

From Migdalia Cruz's EL GRITO DEL BRONX

ACT ONE/ SCENE 9

In a park. 1991.

ED has his head resting in LULU's lap.

THEY lounge on a red picnic blanket.

ED

A park is the one place where all children look happy. Even if they're terrified coming down a slide. Or you swing them too hard.

(pointing)

Look at that little girl.

LULU

Mmhmm. Look at her smile. She looks—

(Pause; with a sad smile)

My brother used to smile like that. He used to say that the shadows of the leaves on his face—made him feel like a tree. We'd go to the park all the time. Just to feel those shadows.

ED

Are you going to go see him?

LULU

What do you mean?

ED

I mean...are you going to go see him? He's—where? In Florida, or something?

LULU

Don't know. We lost touch.

ED

I could help you find him.

LULU

No. That's not—I really don't want that.

ED

You talk about him all the time.

LULU

I do? Maybe. I been thinking about the stories he used to make me tell him.

(We see PAPO caught in the dark shadows of the bars of his cell.)

ED

Tell me a story.

(SHE rubs ED's head gently as SHE begins to tell ED a story. PAPO seems to be listening too, as if HE is recalling this story from the past.)

LULU

Once upon a time, a long, long, long time ago, there was a beautiful Princess named Antonia. Her father ruled the Earth and her mother ruled the Sky. This left the Princess to care for all the animals of the kingdom. She fed them sweet blossoms from an ancient tree called the Flamboyant that cried when his red blossoms fell from his branches. But the Flamboyant sighed with contentment when Princess Antonia touched his limbs, because her hands could heal him with their gentle power to make things grow more beautiful in an empty place.

(Pause)

One day, an evil Chupacabra put a spell on her father, and he began to chop down all the trees in the kingdom. With an axe stained with his own blood, her father severed all the limbs of the Flamboyant, and with his spit he made a poison to kill the roots. Soon there were no trees alive in the Princess' garden. She could no longer feed the creatures that depended on the blossoms to stay alive. They knew no other food, so they grew weak.

(Pause)

Her mother tried to help by making the wind blow fiercely so that fruit from other kingdoms flew into the Princess' garden. Princess Antonia tried to feed them the fruit of ripe mangoes and papayas, but they would choke when they tried to swallow it because everything turned into a bitter paste in their throats and would make their tongues burn. Animals fell to the ground all around her, slowly melting into the soil and becoming a part of the Earth. She decided to try one last meal for her friends. Sobbing she cut into the soft flesh of the palms of her hands and let the blood drip into the mouth of the youngest one, the Coquí, a small frog whose song was like the cry of angels. Suddenly, the Coquí opened her eyes. So the Princess squeezed more blood from her torn flesh and fed it to the dying animal. Slowly, the frog began to sing. It was a song that reached into Heaven.

(Pause)

This song let her mother whisper of her own sadness to the clouds that soon broke open, raining the Earth with the mother's tears. The power of the mother's water and the daughter's blood seeped life back into the earth. And trees began to grow again.

The Flamboyant grew the fastest and his limbs lifted the bewitched father into the sky, while his roots buried the axe where no one would ever find it again.

ED

That's the freakiest story I've ever heard. But so beautiful. No wonder Jesús loved to hear them.

(Pause)

Wow...Hon'?

LULU

Yeah?

ED

Are you gonna tell our children stories like that?

LULU

Maybe.

(Pause)

Maybe I'll leave out the blood and flesh stuff though.

ED

Okay.

(HE snuggles more deeply into her lap and settles in for a nap.)

The sound of your voice is like a pillow.

(Lights cross to PAPO's cell.)