

# LA PERDIDA

PART ONE BY JESSICA ABEL

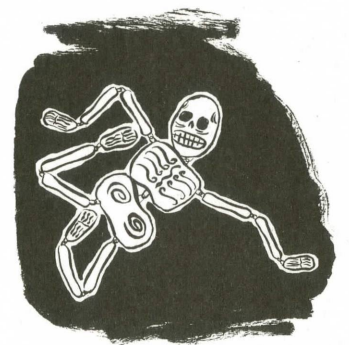






# LA PERDIDA

BY JESSICA ABEL



PART ONE



# LA PERDIDA

for Matt.

La Perdida, part one  
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Published by Gary Groth and Kim Thompson

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Fantagraphics Books, 7563 Lake City Way NE,  
Seattle WA 98115, USA, 1-800-657-1100.  
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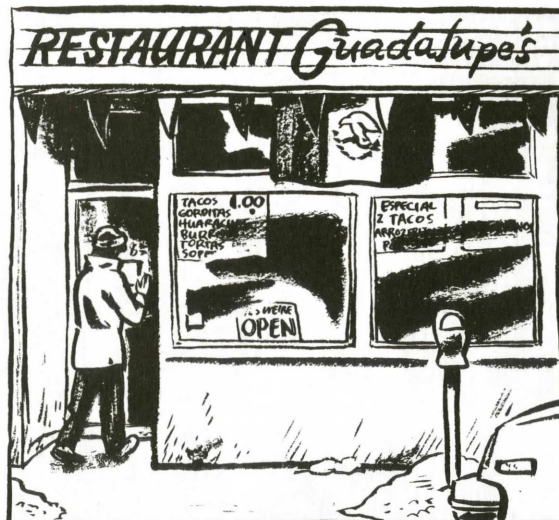
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first printing August 2001  
Printed in Canada

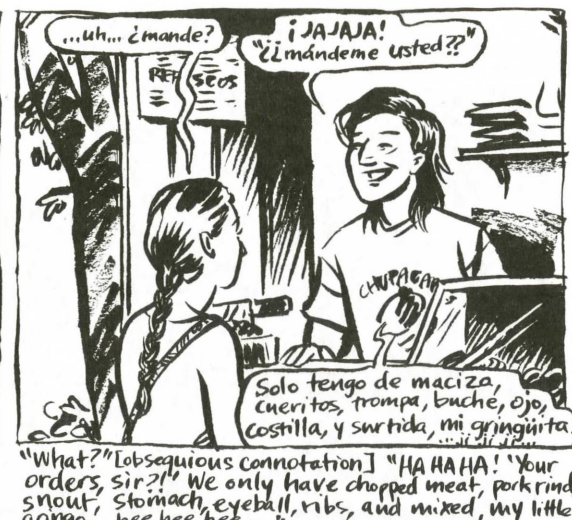








"Yes, a coke with ice and three broiled pork tacos, please." "Right away."









Jesus, I should know better than to come to a Mexican neighborhood.



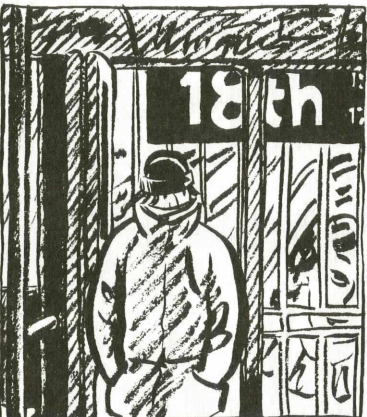
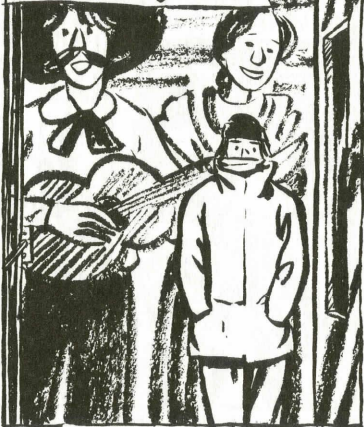
I should know that I won't feel safe — won't be safe.



All I wanted was a little taste of it, just to feel it a little bit.



But I'm an exile, and a target; I can never go back.



Can you be exiled from a place you don't come from?



I don't think you can. So I'm just "not permitted." That doesn't sound half so bad.

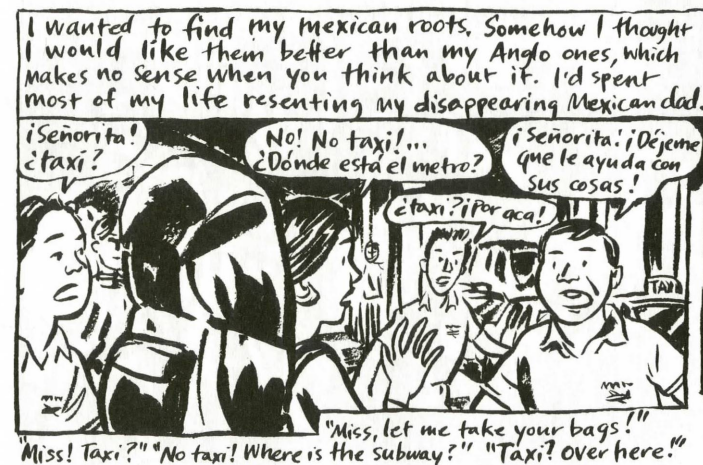
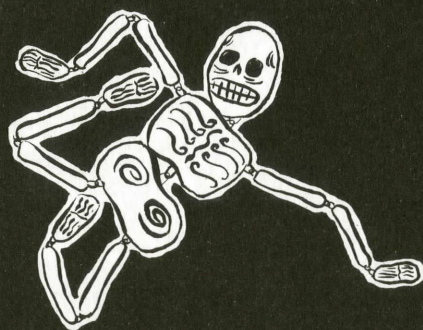


But I feel like an exile.



by  
Jessica  
Abel ©  
2001

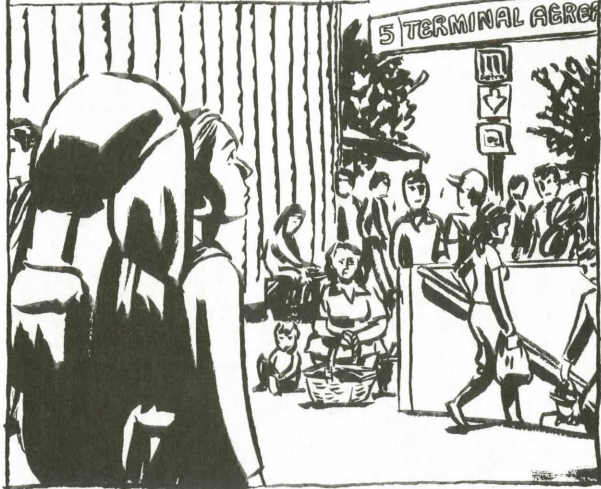




"Miss! Taxi?" "No taxi! Where is the subway?" "Taxi? Over here."



I didn't have money to speak of: a few hundred dollars. I didn't have a resident visa. I had never been south of Kansas City.



I just went.



My ex-boy friend Harry — well, not my ex-boy friend, exactly, but my ex-something anyway... he had moved down three months before.



As soon as he left...well, OK, to be honest, I knew before I met him that he was planning to move down there.



That was half the attraction. That's why I even got involved with him in the first place.



I emailed him that I was coming for a visit and he sent me brief and incomplete instructions on how to get to his house via metro & bus.



I couldn't figure out the bus, though, and I had a map, so I walked.



"What will you have?"

(It looked closer on the map.)



When I met Harry, it hadn't occurred to me to actually move to Mexico myself.



His plans just made a blonde frat-boy type into someone interesting, someone whose future lay in a place I wanted to know. I wanted a piece of him.

But, on the other hand, I offered him strings-free sex for the last few months he was in town.



He hardly told me to get lost.





In my email, I sort of implied that I would be staying just a few days.



"Did it hurt?... When you fell out of heaven?"

Considering our previous relationship, I suppose he was like, OK, at least I'll get laid, what the hell.



"What can we get you?"

I didn't think about it then, but to be honest with myself, in the back of my mind I think I planned it all along.



I had—have—a massive chip on my shoulder about East Coast blue-bloods like Harry (AKA Hamilton Emerson Powell III, son of banker, grandson of banker, great-grandson of asshole industrialist...).



"Get your oranges, two kilos for six pesos! Get your limes, five pesos, two melons, five pesos!"

Before I went down, a lot of people told me horror stories about Mexico City—



Horrible stuff that had happened to their friend's aunt's boss's son or something.



I ignored it as best I could, though I was spooked when I first got there. I mean, there are probably a million VW bug taxis in Mexico City, and I couldn't trust ANY of them?



But then I got to the Parque México, and I felt like I'd found the doorway



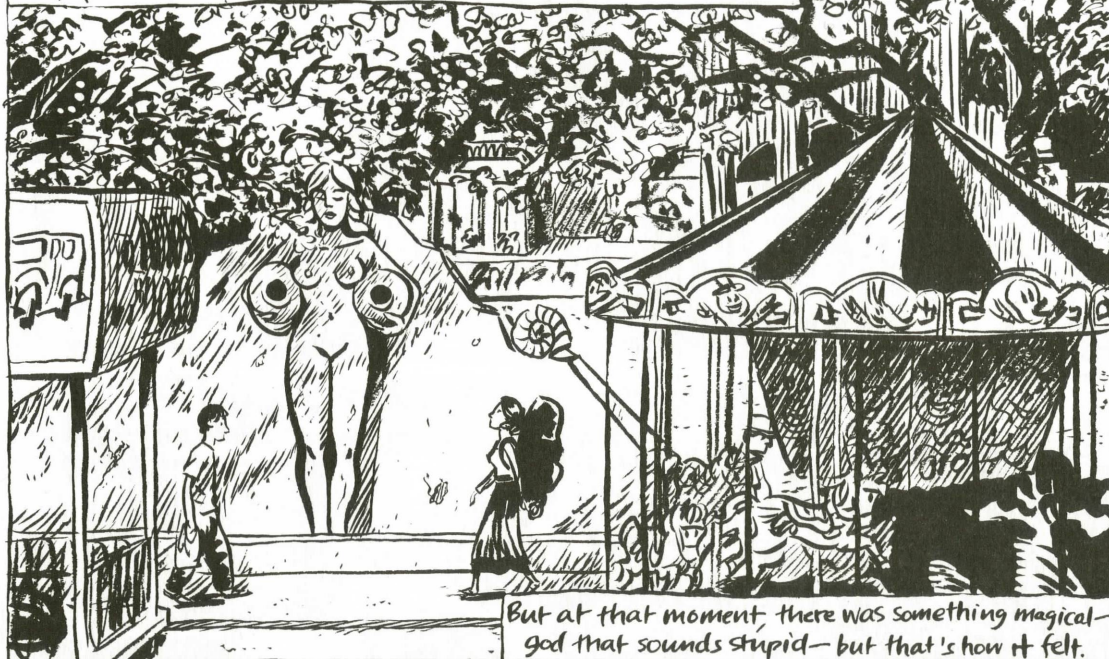
to the part I recognized from my imagination, where the hard facts about the crime



rate, and the pollution, and the US cultural imperialism just don't apply.



How can I explain it? You look at the facts, and it's not that special, really. Just a plain city park with some disused carnival rides in the middle.



But at that moment, there was something magical—god that sounds stupid—but that's how it felt.

I had this immediate feeling that everything would be OK, that I would find the Mexico I was looking for, that it still existed.

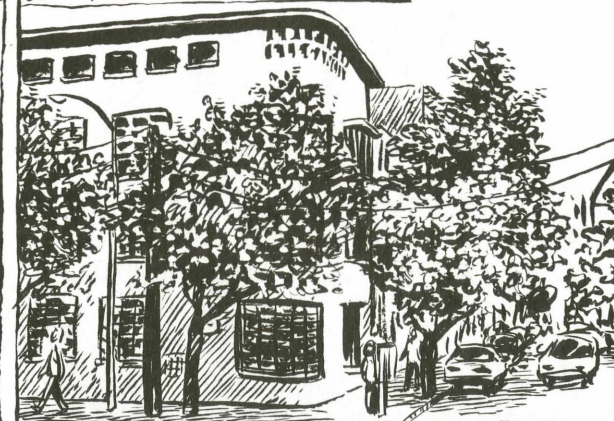


I'd never seen jacaranda before, and the jacaranda was blooming. Maybe that's the answer.

The thing I really can't understand is, despite everything, the magic that park possesses never disappeared.



Harry was living just off the park, and his building was just as beautiful and decrepit as all the others around.



But inside it was...



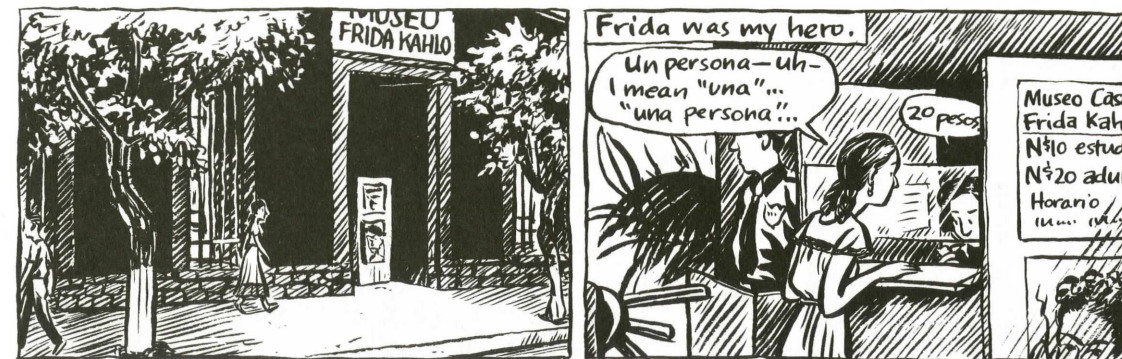
...well, it was only what I should have expected from Harry.



Come on in, take a load off.







Her paintings could make me almost cry. (Though her house didn't have much of the good stuff). I felt so clearly her passion for life and Mexico and the Mexican people.







Her heart-rending pain—physical because of the bus accident, and mental because she couldn't have children.

She was my ideal of an artist, a woman. All I wanted was to be more like her.



Not being Mexican, for another.



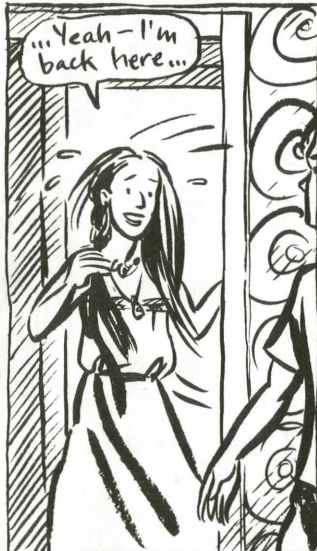
I mean, she was half-Mexican half-German like me, but I think growing up there counts.



And Diego's screwing around, of course.



But I was faced with a lot of obstacles. Not being able to draw, for one.



The next night, Harry took me to a party some acquaintances were throwing.

Chiapas! What were you doing in Chiapas? Have an exclusive with Subcomandante Marcos?



Nah, I was doing a story on how the Zapatistas are affecting this one trucking company. You know, yadda yadda. All the important stuff, right?

Come meet my ex, Carla. She's visiting for a few weeks. When are you leaving, by the way?



No, I mean more the fact that the objects are so badly curated and preserved: wall paint on the retablos, the diaries fading in direct light, the clothes falling apart on their hangers...



They were all journalists. I mean ALL. Also there were no Mexicans there that I could tell. Maybe one or two who were journalists. It was weird.

How're you liking it so far? She went to Frida's house yesterday. She's a Frida nut.



Me too. But isn't it kind of sad to you?



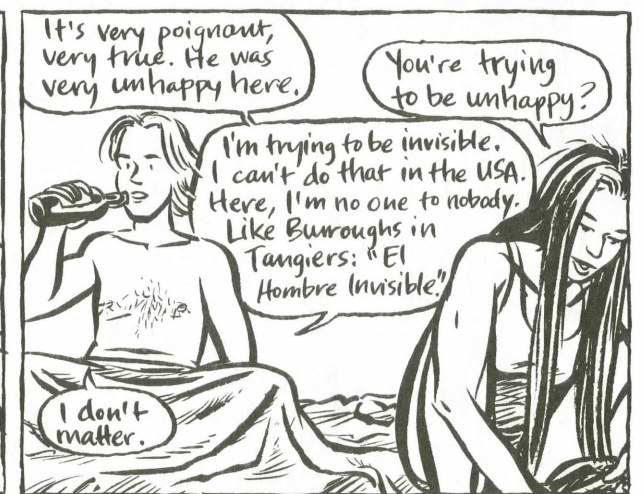
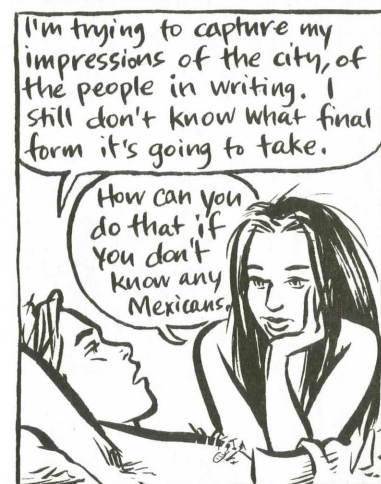
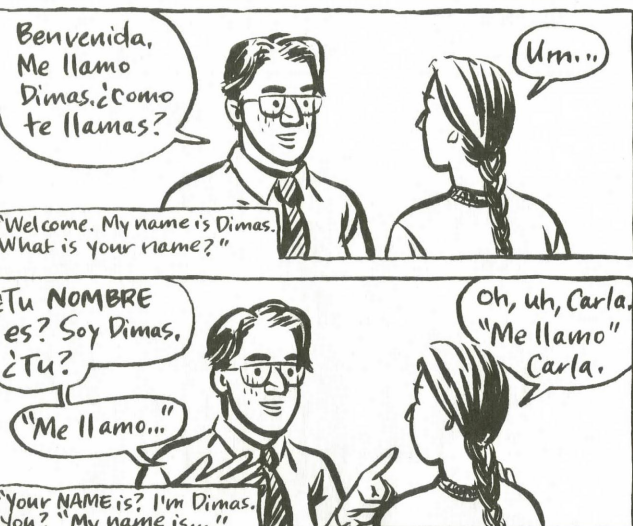
I know that feeling. I was like that my whole first year here.



Wow, that's so great! I wish I could stay forever!











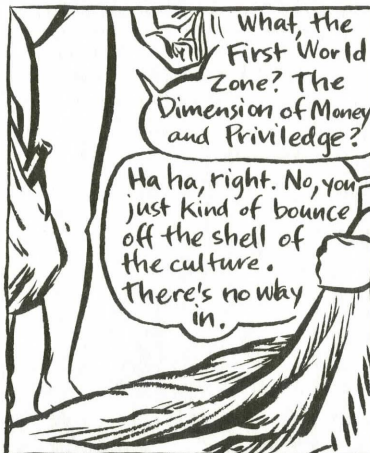
It's very freeing.

We can turn the beer bottles in at the liquor store, to my "buddy" there.



What about Sylvia and Bill and those guys?

The thing is, they don't count. You, me; ex-pats are all like ghosts here. We exist in another dimension.



What, the First World Zone? The Dimension of Money and Privilege?

Ha ha, right. No, you just kind of bounce off the shell of the culture. There's no way in.



That seems like kind of a cop out. And individuals they might have different ideas.

I'm just interested in distance, that's all.



People in the USA, they don't even know where the hell I am. I call people, and they're like, "what TIME zone is that" like I'm in Japan or something. It's like living on Mars. I'm so far away.



But the truth is, we're in Central Time; we're just across the border. It's a real place and people might have ideas about their own lives.

No, that's not the truth. The truth is what it feels like.



Oh, but speaking of "group events," Sylvia called - she wanted to invite you to an art opening. Some photo-journalist thing.



I was so busy. I was taking class and trying to see all the sights.

(Museo Templo Mayor)



(And I kept finding these gorgeous objects that I just had to have - which cut into my fast-dwindling funds.)



I think I hadn't been in the country two weeks when I met Memo at that photo exhibition.

You're going to love this show. The guy is a kind of "outsider" artist; he documents masked wrestling, but in this really interesting way.

Wrestling?



Masked wrestling. It's like a folk art. Sort of. It's not as popular as back in the 50s and 60s, when El Santo and Blue Demon were Kings, but it's still this incredible vernacular art form.



In retrospect, he must have been ridiculous, but I couldn't see it in him. He put me on the defensive right off.

You are Americans? You are visiting my country?

Yes! ...uh, yes, I'm visiting.

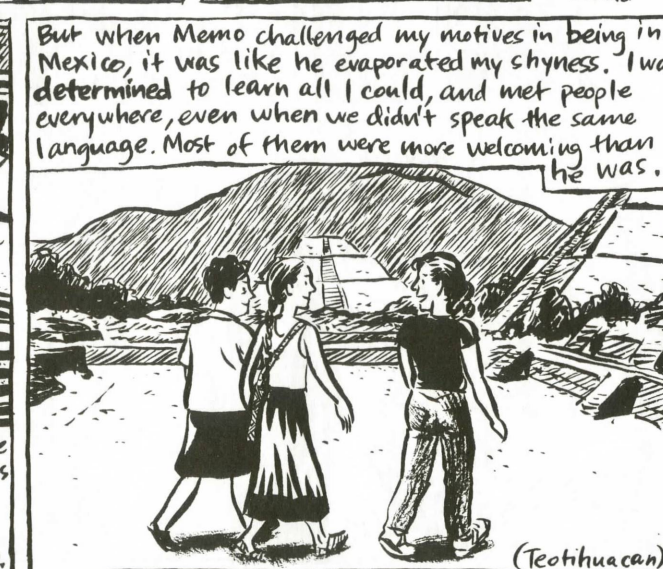
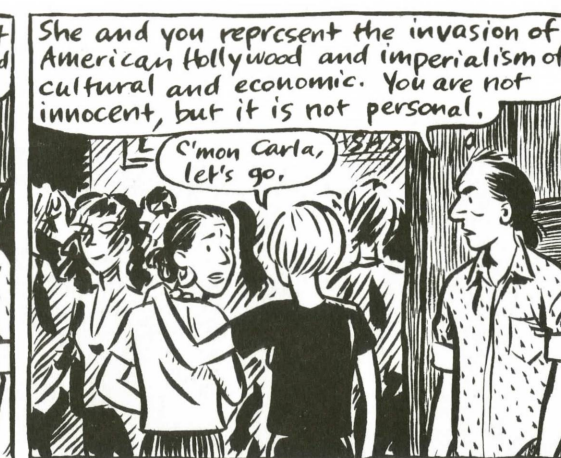
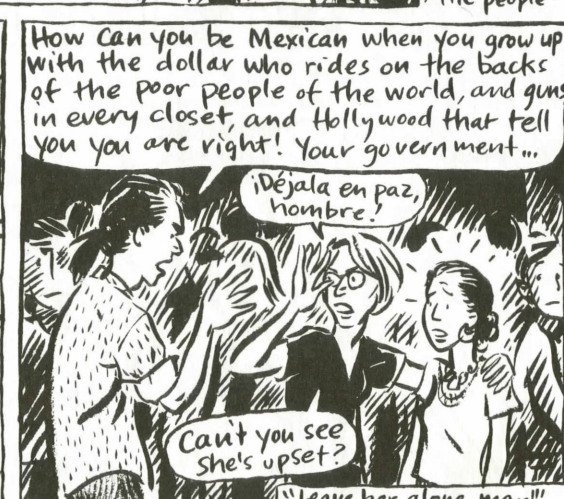
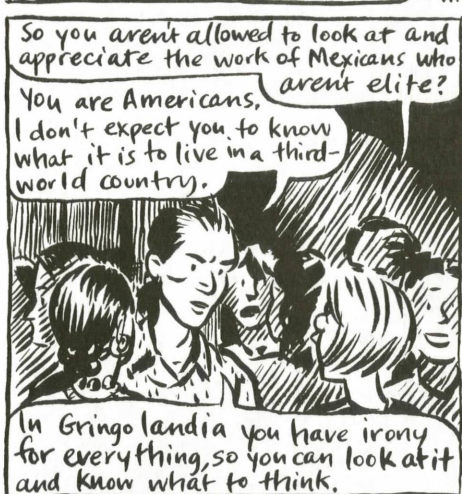
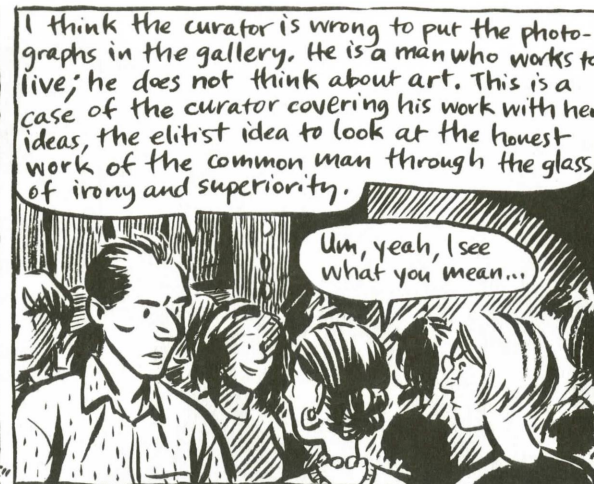
Actually, I live here.



Do you enjoy México? You will stay a long time?

Oh, I love it! I wish I could stay forever!









Harry wasn't getting much writing done, though I don't know if he cared.



Mostly, he drank, and things deteriorated.



Fuck you, chiquita! I'm doing just fine.

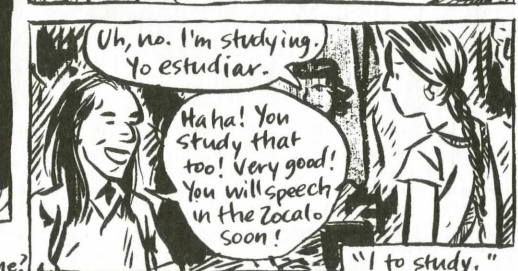


I debated with myself over it, but in the end, there wasn't much question: I went to find Memo at Tianqui's del Chopo that Saturday.



God, el Chopo. The market isn't easy to locate in the first place, and then, I mean, my style was hardly up to date, but even I could see it was a complete throwback! I loved it.

All the punk and goth kids in the city seemed to be there stocking up on cheap black clothes and bootleg hardcore cassettes. Memo was at his stand selling communist t-shirts and buttons.







Ey, media-Mexicana. I surprise that you come here after I fight with your friend.

Joo espik Espanish?

No, um, yo estudiar ahora.

"I to study now."



Está bien. ¿Qué haces aquí en México? Eres una artista?

Um... no compre... entiendo.

"That's good. What are you doing in Mexico? Are you an artist?"  
"I don't compre... understand."



¿Artista?

¿Yo?... ¿Artista? No!... ha ha ha!

Without Oscar, I might never have seen those guys again. Imagine.



I was still, technically, a tourist. And let's face it, I was acting like one, still checking off the Must-Do-In-Mexico list.

(Catedral Metropolitana)



I was so in love, though; I was delirious with Mexico. I was avoiding thinking about the inevitable, the ticket looming in my backpack, threatening the end, until finally I bit the bullet and looked. I had missed my plane by a week.

(The Zocalo)

That's when I knew I was staying.



I don't know why you have to keep your apartment so shitty all the time.

None of your business, frankly.



Well, I have to live with it too.

Oh, you do, do you. That's why you pay me rent instead of buying all your fucking folclórico crap all the time, right?



When ARE you leaving, anyway?

Um...

I'm, um, not...



What?!

What the fuck do you mean you're "not"?

Not soon, anyway.

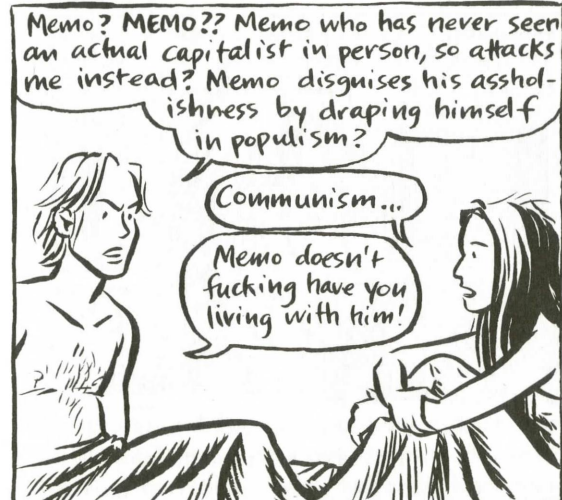


What happened to your flight?

It was, um, two weeks ago...

TWO WEEKS AGO??

I forgot about it, and then I thought it was a sign. Memo said...



Memo? MEMO?? Memo who has never seen an actual capitalist in person, so attacks me instead? Memo disguises his asshole-ness by draping himself in populism?

Communism...

Memo doesn't fucking have you living with him!



Well, I'm sure I could, except he lives with his parents...

Ha ha ha! Fucking great. It's not very communist of you to crash at the oppressor's pad, Carla.

From then on, I think we had that conversation about 27 times.



Harry's parents worried about him. You could tell because they called all the time. His mother set up a meeting for him with a big-time journalist at *Reforma*, a major city paper. I suppose with the notion that maybe he'd decide to be a reporter and get his act together.



Uh, I'm not sure. I'm a writer, and my mother thought, I think that you might have some advice for me?



That was her cue. She launched into a litany of the incredible difficulties of living in el Distrito Federal.

Please be aware that the police can be dangerous. Of course there are good people in the police, but they are radically underpaid and also under-trained and not educated. Small corruptions are common, and then there are those who have turned to crime to supplement their income.



Mariana Fernandez was an organizer of a freedom of the press organization (whose members, it seems, were regularly assassinated for writing the truth) that was affiliated with a human rights group that Harry's mother worked with. She must not have heard about the assassination part.



Well, this is a very dangerous city. You cannot be too careful here. I have a driver—I trust him because he's been with me for 20 years. Every day he picks me up at a different time, we take a different route to the office, I arrive at different times.



She progressed from telling us about air pollution and earthquakes to telling us about the desperation of the poor after the peso crash of '94.

The way she laid it out, if you looked at the bare facts, living in Mexico flew in the face of reason.



Of course, you must never take a taxi off the street—there are gangs, often involving off-duty police, who steal taxis and impersonate taxi drivers.

...Then when you get in, their associates jump in after you, steal your credit cards and ATM cards and kidnap you for hours while they use the cards. They usually beat their victims and leave them in a bad part of town.



Oh yes, kidnapping is a big problem here. Many wealthy people and members of their families are kidnapped for ransom. That is why they live behind high walls, have bodyguards and bullet-proof cars. Of course, sometimes it's their bodyguards who kidnap them.



You just have to be informed, and make decisions about what you will do with the information. But enjoy the city. It's a wonderful place.



But if none of the systems of power worked, or not well, then the day-to-day functioning of the city was, realistically looked at...

If the government was ineffectual and corrupt, you couldn't trust the police, and you could be kidnapped, robbed, or killed at any time without recourse, then what was life in the capital but some kind of mass hysteria on the part of the whole population?



But in the end, she was paradoxically encouraging.



Listen, you mustn't let all this ruin your experience here. This is a vibrant, exciting city, and you can't lock yourself in your house like the rich people and hope it goes away.

... an act of sheer faith, of agreeing not to examine the fabric of life too closely for fear that it might not hold.



But the funny thing is, it did hold. It does hold, despite the rips and tears.



I sort of hated her for her truth-telling, since it pit my desires against my judgement. But I was young, and young people are capable of remarkable faith in their own indestructability. For example, Harry just let it all roll off his back.



Ugh, what a doomsayer.



What if she's right?

Notthin' I can do about it, so why should I let it get to me?

Oscar may have been the reason I saw those guys again, but it was Memo who kept things interesting.



¡Carlita! ¡Ya estoy aquí, tu inamorado!

Vean, ¿no se ve toda triste y sola?

Aside from the whole political thing, where he made me feel like I was dumber even than a newborn baby, because I had WRONG ideas...



Lissen! She speak the Spanish!

Hda. ¿Cómo están?

¿Kiss.

el Espanish.

"Hi, how are you?"



¿No es linda? la Carlita.



He was easily more of a drunk than even Harry was. Qué mal que esté tan plana, porque si no sería una zorrita bonita.

Cálmate, güey, todavía es temprano.



Um, ¿qué los gusta tomar?

You invite us? So nice! Tequila!

Why you be nice today, yesterday you not call me?

"What likes to have you to drink?"



Um, yo llamo, pero tu abuela no quiere...

Don't talk about my abuelita! ¡Ella es una santa!



¡Más te vale no hablar mal de ella con tu sucia boca!

¡Cállate güey! ¡Contrólate!



¿Qué me controle? Chinga tu madre, pendejete. Puedo hacer lo que yo quiera.

O.K., a.k., ya estuvo.

Ahora sí te tienes que ir.

"I call, but your grandmother doesn't want..." "She is a saint!"

"You better not talk bad about her with your slutty mouth!" "Shut up man! You're out of control!"

"Out of control? Fuck you, PIP-Squeak. I can do what I want." "OK, OK. That's it. You've really got to go!"



¡Me voy si quiero!

Tiene que irse. He borracho. He go.

Oh, um...

¡Suéltame, indio!

"I'll go if I want to!" "He has to go. He's drunk" "Get your hands off me, peasant!"



I couldn't believe he was putting Memo in a taxi! At night! On the street!

Uh, um, you're sure this's safe?

¿Qué? Lo estoy mandando a casa.

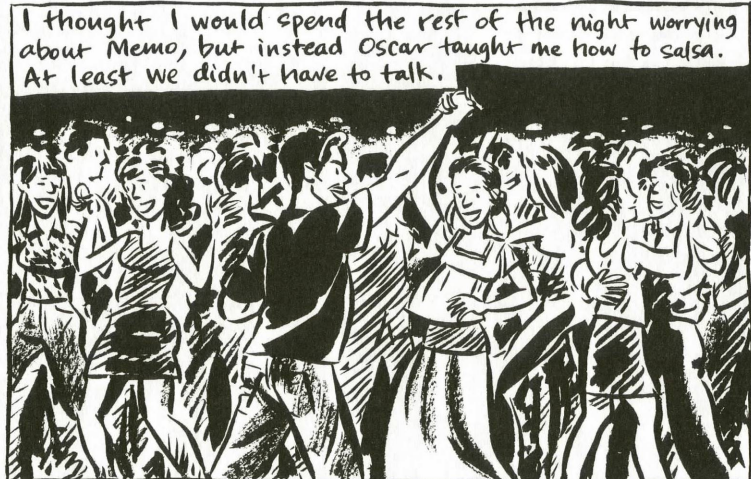
The taxi? OK?

"What? I'm sending him home."



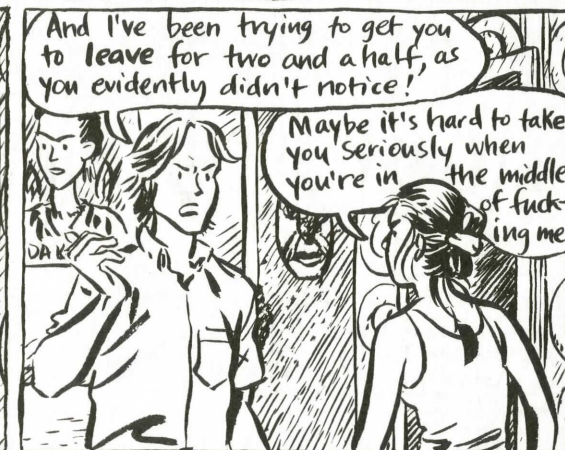
Sí, O.K. Go house.

If you say so...

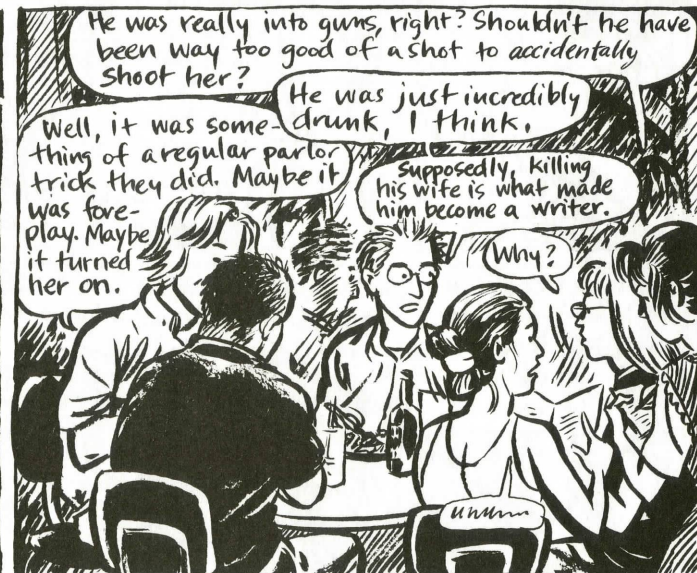
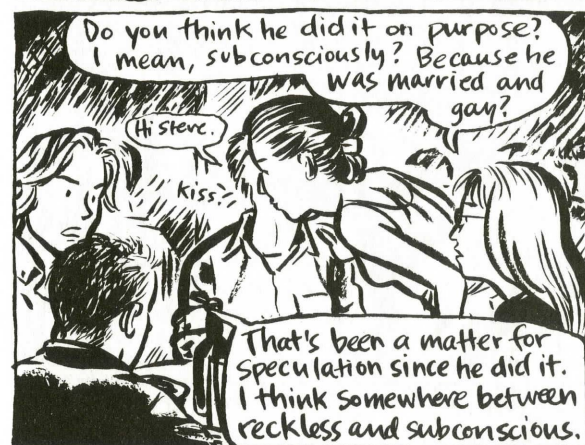


I thought I would spend the rest of the night worrying about Memo, but instead Oscar taught me how to salsa. At least we didn't have to talk.

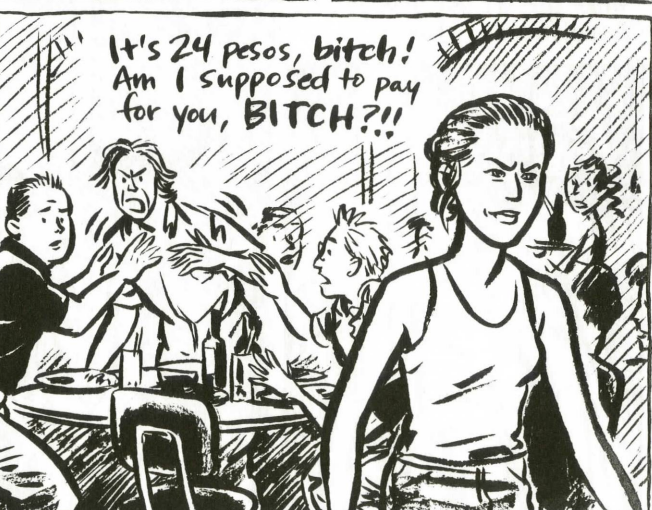
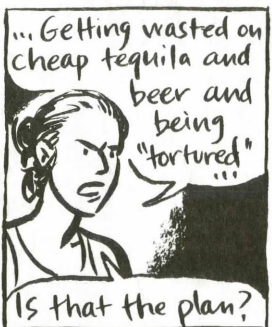
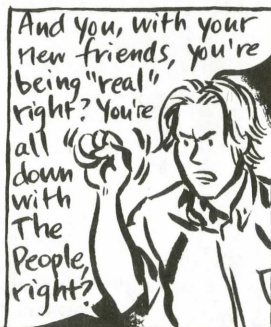
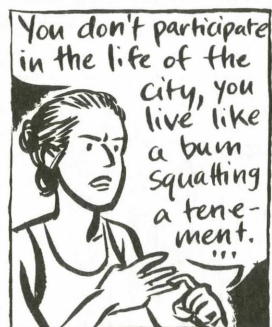








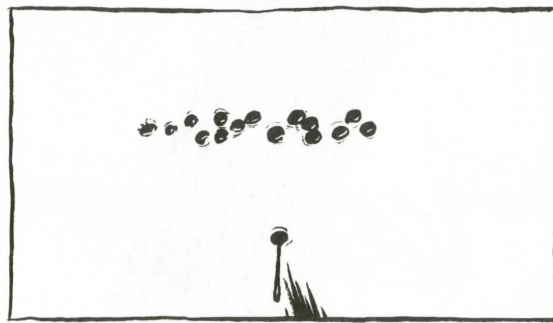
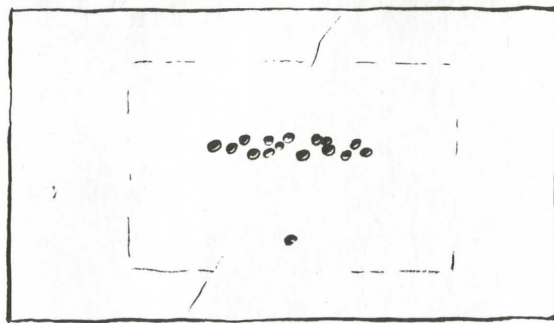
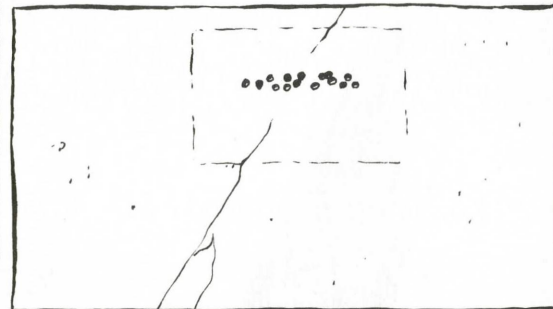




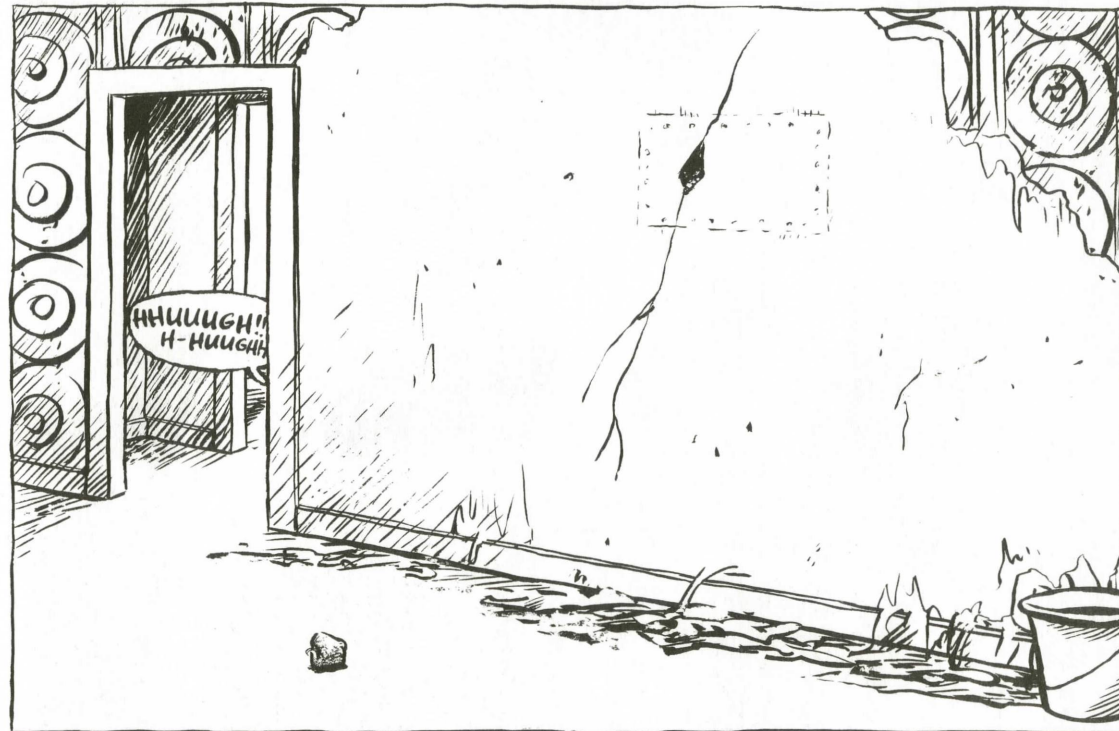




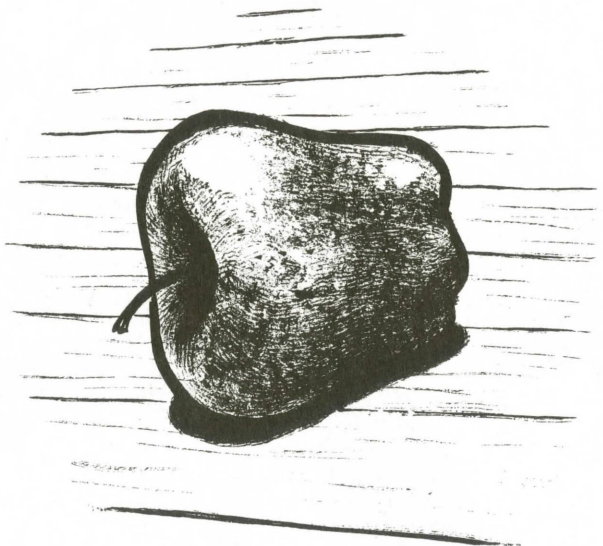
"What can we get you, miss?"  
"A melon-ade, please."







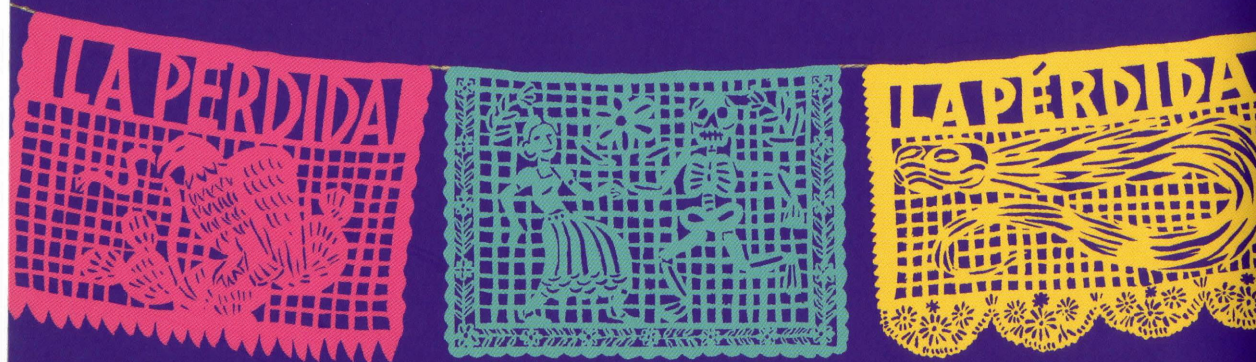












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