

Dear Reader:

A mother knows when she is losing her child. Sometimes it's to age; other times, it's the child who's lost. A mother also knows when to try to re-connect with her child. That's Felicia Esperanza's plan when she takes her young daughter Aurora to a street corner on a sunny afternoon to dance with other mothers and their daughters in a place memorialized in a 1980s Madonna music video. When their dance is cut short by a lethal drive-by shooting, both Felicia and Aurora are cut adrift in Echo Park, a real Los Angeles neighborhood where dreams are like the horizon, always visible in the distance but too far to ever be reached. It's a place where

you need equal doses of hard work and luck to find one's self again, and, in Aurora's and Felicia's case, each other.

Welcome to The Madonnas of Echo Park, a world hidden in plain sight yet right outside your door. I wrote this book to make visible the people you see every day — busboys, day laborers, maids — but might not always notice. Yet the book is about something more. Echo Park was my home until I was eighteen years old. Growing up, Echo Park was both a gritty landscape and a mythical place where the Virgin Mary and Madonna could stand side-by-side on Sunset Boulevard. I wanted to write something that would let every reader experience the same doses of reality and magic I did.

I hope you'll want to take this journey

with me, which begins when you open this
book. If you're so inspired, drop me a line
and let me know about your own travels in
Echo Park.

Sincerely yours,

Brando Jephson