



One Last Chance to Live

by Francisco X. Stork

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The Story

Nico has always believed in his dreams.

Especially the dream he has of becoming a writer; it's the reason he started keeping a journal and writing in it every day. But then Nico has a dream about his own funeral. A dream that feels too real to ignore.

In it, Rosario is beckoning to him to follow her. Rosario was Nico's neighbor, his best friend's girlfriend, and his inspiration. She was also the girl that Nico was in love with. And Rosario died last year.

Nico becomes obsessed with figuring out what Rosario was trying to say to him and how she died. Surely if he can make sense of her death, he can find a way to prevent his own, despite the ominous warning of his dream.

At the same time, Nico's mom is sick, and his brother is getting in trouble. Nico knows it's on him to step up and take care of his family—but how can he keep it together when, like Rosario, he sees how easy it might be to just let go of it all?

Reading Group Questions

1. How important is the setting in this story? What about the place where it happens influences the story?
2. Who do you think is the most misunderstood character in the book? What don't the other characters understand about them?
3. Have you ever kept a journal? How do you think writing in a journal would be different than talking to a friend or posting on social media?
4. Were you surprised by the choices that any of the characters made? Pick one example and explain why.

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About the Author



Photo © Francisco X. Stork

Francisco X. Stork emigrated from Mexico at the age of nine with his mother and his adoptive father. He is the author of many novels, including *Marcelo in the Real World*, recipient of the Schneider Family Book Award; *The Memory of Light*, recipient of the Tomás Rivera Book Award; *Disappeared*, which was a Walter Dean Myers Award Honor Book; and *I Am Not Alone*, which received three starred reviews. Visit him at franciscostork.com.

Author Q&A

How do you define love? How do you think Nico would define love? Does that change over the course of the book?

At its most basic, love is caring for another. Within that fundamental act of caring there is a spectrum that goes from selfish need to energy that acts for the welfare of the other without regard to what we receive in return. Love says, "I am glad you exist." Nico's journey moves along this spectrum toward selflessness in both his love for Rosario and his love for Javier. Nico's need to see Rosario as someone special and to be seen by her as someone special changes to a love for Rosario that is based on acceptance for both Rosario and him as flawed yet still valuable human beings.

Over the course of the story, what does Nico learn about himself? What does he learn about his friends and family?

Nico learns that one does not have to be famous to live a meaningful, fulfilling life. He learns from his mother's life that an "ordinary" life of lovingly fulfilling one's obligations to work and family is in fact extraordinary. He learns from the process of writing that self-discovery and writing to give something helpful to others matters more than fame.

Are there any experiences, books, or people that particularly influenced you as you were writing this book?

I started writing in a journal when I was Nico's age and have kept that daily practice up to the present. The mindfulness and the self-awareness that develops through this practice as well as my views on the role of the writer in our world were things I hoped to convey in this book.

How do you see this book as different from your previous books?

I tried to write this book as if I were Nico writing in his journal. The attitude and mindset of writing in a journal is different than writing a novel that you expect others to read. It is true that Nico begins writing with the expectation he will be read, but as the journal progresses, the writing becomes more personal and more authentic. All my books are authentic and personal, but this one, because of the journal format, felt more immediately honest.

Where do you get your ideas for your books?

Usually there are small seeds of images or ideas that grow into a full story over time, sometimes many years. With *One Last Chance to Live*, the original seed was to write a practical book about the writing life, but my attempts felt very dry and boring. What I was doing seemed wrong and I had no energy for it. When Nico came along, and I started writing his story, the writing felt on target and I was filled with both enthusiasm and patience to carry the work to completion.

What writing advice would you give to young writers?

Probably the best advice is to see writing as something you want to do with your life. That means that you are willing to undertake the long process of learning how to write which includes studying what others have done and practicing, practicing, practicing, just like in any other art. If you see value and feel joy in the effort, regardless of how the result is received, you are a true writer.