



### Summer of the Mariposas

Written by Guadalupe Garcia McCall

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*It was a magical time, full of dreaminess and charm, a time to watch the mariposas emerge out of their cocoons, gather their courage, and take flight while we floated faceup in the water. And that's exactly what we were doing the morning the body of a dead man drifted into our swimming haven. (p. 4)*

Odilia, Juanita, Velia, Delia, & Pita are “the five little sisters, cinco hermanitas! The Garza Girls! Together forever! No matter what!” (p. 11). The girls have gone wild, struggling to find happiness in the hot Texas

summer after their father has abandoned them and their mother for la sirena, a temptress. While swimming in the Rio Grande, the girls find the body of a dead man who had attempted to cross the river. They find his identification documents and realize that he is from a town close to the home of their father and their Abuelita (grandmother). The girls are determined to take his body back to his home without the knowledge of their mother, and visit their grandmother. The eldest sister, Odilia, is against the idea, feeling that this betrayal of their mother is going too far. McCall weaves elements of Greek and Mexican mythology as Juanita is described as an “Amazonian” (p. 14) and Odilia is guided by La Llorona, the feared yet misunderstood crying lady, who was believed to have murdered her children. La Llorona tells Odilia she must work with her sisters to complete the task of returning the dead man to his family if Odilia wishes to save her own family from self-destruction.

Using a magical earring given to her by La Llorona, Odilia manages to sneak the cinco hermanitas and the corpse across the border into Mexico. The girls find the family of the man, only to realize they have arrived on his daughter’s quinceanera. As the girls agonize over how to handle the situation, the dead-man’s son approaches the car and the girls discover that the dead-man was not the long lost husband and father they had imagined, but a man who had abandoned his family many years before as their own father had abandoned them. The Garza girls leave the man behind with his family and continue on their journey to find their Abuela. Along the way, the girls must learn kindness and purity of heart and Odilia must embrace her heritage and the gifts of the curandera (a mystical healer) that come with it. They must survive the insanity that loneliness can cause when a bruja (witch) tries to poison them with sweets to keep them with her forever, a nagual (warlock) disguised as a donkey tries to cook them to release himself from his curse, lechuzas (witch owls) taunt the girls with their deepest fears and try to tear them to

shreds, and finally a chupacabra befriends and then attacks them.

A fresh morning leads them to their destination, their Abuelita's home. She treats their wounds, both physical and emotional, and helps the girls return to their mother. She also helps them realize what is most important by leading the girls to the Virgen de Guadalupe, the Virgin Mary, who guides them on a journey through a celestial passage. The guidance from Mother Mary sheds light on the secrets of the Garza family and helps the girls understand how their family may become holy once again. The girls' return to Texas is highly publicized as the girls have been reported missing.

Their father returns with his new family and tries to force the girls out of their home, causing deep wounds that cannot be mended. However, his return further tightens the bond, not just among the girls, but between the girls and their mother as their mother finally shows her strength, stands up for her girls, and drives this hateful man from their home. The story ends happily, as the agent who helped the girls in their return to Texas falls in love with their mother, marries her, and the girls move forward with their new families and find forgiveness in their hearts, after all.

Guadalupe Garcia McCall was born in Mexico and grew up in a border town in Texas. Her descriptions of the places are vivid and honest, while her inclusion of Mexican mythology offers new twists and interest to her audience. McCall is one of five sisters and her descriptions of the interaction of the varied personalities of the sisters, different yet dedicated to one another, reflect the sisterhood and friendships vital to adolescent girls. Information about McCall can be found on her website.

Any reader who enjoyed the twinning of American and Mexican cultures in Alma Flor Ada's (2013) *Dancing Home* or the mythical elements that guide the story of the young girl in Ann Cameron's (2005) *Colibri* will enjoy the adventures of the Garza girls, cinco hermanitas, together forever.

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