular and conduct violent raids every other week. A no-man's-land of savages, the townsfolk say.

My father is one among this new population that lives here. Before his migration in the late eighties, there is another. Through the late sixties, seventies, and early eighties the neighborhood is a Puerto Rican neighborhood. This is the migra-

tion that includes my mother. My grandparents move into this neighborhood all the way from Brooklyn after having been told by another Puerto Rican friend how quiet and quaint this little area is. The houses small but cheap. The land spacious and not cramped like a New York City tenement. Opportunity for field work and domestic work. There is possibility here whereas in Puerto Rico and New York City they do not see much possibility. In this small town, in this neighborhood tucked away on the edge of it, they think they have a better chance of attaining the American dream. My grandparents are gone now, the house they lived in condemned and overtaken by the flora and fauna of the adjacent woods, nature taking what is hers to take. I still wonder if my grandparents found what they were looking for all those years ago when they decided to come to this small town. I wonder if they ever found their American dream.

This neighborhood where my parents meet, where I am born and raised, is a spot of brown amongst a surrounding mass of white. We are a fascinating anomaly for the white population of the town. A place to gawk at, to joke about, to conduct violent fantasies in when they dare even step foot in our boundaries. A place where the border between the United States and Mexico materializes. A place where the ocean between the mainland United States and the island of Puerto Rico opens up. A place where all the nobodies of the Americas come to congregate in order to debauch and terrorize and infest the United States, according to them. I live for nearly

twenty years in this place constructed by the white imagination. And through this white imagining is how I conceive an image of myself and my family for the decades to come. An image of myself I have had to fight against day in and day out.

My parents no longer live in this town but they live nearby. Fifteen minutes away or so. Anytime I return to visit them, I like to drive over to New Egypt and cut directly through Main Street. I go to see what's new. A barbecue wing joint and a bagel shop are the newest additions. The video rental store long gone, the barbershop my grandmother's uncle worked at no more, the gas station bulldozed over. I ride through to feel nostalgic over a place I called home. But was it ever really home? Can you really call a site of cruelty and violence your home? Can you call a place of fantasy your home?

Each time I drive through Main Street I feel a welled-up rage build inside of me. A rage at how surfaces can lie to you. At how easily white America can hide its cruelty behind a veneer of innocence that is really just blatant ignorance. A rage at wishing others could see through the façade of what I had to endure.

Each time I drive through Main Street and feel this welled-up rage, this chest tightening and loss of breath, I know it's the little boy, the little Marcos, coming out, begging to be heard, begging to be seen, begging to get another chance at life, a life that does not have to be the one he had to live through for all those years.



THE SMALL ROOM encloses him. The boy cannot focus. The objects in the room steer him from Mr. S—, the man who takes the boy every day from his kindergarten classroom, the man who has many tools in which to quiz the boy. He is quizzed on words, on syllables, on pronunciations, on language. A card with an image is raised and the boy states what it is.

“No, it is not. What is this, Marcos?”

The yellow fruit shaped like a crescent moon is what he said it is.

Guineo, it's a—

“No, Marcos, tell me what this really is.”

The boy thinks on this question but he is not sure he is doing it right, he thinks and he thi—

“Look at the picture and think hard about what it is.”

The answer to the question is how the boy's grandmother or father would answer, how those in his family and neighborhood would answer. After all, he is of them, their ways of speaking, their kin and kind. This man though is not like them. The answer the man is demanding, then, if the correct answer is to be given, is one of Mr. S—'s making, somewhere in this room, in the likeness of his being.

The difference between the man and the boy's family is the answer.

“A banana. It's a banana.”

“Yes it is, Marcos. Very good. What about this? What do you call this?”



AS A KID, I am such a crybaby. I cry *a lot*. Grow up, my siblings say, as I sit in a corner huffing and puffing, hoping someone will come over to console me. I don't want to grow up and that's that. I want to be able to just cry, crying as much as I want to, crying over the littlest things. Crying feels like a kind of relief for little Marcos, and for the Marcos of today. More than anything I want attention and want to be noticed. Tantrums are opportunities. My skills as a kid at pouting on cue are Oscar-worthy.

There is no guarantee I will be met with the response I crave. My mother, a woman who thinks with her hands before she thinks with her mouth, always moves in swiftly, correcting whatever wrong she thinks my body is doing by force, by her right to my body because she is my mother. I think for this reason I want her more than anyone to comfort me. To show me her love when all I get her is her irritation and anger. I want her to prove me wrong though this happens infrequently; she rarely gives in to being that kind of mother. Whenever I am upset over something, or feel hurt, I still to this day, as an adult, yearn for her comfort. Some kind of instinct in me kicks in, some primal maternal link I want to fulfill. I call her feeling emotional, she asks me how I am doing, and I pause. Do I tell her I am

hurting? Do I tell her I want her comfort? Will she respond how I need her to respond? Each time, without a doubt, I pretend I am fine. I fail to tell her I am calling her because I need her.

Always working and away from home, my father rarely sees my childhood pouting. When he does, he offers only his most striking indifference, no eyes or face or shoulders turned my way. Pay no mind to this child behaving as a child, it seems like he is saying with his back turned toward me, he will tire soon enough.

The only one who gives in to my childish demands is my grandmother. I can cry and complain and throw a tantrum every single day and she will always be there to coddle me, to rub my hair until I find peace. My grandmother goes so far as to scold my mother about her treatment of my crying time and time again but my mother pays no mind to such things. The audacity of it, she seems to say beneath the surety of her ironclad voice, how can this woman who was so cruel to me growing up, so forceful with her words and her hands, dare to talk of kindness? She treats you so good, my mother says to me all the time, jealousy transparent in the voice.

I am a point of tension between my mother and grandmother. My mother hates when she indulges in my crying. The way my grandmother treats me forces my mother to confront why she is the way she is with her. I try to defend my grandmother by saying she is a woman from an island—they do things differently. My mother takes this explanation with a

grain of salt. She does not care how that island in the Caribbean shapes my grandmother, she does not want a five-hundred-year history to make excuses for her. My mother does not want to believe what I am saying because to believe it is to take a step toward forgiveness. My mother wants none of it. My mother wants childhood given to her, a childhood where she can be but a child, a childhood she, nor my grandmother, nor my father, nor I, can ever know.

I think of my crying childhood self a lot. Crying for attention, crying for sympathy, crying for love. I cry as a kid because I don't have a language to tell what is going on with me. I don't really understand what is happening in my young life. I go to school and words are said about me, my family, my neighborhood. I am tucked away in a separate classroom because I am some sort of problem. My parents argue right in front of me, my mother threatening to kick my dad out, my dad threatening to leave, and I don't know why this is happening. I pull out the hair from my scalp and eyebrows, mind distressed and hearing voices, and I am hit across the face, told to stop doing that.

Why, little Marcos, are you crying? What is it you need? I am still searching for those answers.



DURING THESE MIDDLE school and high school years, all these years mastering English, having no choice but to master En-

glish, the boy finds himself in precarious positions where his English skills are *too* good. He interprets, thinks, and over-thinks on the meanings of their language, their syntax and their pronunciations and their words and their intonations all a part of a system the boy knows well. He is better at their language than they are themselves.

A David laughs at the idea. This David always begins his ideas with a rapturous smile, white teeth brimming, the whites of his eyes contrasted against the blue iris, the pompousness of white hands in gesture, “*Like, just imagine it, right, one of them is _____.*”

There are several options as to how this sentence can finish:

A. “. . . *riding their bike and you scream from the car. I did it one time and Pedro fell straight on his ass. I was cracking up so hard I almost swerved off the road.*”

B. “. . . *delivering the pizza late, and just waits at the door for a tip. A tip? Get the fuck outtaaaaa here, Pedro. Don't expect nothing delivering my pizza pie late.*”

C. “. . . *in your house, cleaning and shit. They shower like once a week so this Maria was bombing up my house. I couldn't wait till she was gone.*”

THIS DAVID, OR Timothy, or Shane, or John, or whatever other name boys like him may have, ends their scenario with a hearty, and innocent, “*Dude, I love Mexicans.*”



ON OCCASION, MY father and mother like to lecture me on how bad my Spanish has become. I shrug my shoulders, feigning indifference, though their words do hurt me. They do not know the history of why my Spanish is as bad as it is. Of the many years in speech pathology I endure, the many hours I am forced to work on erasing the Spanish my family teaches me, the many times I am told Spanish is a poor people's language. Neither know this is happening when it does. No one signs off on the speech pathologist's "therapy." No one knows I am told not to speak Spanish in class. It's just procedure for little brown kids to be treated as a problem. For our ways of speaking to be policed at every turn. For us to be corrected by a world that would rather we not exist.

My father only speaks to me in Spanish, and my mother speaks to me in a mixture of both. The language of their love is Spanish. Their meeting in the neighborhood I grow up in happens through Spanish. He lives next door to her and she decides to talk to him one day as he's sitting on his porch. My mother, ever so bold, so willing to go after what she wants. I admire this about her. She says what she wants to say however she wants to say it. She doesn't care for consequences or who it offends whereas I am so in control, so moderated, so careful what people will think of me. I know language is a powerful thing, as she does too. She knows language can let her express

exactly how she feels when she feels it, and I know language is something to manipulate, to use when you need it in order to get by. I, on one end of the spectrum, she, on another.

My mother sees my father from down the street and she wants him. His long hair, she tells me, all the way down to his butt, was so sexy. My father Moctezuma there on the porch, an Aztec warrior muscled and youthful. My mother won't deny herself this newcomer.

And both witness as a Caribbean kind of Spanish is replaced by a more Mesoamerican one as the demographics of the neighborhood change in the eighties. A few years after knowing one another, of speaking their different kinds of Spanish, comes me. My father's only child, and my mother's third, a pleasant surprise to them both.

To this day, my ability to speak Spanish is hampered by the speech pathology I am put into as a kid. Each time I speak to my parents in my broken Spanish and I think they understand me. Though I still get the occasional lecture about how my Spanish keeps getting worse, they accept the way I speak. Both are sympathetic to the fact I am a second-generation kid, dwelling in a primarily English-speaking world. When I speak Spanish I have to think hard about what I am going to say, translating in real time from English into Spanish. Each time I do this, I remember those afternoons with the speech pathologist and the teachers who tell me not to speak Spanish. The days upon days of confusion. How inadequate I feel as I am

forced to speak and think differently. I don't even know yet who I am but I am being forced to change. Who am I? Where do belong? I, little Marcos, am a problem but I don't know why. Years later, as I read writers like Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, Jamaica Kincaid, and José Muñoz in undergrad, writers analyzing how race and white supremacy operate in the United States and beyond, operating as something we aspire after and dream of and die for, I come to learn something. These little places, these Main Street, U.S.A.s, quiet and quaint as they are, aren't all that nice, are little more than a nice dream white America dreams up for itself. And time will tell how much longer the dreamer can keep on dreaming.

MY FIRST MEMORY might have been a dream. I am sitting between my mother and father in their bed. They are asleep and I am watching TV. *Barney*, my favorite show, is playing and the song "John Jacob Jingleheimer Schmidt" is being sung. Why am I here at this hour watching *Barney*? Does *Barney* even play at these hours?

The lines between fact and fiction are hard to discern for the child. Like a dream, moments are fragmentary and elliptical, a this or that happening to your body, snatches of memories drifting in and out on the tide, down and down the stream until they are no more. I ask my grandmother what she remembers from her childhood and she just smiles, turning away from the TV for a second, then returning to it without

having spoken. Is this what happens when you have lived on the planet for eighty years? I want to believe my grandmother knows more than she is telling. I want to believe she is hiding these childhood memories because they are too intense, too hard to relive again, rather than the grim fact she may have simply forgotten them, that she can no longer relive their joy and their pain.

I want to be on my deathbed remembering my first memory—the one that might or might not be real. The darkness of the room, the TV's light upon my face, the heavy breathing of my parents. I want those details, all the ordinariness, at the final hour.



AN ABIGAIL LAUGHS at David's theory. It is a rapturous laugh. She believes what he is saying even more than he believes it himself. He has proof, he has evidence, he has the credentials giving legitimacy to what he is saying. It explains so much. She does not doubt him, nor contest his theory. She affirms it, builds onto it, advances it. His theory gives her the pleasure of reminding her she is Abigail, who resides in a cluster of houses upscale and secluded, whose dad will purchase her a spanking new car when she gets her permit to drive, whose life is a life best lived as a quarantine, a keeping out of all that is contrary to her and her being Abigail Baker.

His theory creates her laughter, her joy, her being Abigail in its fullness.

To sum up or simplify David's complex theory that he tells Abigail, while, unfortunately, in the process diminishing his rigorously thought-out theorizing, it would be this: Mexican people do not take showers because water was a scarcity for them in Mexico so they have evolved a natural aversion to it. As a substitute for this lack of hygiene, their solution, as he identifies it, is to take "Mexican showers." These showers are the dousing of the body in excessive amounts of fragrance. The odor of the Mexican is one so overbearing, so distinct, so swarming, it must be masked by those who have it. Those who have the scent do not want to be identified as a campesino nobody, some Pedro Schmo or Average Guillermo or Plain Maria. They want to be a knockoff Gucci, a counterfeit Chanel, a bogus Armani. They want to compensate for some lack, some not-being-something enough.

David's theory is as simple as that.

Overhearing his theory brings anxiety to the boy. He turns to his body. Does it smell like David's theory? Does it prove David's theory in any way? Too much fragrance suggests the boy is performing this ritual known as a "Mexican shower," and too little of it might mean risking potentially exposing himself as having the scent. David does not list any specificities of his theory so the boy is not sure how best to defend himself from it. How does it smell? Is the smell itself something unique

to Mexican people? How does the scent come about? Does some genetic code live in the blood causing the sweat glands to secrete a particular pheromone? How does David know it so well? The boy wants to ask him particulars but he is afraid David will turn the question against him—“*Why do you want to know? Scared you smell like one of yours?*”

This hypothetical *yours* halts him from questioning David’s theory. The imposed ownership, this being in a group against his will, this belonging exclusively to this *yours* he cannot really name but he knows is not of David’s kind, it is distinct from him and inferior to him. The *yours* functions to make a distance out of him. He wants belonging in the *ours*—“*Why you want to know? Ours is a smell nothing like theirs*”—and the belonging in not belonging to *theirs*.



YOU CAN COUNT how many students of color are in the New Egypt school system on two hands when I’m growing up there. Three or so Black students, one Asian, one Puerto Rican, three or so Mexicans, and one MexiRican. Our difference is stark, very visible amongst all the white. From the day I enter elementary school to the moment I finish twelfth grade on my way out to New York City for college, these white boys and girls make me feel my difference. They poke fun at my fat body, and touch me in ways I most definitely do not like. They make

jokes about immigrants and Mexicans. They question my sexuality and mock my femmeness. They make it well known being poor isn't cool. When I am not the victim of their direct assault, they say things amongst themselves. About Mexican people, disabled people, Black people, Asian people, queer people, Muslim people, trans people, all kinds of people who do not fit into their little world. I always sit by quietly. Not wanting to expose myself to more harm, to their public cruelty, to the physical violence they are capable of.

This goes on for more than a decade of my life. None of my family know this is happening, no one asks. My mother knows what white people are capable of but for some reason she doesn't inquire. My father has never even gone to a day of school so he has no idea of what to expect within those walls. I don't have many friends to tell what happens to me. Who, after all, wants this queer and fat and poor and brown boy who comes from the "Mexican ghetto" in their house? Who wants to be seen with someone like me? I am terribly alone as a child and teenager. An unfathomable kind of loneliness that, looking back now as an adult, I can't even imagine it, write it into existence. It seems foggy, the loneliness, almost unreal. All I know is every day, between the ages of ten and eighteen, I think of taking my life. I want it over. I want this nightmare to end. I want total and definitive peace.

Those hallways with the brightly colored lockers, the artwork on the brick walls, the well-mowed lawns, are haunted.

My childhood self lives there. That boy, that ghost, that yesterday, that Marcos. He wanders them now as I write this. Dazed and confused, afraid and ashamed, an anger building in him he will never be able to let go of. An anger and a pain he will hold onto that will make him question whether he is worthy of being loved, whether he is beautiful, whether he should even keep on living. Somehow, somehow, something in him wants to live. Some small kernel of hope. A hope that one day, Marcos, older Marcos, another Marcos in a different timeline, will be happy, will be free of this. He does keep on living but another self died there in those hallways. Or maybe he never even got to live in the first place.