

Chapman, Marina. (2013). The Girl with No Name: The Incredible Story of a Child Raised by Monkeys. Vancouver: Greystone Books.

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“The Girl with No Name”, is a troubling, yet inspiring memoir of Marina Chapman’s childhood. Abducted from her home while picking peapods at the age of four, her journey spans approximately ten years ending (or maybe beginning) in Bogotá, Colombia. In between these bookends though, the “girl with no name” was forsaken at every turn: at four she was abandoned in the jungle; at ten she was sold to a brothel; escaping the brothel, she became a “gamine” in Cúcuta, and later, a servant for an abusive criminal family. Exploring each of these four main periods, I will look at the emphasis on family and how the absence of belonging, and yearning for love guides many of her decisions. Furthermore, I will also look at how the crueller realities of humanity, freedom, perseverance, and altruism are woven into the fabric of her story to supplement the main themes.

While living with her troop of capuchin monkeys, belonging, family, and feeling loved guide Marina. As she is adopted, the troop both helps her survive, and also provides a reassuring “sense of order and family” (p. 31) to help cope with the separation from her mother and family. Initially a “tolerated outsider”, after being saved from a poisonous tamarind by “grandpa” monkey, she finds herself belonging as a “real part of the troop” (p. 53). While the younger monkeys become like siblings or friends missing in her life, those such as wise old “grandpa” monkey, or “Lolita”, a committed and loving mother, were revered as parental figures. As she realizes, “family is not just about who you appear to belong to, or what it says on your birth certificate, or who you look

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like, or even what they find if they studied in your DNA. Family is found anywhere you are loved and cared for... [and] that precious bond, that reassurance that they won't let you down" (p. 89). While the monkeys became her "adopted family" though, she also felt an inexplicable desire for human love – for someone to look into her eyes and love and care for her the way she saw the indigenous mother do to her own baby (p. 87). Reaching out for this love, Marina reveals herself both to an indigenous mother and her human tribe who reject her, and later a dangerous female hunter who cages her like an animal.

Sold by the hunters to a Colombian brothel owner named Ana-Karmen, a now ten-year-old Chapman was given her first name: "Gloria". Essentially a slave and prostitute-in-training, her jungle life was forcefully removed as she struggled to relearn how to speak and function like a civilized human, contend with day-to-day life, and perform rudimentary chores. Despite being treated kindly by some out of pity, she remained "suspended in a place where [she] felt completely alone" (p. 139). Constantly beaten by Ana-Karmen, her only "friends" were animals, and only solace was within trees reminiscing about her troop. Although she desired human friends (p. 142), her feral disposition ostracized her. Over her time at Ana-Karmen's she was warned of becoming a "piece of meat", witnessed babies of Ana-Karmen's girls being sold, almost died as one of Ana-Karmen's clients drove off a cliff, was almost killed by Ana-Karmen, and yet it was only the impending threat of becoming a customer's "piece of meat" was enough to force her to finally run. As her new life's cold realities are contrasted with her old monkey troop's warmth, there is a distinctive regret about leaving her adopted family, a disdain towards humans, and an overwhelming fear of the unknown.

Although the streets of her new "jungle", Cúcuta were characterized by rape, violence, addiction, sickness, hunger, theft, and sub-par sleeping conditions, "Gloria's" wits and thieving

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adeptness allowed her to thrive. Respected, and a part of the “gamines”, her loneliness dissipates as she became “Pony Malta”. Due to the societal stigma attached to gamines, feelings of belonging with anyone outside their groups were unlikely. Like a troop, each street kid’s eyes that told sad stories (p. 170) beyond their control found understanding only among fellow gamines. In spite of this though, there was also a recognition: “[while gamines] were all in the same boat and had an intense, loyal friendship, none of [them] could care for one another in the way that a parent could,” or provide “a mother’s love” (p. 188). Although internally “Pony Malta” remained enamored by “becoming someone”, and providing her future children a better life, these idyllic desires were sometimes overtaken by her gamine identity. For example, given an opportunity escape the street life by Ria, a local waitress, “Pony Malta” spurned the opportunity. While Ria’s care was something she had not felt since leaving her monkey family (p. 181), she tired of working especially as it distanced her from her fellow gamines. Although surprising she rejects Ria, a seemingly mother-like figure, this also speaks to street life’s impact upon one’s psyche and her dedication to her new troop.

Finally, in an attempt to escape Cúcuta’s streets, “Pony Malta” moves into the Santos house as “Rosalba”. Although initially hopeful, she quickly learned that her new “family” were cruel, notorious criminals. Rather than receiving love, she became a servant treated like an animal, was almost raped by Mr. Santos, and was beat consistently and harshly. Trapped, resented, and rejected by her own species, her only solace, again, was up in a tree in their backyard longing for her monkey troop. As “Rosalba” watched the children playing next-door from her tree though, she also bonded with their loving mother, Maruja, who, through her caring nature, helped “soothe [Rosalba’s] hurts away” (p. 204). Pitying her situation and recognizing her danger, Maruja formulated a plan to free “Rosalba” and take her to a local convent, and later, a trusted friend’s

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house, before flying her to her daughter Maria's house in Bogotá. While far from easy, Maruja embodied Chapman's definition of family. She became "Rosalba's" guardian angel that selflessly loved, cared, protected, and would not let her down. Maruja was the first person that had genuinely shown her the love, sympathy and compassion that she had sought for so long. Resolutely, Chapman explains "I loved Marjua from the day I met her. I still love her today," (p. 205) and "I loved [her] more... than I love myself" (p. 244). She saved the "girl with no names" life, and allowed her to become Marina Chapman.

As she concludes, Chapman's intentions are to communicate her remarkable childhood while also touching on various underlying themes such as family, love, freedom, belonging, perseverance, and altruism. However, Chapman's message also transcends her own story as she underlines crueler aspects of humanity and shines a light on impoverished realities Colombian children face. To reinforce this stance, any profits she made from the book were donated to these vulnerable children. As such, this book becomes as much of a recount of her own life as it does a life-vest to those who still suffer, and a signal to those unaware.

While inspiring, the most noteworthy limitations in this memoir are those regarding its authenticity. For such a remarkable story, one may ask how Marina cannot remember anything prior to the age of four, yet following her abduction detail a relatively specific story. Moreover, some parts may be criticized as unrealistic (eg. "grandpa" monkey saving her), or overdramatized to the point where it seems like she was a Baudelaire trapped within a Lemony Snicket novel as unfortunate event after unfortunate event occurred. Since the story was written through disjointed recounts recorded passed from Marina's daughter to the ghost-writer, the sequential accuracy, Marina's aging memory, and whether these events were fictitious or imaginings born from a traumatic childhood, may also all be questioned.

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In spite of these limitations/criticisms though, I took the story's overall message as being more important than the absolute authenticity of its details. In evaluating a memory-based memoir or biography it seems logical to take such details with a grain of salt. Although certain things probably could have been improved, some parts may not be perfectly remembered, and some details may be fuzzy or questionable, the message underlying her personal story is still powerful as it comments on broader societal and systemic problems. If nothing else, readers are drawn out of their personal bubbles to acknowledge these often-forgotten street kids. Although it may not be Marina, nor someone raised by monkeys, similarly unnamed children still contend with the harsh realities described. It is for these reasons I believe sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, primatologists and social workers could all take something useful out of this book. Outside of academia, I would also recommend it to casual readers looking to be inspired by perseverance, feel realities children face in third world countries, or just want to read about a girl who grew up with monkey's. Far from perfect, it remains a compelling and an easy to read book that communicates its message without becoming overly explicit or dragging on.