

# Blind-Sided, PT 1.

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## Chapter 1: Flicker

The humid night air clung to Julio's skin as he and Marco stepped off the bus near campus, laughter trailing behind them like the smell of esquites from the street vendor across the road. The political rally had been noisy and full of energy—and for Marco, a kind of high. For Julio, it was just another evening spent ducking and trying not to get arrested for standing too close to a megaphone.

"Tell me again why you dragged me to a protest and not a party?" Julio asked, nudging Marco with his shoulder.

"Because, güey, revolutions don't happen on dance floors," Marco grinned, eyes shining behind his thick glasses. His oversized backpack shook on his back as he adjusted it.

Julio snorted. "You haven't been to the right parties."

They crossed the street and entered the university parking lot, where Marco's old gray Volkswagen Beetle waited like a tired dog. Julio had named it "La Pulga" for the way it always sputtered and scratched its way into motion. Marco claimed it was "full of character."

As they approached, Marco slowed down, glancing over his shoulder.

"You feel that?"

Julio looked around. Empty lot. Flickering lamplight. "Feel what?"

Marco shrugged. "Nothing. Just a vibe."

Julio rolled his eyes. "It's Chiapas, man. Everything feels weird after 10 PM."

Marco popped the door open and slid inside. Julio circled around and climbed into the passenger seat. The inside of the car smelled like old upholstery and burnt plastic. Marco turned the key. The engine coughed, then caught.

Then came the static.

The radio flared to life, unprompted. Not music—just soft, crackling noise, like a distant thunderstorm tuning in. Marco frowned and tapped the volume knob. Nothing changed.

Julio leaned forward. “Is this station for real, güey?”

The static sharpened into a garbled voice—half a syllable, then another. It faded just as quickly.

Marco didn't speak.

Julio, trying to lighten the mood, laughed. “Probably just the devil making a Tik-Tok video.”

That got a grin from Marco. “You know what I found last night?” he said, pulling his phone from the dash. He opened a YouTube app and tapped a saved video. “This. It's been going viral in some Reddit circles.”

Julio leaned over to look. The video's thumbnail showed a grainy black-and-white image of a woman standing beside a highway at night. The title read: *La Mujer del Vado — Last Transmission (Original Upload)*.

The video began: shaky cam footage from a dashboard. The car drove slowly along a foggy road. There was no sound but engine hum and faint static.

Then the camera panned—briefly. A figure on the side of the road. Long black hair. A white dress or coat. Bare feet.

Julio felt a small shiver crawl up his back. “Okay, creepy. So?”

“Just wait.”

The camera turned back to the road. The driver spoke in Spanish: “¿La viste? ¿La viste?”

Then the screen glitched. For a second, just a frame or two, the woman appeared directly in front of the car.

Cut to black.

Julio blinked. “That's it?”

“No,” Marco said. “Look again.”

He rewound a few seconds. Froze the video right before the glitch. There, in the side mirror—so faint Julio hadn't noticed before—was the reflection of a second person. In the back seat.

“That wasn't there a minute ago,” Julio muttered.

Marco raised an eyebrow. "I know."

Julio sat back, rubbed his arms. "Where was this filmed?"

"Right outside Tuxtla. Around that curve before the hills."

Julio squinted at him. "Wait. Isn't that where we saw that weird chick by the road?"

Marco just nodded.

For a long moment, the only sound was the car's idling engine and the faint hiss of the still-humming radio.

Julio tried to laugh again, but it came out dry. "Come on, bro. Don't tell me you believe in this stuff."

"I didn't," Marco said. "Until last week."

"What happened last week?"

Marco didn't answer right away. He reached into his backpack and pulled out a small black notebook—worn, weathered, filled with tabs and highlighted scribbles. He opened to a page filled with hand-drawn maps and timestamps.

"I think I found the car."

Julio frowned. "The one from the video?"

Marco nodded. "It's for sale."

Julio stared at him. "And you want to buy it?"

Marco's smile was the kind Julio didn't like—quiet, certain, and maybe just a little too calm. "I already did."

