

MUSA'S GARDEN

PROLOGUE

by Maria Paula (Mari) Gonzalez Curia

January 2024

[Scene notes: Keep PAST MUSA's face partially hidden (by her hair, shadows or cropped by the panel). The scene should feel like a vague memory or dream]

PAGE 1 (Right) - Splash page

1.1 Interior shot of the dark halls of a church. The stone walls are lined with torches and adorned with religious symbols/items; fog creeps into the cold interior. Add other indicators that this is the same church we'll see in future chapters.

TIME & PLACE CAPTION:
Castille, Spain, circa 1500 AC

PAGE 2 (Left) - 4 panels

2.1 [Low angle] An ornate statue of virgin Mary overlooks the scene, ominously lit by the torchlight.

HIGH INQUISITOR (OFF-PANEL):

You stand accused—

2.2 In a corner, a group of nuns huddle together, clutching their rosaries close to their mouths or chest and praying *Hail Mary* (in Spanish) under their breath.

HIGH INQUISITOR (OFF-PANEL):

— of *heresy* and *witchcraft*!

NUNS (WHISPERED)

Santa María, Madre de Dios... ruega por nosotros pecadores...

2.3 [Low angle] In the center of the panel, the HIGH INQUISITOR towers over the viewer and points forward accusingly, haloed by the torchlight behind him. His bright red clothes seem to glow in contrast with everyone else's modest, brown robes. Two other inquisitors stand behind him (at each side) with staffs or spears.

HIGH INQUISITOR:

... as well as using the dark arts to *trick* this poor, innocent village with *false miracles*. How do you plead?

2.4 [Extreme close up] PAST MUSA's eyes glare upward, full of tears, and seem to glow with a fire of their own amidst the dimly lit scene.

PAST MUSA:
False, you say...?

PAGE 3 (right) - 4 panels

3.1 [High angle, as if from the inquisitor's POV] Past Musa is kneeling on the stone floor, her hands chained in front of her, fists clenched and tears rolling down her cheeks. Her eyes remain hidden under her messy hair.

PAST MUSA:
I have given you– *everything!*

3.2 The nuns pause their prayer and look up, feeling alluded to. One of them, older and taller, is consoling the others, who are now crying. Their rosaries are still intertwined in their fingers.

PAST MUSA (OFF-PANEL):
Yet you repay me with *fear* and *distrust*...

3.3 Musa musters a small, defiant grin. A few “strands” of green-colored magic begin to swirl upwards around her, coming from her hands (out of panel).

PAST MUSA:
How I pity you...

3.4 Helped by her magic, she pulls on her chains and they crack or bend open. Magic vines entangle between the chainlinks (bending them) and/or “pour out” of the locks.

PAST MUSA:
...but I *refuse* to burn for you!

PAGE 4 (left) - 5 panels

4.1 [Low angle, from the base of the stairs] Past Musa runs away, up a long set of stairs, followed by the inquisitors.

HIGH INQUISITOR (OFF-PANEL):
GET HER!

4.2 She barricades the door with a heavy wooden bar, just in time.

SFX (door):

BLAM!

4.3 As the inquisitors slam on the door from the other side (in the background), she opens a large tome on one of the scriptorium desks.

SFX (door):

SLAM! SLAM! SLAM!

4.4 [Close up] With quivering lips and tears pouring down her cheeks, she begins whispering an incantation, unintelligible at first.

4.5 [Seen from behind her]: Magic swirls up from the book and surrounds her as she continues her spell.

Note: Make speech bubbles black with green letters for the spell.

PAST MUSA:

*Take all that I am,
all that I've been...*

PAGE 5 (right) - Splash page

5.1 Magic continues to flow upwards (towards the upper-left corner) and the background begins to turn black (towards the bottom-right corner) as the incantation reaches its end.

PAST MUSA (OFF PANEL):

*'Til with kind eyes I'm greeted,
'Til my wounded soul is healed.*

PAGE 6 (left) - Transition page

6.1 [Fade to Black] Completely black page, perhaps with a few subtle magic specks/particles still remaining.

PAGE 7 (right) - 3 panels

7.1 Extreme close-up of MUSA's eyes, closed

7.2 Same view, her eyes open slightly.

7.3 [Zoom out to a full/half-body view] Musa is lying inside the Garden's POND, floating or just lying down in shallow water. Some petals/leaves float in the water around her. She still looks sleepy and confused.

PAGE 8 (left) - 2 panels

8.1 [Zoom out to show surroundings] She kneels up, still hanging her head and looking down at the water, her hair and clothes dripping. Around her, the trees that surround the pond, with its twisting roots and flower-covered trunks, seem to shelter/cradle her.

8.2 [Close up to her face's reflection on the water] Bringing a hand to her cheek, she stares and studies her face with a puzzled look. She doesn't recognize herself.

PAGE 9 (right) - 6 panels

9.1 She snaps out of it and looks up as a bright blue butterfly flutters playfully around her.

9.2 Musa raises her hand and the butterfly lands gently on her finger.

MUSA:

Hola pequeña... Have we met?

9.3 She frowns slightly and her eyes lose focus as she struggles to remember.

MUSA:

I can't seem to remember– well, *anything*...

9.4 The butterfly flies away from the pond. Musa stumbles after it, reaching out.

MUSA:

W-Wait!

9.5 [Close up] As soon as her foot touches the grass outside the pond, plants and flowers magically sprout on the spot.

9.6 Musa flinches, startled by the spontaneous blooming at her feet.

PAGE 10 (left) - 4 panels

10.1 She jumps back with a scream, stumbling back and onto the ground, as the plants explode upwards, growing and blooming in front of her.

SFX (plants):
FWOO–OSH!

MUSA:
AAAH!

10.2 Sitting on the ground, she stares up in awe at the plants that just sprung out of nothing, speechless. Some magic lingers around the plants (in the form of tiny specks or vapor-like strands), continuing to float around them and Musa.

10.3 Intrigued, she extends her hand to try to touch the leftover magic, which behaves like smoke or vapor, ethereal but somehow palpable.

MUSA:
This feels–

10.4 [Extreme close-up of her hand] She moves her fingers instinctively and the magic vapor seems to follow her lead.

MUSA:
– *familiar*.

PAGE 11 (right) - 3 to 4 panels

In 3 or 4 panels, show how she gets used to her magic and starts creating more plants, flowers and life for the Garden.

She starts by waving her hands or arms, curiously testing things, and by the end she's practically frolicking or dancing as she goes. A variety of trees, plants and flowers manifest at each step (crops with bright ripe tomatoes, giant sunflowers, fruit trees, etc). The blue butterfly flies around her creations and is eventually joined by other birds, butterflies and insects.

PAGE 12 (left) - 4 panels

12.1 She stops to admire her work, holding one of the flowers close to her face to smell it. She smiles nostalgically.

MUSA:
Yes... *This* I do remember...

12.2 [Zoom out] She looks up/away from the plants as music starts “pouring in” from out of frame, from the direction of the pond.

12.3 [Zoom out more] Cautiously curious, Musa approaches the pond (in the foreground) as music continues to rise, seemingly from inside it. The blue butterfly rests on a branch or root near the pond.

12.4 [Over Musa’s shoulder] She leans in, holding on to one of the trees for safety, and glances into the pond, which starts to reflect a place on the other side.

PAGE 13 (right) - 5 panels

13.1 Interior shot of a library. Its walls are covered in wooden shelves filled with ornate books and assorted trinkets. A large [globe](#) sits in a corner.

13.2 [Close up] A hand delicately moves through the keys of a piano.

13.3 A young LADY in regency era clothing (1800) peacefully and gracefully plays the piano in the privacy of her study.

13.4 [Close up] Musa’s eyes shine as she listens to the music, instantly captivated by this new person and this “other world” she’s discovered.

13.5 [Zoom out] Musa sits by the pond and leans closer, eagerly listening to the music.

MUSA (VO):

That was my first glance into that “other world”.

PAGE 14 (left) - 4 panels

14.1 [Transition or ellipsis to some time later] The blue butterfly flutters by the Garden, showing the flora and layout have changed.

14.2 [Half or full body shot] The butterfly lands on Musa’s right shoulder as she draws on a large notebook, sitting on the tree roots by the pond and listening to the piano music coming from it.

14.3 Musa lifts the notebook, proudly showing her butterfly friend her drawing.

MUSA:

Mira, pequeña!

14.4 The drawing shows the sketch of a new dress (which looks like Musa's final design). There are a few arrows with notes in unintelligible handwriting.

MUSA:

I based it on the one *she* wears!

PAGE 15 (right) - 3 panels

15.1 [Full body shot] With an elegant wave of her wrist, magic swirls around her, creating the dress she was drawing right on her body (The only difference with her final design is she doesn't have the butterfly bow).

MUSA:

Let's try it on...

15.2 She looks at herself in the lake, pouting a bit as she examines the outfit, unconvinced, lifting up the dress and posing to get a better look. The butterfly flies in place next to her.

MUSA:

Hmm... feels like it's still missing *something*...

15.3 The butterfly flies around her and rests on her neck, creating her signature bow (the ribbons are created in the path it traced as it flew).

MUSA:

Hala!

PAGE 16 (left) - 5 panels

16.1 With a radiant smile, she gently holds the bow in one of her hands and tilts her head towards it, as if "hugging" it.

MUSA:

It's perfect! ♥ And now you'll always come with me!

16.2 She suddenly jumps up, startled by a loud, dissonant sound erupting from the other side of the pond.

16.3 [Close up] The Lady's hands rest on the piano after violently hitting several keys at once and making the sound that startled Musa.

16.4 [Zoom out] Hands still on the keys, the lady now stands there, glaring frustratedly at the sheet music in front of her as if it's her worst enemy.

16.5 She takes the sheet music and angrily crumples it up in a ball, cursing unintelligibly under her breath.

PAGE 17 (right) - 4 panels

17.1 [Wide shot, slightly low angle] The lady sits at her piano again, holding her head in her hands despondently. The floor of the study is littered with broken, crumpled and/or scribbled papers.

MUSA (OFF-PANEL):

She's really struggling with this melody...

17.2 Peeking from the side of one of the trees, Musa leans in towards the pond with wistful eyes.

MUSA:

If only I could talk to her...

17.3 She begins to reach out towards the water.

MUSA:

– maybe I could cheer her up.

17.4 As her fingers touch the water, it begins to glow.

MUSA:

I wish I could *be there*...

PAGE 18 (left) - 4 panels

18.1 [Ext. Close up to her eyes] Musa blinks and opens her eyes wide.

18.2 She looks around frantically, suddenly finding herself in the middle of the library she was just observing.

MUSA:

What? Where— Oh goodness...

13.3 The Lady quickly turns around to glare at her, alert and annoyed by this interruption. Her head turns but her body is still mostly leaning over the piano, one hand still holding her head.

LADY:

¿Qué—?

13.4 She jumps up angrily and faces Musa, who raises her hands and backs off meekly.

LADY:

Who are you?! How did you get in here?!

PAGE 19 (right) - 5 panels

19.1 The Lady reaches out to try and grab Musa's hand but her hand goes through it, as if she was intangible.

MUSA:

I-I don't—!

19.2 The lady backs off, instinctively bringing her hand to the golden crucifix necklace around her neck.

LADY:

¡Dios bendito! What are you?

19.3 Musa blushes and shakes her hands nervously.

MUSA:

I-I am so very sorry! I did not mean to intrude!

19.4 She lowers her head and tries to cover her face sheepishly.

MUSA:

It's just... I am a bit of an *admirer*... of your music...

19.5 As Musa stutters on, the Lady studies her. Her expression softens slightly; she's still suspicious, but intrigued.

MUSA:

And I noticed you were struggling so... I wanted to *help you*...

LADY:

Could it be...?

PAGE 20 (left) - 4 panels

20.1 The Lady's expression shifts to awe (eyes wide open, raised eyebrows) as she connects the dots in her mind.

LADY:

Una Musa!

20.2 Musa stares back, confused.

MUSA:

I'm sorry?

20.3 The Lady smiles and walks closer. Her demeanor is a lot more welcoming.

LADY:

A Muse of inspiration! You say you are a patron of the arts that has come to aid me in my struggles, do you not? Then your visit is a blessing!

20.4 Musa pauses. She brings her hands to her chest and her eyes light up as she takes in this new concept and contemplates its possibilities.

MUSA:

Musa...

PAGE 21 (right) - 5 panels

21.1 Owning this new role, Musa smiles warmly (maybe still a bit awkwardly) and opens her arms.

MUSA:

Y-yes, that is correct! That is my name! And I'm here to help you– to *inspire you!*

21.2 The previous panel “fades to black” to show the transition.

MUSA (VO):

There is a place I'd like to show you...

21.3 Close up to the Lady's eyes, closed.

21.4 Close up to the Lady's eyes, open and surprised.

21.5 With a cheerful flourish of her hands, Musa presents the garden to the Lady, who watches in awe in the foreground. More flowers bloom around them to welcome their first guest. [Page notes: Have flowers climbing up the page (from the bottom up to panel 2) to emphasize the transition to the garden]

MUSA:

Welcome to my garden!

PAGE 22 (left) - 5 panels

22.1 Musa and the Lady talk (no dialogue) over some of the flowers as Musa creates more.

22.2 The Lady sings with some of the Garden's birds as Musa laughs and claps.

22.3 Musa creates a piano, similar to the one the Lady had in her library, but covered in the flowers she liked in Panel 1. Plants and flowers grow out from the inside of the piano too.

22.4 [Close up to her hands] The Lady begins to play the piano.

22.5 Musa leans on the side of the piano, observing with a warm smile as the Lady plays peacefully.

PAGE 23 (right) - 4 panels

23.1 [Similar view as panel 22.5] They begin to sing together as the Lady plays more enthusiastically.

23.2 [Full body shot] Surrounded by music, they begin to dance together.

23.3 [Zoom in] Their dance continues.

23.4 [Close up to their faces] They laugh heartily, dancing very close together.

[Page notes (22 and 23): This scene has a parallel/callback later in the story, but could still be reorganized or made slightly longer (maybe add them looking at Musa's art and/or drawing together, where we see the Lady isn't so good at drawing).]

PAGE 24 (left) - 7 panels

24.1 [Close up] The Lady takes Musa's hands in hers, squeezing gently.

LADY:

Gracias, mi Musa... I won't forget this while I live.

24.2 [Over Musa's shoulder] Facing each other, the Lady holds both of Musa's hands and smiles sadly.

LADY:

But I cannot stay... It's about time I go back and live again.
I shall share this joy you've given me with the world!

24.3 [Reverse shot] Musa forces a smile, visibly sad but trying to be sympathetic.

MUSA:

I... understand.

24.4 A black panel cuts through the page, showing Musa's thoughts/voice over.

MUSA (VO):

I didn't.

24.5 Still holding hands, they bring each other close, pressing their foreheads together.

MUSA (VO):

*Why? She was happy here... she was **safe**.*

25.6 Musa waves as the Lady walks away, stepping into the pond to return home.

MUSA (VO):

Why go back to that world of hardships?

25.7 Musa stands alone, with her back turned to the viewer. The panel doesn't have any borders or dialogue, to emphasize the emptiness around her.

PAGE 25 (right) - 2 panels

25.1 [Zoom out to a wide shot] In a corner of a huge panel, Musa stands alone next to one of the trees by the pond, looking tiny next to the tree and overlooking what is now an empty grassland.

MUSA (VO):

*Suddenly, my world felt... **Empty**.
Somehow, emptier than it ever was.*

25.2 [Ext. close up to her face] She stares ahead with wide and unfocused eyes, struggling to process her emotions, starting to panic.

MUSA (VO):

Filled only by the most deafening... most maddening... silence.

PAGE 26 (left) - 9 panels

[Page notes: Make this a very structured, monotonous-feeling page to emphasize how repetitive this routine/loop is. Each guest wears different historical attire, showing the passage of time.]

26.1 Musa appears before a new guest, a painter, as they stand by their easel, plein-air painting. The painter backs off, startled, paintbrush still in hand. They're covered in paint stains and their painting has been angrily "crossed out" with hasty brushstrokes.

MUSA (VO):

So I did it again...

26.2 Very similar to how she did for the lady, she presents the garden with a flourish, arms spread out as flowers manifest around them. Her guest looks on, fascinated.

26.3 Once again, she waves goodbye as her guest, now much more cheerful, waves back in the background, on their way out.

26.4 Musa appears before another guest, a writer, as they hold their head over their desk, facing a notebook full of scratched sentences and surrounded by books and crumpled papers.

MUSA (VO):

And again...

26.5 She introduces the garden again, but this time she sits atop a giant mushroom, surrounded by colorful butterflies, trying a different style of presentation. Her guest stares in awe, clutching a notebook in their hands.

26.6 Again, she waves goodbye, this time less enthusiastically, as her guest leaves and waves back, hugging their beloved notebook with their other hand.

26.7 Musa peeks from behind a tree, starting conversation with yet another guest, who appears to have been hiding, crying over their violin.

MUSA (VO):

And again...

26.8 Once again, she introduces the garden, where flower-covered instruments play magically, filling the panel with music. The musician looks ecstatic.

MUSA (VO):

And always, without fail...

26.9 In the last panel, she's once again alone, not even waving. Her guest has already left.

MUSA (VO):

...they left.

PAGE 27 (right) - 4 panels

27.1 Musa lays down by the pond, leaning against one of the trees and glancing towards the water with heavy eyes. She combs through the surface of the water with her hand, her arm moving in a languid, bored motion.

MUSA (VO):

It was a vicious cycle, never changing.

MUSA:

I wish someone would just **stay**.

27.2 [Zoom into her face] Her eyes begin to close.

MUSA (VO):

Until...

MUSA:

SIGH— Maybe I'll just...

27.3 [Ext. close up] Her eyes close completely.

MUSA:

...rest. For now.

27.4 The panel/page fades to black

MUSA:

Just for a while...

PAGE 28 (left) -

28.1 [The top of the panel/page fades in from black] DANTE snaps awake in class, the hand he was just leaning against still held up near his face. From out of the panel, the teacher announces the end of class.

TIME & PLACE CAPTION:

Buenos Aires, Argentina, circa 2010s

TEACHER (OFF-PANEL):

Ok, that's it for today, folks!

28.2 Dante rubs his eyes under his glasses, annoyed.

Teacher (OFF-PANEL):

See you next week.

28.3 [Over Dante's shoulder] He looks to the side, at his phone buzzing on the desk. The screen reads the time (11:00 am) and the alarm name (Go to work!).

SFX (phone):

BRR! BRR!

28.4 Framed and backlit by the window behind him, he slumps back on his chair, letting out a long and exhausted sigh.

SFX (Dante):
SI—GH—

28.5 [Ext. close up to his face] He stares off into the distance, to something that isn't there.

DANTE:
I wish I could just *leave*...

PAGE 29 (right) - Transition page

Black page with the blue butterfly flying by near the bottom right corner of the page.

***** END OF PROLOGUE *****

MUSA'S GARDEN

CHAPTER 1

Art & Story by Maria Paula "Mari" Gonzalez Curia
January 2024

[Scene notes (pages 1 and 2): Panel layout is mirrored, to show a parallel between Musa and Dante's reality.]

PAGE 1 (left) - 4 panels

1.1 [Exterior shot, slight low angle] In Musa's world, tree canopies shake gently in the soft breeze.

SFX (leaves in the wind)
FWOOSH~

1.2 [Ext. Close up] Musa's hand delicately holds a brush as she makes a mark on her canvas, depicting a sunflower.

MUSA:
Goodness...

1.3 [Ext. Close up] Musa brings the other end of the brush up to her lips or chin, thoughtful.

MUSA:
Has it really been *that* long?

1.4 Musa stands in front of the canvas, holding a palette in one hand and still holding the brush up to her chin with the other. She glances to the side (towards the next page) visibly intrigued.

MUSA:
I wonder...

PAGE 2 (right) - 4 panels

2.1 Interior shot of a crowded and noisy subway car. All the seats are taken by people reading, looking at their phones or keeping their eyes closed. Others stand in front of the taken seats, holding onto railings/hoops above or to their sides (most of the standing passengers have their backs turned to the viewer).

SFX (subway):
CLA-CLANK– CLA-CLANK– CLA-CLANK–

2.2 Dante stands in front of the subway doors (back turned to the viewer), surrounded by a crowd of commuters, each in their own world.

SFX (crowd):
Blah– Blah– Blah–

2.3 [Ext. Close up] Dante holds up his phone and hits play (or turns up the volume) on some kind of Radio App.

DANTE:
Let's see if this keeps me awake...

2.4 [Ext. close up, profile] Dante stares on with vacant, downcast eyes as the RADIO broadcast starts.

RADIO HOST 1:

... Now, moving on...

PAGE 3 (left) - 4 panels

3.1 [Full body view] Dante is slightly slumped over, holding on to one of the poles/railings near the subway doors with one hand. His other hand is in his pocket or holding his messenger bag (or its strap) closer to him. His expression and posture give away a mix of exhaustion and boredom. The radio hosts move on with their story. [Panel notes (1 and 2): The first text bubbles for the RADIO overlaps with panel 2, but points to Dante's earphones in panel 1]

3.2 Dante yawns loudly, tearing up a little. He holds his hand up but barely covers his mouth.

SFX (Dante):

YAAAWN—

RADIO HOST 1:

I hear you have news for our fellow book lovers?

3.3 [Same view as panel 2] He rests his head on the pole he's holding onto and rolls his eyes to the side.

SFX (pole):

TOC! / CLANK!

RADIO HOST 2:

Yes! I *finally* went to this Medieval Manuscript Exhibit and it is *FAN-TAS-TIC!*

RADIO HOST 1:

Ooh~ So? Did you SEE IT?

3.4 [Over Dante's shoulder] Dante glances at a poster on the subway wall, right next to him. The back of his head and his hand on the rail are visible in the foreground, framing the poster. The poster is all black, with the front view of an elaborately decorated book in the center and the words "*The Mirror Manuscript Exhibit*" in red or gold letters above it. The date and place of the exhibit aren't clearly visible or are covered.

RADIO HOST 2:

Of course, it's the star of the show! The intriguing **Mirror Manuscript...**
Do **NOT** miss the opportunity to see this **legendary** book in person, folks.

PAGE 4 (right) - 4 panels

4.1 Large, wide panel showing the book in detail, as if zooming into the poster. A dark, eerie aura surrounds the book as the radio continues speaking. [Panel note: spread out dialogue throughout the panel]

RADIO HOST 2:

For centuries, its haunting beauty and mysterious origins have inspired wonder, and even fear, in the public imagination. Some records claim it was part of *multiple* book burnings and it somehow *survived*. To this day, many say it's cursed or possessed by dark magic.

4.2 [Extreme close up] Dante's tired and vacant eyes stare ahead.

4.3 A completely black, thin panel, with only dialogue cuts through the page.

RADIO HOST 2:

... some swear they feel **watched** in its presence.

4.4 [Extreme close up] As if confirming the radio hosts' claims and in stark contrast to Dante, Musa's starry eyes gaze ahead, seemingly glowing with curiosity.

PAGE 5 (left) - 5 panels

5.1 [Interior shot, high angle] The subway arrives at the station, where a few other passengers are already waiting.

SFX (subway):

KSHHHHHHHH—

RADIO HOST 1:

Eek! I got chills! So creepy...

RADIO HOST 2:

Well, if you believe that sort of thing!

5.2 As the subway doors open, Dante pulls out his earplugs with an annoyed expression, his inner monologue interrupting the laughter from the radio.

SFX (radio from earplugs):

Ha ha ha!

DANTE (VO):

Oh, please...

The world is too dull for something like that to exist.

5.3 [Interior, high angle] Dante walks out of the subway and into the platform. A few other passengers walk in and out.

DANTE (VO):

Something like magic, or cursed books...

5.4 [Half body, profile] He goes up the stairs/escalator.

DANTE (VO):

Even if it ever existed, I bet we found a way to ruin it.

It's what we do.

5.5 [Exterior shot, slightly low angle] Dante steps out of the subway station into the street, looking down, already lost in thought. The subway entrance is still visible behind him. The city looks gray under the overcast sky and the trees around him are covered in dry, brown autumn leaves.

DANTE (VO):

But I guess even I believed in that stuff at some point...

Maybe before I got stuck in... Whatever this is.

PAGE 6 (right) - 4 panels

6.1 A large panel taking up most of the page shows the vicious cycle of Dante's routine. In the center, Dante stares ahead with an exasperated expression and around him, 4 mini-panels show him in different activities. Each mini-panel is labeled and connected to each other with arrows, drawing the never-ending cycle.

[Top left: "Wake up"] A chibi version of Dante sits up in bed, eyes still closed.

[Top right: "Study"] He sits at his desk in class, in front of a notebook, still sleepy.

[Bottom right: "Work"] He sits at his desk at work, in front of a laptop, a pile of papers and a cup of coffee, looking bored.

[Bottom left: “Sleep”] He collapses on his bed, exhausted.

DANTE (VO - center):

HELL is what this is...

6.2 [Close up] Across the street, the traffic light is green but the pedestrian crossing light is starting to count down (shows a 5).

DANTE (VO):

How did I end up in this loop, anyway?

6.3 Dante pauses. His expression softens slightly and goes from anger to concern.

6.4 [Zoom in from 6.2] The countdown on the pedestrian crossing reaches 0 and the standing figure on the top screen starts flashing red.

DANTE (VO):

I can't... remember.

PAGE 7 (left) - 4 panels

7.1 [Wide shot] Dante makes it to the other side of the crossing, looking down and completely lost in his own thoughts. A car blasts their horn as it narrowly misses him. People glance as he walks by, startled by the noise. He seems oblivious to the accident he almost caused.

SFX (car):

HOONK!

7.2 [Ext. close up to his feet] He stops on his tracks in front of a fallen flower that is lying on the street before him.

DANTE (VO):

*Is this really what I wanted to do? Who I wanted to **be**?*

7.3 He looks up at the large cluster of [bright fuchsia flowers](#) that hang just above him, spilling into the street from the garden on the other side of the fence he was just walking next to, too big and overgrown to be contained. His expression shows a conflicted mix of concern and wistfulness.

7.4 [Close up to his hand and the flower] He reaches out to touch one of the flowers.

DANTE (VO):

Did I really forget... something so important?

PAGE 8 (right) - 6 panels

8.1 A fully black or white panel, with only dialogue or a view of the cloudy sky with the dialogue over it.

DANTE (VO):

*I wish I could leave this **hell**.*

8.2 [High angle] Interior shot of Dante's workplace, a small office. A few other people are typing on computers, talking on the phone or reading paperwork. Dante sits at a desk by a large glass window that takes up most of the wall.

DANTE (VO):

*But I know there's no point in dreaming about it.
Nothing ever changes.*

8.3 [Zoom in] His face is partially covered and the glare of the computer screen on his glasses obscures his eyes. His hands type lazily on the keyboard.

DANTE (VO):

*Not for good, at least.
And this— works.*

8.4 [Extreme close up] His hands stop typing and pause over the keyboard.

DANTE (VO):

It's fine. I'm fine.

8.5 He sighs, defeated, and glances out the window.

DANTE (VO):

It's probably better this way...

8.6 [Ext. Close up] His eyes open wide and light up (as do his surroundings).

DANTE:

?

PAGE 9 (left) - 2 panels

9.1 [Exterior shot, high angle, as if seen from Dante's POV] Outside, Musa stands in a seemingly empty park, at the other side of the street, looking in his direction.

9.2 [Zoom in] Musa looks up directly at Dante with curious and hopeful eyes, stepping forward. Leaves fly around her, her hair and dress flowing in the breeze. It looks as if the sun has come out, because everything looks a lot more colorful. Tree canopies (at the top) and flowers (at the bottom) frame the panel, adding to the magical atmosphere.

MUSA (VO):

Perhaps...

PAGE 10 (right) - 2 panels

10.1 Dante looks down from his window, confused but with a new spark of curiosity in his eyes. The panel is framed by sunflowers in the top right of the page.

MUSA (VO):

... this time *will* be different!

10.2 Musa looks up with the slightest hint of a smile, her eyes gleaming with possibility. The panel is framed by morning glory flowers in the bottom left of the page.

PAGE 11 (left) - 6 panels

11.1 Dante snaps back to reality and looks ahead into the office again as he's called out.

CARO (OFF-PANEL):

Hey, Dante!

DANTE:

!!!

11.2 Dante looks back at CARO, one of his coworkers, who looks concerned and mildly annoyed, carrying a pile of folders/paperwork.

DANTE:

S-Sorry, Caro! I spaced out... What do you need?

CARO:

No worries... Did you find that document I told you about earlier?

11.3 [Close up] Dante side-glances towards the window again.

DANTE:

Oh! Yeah... Um... *That...*

11.4 [Exterior, high angle shot of the park] Musa is nowhere to be seen, people are walking by, minding their own business, and everything seems normal.

DANTE (OFF-PANEL):

I know *exactly* what you're talking about...

11.5 Dante looks at the computer screen and scratches his neck apologetically. Caro glances over his shoulder at the screen and pumps her fist triumphantly.

DANTE:

It's right here. Just forgot to print it out.

CARO:

Yes! I knew I could count on you!

11.6 [Side view] Dante glances towards the window again, his hands resting on the keyboard. He's mostly in shadow with some rim light from the window.

CARO (OFF-PANEL):

Leave it on my desk, ok?

DANTE:

Sure...

PAGE 12 (right) - 5 panels

12.1 Exterior shot of the city near the office (the tree canopies from the park are visible near the bottom of the panel). The afternoon sky is turning orange/pink as the sun sets, showing time has passed.

DANTE (VO):

Was she... looking at me?

12.2 Dante scratches his head nervously as he walks along the street, musing to himself.

DANTE (VO):

No. Stop. That's impossible.
I'm just *tired*. Just seeing things.

12.3 [Close up profile of Musa's mouth] Musa speaks up, lost in her own train of thought, while daintily touching her chin or cheek.

MUSA:

I see... you're *avoiding* it.

12.4 [Close up profile] Dante stops on his tracks, eyes open wide and looks behind him, frightened.

12.5 Dante and Musa stand face to face for the first time. Dante looks back, his hand still hovering above his head, mid-scratching, still wide-eyed and surprised. Musa looks at him curiously and speaks casually, as if she hadn't just appeared out of nowhere.

MUSA:

Why are you avoiding your own curiosity?

PAGE 13 (left) - 7 panels

13.1 Dante frowns and tenses his shoulders, squeezing the strap of his bag in his hands. His mouth is half open, with a hint of a forced smile, as if he's about to say something, but is still processing what he just heard.

13.2 He finally speaks, nervous and visibly offended.

DANTE:

UM– I don't...!

13.3 Standing in front of him, Musa begins to open her mouth and slightly raises her hand, preparing to speak.

DANTE (OFF-PANEL):
That doesn't even make sense!

MUSA:
Oh—!

13.4 Someone runs by next to Dante, bumping into him and pushing him back slightly, causing him to stumble.

DANTE:
Hey!

13.5 Dante yells (in the foreground) at the random pedestrian as they run away after a bus in the background, paying no mind.

DANTE:
Watch it!

13.6 Dante turns around but Musa has disappeared. Show her silhouette and action lines pointing to the empty space.

DANTE:
WHAT?! She's gone...

13.7 Dante looks around, deeply concerned. Add some dramatic lighting to emphasize the eerie nature of the moment.

DANTE:
What the hell is going on?

PAGE 14 (right) - 5 panels

14.1 [Close up] The pedestrian crossing light, showing a green walking figure, signals it's safe to cross.

DANTE (VO):
That's it.

14.2 [External shot, high angle] Still distressed, Dante makes his way across the pedestrian crossing surrounded by people walking in the opposite direction.

DANTE (VO):

I'm going mad. It's finally happening.

14.3 [Side view] Dante keeps walking, backlit by the bright lights of the cars. Show him and the other pedestrians as silhouettes, with the light accentuating only a few features.

DANTE (VO):

*People don't just **disappear**...
And there's that **cryptic** thing she said...*

14.4 [Close up] Exasperated, Dante hits his forehead with the side of his fist.

DANTE (VO):

Ugh- STOP! Why am I still thinking about this?! It's just a coincidence! We're just walking around the same area, at the same time.

14.5 [Close up] The pedestrian crossing light shows a standing figure and starts counting down from 5.

DANTE (VO):

And she's just... *weird*.

PAGE 15 (left) - 3 panels

15.1 [Profile view, right below the characters' eyes] As Dante walks (towards the right), Musa walks past him in the opposite direction (left).

MUSA:

You're doing it again...

15.2 [Ext close up] Dante quickly turns around with wide open eyes.

15.3 Dante stares in shock (in the foreground) at Musa who now stands before him again. Her hair and the ribbons of her bow flow ethereally.

MUSA:

I really *am* trying to talk to you, you know!

PAGE 16 (right) - 6 panels

16.1 Dante leans in.

DANTE:

Who—

16.2 [Close up] The standing figure in the pedestrian crossing light flashes red, signaling the countdown has reached 0.

16.3 Musa looks to the side, startled by something to her right.

DANTE (OFF-PANEL):

— are you?

MUSA:

!!

16.4 Musa extends her hand towards Dante, as if to push him. In the foreground, Dante backs away.

MUSA:

Watch out!

16.5 [Side view] Dante steps back, away from Musa, on a reflex. Her hand is still extended towards him but doesn't really reach him. A bright white light shines behind them.

16.6 [Close up to Dante's feet/legs] Dante trips over the edge of the sidewalk (close up to his legs/feet).

PAGE 17 (left) - 4 panels

17.1 Dante falls backwards, landing on his butt.

SFX (fall):

THUD!

17.2 [Low angle shot, seen from behind Dante] A car darts by, just inches away from Dante, who is still sitting on the sidewalk.

SFX(car):

BRRRMM!

17.3 Dante sits on the sidewalk, leaning backwards (away from the street), holding his hand up to his chest and gasping for air after the shock. Behind him, other pedestrian's feet are visible as they mumble to each other.

SFX (pedestrians):

Blah! Blah! Blah!

SFX (Dante)

Huff– Huff–

17.4 [Ext close up to Dante's eyes] Dante is shaking, disoriented, his eyes wide and unfocused. The loud thumping of his heart takes up the upper part of the panel.

SFX (Dante's heart):

TU–TUM– TU–TUM– TU–TUM– TU–TUM–

DANTE (VO):

Where– Where did she go?! No– Don't tell me...

PAGE 18 (right) - 6 panels

18.1 [Ext. Close up to Musa's smiling mouth]

MUSA:

Do not worry—

18.2 Musa appears again, safe and sound, kneeling daintily behind/next to Dante, who is still sitting in the same position. With wide open eyes, he glances to the side.

MUSA:

Your world cannot do me any harm.

DANTE:

How did you—?!

18.3 Dante stares forward again, sweat rolls down the side of his face.

DANTE:

Nevermind– Why are you following me?

18.4 Musa stands up/leans away from him.

DANTE (OFF-PANEL):
What do you want from me?

MUSA:
Only to *help*... but please, let us speak somewhere *safer*.

18.5 Dante stands up and turns around. Musa has already disappeared or is walking away.

MUSA:
Follow me, if you're *curious*.

18.6 [External shot of nearby buildings] The sky turns darker and more windows light up, showing the passage of time.

PAGE 19 (left) - 6 panels

19.1 [External shot, high angle] In a new location, Dante looks up with a mix of irritation and fear, hands on his hips.

DANTE:
“*Somewhere safer*” she said...

19.2 [External shot, low angle, seen from the opposite side] Dante stands (foreground, back turned to the viewer) in front of a large abandoned building, looking tiny in comparison to the looming structure. The building is covered in overgrown vines, grass and moss. The broken windows and glass doors (of what seems to have been a shop) have been covered with tape and cardboard, but a large opening for the entrance still remains.

DANTE:
And went in *there*... *Of course*.

19.3 [Inside shot, facing towards the entrance] The abandoned shop is mostly in shadow except for the light coming from the door where Dante stands (in silhouette), screaming into the empty building.

DANTE:
A creepy derelict building isn't exactly my idea of **SAFE**, lady!

19.4 He frowns and huffs through his nose, annoyed at the lack of response.

DANTE:

Hmph!

19.5 He smiles mockingly, feigning confidence, and looks away.

DANTE:

Whatever. I'm sure my survival instinct will kick in *any second* now...I'll get the HELL out here and everything will go back to normal.

19.6 He looks into the building again, with a conflicting mix of fear and intrigue.

DANTE:

Any. Second.

PAGE 20 (right) - 5 panels

20.1 [Interior shot, high angle] Dante dashes across the abandoned building.

DANTE:

I'm outta my mind— I'm outta my mind— I'm outta my mind— I'm outta my mind—

20.2 Dante stops, clasping the strap of his bag nervously, and screams into the empty building. He's doing his best to seem brave. The overgrown plants frame the panel around it, making it look threatening.

DANTE:

Ok, I'm here! S-stop playing and sh-show yourself!

20.3 [Close up] With a serious expression, Musa begins to extend her hands in front of her. Vapor-like magic begins to come from them, expanding upwards.

MUSA:

I'm sorry...

20.4 [Close up] Dante turns around, startled.

DANTE:

?!

20.5 [Zoom out to a wide shot, slightly low angle] Dante and Musa stand face to face. Musa's hands are extended at both sides of Dante's face as magic flows from them, swirling and expanding all around them and all over the room.

PAGE 21 (left) - 6 panels

21.1 [Close up, seen from Dante's POV] Musa smiles apologetically, her hands still held out at the sides of his face.

MUSA:

I know this has been confusing.

21.2 Dante suddenly feels dizzy. He puts his hand to his head and frowns, trying to focus. Make the panel tilted/distorted to reflect his disorientation.

MUSA (OFF-PANEL):

It will all make sense in a moment...

DANTE:

What... did you... do?

21.3 [From Dante's POV] Musa looks blurrier/darker now. The strands of magic coming from her hands begin to "spill out" of the panel, going over the next ones and into the next page.

MUSA:

... I promise.

DANTE (OFF-PANEL):

Why...?

21.4 Dante holds his hand to his forehead and squints his eyes, having trouble keeping them open.

DANTE:

... do I feel so...

21.5 [From Dante's POV] Musa smiles faintly, she looks even blurrier/darker.

DANTE (OFF-PANEL):

...sleepy?

21.6 As Dante's vision fades to black so does the last panel. Musa's magic flows through the bottom part of the page, connecting with the splash page on Page 22. Musa's voice echoes in the darkness.

MUSA:

I will see you soon.

PAGE 22 (right) - Splash page

22.1 In the bottom right corner of the page, Dante falls backwards softly, as if he was floating down in water. The panel is completely dark except for a bright white light at Dante's back. Bright green strands of magic vapor surround Dante and rise towards the upper left side of the page, bleeding into the previous page.

PAGE 23 (left) - Transition page

23.1 In the darkness, a few specks of magic remain, floating in a similar direction as Dante in the previous page.

PAGE 24 (right) - 7 panels

[Page note: Make the gutters of this page black up until the last panels, to connect with the previous page]

24.1 Dante lays on grass. He frowns as a bright light shines on his face.

DANTE:

Hmm—

24.2 [Zoom in] He opens his eyes ever so slightly, squinting at the light.

DANTE:

?!

24.3 He raises a hand to block the light and half opens his eyes.

DANTE:

What the—?!

24.4 [Dante's POV] Above him, he can see the sky and light coming through the leaves of a tree canopy.

DANTE:
It's... *daytime*?

24.5 He sits up and rubs his head.

DANTE:
Right, I passed out... Maybe I really was hallucinating after all.

24.6 [Ext. close up] His hand, resting on the grass, twitches slightly.

Dante
Huh? *Grass*?

24.7 Dante finally looks up and looks awestruck.

Dante
!!

PAGE 25 (left) - Splash page

25.1 In the foreground, seen from behind, Dante stands beside a tree. Before him lies a vast, lush landscape of green grass, brightly colored flowers (hydrangea to one side and sunflowers to the other) and plants, spreading as far as the eye can see. The sky, although bright enough to feel like regular daylight, is colored in soft, pastel shades of light blue, pink and orange, crossed by a few thin white clouds.

DANTE:
Where... am I?

PAGE 26 (right) - Transition page

Black page with a single sunflower in the bottom right corner of the page.

***** END OF CHAPTER 1 *****