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Young Adult Fiction

**A Good Long Way**
Rene Saldana Jr.
Arte Público
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After coming in past curfew yet again, Beto's usual argument with his father takes a violent turn. He has been threatening to run away for weeks, and now Beto takes off into the night, deserting his parents and his younger brother Roelito. In the latest novella by Rene Saldana, Jr., *A Good Long Way* chronicles the rest of that night and the next day, as three teens, Beto, Roe, and Beto's friend Jessy, learn that growing up can be harder than they had ever imagined.

Told in alternating point-of-views, a feature that is essential to the book's style, Saldana shows how Beto's impulsive decision stirs up deeply-held emotions in the characters, and how each has to come to terms with anger, hurt, and insecurity before they can take their next steps into the future. Beto wrestles with his guilt about the fight while he craves respect from his overprotective father. Roelito, a bright, ambitious boy, feels completely betrayed by his brother's actions, but also torn between his loyalty to his brother and his parents. A budding artist, Jessy reflects on her own misguided attempts to run away from her troubled home life. While each character experiences a unique set of circumstances, Saldana has created multilayered, meaningful parallels in their journeys. Each struggles with changing family dynamics, external expectations, and the realization that their own actions will dictate their future.

These universal themes are reflected in authentic ways, and will appeal to teens, although the reading level may allow the book to be read by a slightly younger age. Saldana, who has authored three other books, including the Junior Library Guild Selection *The Whole Sky Full of Stars*, also excels at creating round, realistic characters, an especially difficult feat in a shorter work. While featuring South Texas teens, his work will appeal to many readers, and will resonate with anyone who has felt the range of emotions that often come up when dealing with family.

While the novel's resolutions might appear slightly idealistic to some, Saldana shows

how love, communication, and mutual respect can really help repair relationships, and that despite hardships, inner strength and conviction can drive teens to reach their potential. A poignant, brief novel that leaves a lasting impression, *A Good Long Way* is a meaningful read for teens by an author with a deep understanding of the struggles and rewards of growing up.

*Alicia Sondhi*