

Xavier Castillo

One Life As Three

Prologue:

Michael opened his eyes to the blinding lights hung above him, the hands of delicacy and of no experience caressed his underside as he was lifted into a cradle-like motion. His lungs filled with air as he took his first breath, crying for someone to love him-however, he never found the love he was yearning for. The warmth of a silk cloth enveloped his body as he was taken away from the one that could not love, support, or care for him. He was given to a stranger that he would call his new "father."

6 years later...

Michael just graduated from grade one, with no sense of accomplishment, satisfaction, or even the face of a proud parent. After his last day of school, he was pulled into his house that smelled of burnt plastic and distilled spirits. When he entered his lungs are suffocated by smoke and nicotine. The farm, run-down and unmanaged, was the only place Michael could call home. He runs to his room, equivalent to the rest of the house- as his father would walk outside to get wood ready for winter. The moment his father's footsteps left the house, Michael would begin to move around inquietude.

Michael, fearing for his father's return, would finish his chores in the meantime. He cleaned his room, finished his homework, collected the trash that had accumulated

over time, and was to head off to the animals to tend to them. It was silent, something he enjoyed. No one to talk to, no one to be afraid of. In his final thoughts, he swept the bit of dust away. After tidying up the house, Michael began his trek to the chicken coop, a trip he took very slowly as he savored every step and image that appeared before him. This small vivid world was flooding his eyes and caused a smile to form unintentionally. In the mix of his happiness, he heard the breaking of a bottle coming from inside his house. He rushed back in, to see his father covered in sweat from head to toe.

"Did you finish everything?" his father uttered.

"Yes, sir."

"Then why the hell are there no milk or eggs in this kitchen?" asked his father as he held his arms out as if to show there is nothing in the air.

"I'm sorry sir,"

"Where's the beer?" questioned his father in a stern tone.

"You drank it all... like always" whispered Michael. Soon after his words fell out, Michael wished he could have grabbed them before they hit the floor, coming down like thunder during a storm.

"You wanna be a smart piece of crap, huh?" Shouted his father, turning around towards Michael who is now backing away into the corner of the kitchen.

"No, no I'm sorry!"

"Come here..." grunted his father as he walked forward and grabbed Michael's ear.

Michael felt the infliction as his skin was being pulled away from the side of his head.

He cried in anguish, trying to pull away from the grip of his father. Before he could he

even take a second breath, a strong blow hit Michael in the back of his head. Michael, now down on his knees, ignored the pain and turned to his father.

"I hate you!" screamed Michael as he brought his powerless hand across his father's face.

It was as if the world stood still- the only thing that moved with the heart in Michael's chest. However, before Michael could attempt to run, blackness engulfed his sight and mind.

Michael:

I woke up to the sound of my mother's voice and the chains of fatigue making it difficult to get out of bed. She whispered for to get ready for school. I turned my head towards her as she was heading out the door.

"Good morning mother," I said in a groggy voice.

"Good morning love," she replied softly.

The door closed shut before I began to change into my new jacket. Today is the first day of school, and I can't be late. I throw on my brown frock coat and headed out the door.

The cold wind blew in my face as I ran down the side green hill our house has stood on top of for all these years. I see the small schoolhouse in the distance ahead of me, past the stream that has provided my family with its essence of life since I've been alive. I

slow down, jump onto the small bridge connecting me and the small house of

education. I walk up the path and see everyone I've grown up with since I was a child. I

saw the smiling familiar faces and some new ones. School was now in session.

I entered the schoolhouse, the air cold and filled with dust or ash. The room was just how I remembered it, a small square room with four windows on opposite walls. The chalkboard in the back of the room along with the teacher's chair sitting in the front of the room. The wood stove in the middle that never supplies enough heat for all of us. Finally, my old desk where I've sat in since I was six. Now, 7 years later. This is going to be the last year I will ever step foot in this classroom. My thoughts were cut off from absorbing the nostalgic memories that came from this humble world when Isaac, my best friend, came up behind me and lightly tapped my shoulder.

I turned around to see the chest of a giant. I looked up as he stood hovering above me, smiling as he looked down.

"Hi Isaac, long time no see," I said in surprise.

"Hey Michael, how you've been?"

"I've been -"

"Welcome students! Take your seats please," interrupted the teacher as she walked in. I quickly turned to the teacher, then to Isaac, and then to my desk. I slid past one chair and sat in the middle of the three wooden seats that were all interconnected. Two new students sat next to me, a girl and a boy. The class went silent, everyone waiting for the teacher to speak before letting out a breath.

"Welcome back veterans, and if you're new this year, welcome to my schoolhouse," the teacher said with rotting teeth.

“Now if you all would look into your desks, please.”

I open the drawer, pulling back along with the two new students beside me. We find our respective pieces of slate and chalk.

“Alright students, time for algebra. Michael, take the older kids with you to the back and begin on page 46. I’ll be with you all after I read to the younger students,” the teacher said as she pulled out a book read to him as a child. He took his slate and textbook, sharing it with the other students and began his teaching. The other students caught on quickly, each solving the problem before the teacher or even I could finish our work.

This was all too common in the classroom. I’m seen as the slowest one in school and the teacher can’t seem to rely on any other student to teach the new ones because I’m the oldest. I had stress and anxiety coursing through my veins each time I spoke, moved, or even took a breath. Having to teach the other kids has taught me one thing- I hate teaching.

I was struggling to understand the basic concepts of every subject including English and geography. I couldn’t quite grasp anything. I looked to Isaac for help, the opposite of me. He had perfect knowledge of everything, understood whatever it was that was in front of him. I could never compete. The day finally came to a close, with no improvement. Every day is a struggle to understand and follow the class. There is no point in understanding anything if I’m just going to have to work on the farm for the rest of my life. I can’t do this, I can’t do anything.

“You’ll never be good enough,” was heard in the voice of my father’s.

He was right, I *will* never be good enough, because no matter what- you can't help stupid. Or as how my father put it, being a disgrace to my family is something I will always be. I walk out of the classroom, putting a smile to turn around and wave goodbye to all the new or familiar classmates I will see again tomorrow. I walked back, the sun setting and extending its colorful shades of oranges with reds across the purple sky. In my moments of walking back, and the scenery of the beauty from the distance, I felt hopeless. However, I felt a hopeless happiness with it. I made my way across the stream once again and up over the hill. I grabbed the cold doorknob and swung opened the door. My mother stood in front of me, holding a paddle in her left hand.

I walked in, in silence. I knew what was going to happen next and after all these years, the fear of pain whittled away. I went and stood in front of her, where she grabbed my ear and pulled me down to the ground. I looked up at her in pain.

"Get up!" she yelled.

I slowly grabbed the strength from my legs and rose slowly to the eye level of my mother. Without hesitation, she took hold of my right hand and slammed it down on our dining table. I helplessly struggled, with her grip too tight for me to pull away from the hammering paddle about to come down. I closed my eyes and felt my right-hand shoot pain throughout my arm. I try to pull away once again but was no match for my mother and her powerful strike. This time it hit more bone. I clench my teeth and tried to blink

away the tears. This pain, what was it for, why was I the one to blame, and how could she be okay hurting me. Ever since I was little I asked myself these questions everytime I would get punished. This time, however, I know what I've done. A simple task, a duty as the only child in this family of two. I left the house without grabbing the eggs from the chickens this morning. My mother is always in need of eggs, and as a part of ruining her day, I was the one to blame. I should have acted more carefully, and now, as I pull away in anger and agony I was sent off to go finish the rest of my responsibilities. This time, however, it took me twice as long with a bruised hand.

I held my tears and withstood the pain, all to get through the day. I questioned my abilities once again, always holding onto what could redeem my spirit. Nothing, nothing could ever make up for my lack in intelligence, strength, or capabilities. Everything my father had told me, is what I have become- a failure. My legs began running. My tears began to fall, turning into sweat. My pain began to ache, turning into strength. My uselessness turned useful, or so I thought. I stopped my legs before they could run any further into the field.

My breath was heavy, my legs were weak. I trudged towards the house, letting the wind cool my skin. I looked up at the sky, falling deep into its gaze. Before I knew it, my body dropped to the floor and my eyes slowly shut. I peeked out one last time before darkness covered the sky and I was sound asleep.

"Hey," spoke a voice above me.

I opened my eyes to bright green eyes looking down on me. I shot my body up and turned around. A boy a little older than me stood tall. I took in the surroundings, a large lot of grass with nothing but mountains and a few trees the eyes could see. I couldn't tell where I was. I looked up to the boy in front of me.

"Who are you?" my voice shook.

"I'm... you. Well, part of you anyways."

I looked at him in confusion. I slowly stood tall, seeing him at eye level and realizing we're the same height. I stepped back, analyzing him.

He began to speak once more. "It's okay, this is just a dream, although it appears your dream has also mixed with our world."

"Our?" I repeated.

"Yes, mine and... *his*," said the boy looking afraid and disgusted by the thought he just had.

"Who's *he*?"

"Oh, right! I never introduced myself. Call me David. I'm your 'smart' alter. I've been with you for about four years now after your father burned your new shoes for not understanding the algebra homework."

"What? Alter? What?!" I kept running questions through my brain and out my mouth.

"Okay, this is why I'm here. You experienced something very traumatic, and to cope with it, your brain made me. A different, smarter you. However, I only take over when you take your final for school."

"Take over... what exactly?" I asked, afraid to hear the answer.

"Your mind. Something that has been struggling to understand for the entirety of its life.

But don't worry, that's why I'm here to help you. I know a lot about what you can't

understand. However, please try and understand this. I'm here to help you and I

both-although someone is in this world that isn't. You can't let him take over you. He

can't leave this place no matter what. You got that?" He warned me, looking panicked.

"Who else is in this 'world', I said calmly, feeling myself get lost in this dream.

"I don't know his name. But he's much older and stronger than both of us combined. All I

know is that he's not here to benefit any of us. He's always causing trouble and waiting

for *his turn*." He looked worried.

I heard another voice out in the distance and turned my head. A tall dark figure stood afar. I turned back around to David. "Is that him..." I questioned.

"Yes, you should probably go before he tries to convince you otherwise. It was nice talking to you, finally meeting in person- or rather in a dream," David laughed at his own joke.

"Hurry now, or he'll chase you," cautioned David.

I had fear slowly build inside me. "Wake up!" I yelled inside my head.

My heart began racing. I looked over to the dark figure that had suddenly stopped

moving. Sweat began forming at the top of my forehead. The figure came closer, and

closer until it was almost visible. A tall man with clear skin, dark brown hair, jeans, and a

chocolate colored jacket walked faster and faster. I stepped back before realizing I

hadn't the slightest idea what David was wearing. I turned my head to the right, only to see the bright warm colors in the sky. I was laying in tall grass. I could feel the warmth on my skin. I got up slowly, facing my house. I was dazed, not understanding what just happened. "*It was just a dream,*" I told myself. I got up, feeling the pain in my back from sleeping in the grass. I walk back home, pushing the dream towards the back of my mind. I entered the house, the aroma of eggs and bacon filled my nostrils. I headed towards my room and saw my mother sitting in the living room as I passed, rocking back and forth. She was staring out the window, holding a mug filled with water. Her eyes were still, staring for something. I walked into the room.

"Good morning mother," I said cautioning my every word.

She turned her head to look at me, her eyes widened a little and her eyebrows raised.

"Hello sweetie, I made breakfast for you on the kitchen table," she said softly.

I was taken back by her calm composure.

"Thank you mother, I'll eat it right away." I turn around towards the kitchen, but before i could leave the room, my mother interrupted my leave.

"Can I talk to you?" she asked.

"Of course mother, what would you like to talk about?" I asked, afraid of what she might say.

"I've noticed your behavior Michael, and I must say, I'm very proud," she said.

"Thank you mother, may I ask what you mean?" I wondered.

"Every year, I'm so afraid that you wouldn't pass with your friends. But every year you surprise me," she stated.

I stared at the floor. My thoughts were racing, trying to understand what she was trying to say. Before I could even speak she continued.

“However, you’re scaring me,” she said suddenly. “What is going on? You can tell me, I’m your mother,”

W-what? What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about you!” she yelled.

She was getting irritated. I looked at her, shocked she was beginning to lash out. I stood still.

“How did you-” a knock at the door cut her off.

We both turned our heads towards the door.

I saw a black figure standing outside.

My mother composed herself before getting up and slowly walked towards the door.

She fixed her hair and dusted off anything that came in contact with her dress. Her hand turned the doorknob to reveal a tall white man with black hair standing in front of it. I stood up to greet him.

“Hello there Mrs. Nixon. I’m Dr. Catten, pleased to make your acquaintance,” said the man.

“Why hello there Doctor, likewise. Please, do enter,” mother opened the door to let him in.

I gathered up the courage and spoke aloud, “Hello sir, I’m Michael, Michael Dix.”

“Hello Michael, pleased to meet you too.”

I nodded my head in agreement. He turned to my mother after done with me, asking her to come outside. The door closed and I was left alone indoors. I ran towards the window to peek behind the curtains. I could only make out a few words; "why?" asked my mother. The doctor began explaining his position, I assumed. Before the conversation could come to an end, mother ran off and stormed into the house, infuriated by what the Doctor had said. I quickly ran to the couch and sat down, as if I had been waiting there for the entire time they conversed. My mother shut the door before the doctor could walk in, and ran upstairs to her room. I stayed sitting, listening to mother's footsteps slamming against the floorboards. They neared the stairs and came down. I saw her walk by, completely in sight of what was in front of her rather than myself. The door slammed shut and I was at a lost for words.

The sun came down, and I was left alone in my room without the presence of another, being in the house. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't tell if it was the absence of my mother or the dream from the night before. I laid there, thinking to myself, trying to distract myself from reality. However, I always kept coming back to David's voice. I had stressed so much, my body began giving out. My eyes were weighing down and my thoughts were walking off on their own. I could feel myself floating, a light in front of me, shining brightly. I got closer and closer until my eyes could take no more of its bright rays and I awoke in my bed. The sun hitting my eyes when they opened. I turned away, noticing the morning had come sooner than I realized. I sauntered towards the door, pushing my

heels into my shoes before leaving. I walked to the front door, and saw my mother asleep on the sofa. *"She must have had a bad night for her to sleep there,"* I thought to myself. I slowly unlatched the door and walked outside to feel the fresh air against my skin and hair. I walked into class, without doubt that whatever happens before was just a dream. I had left everything behind.

127 days later...

It was five days before the final, and I had been preparing for it all year long. Everything in my life was going alright. My mother had her advocating speeches and works written for years, yet she had no luck to be recognized or even published. She saw that I had gotten better, still not understanding why I seemed bad in the first place. She also had lost many of her "patients" due to unforeseen medical conditions. I was always curious why my mother delved into the world of sanity, going from mental ward to mental hospitals, hoping one day those that were suffering would be liberated from what she called "hell." Although, her ambition did rub off on me. I seemed to be more determined to succeed in my studies just as my mother did when she was my age. However, the toll of overworking grew on both of us. Along with maintaining the farm, we both began developing our bodies. Men thought it was fine to treat her like a cute pet and me like I was a strong young king. The contrasting treatment from the world only made my mother grow stronger. I was proud to be called her son, and she as my mother. I strived to meet her standards, and in one week- I shall prove to both of us that I am enough.

I wake up to the sound of a rooster's crow Monday morning. I'm energized and ready to take on the day. I run towards the school without a second thought and mistakenly missed breakfast. I enter the class, and see the teacher, making sure I greet her with the brightest smile I could conjure up. I sit down, pressed against the shoulders of my classmates. As always, I got sent to the back of the room and began teaching the minor students- already knowing what to do due to my studying. I solved, read, and analyzed every problem given to me, impressing my teacher to my surprise. However, to the other side of the room, I see Isaac struggling with a problem in his math book. I remembered him and another student was working on the same problems and decided I wanted to help him out because I had just previously finished working with the other student. I was astonished however at his reaction, "Leave me alone, I almost got it." I stepped back, making sure I would not disrupt the teacher's lesson in the front of the room. The day passed by quickly and I began walking home. I can't help but think why Isaac pushed me away, especially in such a manner. I reached the doorsteps and opened the door. I see the interior looking clean and smelling of natural herbs. My mother comes from the living room.

"Hello honey, welcome home. How was school?"

"Hello mother, it was fine," I said clearly lying between my teeth. What Isaac did was still in the back of my mind. I grab my lies and homework and start heading towards my room.

"Dinner will be ready soon."

"Alright, thank you, mother."

I close my door and take a sigh of relief. My mind is pushing against its limit. I felt the whole weight of overworking overtake my body. My arms and legs seem to be burning and I caught my mind floating above the clouds. I began to drag my body to the bed, where I slumped down and close my eyes. I knew much-needed work had to be done, but nothing could feel better than the warmth of this bed. The way it hugged my body and took me away from this reality.

The nap was short, as I was woken by the yells of my mother and the slaps of her hands. I only took her beatings in silence, finished my chores and headed to sleep. *"Another eventful day..."* I told myself. I close my eyes and feel my weight lift from the bed. I floated upwards, all the way until I saw a chair in the clouds. The chair was empty, wooden and had restraints on it. Before I could take a step forward, I was pushed down into the same chair that had disappeared and reappeared behind me. The restraints locked my hands and feet down. I was stuck and afraid. Before I knew it, I saw David appear in front of me. He spoke, "I knew this would happen one day, but I was hoping it would happen until after the final."

"What do you mean, what happened?" I asked.

"Henry happened."

As the words fell from the mouth of David, the restraints unlocked from my wrists. I got up slowly and looked around me. The chair disappeared and in front of me appeared a man. A man with dark black hair, blue eyes and was clearly years older than me. He

looked irritated as if I was at fault for something. I looked at him in confusion and asked, "Who are you?"

"Why do you need to know."

He reminded me of Isaac's manner from earlier today. I began to step down, back away from the scene. I had forgotten where I was for a moment and realized this was all a dream. I wasn't scared anymore.