



AS WELL AS GIVING BATHS FOR A LIVING IN THOSE DAYS, CHELO WAS ALSO A MIDWIFE. SHE CAN TELL YOU STORIES.



IT WAS CHELO WHO TALKED VICENTE'S MOTHER GABRIELA INTO NOT DROWNING HIM WHEN HE WAS BUT A FEW MINUTES INTO OUR GREY WORLD.



JESÚS ANGEL TOOK TWO DAYS TO REMOVE HIMSELF FROM HIS WEARY MOTHER RITA. WITNESSES OF THE BIRTH AGREED IT LOOKED LIKE JESÚS MIGHT STAY INSIDE HIS MOTHER FOREVER, BUT THE MOMENT AFTER CHELO SUGGESTED A CAESAREAN SECTION, OUT HE CAME AS IF HE HAD HEARD HER AND UNDERSTOOD THAT HE WAS ALREADY MAKING THINGS DIFFICULT FOR EVERYBODY.

AURORA AND ISRAEL WERE BORN TO ELISSA AND JUAN DIAZ WITHOUT INCIDENT. FOUR YEARS LATER WHEN THE TWINS WERE PLAYING JACKS IN THE STREET, A TOTAL ECLIPSE STRUCK; THE SUNSHINE RETURNED SOON ENOUGH AND EVERYTHING SEEMED NORMAL, SAVE ONE THING: AURORA WAS GONE.

THE SEARCH FOR THE MISSING CHILD LASTED TWO MONTHS, BUT IT WAS OF NO USE. VENGEFUL SPIRITS, INTERGALACTIC KIDNAPPERS, DIVINE INTERVENTION, EVEN OLD FASHIONED EARTHLY FOUL PLAY WAS CONSIDERED AS THE SOURCE OF THE MYSTERY.



YEARS LATER, A STRANGER PASSING THROUGH PALOMAR WOULD MENTION TO ISRAEL THAT SHE HAD SEEN A GIRL FIRE-EATER IN AUSTRIA WHO LOOKED EXACTLY LIKE HIM.

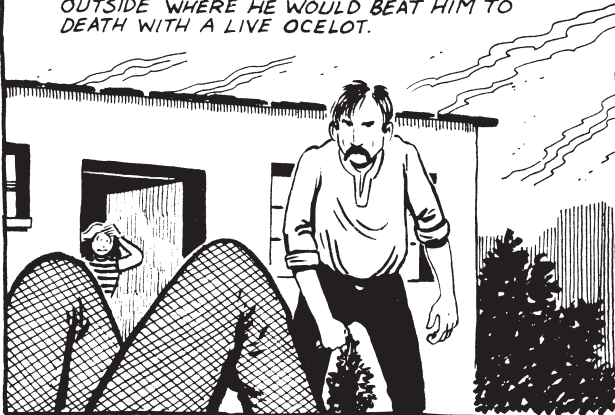
SAKAHAFTEWA, KNOWN AS SATCH TO HIS FRIENDS, WAS BORN TO NENA AND OLAF GARCIA. SATCH ENTERED THE WORLD WITH A RESONANT SNEEZE.

LATER IN HIS LIFE THE LAD BECAME A MASTER SOMNAMBULIST: IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT HE COULD BE FOUND SIX STREETS FROM HIS BED FAST ASLEEP ATOP A FRESHLY FILLED GRAVE OR UNDER THE CHURCH STEPS AS HE DREAMED OF SWIMMING WITH BALDHEADED WOMEN.



CHELO WAS ONLY ALLOWED TO ASSIST IN PIPO'S BIRTH BECAUSE A PHYSICIAN WAS CALLED IN WHEN PIPO'S MOTHER ELVIRA BROKE OUT IN A RAGING FEVER DURING LABOR.

PIPO WAS BORN WITH FEW COMPLICATIONS, BUT THEN THE DOCTOR ACCIDENTLY DROPPED THE INFANT ON HER HEAD PROVOKING HER DRUNKEN FATHER TO DRAG THE PHYSICIAN OUTSIDE WHERE HE WOULD BEAT HIM TO DEATH WITH A LIVE OCELOT.



PIPO'S FATHER WAS THEN SENT TO JAIL WHERE HE WAS KILLED IN A KNIFE FIGHT OVER OWNERSHIP OF A CIGARETTE LIGHTER.

PIPO GREW UP TO BE A LOVELY GIRL WITH NO APPARENT SIGN OF DAMAGE.

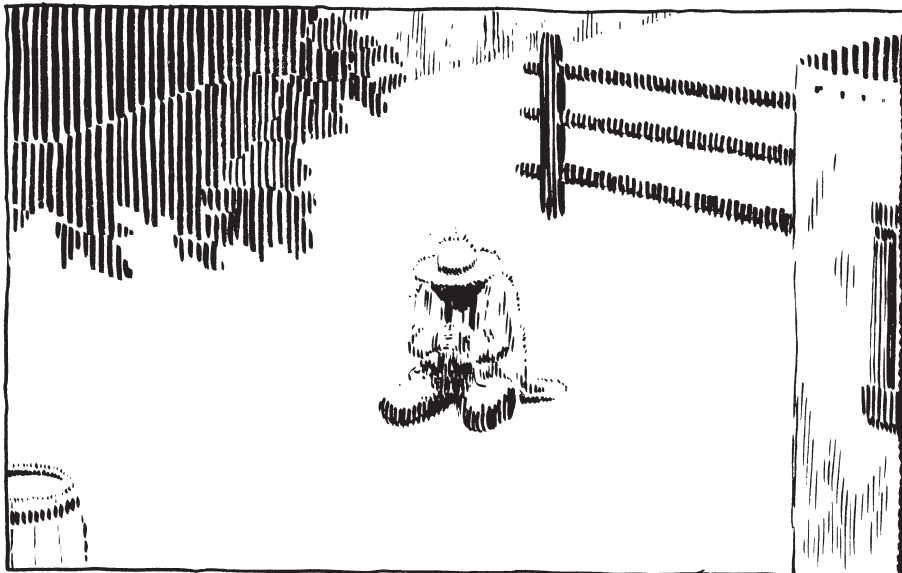


CHELO'S ANCESTORS FOUNDED THIS TOWN OF PALOMAR, SHE BEING THE LAST OF THAT LINE.

CHELO'S FATHER EMIL WORKED IN A MINE AND HER MOTHER IRMA WAS A MIDWIFE.

OVERLY STUBBORN AS A GIRL, CHELO WAS ONCE BEATEN SO SEVERLY BY HER FATHER THAT HE RENDERED HIS ONLY CHILD INCAPABLE OF HAVING CHILDREN.

ALTHOUGH EMIL WAS SORRY, HE WAS NEVER ALLOWED NEAR HIS DAUGHTER AGAIN.



DESPERATE, EMIL TRIED TO GET IRMA TO HAVE MORE CHILDREN; SHE TOLD HIM TO FIND SOMEBODY ELSE. HE WISELY DID NOT ARGUE.

HIS ATTEMPTS TO HAVE CHILDREN WITH OTHER WOMAN FROM THE TOWN FAILED. NO WOMAN IN PALOMAR WANTED A CHILD BY A CHILD CRIPPLER.

EMIL BLAMED CHELO'S STUBBORNNESS FOR ENDING THE FAMILY LINE AND THEREFORE ABANDONED HIS FAMILY TO START A NEW ONE SOMEWHERE IN THE UNITED STATES. MONTHS LATER, IRMA RECEIVED IN THE MAIL AN ENVELOPE FROM PARIS TEXAS CONTAINING ONLY TWO GOLD TEETH CAKED WITH DRIED BLOOD. IRMA NEVER SHOWED CHELO.

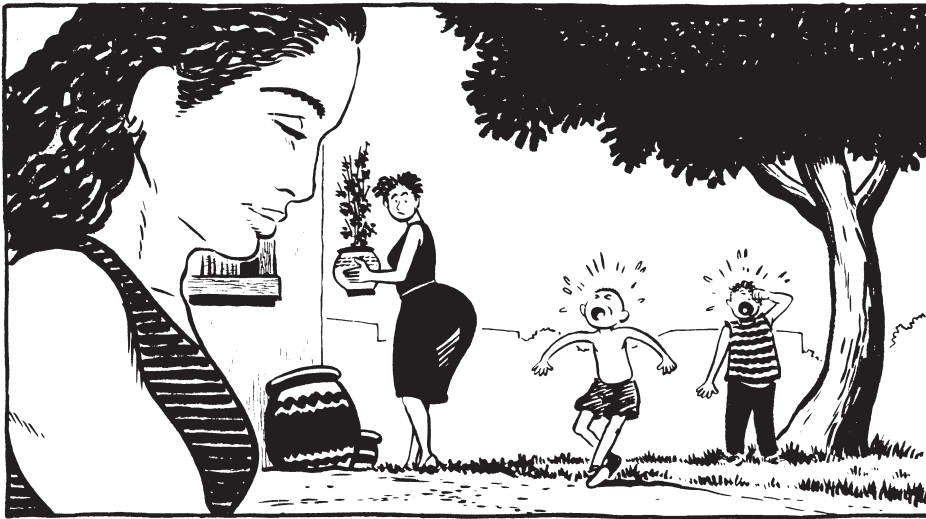
IRMA REMARRIED TO A GERMAN TRUCKDRIVER NAMED HANS WHO WAS VERY GOOD TO HIS NEW WIFE AND DAUGHTER, YET CHELO WAITED FOR HER TRUE FATHER TO RETURN, THE FATHER SHE FELT SHE DESERVED. WHEN HANS AND IRMA FINALLY CONVINCED CHELO EMIL WAS DEAD, CHELO DECIDED SHE WOULD BE A MIDWIFE LIKE HER MOTHER. CHELO FELT SHE WAS GOING TO BRING CHILDREN INTO THE WORLD ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.



FOR CHELO'S FIRST ASSIGNMENT IRMA TOOK HER DAUGHTER TO A HOUSE WHERE TWO UNRELATED WOMEN WERE ABOUT TO DELIVER. INSIDE, CHELO WAS LED TO A ROOM WITH TWO BEDS.

ON ONE BED LASHED TO THE POSTS WAS A WOMAN NAMED DALIA WHO CURSED AND HOWLED AND THRASHED AS IF POSSESSED BY THE DEMON ITSELF. ON THE OTHER BED A WOMAN NAMED LICHA SIMPLY SMIRKED AT CHELO AS IF TRYING TO SUPPRESS LAUGHTER.

WHEN IT WAS ALL OVER CHELO'S FEELINGS OF GUILT FOR ALLEGEDLY CAUSING THE END OF THE FAMILY LINE WANED. SHE WAS ALMOST GLAD SHE COULD NEVER BEAR CHILDREN.



MANUEL AND SOLEDAD WERE BORN ALMOST SIMULTANEOUSLY. CHELO WOULD SEE THE TWO BOYS GROW UP TO BE THE BEST OF BUDDIES.

AS KIDS THEY FOUGHT MOST OF THE TIME, LICHA'S SON SOLEDAD USUALLY BEING THE VICTOR. DALIA'S SON MANUEL WOULD BEGIN TO CRY, THEN SOLEDAD WOULD FOLLOW SUIT BECAUSE HIS BEST FRIEND WAS HURT.

SOLEDAD LATER BECAME QUITE THE EDUCATED FELLOW. WHENEVER HIS NOSE WAS NOT BURIED IN A BOOK ABOUT SOCIALISM OR PHILOSOPHY, IT SEEMED HE HAD A QUESTION OR AN ANSWER FOR EVERYTHING. HE WAS QUICKLY REGARDED AS SOMEONE TO AVOID.



MANUEL PREFERRED TO CONCENTRATE ON THE DELIGHTS OF THE DIVINE PASSION. AS YOUNG AS THIRTEEN YEARS OLD HE WAS IN AND OUT OF LOVER'S BEDROOMS.



WHAT INTERESTED MANUEL IN A PARTICULAR WOMAN COULD NOT BE PREDICTED: ONE WOMAN WOULD BE PRETTY, ALTHOUGH IT WAS THE WAY SHE CURSED AND BELCHED THAT EXCITED HIM; ANOTHER WOMAN WOULD BE HOMELY, YET POSSESSING EARS THAT INSPIRED HIS KNEES TO TREMBLE...



SOLEDAD'S ENCOUNTERS WITH WOMEN WERE PITIFUL AS HE SEEMED TO HAVE A DIFFICULT TIME EVEN SPEAKING TO THEM.

HE WOULD ROUTINELY SUFFER FROM BOUTS OF DEPRESSION THAT COULD ONLY BE SHAKEN BY MANUEL AND HIS UNRELENTING LUST FOR LIFE.



MANUEL WAS NOT AN ARTICULATE FELLOW, SOMETIMES LITERALLY SPENDING HOURS STRUGGLING TO DESCRIBE SUCH THEORIES AS SOLVING THE WORLD HUNGER PROBLEM BY CROSSBREEDING CATTLE WITH ELEPHANTS.

SOLEDAD WOULD SIT AND LISTEN PATIENTLY TO EVERY WORD.



WHILE SOLEDAD WORKED FOR HIS LIVING AS HARD AS HE WORKED ON HIS EDUCATION, MANUEL RARELY PICKED UP A SHOVEL OR HAMMERED A NAIL. IT WAS SAID AN EX-LOVER WHO MOVED TO THE UNITED STATES PERIODICALLY SENT HIM LARGE SUMS OF MONEY. THIS DISGUSTED SOLEDAD TO NO END AND HE AND MANUEL ARGUED OVER IT CONSTANTLY.

