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Prompt 2: The journey or quest in literature (for example, *Gilgamesh*, *The Odyssey*, *Don Quixote*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *The Grapes of Wrath*, *The Wizard of Oz*) often brings about a change in the protagonist. Using specific examples from the book, write an essay that illustrates how Enrique's quest to reunite with his mother changes him.

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### A Living Struggle

In a world of boundaries, the desire for physical or spiritual exploration is an innate, human tendency driven by fascination for a higher purpose. An undeniable part of this journey involves a metamorphosis of the individual himself as challenges to previous conceptions force him to incorporate these new revelations. Literary history has seen epic travels through Odysseus, Dante, and Gulliver, but Sonia Nazario depicts a modern quest through a sixteen-year-old Honduran boy, Enrique. Having witnessed his mother leave at the age of five to work in the United States, Enrique vows to find her again, braving through gangs, trains, and deadly borders, often experiencing horrifying physical trauma. However, Enrique's experiences have inspired an emotional detachment that permeates his relationships, and his mother can only temporarily fill the void of maternal love in his heart. In Nazario's *Enrique's Journey*, external and internal transformations mark Enrique's endeavor to reunite with his mother and define life as a constant struggle that strengthens but hardens the individual.

Nazario vividly depicts Enrique's physical development from youthful vigor to an adult-like deformation that reflects a hardening, veteran body. Initially, Enrique is "the slight kid with a boyish grin" (43), suggesting a young boy's inexperience to physical hardships. On his seventh attempt, however, men beat Enrique on a train for nearly ten minutes, finally throwing

him off and leaving him in Las Anonas, “battered and bleeding” with gashes, a limp, and a swollen face, one of the many experiences that leave him physically ruined (45). Later when Enrique sees his reflection, he “recoils from what he sees. Scars and bruises. Black and blue” (100). Even Enrique balks at his appearance which has made him “almost another person... he sees a battered young man, scrawny, and disfigured” (100). Unlike the “boyish grin” of his youth, his body now stands “battered” and worn in the face of physical danger.

Most importantly, Enrique’s internal, emotional nature undergoes a similar hardening that parallels his physical change, a natural consequence of suffering at a young age. From a young boy who delights in simple pleasures, Enrique becomes a fiercely independent figure of the growing cynicism of adulthood with a hardened emotional conscience, making the loving reunion with his mother ironically full of resentment. Nazario, for instance, claims that Enrique, even at 16 years of age, loves “kites, spaghetti, soccer...play[ing] in the mud and watch[ing] Mickey Mouse cartoons” (43). This childish enjoyment of simple foods, sports, or Mickey Mouse illustrates an innocence that starkly contrasts with Enrique’s bitter anger when he sees his own physical deterioration, “steel[ing] his determination to push northward” (100). The images of hard “steel” or iron epitomize the growing emotional toughness within Enrique. He turns away from the statue of Jesus in Veracruz believing that in his current state, “he has no right to ask God for anything” (102). The denial of God’s help stems from a belief in self-inferiority, but also exemplifies a developing self-reliance that originates in Enrique’s independent confrontation of the journey’s horrors. In the safety of a migrant encampment in Nuevo Laredo, Enrique delightedly tattoos the words “*Enrique Lourdes*” on his stomach, but when someone steals his bucket for washing cars, his only livelihood, the “words mock him... But he holds back his tears... He refuses to give up” (161). In a moment of happiness, Enrique’s dreams seem possible,

but in the reality of his suffering, these desires for love “mock” him, suggesting a growing callousness that simultaneously drives him.

This very transformation within Enrique interrupts the initial happiness of mother and son with the resentment of years of neglect. Nazario remarks that mothers generally “bristle at the independence they show-- the same independence that helped the children survive their journeys north” (191). Enrique specifically targets his mother for leaving him with his irresponsible father, her pregnancy in the U.S., and her belief that the money she sent back would replace her presence, claiming that she has no right to discipline him as a mother (197-8). His wounded heart resents her treating him as an infant: “Didn’t he fend for himself growing up? Didn’t he hop freight trains across Mexico?” (200). Although Enrique finally experiences his mother’s love, the journey’s hardships, which force him to quickly mature and endure suffering, corrupt the innocent, romanticized notions he has always harbored for his future reunion.

The inevitable result of an epic-like odyssey reveals essential truths of human life. Enrique’s development from innocence to experience is a classic portrayal of the adulteration of youth that naturally detaches him from others in his desire to regain the stability of his early childhood. Nonetheless, the same quest manifests Enrique’s spirit of defiance and sheer determination that allows him to hold his own as an individual and eventually restore his relationship with his mother. Nazario brilliantly portrays Enrique’s heart-wrenchingly unique journey in the lens of an emotional path upon which every human must inevitably embark. An exploration into the unknown may pose challenges to the individual, but transformation molds a human that exemplifies the reality of life, at once brutal and inspiring.

Works Cited

Nazario, Sonia. *Enrique's Journey*. New York: Random House, 2007. Print.