

LA PERDIDA

PART TWO

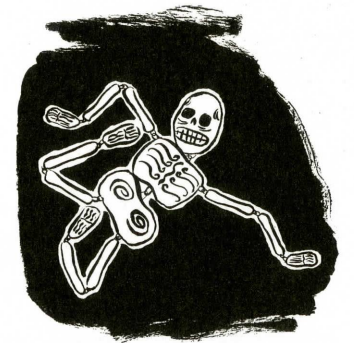
BY JESSICA ABEL





LA PERDIDA

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PART TWO

LA PERDIDA

for Matt.

La Perdida, part two
by Jessica Abel
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Thank you, Ernesto.

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In the first issue, Carla, in Chicago in February of 2001, remembers her arrival in Mexico City in February of 1999, when she stayed with her ex-boyfriend, Harry. As her "visit" extended from weeks into months, Carla faced the fact that she didn't want to return to the USA, while, at the same time, she and Harry become ever more impatient with each other. Carla spent her time seeing the sights and meeting several new friends, including a few expatriates; Memo, a would-be revolutionary; and Oscar, a young friend of Memo's. Romance began to bud between Carla and Oscar while she and Harry were at each other's throats. In mid-April, on the afternoon of a vicious fight between Harry and Carla, she became terribly sick.

All dialogue is in Spanish, unless <marked by arrow brackets>.

Fortunately, Harry was not so mad at me that he'd let me die of food poisoning in his own house. He got me to a doctor, he got me on antibiotics...



...and then, two weeks later, when I was on my feet again, he kicked me out.



My new place was in the plumbing district.

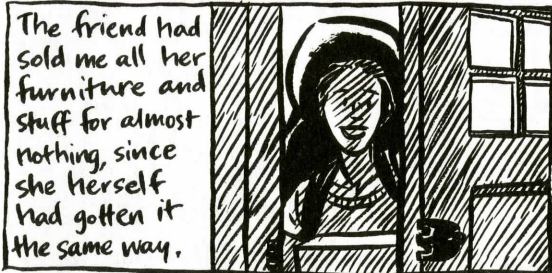
You entered through a 24-hour taqueria, up a staircase...



...and out into a foyer open to the sky.



Sylvia had hooked me up with it. A friend of hers was going back to the US to get her Master's.



The friend had sold me all her furniture and stuff for almost nothing, since she herself had gotten it the same way.



It still took pretty much all the cash I had left, though.

In fact, Sylvia had been basically responsible for the fact that I managed to stay in Mexico. She put me up for a few weeks on her couch ...



And she recommended me for a job teaching English at the school where I studied Spanish.



(They didn't ask for papers, and in return, didn't pay much.)

But we were also getting slightly sick of each other.



I did find my own roommate, though.



Hi Carla!

Liana! Welcome!

Rent wasn't too bad in that neighborhood, basically because it wasn't especially safe or insulated from raw Mexico City the way Harry's had been. It was old and noisy and full of people all the time. I thought it was absolutely incredible.



So, here we are ...

This is it!

Liana, however, was less thrilled.

And her parents, who lived in tidy, well-kept Del Valle, were appalled.



Oh, Liana, treasure... Are you sure??

Does she even speak Spanish?!



Hello Mrs. Ramos. My name is Carla.

Oh, uh... very nice to meet you, dear.



I'm Oscar. Pleased to meet you.

Nice to meet you, young man. Are you Carla's husband?

Papa!



Ha ha—no, he's my boyfriend.

He lives here?

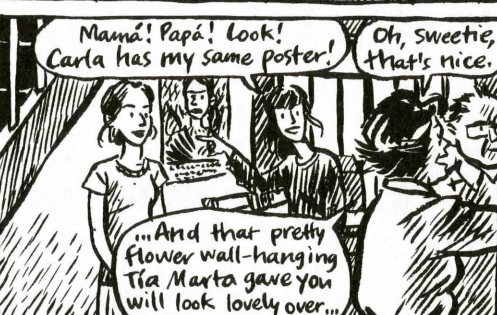
Oh, no. He's just visiting.

old reactionary...

Still, she was desperate to move out of her parents' house, and this place was pretty much all she could afford anyway.



Oh, Carla! I have that exact same Frida poster!



...And that pretty flower wall-hanging Tía Marta gave you will look lovely over...



So we had a housewarming party. Liana invited her spanish students and a few co-workers and relatives, and I invited Memo and Oscar and Sylvia and my other friends.



I have to jump in the shower.

OK.

We said nine o'clock, which, in Mexican Time, is about eleven. At 9:02, there was a knock at the door.



<Oh my god!> Liana!

Knock Knock

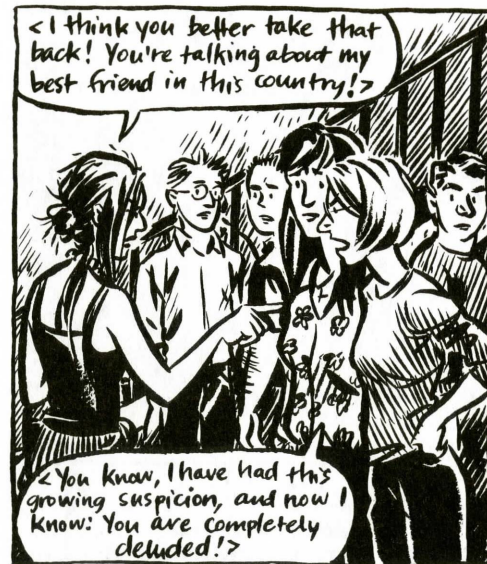






*Mexico City's English-language newspaper.





The sky in the afternoon of the late dry season—that is, late May and maybe early June—is the definition of "portentous".



The heat is dense and tiring, the air is as polluted as it gets, yellowish and smelly, and the thunderheads pile on themselves and rumble and groan every afternoon.



And in the morning, they're gone, only to gather again as it nears evening.



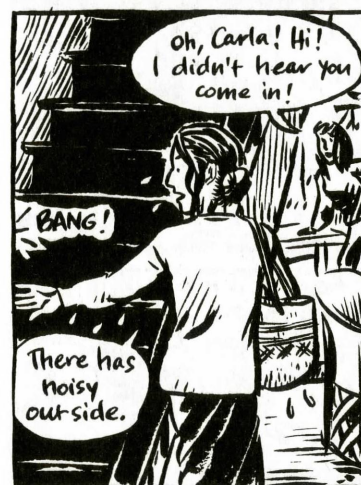
Waiting for the rain imbues the world with a feeling of yearning: you eat the dust while the crackle of electricity in the air promises relief that seems never to arrive.

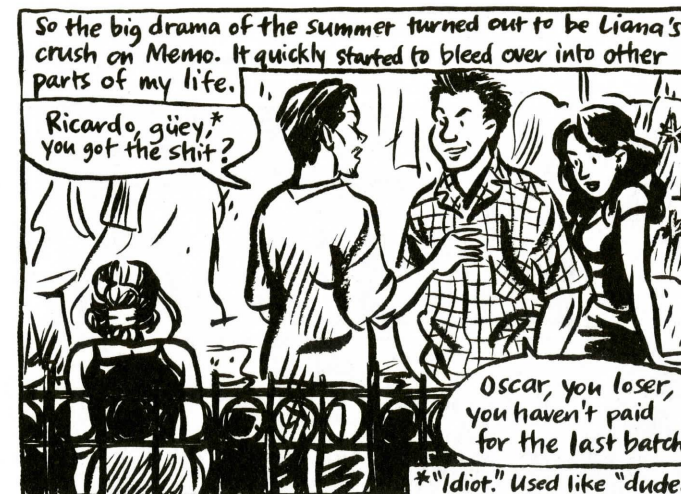
The first rainstorm of the rainy season was exhilarating: short and sharp, and rivers of runoff filled the streets instantaneously.



And then it was over, and the landscape absorbed the moisture like a dry sponge, and it was as if it had never happened.

But soon the rainy season started in earnest, and the air cooled, the plants were happy, and it was sweeter weather again—at least in the afternoons.





*"Idiot." Used like "dude." *"Asshole"



He ignored her and she watched him flirt with his new girl, Tyler, and just ate her heart out.



Yeah, maybe I should eat anyway.

AND she was a total square, which made our jobs a lot harder, but I couldn't just send her away! I felt responsible for her.



And so it went, for weeks.



He'll probably meet up with us again later, right, Carla?



<Hey pretty lady - Joo wan' a T-shirt?>



i viva che!



<Nice T-shirt?>



C'mon Carla!

Coming!



You guys! Someone will see!

*"shut up!"



Amor, give me una lana* for las chelas,** OK?

*"some money" ** "beers"



Don't you have any? I only have 40 pesos!

That's enough for a couple caguamas.*

*40-ounceers" (actually 1-liter)



Don't we have to go find Memo?

Ah, sí.

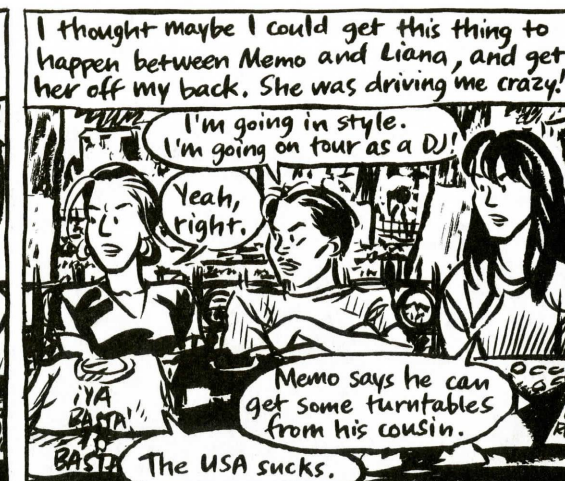


Oh my god! Kaneda!



Hi! What are you doing here?

Hola, Carla.



It was hardly easy, but for Memo's 35th birthday in late June, I made Liana swallow her prudishness and buy him some coke for the party, and she and Memo finally hooked up.



Check out Memo over there macking on the morena!*

Ha ha! He must be desperate!

*"brown-skinned woman"



Well, you see a pretty girl around for him to hook up with?

Hahaha!

Things were fine for a month or so, I guess, until Memo started specifically ~~not~~ inviting her to stuff.



...But can't you invite me?

I don't know if that would be a good idea...



It was ugly.

Is he going with another girl?

No, Liana, c'mon...



If he said he was going out alone, he is going out ALONE, woman!

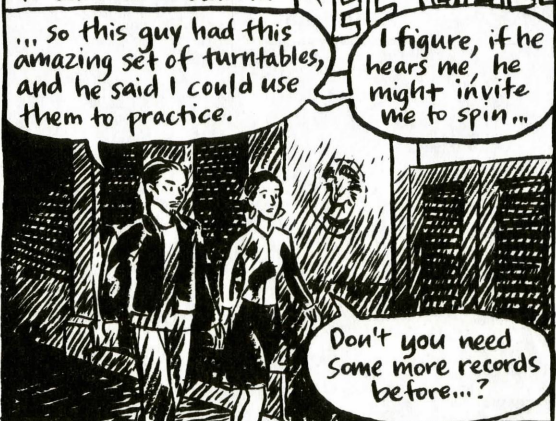
I would have to play 20 Questions whenever I got home. Oscar was over almost all the time, and he was no help.



But he showed up alone? You sure?

Ha ha ha ha ha!

Then, sometime in August, Oscar and I went to Cantina el Gallo...



...so this guy had this amazing set of turntables, and he said I could use them to practice.

I figure, if he hears me, he might invite me to spin...

Don't you need some more records before...?



Yeah, I know! But I'm building up ... I've got to get some money...

Did I ever tell you my brother's a DJ?



... And ran into Memo and Tomoko there.

What?? You've been holding out on me again?

<Oh fuck.>



You fucking gringa...

Oscar, shut up! Look, it's Memo with Tomoko!

So??



VEZA GRA ELO

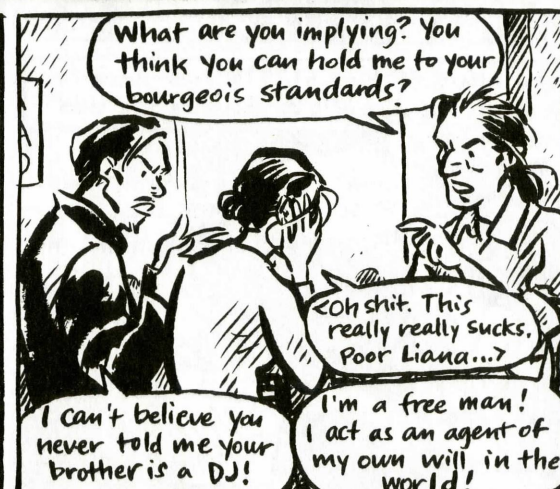
Carla, mi amor, how great to see you!

Memo, what are you doing with Tomoko?



What do you mean?

What about Liana?



What are you implying? You think you can hold me to your bourgeois standards?

<Oh shit. This really really sucks. Poor Liana...>

I can't believe you never told me your brother is a DJ!

I'm a free man! I act as an agent of my own will in the world!

I felt completely responsible. I couldn't decide at first whether it was my duty to tell her or to keep it from her, but in the end, I figured things would only get worse from here, so I told her. She had a big fight with Memo and broke up with him, not that he seemed to care.



He still came over all the time, just like it was nothing, and drove the poor girl to drink.



I felt almost as bad as she did about it, with the guilt. It still makes me cringe to think of it.



She couldn't hack it. The last week of August, she abruptly announced she was moving home.



She'd been living with me just over three months.



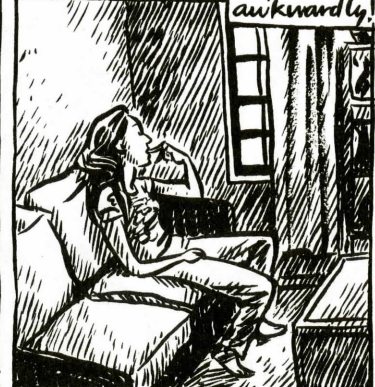
It was only much later that I realized that I should have asked Memo to stay away from the house.



Maybe if I had, she would have stayed, and things would have turned out differently.



I still saw Liana all the time at work, but we never said much more than "hi" awkwardly.



And then one day she quit, and I didn't see her anymore.

I couldn't make rent for September by myself, and, for a minute, I thought I might have to leave.



Wahh hahh... an' I HATE it there! Waaahh!



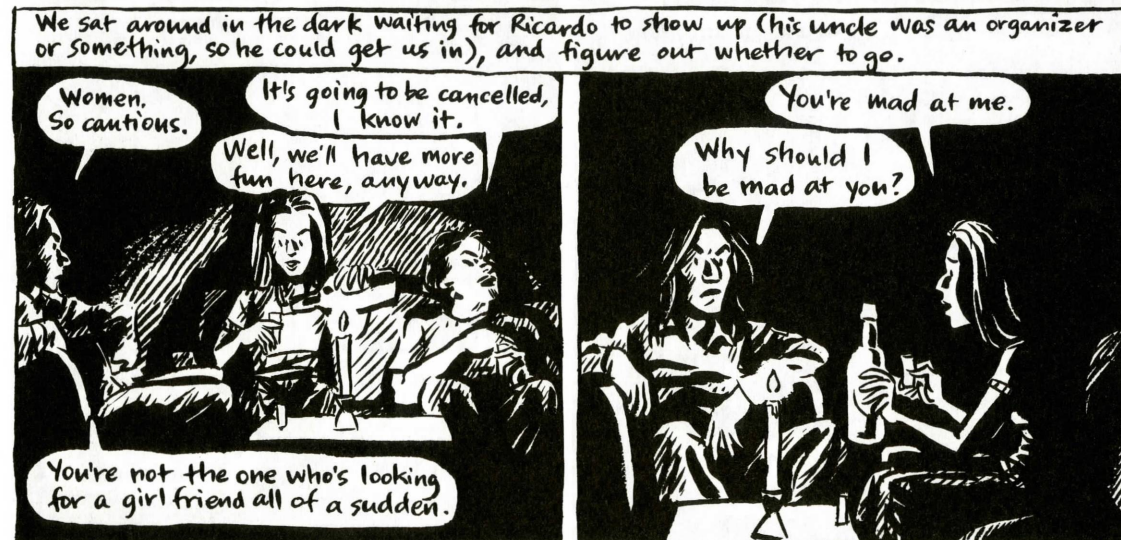
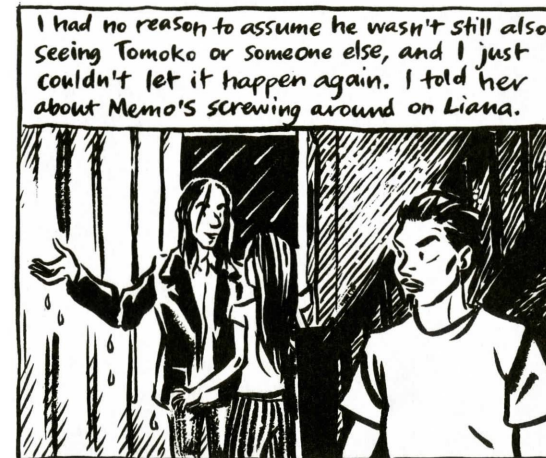
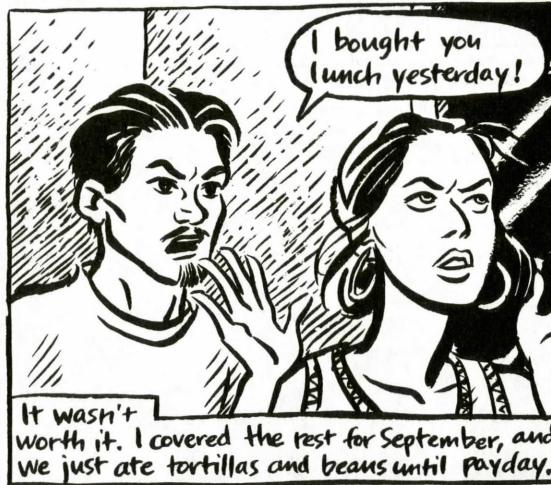
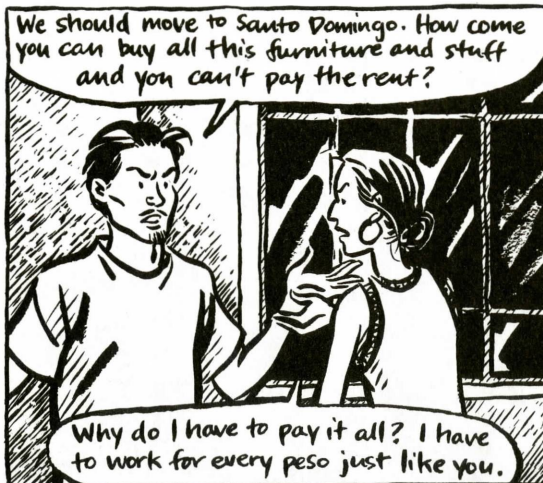
The thing was, Oscar was effectively living with me anyway, so I just asked him to move in for real, and pay rent.

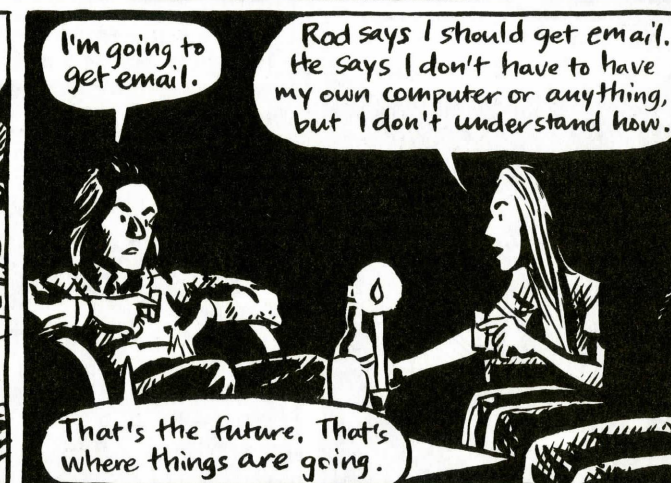
It seemed like a perfect solution to me. He had to work in his dad's car-stereo shop a few days a week to make the money, but he got it together...

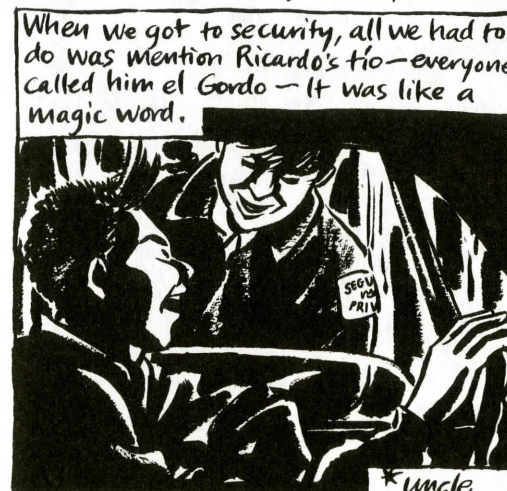
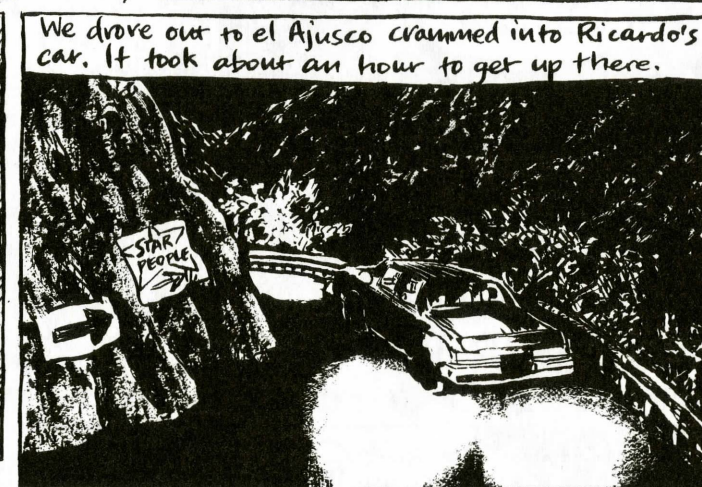
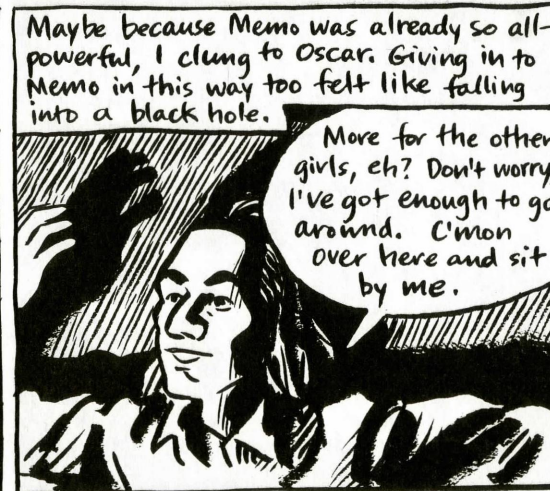
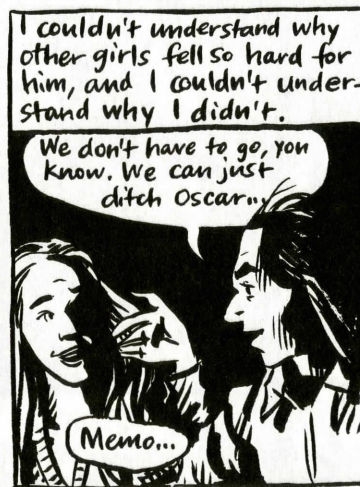
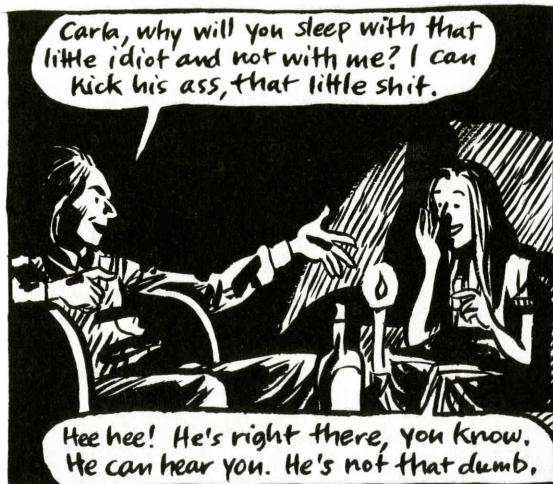


C'mon Oscar, how do you manage to sell drugs and still have no money?









The trees were huge and beautiful, but it was really dark, and there were lots of people wandering around back in the bushes.



I probably should have taken some ecstasy; it would have felt more friendly.



Oh look, there's Marisol.

Let's go find José!



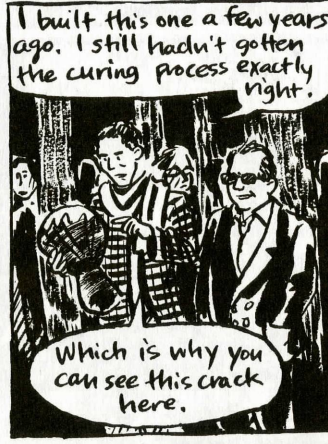
Where are your records?

Oh, they're in the car. Maybe he'll let me use his.



It's el Gordo! You've got to meet him!

It turns out el Gordo wasn't all that fat. Must have been a childhood nickname.



I built this one a few years ago. I still hadn't gotten the curing process exactly right.

Which is why you can see this crack here.



Ha ha, and this gets you the girls?

Shit yes.

Maybe I'll go into the drum business.



You've got enough business, my friend. And enough girls!

No such thing as enough girls.

Oh, look, it's oscarito. How is your lovely cousin Sara?



She's fine, sir. She's with Ricardo over there...

So, my nephew's here. Who's your beautiful friend?



This is my girlfriend, Carla.

She's an American. Her Spanish isn't too good.



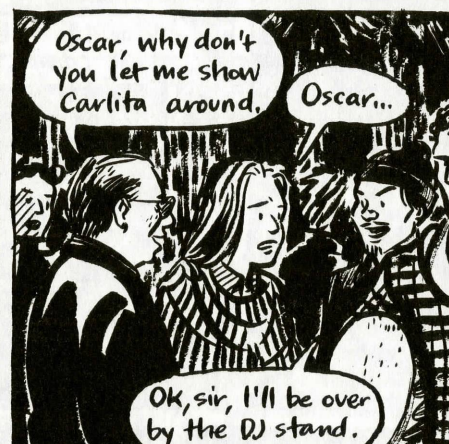
I'll speak slowly. Nice to meet you, precious.

Lovely hair you have there.



Thank you...

Skiss



Oscar, why don't you let me show Carlita around.

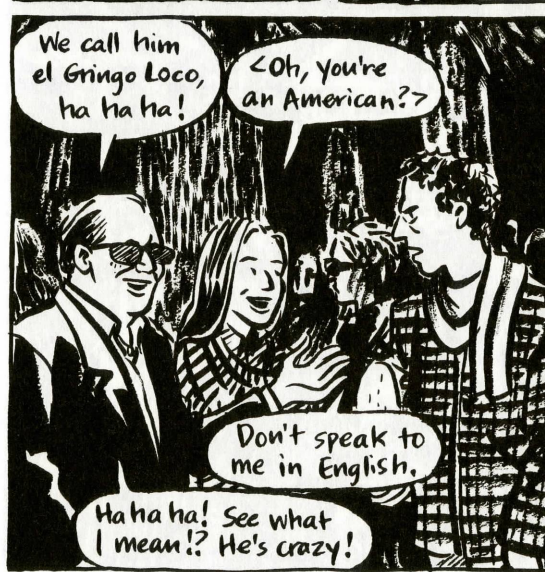
Oscar...

OK, sir, I'll be over by the DJ stand.



What pretty green eyes you have.

Have you met my friend Ray?

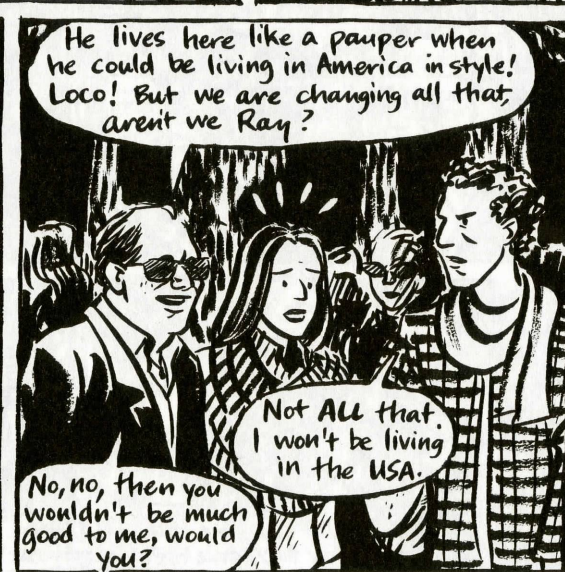


We call him el Gringo Loco, ha ha ha!

<Oh, you're an American?>

Don't speak to me in English.

Haha ha! See what I mean!? He's crazy!



He lives here like a pauper when he could be living in America in style! Loco! But we are changing all that, aren't we Ray?

Not ALL that. I won't be living in the USA.

No, no, then you wouldn't be much good to me, would you?



Carla, my dear, would you like some cocaine?

Um...



Oh, she doesn't understand. Cocaine?

Don't baby her. You should send the little tourist home.



Hahaha! Ray, you are too hard. Go beat up some ugly Americans. But leave the pretty ones for me!

Sure, I'll have some.



Oh, you do speak Spanish. Good.

Here, come behind the trees where not everyone will see.



I don't have enough for the whole crowd, not for free!

Here, you just turn this little thing, then...

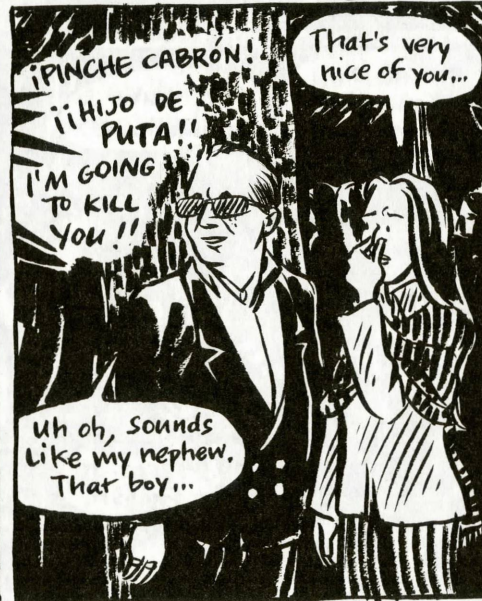


...that's it.



ooh, um...

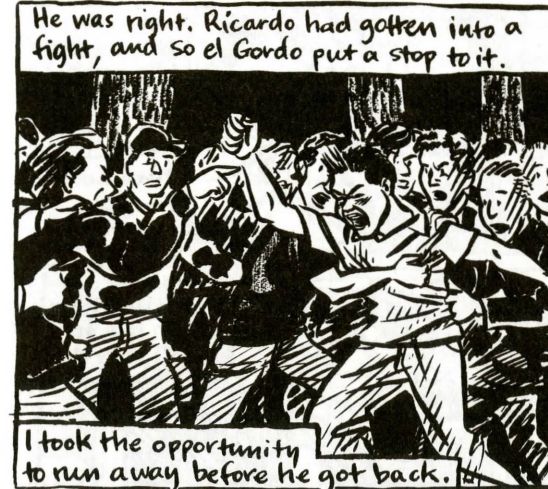
Would you like to go to dinner with me sometime, sweetheart?



¡PINCHE CABRÓN!
¡HIJO DE PUTA!!
I'M GOING TO KILL YOU!!

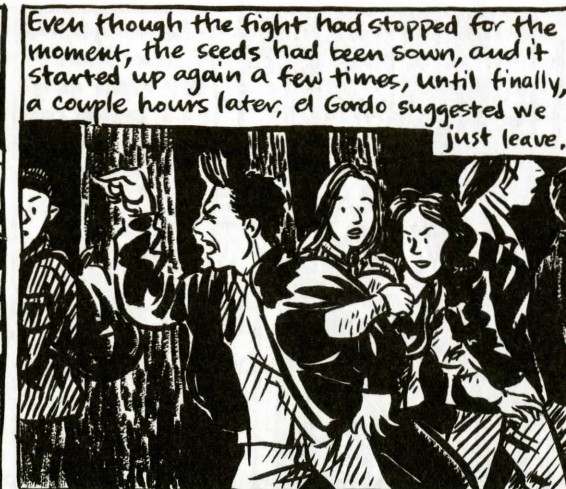
That's very nice of you...

uh oh, sounds like my nephew. That boy...

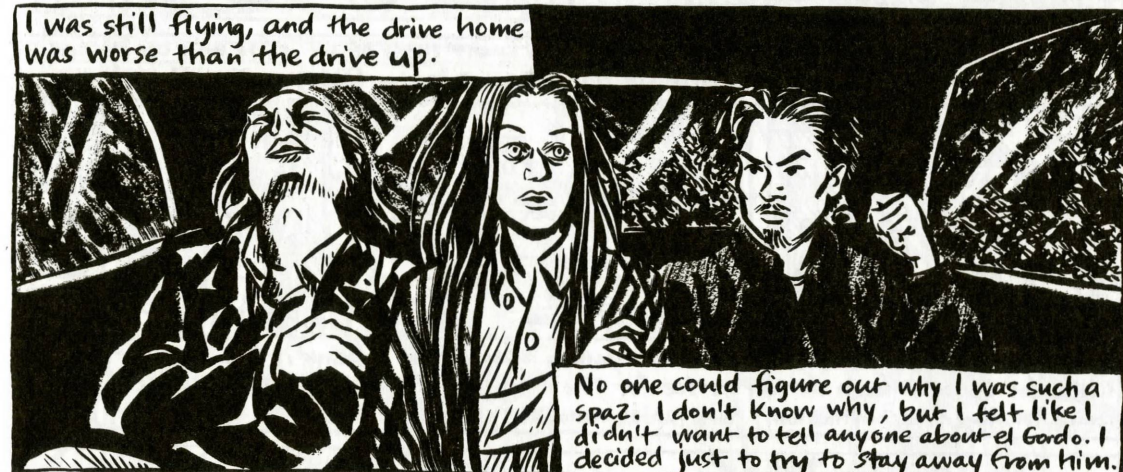


He was right. Ricardo had gotten into a fight, and so el Gordo put a stop to it.

I took the opportunity to run away before he got back.

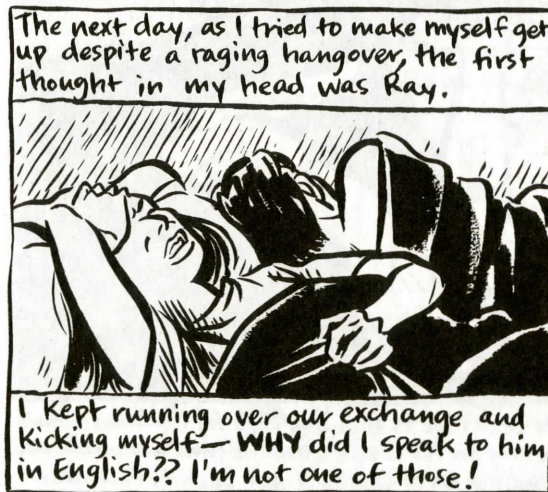


Even though the fight had stopped for the moment, the seeds had been sown, and it started up again a few times, until finally, a couple hours later, el Gordo suggested we just leave.



I was still flying, and the drive home was worse than the drive up.

No one could figure out why I was such a spaz. I don't know why, but I felt like I didn't want to tell anyone about el Gordo. I decided just to try to stay away from him.



The next day, as I tried to make myself get up despite a raging hangover, the first thought in my head was Ray.

I kept running over our exchange and kicking myself—WHY did I speak to him in English?? I'm not one of those!



All I could think of to explain my actions was that I was looking for an ally, someone to confirm that el Gordo was a scary creep. Man, did I look in the wrong place.



The thing is, and I knew this: One expat gringo in a crowd can be the exception to the rule, the cool American who proves everyone's lack of prejudices. But two gringos, speaking English, and suddenly you stand apart, where neither of us wanted to be.



And no one can spot an expat like another one, and no one was ever harder on me than another American, gone native.



For a long time, that's all that stuck with me from that night.

When it came time to pay October's rent, Oscar had spent most of what he had on records, beer, and coke. He came up with about 700 pesos, we had a fight, and I paid again.



But I was really broke this time. It was getting scary, and I think it finally sank in a little for Oscar when a cut-off notice for the electricity arrived, which would mean no juice for his (as-yet-phantom) turntables, among other things. We scraped it together, just.



I was looking for more classes to teach, but hadn't been able to find anything for the hours I had free. Poor sweet dumb Oscar: instead of just working for his dad, he tried to take a shortcut and sell some pot to some of Ricardo's regulars. He overcharged, so of course it got back to Ricardo.

I mean, I could have warned him. But he figured, hey, we're such good friends... I could have told him that Ricardo doesn't have that kind of friend.



He went down to Coyoacán that Saturday in mid-October, but I had a bunch of stuff to do for my classes, so I stayed home.



*that fucker"

Ricardo found him there, and laid into him like—you'd think he was the fucking mafia or something instead of some minor drug dealer. It was ridiculous.

I don't think Ricardo actually meant to hurt him, but he had such a short fuse; he probably just grabbed Oscar's shirt and ripped it by accident.



Understandably, though, he freaked Oscar's shit.



We're practically related and he does this to me?!



Do we have any beer?



You have a job, how come you don't have any money?





I don't think that: I just think I don't have any.

Hahaha... OK, look...



We've got some nice, refreshing water! We can check between the sofa cushions for change!



...Don't you have some T-shirts we could sell?

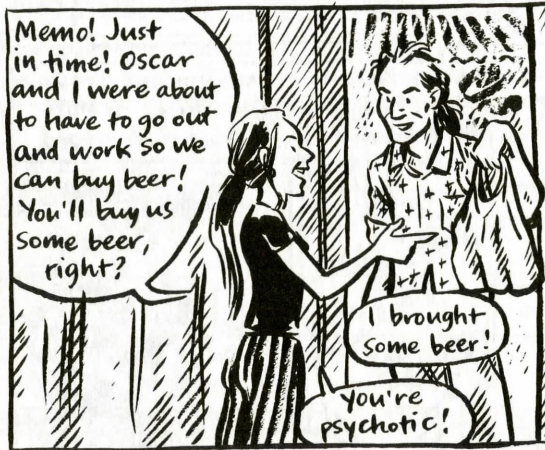
Oh yeah! I've got a few!



OK, then! Go put on a shirt and let's go over to the market and sell them!

I'll answer the door!

Knock knock



Memo! Just in time! Oscar and I were about to have to go out and work so we can buy beer! You'll buy us some beer, right?

I brought some beer!

You're psychotic!



You mean I'm psychic! Hahaha!

Poor Oscarito: Ricardo clean your clock for you?

Chinga tu madre*! That guy's crazy!

Hahaha!

*"fuck you"



You know what he's like, guiey. You gotta watch out for him.

He's supposed to be my cuate.*

*"homie"



He is your cuate, but you don't mess with him.

No shit.

C'mon you guys, let's go outside.



Do you ever go up on the roof?

Sometimes. You can see the church better from up there.

Let's go up.

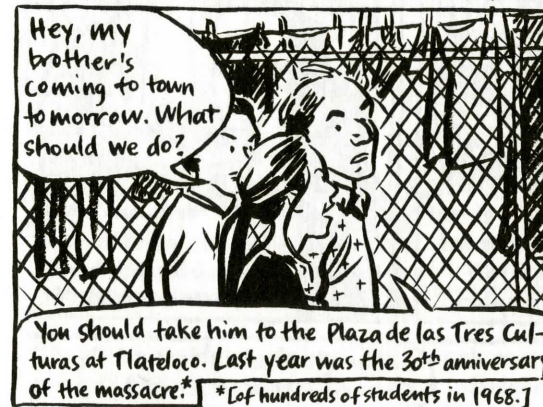


What's in that room?

Nothing. Some junk. I think it's supposed to be like the maid's room.

Most people, I think they just use it as a big closet. No one's ever up here except to hang clothes out. It's nice and solitary.

I like the view.



Hey, my brother's coming to town tomorrow. What should we do?

You should take him to the Plaza de las Tres Culturas at Tlateloco. Last year was the 30th anniversary of the massacre.* [of hundreds of students in 1968.]



We should go to Frida's house.

You are such a little bourgeois. You and your Frida...



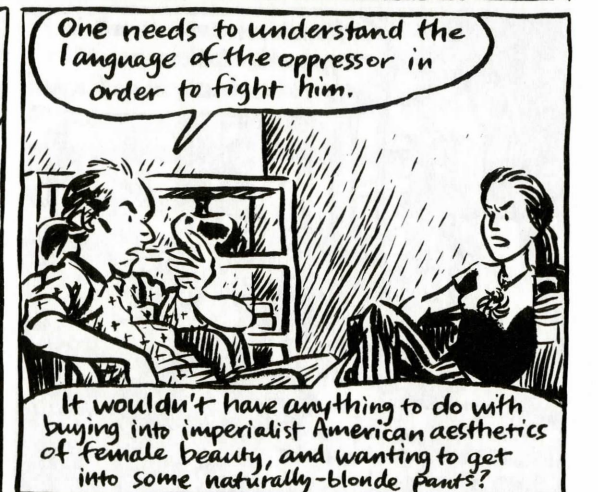
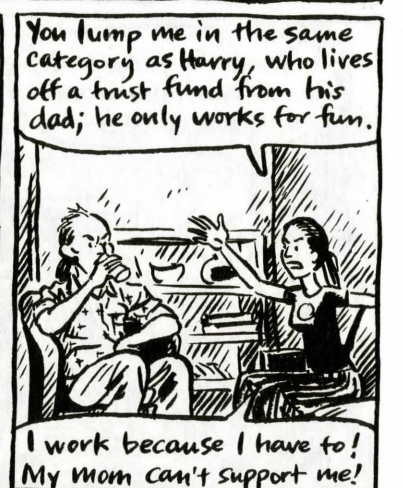
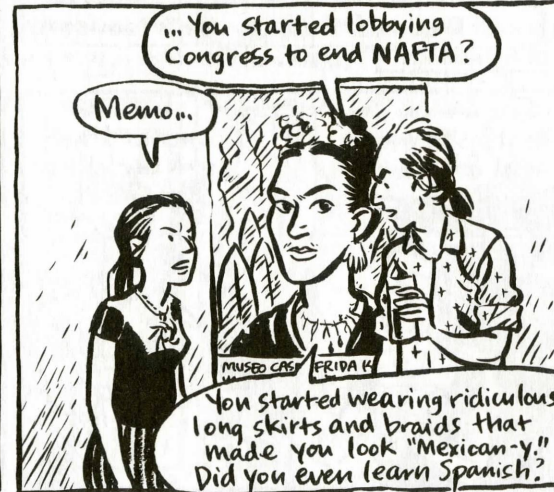
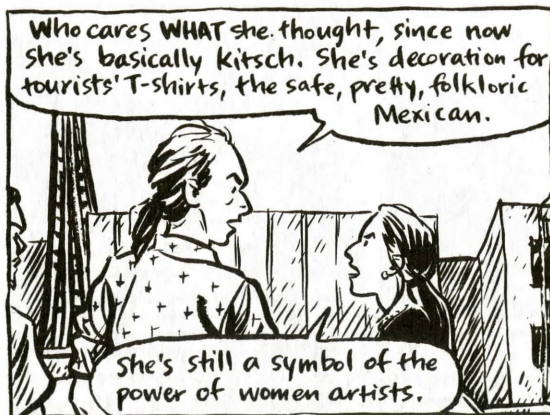
How can you say that? She was a total communist!

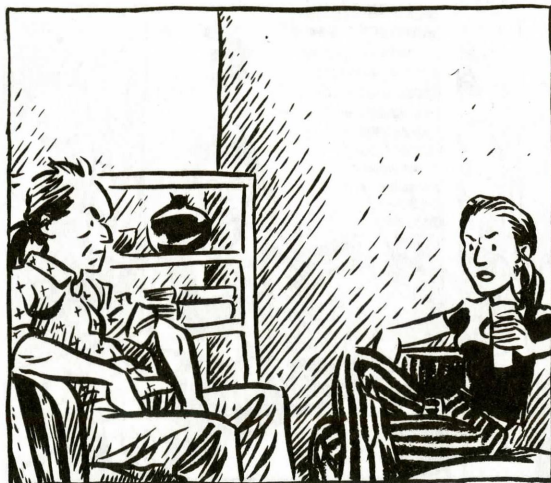
With her domestic staff and her elitist ideas.



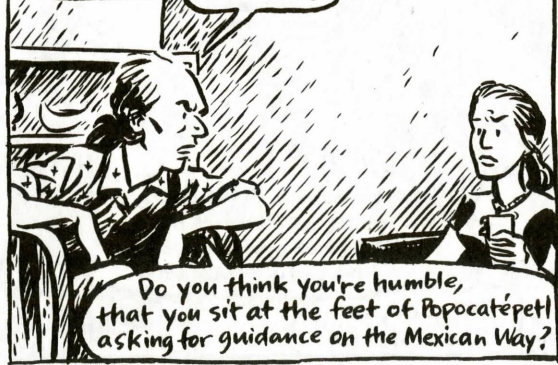
She was NOT an elitist! You don't know anything about her. She died while working on a portrait of Stalin!

It doesn't matter anyway...

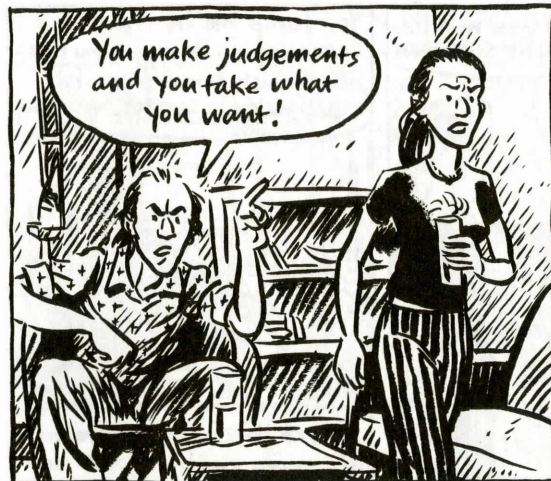




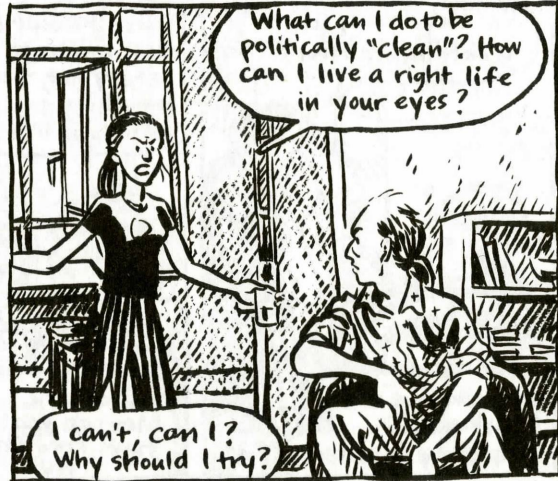
You come in here bringing your cultural assumptions, and then you think you can pick and choose the nice bits of our messy culture!



Do you think you're humble, that you sit at the feet of Popocatepetl asking for guidance on the Mexican Way?

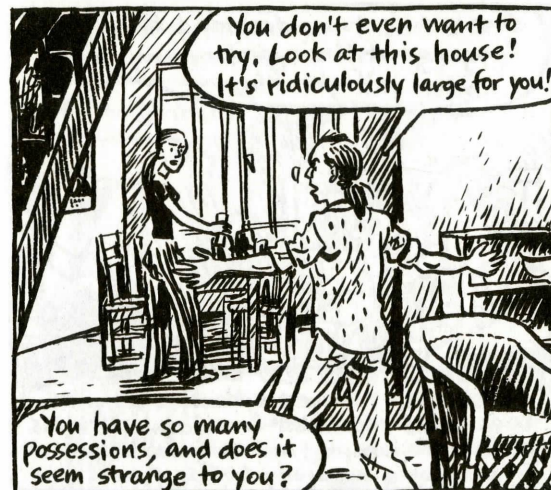


You make judgements and you take what you want!



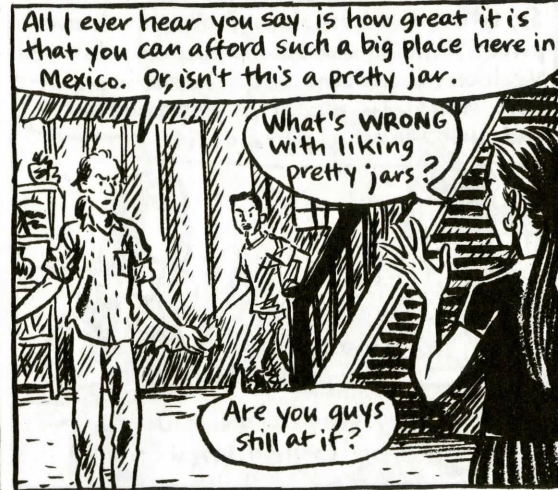
What can I do to be politically "clean"? How can I live a right life in your eyes?

I can't, can I? Why should I try?



You don't even want to try. Look at this house! It's ridiculously large for you!

You have so many possessions, and does it seem strange to you?



All I ever hear you say is how great it is that you can afford such a big place here in Mexico. Or, isn't this a pretty jar.

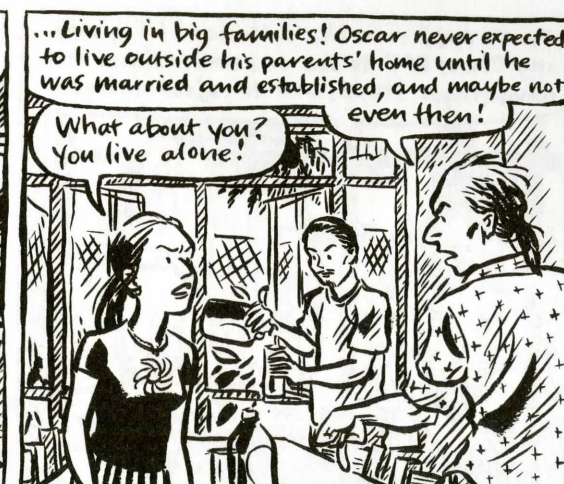
What's WRONG with liking pretty jars?

Are you guys still at it?



How can Oscar pay an equal share of a place like this? He never expected to live in an apartment this size!

Everyone else in the building is Mexican!

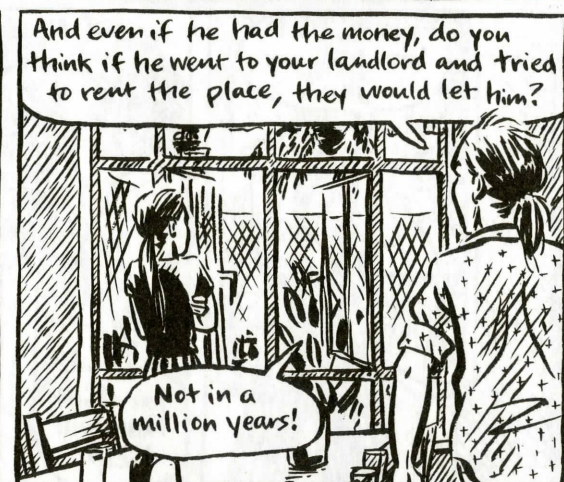


...Living in big families! Oscar never expected to live outside his parents' home until he was married and established, and maybe not even then!

What about you? You live alone!

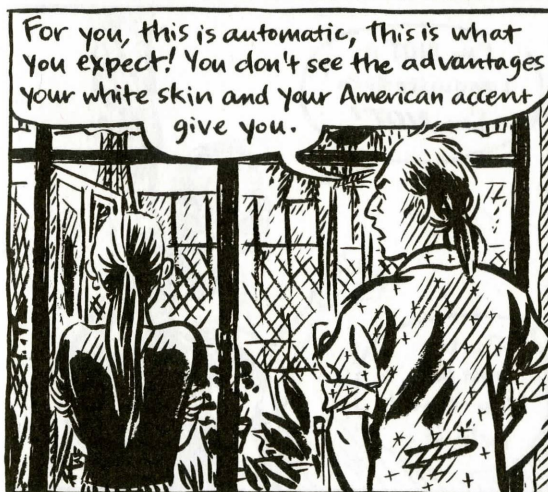


I'm fifteen years older than he is, and I only live by myself because my parents are in Michoacán!



And even if he had the money, do you think if he went to your landlord and tried to rent the place, they would let him?

Not in a million years!

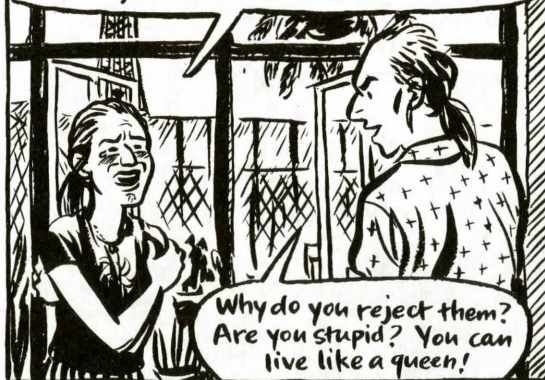


For you, this is automatic, This is what you expect! You don't see the advantages your white skin and your American accent give you.



You don't know what it is to be a conquistadora. But here you are.

I'm TRYING to be like a Mexican! I'm working EVERY DAY to see and understand the advantages I have, and to reject them...



Why do you reject them? Are you stupid? You can live like a queen!

But I don't want to live like a queen! I want to live like YOU!



You want to live like me?? I live like a bum! Ha ha ha ha!

Look, I'm breaking my jar!



No, don't do that. Don't be an idiot.



You think that will help?

Look, I hate Frida!



CRASH!!

I hate her, see!



Don't be a child, deal with reality.

I'm NOT a conquistadora! I'm NOT!



Carla, you are. You can't help it.







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