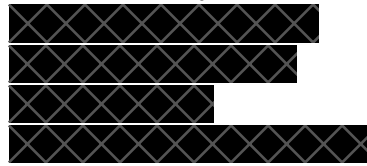


Delays in Parenting

Michael Gainey



PAGE ONE – Six Panels

PANEL ONE

A wide shot the width of the page. Inside a hospital room. Rather than the clunky, box-like machines of today, heart-rate monitors and the like are spherical, smooth, clean. This is the future. Against the wall on the right side of the panel, a hospital bed (again a spherical design) is centered on the wall. On the readers' side of the bed, a woman, MARIA, with straight black hair in a paper gown places a NEWBORN into a spherical bassinette. At the window (a floor to ceiling transparent panel), HECTOR, a man with rounded cheeks wearing a humble jumpsuit looks pensively at a futuristic skyline in the distance.

Hector: Do you think they jump us back to *right now*? Or have we been here a few days already?

Maria: For parenthood?

PANEL TWO

A MEDIUM SHOT of Hector. He rolls his eyes as he gestures with one arm crossing the other and his hands indicating two separates moments in an imaginary timeline.

Hector: Yeah, I mean, I'd hate to wait thirty years, jump back and wait *longer*.

PANEL THREE

Hector steps away from the window, making his way to the end of the hospital bed. As he speaks, Maria, nearly nude, pulls her jumpsuit (similar to Hector's) up from the floor over her legs. Her paper gown tossed on the bed, she shoots Hector a playful smile. The newborn sleeps soundly in the bassinette beside her.

Hector: What if the jump makes us sick? Is there recovery time?

Hector : We won't exactly be in our prime.

Maria: Speak for yourself.

MORE

PAGE ONE CONTINUED

PANEL FOUR

Hector now sits on the bed. He slouches and eyes the floor, lost in thoughts of the future. Maria stands next to him, fastening the top button of her jumpsuit, now fully clothed.

Hector: Thirty years...

Maria: Our parents did it, so can we. We'll work and save and do it right.

PANEL FIVE

Hector, still slouching, looks up at his wife, surrendering to her superior logic. She's right. She stands beside him, resting a comforting hand on his shoulder.

Maria: Career first, then a child.

PANEL SIX

Maria sits next to Hector and wraps her arms around Hector's arm closest to her, resting a loving head on his shoulder. She smiles as she teases him. Hector cracks a smile, lightening up.

Hector: I'll probably go bald.

Maria: Maybe you'll shrivel up like a raisin.

Hector: Some liver spots.

Maria: Ooh, baby.

PAGE TWO – Seven Panels

PANEL ONE

Hector and Maria lean over the bassinette as a NURSE IN JUMPSUIT-LIKE SCRUBS stands by to escort the baby out (her shoulders and head stand above them out of frame).

Maria: See you soon, sweetheart.

Hector: Bye, kiddo.

PANEL TWO

Wide, over Maria and Hector's shoulders. They watch the Nurse as she leads the wheeled bassinette down the hall toward a pair of double doors. Over the door, a sign reads, "to Parental Wing" with an arrow facing upwards.

Maria: I bet I'm a shriveled old hag.

Hector: Wanna bet?

PANEL THREE

Close on Maria and Hector. She eyes Hector with fear, but he throws up his hands defensively as he shakes his head.

Maria: ...

Maria: What did you do?

Hector: Nothing...

PANEL FOUR

Similar framing to Panel Three, but Maria's fear has transitioned to anger. She GRABS the chest of his jumpsuit in tightened fists. She has caught him in mid-shrug/eyeroll as he downplays his actions.

Hector: It's just a little camera.

Maria: WHAT?!

MORE

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PANEL FIVE

A close-up of the newborn in its bassinette, fast asleep. Attached to the blanket wrapped snugly around its body, we can see a VERY SMALL CAMERA. Basically, it's the size of a lapel pin shaped like a simple lens.

PANEL SIX

SMALL PANEL: Closer on the small camera. It is ominously neat, clean, and hardly noticeable when not the focus of the panel.

PANEL SEVEN

Over Maria's shoulder (still clutching her stupid husband in an angry grip), Hector stands off-balance while showing her a tablet-like monitor with a video feed. In the video feed, we see a low-angle of the nurse's torso and head as she escorts the baby (and therefore camera). Beside her in the viewscreen, circular ceiling lights lead from the top of the screen to the bottom.

Hector: It's not a big deal!

Maria: They'll find it!

PAGE THREE – Seven Panels

PANEL ONE

At a futuristic security checkpoint, the nurse leads the baby in its bassinette through an archway, a sleek, high-tech metal detector. A military officer (styled after the gritty, tough guy JUDGES of 2000 AD comics) gestures off-panel, indicating that the nurse and baby have passed security and can continue on.

Security Officer: All clear. Thank ya, ma'am.

CAPTION: See! He's through!

PANEL TWO

A medium shot of Hector and Maria. Back in the hospital hallway, Hector gloats, his chin raised as he looks down at his wife. Maria pulls at her hair with both hands; she is hunched over, incredulous as she stares hard at the floor.

Hector: Maybe I'm not as dumb as your mother thinks.

Maria: omigodomigodomigod

PANEL THREE

In a closer medium shot, Hector holds the tablet with one hand, while using his body and free hand to block Maria as she reaches desperately to snatch the tablet from him. Hector smiles anxiously, his eyes wide, locked on the tablet screen in his hand.

Hector: Shh, shh, sh. Here we come.

PANEL FOUR

Wide shot of the hall. Off center in the frame, we see Hector hunched over the screen in his hands, intently looking for a glimpse of himself. Maria uses her body to block Hector from the view of onlookers and waves innocently at a nurse walking toward them in the hallway. Next to Hector and Maria, a decorative bamboo plant brightens up the hall.

Maria: H- hi.

Hector: Alright, where's saggy old Hector?

MORE

PAGE THREE CONTINUED

PANEL FIVE

CLOSE ON Hector, he smiles at the viewscreen in his hands, practically hiding behind the decorative bamboo plant now. Over his shoulder, Maria, her back still to Hector, HUSHES him through gritted teeth, trying not to draw attention to herself.

Maria: Keep your voice down.

Hector: Hey, I don't look half b---

PANEL SIX

Hector's smile is now completely trumped by TERROR. He doesn't just dislike what he sees; it strikes fear into him.

Hector: NO!

Maria: Shhhh!

Hector: No no no no...

Maria: What? What is it now?

PANEL SEVEN

Over Maria's shoulder, we see Hector, now crouched. Maria clutches the shoulder of his jumpsuit, turning him around to look at her. Tears stream from Hector's panicked eyes. He has just seen the future and he is not in it. He is afraid for his life. Maria's free hand clasps her open mouth shut and stifles any sound like that might escape. On the tablet screen in Hector's hand, we can see two faces smiling toward camera to their new adopted child. The woman has SHORT, CURLY WHITE HAIR and a BEAUTY MARK on her cheek. The man has a STRONG ANGULAR FACE.

Hector: That's not us...

PAGE FOUR – Six Panels

PANEL ONE

A Wide Shot across the top of the page: Hector SPRINTS around a corner in the hospital hallway toward the reader. He SHOVES a NURSE aside to panel right to clear his path. To his left, people, dressed in similar jumpsuits, sit in chairs along the inside wall leading to the corner Hector just rounded. At the corner, Maria has just passed into view, YELLING frantically for her husband and giving chase.

Nurse: Ah!

Hector: No no no no no no no no no

Maria: Hector!

PANEL TWO

Similar framing to Panel One. From panel left, a military officer SLUGS Hector in the face, throwing his full weight into the punch. The fist presses firmly into Hector's cringing face, lifting him off his feet and sending his body falling to the right side of the panel.

SFX: CRACK!

Caption: My son.

PANEL THREE

The military officer who punched Hector and a second officer grab Hector roughly by his upper arms, lifting him to his knees. Hector slouches, barely conscious. He lacks the strength or clear-headedness for a struggle. Behind the leftmost officer, Maria SCREAMS hysterically while a third military officer detains her in a tight bear hug. Her feet churn under her, but she is going nowhere.

Maria: NO! NOOOOO! PLEASE!

Caption: Am I dead?

MORE

PAGE FOUR CONTINUED

PANEL FOUR

CLOSE ON: Hector. His shoulders raised as the military officers drag him; their hands are visible just above his shoulders, firmly gripping his upper arms. His right eye swollen, Hector regains consciousness, but looks at his hands in despair. What has he done?

Caption: Did I...?

PANEL FIVE

HEAD ON, we see the two military officers pulling Hector (with his back to us, his legs dragging behind him). On the left side of the panel, a young man holds a young woman (both in jumpsuits) as they look on, shocked at the uncommon display of violence.

Officer: Suspect apprehended. Birthing Wing Six.

Caption: Did they...?

PANEL SIX

CLOSE UP: Just Hector's head, neck and shoulders. His head hangs. Tears stream down his face, dripping from his chin. His mouth

Caption: Will I never be a father?