

## Only Pieces

**Edd Tello**

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When Edgar was small, he and his father built puzzles together. Each piece had its own special place; if one small piece was missing, the puzzle would be forever incomplete. And in Edd Tello's novel-in-verse *Only Pieces*, Edgar's father had plans for his son that are typical of a traditional Mexican American family. These plans do not include hearing that Edgar is gay—a puzzle piece that would not fit.

Edgar's mother knows his secret, but she's uncomfortable with it. She tells him “*mijo*, you're not gay. You're just confused.” Wary of her husband's anger, she warns Edgar not to come out. Edgar longs to be free to be himself, with no secrets and no shame, but he heeds his mother's warning: coming out to his macho father could destroy their fragile family.

The book's short lines are spaced like poetry on the page, resulting in both intimacy and space to breathe. They touch on elemental fears over belonging and survival. Edgar's stressed, fearful parents strive to make a better life while undocumented in an unkind land. Their relationships are strained by secrets. But there's also the beauty of first love: Edgar, who keeps to himself and writes poetry, is drawn to Alex, a popular football player and a piece from a “different puzzle.”

The growing attraction between the boys is handled with sensitivity. Alex confronts what it means to risk his image, and Edgar weighs his need to live authentically against his feelings that he is responsible for keeping his family together. When affirmation comes, it's from unexpected sources. *Only Pieces* is a satisfying novel-in-verse about the different types of love that bind diverse people together to form a beautiful whole.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May / June 2022)

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