

1. October 17, 2012

On October 17, 2012, in a declining old city by a lake, Sugar Heights emerges as a notably pleasant suburb, especially Ridge Road that stretches from Bell College of Arts and Sciences to the expansive Deerfield Park. Despite the unkempt Thickets on the west, the park is meticulously maintained, offering a picturesque setting complete with ponds, playgrounds, and a vibrant community life, though lacking a public pool due to budget constraints.

Jorge Castro, a forty-year-old creative writing teacher at the college, maintains a healthy lifestyle to avoid becoming an "American manslob" as he ages. One drizzly night, he jogs towards Deerfield Park, encountering only the old poet observing the mist along his route.

Upon reaching the park, Jorge assists Emily Harris, a colleague, and her husband, mistakenly thinking their van's battery died. Instead, Jorge is incapacitated by a sting-like injection and kidnapped by the elderly couple.

Waking in a cage within a well-equipped basement, Jorge realizes he's been kidnapped by the Harrises. Distraught, he navigates through the initial shock, dehydration, and hunger, all while attempting to communicate or understand the motives behind his capture. His attempts are met with silence or cryptic interactions, escalating his desperation.

Emily Harris, now displaying control, forces Jorge into a cruel form of compliance, having him consume raw liver and its juice before finally granting him water—a disturbing interaction hinting at a complex, yet undisclosed, rationale for his imprisonment. Throughout, Jorge's pleas for communication or release are ignored, emphasizing the despair and helplessness of his situation, while the narrative carefully balances elements of suspense and psychological horror amid the otherwise normal backdrop of the academic and natural setting.