

Love- In Concert – Pequeno Sonador “Little Dreamer”



Character: Soledad Palacios, late teens

Setting: “Safe House” in Ciudad Juarez, on the Texas/Mexico border

Soledad Palacios has experienced unspeakable and unfathomable things in her young life. Originally from Honduras, her entire family (Parents, grandparents, and four siblings) have been brutally murdered by members of the notorious MS13 gang. A pregnant Soledad finds herself living in a 3-bedroom safe home with eight other migrants who are awaiting to have their Asylum cases heard in an El Paso court.

Soledad never imagined that her life would turn out like this. She was on track to finish high school at the top of her class. She was

accepted a year early on a full scholarship into the prestigious Conservatorio Nacional de Música in Honduras. Guitar was her passion; she would longingly watch her father, Luis, play guitar from an early age. When Soledad was 4, Luis decided to teach his daughter to play after her consistent (and non-stop) pleading. Luis agreed since Soledad was the only one of his five children who showed musical interest or talent. "I want to be a famous guitar player, Papa." Luis never discouraged her: "Mi pequeno sonador, sigue sonando" (My little dreamer, keep dreaming).

As Soledad grew, she may not have grown much in stature, but her beauty, talent, and intellect grew by leaps and bounds. Standing 5'1, this petite beauty was no match for the 6'1 robust Alejandro. He and the other gang members in the area had been watching Soledad and knew all about her. Her musical skills were evident concert after concert. She was somewhat of a local celebrity. Alejandro had dropped out of high school and joined the gang after his parents were killed violently. He, too, had aspirations of becoming a musician before his world turned upside down when he was just a small boy. Watching Soledad live out her dreams with her "perfect family" became an obsession to him. He always admired the Palacios family and used to wish that Luis and Maria (Soledad's mom) were his parents.

Soledad's family was deeply religious, and a prophet once told them that their daughter would be the one to change the world. She and her offspring would be the game changers of their family, and the family would know great honor and respect through Soledad's life. As a result, Soledad's parents doted on her. She was the only female child, and her brothers fiercely protected her. She was everyone's "cielito lindo" (beautiful sweetheart).

The family had fared well against the gangs in the area thus far. They laid low, and Luis would always warn his children of the dangers outside their home. The gangs had terrorized the

community for years, and Luis was eager for his only girl to leave home as soon as possible so that she could make something of herself in this world and become the greatest female guitar player that ever lived.

Soledad was walking home after a music rehearsal after school one late afternoon. Luis had always cautioned her to take the local public transit, but this time, the bus was running late, and Soledad wanted to quickly get home to practice on the new guitar her father had purchased for her that day. "It's still daylight, and it's only a 20-minute walk", Soledad reassured herself.

Per usual, the street gangs were out in full effect. When Alejandro saw Soledad alone...he drove up beside her and offered her a ride. When she refused, one of his friends in the back pulled out a gun, and she was forced into the car. She was taken to a nearby wooded area, violated by Alejandro, who instructed his boys NOT to touch her. Typically, each member would take their turn, but Alejandro wanted the beautiful Soledad for himself. "You're going to be my wife," he told a crying and hysterical Soledad once she was back in the car. Once he dropped her back home, he promised, 'I'll be back for you'.

The utter devastation and sheer chaos which ensued over the next two months was unspeakable. In these parts of the country, the gang members ran the streets. So many young women had been forced to marry gang members upon their request. A family's only "out" would be a successful escape or death. The fear that gripped the community was paralyzing, and fathers and mothers had to watch as their young girls were violated over and over again by members of these brutal gangs.

Alejandro began dropping off money to Soledad's family each time he would come and demand that she go with him. His boys were around, armed, so the family had no choice. This strange

ritual was a dowry of sorts, and it was clear that Alejandro would now support the family of his “girl.” Although some families accepted this fate, seeing their daughters as sacrificial lambs to gain financial stability, security and protection for the family, but Luis could not stand what was happening. They had known Alejandro as a small boy and knew the tragedy that befell his family. Luis tried pleading with Alejandro, but it was no use.

Luis planned with a relative in Ciudad Juarez to help them escape their home and find shelter there until the family could apply for asylum with the United States government. Finding a home for that number of people would be difficult, but the relative understood the family's danger. Not only that, but the family was also aware of the prophecy surrounding Soledad's life and destiny, so it now became a spiritual duty to ensure her safety and the safety of her family...and her unborn child.

The day of the family escape had come. It was 1 am, and the family had been secretly sending some of their things to Ciudad Juarez for the past two weeks. They had to leave earlier than expected because Alejandro announced that it was time for Soledad to come and live with him as they awaited the birth of their child. In some twisted way, Alejandro felt that this was his opportunity to live out the life he always felt was robbed of him. He never planned on separating Soledad from her family but planned to insert himself into their family... by force. Soledad and their unborn child were his dream.

An MS13 informant in Ciudad Juarez had gotten word about the plan. Alejandro, after all, was one of the most powerful sect leaders within the gang and was known throughout many other cities for his “unusual tactics” in handling people who got in his way. Oddly, he felt betrayed by Luis in the family when he learned of the plan. “All of this money I’m giving them, and they

do this to me?" His anger was unquenchable. The entire family would be punished...all but Soledad and his child.

In the wee hours of the morning, the carnage began. Four members of the MS 13 gang, headed by Luis, intercepted the escape and began to massacre each one of the family members. Maria, a robust woman, hid Soledad behind her amid the chaos. When Maria was shot, she flattened herself over Soledad. Her body was large enough to cover the petite Soledad. In shock, and with her mother lying on top of her, Soledad tried not to breathe. After what seemed like an eternity of screams, there was.... quiet. The members of the gang searched for Soledad but could not find her. They left the home to search for her at nearby relatives' homes.

The point person to aid the family escape arrived to find the shocking horror. Soledad was able to escape with him, and she is alive to tell the story and to shed light on what so many families endure day to day, living in fear from brutal gangs and local governments that refuse to provide safety to these families.

The only thing that keeps Soledad going is her music. The owner of the Safe House, Elena, allows Soledad to have her husband's old guitar because she knows all about Soledad and her family. As her belly grows and she endures the mundane and uncertainty within the safe house, Soledad sings and plays while telling her story...reassuring herself and her unborn child that they will find favor with the "Buenas Americanos" (Good Americans). As the lights dim and Soledad "gives birth" in the safe house with Elena acting as midwife, we hear cries of her newborn son and Soledad's recorded guitar solo playing as we fade to black. A song her mother would always sing to her to comfort her: "Ay, Ay,

*Ay, Ay! Canta y no llores. Porque cantando de alegran, Cielito
Lindo los corazones.*

*(Ay, Ay, Ay, Ay, sing and don't cry, because singing makes the
heart happy, Beautiful Sweetheart!)*