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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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The Journey from Childhood to Adulthood

As a young boy, Enrique embarks on a quest to find his mother, Lourdes, who has left in order to provide for him a better life. Her departure is the reason Enrique begins his journey and his fond memories of their time together significantly influence his future. The idealized thought of her becomes what Enrique holds onto during his long and arduous journey, and his love for her changes him in countless ways. A journey in literature often brings about a change in the protagonist, and through four stages in Enrique's journey, readers discover how his real and imagined relationship with Lourdes shapes him from a child into an adult.

During his childhood in Honduras, the first stage of his life, Enrique's relationship with his mother is one of confusion. He misses her and does not understand why she left. "Enrique asks about his mother...but his mother does not come. Her disappearance is incomprehensible. Enrique's bewilderment turns to confusion and then to adolescent anger" (9). Because of the constant moving from house to house and the resulting confused identity, Enrique becomes a troublemaker at school and at home. His father leaves him, and his Uncle Marco is killed. Enrique feels rejected and forgotten. "Enrique fantasizes about Lourdes's expected homecoming

in December... Christmas arrives, and he waits by the door. She does not come...Confusion finally grows into anger” (19). Lourdes’ absence has an effect of frustrating the young and impressionable Enrique.

The next stage of Enrique’s life is one of action. As he progresses through adolescence, he acquires new knowledge and understanding. “Money from Lourdes helps Enrique, too, and he realizes it. If she were here, he knows where he might well be: scavenging in the trash dump around town” (27). The older Enrique better understands the reasons why his mother left; however, he still misses her terribly. If she will not come to him, he sees no other choice but to find her. “He will simply have to do it himself... He will ride the trains” (23). Thus Enrique begins his physical journey to find his mother, and in doing so grows a little bit more into an adult.

The third stage in Enrique’s journey is the most defining, as he is forced to look inward for strength, instead of to others. He is alone for the first time of his life, and the only reason he forges on is the idea of his mother. Their relationship inevitably grows more strained because of the difficulties Enrique encounters while travelling and the little contact between them. The more desperate Enrique’s situation becomes, the more Enrique idealized about their reunion. With this important stage Enrique defines his own values and ideas.

The final stage, Enrique’s growth into an adult, occurs after their reunion. He is now 16, and after so many years of solely wanting to be with his mother, Enrique is let down. “... they realize they are strangers. Neither knows the other’s likes or dislikes... Enrique says, “Who are you to me? I don’t even know you!”” (194 and 195). Without his mother present during

formative childhood years, Enrique has grown into an adult that never knew anything but an idealized, childish version of his mother.

Though there are many days of fights and disagreements in the days following their reunion, Enrique finally respects his mother's decision for leaving him. "As time passes, Enrique sees other things with equal clarity. He knows now that his mother will never offer an apology for leaving him. He tries to put the love he has always felt for Lourdes above the resentment..." (235). Through this forgiveness Enrique grows out of his childhood fantasy. He matures into an adult who does not depend on an idea to carry him forward. "... with his third New Year in the United States, Enrique resolves to change. He can no longer wallow in what happened in the past. He must live in the present— and for the future. He's not hurting Lourdes as much as he is hurting himself" (217). Enrique is his own person who has come to terms with his difficult childhood and his mother's absence. He resolves to reunite with his daughter and her mother, possibly bringing them to the United States. "He can't have her grow up worrying about money as he did... if he doesn't change, he will repeat his mother's mistake; time will slip by, and Jasmín will grow up without him."

Enrique's unique relationship with his absent mother greatly influences who he becomes. Reuniting with her is his sole purpose for the entire first part of his life. His journey starts as a search for his mother, but becomes a journey of self-discovery. Enrique begins as a child, with a confused view of his mother, but in time grows into a person of his own. In the end, Enrique becomes an adult, with his own individual understanding of the world. His quest to reunite with his mother ultimately defines who he is.