

DISAPPEARED

FRANCISCO X. STORK



ARTHUR A. LEVINE BOOKS
AN IMPRINT OF SCHOLASTIC INC.

Copyright © 2017 by Francisco X. Stork

All rights reserved. Published by Arthur A. Levine Books, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., *Publishers since 1920*. SCHOLASTIC and the LANTERN LOGO are trademarks and/or registered trademarks of Scholastic Inc.

The publisher does not have any control over and does not assume any responsibility for author or third-party websites or their content.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without written permission of the publisher. For information regarding permission, write to Scholastic Inc., Attention: Permissions Department, 557 Broadway, New York, NY 10012.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Stork, Francisco X., author.

Title: *Disappeared* / Francisco X. Stork.

Description: First edition. | New York, NY : Arthur A. LevineBooks, an imprint of Scholastic Inc., 2017. | Summary: Four months ago Sara Zapata's best friend, Linda, disappeared from the streets of Juárez, and ever since Sara has been using her job as a reporter to draw attention to the girls who have been kidnapped by the criminals who control the city, but now she and her family are being threatened—meanwhile her younger brother, Emiliano, is being lured into the narcotics business by the promise of big money, and soon the only way for both of them to escape is to risk the dangerous trek across the desert to the United States border.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017017320 | ISBN 9780545944472 (hardcover : alk. paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Brothers and sisters—Mexico—Ciudad Juárez—Juvenile fiction. | Women—Violence against—Mexico—Ciudad Juárez—Juvenile fiction. | Crime—Mexico—Ciudad Juárez—Juvenile fiction. |

Kidnapping—Mexico—Ciudad Juárez—Juvenile fiction. | Reporters and reporting—Mexico—Ciudad Juárez—Juvenile fiction. | Ciudad Juárez (Mexico)—Fiction. | CYAC: Brothers and sisters—Fiction. |

Kidnapping—Fiction. | Reporters and reporting—Fiction. | Ciudad Juárez (Mexico)—Fiction. | Mexico—Fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ7.S88442 D: 2017 | DDC [Fic]—dc23 LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017017320>

ISBN 978-0-545-94447-2

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 17 18 19 20 21

Printed in the U.S.A. 23

First edition, October 2017

Book design by Christopher Stengel

CHAPTER 1

SARA

FRIDAY, MARCH 24

9:10 A.M.

“You need to give up on the missing girls,” Felipe says.

Sara isn’t sure she heard him correctly. Although Felipe’s tone is not harsh, the index finger he points at her makes his words sound like a reprimand. He’s sitting behind his desk, covered in a disordered mess of envelopes and paper. Sara looks at her editor, Juana, who stands up and closes the glass door to the office.

“Look, Sara,” Felipe continues when Juana sits down. “You’ve done a great job with your column, but now it’s time to focus on the good stuff. This is not 2010, when twenty girls went missing every month. Juárez is prospering. Tourists are coming back to the shops, nightclubs are hopping again, Honeywell just opened a new assembly plant. We need to get on board and contribute to creating a positive image. Why don’t you write a weekly column on the new schools opening? The slums getting cleaned up?”

Sara feels Juana’s hand on her arm. Ever since her article on Linda’s disappearance, she’s written a weekly profile of one of the hundreds of girls who have gone missing. That column has been her fight and her comfort, the fulfillment of the promise she made to Linda to never stop looking for her. It cannot be

taken away. Juana has always been Sara's close friend and staunchest advocate, and her touch gives her strength.

Sara speaks as calmly as she can. "You're right that there aren't as many girls disappearing as a few years ago, or even a year ago," she says. "But there are still so many girls who go missing, like Susana Navarro last week. And what about the dozens still unaccounted for? Where are they? Maybe some of them are still alive. The fact that we're still getting threats is proof that our articles hit a nerve. We're the only ones keeping the pressure on the government. They'd give up if it wasn't for us."

Felipe rubs the back of his head. Sara knows he always has trouble responding to logical arguments. "Bad news doesn't sell anymore. The newspaper is finally beginning to do well. We went from daily to almost dead to weekly and now we're biweekly. I don't want to take a step backwards here. No one wants to buy ads next to pictures of missing girls."

"But that's been true for a while now," Sara says. "Has there been a specific threat?"

Felipe and Juana look at each other. Then he sighs and pushes a single sheet of paper across his desk. It's a printout of an e-mail.

If you publish anything of Linda Fuentes we will kill your reporter and her family.

Sara reads the e-mail once, then again, pausing on the words *kill, reporter, family*.

"It was sent to me around six this morning. I forwarded it to you," Felipe says to Juana. Then, fixing his eyes on Sara:

“Are you doing anything with Linda Fuentes? Research, interviews, calling people?”

“No,” Sara says. She’s received threats before, but this is the first time her family has been mentioned. The thought of anyone coming after Emiliano or her mother makes her shudder. But alongside fear, something like hope blooms in her chest. If someone needs to threaten her about Linda, does that mean she’s still alive? She places the sheet of paper on the desk. “I mean, Linda was . . . *is* my best friend. I’m still close to her family. They live in my neighborhood, and I go with Mrs. Fuentes to the State Police headquarters every couple of weeks. But I’m not doing anything about Linda that’s related to my job.”

“Well, someone thinks you’re investigating or writing about her.” Felipe leans back in his chair and touches the pocket of his shirt, searching for the cigarettes he gave up smoking a month before. “There’s something weird about this threat. It’s like they know it’s you who’s been writing the column.”

“There hasn’t been a byline on the column since Sara’s article on Linda,” Juana says. “No one knows it’s her.”

“You think those people can keep a secret?” Felipe points with his hand to the room full of cubicles outside his glass wall. “And what is this about family? Since when do families of reporters get threatened? No more articles on missing girls. That’s it.”

“Someone has to keep the memory of these girls alive,” Sara blurts out louder than she intends. She takes a deep breath and looks into Felipe’s eyes. “If we don’t care about them, then who will?”

“Sara,” Juana says softly, “I’m with Felipe on this one. We lost two reporters during the cartel wars. They were both

young and enthusiastic like you.” She takes a deep breath. “If our articles were doing any good, maybe it would be worth the risk. But has a single girl turned up since we’ve published these profiles?”

“No,” Sara says. “But if nothing else, the families know their daughters and sisters are not forgotten. That makes a difference.”

“I don’t want to be responsible for another dead reporter,” Felipe says with finality. “No more articles on the Desaparecidas. There’s more to life than just evil and pain, no? Think of something happy for a change. I want a proposal for a positive story on my desk by the end of the day.” To Juana he says, “You better clear your day tomorrow so we can finish that damn budget. That’s all. Let’s get to work.”

Sara stands and walks out of the office. She needs to do something before she speaks—or worse, shouts—the words on the tip of her tongue. She heads for the stairs that connect *El Sol*’s IT room to the main floor. They are dark and cool, as expected.

She sits on one of the steps and grabs her head. Is it true that all she can see is the suffering and injustice that need fixing? She remembers her first column about Linda, the most personal article she’s ever written. It was a miracle that Juana convinced Felipe to allow one of his reporters to write about something that affected them. In the days that followed the publication of the article, *El Sol* received dozens of letters from families of missing girls. The article provided hope and comfort to many, and the positive response convinced Juana and Felipe that a regular column on the Desaparecidas was