

Marcelo in the Real World



By Francisco X. Stork



Adapted Text

Chapters 1-4

Vocabulary: research, straightforward, Asperger Syndrome, independent, responsible, tree house

¹ “Marcelo, are you ready?” I give the doctor the thumbs up and he slides me into the tunnel machine. I like the feeling of being closed in. I close my eyes and wait for the music - the music inside of me. I call it internal music or IM. I don’t really hear the IM as much as I remember it. I lift my finger to let the doctor know when I remember it.

² Ready for the real stuff?” he asks when he slides me out. By “real stuff” he means music you can hear with your ears. I pick Beethoven’s “Largo” from Piano Concerto No. 3. I like the music’s simple melody and I know it’s only about 10 minutes long. Then he slides me back in.

Marcelo needs to learn to live in the real world.

³ I have been going to see the doctor every six months since I was five. He does research on the brain. I like the doctor because he is straightforward. He says what he means. The doctor asks me what it’s like remembering the IM. I tell him it is like a big watermelon. When the internal music is there, I am one of the seeds and the music is the watermelon.

⁴ My mom, Aurora, asks if the doctor found anything in there and taps my head. He laughs and says it was totally empty. Arturo, my father, wants to send me to Oak Ridge High, a public high school. I am seventeen years old and have always gone to a private school called Patterson. Patterson is a special school for people with autism. It is hard to describe why I am different, but the closest thing I can say is that I have Asperger’s Syndrome, a kind of autism.

Marcelo needs to learn to live in the real world.

⁵ One reason I like going to Patterson is because I get to work with the ponies. I got a summer job at Patterson as the stable man. I will help take care of the ponies. Children with disabilities come to Patterson to ride the ponies. My job as stable man will continue into next year. Next year I will be involved not only with the upkeep of the ponies and the stable, but with the actual training of the ponies. I am very good with the ponies.

⁶ When we get home, Arturo is grilling steaks for dinner and wants to talk to me. Arturo thinks I need to learn to live in the real world so I can be independent and responsible. Life is too easy for me at Patterson. He wants me to have a job where I have to interact with people and figure out new things by myself. He wants me to work in the mailroom of his law firm. He tells me if I give it a real try, he will let me decide where I will go to school my senior year. I go to my tree house to think about Arturo’s offer.

Marcelo needs to learn to live in the real world.

Chapters 5-7

Vocabulary: abide, customs, discreet, scripture, competitive, geographical order

¹ The night before I start the job at the law firm, I don't sleep. I made my schedule the night before:

5:00 a.m. Wake up

5:05 a.m. Remembering

5:35 a.m. Feed Namu (my dog)

5:40 a.m. Dumbbells

6:00 a.m. Continue with reading of Psalms

6:30 a.m. Breakfast

6:45 a.m. Shower and dress

7:00 a.m. Wait for Arturo to go to the train station

² Arturo is late and we have to hurry to the train. We are the last people to board. I say it is much more relaxing to be early. He tells me this is work now - no more relaxing. Arturo goes over a few things before we get to the law firm. First, he tells me that I have to abide by some established customs in the business world. People at work are discreet about their religion. They don't quote scripture. I write all this down in my notebook. *Do not pray so others see you. Do not quote scripture.*

³ Second, the law firm is competitive. You can be friends with someone and still compete against them. You can't be afraid of competing. You must assume that people are looking out for number one. Every day you need to tell yourself that you are a warrior and this is a battle.

Marcelo discovers many rules in the real world.

⁴ Arturo introduces me to Jasmine, my boss in the mailroom. She points to a small metal desk next to the copier and says I can put my backpack there. I decide to bring a picture of Namu to put over the nasty things someone has written on the wall next to the desk. I think maybe they weren't too happy about working there, either.

⁵ Jasmine tells me she is not happy about me working at the law firm. She wanted to hire a girl named Beverly but, since I was the boss's son, I got the job. Arturo is also paying her an extra \$2,000 a month. She needs the money, so she agreed. I tell her I am not happy about working there either. I tell her about the summer job I was supposed to have at Patterson.

⁶ She shows me the mail cart and describes the job. We deliver mail four times a day. If something comes in by hand delivery or overnight, we deliver those things right away. When the mail comes in, it is sorted into folders in geographical order. They follow the way the offices are laid out, so when you go around the office you just move from one folder to the next. I like the order of the mail. When I get back to the mailroom, Jasmine hands me a list of tasks I will need to learn. She will show me today. Tomorrow, I will do it on my own.

Marcelo discovers many rules in the real world.

Chapters 8-10

Vocabulary: progress, trust, defective, suing, client, bonus

¹ One of my jobs is filling the copy machines with paper and making small talk if I have to. I studied small talk at Patterson. I have a number of responses to small talk initiated by others, as well as a number of small talk questions for when I have to start the small talk. In Social Interaction class, we learned to formulate four or five questions from the day's events. Every morning, I go to a local event Web page and write down a few questions.

² Arturo defines progress as successfully completing the tasks you're given. By his definition, I am making progress. One day, Wendell, the son of my father's partner, stops to talk. He also has a job working at the firm this summer. Arturo wants me to be friends with Wendell, but I don't trust him.

Marcelo learns to work in the real world.

³ Wendell wants to talk about Jasmine. He likes Jasmine, but Jasmine doesn't like him. He thinks I can get Jasmine to go out with him. I ask if he thinks Jasmine is beautiful. He says she is beautiful in an elemental kind of way. Then I ask if he wants to marry Jasmine. He laughs and says people like him do not marry people like Jasmine. Jasmine tells me to watch out for Wendell. He is not someone I can trust. He's all appearance, just like his father, and just as mean inside. Wendell gives Jasmine the creeps.

⁴ One morning, I am getting ready to go to the train when Arturo tells me to get my gym clothes. He wants me to go to the gym with him before work. When we're at the gym, I hear my father talking business with another man. My father represents a company called Vidromek.

Marcelo learns to work in the real world.

⁵ Vidromek makes windshields. Some of the windshields made by Vidromek are defective. That means the windshield did not do what it was supposed to do when the car was in a wreck. People have been badly hurt because the windshield did not shatter when it was hit. The people are suing Vidromek. Vidromek is Arturo's client. Arturo makes a deal with the man to pay the people money and, in return, they stop suing Vidromek. When the deal is finished, my father gets a little "bonus". Marcelo is not sure their father son time was what his father had hoped it would be.

Marcelo learns to work in the real world.

Chapters 11-14

Vocabulary: religion, Rabbi, misread, partners

¹ I am interested in music, horses, and religion. I have been going to see Rabbi Heschel since I was 10 years old. The Rabbi is Aurora's best friend. Aurora wanted me to talk with the Rabbi about the holy books I was reading so I didn't misread them. I say Rabbi Heschel is a holy man that is a woman.

² On this afternoon, I am talking with Rabbi about sex between two people. I am trying to understand what Wendell means when he says he wants to have Jasmine. The Rabbi explains that we can use sex to hurt each other. When we treat another person like a thing, something to be owned, we are hurting them. It saddens the Rabbi that I am learning about these things.

Marcelo has many questions in the real world.

³ Wendell invites me to lunch at the country club. He says he wants to be my friend. But, in order to be my friend, I need to do something for him. He wants me to ask Jasmine to come out on his boat. Wendell thinks Jasmine will come if I ask her and come along, too. She trusts me. Arturo wants me to be friends with Wendell. But I don't like what he is asking me to do to Jasmine.

⁴ Wendell explains how our fathers became partners. Our fathers went to law school together. Arturo started the firm and brought Wendell's dad in as a partner to help. Wendell keeps calling me *Marchelo*, even though he knows my name is pronounced with an "s", not a "ch". He asks me to tell him the thing I want most. I tell him I want to go to Patterson my senior year. Wendell wants us to be partners like our fathers. I will help him get what he wants and he will help me get what I want. What he wants is Jasmine. He also wants me to come and work for him.

Marcelo has many questions in the real world.

⁵ Wendell leaves me to walk back to the law firm on my own. I get lost and call Jasmine to help me. When I describe the stores and tell her the street name, she knows where I am and comes to get me. As we are walking back, she tells me about her family. Her brother died when he was kicked by a horse named Kickaz. She was mad at the horse for a long time, but not anymore. Her father still lives on their farm in Vermont. Then she takes me to her apartment. She loves music like me. I am glad she showed me her apartment.

Marcelo has many questions in the real world.

Chapters 15-18

Vocabulary: organize, intact, taqueria, logical

¹ Wendell asked my father if I could work for him instead of Jasmine and Arturo said yes. I told Arturo that Jasmine needs me in the mailroom, but it doesn't matter. Arturo has made up his mind.

² Wendell wants me to organize some files from the Vidromek case. The pieces of paper that I don't file, I am to put in the "trash" box to be thrown away. Then he leaves. When I am finished sorting the documents, I check the "trash" box to make sure nothing was placed there by mistake. In the bottom of the box, I find a picture of a girl. It must have come from one of the Vidromek files. The girl is about my age. Half her face is intact, but the other half is missing. I don't put the picture back in the "trash" box. Instead, I take the picture with me when I leave.

Marcello finds a mystery in the real world.

³ Why does the picture of the girl upset me so much? I remind myself that my goal is to make it through the summer, to complete the assignments I am given, so I can go to Patterson next year. I lie awake in my tree house trying to remember the IM, but I can't find it.

⁴ I ask Jasmine to help me. I show her the picture of the girl and ask her to help me figure out who she is. She says the girl was probably involved in an accident involving a Vidromek windshield. I think that Vidromek should pay if they caused this terrible thing. Jasmine says it's not that simple. I want to help the girl, but I don't know what to do next. Jasmine tells me that only I can decide what comes next. When I ask her how I will know, she says it's like music. The right note sounds right and the wrong note sounds wrong. I think to myself: *If I do nothing to help the girl, if I let things be, what do I lose?*

Marcello finds a mystery in the real world.

⁵ When I get back to the law firm, I look at the picture again. I notice the picture is taken in an office, like a law office. I think the person who took the picture is a lawyer. The girl is standing in front of a calendar. Jasmine blows up the image so we can read the words on the calendar. One of the words is taqueria. Taqueria is a place that sells tacos.

⁶ Vidromek only does business in the United States. So we know the calendar came from a restaurant in the US that sells taco. The other thing we can read is a zip code. Jasmine looks up taqueria and the zip code on the Internet and finds 10 restaurants. We call the restaurants to see how many gave out calendars and only one restaurant did. Another quick search of the Internet revealed that there were 30 lawyers in the area. When I called the owner of the restaurant he gave me Jerry Garcia's name. Jasmine is a very logical thinker.

Marcello finds a mystery in the real world.

Chapters 19-21

Vocabulary: subway, autism spectrum, reconstructive surgery, Sisters, memo, client

¹ Jerry Garcia is a lawyer in Jamaica Plains. I have a detailed map that shows me how to get to Jerry Garcia's office. Jasmine walks me as far as the subway. I can do the rest on my own. I wait three hours to see Jerry Garcia because there are many other people waiting to see him. When he finally calls me into his office, he asks if I am in the autism spectrum. I tell him yes, I have Asperger Syndrome. He recognizes my name. I tell him why I wanted to see him and show him the picture.

Marcello makes friends in the real world.

² Jerry Garcia and Arturo went to school together. He sent Arturo the picture and a letter asking Arturo to do the right thing for the girl in the picture. Her name is Ixtel. She was hurt in a car crash. Because the windshield was defective, it didn't shatter into small pieces like it should have. Instead, it broke into big pieces and damaged the girl's face. Ixtel needs reconstructive surgery to put her face back together. It is very painful for her to talk or eat.

³ Jerry Garcia wanted Vidromek to pay for the surgery and had written the letter to Arturo asking as much. The girl's family is gone – her father had died when she was a baby and her mother died shortly after the accident. Ixtel is living with Sisters in a home about an hour from Boston. Jerry Garcia needs something to prove that Vidromek knew the windshield was defective. I say I will have to think about it.

Marcello makes friends in the real world.

⁴ That night, Jasmine finds a memo. It is the proof Jerry Garcia needs. She tells me about it, but won't give it to me. She wants me to think about what will happen if I show the memo to Jerry Garcia. What will it mean to me, to Jasmine, to Arturo, to everyone who works at the law firm? Vidromek is the law firm's biggest client.

⁵ Jasmine invites me to go with her on the weekend to Vermont. She needs to take her dad to the doctor. We can spend a night camping. When we get back, I can decide what I want to do about the memo and Ixtel.

Marcello makes friends in the real world.

Chapters 22-26

Vocabulary: camping, dementia, forgetful, hostile, shack,

¹ Aurora thinks the camping trip is a great idea. Arturo does not. This time Aurora wins. Namu gets to come, too. It is a long drive. First, I meet Jasmine's dog Gomer. Namu and Gomer like each other. Next, I meet Eleanor, a cow who thinks she's a family pet. Last, I meet Jasmine's dad, Amos. Jasmine tells me not to pay much attention to him because he has dementia. Dementia makes him forgetful and mean.

Marcello goes camping in the real world.

² Jasmine make Amos take a bath, then takes him to the doctor. I stay behind to think and explore the hills around the farm. The next day we load up Kickaz with camping gear and supplies for Amos's fishing shack. As we hike up Amos's hill, we can hear hunters in the distance. Their guns go pop, pop, pop. When we get to the lake, we set up the tent. Jasmine fishes while I think some more. For dinner we eat the fish Jasmine caught and sleep out under the stars. It is wonderful being next to Jasmine under a million stars.

Marcello goes camping in the real world.

³ When we get back on Tuesday, I see Wendell. He asks me about Jasmine and I tell him I am not going to ask her to go on his boat. Wendell thinks I want to be with Jasmine and he is mad. He tells me he wants to give me the gift of truth. It is a letter from Jasmine to Arturo. In the letter, she writes that something she and Arturo did at the Christmas party was wrong. She is sorry she couldn't say no to him. She is leaving the law firm. Wendell's "gift" hurts me very much.

Marcello goes camping in the real world.

Chapters 27-31

Vocabulary: memo, guarantees, threatens, fires

¹ The second trip to Jerry Garcia's office is easier than the first. Jerry Garcia asks me if I have found something that will help Ixtel. I say yes. Then he asks me if I have thought carefully about what I am about to do. Again, I say yes and give him the memo.

² He doesn't take the memo, only asks me the date on the memo. He will ask Wendell's dad for a copy of the memo and he will have to give it to him. Jerry Garcia tells me that he will try to work it so that the least amount of harm comes to my father, but he makes no guarantees.

Marcelo knows what comes next in the real world.

³ The next day, Wendell finds me. He is mad again. Wendell knows about the memo I gave Jerry Garcia. He looked through my backpack when I was delivering the mail and found the memo. Wendell threatens to send a copy of Jasmine's letter to Aurora because he knows it would hurt Aurora and me.

⁴ Arturo is waiting for me, too. He had just got off the phone with Jerry Garcia. He is very angry. He asks me if I have anything to say. I ask if he knew about the girl. Arturo says he knows everything that happens at the law firm. Arturo tells me I should have talked to him about it. I asked if I had, would he have given Jerry Garcia what he asked. Arturo says absolutely not. Then Arturo fires me and tells me I can take the rest of the summer to get ready for Oak Ridge High. As I am leaving, I lay Wendell's gift of truth on Arturo's desk.

Marcelo knows what comes next in the real world.

⁵ Aurora is not surprised that I come home earlier than usual. She asks if I want to talk about it. I tell her not right now. Maybe Arturo is right and Oak Ridge High is best for me. Maybe I can work with the ponies on the weekend. Aurora was right when she told me I needed to be both gentle and strong. I go to my tree house. I have seen so much this summer, good and bad. But I think I know what the next note should be.

Marcelo knows what comes next in the real world.