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Autobiography & Memoir

Madre & I: A Memoir of Our Immigrant Lives
Guillermo Reyes
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He may have been a bastard, but he had his father's name. That counted for something. It elevated him a notch above his mother and grandmother in the legitimacy ranks. They were also illegitimate children, but bore the matrilineal name. Having his father's name made him *el hijo natural*, a "child born of nature." It was just the first of many labels Reyes would hold.

Reyes, a theater professor at the University of Arizona and author of the play *Men on the Verge of a His-panic Breakdown*, chronicles the journey that led him and his mother to leave their native Chile for the United States and attempt to discover their identities in this new home. His life, marked by anxiety and an inability to connect socially with others, is contrasted with that of his mother, Maria, a woman who was always ready for adventure.

After moving to the US, Maria worked as a maid in Hollywood. When she discovered that her friend was working for a famous director who had just won an Oscar, she convinced the woman to let her come along on the next job and take pictures of each other holding the Oscar. Reyes, on the other hand, preferred to stay home and watch Oscar-winning movies on television.

As a teenager Reyes developed body dysmorphic disorder, an anxiety about his body that kept him in long pants and long-sleeved shirts and prevented him from going to pools or beaches where he would be expected to show any more of his body than his face and hands. Added to the already complex mixture of his immigrant status, illegitimacy, and gayness, Reyes was paralyzed socially, constantly afraid one of his many secrets would be found out. "I was my only companion, and I was clearly the wrong company for myself."

Reyes introduces readers to Chilean culture and history, the power of an anxiety disorder, and the feelings of marginalization that accompany status as an immigrant and a gay man. His tendency to jump around in time and place throughout the book can be distracting at times, but his openness in discussing the unique position he holds in society gives the reader insights into worlds one may not otherwise see. *Madre & I* is more than a coming-of-age story;

it is a testament to coming to terms with the myriad labels placed on Reyes and moving beyond them to define who he is as a singular individual.

Christine Canfield