

# THE MISSING COLOR

AMOSTRA



*The color only you can bring*

WAGNER R. BOMFIM

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## THE MISSING COLOR

### PREFACE

This book doesn't begin with "Once upon a time" nor end with "happily ever after." Because life between the ages of fourteen and twenty is not a fairy tale—it's a silent revolution, an inner earthquake that no one else seems to hear.

**The Missing Color** is about the interval. That uncomfortable and miraculous space between the child you were and the adult you don't yet know how to be. It's about the first time you look in the mirror and don't recognize the face staring back. About the first time you love in a way that hurts because it's so real. About the first time you betray or are betrayed and discover that a heart can truly break in two. About the night you look at the ceiling and think: *No one else in the whole world feels as alone as I do.*

I wrote these pages for the girl holding her breath in the hallway, hoping not to be noticed. For the boy laughing too loudly to disguise his panic. For those who have loved in secret. For those who have been loved in a way that hurt. For those who carry a name or a pronoun that still sounds strange in their own mouth. For those who have felt they were stepping wrong in a dance everyone else seemed to know.

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The characters you will meet here—**Elisa, Mateus, Júlia, Daniel, Ana, Pedro, and Luiza**—are not heroes. They are human. They make ugly mistakes. They are cowardly when they need to be brave. They are selfish. They are generous to the point of pain. They love the wrong people. They stop loving the right ones. They search for answers in dark places, and sometimes, that's where they find them.

This is a book to compete with the greats of YA not by having more action or plot twists, but by having more truth. Because the modern YA reader is tired of fantastic dystopias. They want a mirror. They want to see their own confusion, their own fear, their own clumsy beauty reflected on the pages. They want characters who sweat, who stutter, who tremble, who doubt, who desire, who break—and who come together in unexpected ways.

**The Missing Color** speaks of all the colors that try to paint us: the color of family expectations, the color of gender roles, the color of popularity, the color of good grades, the color of first love. And it speaks of the color that doesn't come from outside, but from within—the one that is yours alone, but that sometimes takes a whole lifetime to discover.

May these pages be a hug for you who are in the middle of your own silent revolution. May you find in Elisa, Mateus, and the others not ready-made answers, but the courage to ask the right questions. And when you close this book, may you remember: the color missing in the world is exactly the one only you can bring.

With all the honesty I can offer,

*The Author: Wagner R Bomfim*

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## **BOOK ONE: THE SPECTERS**

### **CHAPTER 1: THE CITY THAT BREATHES UNDER THE SKIN**

The city was called Esperança (Hope), but Elisa knew that names were just clothes that places wore to hide their bones. From her room on the fourth floor, she saw the city's rooftops stretching like a sea of old tiles, some red, others gray, most a sickly tone between the two. It was a city that breathed slowly, with lungs full of factory smoke and dust from unpaved roads.

In summer, the air smelled of melted asphalt and rotten mangoes. In winter, of burning wood and damp despair. Elisa knew every smell, every sound, every silence. She knew the times when the textile factory blew its whistle—seven in the morning, noon, six in the evening—like the heartbeat of a sleeping giant. She knew the specific sound of bus number 14 coming down Flower Street hill, the brakes squealing always in the same spot, as if the city had its own nervous tics.

Today was the first day of school. Sixteen years old, second year of high school. Elisa looked at herself in the foggy bathroom mirror while brushing her teeth. Her face seemed like a collection of parts that didn't quite fit together: eyes too big for her face, nose too small for the eyes, a mouth that never

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decided whether it wanted to smile or frown. Her hair, dark brown and straight, fell over her shoulders like a veil she wished she could tear off.

"Elisa! You're going to be late!" Her mother's voice came up the stairs, sharp with routine worry.

"I'm coming!"

She put on her uniform—white blouse, navy blue skirt to the knees, dress socks. The costume of normalcy. In the kitchen, her mother was preparing lunch sandwiches, precise movements of someone who has done the same thing for fifteen years.

"Have the juice. Fresh today."

"Thank you."

Her father was already gone, of course. He always left before sunrise, returned after sunset. An engineer at the textile factory. A man of numbers and silences.

"Remember there's a meeting with the guidance counselor today," said her mother, without looking at her. "To talk about your future."

"I have no future," Elisa thought, but said: "I remember."

The walk to school was a choreography she knew by heart: down the external fire escape (it was faster), turn right at the bakery, cross the square with the fountain that never worked, climb the steep hill where her lungs always burned in the same place.

At the corner of Flower Street and Central Avenue, she saw him.

Mateus.

He was leaning against the wall of the old hardware store, smoking a cigarette with an intensity that seemed personal. His black hair fell over his eyes, but even from a distance, Elisa saw the tension in his body—a stretched rope about to snap.

They had known each other since childhood, but in the last two years, something had changed. Mateus had become quieter, more distant, as if he were slowly unraveling. Last year, he had disappeared for three months. When he returned, he had a new scar on his chin and older eyes.

He saw her and raised his head slightly, a minimal greeting. Elisa did the same. That was how they communicated now—through shared silences, through looks that said: "I also know this place is a cage."

She continued on her way, feeling the weight of his gaze on her back. It had always been like that. Mateus saw her—really saw her—when most people just looked at her.

The school was a concrete monster painted a faded yellow. State School Professor Almirante, but everyone called it "Almirante" as if it were a sinking ship. Elisa passed through the main gate, merging into the river of identical uniforms, faces with expressions ranging from boredom to panic.

In the main hallway, the groups were already formed. The popular kids near the new lockers, laughing with a confidence that seemed genetic. The athletes with their uniforms already sweaty at eight in the morning. The nerds with calculators and notebooks organized by color code. The rebels smoking in the back bathroom. And the invisibles—like Elisa—who floated between the groups without belonging to any.

Her classroom was 203. She entered and went straight to her desk—third row, second seat by the window. Strategic position: close enough to seem interested, far enough to look out the window without being noticed.

The Portuguese teacher, Dona Marlene, began calling roll. "Ana Beatriz?"

"Here."

"Carlos Eduardo?"

"Here."

"Daniel Oliveira?"

"Here."

Daniel. Elisa looked at him involuntarily. He was two rows ahead, his blond hair carefully messy, his broad shoulders under the white shirt. Daniel was the kind of boy who seemed to have come from a catalog: handsome, athletic, smart enough, kind to everyone. Perfect.

And impossible.

Not because he was unattainable—though he was—but because when Elisa looked at him, she didn't feel the butterflies in her stomach that books described. She felt... nothing. An aesthetic admiration, as if looking at a beautiful painting. And that scared her more than anything. Because if she couldn't feel something for Daniel Oliveira, the boy every girl at school sighed over, what was wrong with her?

"Elisa Montenegro?"

"Here."

Dona Marlene looked up, her glasses sliding down her nose. "Ah, Elisa. Your essay on 'The Place I Like Most' was selected for the municipal contest. Congratulations."

A few classmates turned to look, some with envy, most with indifference. Elisa felt her face heat up. She hated being noticed.

"Thank you," she murmured.

Class began, words about grammar and literature flowing around her like a river she didn't dive into, just dipped her toes in. Elisa opened her notebook and began drawing in the margins—intricate patterns, mazes with no exit, faces dissolving into abstraction.

At the next desk, Júlia watched her. Júlia with her green eyes that saw too much, her thin wrists like twigs, her silence that was different from Elisa's silence. Elisa's silence was a defense. Júlia's seemed like a choice.

"Your drawings are good," Júlia whispered.

Elisa closed her notebook quickly. "They're just doodles."

"Doodles tell stories."

Elisa looked at Júlia, really looked. There was an intensity there, a curiosity that wasn't just polite. "What story does this tell?" she asked, pointing to one of the drawings—a bird with clock wings.

Júlia smiled, a small, private smile. "That time flies, but not always where we want."

Elisa was surprised. That was exactly what she had thought when drawing it.

The bell rang, saving her from having to respond. Elisa gathered her things, preparing for the next class, when Daniel appeared at her desk.

"Congratulations on the essay," he said, his perfect white smile.

"Thank you."

"You write very well. You should join the school newspaper."

"I don't really like... group work."

"I understand." He hesitated, something rare. "Look, there's a party at Rafael's house on Friday. If you want to go..."

Elisa felt the eyes of the classroom on her. Daniel Oliveira inviting her to a party. It was every girl's dream. She should feel happy, excited.

She felt only panic.

"I'll see," she said, the safest answer.

He looked a little disappointed but recovered quickly. "Cool. See you around."

When he left, Júlia approached. "Daniel Oliveira, huh? You're the girl of the moment."

"I don't want to be the girl of the moment."

"Why not?"

"Because the moment passes."

Júlia laughed, a surprisingly warm sound. "Wise."

Elisa looked at her, this strange, insightful girl who suddenly seemed interested in her. "You're new, right?"

"I arrived mid-last year. But you never noticed me."

It was true. Elisa had spent so much time trying not to be noticed that she ended up not noticing anyone.

"I'm Elisa."

"I know. I'm Júlia."

They stood in the hallway, the flow of students parting around them like water around stones.

"Are you going to the party?" asked Júlia.

"Probably not."

"Me neither. Parties are... too loud."

Elisa nodded. For the first time in a long time, she didn't feel alone in her preference for quietness.

"What do you do on Fridays?" asked Júlia.

"Nothing. I stay home."

"I know a place. Quiet. Far from here. If you ever want..."

Júlia slid a piece of paper into Elisa's hand—an address written in tiny, precise letters—and then blended into the crowd before Elisa could respond.

Elisa looked at the paper. *Warehouse 7, old docks. Any Friday, after sunset.*

She folded the paper and put it in her pocket, feeling it burn against her thigh like a question she didn't yet know if she wanted to answer.

## CHAPTER 2: THE WEIGHT OF NAMES

While Elisa navigated the school hallways, on the other side of town, Mateus lit his third cigarette of the day. The smoke scratched his throat in a way he found fair—a small punishment for still breathing.

The Santos house was in the lower part of the city, where the streets weren't paved and the smell of the polluted river was a constant presence. A small house, with cracked walls and peeling paint like sick skin. Mateus lived there with his mother and younger brother, Lucas. His father was a ghost who appeared from time to time, bringing promises and the smell of cachaça, disappearing before dawn.

"Mateus! You're going to be late!" His mother's voice sounded tired, even so early.

"I'm coming, Mom."

He put on the uniform—the same white shirt, the same blue pants everyone wore, but on his body it seemed a ridiculous disguise. In the hallway mirror, his reflection stared back: sunken eyes, dark circles, the scar on his chin telling a story he'd rather forget.

"Take your lunch money," said his mother, handing him some crumpled bills. "And remember to pick up Lucas from school at four."

"I remember."

She looked at him, her eyes carrying a weight he had never been able to name. "Are you okay, son?"

"I'm fine."

The lie was an old habit. Everything was never fine in the Santos house. But saying it out loud would make the fracture become real, so they danced around it, careful, as if the floor could give way at any moment.

On the way to school, Mateus passed the textile factory. The main gate was open, and he saw his father inside, carrying a roll of fabric on his back, his body bent under the weight. Antônio Santos didn't see him, or pretended not to. That was how they worked—two planets in the same orbit, but never touching.

Mateus quickened his pace. He hated the factory. Hated its smell of oil and sweat. Hated the sound of the machines echoing through the city like a lament. More than anything, he hated the unspoken promise that one day he too would be there,

his body bending under the same weight, his days counted by the shift-change whistles.

At school, he avoided the main hallways, taking the back entrance that led directly to the sports court. There, the boys were already playing basketball, their bodies sweating in the morning sun. Mateus watched for a moment, not with envy, but with a strange detachment. As if observing animals in a zoo, creatures whose instincts he didn't share.

"Santos! Come play!" shouted Rafael, the team captain.

Mateus shook his head. "Not today."

"You never play. What do you do, anyway?"

"Things."

Rafael laughed, not a friendly sound. "Things. Of course."

Mateus continued on his way, feeling Rafael's gaze on his back. Rafael Costa was the kind of boy who was born knowing how the world worked and decided to become its master. Son of the owner of the city's largest appliance store, he had the kind of confidence that only money and an absence of doubts can give.

In the classroom, Mateus sat at the back, near the window.

Strategic position: he could see everything without being seen,

could escape if necessary. He opened his notebook, not to take notes, but to write the words circling in his head like trapped birds.

*The weight of names. I carry Santos like a chain. My father drags it. My mother carries it on her shoulders. My brother doesn't yet know its weight. I... I want to tear it off.*

"Mateus Santos?" the teacher called.

"Here."

"Could you read the passage on page 42?"

He looked up. The teacher, Dona Sandra, looked at him with a mixture of expectation and pity. She knew his story. Everyone did. The city was too small for secrets, too big for compassion.

He read the passage—a poem about freedom. His voice sounded strange in his own ears, rough and disconnected.

When he finished, the silence in the room was thick.

"Thank you, Mateus," said Dona Sandra, her voice soft. "You have a good voice for reading."

He nodded, looking down. Praise hurt more than criticism.

Because it demanded something from him that he didn't know if he had to give.

During break, he went to his usual spot—the flat roof behind the library. Few knew how to get there, and even fewer cared. From there, he could see the whole city: the smoking factory, the brown river snaking through, the houses pressed against each other, the church with its steeple pointing to a sky that never answered.

He lit another cigarette, watching the smoke dissolve in the air. Sometimes he wondered what would happen if he just kept climbing. If he scaled the steeple and jumped. If his broken wings finally unfolded in the air before impact.

The roof door creaked. Mateus didn't turn. He knew who it was before he heard the voice.

"I always find you here."

Elisa. She approached, standing beside him, looking at the city as he did.

"It's the only place that doesn't squeeze me," he said.

"I know."

They were silent for a while. Mateus and Elisa had a history that started before either could remember. They grew up on the same street, played in the same backyards, shared the same

childhood discoveries. And then, at some point, something changed. The simple friendship became something more complex, more charged. As if they had both developed a sensitivity to each other's pain that connected them in a way words would only spoil.

"Daniel invited you to the party," said Mateus, not as a question.

"How do you know?"

"The city breathes gossip."

"I'm not going."

"Why not? He's perfect."

"Exactly."

Mateus looked at her, really looked. He saw the tension in her shoulders, the sadness in her eyes she thought she was hiding.

"You deserve perfect, Elisa."

"No one deserves perfect. Perfect is a prison."

He smiled, a sad smile that didn't reach his eyes. "I always knew you were the smartest of us."

"Mateus..." Elisa hesitated. "How are you? For real?"

The question hung in the air between them, dangerous and necessary. Mateus felt the answer burning in his throat. *I'm not okay. I'm falling apart. I'm scared all the time. Sometimes I think of ways to make it stop.*

But he said: "I'm surviving."

"It's not the same as living."

"It's what I have."

Elisa put her hand on his arm, a light touch that felt like a shock. "If you need to talk..."

"I know."

She removed her hand, and he missed it in a way he didn't understand.

"I found a place," she said suddenly. "A warehouse at the old docks. A girl from school gave me the address."

Mateus raised his eyebrows. "What girl?"

"Júlia. She's new."

"And you trust her?"

"I don't know. But the place... seems like one of those places that exist just for people like us."

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"People like us," repeated Mateus. "What kind of people are we, Elisa?"

She looked at him, her eyes big and serious. "The broken ones. The ones carrying missing pieces."

He laughed, a dry sound. "We're a collection of absences."

"Exactly."

The bell rang, calling them back. Mateus threw the cigarette butt on the ground, crushing it with his foot.

"Shall we?" said Elisa.