

THE SWAPPERS

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CHAPTER 1

EXT. STREET -- DAY

In a suburb that is old enough for the trees to have grown taller than the houses, there is a curious kid looking up at the cloudy sky. Her name is Flor (short for Florencia) (12). She is listening for some sound in the environment.

What, though? Not the summertime chorus of cicadas, or the leaves dancing in the wind. It's something so subtle that she must hold her breath, else she might miss it.

Wait. There it is. Did you hear it? That popping sound?

Flor perks her ears, just to be sure.

There it is again.

She scans the heavens for its source, but it's hard to see anything with the clouds moving around like that.

Still, Flor keeps her eyes and ears peeled. She's sure that it's bound to happen again, at least one more time.

And when it does, she's finally able to spot it. It's right there, just behind that slow-crawling, dark cloud.

There is a crack.

Can you see it? It's not all that big, but it's definitely there; a crack in the sky.

As if aware that it's been spotted, the crack grows a little. This, accompanied by that same popping sound from before.

At first, Flor is spooked. But, this soon morphs into a curiosity that far outweighs her survival instincts.

Again, a little pop announces that the crack has grown. Flor reaches down to the floor and picks up a rock.

With her target now in sight, Flor puts her little league training to good use, and throws the rock with all her might.

She stumbles forward from her own momentum.

Wow, she has a great arm for a kid her size. The rock is way up there now; way farther than Flor ever expected.

The rock grows smaller and smaller and smaller, until it is just a speck, easily lost with the blink of an eye.

Is it gone?

No. It's coming back, plummeting faster than it rose.

It lands a little up the street, at the feet of a not-quite-human SPECTER; a ghastly humanoid seemingly pulled from artist Sergio Bustamante's own surrealist dreamscapes.

Flor mouths something that we can't hear; a name, perhaps.

The Specter responds by pointing to the sky, which instantly shatters like a window. Shards made from the broken sky rain down, revealing a cosmic night behind this cloudy day.

VOICE

Flor

The view of the falling sky renders Flor speechless. She marvels at it for so long, that she fails to consider the thousands of glass shards racing down to meet her.

VOICE (CONT'D)

Flor?

Oh, right. There are thousands of glass shards racing down towards Flor. Unfortunately, it's too late. All that she can do is take cover under her arms, just before they hit.

INT. FLOR'S ROOM -- DAY

Flor watches the rain through her bedroom window.

MOM

(O.S.)

Flor!

Puzzles, trinkets, and LEGO blocks; Flor's room is full of things that you can put together to make stuff.

LEO

I think mom's calling you.

That kid by the door is LEO (8), Flor's younger brother.

FLOR

Coming.

By the time Flor rolls out of bed, Leo is already gone.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Flor stumbles into strangely narrow hallway that connects her room to her brothers'; all part of the architecture of this long, windy house that never seems to want to end.

MOM

Flor!

FLOR

I said I'm coming!

Flor trips over a skateboard with no wheels.

FLOR (CONT'D)

Ah!-- Tito!

TITO

(O.S.)

Sorry!

That's Rodolfo, Flor's pubescent older brother. He goes by TITO [tee-toh](16), and responds from nowhere in particular.

None of this loud exchange bothers DAD (late 30's), who fell asleep watching broadcast footage of the Vietnam War.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Flor's MOM (late 30's) chops fruit into perfect cubes. She is accurate and precise with her cuts, as with anything else.

MOM

(To herself)

Esta niña...

Leo has already been presented with a bowl of these cubes, but has chosen to ignore them in favor of a toy.

MOM (CONT'D)

Florencia!

FLOR

What.

"What" is not a respectful enough response. Mom quietly notes this in her mind, and continues making breakfast.

MOM

Have you seen your brother?

FLOR

He's right there.

It's true, Leo is.

MOM
No, not Leo.

FLOR
Tito?

MOM
Luis.

FLOR
Luis!

MOM
Shh! Don't just yell, go find him.

Flor quietly notes the hypocrisy. She would rather pawn this chore off on someone else, but Leo is already gone.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Flor crosses through the house, back to the bedrooms. She steps on that toy Leo was just playing with in the kitchen.

FLOR
Ah!-- Leo!

LEO
(O.S.)
Sorry!

Flor kicks the toy out of the way. It lands on Dad's lap, but even this doesn't wake him from his slumber.

FLOR
Have you seen Luis?!

LEO
No!

Leo shouts from some unknown location. Flor sulks back to the bedrooms, past footage of Vietnam protesters on the t.v.

INT. TITO'S BEDROOM -- DAY

Nobody is allowed in Tito's room, something that he made clear when he added the KEEP OUT sign to the collage of magazine covers and record sleeves decorating his door.

The door is open, though. Flor peeks in without entering.

FLOR

Tito?

Tito keeps memories in his room: broken skateboards; a cool commemorative coke bottle that he found; tickets for every movie and concert that he's ever attended; piles of books.

TITO

Yeah?

Tito's too distracted by the patches that he's trying to hand stitch onto his favorite jacket. He's never done this before.

FLOR

Have you seen Luis?

TITO

Did you check his room?

It's across the hall. The door is wide open. He's not there.

FLOR

Yes.

TITO

I don't know, then.

Flor goes to leave.

FLOR

Okay.

Tito rips the extra string from his patchwork with the nearest utensil: a spoon from a bowl of oatmeal.

TITO

Hey... Have you seen Maya today?

Flor stops. Tito's actually looking up from his jacket now.

FLOR

No. Why?

TITO

I think I forgot to bring her in last night.

EXT. BACKYARD -- DAY

It's still raining. Flor stands by the door to get a look at the hole in the fence that probably fits a medium sized dog.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Mom's already moved on from chopping fruit to setting the table. The menu includes pan dulce, fruit, milk, juice; she's now cooking scrambled eggs with machacado on the stove.

FLOR
Maya ran away.

Leo enters the kitchen reading a coloring book.

MOM
Maya?

FLOR
The dog.

This is another thing that Mom disapproves of.

MOM
You shouldn't give animals people names. It's disrespectful.

Leo drops his coloring book.

LEO
Puppy ran away?

MOM
No.

FLOR
Yes.

LEO
What?

MOM
Flor, you're going to make your brother cry.

She already has.

TITO
Mom, I'm going out!

MOM
What for?

Tito just arrived, but he already wishes that he hadn't.

TITO
To... Look... For--

FLOR
--She knows.

TITO
The dog. I'm sorry.

MOM
Not in this weather.

Mom! TITO Mom! LAU

MOM
You'll get sick. I don't want you
missing school.

TITO
Fine, then I'll take the car.

Mom chuckles to herself. She transfers the *machacado* to a
serving platter, and goes to wash the pan.

TITO (CONT'D)
What's so funny?

Mom notices Leo quietly sobbing to himself at the table.

MOM
Nothing... Get in the van. I'm
parked out front.

She cradles Leo on her way to the door.

INT/EXT. VAN -- DAY

That very particular melodic whistle that is Maya's usual beck
and call echoes fruitlessly through the neighborhood.

Maya! LAU Maya! TITO

The family van transports all four of its passengers at a
slow crawl through the thick morning rain.

MOM LEO
Maya! Puppy!... Toot-toot-toot.

Because Leo can't whistle, he resorts to chanting the melody
that he hears, followed by a pause at regular intervals.

FLOR
Wait, stop.

MOM
What? What is it?

FLOR
There.

It's Maya's collar stuck on a bush. There's no dog in sight.

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- DAY

Mom exits the van. She hurries to the house with an umbrella in one hand, and Leo, still weeping, in the other.

MOM
Shh... I'm sure she'll come back.

Leo says something unintelligible between sobs, before burying himself into Mom's shoulder. They go inside.

Eager to go back to his stitching, Tito grabs the other umbrella and waits for Flor to get off the van with him.

TITO
You coming?

FLOR
In a bit.

Tito already has a foot out of the car, which Flor interprets as evidence of his half-hearted consolation.

TITO
Hey, I'm sorry... We'll put up signs tomorrow, no?

FLOR
Sure.

Tito accepts this as his cue to leave. Now alone, Flor takes a moment to inspect Maya's collar. It's been cut.

INT. GARAGE -- DAY

The garage door opens, revealing Flor making a run from the van to the garage. The family's station-wagon is on.

Flor coughs at the smell of fumes that fill the room.

FLOR

Hello?

She goes to place the remnants of Maya's collar next to a stack of dog toys and accessories, before inspecting the car.

FLOR (CONT'D)

Luis? Is that you?

Flor comes to the driver's side window. LUIS (18), Flor's missing eldest brother lays limp against the steering wheel. He holds a call to military service draft letter.

FLOR (CONT'D)

L-- Luis? Are you okay?

She taps him on the shoulder. Luis doubles over on his side. He must have died reading the letter over and over again.

FLOR (CONT'D)

Mom?!

 INTERLUDE 1

EXT. WOODSTOCK MUSIC FESTIVAL 1969 - MAIN STAGE -- DAY

A million hands clap in unison to the rhythm of bongos introducing a song. The music echoes through the crowd.

The bass line kicks in; some can't help but start grooving. The audience goes wild during the subsequent crescendo.

Somewhere in the ocean of people, there is a distressed woman, MONICA (late 20s). She's barefoot, covered in mud, and carries her unconscious daughter, COLLEEN (9), in her arms.

MONICA
 Get out of the way! Move!

People slowly step aside to open a path for Monica.

MONICA (CONT'D)
 Move! I need to get her to--!

Monica slips on a rock and falls on her side. Colleen stumbles to the ground and rolls a couple of feet on the mud.

MONICA (CONT'D)
 No, no, no, no, no... You're okay.
 Colleen! Baby, can you-- Ah!

Monica tries to get up, but the rock that she slipped on gauged her foot wide open. She's bleeding quite a bit.

MONICA (CONT'D)
 Colleen! Colleen? Baby.... You can
 hear me, yes?

Colleen's limp body suggests otherwise.

MONICA (CONT'D)
 (Muttering)
 It's okay, you're okay. It's
 okay...

A FESTIVAL GOER goes to tend to Colleen. He checks her pulse, and immediately waves for assistance.

FESTIVAL GOER #1
 Help! She needs help!

More FESTIVAL GOERS run over to help Colleen, obscuring Monica's view of her daughter. This makes her anxious.

MONICA

No, wait... What are you doing?
She's my daughter! Hey!

Monica drags her body towards the huddle. She makes her best effort to get back on two feet, but keeps half-tripping. Some TEENAGERS try to help her up, but she bats them away.

MONICA (CONT'D)

I said, let her go! She's MY D--Ah!

Monica slips again and falls face first into the mud.

EXT. WOODSTOCK FESTIVAL 1969 - MEDICAL TENTS -- DAY

Monica sits on a plastic chair outside of the medical bay beside a long line of people waiting for medical attention.

She toys with some granola that she was given in a tiny plastic cup. Her foot is crudely bandaged, as is the side of her head, where she fell into the mud the second time.

She eyes the inside of the medical tent, anxious to see anything. She can't. She plays with her granola some more.

She tries loosening her jaw, which she had been clenching without realizing it. She wipes her sweaty hands.

Her eyes remain dilated from the LSD that she took earlier.

FESTIVAL GOER #2

(O.S.)

The kid okay?

FESTIVAL GOER #1

(O.S.)

Seems so.

Monica doesn't dare to look at the source of these voices.

FESTIVAL GOER #2

(O.S.)

What happened?

FESTIVAL GOES #1

(O.S.)

Don't know, wasn't breathing, just out there, near the mud pits... Must've swallowed who knows what.

FESTIVAL GOER #2

(O.S.)

Can't imagine bringing a kid here.

This hurts monica's feelings. She tries and fails not to show it, though she *does* stop herself from screaming at them.

FESTIVAL GOER #1

(O.S.)

Heh, yeah, I know.

FESTIVAL GOER #2

(O.S.)

You saved that kid's life

(Teasing)

Mr. Purple Heart.

FESTIVAL GOER #1

(O.S.)

Hah, I ain't do shit. Kid just started breathin' again.

FESTIVAL GOER #2

(O.S.)

Just like that?

FESTIVAL GOER #1

(O.S.)

Just like that.

FESTIVAL GOER #2

(O.S.)

Shitty parents get lucky.

This is like a knife straight into Monica's heart. She turns to look at her detractors, who fail to recognize her. They simply get up, and leave. Monica watches them go. She can't get up with her bandaged foot. What would she say, anyways?

Once they are out of sight, she returns her attention to the medical tents. They're closed; still no news.

She chooses to look out at the miles of people ahead instead.

WHAT SHE SEES: Dozens of DANCERS grooving to the music. The longer she stares, the more they blend into one another.

MONICA

(To herself)

She's okay. You got this... She's okay. You're okay... You're okay...

She keeps mutterings the words and breathing. With every slow inhale, she focuses more on the music; with every slow exhale, she releases tension, until she finds her center.

SINGER

(Distant, faint, O.S.)

Fried neckbones, and some home
fries... Fried neckbones, and some
home fries... Fried neckbones, and
some home fries... Fried neckbones,
and some home fries.

Monica lets out a deep sigh. The stress is coming back; her
balance shifts; the world seems to be shrinking around her.

She's starting to panic.

NURSE

(O.S.)

Monica!

Monica snaps out of her trance, sweating. She gets up, and
makes her best effort to appear normal. It's not very good.

MONICA

Y-- Yes?

NURSE

Your daughter. She's ready for you.

MONICA

Yes. Of course.

CHAPTER 2

A SERIES OF IMAGES

- A framed picture of Luis' high school graduation. Its glass reflection shows Flor looking up at it.
- A basketball trophy being removed from a shelf
- An acoustic guitar
- A couple of milk-crates filled with records under a desk.

INT. LUIS' ROOM -- DAY

Flor slides the crates with records out from under the desk, and carefully sorts through them. They are mostly of progressive rock bands from the late 60s and early 70s.

Flor picks this last record and reads through the track listing to find the correct side and time of the song that she wants. She carefully positions the needle on the record.

As she listens to the song, she notices Tito listening from across the hall. He had been applying zombie-face make-up to go with his skeleton themed halloween costume.

Tito helps Flor pack some of the records into a cardboard box that already contains some of Luis' favorite things.

Together, they sort through the pencil sketches that Luis used to tack onto the wall, just above his bed frame.

Flor finds an aviator cap and goggles that are a bit too big to fit in the box. She puts them back on a shelf.

Before long, they've packed as many mementos as they can fit into the box. It's just light enough for Flor to carry.

INT. KITCHEN -- DAY

Perhaps out of habit, Mom set the table for six people, not five. Flor placed the box of mementos in Luis' chair. Leo placed a similar box full of dog toys on the floor.

Like Tito, Leo also wears a costume: An El Santo (Mexican wrestler) mask and cape. Flor chose to dress normally.

They each eat breakfast in silence: Mom, Tito, Flor, Leo, and Dad. Now that he's awake, we can appreciate that Dad looks just like Luis would have, had he aged into his 30s.

EXT. DRIVEWAY -- DAY

The station-wagon has been moved out of the garage, and parked in the street. There's a For Sale sign on it.

Mom waves goodbye to Tito as he gets picked up by a similarly costumed FRIEND (16) in a a brand new used sedan.

Up the street, Dad helps Flor and Leo load their respective boxes into a school bus. He waves them goodbye.

With the kids gone, Mom and Dad share a bittersweet smile.

INT/EXT. SCHOOL BUS -- DAY

Leo protects his precious box from the riot-in-progress led by the costumed children at the back of bus.

Likewise, Flor keeps one hand on the box, her attention is on the colorful town passing by just outside the window.

WHAT SHE SEES: The iron gates to Latrinidad Park, a lush forest-area complete with a small lake and running trails.

Some RANDOM KID's paper plane hits the back of Flor's head.

RANDOM KID

(O.S.)

My bad!

Flor tosses the plane back. She then notices another girl across the aisle: Colleen (now 10 years old), who stares out the window and cares for a box, just as flor does.

Colleen's box is full of little wooden carvings. Most of them are of people, though there is no detail to their faces. The carvings themselves are elegant, not creepy. What creeps Flor out is that one of them is of the specter from her dreams.

INT. SCHOOL GYM -- DAY

A couple dozen KIDS from every grade (1st through 5th) are at work setting up *Day of the Dead* altars across the Gym. A few others prepare sugar *calaveras* and *papel picado* decorations for some VOLUNTEER ADULTS to hang from the ceiling and walls.

The altars are mostly for fallen soldiers, grandparents, and a few pets. Luis and Maya are represented among the altars.

FLOR EXPLAINS THAT IT'S BEEN A YEAR SINCE LUIS DIED.

Theirs are being put together by Flor and Leo, respectively.

A TEACHER (30s) supervises the activities. Though she watches the kids attentively, something is making her anxious.

PRINCIPAL

(O.S)

We need to talk.

There's what makes her anxious, the PRINCIPAL (50s).

TEACHER

Umm, sure?

PRINCIPAL

Is this really appropriate?

TEACHER

What, exactly?

The PRINCIPAL motions at *everything* in the gym.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

We're trying something new.

PRINCIPAL

What, exactly?

As they discuss, Colleen enters from afar, and goes about setting up an altar in her own little corner of the gym.

TEACHER

Right, well, you see... in many Latin American cultures, they practice some variation of the Day of the Dead. It's a tradition where you create altars in the memory of--

PRINCIPAL

--No, I can't-- That's way too abstract. Who's gonna get that?

TEACHER

I do. These students do. This is an optional, extracurricular activity.

The Principal sighs, exasperated.

PRINCIPAL

Did you read the book I passed to the staff?

TEACHER

(Containing laughter)

Satan Seller? Sure, I mean--

Oh, he's serious.

PRINCIPAL
I'm concerned.

TEACHER
That this is like that?

They both fail to notice Flor walking over to Colleen.

PRINCIPAL
Don't you think?

TEACHER
(Annoyed)
No, of course not. That's
ridiculous.

The principal inspects a *calavera* doll from a nearby table.

PRINCIPAL
When you proposed this whole thing,
I didn't expect it to be quite
so... explicit.

Flor and Colleen start speaking, though we cannot hear it.

TEACHER
It's been rough. People mourn. You
don't have to get it.

PRINCIPAL
But it is christian?

Flor grabs a carved figure from Colleen's in-progress altar.

TEACHER
Enough... Did you read the book I
lent you?

Colleen snatches the carved figure back and pushes Flor so
hard that she falls backwards to the ground

PRINCIPAL
Some chapters... Look, I do *get*
what you're doing, I just don't
want the parents complaining.

After a moment, Colleen goes to kick Flor on the ground, then
climbs on Flor and starts punching her.

TEACHER
Well, I'll be here to listen if
they do. Okay?

Leo sprints onto the scene, ready to tackle Colleen.

PRINCIPAL

I'd rather they not complain at--
Hey! Hey!

Leo bounces right off of Colleen. A small congregation of STUDENTS is beginning to gather around the fight.

TEACHER

STUDENTS

Flor! Colleen! You need to stop that, right now! Fight! Fight! Fight!

Flor smacks Colleen across the face with a sugar skull.

INT/EXT. VAN -- DAY

Mom drives Leo and Flor back home. Leo rides shotgun.

MOM

Well, at least we can agree that it was in self-defense. Who's this girl anyway, is she new?

Mom can see Flor shrugging through the rearview mirror. Leo chomps right into a sugar skull the size of his own head.

MOM (CONT'D)

Leo, stop that.

LEO

I deserve it.

He takes another bite.

MOM

Now, Leonardo. As in, immediately. You'll spoil your dinner.

Okay, now she's serious. He puts it down. But, not even a second later, his eyes brighten up with a new thought.

LEO

Are we going trick or treating tonight?

The words "this fucking kid, I love him" run through Mom's head, but all that comes out of her mouth is a chuckle.

MOM

Hmm, you did get into a fight, so you're grounded.

(This saddens Leo)

(MORE)

MOM (CONT'D)

But... It was for a good cause. So, according to the big book of rules, I can lift the punishment, provided that you clean your room.

LEO

(Happy again)

Deal.

MOM

Flor? What'd ya say?

FLOR

I have homework.

She doesn't. Mom knows this. Even Leo knows this, but he also knows to stay quiet when Mom and Flor are "discussing".

MOM

Do you really?

FLOR

I don't know.

MOM

Look, I'm not mad about the fight, okay? Just don't touch her stuff.

FLOR

It's not that.

MOM

Okay... Then what?

FLOR

Nothing.

MOM

Well, it's not nothing... Girl stuff?

FLOR

No!

MOM

Alright, alright. I'm just covering all the bases.

Leo has no idea what they're talking about.

FLOR

It's just... a little weird.

MOM

Oh yeah? Try me. Just start at the beginning.

This is Mom making a genuine effort to connect with her daughter. Flor recognizes this, and decides to relent.

Flor takes a breath and goes to speak.

INT. FLOR'S ROOM -- DAY

Flor watches through her window as Mom and Leo venture off into the neighborhood to go trick or treating without her.

She watches them disappear around the corner. She watches them some more. Her attention then shifts up to the sky.

It's that time of day, just before night, when the sun and moon can agree to occupy opposite sides of the heavens.

Flor clicks her tongue, as if to simulate that popping sound that marked the growth of the crack in her dream.

FLOR

I told you it was weird.

She falls to her bed and stares at her ceiling, which is revealed to be decorated with paper cut-outs of stars.

Disappointed, and certainly confused, Flor decides to close her eyes and force herself to sleep, but this is quickly interrupted by the gentle strumming of a guitar.

FLOR (CONT'D)

Huh?

Yeah, it's definitely a guitar. The strumming is calming, if a little clumsy on the chord changes. Flor goes to follow it.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

The sound is coming from nowhere in particular; the end of that hall; Luis and Tito's corner of the house.

INT. LUIS' ROOM -- DAY

Flor stands at the threshold of the door. She can't believe her eyes. It's Luis playing his guitar on the bed. She goes to say something, but chooses to listen to the song instead.

Sensing Flor's presence, Luis turns around, revealing that he's actually Dad. Goddamn, their resemblance is uncanny.

DAD

Hey, bug.

That's his nickname for her.

FLOR

You--

DAD

I know, I'm sorry... Didn't mean to scare ya. I thought y'all were candy huntin'.

FLOR

No, I--

But she has no idea how to finish that sentence either.

DAD

You too, huh? Yeah, well... Sometimes you just need some alone time.

FLOR

It's not that.

Flor takes a seat on the bed next to Dad and allows herself to fall limp up against his shoulder.

DAD

That's alright, bug. You don't gotta talk about it.

FLOR

But I do want to. We never talk, not really... It's like nothing ever happened.

This hits dad right in the feelings. Thankfully, he has good dad instincts and puts a comforting arm around his daughter.

DAD

I know... I miss him too, but I think-- I think everyone needs time to figure out how to talk about things. That's all.

FLOR

What if we don't?

DAD

We will.

FLOR

How? When?

DAD

Well, I don't know when. It's different for everyone. If you're Tito, you need to spend time with friends, go to parties, hang out... And Leo, heh, he just needs to--

FLOR

--Eat more candy.

It's true. They can both laugh about this in private.

DAD

And mom--

FLOR

--She's just Mom. Same as always.

Dad lets a sad chuckle slip.

DAD

Is that what you think?

FLOR

Sometimes.

Dad takes a moment to look for words, but can't find any.

DAD

Agree to disagree, I suppose.

He wants to say something more, but he chokes up a bit. Flor, having good daughter instincts, changes the focus.

FLOR

And you?

Dad starts doing that thing he does when he gets nervous: rubbing his legs. Flor helps mitigate it by holding his hand.

This calms him, at least a little. He reaches into the drawer on Luis's night stand and pulls out Luis' old journal.

Together, they flip through the little leather bound book where Luis recorded his dreams, aspirations, and anxieties.

He liked cartooning, especially about planes of all sorts.

About halfway in, the handwriting changes. The text reads:

Dear Luis: Tomorrow's your birthday. Don't think I forgot...

It goes on, but there's no need to read much further.

DAD

It's a little weird.

Flor closes the book and puts it back where it was.

FLOR

Maybe... I could give it another shot with mom.

DAD

She'd like that... I bet they're not far off. You'll catch right up.

FLOR

But I don't have a costume!

Dad looks around and immediately hones in on the aviator cap and goggles that Flor chose to forgo earlier. They're just a tad too big for her, but she looks awesome in them.

DAD

There. All problems are solved.

Flor gives Dad a tight hug and hurries out the door.

FLOR

Thanks, dad.

INT. LIVING ROOM -- DAY

Flor hops over Tito's skateboard and heads straight for the front door. Just then, Mom burst through instead.

FLOR

Mom!

MOM

Have you seen your brother?

FLOR

Tito?

Mom goes straight for her purse on the coffee table. She empties it and starts sifting through its contents.

MOM

Leo! Where are my keys?

DAD
What's wrong?

MOM
Leo! I can't find Leo!

Mom has given up on her purse and has now taken through turning the entire living room upside down.

MOM (CONT'D)
He said he-- he saw something. The dog! He said he saw the dog, and just-- He just-- I just--

DAD
Where?

MOM
Near the park.

Dad grabs the keys to the station-wagon from a drawer.

DAD
We'll take the car.

EXT. STREET -- NIGHT

The last of the sunlight has started to drain from this day. The dark contrast gives the Latrinidad Park gate that eerie atmosphere it lacked last we saw it.

The station-wagon Luis died in speeds past the gate and around the perimeter wall, towards a cabin in the distance.

EXT. GROUND KEEPER'S CABIN -- NIGHT

The station-wagon slides to a stop outside the modest log cabin where the GROUNDS KEEPER (60's) lives.

Mom and dad exit the station-wagon. Flor goes to follow.

DAD
No, wait here.

FLOR
But!

MOM
Flor, please.

Instead of retorting, Flor takes a breath and complies.

FLOR

Okay.

She meant that to be sincere. Mom does not seem to have received it that way. Flor pulls herself back inside.

Dad is already trying his best to explain the situation to the Grounds Keeper between panicked breaths. The Grounds Keeper seems to understand. He heads back inside. After a moment, he returns with the necessary equipment. He unlocks the gate, and leads Mom and Dad into the park.

Just like that, they've dissolved into the dark. All Flor can see now are the beams extending from their flashlights.

Pretty soon those are gone as well, and that's when flor starts getting antsy. She hates being in this car. That steering wheel gives her chills. If only it had eyes, Flor could claim that it's staring right back at her.

Actually, it is kind of chilly in here. Flor's breaths have started to accumulate as condensation on her goggles.

This is too much. Flor needs some air. She exits the car.

The air is easier to breathe out here, but the whole situation still makes Flor quite uncomfortable. She closes her eyes and tries her best to assimilate to the absolute silence that has taken over. It's not easy, but...

Wait, did you hear that?

There it is again, a little tune. That same whistle-like tune that Leo uses when he's calling for Maya.

VOICE

(Distant)

Puppy...

FLOR

Leo?

VOICE

Toot-toot-toot.

FLOR

Leo!

Flor takes a few steps to get a better listen. Then another two. And again. Before long, her curiosity wins out.

EXT. LATRINIDAD PARK -- NIGHT

Flor can barely see two feet ahead, especially with this fog.

FLOR
Leo? Where are you?

VOICE
(Distant, O.S.)
Puppy...

The voice came from deeper in the park, away from the direction that Flor's parents took with the Groundskeeper.

VOICE (CONT'D)
(Distant, O.S.)
Toot-toot-toot.

At this point, all Flor can see in the dark are her own cold breaths; that, and a full moon watching from above. Pretty soon, she finds herself at a clearing that goes to the pond. Strangely, though, the pond is... frozen?

VOICE (CONT'D)
(O.S.)
Puppy...

It's a voice not unlike the one in Flor's dream.

FLOR
Leo! Is that you?

VOICE
(O.S.)
Toot-toot-toot.

The voice is growing closer.

FLOR
Leonardo! This isn't funny!

The ice is solid enough that Flor can walk on it with some confidence. The night sky reflects over the frozen pond.

FLOR (CONT'D)
Leo... Please, just--

And that's when Flor see it, the Specter. It steps out of the shadows and stands at the edge of the pond.

FLOR (CONT'D)
You--?

The Specter clicks its tongue, and the ice below Flor's feet cracks open, emitting the same sound from her dream.

FLOR (CONT'D)
No, wait--ah!

The ice breaks. She falls through.

Flor slowly sinks to the bottom of the pond. She can see pieces of ice floating down with her. Beyond them, through the ice, she can see the perfectly clear night sky; an awe inspiring view of the cosmos shattering from above.

And, between all of that, at the edge of the pond, herself, calmly looking down on herself as she sinks further down.

INT. COLLEEN'S ROOM -- DAY

The room is relatively plain, save for a few plushies, school supplies, a pocket knife, and several more wooden carvings.

Colleen's body lays limp on the bed.

MONICA
(O.S.)
Colleen?

Monica rushes to her daughter's side. There's no reaction from Colleen, despite Monica nudging her repeatedly.

MONICA (CONT'D)
Colleen? Baby, wake up. Colleen!

Monica starts shaking Colleen a bit more vigorously now. There's still no reaction. Monica checks her pulse.

MONICA (CONT'D)
No, no, no, no. Colleen!

Colleen awakens with a sudden deep breath.

MONICA (CONT'D)
Oh! Baby, I thought I lost you.

Monica cradles Colleen, repeating words of comfort. Colleen seems disoriented at first. But, after a moment, she comes to understand where she is, and lets out a sigh of relief.

 INTERLUDE 2

EXT. SOUTH KOREAN MILITARY CAMP 1952 -- DAY

A couple dozen PRISONERS OF WAR (POWs) stand in a field, hands tied, and individually strapped to tall wooden poles. Another dozen SOUTH KOREAN SOLDIERS prepare rifles with ammunition, while a few more bandage the POWs eyes.

A MEDIC watches the proceedings from a safe distance.

SOLDIER
 (O.S.)
 Ready... Aim... Fire!

The Medic flinches at the sound of several rifles firing.

INT. MILITARY MEDICAL TENT -- NIGHT

The tent has a few beds where MORIBUND SOLDIERS rest and recover. Most won't make it into the morning.

The Medic stuffs some supplies into a travel bag. He has a couple more bags already packed and ready to go.

An OFFICER who accompanies an INJURED SOLDIER at a nearby bed lets out a hearty laugh. This startles the Medic.

OFFICER
 Hah! Hah! Hah! And the void stares
 back, ever deeper.

The Officer pours another drink for both of them.

INJURED SOLDIER
 So it is.

OFFICER
 So it is.

They clink their glasses and down their drinks.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
 But not today, my friend. Today,
 you rest. And tomorrow... Tomorrow
 we live to fight another day.

The officer attempts to get up, but he is just a bit too drunk to do so gracefully. He stumbles forward, nearly knocking over the IV bags hooked up to the Soldier.

INJURED SOLDIER
Woah, woah... Careful. I'll need
those for all this resting that
you're going on about.

The Officer stabilizes himself; no harm, no foul. He stands
up straight, and salutes his injured friend.

OFFICER
So it is.

The Soldier salutes back.

INJURED SOLDIER
Sir.

Having said his goodbyes, the Officer weaves his way through
the beds, to the Medic, who has just finished packing up.

When the Officer approaches, the Medic stops to salute him.

MEDIC
Sir.

The Officer stops to return the salute. He sways back and
forth, struggling to stand, so he leans on the table.

OFFICER
Bah, cut that out. We're off duty.

The Medic relaxes his posture. He continues cleaning. The
Officer looks back to his friend in the bed.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
Life's too short to care about
decorum.

He goes to take another drink from his flask, and notices the
packed bags tucked under the table while doing so.

OFFICER (CONT'D)
Going somewhere?

MEDIC
It's... for inventory.

OFFICER
Oh, inventory? Well, good, 'cause
the military really doesn't take
kindly to deserters.

The Officer maintains unnerving eye contact for what seems
like an eternity, until he bursts out laughing.

The medic, initially confused, joins in with timid snickers.

They laugh together for a moment. Then, the Officer abruptly cuts them off when he lets his hand fall heavy on the Medic's shoulder. He is pained; nearly in tears.

OFFICER (CONT'D)

I don't care what you do tomorrow.
But, tonight, please take care of
my friend. He's a good man. He has
a family... He deserves to live.

The Medic nods empathically. He takes the Officer's hand.

MEDIC

I will. I promise. And you... You
need your rest, too.

The Officer chuckles. He adjusts his uniform.

OFFICER

Heh... Doctor's orders.

He salutes the medic one last time. The Medic returns the salute, then watches the Officer until he leaves the tent.

LATER

It's storming outside.

The Medic's shadow hovers over the Injured Soldier. He's asleep, but wakes up just in time to see the Medic getting ready to smother him under a pillow.

The Soldier tries to scream, but the Medic is too quick. The soldier thrashes and tries to scream under the pillow.

The Medic presses down harder. He uses the rest of his body to restrain the soldier. They're making quite a bit of noise.

The soldier knocks over his IV bags.

Another MORIBUND SOLDIER witnesses the event from his bed across the room, but he is too hurt to even scream for help.

The Injured Soldier's thrashing subsides. He goes limp.

The Medic removes the pillow. He checks the soldier's pulse.

He's dead.

The Medic tosses the pillow and goes to give him CPR.

MEDIC

One... Two... Three...

He counts with every chest compression, up to fifteen, then moves back to mouth-to-mouth breathing.

After a couple of cycles, the soldier finally gasps for air. The Medic steps back to give him room to breathe.

The moribund soldier observes all of this, utterly confused.

The Medic re-approaches the injured soldier. He takes a moment to stare deep into the soldier's eyes. He must see something there, because his demeanor changes. He smiles.

MEDIC (CONT'D)

Hi.

INJURED SOLDIER

(Weak)

Hi.

They hug; an overdue, loving embrace.

MEDIC

I missed you so.

INJURED SOLDIER

But I'm here. I'm here now.

The injured soldier slowly comes to recognize his own body. He is in bed. He is weak. He is in pain.

INJURED SOLDIER (CONT'D)

Am I well?

MEDIC

You will be, soon. I have a plan.
We can leave by morning.
Everything's ready.

INJURED SOLDIER

What should I do?

The Medic kisses the soldier's forehead.

MEDIC

Rest. I'll come for you before
long.

There's some activity outside the tent. The Medic signals the Injured Soldier to be quiet. The Soldier nods in agreement, then watches the Medic until he leaves the tent. Once alone, the soldier smiles to himself, and lays back down to sleep.

 CHAPTER 3

OVER BLACK

FLOR
 (V.O. Distant)
 Leonardo! This isn't funny! Leo...
 Please, just-- You--? No, wait--ah!

FADE TO WHITE

A small spec appears. It grows slightly, slowly shifting between various colors as it floats across empty space.

Another spec appears.

And another.

Soon, dozens of specs fill the space.

They dance about in rough unison; one moves, the rest follow.

VOICE
 (V.O.)
 I'm sorry.

FLOR
 (V.O.)
 For what?

VOICE
 (V.O.)
 I had to.

FLOR
 (V.O.)
 What? What did you do?

The specks morph into tiny shapes, sort of like miniature snowflakes. They converge together into a vague form.

FLOR (CONT'D)
 (V.O.)
 Hello?

The shape is somewhat humanoid, but not quite. It's sort of like the Specter, but the exact features are different.

FLOR (CONT'D)
(V.O.)
Hello? Are you there?

The shape is Flor... but not quite. She has taken an abstract form composed from smaller shapes in this empty space.

FLOR (CONT'D)
Can you hear me?

Flor begins to take control of this new form. She moves around a bit, testing out her limits.

FLOR (CONT'D)
Who are you?

She can't walk, but she can float around. Sudden movements cause her form to disperse into various particles. Then, she reforms into a slightly different shape.

She tries to move again, with more force this time. She disperses altogether, and does not reform. The particles drift apart. They fill the space, extending infinitely.

They grow smaller and smaller. They are distant lights

The lights look like stars, each one a unique glow.

Together, they form a galaxy.

One of many.

Each galaxy, but a speck inside of a universe.

It is one of many more.

They swirl forever into a black hole.

It's in the iris of an eye; Flor's eye.

She has regathered into a new, slightly different form.

She floats along the space, repeating the motions from before; testing the limits of her movement.

FLOR (CONT'D)
Am I?

She finally gives up, allowing herself to glide along, until she becomes one with the infinite sea of specks and shapes.

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD UNDER CONSTRUCTION -- NIGHT

A starlit night sky overlooks the wild halloween themed high school party raging at one of the only completed houses.

The family station-wagon rolls up and parks out front.

INT. PARTY HOUSE - BEDROOM -- NIGHT

Tito holds a joint in his hand. He stares down at it.

FRIEND

(O.S.)

Tito... Hey, Rudolph, don't hog
it... Puff, puff, pass.

Tito realizes that he's been holding the joint whilst staring off into space. He takes a hasty hit and passes it on.

TITO

Oh, sorry... He--ack

He goes into a coughing fit. He reaches for his drink, but coughs the water out instead. This makes his FRIENDS laugh. Some of them start to sing *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*.

Tito flips them off, giggling between coughs.

Just then, Dad walks into the room. Tito's heart drops.

DAD

Tito. We gotta go. C'mon get up.

TITO

Dad, I-- Whu--

DAD

It's okay. C'mon. Let's go.

He takes Tito's hand and nudges him out the door.

On their way out of the room, Dad stops to acknowledge the room full of perplexed, guilty looking teens.

DAD (CONT'D)

Just... Don't drink and drive,
alright?

He exits with Tito, who is both confused and embarrassed.

INT/EXT. STATION-WAGON -- NIGHT

Tito hops into the passenger's side seat. He dares not say a word. Dad turns the car on and pulls out onto the road.

They share in the silence, until Tito goes to turn on the radio in an attempt to break the ice. Dad turns it off.

DAD

No, don't... I need to concentrate.

TITO

Sorry.

DAD

Are you drunk?

Tito says nothing. He looks out the window, as if imagining that he could just float off and escape this situation.

DAD (CONT'D)

Hey, it's alright. I'm not mad.
Please be honest. Are you drunk?

TITO

Y-- Yes.

DAD

Are you high?

Tito glances at Dad driving, but he looks too much like Luis once did. This makes Tito even more uncomfortable.

TITO

I think so... Yeah.

DAD

Anything else?

Tito shakes his head; avoids making eye contact.

DAD (CONT'D)

Okay... Look in the glove box, find
some eye drops. Comb your hair,
too. You'll worry everyone looking
like that.

Tito opens the glove box and finds a whole grooming kit that Dad keeps in there for emergencies.

TITO

Wh-- What's going on?

The station-wagon speeds onto the highway.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING ROOM -- NIGHT

Words words words

The doctor approaches

And some other things happen

Yep yep yep

INT. HOSPITAL - RECOVERY ROOM -- NIGHT

Flor lays in her hospital bed. She stares back, aloof.

Mom stands at the edge of Flor's hospital bed. She is flanked by Tito, and Dad holding Leo. The DOCTOR stands by the door.

DAD

Hi, bug.

Flor takes a bit too long to react. She offers a weak smile that mom interrupts with a great big hug.

MOM

Bendito sea...

Dad joins the hug from the other side of the bed with Leo.

Still in the hug, Flor looks to Tito, who somehow looks worse than she does. She does not recognize him, so she looks away.

DOCTOR

She may be a bit disoriented,
still. I'd like to keep her
overnight for observation...
Unfortunately, only one family
member can accompany her overnight.

Mom and Dad look to one another and wordlessly decide how they'll divide up responsibilities for the night.

They won't.

LATER

Flor sleeps in the hospital bed.

Mom sleeps in a chair besides her, curled up into a just-comfortable-enough-knot so that he can fit on the seat.

Tito can't sleep, especially not in these chairs.

He's more focused on the shadows that he can see through the underside of the door frame. They're Mom and Dad's. He can hear them arguing about something.

INT. HOSPITAL - WAITING AREA -- NIGHT