

#LIKE

TEXT BY ANA ROMERO

ILLUSTRATIONS BY IXCHEL ESTRADA





ANA ROMERO was born in La Piedad, Michoacán, in 1975. She writes fiction and poetry for children and young people. She has published over a dozen books in both genres and has also contributed to various short story anthologies. Her most recent publications include *Sirena*, a novel about imagination and disability; *Cien dragones y una niña*, a fairy tale told in verse; and *Nosotras / Nosotros*, a picture book co-authored with Valeria Gallo that aims to break gender stereotypes.

In 2011, she won the Premio de Literatura Infantil Juan de la Cabada for her book *Puerto Libre. Historias de migrantes*. She has been a member of the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte since 2019.

Ana Romero has also written scripts for more than a dozen series and teleseries. Before becoming a writer, she studied psychology and theater. Although she has great admiration for both disciplines, she admits that she was never particularly skilled at practicing them. Unbeknownst to her at the time, she always had a strong desire to write.

#LIKE

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PRESENTATION

#Like is a literary proposal that joins the **Árbol** collection, which the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE, National Electoral Institute) makes available to teenagers with the intention to disseminate, in a simple and enjoyable way, topics related to civic education, democratic values, and gender equality.

The Unidad Técnica de Igualdad de Género y No Discriminación (Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination Technical Unit of the INE) aims to extend the human rights approach and the principles of equality, gender parity, and non-discrimination to all areas of the Institute and its services to citizens, to promote the participation of all individuals, without distinction, in elections and decision-making processes that involve them.

Gender-based violence through social media is a complex and not always easy topic to address. That is why the INE decided to use a literary work with language that resonates with teenagers, to reflect on the significant risks that can arise from the misuse of internet platforms, which have become an indispensable tool in our daily lives.

#Like is a fictional youth story that could take place in any city and country. It narrates how a teenager falls in love and becomes entangled in the deceit of someone with hidden intentions, putting her at high risk, and how her friends warn her of the danger and help her escape from it.

Beyond fiction, there are many real-life stories of teenagers, both in urban and rural areas, who have unfortunately experienced similar situations. Our goal is to generate dialogue about digital violence and empower readers to freely express their experiences, while also providing them with knowledge about the resources available in Mexico today to prevent and address such situations.

This story offers an opportunity to enjoy a fictional narrative together as a community. Although the story can be appealing to people of all ages, it is specifically intended for high school students, who will have the opportunity to reflect on the importance of respecting the rights of others in the pursuit of the common good.

The final pages of the book include the section “To Reflect and Discuss” aimed at encouraging adolescents to reflect, either on their own or with the support of a trusted adult, on the importance of analyzing the root causes of the serious problem of gender-based violence, particularly its manifestation on social media. This appendix also provides information on the legal references and institutions that allow us to report these acts that violate human rights and democratic values in Mexico. Through reflection and dialogue, it will be possible to propose feasible actions for resolution and emphasize that we all have a civic commitment to contribute to the elimination of violence against women.



#Like



The park was crowded at that time in the afternoon: ladies coming out of work, people pushing their children's swings, dogs running to sniff other dogs, student couples who, between kisses, reviewed the verbs *ser* and *estar* and lonely individuals searching for love at the depths of their cell phones.

Erandi and Alfredo belonged to the group of those who kissed while doing homework, while Susana was among those who, between memes and videos, tried to flirt with some mysterious being hidden on the other side of the screen.

Erandi and Susana were best friends.

Alfredo and Erandi were madly in love.


But Susana and Alfredo barely tolerated each other because, many times, *the other*—what a complicated concept!—interfered in the perfect friendship they had before Erandi got into a relationship.

It's not that Susana and Alfredo were rude to each other or wished ill upon one another, not at all. It was more like they were obstacles to each other. Even if Alfredo was the embodiment of all virtues, Susana would not acknowledge it; to her, he would always be the *intruder*.

In the afternoon when this story began, they were at the park, as I mentioned before. Susana wanted Alfredo to leave and go to his house so she could tell Erandi that she had been chatting with an amazing guy named Raphael, like the singer her grandma Esther liked, while Alfredo wanted Susana to go away so he could invite Erandi to have some lemonade.







The point is, time was passing, and neither of them (Susana and Alfredo) showed any signs of wanting to leave the park. But Erandi, who was very clever, noticed and, guessing their desires, uttered the magic words:

“Alfredo, why don’t you go get some lemonade while I tell Susana some gossip?”

“Tell me too,” protested the boy.

“I can’t, it’s a secret between friends.”

“Darn!” exclaimed poor Alfredo, but he had no choice but to go alone for the lemonades. He hadn’t even reached the corner when Erandi threw the explosive command at Susana:

“Tell me everything!” she blurted out.

“What are you talking about?” asked Susana, with the sole intention of prolonging the anticipation of something she knew she would enjoy, like when she took her time to open one of the spectacular gifts that her grandma always gave her. A set of pens for writing invisible letters, a book that turns into a little theater, a toolbox for building armchairs by the fire, a magical stole... Anything could fit inside one of grandma Esther’s gift boxes.

“Don’t play innocent. By the dreamy look in your eyes and the giggles you let out every time the notification cricket of your phone chirps, it’s obvious that you’re hiding something.”

“You read my mind. You are like a witch,” said Susana, amused.

“Maybe I am,” Erandi responded, then let out a sinister cackle, like a cheesy movie witch.

“Well, it turns out that I found a wonderful guy online: he’s handsome, smart, and funny.”

“And how do you know all that?”

“Well, from everything he posts...”

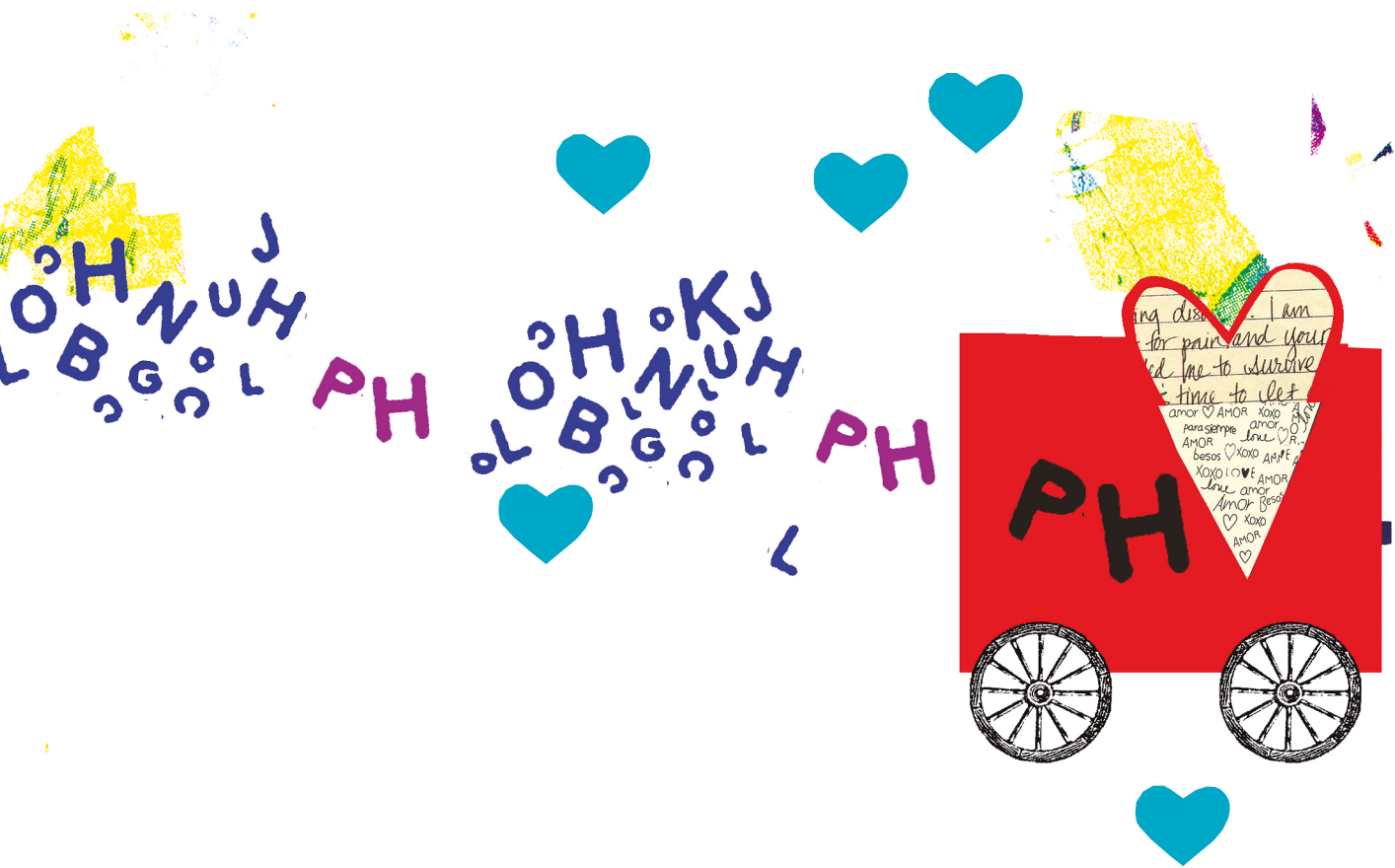
“So, you don’t actually know him?”





“No... well, not in person, but I feel like I’ve known him forever...” said Susana, and then let out a little sigh that, who knows why, hit Erandi like a punch in the gut.

Susana gave her a summary in four minutes: first, he had liked one of his stories, then it followed a #Like bombing, and he even put hearts on posts that only her aunts from Chilpancingo had found enjoyable. They soon became friends on all social media platforms and started commenting even on the quizzes to find out what kind of bread they were; from there, they moved on to private messages and now they were writing to each other all the time.



“He’s called Raphael,” Susana concluded with a twinkle in her eyes, elongating that *ph* almost like a new sigh. The punch in the gut turned into a full-blown hole in Erandi’s stomach.

“No one is named like that,” Erandi spat out the comment filled with suspicion, but her friend took it as a compliment because she was at that stage of infatuation where everything sounds like crystal bells.

“True, right? Only him, because he’s perfect. Respectful, and funny, he listens to the same music as me, and we even share the guilty pleasure of some cheesy and super corny songs! And, look, he’s really handsome.”

Erandi only managed to catch a glimpse of a couple of pictures of a guy around her age, but she had to give the phone back to her friend because she saw Alfredo coming back

juggling three glasses of lemonade. Well, two and a half, because one was leaking and leaving a trail all over the plaza.

“If I don’t grow a third arm from my stomach, this is the last time you send me alone for the drinks,” complained Alfredo as he sadly looked at the half-empty glass they had left for him.

Erandi and Susana put the Raphael topic aside for now and started discussing the advantages that the *bolillos* offered over *teleras*, a topic in which Alfredo had ample experience.

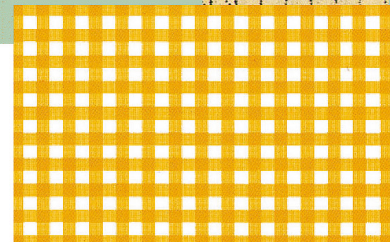
“They can say whatever they want, but *telera* is perfect for sandwiches: it’s endorsed by the best sandwich makers in town,” said Erandi, very convinced.

“You’re crazy!” protested her best friend and her boyfriend.

“*Bolillo* is better because you can eat the soft part and leave a little pocket to stuff with loads and loads of filling,” emphasized Susana.

“Exactly. Have you noticed, Susi, that avocado slices fit perfectly in the little pocket?” added Alfredo.

Who knows if it was due to Susana’s infatuation or their shared love for devouring food, but that was the first time since they started dating that the three of them laughed and chatted together, something Erandi had longed for with all her might. Ever since she became Alfredo’s girlfriend, that was what she always wished for before blowing away a fallen eyelash or tossing a coin into the park’s fountain, activities that, as everyone knows, make wishes come true.





Erandi forgot about the suitor on the phone. She was so happy that, unintentionally, she stopped thinking about the warning signs that came to be when Susana sighed, twice, for a guy she didn't know.

Later, she would regret letting herself be carried away by her fulfilled wish that afternoon in the park.

And while the three of them laughed and chatted about nonsense, let's take a look at Erandi and Susana's friendship, to understand why Alfredo's arrival marked a before and after in their relationship.

The two friends were inseparable since they met in elementary school. It was usual to see them together. Despite having other friendships and groups, they were always like inseparable twins. They were connected by everything: music, their love for animals, their adoration for K-pop, and vampire books.

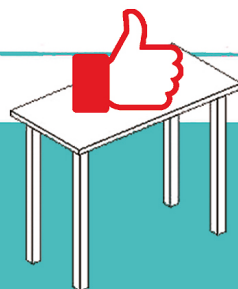


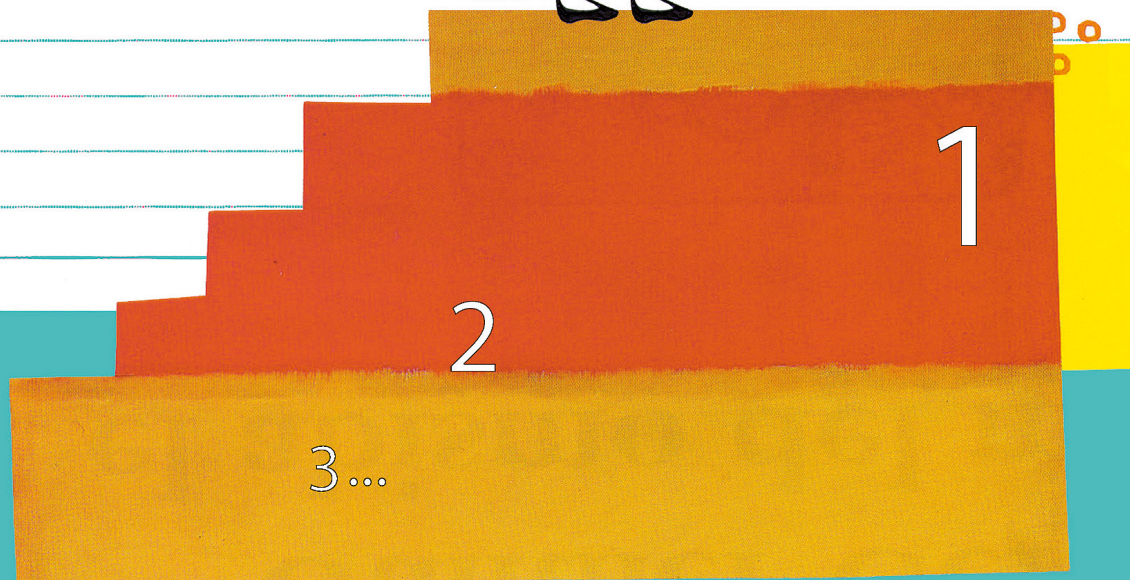
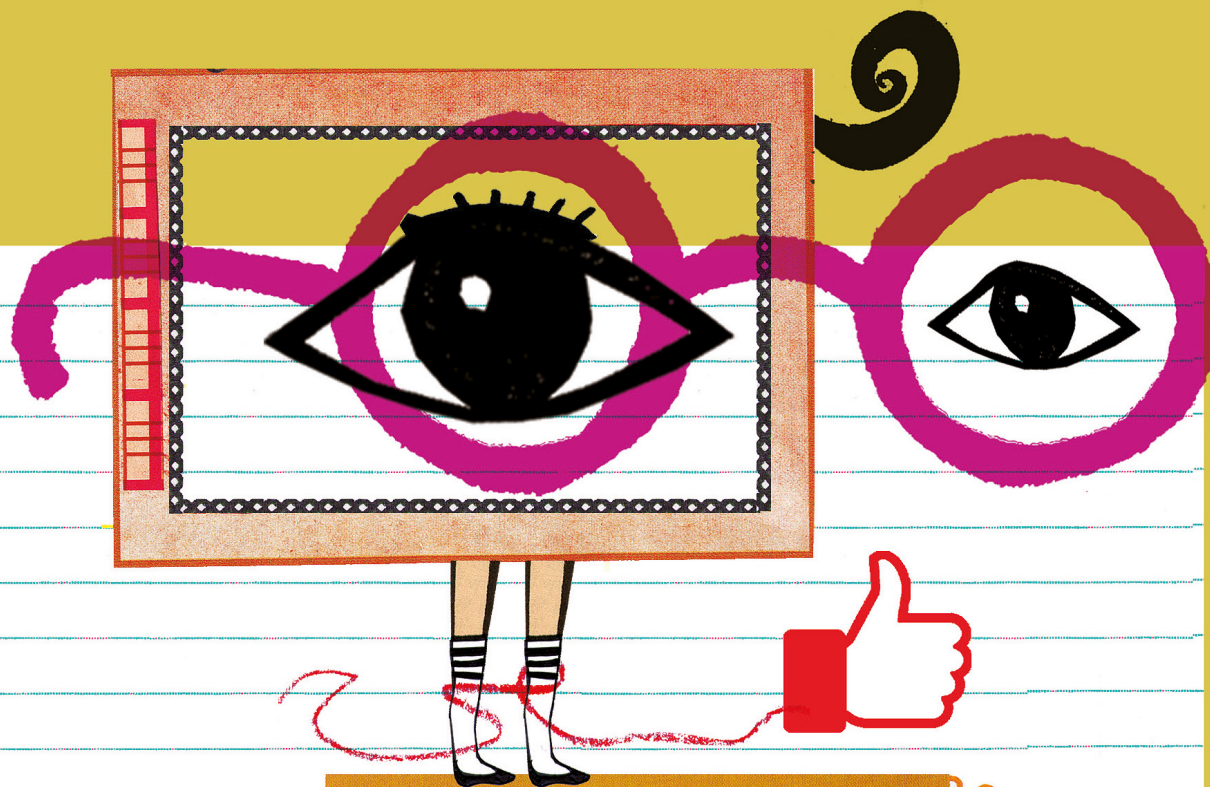
But above all, what united them was the feeling of being ugly and, therefore, they were certain they would die without ever having a boyfriend.

Susana is a big eater and a little bit chubby. Furthermore, she started getting pimples at the beginning of middle school, two things that are considered “a tragedy” according to a large portion of the posts shared on Insta, Facebook, Tik Tok, and other social media platforms, where the trend dictates that teenage girls must be thin to the point of resembling skeletons, and they need to have smooth, white skin, and of course, be free of pimples, which can only be achieved through filters. On the other hand, Erandi is very, very tall, has gapped teeth, and wears glasses. Three attributes that will never be seen in the photos of “The most beautiful girls of the season.”

What neither of them noticed was that all those posts that attack us every three minutes and make us feel inferior are designed to sell something: creams, blouses, gyms, status, #Likes... They sell an impossible aspiration because if it were achievable, they would stop selling.

The breaking point came in the first year of middle school, where social rules turned into a nightmare of who had the highest number of #Likes and followers. Only those who obtained the most thumbs up could dream of belonging to the tangled “aristocracy” of Leona Vicario Middle School.





They were not popular; most of their #Likes came from their relatives, so everything indicated that they were doomed to social failure, something they pretended to be indifferent about but deep down, no matter how clever they were, made them feel inferior. That's why, as if reluctantly and almost without speaking about it, they entered the game of #Likes.

On the first school gathering in middle school, Erandi and Susana spent two hours rummaging through their own closets and their mothers' until they found the perfect outfit that would make them appear indifferent, sophisticated, natural, careful about their appearance, rebellious, well-behaved, studious, and cool... it was like 12 things, and I don't know how their heads didn't explode with so many requirements, but they achieved the desired result and on the day of the gathering, they were on fire. They even danced a couple of songs with the group of the "cool kids." Had they succeeded? They wouldn't know until the next day when *everyone* (meaning the students from middle school) uploaded photos to social media. But above anything, it was important to get likes on individual selfies.

Paty and Teresita had about like *two million* #Likes each (so in truth, 67 and 68, respectively). Erandi had two likes: from Susana and from Alfredo, the new boy whom the friends had recently started hanging out with during recess. Susana had three likes: from Erandi, her mom, and a user named BTS4ever who no one knew who it was, but they had connections on various social media platforms with many students from the middle school, especially from the third grade.

Faced with failure, Erandi and Susana did what they had to do: pretend that it didn't matter to them more than a semi-dry cucumber forgotten at the back of the fridge. They formed the Lionesses Club, and to their surprise, many girls from their class soon joined. But what impressed them the most was that Paty and Teresita joined too and from the beginning made it clear that they also felt ugly. The pretty girls of the class? Seriously? The world was crazy!

The club was a success: they played Dungeons and Dragons, talked badly about anyone over 25, complained about guys, practiced choreographies, and shared tips against orange peel skin, although that didn't catch on much because none of the participants really knew what it was.

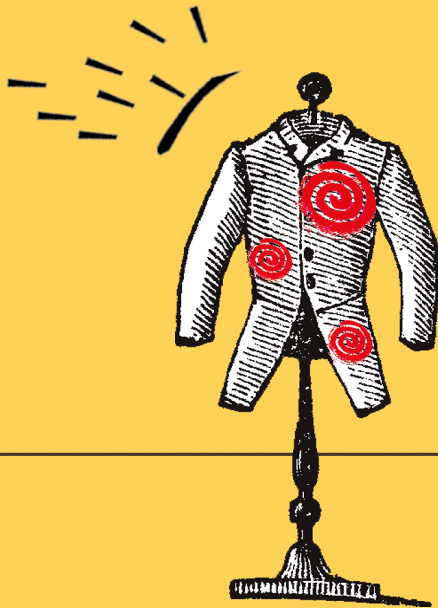
“Maybe it's to prevent one from turning orange? Like when the tan fades on the cuties in my mom's magazines.”

Since no one could provide a reasonable explanation, they switched to giving each other “total wardrobe makeovers” advice. In other words, they ruined half a dozen pants and shirts that were still in good condition.

Everything was happiness.

And then came Alfredo.

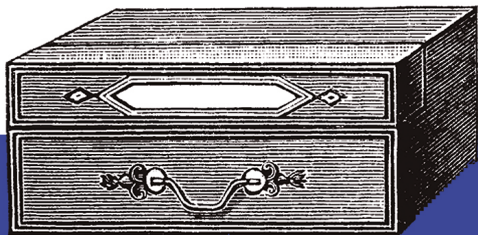
Well, he didn't arrive because he was already there, and unlike *love at first sight* stories, which are as popular as they are rare, his connection with Erandi was a kind of *fortuitous love*, and by the time they realized it, they were already at the “do you want to be my boyfriend?” stage.

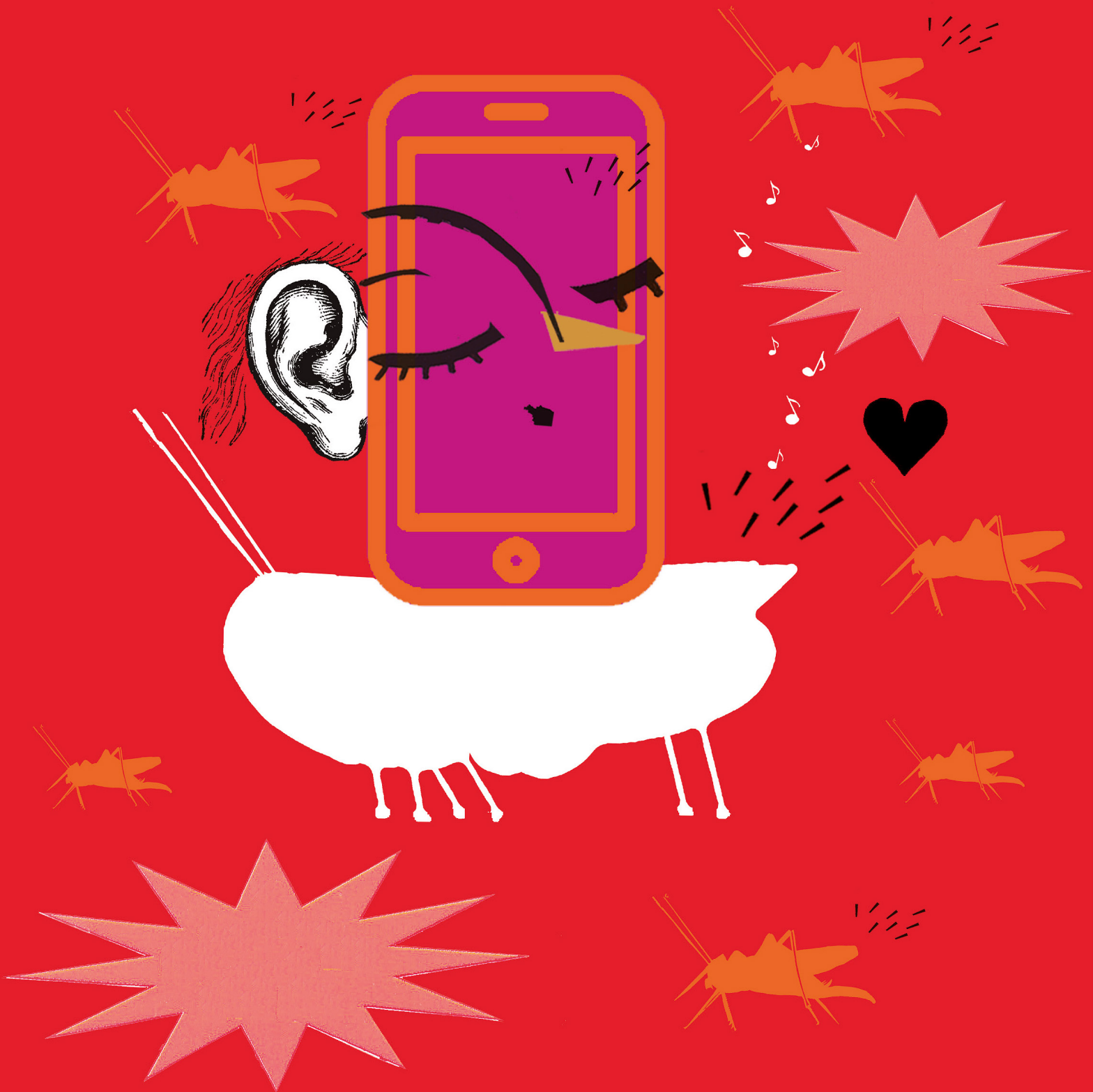


“Good thing you asked, because I wasn’t sure if that was still a thing.” And of course, they became a couple in the park, where else?

Although the three had been friends for several months, when Erandi officially shared the news with Susana, her friend started to distance herself from the newly formed couple. It was natural for her to feel jealous of the time they used to spend together and the exclusive attention Erandi had given her. Feeling a little betrayed was natural, and under normal circumstances, it would have settled over time or perhaps resolved with a good fight and subsequent reconciliation between friends. However, neither of those things happened because these were not normal times.

Let’s go back to the moment we left Susana, Erandi, and Alfredo. As people don’t usually stay frozen in time, they are no longer in the park but at Sandwiches Beto, where they went to settle the debate between *teleras* and *bolillos*.





“Chirp, chirp,” Susana’s phone rang, and her bologna with cheese got stuck in her throat as she read the message. She didn’t want it to disappear if she took half a second too long to see it. Alfredo raised his eyebrows at his girlfriend, a universally understood gesture that meant, “What’s going on with her now?” Erandi gestured to him, “Later,” and he responded with a gesture of “ok, you better.” They continued communicating without words, progressing from questions and answers to winks and blown kisses, their favorite form of conversation.

We can’t blame them for not noticing the intense blushing that came and went on Susana’s face as she typed at supersonic speed. They also didn’t notice anything strange about Susi’s silly smile, mainly because devouring a sandwich from Beto produced the same effect on all its customers. So they said their goodbyes, allowing Erandi and Alfredo to pretend they still struggled with the future of *ser* and *estar*, and walked hand in hand for a little while longer.

Days passed, and everything seemed to be following its normal course, except that Susi was in a foul mood at times. However, this mood vanished when the cricket of her phone’s notification filled the air with its magical “chirp, chirp.” And so it went until one Friday, during the club’s meeting time, Susana stood them up again, but unlike other times, she didn’t notify them.

“Where are you?” Erandi asked when Susana answered the phone.

“Why? What’s it to you?” Susana responded defensively, unlike ever before.

“Well, because we’ve been waiting for you for half an hour, and since you didn’t let us know you weren’t coming, we thought we would see you this time. Don’t tell me you forgot that we had a club meeting at my house today.



“Ah!” Susana exclaimed with relief. “How embarrassing! I just realized I didn’t send that message. You see, my mom called me to take the cookies out of the oven because my grandma was coming over, and just as the doorbell rang, guess who it was? Well, my grandma, complaining about her sciatica pain. We had to apply hot compresses, but she’s feeling better now. I just have to stay with her in case she needs anything,” she told the lie, as she always did, poorly.

It was very obvious when Susana lied because she spoke rapidly and without pauses. She mistakenly thought that if she talked without commas, it would be harder to catch her lie. Erandi knew this because she knew everything about Susi. What was new was that Susi was lying to her, her best friend.

“Oh, well, please say hi to her and hope she feels better,” Erandi played along because they weren’t alone, and they needed to fix things face to face.

There was no grandma (or cookies) at Susana’s house. What was happening was that she was having yet another text conversation about the same topic: to go or not to go with the Lionesses.

“But, Raph, they’re my school friends, and I have fun with them,” Susi typed.

“Forgive me, darling, I just wish you could have fun only with me. But go, I can’t deny you anything,” the letters appeared on the other side of the screen.

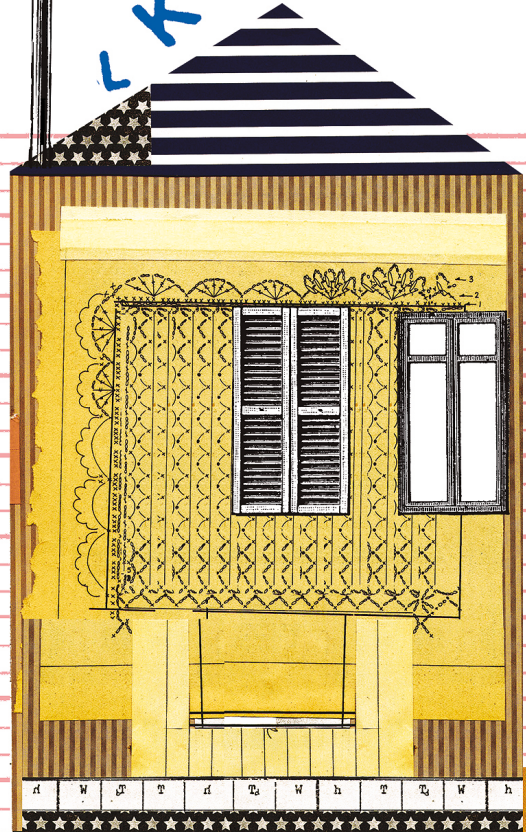
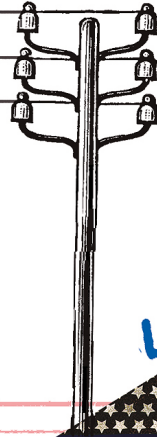
“Well, I still have time. What were you going to tell me?”

“It’s not important...”

“Come on, tell me,” Susana insisted, as she always did.

“Well, my dad...”

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If it wasn't the dad, it was the mom or their rescued puppy with a broken leg in the middle of the road, but the thing is that "by sheer chance," every time Susana wanted to interact with the outside world, Raphael suddenly had a strong urge to confess some huge problem. And she, so in love, decided to stay and read about the sorrows of her distant love instead of going out to eat with her family, to the park with her friends, or even more, to the club with the girls.

It was easy to see that Raphael wanted to isolate her. But of course, that's me saying it from the outside, narrating the story, because in reality, when you're in the midst of the whirlwind, it's difficult to distinguish anything, and Susana believed that everything he said was true. How could he harm her if he swore to love her madly?

The only thing that bothered her was his reluctance to meet in person, but even that took a long time for her to reproach him because she understood that Raphael couldn't make video calls since the signal at the ranch was terrible. She also didn't complain about his aversion to talking on the phone because the boy hated his own voice, it embarrassed him. It was strange to her that such a perfect being had flaws, and even if his voice sounded like the honk of an ancient Volkswagen beetle, it would have sounded like velvet to her; but to avoid making him feel bad, she also gave in on that.

She also believed the convoluted stories that Raphael told her to avoid meeting or making their relationship public. "Your parents are going to hate me because I dropped out of school to work on my family's ranch." "There's this girl from your school who harasses me, and if she sees us together, she'll make your life miserable."





“What bad luck, I’ll be at a livestock fair all week.” And so it went until that afternoon...

“Do you swear it?! Of course, I love the idea!” Susana typed with trembling fingers, thrilled to finally see her *boyfriend* in person.

Just then with her usual two knocks, Erandi announced her entrance to the room. She came in with the little backpack she always carried when she stayed over.

“Since it’s Friday, I came to sleep over in case you needed help with Esther,” Erandi said without greeting, without a half-smile or anything, making sure Susana knew she was aware of her lies.

“Yeah... but Esther felt better and preferred to go back home to rest... You know how my grandma can be,” Susana stubbornly stuck to the lie.

“And I know how you are and how you’re trying to fool me. You didn’t go because you were glued to that damn phone! Look at you, you can’t even take your eyes off the screen right now,” reluctantly, Erandi raised her voice more than she would have liked.



“Well no, I can’t and even if I could, I don’t want to! You least of all have the nerve to tell me anything considering how stupid you were when you started dating Alfredo!”

Susana exploded outright, unlike her friend, she felt no remorse. “Or did you think you were the only one entitled to have a boyfriend?”

“So, is that it? Jealousy? Susi, come on, I love you the same, with or without Alfredo in the picture.”

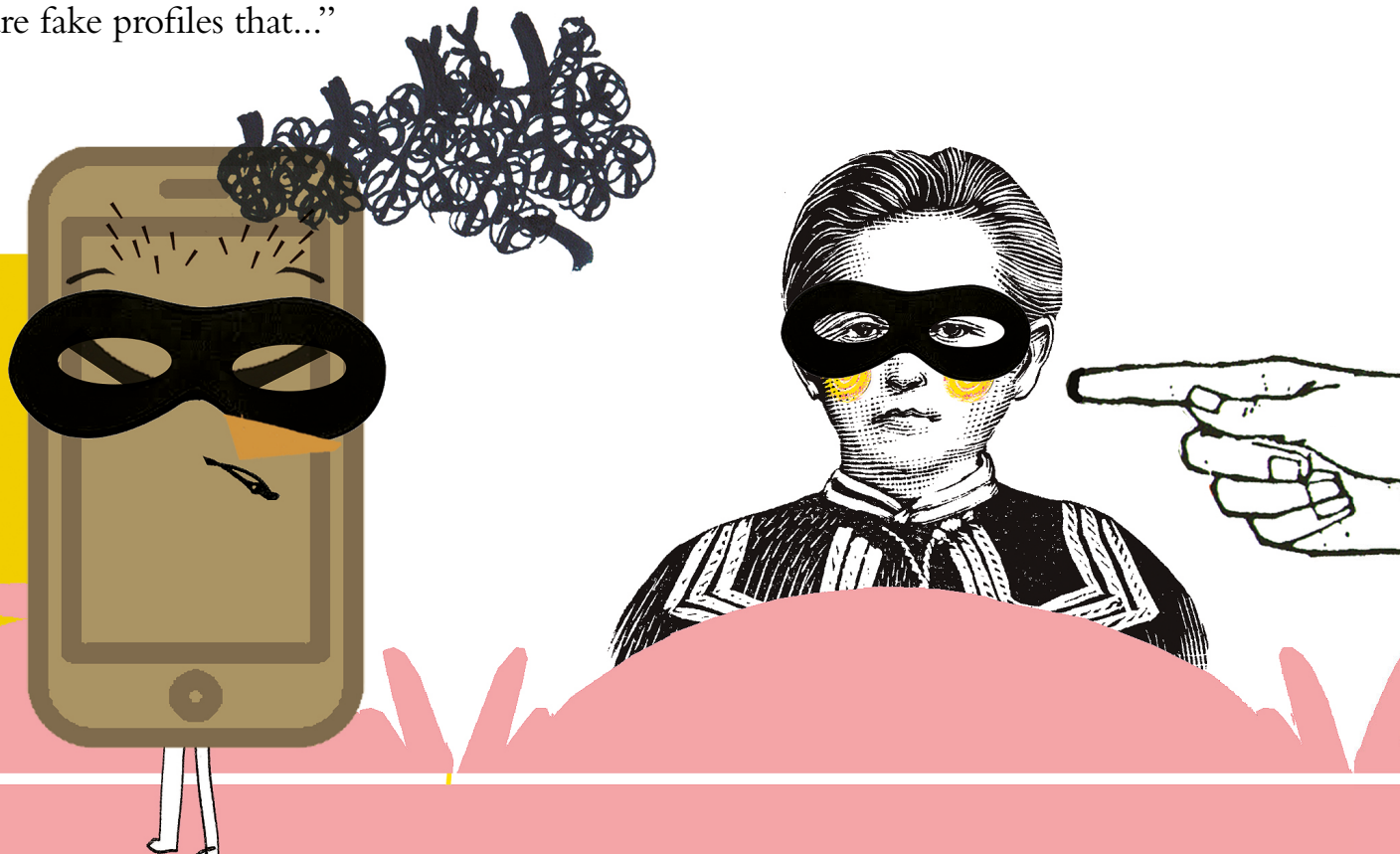
“Then back off. It’s not fair that I don’t have anyone to talk to about this, which is the best thing that has happened to me in my life.”

Erandi realized the situation: the last thing her friend needed was a fight. Her duty, and her only chance to intervene, was to be by her side.

“You’re right, sorry. But also, you don’t tell me anything anymore, you just disappear,” she said, and Susana eagerly dove into her favorite topic of conversation at that moment: Raphael. Between sighs, she shared the little details of their impossibility to meet or even talk.

From the first few sentences, alarm bells went off in Erandi’s head, but she waited until Susana finished before asking, with all the caution in the world and her sweetest voice:

“And has it never occurred to you that Raphael might not exist? You know, sometimes there are fake profiles that...”



“See?! That’s why I avoided you! That’s why I didn’t want to tell you anything! I knew you would come up with some stupid thing to ruin my happiness!” Susana interrupted, shouting, and miraculously, her parents didn’t hear.

“I’m sorry, forgive me, I really didn’t say it to upset you. Forget it, please, I’m happy if you’re happy. Erase that last sentence and keep telling me,” Erandi tried to correct herself.

“Later. I’m going downstairs to have dinner with my family, are you staying?”

“No, I think it’s better if I go home. But are we okay?”

“Yes, no problem,” said Susana, and of course, her friend didn’t believe her.

“Can you pick me up at Susi’s house?” Erandi sent a message to her boyfriend.

“Are you afraid that the wailing woman will appear to you during the three blocks to your house or what? Haha,” Alfredo tried to joke.

“Can you or can you not?” Erandi retorted, and he understood that it was something serious.



He confirmed it when he saw her waiting at the door, with the saddest face in the world and a backpack that made the scene even more desolate. They walked in silence, and Alfredo didn't say anything, not even when Erandi, instead of heading towards her house, headed to the park. It wasn't until they reached their favorite bench that she felt ready to speak and told him everything from the beginning. Then she spoke of her fears and finally reproached herself for being so foolish to let it go.

“Don't call yourself foolish because you're not, and neither is Susi,” said Alfredo.

“The only one here to blame for anything is that so-called Raphael.”

“No, no! I wanted you to tell me that I'm crazy with jealousy because my friend already has a boyfriend, that I'm seeing things that aren't there, that everything was fine and...” she didn't say anything more, a lump in her throat prevented it. “Now what do we do?”

“I don't know. For now, it was cool that you didn't fight with her, she needs you”.

“That's why I didn't insist, but now I need to find out if my fears are real or if I'm just going crazy.”

“I don't think so, but yes, let's make sure... But how? If only we knew a good hacker to see what they write to each other...”

“I know all her passwords,” Erandi confessed. “We've been sharing them for a while, just in case something happens to one of us, the other can close all the social media accounts before the adults find out. But we swore not to use them unless it was a matter of life or death, I won't betray her.”

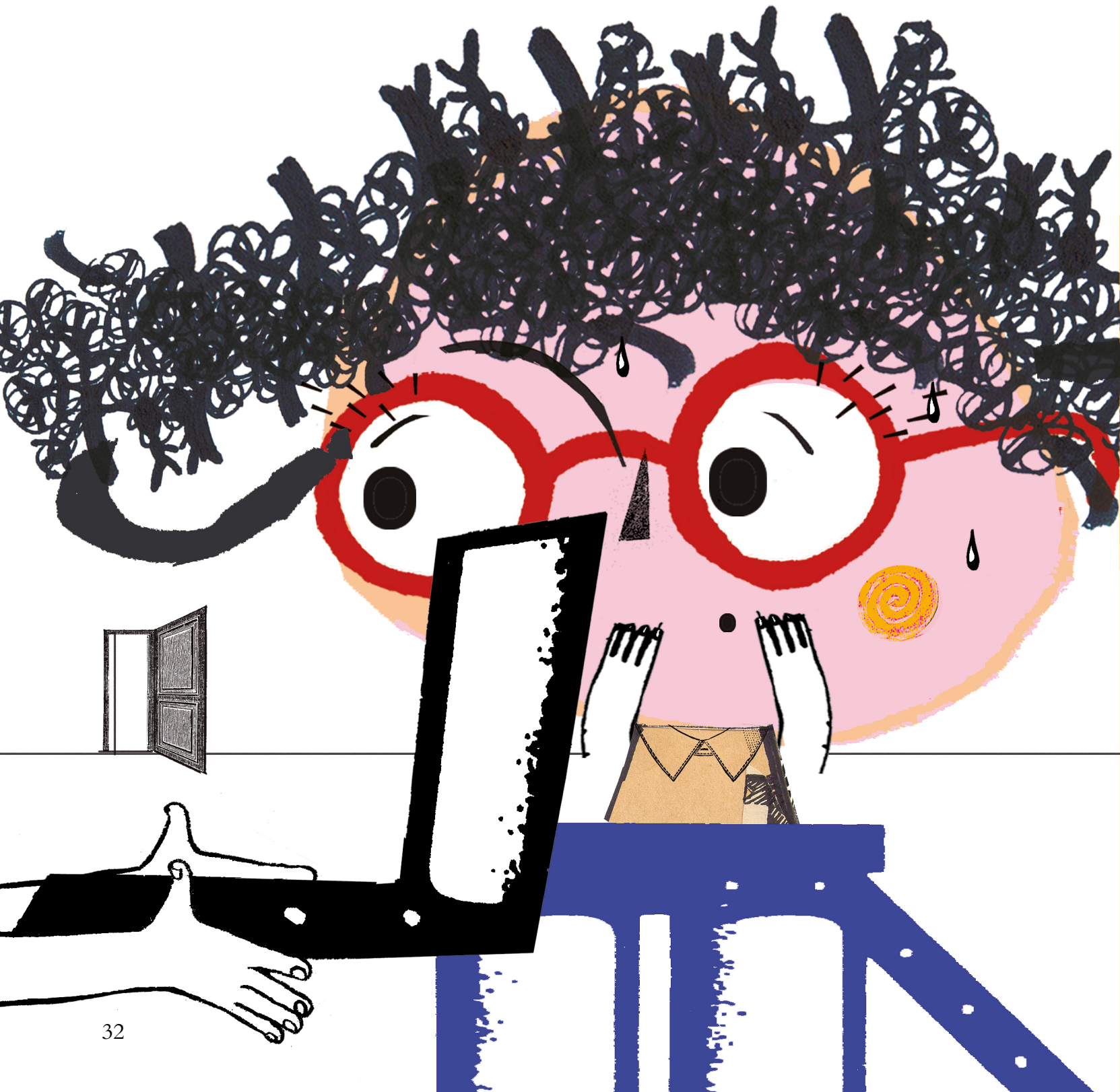
“But it is a matter of life or death,” Alfredo said, and he truly believed it.


The next morning, Erandi returned to Susana's house, accompanied by Alfredo. Using the excuse that because it was Saturday her parents had gone to a barbecue, which she hated, she invited herself over for breakfast.

“Do you mind that I brought Fredo?” she asked her friend.

“Not at all! I've resigned myself to having him as a brother-in-law,” Susi replied with her happiest voice as if nothing had happened between them. Erandi felt even more distressed.







As planned in the park, Alfredo offered to do the dishes in exchange for Susana going over his lines for the play their group was putting together for the end of the school year. Erandi borrowed her friend's computer to search for and print some sketches of the set design they had been assigned, but she had already printed them beforehand.

Once in Susi's room, the fake hacker pleaded for forgiveness from all the gods, old and new, and then proceeded to access Susana's social media accounts. The pit in her stomach turned into a cold sweat when, after an image search, she confirmed that the supposed photos of Raphael actually belonged to a Peruvian guy who had his accounts open, making it incredibly easy to steal his pictures. Erandi discovered that at that very moment, he was taking selfies at a gym, completely unaware of what was happening. Clicking rapidly, she noticed that although he had no personal information or photos on his profile, the user BTS4ever had many friends from her city and surrounding areas, especially girls among his contacts. However, he didn't interact with anyone; he only liked certain posts. He had liked all of Susana's photos and posts related to her music preferences, pets, and books... No wonder this so-called Raphael had such "similar" interests. Either it was the same person, or they were accomplices. The unease growing inside her was so strong that Erandi didn't realize she had taken much longer than planned. She didn't react until Susana was already beside her, snatching the computer angrily.

"You despicable traitor!" she almost howled. "What the hell are you...?"

Susana couldn't finish her sentence because, as she saw how far her friend's meddling had gone, she saw the photos of Raphael and the Peruvian guy, the open windows of different profiles, and the lack of evidence that he knew anyone from their city... The pieces started to come together. Despite being blinded by love, she understood the deception.

Alfredo peeked his head through the door and bid them farewell with a gesture that Erandi barely responded to. Seeing her friend, breathing heavily and silently shedding huge tears, she took the computer away and embraced her tightly.

“I’m such an idiot, but that damn scoundrel is a demon,” Susana said half an hour later when she had gone from tears to pounding the pillow, followed by self-insults.

“I forbid you from insulting yourself! Don’t get it twisted, Susi, you’re not dumb, far from it. You’re the victim,” Erandi reminded her.

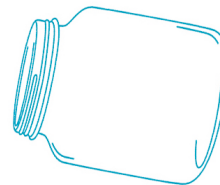
“You know what’s the worst part? He didn’t have to blackmail me or anything. In fact, he couldn’t have because he never asked me for intimate photos. Maybe if he had, I would have raised my defenses,” Susana said with heartbreaking sadness. “But it was the opposite. He always showed respect. Of course, that despicable person was setting a trap, and I fell into it, thinking it was love. What else could it be when he even respected me? He never forced or forbade me from anything. He knew exactly what he was doing.”

“See? It’s not that you’re dumb, it’s that he’s an adult who knows all the tricks in the book. The old creep charmed you, but look at the bright side: although you’ll be sad for a while, you’ve opened your eyes, and it’s over now,” Erandi said.

“Yes, I’ve opened my eyes, but it’s far from over! What you didn’t read because that idiot didn’t tell me on social media but only through text messages is that he invited me to meet him tonight, to share our first kiss of love,” explained to Erandi with disgust.

“No way! That’s horrible. What if he wants to kidnap you or something? You’re definitely not going, right?”

“On the contrary. I will definitely be there at nine o’clock sharp. And you will be there too,” Susana concluded with a determination that her friend had never seen before.





The park was nearly empty at that hour. Or at least it seemed to be...

As agreed that morning, the eight members of the club informed their families that they would be meeting the others at the park. It was important that everyone knew where they would be. Two of them brought their older sisters, and three others brought their cousins, without telling them much, just that they might “need backup.”

Alfredo gathered his two best friends, Armando and Felipe, whom he told a little about the situation. However, the other guys from the basketball team were simply told that they were needed as undercover bodyguards.

There were a total of 18 teenagers, strategically dispersed throughout the park and the surrounding streets. They were just finishing hiding when Susana appeared. She looked gorgeous and radiated a glow whenever her face was illuminated by the light from her cell phone, eagerly awaiting a notification. It arrived at 8:54 p.m. Susana smiled and headed towards the darkest area of the park, which was adjacent to a street descending from the main road and, of course, was the most closely monitored.

In the distance, an engine could be heard.

Erandi couldn't hold back more, and let out her distinctive cowboy whistle.

Everyone heard it, including Susana, who turned pale because, despite their detailed planning, panic took hold of her as she came face to face with the danger that had until then remained confined to a screen. Her legs began to tremble as the unmarked van appeared on a small street, and the commotion of the teens organizing their movements erupted. Susi tried to make her way through the tight circle that had formed around her just as the van screeched to a stop. A greasy, big man in his forties held the passenger door open, while another equally repugnant man, wearing a cap, drove at full speed. As the truck reached the end of the street, several teens chased after it, while many others tried to block its path ahead.

Susana screamed to be released, wanting to confront the bastard face to face.

The circle opened up, and she could see the true identity of her supposed boyfriend: a repulsive figure glaring at her with pure hatred.

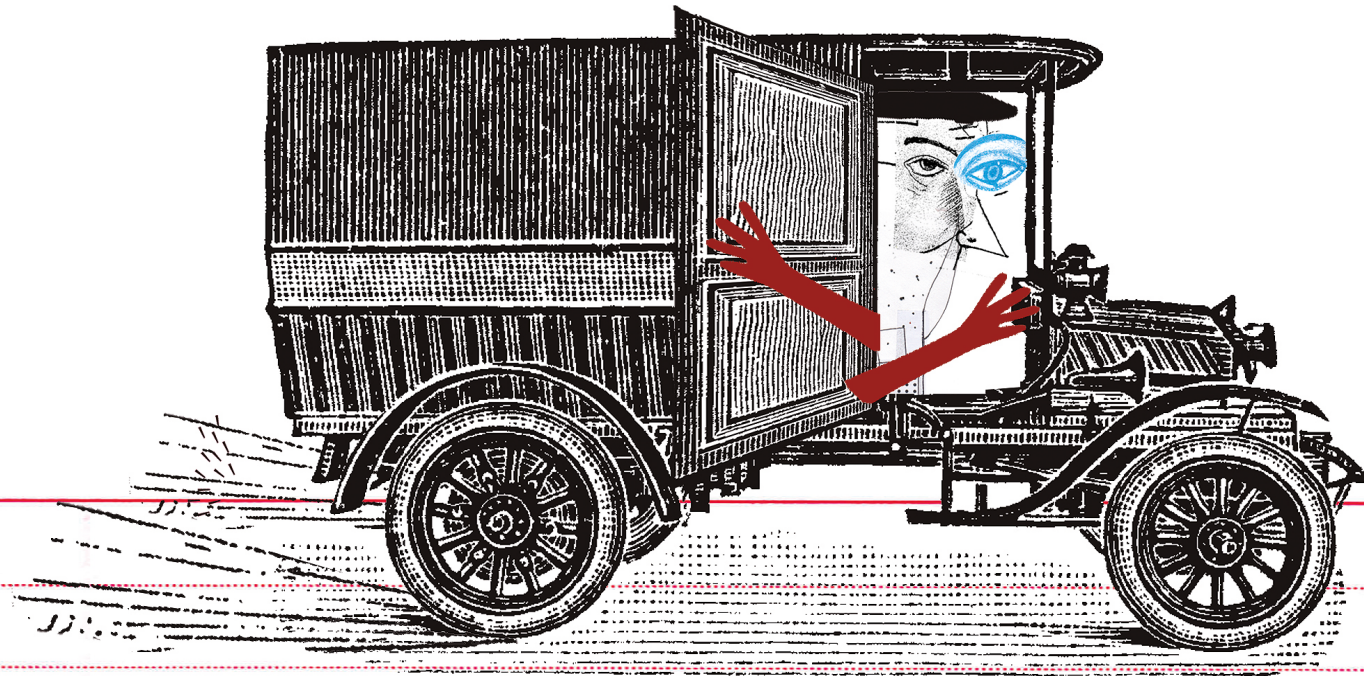
By that time, the few remaining people in the park had gathered around, and neighbors were starting to come out as well. Upon seeing the growing crowd, the van accelerated, attempting to run over those blocking its path. Everyone had to jump out of the way to avoid being hit.

Alfredo and Armando had their skateboards with them and, in a moment of madness, tried to cling onto the back of the truck to not lose sight of it.

“No! They have a gun!” Teresita managed to shout. She had the best angle and caught a glimpse of the weapon, just in time to abort the plan of hanging onto the van.

The van drove off but not before honking the horn to the rhythm of a familiar insult.

Four minutes later, the park fell silent again. Only Susi’s sobs could be heard, a mix of relief and gratitude towards the 18 friends who had responded to her call for help.



Thanks to Susana’s courage in reporting and providing the cyber evidence she had, along with the collaboration of her group, the investigations yielded results. It was discovered that Raphael and the mysterious BTS4ever were part of a criminal group that had been kidnapping teenage girls, almost kids, for months. They operated in specific areas and only made their appearances once they were sure to have at least two victims on a given route. Meanwhile, Raphael or Leonardo (another one of the many fake profiles they used) would charm their “girlfriends” and postpone their meetings over and over.

On that Saturday, not only did Susana escape a dark fate, but another teenager from a nearby town did as well. “Leonardo” had scheduled a meeting with her half an hour later, but they backed out after the incident, unwilling to take any risks. However, they insisted on maintaining the charade of being her boyfriend, sealing their fate, because once the *modus operandi* was known, it was easy to track them down. The two individuals from the park have been caught, but the investigations continue.

Susana sent the 18 of them little baskets filled with sweets and a card that said, “Thank you for being there and for teaching me that one is never alone, the gang is always there.”



A few months later, Susana's nightmares disappeared, and the world began to smile again. Erandi and her walk through the park, which is crowded in the late afternoon. They look stunning, although their appearance is the same as always. They are heading to the monthly gathering where "Susana and the 18" celebrate their triumph since that fateful day. They are practicing because Erandi insists that it is essential for her friend to know how to whistle like a cowboy.

Erandi and Susana overcame the obstacle because if their friendship was already strong, the event made it unbreakable, just like they are. So much so that Susi and Alfredo became close friends again, as they had always been deep down.

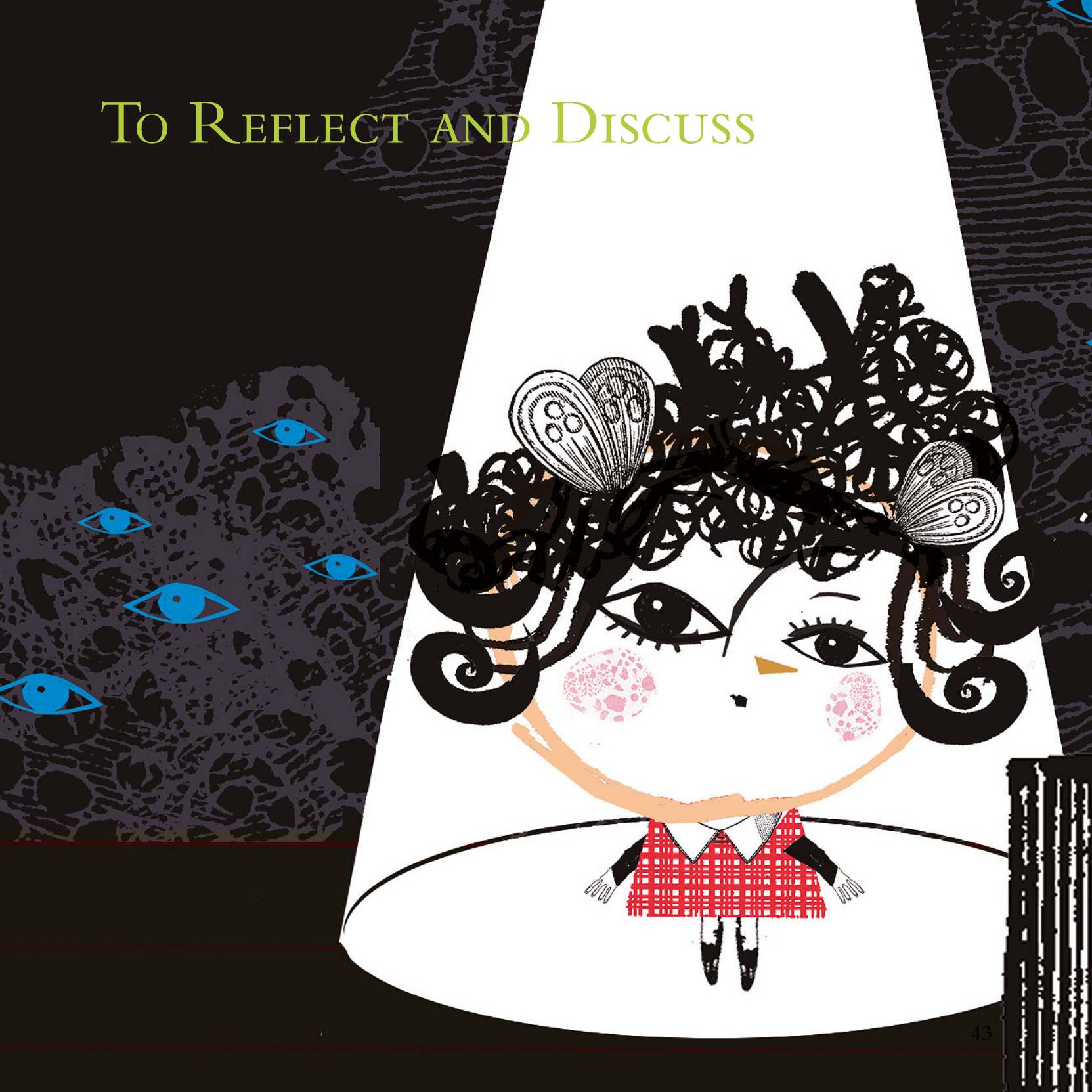
Both girls emerged stronger, determined to face whatever came their way, but together. They soon convinced themselves that the only way to leave all that behind and emerge as better versions of themselves was by doing something useful and good to share. And they did just that. Alongside the Lionesses Club, they now roar as a pack and dedicate a significant portion of their efforts to continue investigating social media violence and, more importantly, to engage in conversations with other girls to prevent such incidents, offer them shelter, and let them know that in cases like Susana's, nobody has to be alone.

They are about to cross paths with Armando, who is approaching from a side street, all perfumed, without his perpetually dirty sneakers, and even styling his hair with gel, as the occasion warrants. It's no small thing that he finally mustered the courage to ask Susi out. Will she like Beto's sandwiches?





TO REFLECT AND DISCUSS



Stereotypes and Gender-Based Violence in Social Media

Any type of violence goes against human rights and, therefore, against the values of democracy. In this section, we offer some elements of analysis to motivate and facilitate reflection and dialogue about gender stereotypes and the role that social media plays in transmitting harmful and violent messages received by teenagers.

In Mexico, there have been significant advances in legislation regarding gender-based violence. Examples of this are the Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia, General Law on Women’s Access to a Life Free of Violence, and the so-called “Olímpia Law,” which includes a set of legislative reforms in several federal states aimed at recognizing digital violence and punishing offenses that violate individual sexual privacy through digital means, that are known as cyber violence.

A central feature is the reeducation free from stereotypes for everyone, as well as providing information about the risks that women face in an unequal and discriminatory society.

While *#Like* is a fictional story that takes place in a city, in reality, there are many testimonies from young women, like those depicted in the story, who unfortunately have experienced similar situations, both in urban and rural areas. To ensure that this story is meaningful for girls and boys in different regions, we invite close individuals such as teachers and family members to accompany them in reading, enjoying the story, talk about the risks that they face in the present time, empower them to freely express their experiences, and most importantly give them the knowledge of what resources are available in Mexico to prevent and, if necessary, address situations of this nature. Here are some important concepts identified throughout the narration.

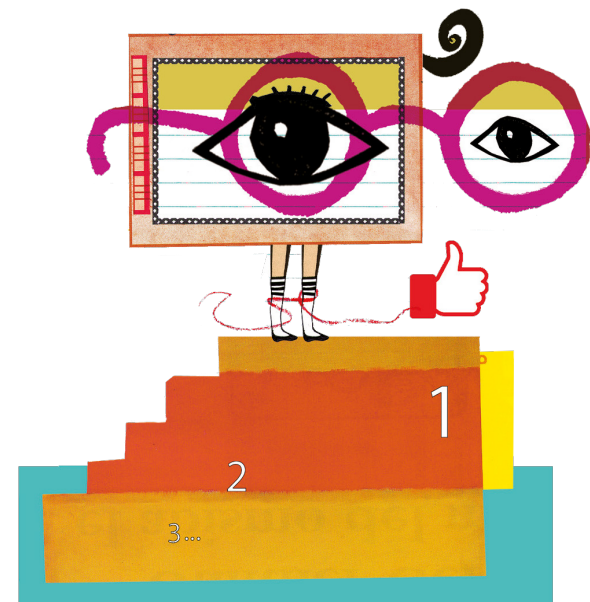


Stereotyped behaviors and culturally assigned roles to men and women limit the development and potential of both. Many of the messages available to teenage boys and girls through digital platforms promote gender stereotypes and “beauty” standards focused on creating needs centered on consumption and the manipulation of behaviors that devalue and degrade the female image and identity.

Like many of their friends, Erandi and Susana were influenced by the feeling of being considered “ugly” according to a significant portion of the posts shared on social media, where fashion demands that teenagers be extremely thin to the point of resembling skeletons, as well as having smooth and white skin. These imposed physical characteristics distort the concept of beauty and enforce replicated beauty standards. Neither of them realized that all these intensely invasive publications that make us feel inferior are created to sell something.

Dependency on the internet has increased worldwide for many of the daily activities of people, particularly among minors. This has created significant risks and vulnerabilities, opening the door to new possibilities for criminal activities that are not always perceived in their true magnitude, especially among this age group. In this sense, electronic tools provide opportunities to explore a world of information and facilitate distant contact between people, even if they don’t know each other. Paradoxically, what may be seen as a benefit also becomes counterproductive because there are often individuals who communicate false or unreliable information, allowing for the establishment of risky relationships, particularly for minors.

In the story, Susana meets Raphael, a “wonderful” guy: handsome, smart, and funny, whose initial reluctance to meet in person is accepted by her, even though she doesn’t like this situation. She even takes a long time to confront him about it, as well as his refusal to let her hear his voice or engage in video calls. She also believes the convoluted stories that Raphael tells to avoid meeting or publicly acknowledging their “relationship.”



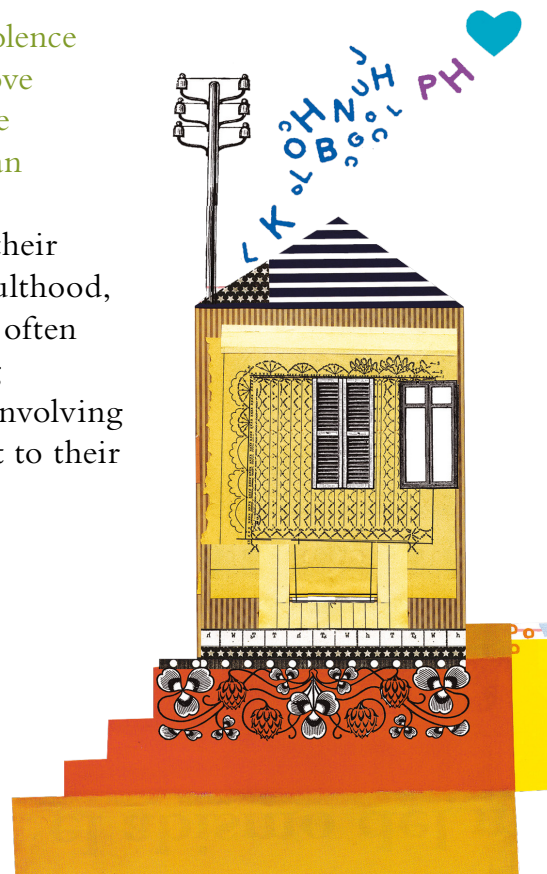
In Mexico, the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence stipulates that there are different types of violence against women, as well as several forms within the family, workplace, educational, institutional, and community fields. These include psychological violence, physical violence, sexual violence, and any other analogous forms that harm or have the potential to harm women's dignity, integrity, or freedom.

Other actions that are also considered digital violence are those committed through information and communication technologies, internet platforms, social networks, email, applications, or any other cyberspace that undermines the integrity, dignity, privacy, freedom, or private life and violates any of women's human rights.

Digital violence encompasses acts of harassment, stalking, threats, insults, violation of data and private information, dissemination of false information, hate speech, and non-consensual sharing of sexual content, texts, photographs, videos, personal data, or other graphic or auditory impressions, whether true or altered.

In our story, Susana is a victim of psychological and digital violence because her fake friend Raphael deceives her by pretending to love her. At the same time, he exhibits misogynistic and manipulative attitudes because his true intentions are to involve her in a human trafficking network.

As part of the psychological characteristics of adolescence and their search for independence and autonomy as they transition into adulthood, young people often share their feelings and problems with peers; often they trust each other and the ability to resolve their issues among themselves, thinking that they can handle things easily without involving adults. Unfortunately, there are external factors that pose a threat to their well-being, create

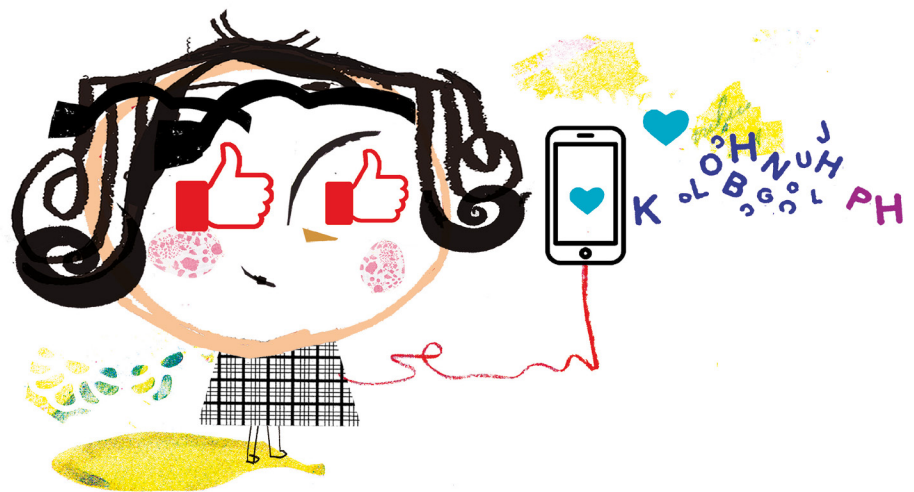


vulnerabilities, spiral out of control, and endanger those involved, as happens to the protagonist in this story. Although the story has a happy ending, it is important for us to recognize the risks and seek help.

Thanks to Susana's courage to report the situation and provide cyber evidence, combined with the collaboration of her friends, the investigations yield results. Susana, Erandi, and the Lionesses Club decide to continue researching social media violence and counsel other teenagers about the risks they face.

All citizens have a responsibility to participate in solving the problems that afflict our society: Unarguably, sharing negative experiences can help raise awareness of the dangers present today, nonetheless, it is crucial to abandon any notion of seeking justice on our own and instead become familiar with the laws that protect us. At the slightest sign of danger, it is necessary to resort to other more effective options; initially, report it to close adults, contact the cyber police, and file a complaint with the appropriate authorities.

The United Nations (UN) has declared November 25th as the "International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women," aiming to draw attention to the importance of eradicating violence against women in all areas of society. As citizens, we must join this fight, become more aware of our personal relationships, be more empathetic and supportive in rejecting stereotypes of any kind, and combat gender-based violence in all its forms.





#LIKE

The Bembo Std font family was used.



IXCHEL ESTRADA is a Mexican illustrator who has been collaborating since the year 2000 on books, magazines, animated shorts, independent publications, institutions, and publishers such as *Premiere*, Santillana, the United Nations Environment Programme, *Mundo Médico*, Richmond Publishing, *Expansión*, Oxford University Press, PUEG, *Nueva Sociedad* (Argentina), *Avianca* (Colombia), Universum Museum, *KM cero*, *Viento en vela*, *Chilango*, *Algarabía*, *Letras Libres*, *Tierra adentro*, *Alas y Raíces* program of Conaculta, among others.

She has illustrated 19 books published by Fondo de Cultura Económica, Alfaguara Infantil, Castillo, SM, Ediciones El Naranjo, RBA Libros, Serres, Serpentina, Colofón, Océano, Chuen México, Pearson, Edelvives, and Norma, with titles translated into other languages and published in countries like Taiwan, China, and Korea. Her work is also part of the Classroom Libraries Program of SEP (Institute of Public Education). Her work has been awarded and exhibited in numerous national and international exhibitions. She is a professor at Universidad La Salle in Pachuca, Hidalgo. She has her own personal project of author articles under her own brand.



Susana is in love with a guy she met through social media, and he seems perfect. However, Erandi, her best friend, is not so sure. This situation puts their relationship at risk, but only the strength of their friendship can save them.

This volume is part of the **Árbol** collection, which aims to contribute to the civic culture of children and young people through engaging stories that encourage reflection and active participation in society.