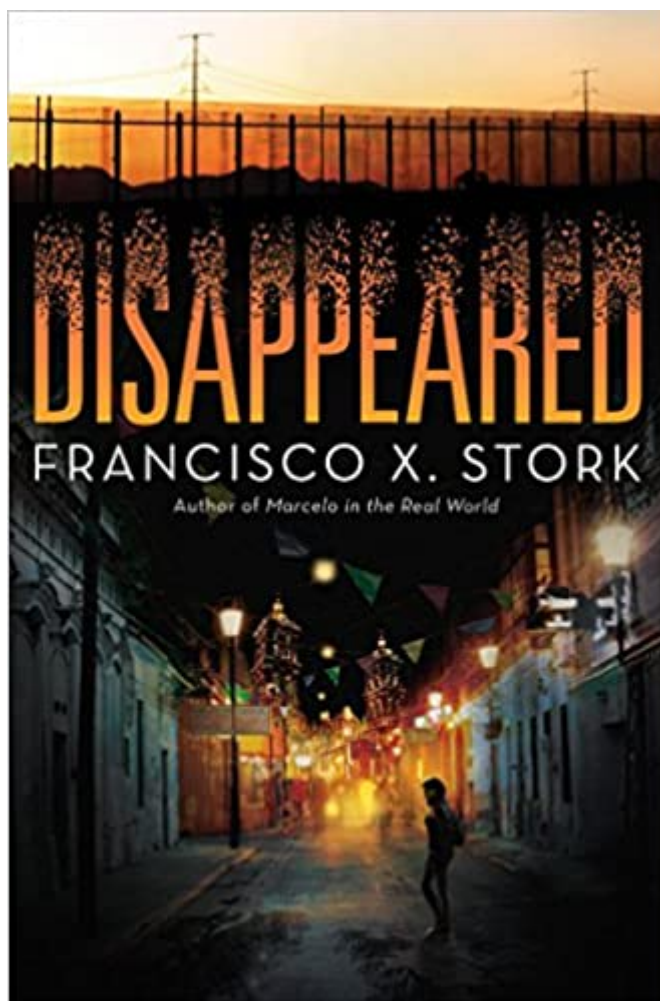


The book was found

Disappeared



Synopsis

Four Months Ago Sara Zapata's best friend disappeared, kidnapped by the web of criminals who terrorize Juarez. Four Hours Ago Sara received a death threat - and with it, a clue to the place where her friend is locked away. Four Weeks Ago Emiliano Zapata fell in love with Perla Rubi, who will never be his so long as he's poor. Four Minutes Ago Emiliano got the chance to make more money than he ever dreamed - just by joining the web. In the next four days, Sara and Emiliano will each face impossible choices, between life and justice, friends and family, truth and love. But when the web closes in on Sara, only one path remains for the siblings: the way across the desert to the United States.

Book Information

Hardcover: 336 pages

Publisher: Arthur A. Levine Books (September 26, 2017)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0545944473

ISBN-13: 978-0545944472

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.1 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.7 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars 6 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #128,598 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #20 in [Books > Teens >](#)

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Age Range: 12 - 17 years

Grade Level: 7 and up

Customer Reviews

Praise for *The Memory of Light*: "Stork further marks himself as a major voice in teen literature by delivering one of his richest and most emotionally charged novels yet." -- Kirkus Reviews, starred review "Stork writes sensitively about Vicky's journey from near death to shaky recovery... A subject that needs the discussion Stork's potent novel can readily provide." -- Publishers Weekly, starred review "Accurate, heartbreaking, and hopeful... A beautiful read." -- School Library Journal, starred review "Undeniable emotional strength and an encouraging, compassionate message. Stork writes his characters with authenticity and respect... Highly rewarding." -- Booklist, starred review Praise for

Marcelo in the Real World: "[A] brisk, brilliant, unsentimental novel." -- Robert Lipsyte, New York Times Book Review* "Stork introduces ethical dilemmas, the possibility of love, and other 'real world' conflicts, all the while preserving the integrity of his characterizations and intensifying the novel's psychological and emotional stakes. Not to be missed." -- Publishers Weekly, starred review* "It is the rare novel that reaffirms a belief in goodness; rarer still is one that does so this emphatically." -- The Horn Book Magazine, starred review Praise for The Last Summer of the Death Warriors: "Stork's latest marks him as one of the most promising young adult authors of the new decade." -- The Horn Book, starred review "Complicated yet ultimately endearing characters are a Francisco Stork standard. His latest novel doesn't disappoint." -- Chicago Sun-Times

Francisco X. Stork is the author of *Marcelo in the Real World*, winner of the Schneider Family Book Award for Teens and the Once Upon a World Award; *The Last Summer of the Death Warriors*, which was named to the YALSA Best Fiction for Teens list and won the Amelia Elizabeth Walden Award; *Irises*; and *The Memory of Light*, which received four starred reviews. He lives near Boston with his wife. You can find him on the web at www.franciscostork.com and @StorkFrancisco.

As a resident of South Texas who lives about 150 miles from the Mexican border, I was impressed by this YA novel. It really hit home for me. It's a tough read at times -- not because of the writing quality, which is very good, but because of the subject matter. This is a story ripped from the headlines, involving drugs, kidnapping of young women for the sex trade, poverty and other serious subjects in Juarez, Mexico. The main character, Sara Zapata, is a reporter for *El Sol*, a newspaper in Juarez. The book starts with one of Sara's articles about human trafficking -- specifically, about the kidnapping of her friend, Linda, several months ago. Sara is on a mission to find the kidnappers and free Linda, if she's still alive. But then her editor tells her to back off because the paper is being threatened by criminal elements. They've already had two reporters killed. Meanwhile, Sara's younger brother, Emiliano, a high school soccer standout, struggles to supplement the family income by marketing pinatas and other craft items his friends make to stores that cater to tourists. He's also in love with a young woman from a wealthy family. Trying to impress her and please her family, he gets drawn into shady dealings. As the stakes get higher, so does the violence. This is a gritty, realistic novel about life in Juarez at the height of the cartel wars. Although the recommended age for readers is 12 and older, parents should make sure their child is up to reading a book with this level of threat and violence. The characters are well-drawn and the situations are all too believable. Some younger readers might find it a bit scary.

I was captivated by this book for two reasons. First, I've always been fascinated by and horrified by what happens to girls in Juarez. There are a number of wonderful non-fiction books on the subject for those who are interested, but Stork does a great job here of truly putting us into the places of the victims and their families in this fictional account. Second, I loved Emiliano. This was such an awesome character. He's a sort of tarnished knight and I spent so much of the book just hoping that he would end well - and fearing that he would not. The book also gives us insight into the issues of immigration and border crossing from the Mexican point of view - as well as a look at life in a modern border town. Note that while it's classified as Teens/YA, it's a book that will definitely appeal to adult readers - maybe even more so. The themes of drugs and prostitution are there, though not graphic. A very good book that transported me to a very dark place for a while.

This Young Adult novel is pegged for ages twelve and up but is probably best suited for the end of the range because of the harshness of its theme, which is how corruption spreads, drawing in even those who want to lead good lives, in a lawless society like Juarez, Mexico. In alternating chapters, it follows a sister and a brother, Sara and Emiliano Zapata. Their father is gone, across the border and divorced now from Mami. Mami understands why he had to leave but she wouldn't leave Juarez and there was nothing for him. Sara has accepted it but Emiliano has not. He acted out when the divorce papers came, was arrested but was saved by a priest, brother Patricio, who recruited him to a Boy Scout-like group called the Jiparis. The Jiparis thing is hiking the desert and climbing the mountains near the US-Mexico border. Emiliano is still in high school. He's a soccer star there but that won't earn money when he graduates at the end of this year. He needs to find a way to support his family, Mami and Sara, and it's hard to find a way that's honest. Sara's best friend Linda was abducted four months ago. Sara reports for a newspaper in Juarez, El Sol. She writes about Linda and before long has a column in the paper where she writes about other desaparecidas in Juarez, dozens of them every year. She's been threatened before but now she receives a threat specifically aimed at her and her family. Something happened: the stakes have increased, but how? and why this threat against her? Sara starts digging. Meanwhile Emiliano gains a girlfriend, Perla Rubi, from a well to do lawyer family in Juarez. But wooing her comes at a cost: Emiliano will have to bend (really break) his principles to win her. Here we have the two narrative tracks of the novel: Sara's efforts to find her lost friend and increasing pressure

against her to shut her down, Emiliano attempts to negotiate the thin line between adhering to his moral standards and the subtle but intense pressure on him to jettison them in favor of an easier, infinitely more profitable life. Given the location, you know narcotics are involved. There are corrupt cops, other people corrupted as well, even a death squad. The book ends in a desperate chase across the desert. Sara sticks to her principles. Emiliano is forced to a decision about his. The book is well written. Extreme things happen in the novel but they are things that actually do happen there. Nothing is exaggerated or hyperbolic. Sara, Emiliano, Mami, father Patricio, many others are presented as good people. The bad people don't seem to have been created monsters. Harsh reality and the seductions of money and power simply led them that way.

I have to admit, I'm thinking that *Disappeared* is the sort of book that's going to appeal more to an adult audience that enjoys literary thrillers more than the teen audience it's being marketed to. Stork writes the story from a distance in a way. While we see what the two main characters, Sara and Emiliano, are going through, we don't really get into their heads enough to understand how they're feeling or thinking. The events that happen to them feel realistic to what I know about Ciudad Juarez. The first two thirds of the book really set up the final third, but I can't say the payoff is exactly worth it. If you're curious about life along the border in Mexico, this is only a small flavor of what to expect. Emiliano in particular faces difficult choices due to the circumstances of location. I would have liked the book to be more about Sara's quest to find the missing girls mentioned at the start of the book, but the plot takes a decidedly different path. It's not always gripping and tends to be a bit slow moving on occasion which disrupts the tensions. Seeing as my attention was flagging at times and I didn't feel a strong connection to the characters, I wonder about the target audience doing the same.

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