

TEJEDORA

For Lee

The quilt held all of the child's favorite things. His mother was a gifted *tejedora*, weaver: she had the rare knowledge that let her spin the stories and songs themselves, the pictures and scents and tastes, into the yarn that she worked with her clicking needles. The human mind was fragile. Memories could slip through the cracks too easily, but the child would never lose those pieces of his past as long as he kept the quilt close.

The child chose the yarn for each new, palm-sized square. Sky-blue for the clapping game he played with his best friend. Cinnamon-brown for the taste of *borchata*, the sweet drink made with milk and rice and vanilla. Sunlight yellow for the hugs his *abuela* gave him. His mother knitted the squares and pieced them together into a mosaic as singular as the boy himself. From the time when he was old enough to choose the colors, the child knew how much the quilt mattered. Each time his mother knitted a new square, he felt the yarn curling through his thoughts, winding around the things he loved to hold them tight and safe.

The mother used her knitting needles to create her magic, or what other people would call magic, but she kept something else close to her: six spiders, each about the size of a walnut, carved out of wood. They were beautiful, made by her grandfather for her grandmother, who was also a *tejedora*. Their sleek bodies and slender legs were veined with the grain of the pine. Their eyes, made out of polished glass, glittered like dewdrops in the sun. The mother kept the spiders near her, but did not use them yet. For anyone else, they would only have been beautiful carvings. For her, when her hands grew too stiff to work her needles anymore, the spiders would – as they had done for her grandmother – do what spiders did best.

The mother often had trouble getting new colors of yarn. There on the poorest edge of Tegucigalpa, where rival gangs tore at each other with knives and gunfire, the simplest things became luxuries and the luxuries were as remote as heaven. The mother braved the dangerous streets day after day, to get to the better neighborhoods where beautiful things could be had for the asking. She didn't ask for anything for herself: only the colors she wove for her boy.

Someday, she knew they would have to leave. She could scrape some kind of life for herself here on the edges, but she wouldn't lose her son to the drug gangs that had taken his father, or let him grow up in a place where tomorrow was barely a hope. She had a sister away to the north in the *Estados Unidos*. If she and her boy were lucky, if God did care for the weak, they might make it that far.

She didn't know what might happen on that journey across land she couldn't imagine. As the time came when she knew they would have to go, she did something she had never done before.

Her son had never asked her to weave herself into his quilt. *Mamá* was always there, as certain as the patched roof of their shabby house and the faded paint-peeling walls. During their last handful of nights at home, as May burned into June, the mother chose her own favorite colors. Rose, gold, and the pale green of new grass. Carefully, she wove them into the mosaic, making a border around her child's memories. She did it in case, sometime soon, he would need the memory of her arms holding him.