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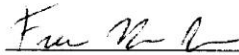
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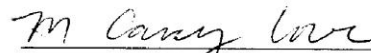
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love of reading and writing and for helping me to understand the importance of thinking outside the limits.

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## Introduction

In the early 1990s, the United States launched a series of border enforcement initiatives in an attempt to reduce the flow of undocumented migration along its southern border, particularly in heavily trafficked urban centers like El Paso and San Diego. One of those initiatives, Operation Gatekeeper, more tightly sealed the border along the San Diego-Tijuana corridor, channeling undocumented migrant crossers through the unwelcoming landscape of the Sonora Desert along the border's decidedly less urban Sonora-Arizona corridor. This redirection of undocumented migrant traffic formed a core component of the plan's design; Operation Gatekeeper explicitly acknowledged the copious dangers and obstacles of the Sonora Desert, such as heat, fatigue, and the presence of venomous creatures, grounding its logic of deterrence on the premise that the rerouting of undocumented migrants into this "more hostile territory" would effectively dissuade prospective migrants from attempting the daunting journey.<sup>1</sup>

This approach to limiting undocumented migration through the risk of "mortal danger" associated with crossing through the Sonora Desert failed in its aim to serve as an effective deterrent for undocumented entry.<sup>2</sup> In the first decade following the launch of Operation Gatekeeper, the number of undocumented crossings along the Sonora-Arizona corridor of the border increased by 253 percent.<sup>3</sup> In 1995, the overall rate of Mexican migration to the United States climbed to a "localized peak" of nearly 450,000 from

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<sup>1</sup> Amnesty International, *In Hostile Terrain: Human Rights Violations in Immigration Enforcement in the Southwest*, available at: [www.amnestyusa.org/sites/.../ai\\_inhostileterrain\\_final031412.pdf](http://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/.../ai_inhostileterrain_final031412.pdf) [accessed 20 January 2013], 17. Sheridan, Lynnaire M. *"I Know It's Dangerous:" Why Mexicans Risk Their Lives to Cross the Border* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2009), 22.

<sup>2</sup> Amnesty International, *In Hostile Terrain*, 17.

<sup>3</sup> Zavella, Patricia. *I'm Neither Here Nor There: Mexicans' Quotidian Struggles with Migration and Poverty* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 76.

around 398,000 the previous year and continued to climb towards the end of the decade.<sup>4</sup> The risk of “mortal danger” inherent in a desert crossing proved to be a grim reality, transforming Arizona into a veritable “killing field,”<sup>5</sup> most commonly through hypothermia, dehydration, or heatstroke.<sup>6</sup> It necessitated the civic involvement of migrant-aid NGOs like No More Deaths, who have provided medical aid, water, food and refuge to the high volume of undocumented migrant traffic through the Arivaca borderlands since 2004 under the guiding ethos, “humanitarian aid is never a crime.”<sup>7</sup>

One of the overarching reasons for the failure of Operation Gatekeeper and other border enforcement initiatives over the last two decades to effectively stanch the flow of undocumented migration lies in the failure to identify how “structural causes”<sup>8</sup> contribute directly to the phenomenon. Theorists like Douglas Massey posit that the broader trend of international migration is partially attributable to “the social, economic, cultural, and political transformations that accompany the penetration of capitalist markets into nonmarket and premarket societies,” which create “disruptions and dislocations,” exacerbated by the geopolitical reality that these penetrations occur “within a global political hierarchy” that often produce heightened dependency on more economically developed and politically powerful states.<sup>9</sup> As scholars like Kelly Hernandez underscore, Mexican migration to the United States fits this theoretical analysis through its long history rooted in structural economic and political imbalance between the two neighbors

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<sup>4</sup> Passel, Jeffrey S. and Robert Suro. “Rise, Peak, and Decline: Trends in U.S. Immigration 1992–2004” (Pew Hispanic Center: September 27, 2005) <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/53.pdf>, 7-8.

<sup>5</sup> Regan, Margaret. *The Death of Josseline* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2010), xxi.

<sup>6</sup> Cornelius, Wayne A and David S. Fitzgerald, Scott Borger, eds. *Four Generations of Nortesños* (La Jolla, California: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, UCSD, 2009), 61.

<sup>7</sup> *No More Deaths*, accessed October 17, 2012, <http://www.nomoredeaths.org/>.

<sup>8</sup> Regan, *The Death of Josseline*, xxiii.

<sup>9</sup> Massey, Douglas S. “Why Does Immigration Occur? A Theoretical Synthesis.” Charles Hirshman, Philip Kasinitz, and Josh DeWind, eds. *The Handbook of International Migration* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999), 41, 48.



that has fueled a tenacious process of out-migration so deeply entrenched that the obstacle of perilous geography cannot disrupt it.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the historically chronic economic disparity between Mexico and the United States, with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, the Mexican economy became more deeply linked to and dependent upon the U.S. economy, deepening these “disruptions and dislocations” that contribute to migration.<sup>11</sup> While NAFTA has produced economic gains for Mexico at the macro level over the last two decades, job creation has lagged far behind “productivity gains,” which has meant that the Mexican economy has not been able to generate sufficient jobs for all of its citizens.<sup>12</sup>

Wayne Cornelius et al specifically point to NAFTA’s deleterious effect on Mexico’s agricultural sector and rural communities, arguing that since the implementation of the agreement, “employment in the agricultural sector has declined sharply.” Cornelius further elaborates that out-migration of rural Mexicans to the United States since NAFTA’s enactment has significantly increased due to the impossible competition between small-scale Mexican farms and the larger government-subsidized farms of the U.S.<sup>13</sup> Zavella adds that there persists a gap in the “relative opportunity structures” between those of Mexico and those of the United States, which contributes to out-migration from Mexico. This is further compounded by a significant wage differential between Mexico and the U.S. since the 1990s, estimated at around eleven to one.<sup>14</sup> In

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<sup>10</sup> Hernández, Kelly. *Migra! A History of the U.S. Border Patrol* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 229.

<sup>11</sup> Passel, “Rise, Peak, and Decline: Trends in U.S. Immigration 1992–2004,” 11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Cornelius, Wayne A. and Jessica M. Lewis, eds. *Impacts of Border Enforcement on Mexican Migration*, (La Jolla, California: Center for Comparative Immigration Studies, UCSD, 2007), 136.

<sup>14</sup> Zavella, *I’m Neither Here nor There*, 58, 61.

addition to heightened economic dependency, Mexico occupies a politically disadvantaged position vis-à-vis its more economically and militarily powerful northern neighbor, which means that it has diminished capacity to pressure the U.S. with respect to migration and economic policies.<sup>15</sup>

Recent trends in Mexican migration to the United States bolster the theoretical claim that heightened dependency on the U.S. economy and labor market is a highly salient influence on Mexican migration northward. Statistically, the number of migrant crossers from Mexico has declined over the last few years. The Pew Research Hispanic Center finds that from 1995 to 2000, the estimated migration flow from Mexico to the United States was 2,940,000. From the period between 2005 and 2010, that number had decreased to 1,370,000. Pew further determines that total net-migration from Mexico between the years 2005 to 2010 was at least zero and possibly negative; they find that for the estimated total of 1.37 million Mexican migrants coming into the United States during those years, an estimated 1.39 million migrants returned from the United States to Mexico.<sup>16</sup> Border Patrol records a total number of 327,577 undocumented migrant apprehensions for the year 2011, a 62 percent decrease from 2007's 858,638 BP

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<sup>15</sup> Sheridan points out that the power imbalance between the Mexican and U.S. governments leaves Mexican migrants more vulnerable to the migration policy decisions of the U.S. government. She underscores, "Unfortunately for Mexicans, effective control over risk is in the hands of the United States." Sheridan, *I Know It's Dangerous*, 170.

<sup>16</sup> Passel, Jeffrey, D'Vera Cohn, and Ana Gonzalez-Barrera. "Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero and Perhaps Less" (Pew Research Hispanic Center: April 23, 2012) <http://www.pewhispanic.org/2012/04/23/net-migration-from-mexico-falls-to-zero-and-perhaps-less/>, 7.

apprehensions.<sup>17</sup> This decrease coincided with severe contractions in the U.S. economy as a result of the recession in the U.S.<sup>18</sup>

This contraction of the U.S. economy and the recorded decline in the number of undocumented migrant apprehensions, however, do not preclude the continued movement of a high volume of undocumented migrant traffic along the perilous Sonora-Arizona corridor of the border. As Pew researchers underscore, Border Patrol apprehensions are an unsatisfactory measure of hard numbers of undocumented crossings because they only account for those migrants who are unsuccessful. Furthermore, they are largely dependent upon the success of Border Patrol agents at apprehending undocumented migrants.<sup>19</sup> No More Deaths leaders emphasize that headlines such as “Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero” can be misleading because they can give the impression to those unfamiliar with the situation on the border that migrants are no longer crossing and that the need for desert aid in the Sonora Desert has diminished. They stress that while crossings are down, activity at the NMD camp is still extremely high and the medical tent consistently filled with patients. Water dropped at designated points along desert trails continues to move. Furthermore, these statistics account for migrants from Mexico, the focus sending country of this thesis, but certainly not a full representation of the other sending countries of Central America, of whom NMD regular volunteers have found an increase in their camp, particularly from Honduras.

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<sup>17</sup> Moreno, Carolina. “Border Crossing Deaths are More Common as Illegal Immigration Declines” (*Huffington Post*: August 17, 2012) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/17/border-crossing-deaths-illegal-immigration\\_n\\_1783912.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/17/border-crossing-deaths-illegal-immigration_n_1783912.html).

<sup>18</sup> Pew finds this to be a common trend over the last two decades. Passel and Suro conclude, “The pattern of rise, peak and decline evident in total immigration flows coincides closely with a similar pattern in the performance of the U.S. economy, and the correlation is particularly strong with the flow from Mexico.” Passel, “Rise, Peak, and Decline: Trends in U.S. Immigration 1992–2004,” 10.

<sup>19</sup> Passel, Jeffrey S. and D’Vera Cohn. “Mexican Immigrants: How Many Come? How Many Leave?” (Pew Hispanic Center: July 22, 2009) <http://pewhispanic.org/files/reports/112.pdf>, 4.

Beyond its failure to account for the salience of structural factors like dependency on the U.S economy, I argue that this restrictionist strategy of ‘deterrence by death’<sup>20</sup> reflects and perpetuates what Mae Ngai identifies as the construction of illegal aliens “as a caste, unambiguously situated outside the boundaries of formal citizenship and social legitimacy” and firmly rooted in hierarchical, racialized histories.<sup>21</sup> The logic behind Operation Gatekeeper demonstrates how Mexican and Central American migrants were and continue to be placed outside of “social legitimacy.” The “deterrence by death” philosophy violates international law and human rights, yet the United States’ employment of this policy demonstrates the extent to which the U.S. government is willing to place undocumented migrant lives in danger in order to prevent their entry as noncitizens.<sup>22</sup> In the context of international human rights, Amnesty International stresses that the U.S. government must surmount this constructed distinction between the value of a human life that is citizen versus the value of a human life that is noncitizen in its approach to immigration policy.<sup>23</sup>

This work of fiction aims to expand upon the scholarly critique of the “fundamentally flawed”<sup>24</sup> nature of U.S. border and immigration policy by more deeply conveying how an undocumented crossing through the Sonora Desert is often a profoundly violent and traumatic experience, both physically and psychologically. Being privileged enough to never have had to experience this crossing myself, the characters of the following pages are based on observations and conversations recorded in a personal journal from time I

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<sup>20</sup> Ferguson, Kathryn, Norma A. Price and Ted Parks. *Crossing with the Virgin: Stories from the Migrant Trail*, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2010), xxi.

<sup>21</sup> Ngai, Mae M. *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 2.

<sup>22</sup> Ferguson, *Crossing with the Virgin*, xxi.

<sup>23</sup> Amnesty International, *In Hostile Terrain*, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Cornelius, *Impacts of Border Enforcement on Mexican Migration*, 12.

spent volunteering with No More Deaths last summer, in addition to secondary literature relating the personal accounts of those who have endured the journey. This work aims to situate these characters in the context of the history and continued reality of economic and political structural imbalance between Mexico and the United States and demonstrate how the undocumented border crossings of Mexican migrants reflect “the relationship of power that exists between the United States and Mexico [that] gets played out on a daily basis.”<sup>25</sup> It further aims to convey how, using Ngai’s lens, the violence of this crossing occurs in a space in which these migrants are “barred from citizenship and without rights.”<sup>26</sup>

Of course, there are a multitude of migrants crossing the border that are not Mexican. Sonia Nazario’s *Enrique’s Journey* conveys the harrowing reality of how, for Central American migrants, the dangers and risks of their journey begin long before they enter the Sonora Desert. Some of these risks include debilitating and/or fatal injuries from riding atop trains through Mexico, in addition to physical violence from both bandits and police alike.<sup>27</sup> This work focuses primarily on migrants from Mexico due to the longevity of Mexican migration to the United States as well as the volume of undocumented individuals from Mexico living in the United States. In 2011, there were an estimated 6.1 million undocumented Mexican migrants living in the United States, a population larger than the total populations of several states of both the U.S. and Mexico and larger than the populations of many countries throughout the world. Roughly ten percent of Mexico’s population currently resides in the United States, underscoring the tremendous

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<sup>25</sup> Ferguson, *Crossing with the Virgin*, xv.

<sup>26</sup> Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 4.

<sup>27</sup> Nazario, Sonia. *Enrique’s Journey*. (New York: Random House Inc., 2006).

scale of Mexican migration to the U.S.<sup>28</sup> Mexico is the leading sending country of migrants to the U.S., and more than 90 percent of those detained by the U.S. Border Patrol are of Mexican origin.<sup>29</sup> This renders Mexico-U.S. migration one of the most significant case studies in the formulation of international migration theories because this migration represents “the largest sustained flow of immigrants anywhere in the world.”<sup>30</sup>

This work seeks to contribute to the existing body of literature that exposes the flawed logic and deleterious effects of contemporary U.S. immigration policy by incorporating fiction as a pedagogical approach with the arguably heightened capacity to transcend audiences. It seeks to further cultivate an understanding of how undocumented crossings through the Sonora-Arizona corridor of the Mexico-U.S. border represent a humanitarian crisis that necessitates aid from NGOs like No More Deaths by humanizing the emotionally and physically traumatic reality of the crossing for those who, due to the aforementioned structural imbalances, are left with few other options other than to embrace these dangers and cross into Arizona.

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<sup>28</sup> Passel, “Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero-and Perhaps Less,” 18.

<sup>29</sup> Passel, “Mexican Immigrants: How Many Come? How Many Leave?,” 4. Passel, “Net Migration from Mexico Falls to Zero,” 11.

<sup>30</sup> Massey, “Why Does Immigration Occur? A Theoretical Synthesis,” 47.

### 1. A Familiar Sensation

Leandro continued to stare at his new Puma sneakers, contemplating whether or not he would make use of this generous gift from his neighbor. They felt comfortable and seemed sturdy, well-made. They supported his legs well; provided a nice cushion for his feet. It made sense to use them in that regard; comfort and sturdiness were appealing qualities in shoes. On the other hand, he found the loud color combination jarring.

*Demasiado llamativo.* He studied them further, arching his brows downward in a way that indicated a high level of concentration on the object. His eyes didn't blink for several seconds. *No...* Perhaps bright orange and turquoise would not be the most logical choice for a person who would be trying to blend in with his surroundings, to remain indistinguishable from the terrain on which his feet would travel. To achieve as much as he possibly could the strange goal of invisibility. *Convertirte en un fantasma en vez de una persona, durante el viaje y mientras estés allá,* was how his cousin had described it, if he wanted to avoid detection.

Leandro hadn't looked up in a while, but he could feel Sofia's penetrating gaze narrowing in on him. It was a gaze he knew well, one that he had always secretly suspected possessed the power to slice him into two parts while it held him in its grip. He nudged his chair slightly to the left in a futile attempt to evade it while twirling two strands of his dark brown hair behind his right ear at a steady rhythm. The gaze was tracking his every movement. He wasn't sure how long they had been sitting there in torturous silence. He glanced at the clock looming over them on the left wall. Only one hour remained. *¿Porqué insistes en irte?* She finally broke it. *No, no me voy con estos,*

*que son demasiado chillones*-¿Leandro! He slowly raised his head to look in her general direction without making contact with her eyes.

Leandro was generally a soft-spoken person, but on that particular morning at that particular hour which reminded him that only one hour remained until that other hour would come that would lead to his departure, his voice escaped him in a rushed yell. ¿Cuántas veces, eh? ¿Qué piensas? Es lo mejor; ayudaría en todo.<sup>1</sup> He nodded his head in a slight downward direction in acknowledgment of her swollen abdomen across the table. His eyes returned to contemplate the matter of the sneakers. His voice returned to its natural pitch. He added that the trip wouldn't be as difficult as she feared; almost everyone seemed to do it successfully.<sup>2</sup> Sofia paused. Y José Elizondo and Efraín Reyes? This question reduced his voice to a nearly inaudible mumble. No me va a pasar.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> No More Deaths co-founder John Fife relates that almost every patient to whom the organization has provided medical aid over the last eight years was crossing to provide for his/her family. As Margaret Regan's *The Death of Josseline* poses the question to convey why so many individuals undergo the foreboding journey, "'How far would you walk to feed your children?'" Regan, *The Death of Josseline*, xxviii. Deborah Boehm affirms through her interviews with both men and women crossers from central Mexico that "children are the primary motivation for migration." Boehm, Deborah A. *Intimate Migrations: Gender, Family, and Illegality among Transnational Mexicans*. (New York: New York University Press, 2012), 119.

<sup>2</sup> Cornelius, et al. finds that in traditional sending states in Mexico like Jalisco, a tradition of out-migration to the United States is deeply entrenched in many communities. Jarvis explains, "Even young children recognize migration as a valid, viable, and often necessary economic and social strategy, something they learn from their fathers or other relatives." Cornelius, *Four Generations of Norteños*, 9. Boehm adds that it is an explicitly gendered tradition, influenced by the legacy of the Bracero Program, and that the act of crossing represents "transnational movement... where expressions of male subjectivities are performed." Boehm, *Intimate Migrations*, 75. Boehm finds not only that out-migration is a deeply entrenched tradition but that it is also "expected" of many young Mexican men. *Ibid.*, 121. She provides the example of two of her interviewees, Aida and Ramón, a married couple from central Mexico that depends on Ramón's income earned in the United States and the inspiration for Leandro's impetus to migrate to the United States in this chapter. Aida feared for his safety, but in the end, pressure from Ramón's father, as well as "cultural pressures to be a man" by migrating to the U.S. to provide economically for his family outweighed Aida's concern according to Boehm. *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>3</sup> According to Sisco and Hicken, 80 percent of their migrant interviewees from Tlacuitapa, Jalisco in 2007 knew someone who had died during their journey across the border through Arizona. Cornelius, *Four Generations of Norteños*, 65. Patricia Zavella explains that prospective migrants from Mexico are fully aware of the increased border enforcement, as well as the copious threats that the journey entails on the "Devil's Highway, to the north." Zavella, *I'm Neither Here Nor There*, 59. Sisco and Hicken further find that it is "Mother Nature-not the border fence, National Guard, or any other factor-is the principal source of worry for both experienced and potential migrants." Cornelius, *Four Generations of Norteños*, 61.



Sofia's voice had become shaky. It was accompanied by the spontaneous outbreak of frenzied sobs. ¡Pero tu pierna! ¿Cómo vas a irte así? ¡Será imposible! Leandro felt compelled to offer her some sort of attempt at reassurance or solace. He experienced a moment of light-headedness as he rose. They couldn't both fit in the small wooden chair supporting her slight but altered body, so he approached her from behind, awkwardly leaning down and wrapping his arms around her neck. He could feel the rapid pace of her heart with his right arm and the heaving of her lungs that caused her chest to inflate and deflate rapidly.

It would serve no purpose to admit it to her now, particularly when he was about to do it; to take the journey. The matter of his leg had often occupied his thoughts but never as much as during the previous few weeks. For thirteen years, Leandro had walked with a limp in his left leg. It had happened on his father's farm, about three months before his father had finally had to sell it.<sup>4</sup> Leandro was a runner and a climber by nature, by far the most active and agile of his brothers. There had not been too many trees nearby to indulge this penchant, but the easy curvature of the rolling hills surrounding their

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<sup>4</sup> Jarvis affirms this in his survey of school children in Tlacuitapa, who emphasized that the earning potential in their town in relation to that of the United States is drastically lower and is thus a decisive factor in migrating to the U.S. Cornelius, *Four Generations of Norteños*, 10. This illustrates one of Cornelius's central arguments in his critique of U.S. border enforcement policy; it fails to acknowledge the weight of economic imperative that surmounts the flawed "danger as a deterrent" ethos underlying Operation Gatekeeper. Cornelius, *Impacts of Border Enforcement*, 54. In their survey of migrants in Tlacuitapa, Jalisco, Cornelius et al found that the overwhelming majority of respondents gave economic necessity as the overarching motivation for undertaking the risk of a crossing. *Ibid.*, 39. David FitzGerald adds that the decline in numbers of migrant crossings from Mexico that Pew finds for 2008 onward reflects the weight of economic necessity as a push factor; the U.S. economy began to struggle severely around that time, creating significant job losses in sectors of the U.S. economy in which Mexican migrants "are overrepresented." As already stated in the introduction, FitzGerald also stresses that this decline should not be interpreted as an indicator of the overall effectiveness of heightened border enforcement. Overmyer-Velázquez, Mark, ed. *Beyond La Frontera: The History of Mexico-U.S. Migration*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 192.

house had lent itself well to his young appetite for speed and height.<sup>5</sup> That was his most enduring, vivid memory of their farm; meandering up and down and up and down for hours, as if his energy and the distance his legs could take him were boundless.

Tío Jaime had stopped by during one brisk February morning for breakfast before he and Leandro's father were to load their trucks with the chickens they were going to sell. Leandro had asked to ride with them in the back of his uncle's truck. He remembered clearly the experience of the sharp open air whirling past him, stinging his eyes as he shared movement with something that could take him much faster than his legs. On the road out of their farm, his uncle had hit a large rock, bouncing Leandro out of the back of the vehicle before he had had the chance to nestle himself in between the chicken crates in the bed of the truck. It had catapulted his light body like a small missile in a perfectly arched trajectory that landed him just in front of the left wheel of his father's approaching truck so quickly that he was out of sight in the blink of an eye. It had occurred too quickly for his father, who, in an uncharacteristic moment of distraction, had taken his eyes off the road during those same seconds in which his son had landed before him and so remained unaware that his youngest child was no longer tucked in the safety of his brother's truck, but rather moments away from being crushed under the weight of his own.

For Leandro, though, those last few moments inhabiting the body that he knew had passed by more slowly than its swift movement conveyed as it sliced through the air. He remembered being extremely aware of each second as he soared through, as if he had had a parachute attached to his back that slowed it all down just enough to allow him to

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<sup>5</sup> I based this description on an image that I found online: <http://www.gettyimages.ie/detail/photo/mexican-farm-outside-of-guadalajara-royalty-free-image/144061784>.

feel each moment of his exhilarating passage through the cool air as he had hit the ground in a light, surprisingly painless thud. He could even remember laughing for a brief moment, his last moment of total fearlessness and blissful ignorance of the fact that everything that happens has a consequence; before he felt the unexpected, terrifying, impossible weight of the Sierra Madre rolling over his lower left leg of his body that lay at a diagonal angle to the front left wheel of his father's truck. Leandro remembered it being difficult to distinguish between the high-pitched squawks of the chickens with the screams of his mother as his father had scooped him up and thrown him into the backseat, storming on the highway towards Guadalajara at a speed Leandro had never experienced before or since. The car ride was blurry in his memory, but he could remember very clearly the transformation of his lower left leg from a flat, olive plain to a bulging red balloon.

It was a bad break. The bone beneath his calf had been crushed and nearly severed completely from the rest of his leg. He walked on crutches for two years. They had moved in with Tío Fran's family in Oaxaca where fortunately, there had been no hills near their new place of residence to tease him, to remind him how from then on, a mere walk up one of those hills surrounding what used to be their farm would exhaust far more energy than any of his former habitual sprints up and down combined. He learned to associate the departure from their farm with the departure of his running; things which felt part of him but which would be gone from him forever, leaving behind the uneasy feeling that there was always part of himself missing.

Even though he had never fully recovered his natural balance; had lost permanently his capacity to anticipate and coordinate the movement of his limbs, he had

grown quite accustomed to walking with it over the years, so much so that it was scarcely noticeable in his gait. He sometimes forgot that it wasn't natural, that he hadn't been born with it; that something had happened to make his leg and his walk the way that they were. Attempting to join a group for the journey had been the first reminder in a long while that his left leg was an obstacle, a handicap; something which negatively distinguished him from others. Un renco? Ni hablar. No guide would consider including him in his group, even for a higher sum of money. They all informed him that it would be too risky for both him and the group as a whole, a not too outlandish perspective considering that a long trek through that terrain was one in which the survival of even the fittest could not be guaranteed. His cousin's friend Pedro had finally acquiesced on Antonio's word that Leandro could keep up. That, plus an additional three thousand dollars.<sup>6</sup>

But all of the fuss over it, the difficulty of securing a guide and a group had planted doubt in his mind over his leg's capacity to sustain the journey. Estaré bien. Todo saldrá bien. He had returned to the present. He felt more light-headed than before, and his arms began to itch. The reticent embrace of his arms around Sofia's neck contradicted his words. The expansion and contraction of her lungs was intensifying so much so quickly so that when she inhaled, it was as if her chest cavity were being sucked away from his arms by an invisible vacuum, leaving only the air which it had trapped floating behind

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<sup>6</sup> Coyotes charge an exorbitant sum of money, but NMD leaders stress that without a coyote, the trip is even more dangerous. The typical coyote fee is around \$2,000 but can reach up to \$6,000. Cornelius, *Four Generations of Norteños*, 54. Current estimates place the coyote industry's annual profits at around \$10 billion. Schyler, Krista. *Continental Divide: Wildlife, People, and the Border Wall*, (Texas A&M University Press, 2012), 252. Hellman emphasizes that groups who don't have a coyote or who become separated from their coyote often end up wandering in circles in the desert, greatly increasing the likelihood of death. Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants*, 109. Border Patrol agents consider coyote networks to be sophisticated, with "absolutely excellent communication" via cellphone to negotiate meeting points and to be flexible in case they should need to change the meeting point in response to the presence of Border Patrol in the pre-designated area. Broyles, Bill. *Desert Duty: On the Line with the U.S. Border Patrol*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 207.

between his fingers. *Todo saldrá bien ...* He kept repeating the words, no longer certain that they were actually leaving his throat. He could feel a strong stinging sensation in his neck. He slapped it. He felt the floor pushing against his back, even though he knew that that was not possible because he could see clearly with his own two eyes that the floor was beneath his feet, directly underneath the jarring bright orange and black Puma sneakers that were providing him with a sturdy, comfortable sole, so it was not possible that he should feel the absence of the floor's force pushing against them as they pushed against it; and if he truly were floating in the air, which he had already established was not possible because it is not possible to escape the laws of gravity, then he would not feel the floor pushing against his back, but he was certain that he felt the floor against his back because he was certain of the dull pain consuming his back from lying against the cold hard floor despite the fact that he was standing.

*Ay.* The stinging in his neck had become a burning. Leandro opened his eyes and blinked. He felt numbness in his limbs, the kind of paralysis one has when emerging unexpectedly from a shallow stage of sleep. His eyes began to blink in a series of frenzied flutters that resembled the rushed but precise motion of a hummingbird's wings. He suddenly could see neither Sofia nor his feet, but he was able to see a discomfiting cloudy, dark gray that he didn't recognize. He closed his eyes again. A terror from deep in his gut overpowered his temporary paralysis and thrust his torso like a bullet into a stiffly upright position. It was the kind of terror that stems from the rather unsettling realization that one has no earthly clue where he is; when he has not the faintest recognition of any aspect of his surroundings. Despite the tornadoes swirling in his head, Leandro recognized this terror because it was intimately familiar to him; one that he had

experienced so many nights waking up in Tío Fran's house in the middle of the night in bed next to his brothers, his left leg encased in plaster in a body and in a place that had been foreign to him.

The heavy remnant odor of the earlier evening storms of July in the Sonora penetrated his nostrils and slowly welcomed him back to the suffocating air; to the thorny ground more rigid than concrete; to the burning texture of what felt like thousands of small welts densely clustered across the back of his neck. He looked down as his sight and touch slowly realigned to process his surroundings, when he could begin to distinguish his own body from the saturated earth beneath him to realize that his whole body was soaked. His sweat and the lashing rains from the hour before had left no inch of his skin uncovered in thick, sticky moisture. He certainly didn't feel chilly, but his arms were decorated in goose bumps. He managed to articulate a fully coherent question in his head, *¿Porqué estoy acá?*, before looking around to see what shelter he should have sought to avoid sleeping in the rain for who knew how long. Or as much shelter as was available amidst those sparse rocks and diminutive, scattered trees surrounding him as far as his eyes would permit him to see into the darkness. The tree just to his right would not have provided much refuge. What remained of its branches had all been completely stripped of their leaves; the rest of them sprawled unevenly in broken twigs around the base of its narrow trunk. It was bare, defenseless; another victim of the sky's rapacious appetite that chewed it up and spit it out, nearly ripping it off the face of the earth as it had so many before it during an afternoon storm.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Schyler lyrically captures the impressive sight of explosive summer storms in the Sonora Desert, "A great crack! Rips through the now-humid air and the sky releases a long-awaited treasure upon the land. The rain comes, first in a scattered pattering of large drops on the dry ground that sizzle and steam." Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 11.

He rolled his neck in a circular motion while covering the back of it with his right hand. Leandro became aware of the presence of his fellow desert companions responsible for its searing inflammation encircling him from all sides. *Pinches hormigas*.<sup>8</sup> He pulled both of his legs towards him to move into a crouching position and concentrated all of his strength in his forearms and his right thigh to push off the ground into a stand. He wobbled for a moment before sinking back into the ground. He looked behind him. Then to his left. He could not be sure, but he thought that his eyes detected a faint flicker of light in the distance. The sight of what he was pretty certain was lights even though he could not be fully certain of this, even though they really did look like lights, produced a feeling of release in his gut that spread to his arms and legs, slowly flushing away some of the tension in his limbs and joints. He might not be isolated from the rest humanity after all.

He was across, though, which would mean a different relationship with it now, one in which typical human interactions would have to be treated with unnatural caution, as his cousin had explained. In that instance, however, Leandro no longer found being caught by la migra a fate to be avoided at all costs. In the end, it was only his first time across.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps that was the explanation for why they had left him behind; he didn't

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<sup>8</sup> One of the aspects of the landscape that I noticed most frequently in the Sonora Desert was the ubiquity of fire ants. Particularly after a rainstorm, the ground is literally covered with them so that you have to pay extreme attention to every single step and every inch of your surroundings. Their bites are not pleasant.

<sup>9</sup> With the implementation of Operation Streamline in 2005, crossing the border as an undocumented migrant became a criminal act in the United States. For those apprehended for the first time, prison sentences can be up to six months. For those apprehended a second time, prison sentences can be up to twenty years. *In Hostile Terrain*, 50. As Robert Koulisch explains, Streamline was designed by the Department of Homeland Security to “criminalize undocumented immigration” by changing the status of an undocumented entry from a “civil offense of undocumented entry” to a criminal “nuisance misdemeanor.” Koulisch, Robert. *Immigration and American Democracy: Subverting the Rule of Law*, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 44. This development comprises what Kelly Hernández refers to as the “carceral era” of border enforcement in which prisons represent “an increasingly important dimension of U.S. immigration control.” She further identifies prisons as spaces that epitomize the persistence of racial inequality, reflected in the predominantly poor, African-American, Latino, and now unauthorized

have as much to lose as they. It had been one of those survival moments, and he was the one with the limp. It was returning to him with clarity; the faint buzzing sound of the propeller that transformed into a large, jarring roar as it narrowed in on them; the blinding floodlight that sent them scattering in opposite directions like chickens with their heads cut off. *No había otra opción*. He had tried to flee too, only his body had not cooperated.<sup>10</sup>

For the first time since his accident, though, it was not his left leg that had impeded his movement; it was the rest of his body that had failed him. The joints in his right leg and shoulders had locked all at once, trapping him in an awkward and unnatural sideways position from which he could not escape. In keeping as much pressure off it as he had been able to during those days of traveling, he had protected his left leg from over-exertion and preserved the energy within its muscles so that in a moment of fight or flight, it had been poised to act; to deliver him from the chaos of that moment despite its limited capacity for speed.

Leandro remembered the light. Since the simple act of standing had revealed itself to be an unviable option in that moment, he tried his luck at crawling. His thighs did most of the work so that there was no distinction in the speed of movement between his right and left legs. His breathing rapidly became more labored as he dragged his body

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immigrant populations of these prisons. Hernández, *Migra!*, 233. In Mae Ngai's lens, this "carceral era" of enforcement would signal an even more aggressive response to the constructed "violation of the nation's sovereign space" for which undocumented migrants are now punished. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 2. In the context of Boehm's analysis of masculinized migration, Operation Streamline adds another grave risk to desert crossings; if a migrant is arrested, that places his (typically a he) family in financial danger in the absence of the earnings from "the family breadwinner." Ibid., 51.

<sup>10</sup> Border Patrol often employs an apprehension technique referred to as "dusting." Border Patrol helicopters locate and target a group by hovering above them and signaling for them to lie down. This often causes the group to scatter and migrants to become separated from their groups and guides, increasing the probability of isolation, dehydration, and death. Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants*, 109. Many of the migrants who end up in need of medical attention in the No More Deaths camp had been separated from their guides during a Border Patrol dusting.



along like a snail. *Ay*. Without light, it was difficult to navigate between the islands of fire ants. He passed by a huge pool of water from the rains. *No lo hagas, no lo hagas...* Their coyote had told them that that water was a death sentence, and he was still too far from what he was pretty certain was light.<sup>11</sup> But the mere sight of the water changed everything. It inhibited further movement, as if someone had tied a leash around his neck. It was a contest between his will and his body, and it was obvious who the victor would be.

An odd rustling noise behind him managed to disrupt his fixation on the water. He turned his head back but could see nothing. ¿Hola? He didn't recognize the sound of his own voice and wasn't fully sure that it had even exited his throat in the form of a recognizable word. He had a moment of hope; clung briefly to the possibility that someone else from his group had possibly wandered in the same direction as he; the same direction that really was a different direction that looked the same as all of the other directions; with one rock that might lead one way but that was really another rock, indistinguishable from any other rock in the dizzying, tortuous cycle of movement in a land without landmarks, save for that one towering rock formation jutting far out of the earth whose presence was useless without light.<sup>12</sup> ¿Hola? He leaned down and turned his

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<sup>11</sup> Migrant-aid volunteers have heard accounts of coyotes telling their groups to avoid even the potable water left behind in water gallons by No More Deaths as a mechanism of control to further increase dependency on the coyote.

<sup>12</sup> Leandro is referring to Babo Peak in the Baboquivari Mountains on the Tohono O'odham Indian Reservation near the border. As a uniquely shaped, conspicuous, and towering rock formation, Babo Peak serves as a basic landmark of orientation in terms of north/south/east/west. Of course, it is a more helpful aid during the day. The Tohono O'odham Nation itself lies in the heart of border militarization and exemplifies one of the detrimental results of the border's existence; being split between two nation states. The bulk of the tribe's nearly 30,000 citizens reside in southwestern Arizona, while 1,500 reside on the other side of the border in Mexico. *In Hostile Terrain*, 30. With increased border enforcement and the rerouting of migrant entry points from major cities to the Sonora Desert, both migrant and drug trafficking in Tohono O'odham territory increased significantly. Citizens of the tribe who cross back and forth using their tribal ID cards have reported to Amnesty International that they are often questioned by Border Patrol agents stationed at the three gates along the fence dividing their nation from Mexico. However, the U.N.'s

head to one side, uncertain as to whether or not his eyes had detected movement. ¿Hola? He could see that it was a rock now, and Leandro knew that rocks could not move. He turned towards the water again. It was a lost battle; he would not be able to conquer the urge-

The same rustling. He looked behind him again. ¿Hola? He was straining his eyes but could see nothing behind him. He turned back to the water and was already in it, headfirst and submerged in the fetid pool, drawing deep, hurried gulps.<sup>13</sup> He turned over and laid his neck in the pool, ousting the flames, for a brief moment. He pushed himself up, his head dripping. He had drunk too fast and could feel the consequences in a sharp pain in his abdomen. He crawled towards another tree a few feet in front of him and rested his back against it. *No te duermas, no te duermas...*

He looked behind him again. It wasn't exactly a noise this time. With the normalizing effect of the water, minus the searing abdominal cramps, Leandro recognized the feeling as one that he had had for however many nights he had been there. He was being watched. He opened his eyes. The listless slouch of his chest informed him that he had been asleep. For how long, he had no way of knowing; it could have been two minutes or two hours or two days: he could not really recall the last sunset. It was still dark; he had to keep moving towards the light before the sun returned to fry him alive. Leandro wrapped both arms around the flimsy source of his back support and attempted to pull himself up. He looked down. The repugnant, bright orange of his Pumas had

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Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples stipulates that those indigenous groups divided by an international border should enjoy freedom of movement across the international line without interruption by law enforcement agencies. *In Hostile Terrain*, 30-32.

<sup>13</sup> Drinking stagnant, fetid water out of desperation is one of the common causes of death during the journey. It can cause severe stomach cramps, vomiting, and diarrhea, further exacerbating and accelerating the dehydration process. Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants*, 107.

diminished and morphed into a pale yellowish color underneath a sheet of wet mud. That was one problem that the journey had resolved for him. The bright color of his shoes would no longer weigh on his mind.

He took a step with his right leg and to his surprise felt a surge of energy pass through his limbs. He staggered as swiftly as possible towards the right direction; of which for once since arriving there he could be certain was the right direction because there was a visible, solitary marker leading him to where he was sure he was supposed to go. There was the occasional stumble; several more encounters with ants; two rattlesnakes stirring nearby, blissfully undisturbed by the surroundings in which they all found themselves thanks to the magical quality of adaptability that their bodies possessed.<sup>14</sup> Leandro was moving at a pace that almost approached normalcy, or at least normalcy for him. He was nearing it, which initiated a mentally innervating and physically enervating cycle forward; as it grew brighter in his vision, his legs picked up speed. He could now discern the outline of a house. A few more steps and he could see the car beside it. Which meant a road. Near the house, his arms finally had the opportunity to share the burden and exhaust the remaining energy provided by the fetid water to grope his way upward. More ants, more thorny shrub. Pulling with his arms and pushing with his right leg, he reached it.

It was a wide, hilly, uneven road; a mix of gravel and dirt. There were several large impressions of tire tracks along it. Leandro began to trudge to his left along it. It was harder, now: the steps. He allowed his left leg to take the lead for a while, placing it in the unfamiliar role as guide for the rest of his body. The only remnants of the water he

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<sup>14</sup> Rattlesnakes are “generalists,” which means that they function well in a variety of habitats, including deserts, forests, and coastal areas. “Sonoran Desert Fact Sheets,” Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, accessed March 3, 2013, <http://www.desertmuseum.org/kids/oz/long-fact-sheets/Diamondback%20Rattlesnake.php>.

had inhaled were the writhing cramps of his abdomen. He froze in his tracks. He could hear something behind him. It was not a soft rustling. Without turning around to look, he felt his steps moving forward at a brisker pace, despite his waning energy; despite his choppy breaths that were shortening by the second as his lungs begged for more oxygen. The sound was growing louder now, competing with the rapid beats of his heart so that it took a few more moments to recognize that what he thought was one sound was in fact many sounds that were becoming increasingly louder sounds as they were zeroing in on him at the speed of a bullet. His left leg returned to its familiar role as an anchor, impeding his natural movement; subverting his body's natural, desperate attempt to propel himself forward at all cost so that he might be delivered; trapping him as it had always done since that bright February morning thirteen years earlier.

Their snarls announced their imminent arrival as they stormed towards him, cutting through the heavy, sticky air like a propeller, as Leandro hobbled along the road that held in store another surprise; it was turning uphill at an abrupt, almost ninety-degree angle. It was over. He could not do it. With his body trembling, he turned to face them, clenching his eyes shut tightly like a fist. Frozen in place, he looked a peculiar statue brought to life by the stimulation of electric pulses.

And then their ravenous growls fell into abrupt, inexplicable silence. It was as if all of the air on the road had been sucked out. Leandro opened his eyes. They were not two feet away from him but had come to a complete stop. One of them placed its round nose to the ground while the other cocked its head to one side, studying something behind Leandro's left shoulder. The one with its nose to the ground had tense, eager muscles, still poised to advance upon him, but it did not move one centimeter closer, as if an

invisible wall had sprung out of the ground to completely block its movement. The one with its head cocked to one side retreated one step, its lungs releasing a faint whimper. It appeared to be engaging in a staring contest with whatever had arrested its movement. The other one followed with a smaller, reluctant, stubborn step, as if antagonized by the possibility that it would lose the opportunity to follow through with the hunt, to capitalize on the unexpected presence of wounded prey. They were not the type of creatures to have eaten him; he had not noticed these details, but they wore collars and were obviously well nourished. They would have ripped him apart limb by limb more for the sport of it, for the opportunity to exhaust the unleashed energy throbbing in their solid, bulky muscles.<sup>15</sup>

They were so close to Leandro that he could see the black hairs on their tails rise, stiff as a board, as they lowered them between their legs. They continued their timid retreat backwards, still facing him while their whimpers increased in volume and frequency. Leandro's body remained locked in the same position, still trembling with terror.

But there was something else peculiar stirring inside of him now. A tingling feeling in his spine began to creep up the whole of his back, arousing his limbs in steady increments; consuming his body in numbness that overpowered the intense throbbing of his legs and the exhaustion of his lungs. The hairs on his arms awakened him to the latent memory of it as they rose up with the same stiffness of the hair of the dogs' tails. Leandro slowly turned his head and looked behind him and upwards with an oddly captivated expression of curiosity, as if he had been momentarily lifted from his trap for one

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<sup>15</sup> This happened to a group of us on Arivaca Road, except we had the privilege of riding in a large Dodge truck rather than limping on our feet to escape a pit bull and Rottweiler that were chasing us. They were astonishingly fast, so much so that the volunteer driving us actually had to push the truck into full speed. They were so aggressive that they tried to leap into the back of the truck, growling and barking at us the whole time.

millisecond and could devote his last drops of energy to contemplate what lay behind him. It was a familiar sensation, one that seized his core and wielded the tremendous, impossible power to distract his body from his pending dismemberment. He wasn't certain how he recognized it...that deep, all-consuming conjunction of fear with excitement. Under less trying circumstances, he would probably have recalled having felt a far milder version of it the first time he had sex. But this was overpowering, an intense union of terrifying and hypnotic.

He searched the darkness but couldn't see anything. It intensified. His limbs trembled again. Broken images in his head. Near Tío Fran's house with his older brothers and his father...Arriba, ese árbol a la izquierda, míralo. Sus ojos...fierce, penetrating eyes that glowed and his father's words that he remembered with such piercing clarity that he could have been speaking them to him in that moment: en sus ojos tu puedes "sorprender tu propio reflejo y entonces pensar sobre tu propia condicion."<sup>16</sup> His heart skipped a beat. The last remaining energy drained from his body, and Leandro collapsed on the hard, rocky, uneven, tire-track impressioned road beneath him.

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He opened his eyes and through his clouded vision discerned a group of pale faces hovering over his head. He's awake! Leandro blinked a couple of times. They couldn't be la migra. Three girls and one boy with a baseball cap. He could hear them whispering but their words were foreign. Say something to him! Hola, Señor; somos amigos de la iglesia, y...I don't know if he understands, go get José! Leandro's head felt like bricks. One of the girls was feeding him sips of Gatorade, slowly coaxing his senses back to life. He

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<sup>16</sup>Medellín, Rodrigo A., et al. *El Jaguar en el Nuevo Milenio*, (México, D.F.: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2002), 23. Oaxaca and southeastern Mexico remain some of the last remaining areas of North America in which jaguars still exist in significant numbers. Ibid.

tried to move his limbs, but every inch of him was made of lead. His left leg felt heavier than his right.

A few moments later, a young man entered...what looked like a circus tent and took a seat on a crate beside his cot. *Hola, Señor. Somos amigos de la iglesia y estamos aquí para ayudarle.* His accent was a blend of familiar and foreign. Leandro struggled to muster words with his desiccated throat but finally managed, *¿Cómo me encontraron?* He realized that in his exhaustion, he had forgotten decorum. *Y muchas gracias por ayudarme.* Leandro was now able to hold the bottle of Gatorade with his own hands. The life was returning to his limbs. *Eh, más despacio, Señor. Bueno; le encontramos en la entrada de nuestro campamento. Supongo que iba en busca de ayuda y se desmayó aquí. ¡Qué suerte que pasara por aquí en vez de por allá!*

The Gatorade was enabling him to recapture some of the images from the previous night. He didn't recall a driveway. *Ay...*he remembered the dogs. And he remembered...it. He could feel the hairs on his arms standing up again as he relived the sensati-*Relájese, señor. Mejor que descanse.* Leandro's body relaxed. It no longer mattered, really. He was alive.

## 2. The Body of Another

It was a few nights later when Sole found herself alone. Although it would be hard for her to say that she truly felt alone. Every night since they had crossed from Sasabe, she felt that she was being followed. Not in the normal way, if it could ever be called normal; not in the sense that a single someone... or something lurked behind her. More like it was coming at her from all directions, as if the shadows coating both sides of those impressive rock formations were alive and stalking alongside her as she descended deeper and deeper into the endless labyrinth of mountains, rocks, and trees. She felt the hairs on her neck rise; the goose bumps coat her parched, bronzed skin... She jerked around to glance behind her, to her left, to her right, overhead. Her neck movements were unnatural, stilted like a robot's, with a non-human precision. *¿La migra? ...But la migra was so loud. The white and green, the tires of their trucks, and the helicopter...Se oirían hasta Veracruz.* No. This, whatever it was, was silent.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps it was a feeling, a lingering discomfort from the lack of privacy of traveling with such a large group. Sole had always been the most private, the most introverted, the most secretive of her family. *¡Siempre tantos secretos con la niña!* It was a constant source of conflict between her mother and her. Sole jolted her neck to the right. *Está otra vez...* A realization, that's what it was. Sole had absolutely no idea where she was. And she was alone.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jaguars move so quietly and blend so well with their surroundings that it is difficult to hear or see one. Brown, David E. *Borderland Jaguars*, (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>2</sup> From her interviews with migrants, Sheridan finds anxiety and fear to be the "key common elements of the migration experience." Sheridan, *I Know It's Dangerous*, 44. Even sleeping in a tent alone amidst the tents of other No More Deaths volunteers, the desert can be very spooky at night and provoke an intense feeling of solitude and vulnerability. As Amnesty International effectively conveys in its report, "One



The afternoon had been so beautiful after the storms. It should have been a reassuring sign. But for Sole, it had been troublesome, ominous. The sky had exploded and then morphed into a collage of electric pink and blue. It reminded her of that sweet fluffy candy she had had with Dolores at the market in Magdalena when they were twelve. *Ay, Dolores...* Sole began to cry. It was so sad what Dolores had whispered to Sole after her accident. She had peered into Sole's eyes, a lifeless stare that penetrated her gut... *Ni te imaginas lo que es querer librarte de tu propio cuerpo, desear habitar cualquier otro cuerpo salvo el tuyo.*

She couldn't recall what she had been thinking about a few moments before, but it came back quickly enough. *El cielo, sí.* And the rainbow...it was the most perfectly symmetrical arch she had ever seen, each side the exact reflection of the other. Too perfect. *Imposible.* It bugged her. How in a spontaneous instance could nature craft something so precisely formed, so intelligent, so beautiful? Sole remembered dedicating hour after hour trying to draw a perfect circle as a child. Despite her mother's continuous warnings that it would be impossible for a person to achieve. Only after about 300 attempts had her dogged determination succumbed to the fact that she would not and could not achieve her goal. And yet, it was so maddeningly easy for the sky to produce perfect symmetry.

Since dusk, Sole had not moved from a tiny nook tucked beneath one side of the most impressively large and cragged rock formation of that particular wash. She remained dazedly squatted on her feet, rocking back and forth. Her shoes were the kind

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cannot imagine being left in the desert, left behind by the group in which you are traveling. If you stop to remove a pebble from your shoe, or a thorn from your sock, that can be a death sentence. No one is going to wait for you. You are alone, with little or no food and water and you have no idea which way to go. The desert is perilous beyond one's imagination." Amnesty International, *In Hostile Terrain*, p. 17.

with the carpet-like material for soles. Para no dejar ninguna pisada, they had informed her on the other side. They were the strangest and most hideous pair of shoes Sole had ever laid eyes on. At least they had served their purpose. Yes, it was the one thing that was comforting. They wouldn't be able to track her footprints as long as she kept them on her feet.

*Espera...* Sole contemplated the matter of the rainbow further. It was beautiful and precise but the product of chaos. And violence. It followed explosions that the sky itself produced without precision or intelligence. And it was fleeting, disappearing almost as quickly as it had appeared. Sole jerked her head to the right again. The goose bumps returned, this time accompanied by raised hairs down her neck.

Te ruego que no, te ruego que no... She couldn't get her mother's words out of her head. Sole never cared to admit to her mother when she missed her. Private, introverted, secretive. And proud by nature. But in that moment, if Sole had glimpsed her mother across a field covered in flames, reason and pride would escape her, and she would leap through them just to embrace her. It seemed to her unnatural for an adult, even a teenager, to feel such a primal yearning for her mother.

She was becoming increasingly agitated. She mulled over whether or not she should leave that spot, tucked safely underneath that particular nook of that particular rock formation, of which there was nothing particular except for the fact that she was underneath that particular piece of it at that particular moment. But she had nowhere to go. Then again, waiting was becoming increasingly torturous and intolerable. And she couldn't be certain that she was tucked *safely* underneath that particular nook of that particular rock formation. *No: te quedas, te vuelves loca.* If she could just bring herself to

stand up, that would be progress; one obstacle conquered. And then she could begin to walk and continue walking, eventually encountering somebody. *Espera...* Sole wasn't entirely sure that it was a good thing to encounter someone whom she did not know. *Es mejor que una chica no se vaya...*<sup>3</sup>

Sole tried to reassure herself. Her situation certainly wasn't as bleak as it could be. She wasn't injured. She was wearing the hideous carpet shoes. It had only been a few hours, so she thought, since she had finished her last bottle of water. It then occurred to her that she would have no way of getting water if no one found her for days. *No. Salir de acá es la única opción.*

Her legs shook so much on her first attempt at standing that she lost her balance. She knew better. She had tried too quickly. One's legs typically could not respond well to quick movement after remaining crouched in the same position for three hours. *Otra vez...* She was more successful on her second attempt. Next came the challenge of taking a step. Her right leg seemed to be only partially attached to her body, unnaturally slow in responding to her brain's commands. Squatting had disrupted the natural blood flow to her limbs. Sole nervously navigated her way around the sharp contours of the massive rock formation. Her steps felt unnatural to her. They were timid, unsure; like a child first learning to walk, except with dread instead of excitement accompanying each unsteady stride.

The tears returned. Sole was unable to see the end of the wash. Unsure if there even was an end. She had wanted to prove her mother wrong. Javier would not be able to

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<sup>3</sup> Several scholars have noted that despite the increase in the percentage of women migrants from Mexico since the implementation of Operation Gatekeeper, gendered social norms still affect the frequency and form of female migrations. As Boehm points out, unlike their male counterparts from traditional Mexican sending communities like Zacatecas, "adolescent females are actively discouraged from migrating." Boehm, *Intimate Migrations*, 121.

return from Fresno, and they could no longer tolerate the distance.<sup>4</sup> And they needed his money. She had planned everything correctly. It was a coyote with a good reputation, one that Javier had picked.<sup>5</sup> It was a group that had almost as many women as men. If only the helicopter had not found them, had not sent them scurrying in chaos to every direction like ants fleeing the foot of a child who has just crushed their home. Sole sank to her feet again. She hated that her mother was right, especially in that moment. She had been a fool to attempt this journey. *Estoy fregada...*

Sole became aware that her body had become stiff. The hairs on her arms and neck were alert, more so than before. Sole leaned to the right, straining to make out the sound. She attempted to stand to see better, but this time, she had really severed the blood flow. Her legs were completely locked. It seemed to be getting closer. Sole was now leaning so far to the right that she had to plant her right hand on the ground to avoid tipping over. She couldn't tell whether or not they were footsteps. It might be an animal; that was an unsettling possibility, especially since she was temporarily immobile. Perhaps it was still only the shadows that had begun to make noise with their feet while they

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<sup>4</sup> Jarvis draws attention to another consequence of increased border enforcement: its unintended encouragement of the more permanent settlement of undocumented migrants as a result of the difficulty of the crossing. Cornelius, *Four Generations of Norteños*, 21. This is also another reflection of the deeply gendered dimensions of migration; women who have a spouse or partner already residing in the United States are generally "better positioned to migrate." Boehm, *Intimate Migrations*, 34.

<sup>5</sup> Boehm finds that when young Mexican women do migrate, it is typically for the purpose of "reuniting with a male partner" rather than for the economic motives that typically define "masculinized migration" from Mexico. Furthermore, when women do migrate, their movement is often "tightly controlled by male family members." *Ibid.*, 73, 119, 96. In addition to the influence of social norms, this "tighter control" stems from the real and perceived heightened dangers that women can face when crossing the border. Some of these are physical; for example, Sisco and Hicken have found that women are nearly three times more likely than men to die from exposure in the desert. Cornelius, *Four Generations of Norteños*, 64. Perhaps more distressing is the real and perceived risk of sexual assault. Sheridan, *I Know It's Dangerous*, 55. This adds increased importance to the coyote selection for female crossers, a selection in which male partners like Javier are typically very involved and one that is heavily influenced by already-established "migrant social networks." Zavella, *I'm Neither Here nor There*, 74.

stealthily crept beside her. *Se están acercando. Sí, estoy segura.* Sole began to feel her heart rate accelerate as her body further tightened into a compact coil.

Farther down the wash, where the rock formation curved inward in its serpentine layout, Sole thought she discerned the vague outline of a figure. It was standing on two feet, so it had to be a person. Or two people. Her eyes narrowed into a squint in an attempt to sharpen the focus on them. The lack of light had caused her to miscalculate. There was a third figure a few feet behind the others. As they drew closer, Sole noticed how surprisingly soft their steps were; that they made no sense because they did not grow louder as they approached her, leaving her to wonder how she had been able to hear them from so far away in the first place.

¿Hay alguien allá? Sole remained silent, incredulous at actually hearing a human voice. As they made their way towards her, she no longer had a choice. A whisper was all her throat could manage. No sound came out at first. *Si, estoy acá.* Sole could see them more clearly now. They were three men, she was sure, even though she could not see their faces. There should have been enough moonlight to see them, but they were standing just within where the shadow reached from the opposite side of the wash.

The men stopped in their tracks, struggling to see where the voice had come from. ¿Dónde? Pushing her arms against the rock to lift up, Sole managed to slowly uncoil herself and balance unsteadily on her numb legs. *Acá.* Sole winced and turned her head as they stepped closer and one of the men drew a flashlight to examine her. ¿Qué haces acá solita? His voice was jarring after so much silence. Sole's throat would still only allow a whisper. She recounted how she had been traveling in a large group of 25. Or maybe 30. How a helicopter from la migra had found them; how she had become

confused and couldn't remember in which direction she had seen some of the others run. How she had wound up alone. Alive, but alone. At least she hadn't been caught, one of them reminded her. Sí, por lo menos.

The one with the flashlight turned it off and spoke again. He explained how they too had been separated from their groups. He, Ricardo, and the man to his left, Armando, had been walking for two days when they had come across Ramón, who had also been separated from his group. Ramón remained a few feet behind Ricardo and Armando, silent. Sole peered between their shoulders to see him more clearly, but his face was still in the cover of the shadow. Sole was at least able to notice that Ramón was by far the tallest of the three. He didn't carry a backpack with him like the other two. Sole suddenly became aware that she had locked eyes with him and quickly looked away.

¿Quieres acompañarnos? Ricardo's voice sounded steady, reassuring. There was a surprising nonchalance to it that she found welcoming. He explained how he had been a guide a couple of times and thus had a pretty good idea of how to get to their pick-up site at Castle Rock. It wouldn't be too far of a walk, but then again, distance was relative, wasn't it? Sole felt a wave of relief begin to emanate from her gut, even though she had no idea where Castle Rock was or who would be picking them up. Armando reached into his backpack and pulled out a bottle of Gatorade. No demasiado, eh. Sole drew two long sips and returned it to him. Síguenos, vamos a buscar un sitio para dormir.

Ricardo led the way, followed by Armando. It took Sole several minutes to travel a few feet, but she could already feel the effect of only those two sips of Gatorade in her body. It was Ramón who lingered behind everyone else. ¿Vienes? Ramón stepped beside Sole, shooting her intermittent stares. His eyes resembled those of a feral cat. Sole

glanced at her feet and wondered if that was what she would have become after a few more days alone there. She inched closer to Ricardo to escape Ramón's unsettling glances. Even though partially obscured by his deep olive complexion, Sole noted that Ramón's face was flushed. His brow sloped inward, forming a deep crease in his forehead. It made her uneasy. Perhaps it was just the stress of being left behind that still overwhelmed him.

*¡Ay!* In her relief, she had forgotten to express her gratitude. Muchas gracias por encontrarme y ayudarme. Ricardo responded that it was nothing; that those in their situation had to help one another out. That the desert could be such a lonely, spooky place. Hay algo extraño en estas tierras, ¿no? Sole laughed a little. Sí, hay mucho extraño. She thought about sharing with them the sense she had had of being followed, how the shadows had seemed to come to life, but she held back. Her steps were beginning to feel more natural.

Sole wasn't sure how long or far they had walked when Ricardo turned to face the group. Paramos acá. She hadn't even noticed, but they had made it out of the wash and had come upon open terrain. Ricardo set his backpack down in a flat area that sloped downward under an isolated cluster of trees. They passed around the Gatorade for everyone to have a couple of last sips before going to sleep. He and Armando pulled two worn sheets out of their backpacks and spread them out over the ground. Para proteger contra las hormigas. Sole was baffled by her luck. It was clear that these two knew exactly what they were doing. There was even enough room for all four of them to sleep on covered ground without crowding one another. Lack of privacy did not bother her as much as it normally would have. Armando sat down on the edge farthest from her.

Ricardo sat down next to him. Sole wanted to sit next, but Ramón beat her to it. Ricardo smirked. ¿Qué caballero, eh? Sole felt guilty, but she didn't want to sleep between the other edge and Ramón. It seemed that she didn't have a choice.

As the three of them began to lie down, Ramón remained sitting. ¿Vas a dormir? There was a pause. Sí, en un rato. It was the first time Sole heard him speak. His voice was surprisingly deep but faint. She didn't feel comfortable with the idea of the three of them sleeping while Ramón remained awake, but she felt comforted by the presence of the other two, or as comforted as she could feel sleeping beside three strange men in the desert. Sole laughed a little to herself. What would her mother think if she were to see them? The ground's thick moisture seeped through the sheet. She preferred this to sleeping with ants; of that much, she was certain.

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Sole opened her eyes. She hadn't even remembered falling asleep. She closed them again. She heard a peculiar sound that she did not recognize. *Espera...* she wasn't sure that it was a sound. Sole had confused her senses. It was not in fact a sound but a feeling: Ramón violently shaking her shoulder. ¿Qué haces, Señ-

Ramón didn't let Sole complete her sentence. He was whispering so frantically, she could scarcely make out what he was saying. Escúchame, niña. Tienes que salir de acá. Ahora. Sole was dumbfounded. She had heard of this happening to those that went too long without water on the journey but had never actually witnessed it. *¡Se ha vuelto loco!*<sup>6</sup> Sole thought it best to wake Ricardo and Armando but couldn't figure out a way to get around Ramón. He stood up and forcefully pulled Sole up with him.

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<sup>6</sup> Those who have traveled in the desert for long periods of time can attest to heat and dehydration's effect on one's mental faculties. Judith Hellman provides the personal account of a migrant who related to her



¡Confía en mí, niña! Ellos no son...no son lo que parecen. ¡Vete ya! Sole felt her heart race. The hair on her arms stood up. The moonlight hit at such an angle that for the first time in days, she saw her own reflection in his eyes. She opened her mouth to call out Ricardo's name when suddenly, she heard an unfamiliar popping noise. Ramón let out a deep groan and grabbed his head as he fell to his knees. Sole stared. Ricardo stood behind him. The light was so clear that she could easily read the darkly lettered Yankees on his mud-covered gray t-shirt. Yes, she could see clearly now. The pistol he held in his right hand was partially coated in a fluid.

Sole didn't remember thinking in that moment. Her limbs seemed to act without direction from her mind, propelling her forward at the speed of a cheetah. The blood to her legs was flowing with force now. She could hear their screams closing in on her. ¡Armando, ven! ¡Está por allá! She could hear Ramón's voice too, yelling distantly. ¡Corre, niña! ¡Corrrrrrrrrrrrrreeeee! Sole stopped for a split second to catch her breath. *Ay, no.* She was back in the wash. Though she wasn't sure if it was the same wash because all of the rocks looked the same as all of other rocks she had seen, leaving nothing in sight that was remotely recognizable or distinguishable. Her previous concern over rattlesnakes, scorpions and tarantulas had dissipated as she lunged herself up and over those rocks, scraping her arms and banging her knees. Sole's feet paused abruptly while she considered whether or not she should choose a side of the wash, either right or left, rather than the middle: she was more visible in the middle, of that she was certain, so she should choose a side, either right or left, and choose it quickly, either right or left,

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how members of his group became "medio loco" and had "no sense at all" after two days in the heat without water. Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants*, 90. Krista Schyler further relates how a friend of hers biking through the Sonora Desert was "driven momentarily mad from the insane heat" and actually began to eat his map. Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 14.

because she could hear his footsteps now, and she was more visible in the middle so she should get out of the middle and choose a side, very quickly, either right or left. *Por allá. Sí. Mejor.* The limits of those two sips of Gatorade were beginning to manifest themselves in her weakened knees. *Abajo. Mejor.* She should at least get closer to the ground to avoid detection; that was a good idea. *A la derecha. Mejor.* Something strange was happening to those rocks, and it was the rocks this time instead of the shadows; they had begun to move. They were closing in on her from both sides, making a tight tunnel of hardened earth around her, sucking the oxygen out while she was still choosing either right or left.

Sole suddenly couldn't move her legs. It was too late. He hadn't looked very strong before. Now his arms were a gorilla's instead of a human's. Ricardo thrust her backwards, pulling her by her hair, and slammed her body with so much force against the rigid, uneven floor of the wash that she thought she heard her head crack. She tried to squirm out from underneath his damp, thick, dead weight dropped on top of her, but it was a futile effort.

¡Ay! Puta chingada! Sole's body was now operating outside of her mind. She had bitten his face without realizing, and she could taste that filthy metal-like residue of blood like dirty coins in her teeth and tongue. His fist was like a boulder landing on her eye. She could feel his sweaty hand and untrimmed fingernails digging into her as she writhed frantically underneath him. Her heart was leaping out of her chest, punching into his as she squirmed and writhed with greater force as she realized that his was beating almost as rapidly as hers. *¿Es así, Dolores?* So that was what it felt like, the desperate need to escape one's physical body, to give anything to occupy the body of another person rather

than her own. She was repeating it so loudly in her mind that it blocked out the sound of her violently pulsating heart shaking the entirety of her body: *Dios te salve Maria, Dios te salve Maria...*<sup>7</sup>

Inexplicably, Sole perceived two small but piercingly bright lights penetrate her tightly sealed eyelids. She felt the sudden relief of the weight of his body being lifted off her, followed by an unnatural scream. It did not sound like the scream of a human. She had seen a group of kids torturing a pig once; her worst memory from her childhood. Its scream had been so shrill, so cutting and penetrating that she had urinated on herself while running home to get her father. The scream stopped. It was replaced by a large, deep cracking sound, like a bolt of lightning snapping the thick branch of an oak tree.<sup>8</sup>

Then the light thud of what sounded like listless limbs quietly collapsing against a rock.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Amnesty International, an estimated six of every ten migrant women from both Central America and Mexico are sexually assaulted at some juncture of the journey, either in Mexico or once they have crossed into the U.S. Migrant women are thus “the most vulnerable of the wayfaring peoples desperately searching for a better life.” Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 206. It is not uncommon for coyotes to be the perpetrators; Boehm relates the harrowing account of a migrant woman who was gang-raped by coyotes while they were all being tracked by a Border Patrol helicopter. Boehm, *Intimate Migrations*, 91. In the training of their volunteers, No More Deaths underscores the prevalence of migrant rape and how women on the Mexican side are often encouraged to take birth control pills before embarking on the journey as a precautionary measure. This demonstrates one of the detrimental consequences of increased reliance on the coyote industry, particularly for women; coyotes are a “varied but often dangerous group.” Sheridan, *I Know It’s Dangerous*, 96. Boehm also links these instances of sexual violence to the ways in which larger political and economic policies like Operation Gatekeeper and NAFTA are responsible for producing these personally traumatic experiences; in her example of the Mexican woman who was gang-raped by coyotes, she underscores how the presence of the U.S. state in the form of the Border Patrol helicopter and the construction of the clandestine crossing itself set the stage for the act of violence, much in the way that the construction of Sole’s crossing as illegal leaves her vulnerable to Ricardo in this chapter. Boehm, *Intimate Migrations*, 107. Boehm rightly concludes that in the final analysis, “The overlapping spheres of state power and intimate lives cannot be separated.” *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> Jaguars have extremely powerful jaws with the capacity to crush the shells of turtle and armadillo. Brown, *Borderland Jaguars*, 19. They typically attack by extending their paw over their prey’s head and pulling it all the way back so that the neck of the prey breaks; they are strong enough to do this to cattle. *Ibid.*, 53. This contributes to the jaguar’s image as “a metaphor for power, strength, and predatory behavior.” *Ibid.*, 67. The jaguar is the largest cat in the Americas, and its style of attack as a lone hunter by “leaping for the head of its prey,” served as a strong symbol for those societies that performed sacrificial beheadings. Benson, Elizabeth P. *Birds and Beasts of Latin America*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1997), 46. Though they are the third largest cat species on the planet behind lions and tigers, they have the strongest jaw in relation to head size of any cat species. “Capture and Immobilization of Free-living Jaguars,” International Veterinary Information Service, accessed January 18, 2013, [http://www.zoo.ba.gov.br/biblioteca/veterinaria/capture\\_immobilization\\_jaguars\\_panthera\\_onca.pdf](http://www.zoo.ba.gov.br/biblioteca/veterinaria/capture_immobilization_jaguars_panthera_onca.pdf).

Sole kept her eyes sealed shut. She could feel the earth beneath her bare skin becoming soaked. She thought she could discern the faint patter of light footsteps brushing against the scattered twigs and brush over the rocks. They faded and then stopped some distance away from her, leaving her in silence with her eyes still plastered shut.

She had no idea how long she had lain alone when she discerned the definitive sound of footsteps approaching. ¿Niña? So...Sole? It was the voice of Ramón. ¿Estás allá? Estás bien? Sole couldn't find her voice. Her eyes still closed, she pressed her left hand against the ground and lifted herself halfway up. She turned her head to the left. With her right hand, Sole pulled her eyelids open. Ramón stood a few feet away on top of a rock to the left of the center of the wash. The moonlight illuminated his body, exposing his blood-stained sweatshirt. His face was no longer flushed but two shades lighter than before. He was staring down to his right. Sole followed his gaze.

There lay Ricardo, lifeless. His head was preternaturally twisted and extended from the right of his neck, though still attached to it in a bizarre, altered shape. It was lying in a thick pool of blood. His upper right shoulder and face were corrugated by deep gashes slashed cleanly and evenly in red, gently oozing grooves, as if someone had sliced him open with a knife in four clean strokes with the deftness and precision of a surgeon. Sole had been unable to open her eyes, and she was now unable to close them. She and Ramón fixated on the body.

¿Fuiste tu? Sole and Ramón finally tore their eyes from the body to look at one another, as if both surprised to hear the words escape from her so effortlessly, without hesitation. Ramón had a more difficult time. El otro sí, pero esté...esté no fui yo. Ramón suddenly turned his back. Whether it was to give her a few moments of privacy or

because he could no longer tolerate the horror, Sole wasn't sure. She started to pull up her jeans. Her pants brushed against the interior of her thighs, stinging them as she slowly slid them over her legs. She moved slightly to the right to avoid staining them in the small puddle of urine beneath her. She looked down as she slid to the side of it and noticed drops of red mixed in with it. She could feel a dull throbbing in her abdomen, interlaced with intermittent sharp pains as she clung to the rock to her left and pulled herself into a wobbly stand. She kept her eyes away from...it, as she hobbled towards the rock where Ramón stood, his back still facing her. It would only take a few days for the desert to consume Ricardo, as it had countless others; for the heat to melt his already rotting flesh so that he would become an indistinguishable part of the earth on which they and others soon after them traveled.<sup>9</sup> With every labored step, the acute pain in Sole's abdomen grew worse. She and Ramón leaned on one another for support as they slowly limped out of the wash. They didn't speak for a while.

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<sup>9</sup> Estimates vary slightly, but the recorded migrant death toll between 1995 and 2004 was 3,181. Zavella, *I'm Neither Here nor There*, 78. Schyler places the death toll above 5,000 through 2010. Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 203. Sheridan estimates that on average, at least one undocumented migrant dies every day while attempting a clandestine border crossing. Sheridan, *I Know It's Dangerous*, 1. Of course, scholars stress that such statistics should be received with caution because they only account for those whose remains are actually discovered and documented. Hellman places the recorded death rate at an average of 400 per year, "if we count only those cases where, rather than being devoured by scavenger animals, the remains are actually recovered." Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants*, 91. Or those that decompose rapidly in the heat. Amnesty International, *In Hostile Terrain*, 22. Revered John Fife, co-founder of No More Deaths, insists that the number of officially documented migrant deaths is drastically lower than the number of actual deaths; many remains are never found because the Sonora Desert "cleanses itself quickly." Many Border Patrol agents share this perspective, "What I'm wondering about is how many dead people there are in this desert that we'll never know about." Broyles, *Desert Duty*, 185. Furthermore, while the estimated number of undocumented crossings has drastically decreased since 2007, the number of recorded migrant deaths has remained steady, which has led NMD volunteers and scholars to conclude that undocumented crossings have become more dangerous than ever as a result of increasing enforcement. The total number of Border Patrol apprehensions in 2011 was 327,577 versus 2007's 858,638. However, Border Patrol recorded 368 migrant deaths in 2011, compared to 398 migrant deaths in 2007. Moreno, *Huffington Post*.

### 3. Farther South

Alex! Jacob snapped his fingers in her right ear. The sound reverberated down her ear canal with such force that it caused a brief pain in her forehead. His voice was a whisper. There's one over there... Alex was still in a trance. She couldn't get the image from earlier out of her head. She had witnessed worse horrors before, but she couldn't shake this one. It had been on the side of the road that morning when she was driving them to the museum. You look like you haven't slept in a year, Jacob had laughed, his mouth full of In-N-Out hamburger. She had shot him a look of disgust. Who eats hamburgers at 9 am? It's not even lunch time. Her appetite tended to be more assertive at night. The smell of meat, though, was causing a stirring in her stomach- Stop the car! Alex slammed on the breaks. What? What is it? Jacob swallowed. Pull over! Alex jerked her car to the right and pulled the keys out. This was likely to be one of Jacob's many trivial roadside observations that he, and he alone, found fascinating enough to warrant a stop on the side of the road when they were already late.

Jacob had stepped out of the car and had crouched over a tiny object a few steps farther behind them slightly to the right of the road. Alex remained in the car, tapping her head back and forth against the steering wheel. She was resting in a lazy slouch, her limbs completely enervated from the night before. Her jaw bones were particularly sore; she could make out the slight appearance of bruises lining both sides of her cheekbones as she stared at herself in the rearview mirror. Alex, come over here. She groaned, swung open her door and dragged her feet towards him. What? She leaned over Jacob from

behind. It was lying helplessly there before them, flapping its left wing in a frenzied, unnatural rhythm. Its right wing was caked in boiling tar. The ill-fated creature was struggling frantically to wrest itself from its prison, but it was too late; its wing had become irreversibly, inextricably intertwined with the black, malodorous viscous so that it now formed a part of its existence; so that it could no longer be separated from it without tearing off its wing and killing itself. They were frozen above it in silence, watching as the sun fried its body alive. Jacob stepped off the side of the road and returned with a large rock. He towered over it for a second of hesitation, crouched down, lifted the large stone above him and then let it drop in a methodical, controlled succession of movements that culminated in the swift, decisive blow that freed the creature from its futile struggle by transforming it into a smashed, boiling blob of melting debris.

He stood up quietly. Alex's eyes were stinging. Jacob had turned towards her, squinting his eyes to read her face. He had settled his hand on her right shoulder, provoking an involuntary flinch. I had to put it out of its misery. Alex didn't say anything. She wanted to move out from under Jacob's hand; that innocuous touch that was often accompanied by long, studious gazes she found unsettling because she was never fully certain of what they conveyed. She worried that his hands and eyes might hold the detective, penetrative power to see through her and expose her; to learn what lay beneath. He didn't release her shoulder from his steady, assured grip that attempted to provide mutual solace; to bridge their shared horror so as to make it ever slightly more tolerable. He sighed. How do you think it got trapped in there in the first place? Alex wriggled her shoulder out from under his hand and walked back to the car in silence, pointing her head down and pulling her large floppy sunhat with the oddly pointed brim

as far over her face as possible to hide her wet, burning eyes and the red splotchy rash she could feel spreading across her cheeks.

Another snap of Jacob's fingers in her ears reoriented her to the present. She became alert. Okay, everybody be very, very still. Let's see if we can get closer! Alex took a few steps back. I don't see it-Shhhhh! Jacob's short whisper. Total silence! We don't want to scare it. The others crept slowly towards it across the sea of green. Two weeks earlier, grass would have been completely alien to that terrain. The rains had startling transformative power.

It was too late. Its tall, awkward ears had detected their presence, and they watched as it disappeared behind the tall brush. Crap! One of the campers shrugged in frustration. We haven't seen a single animal today besides that one. Jacob smirked and gave Alex an unfamiliar, firm, brisk slap on the back. We have Ms. Hernández here to thank for that. She's a certifiable scarecrow! His laugh revealed an unusual hint of scorn. We're not likely to see any more jack rabbits until she takes a snack break inside. We'll have to resign ourselves to more cactus sightings! Alex released a forced laugh in an attempt to mask how his comment had resurfaced a deep wound in her. She had never gotten along well with animals. She loved most of them, but it was a decidedly unrequited love. As a child, she had had to stop spending the night at two different friends' houses because their dogs and cats became so agitated every time she set foot in the house. She felt her eyes burn a little again as she remembered her friend Kelly's painfully accurate assessment. You're such a freak! Who's hated that much by a yellow lab? They love all people...



One of the campers, Henry, had moved closer to Alex. I'll stick with you when we do the desert hike then. You can keep the rattlesnakes away from me! Jacob turned around. What's wrong with rattlesnakes? His voice was louder than usual. They're so ugly and scary! And mean! The smirk returned to Jacob's face. You can't hold that against them; we don't choose the bodies we live in. Besides, they're only mean if you step on them. Henry held his ground. I don't care; I don't want to see any, and I'm sticking with her. Alex looked above her to her right. The sky was shifting into an unsettling blend of gray and dark green, a positive sign that a storm was imminently coming to her aid to forcibly remove the possibility of an afternoon hike.

Alex didn't mind being around children. Plus, helping with Earth Camp would enable her to take one less class in the fall when she would be completing her major in the University of Arizona's Natural Resources Wildlife Conservation & Management Emphasis Program.<sup>1</sup> She liked the desert. She just detested the sun. And the daytime heat.<sup>2</sup> Alex's pediatrician had once told her father that she had an abnormally high basal body temperature, about three degrees above the average temperature for a human. However, her skin burned badly in the heat and in the presence of the sun. She felt more in her element at night.

One of the other campers, Luis, was staring at her with squinted eyes in a look that conveyed suspicion. Your last name is Hernández? Mine too. Where are you from? This was a question Alex had been asked many times by many different people. *Your* last

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<sup>1</sup> "Earth Camp," Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum, accessed March 3, 2013, [http://www.desertmuseum.org/earthcamp/earthcamp\\_ms\\_2013.php](http://www.desertmuseum.org/earthcamp/earthcamp_ms_2013.php).

<sup>2</sup> Schyler provides a vivid and accurate description of a July day in the Sonora Desert, before a storm breaks. She writes, "The July sun boils on bare skin, making it scream for shade, and everything, from cactus to reptile to human creature, shrinks under its searing stare." Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 10. In my own experience, even with layers of sunscreen, I felt like my skin was on fire while walking those trails without shade. Schyler accurately concludes that for anyone standing in the Sonora during a sunny day without shade "it is literally painful to exist." Ibid.

name is Hernández? Both of my paternal grandparents were from Mexico; one from Jalisco and the other from Mexico City. The boy studied her with a slightly quizzical expression. That's cool.

There was much that Alex found strange about her body, including her skin. Her dad's father had been very fair-skinned, but abuelo, her mother's father, had had a very deep olive complexion. She certainly didn't envy abuelo's experience with having dark skin. How had she read it explained so perfectly once...*the predicament of living in dark skin*.<sup>3</sup> She would not have wanted to trade places with him. It was more that her own skin didn't make any sense. She had studied biology. Since one of her grandparents had had skin that dark, she should not be as ghostly pale as she was. And she shouldn't have red hair when none of her parents or grandparents had it. There were certain aspects of genetics that didn't make sense.

Abuelo had worked as a bracero in Texas in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> He died when she was five, but her grandmother would recount to her his harrowing experiences there, how he

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<sup>3</sup> Lewis, David Levering. *W.E.B. Dubois: the Fight for Equality and the American Century*. (New York: H. Holt, 2000), 39.

<sup>4</sup> The Bracero Program, in effect from 1942 to 1964, was a bi-nationally negotiated system of imported labor in which Mexican laborers were contracted by the United States government to work on U.S. farms. As Boehm notes, the Bracero Program had a profound legacy for more contemporary migrations; the U.S. government exclusively contracted male laborers, solidifying a tradition of mostly male out-migration from Mexico. Boehm, *Intimate Migrations*, 15. Michael Snodgrass adds that the program also established a precedent for out-migration from particular regions of Mexico, like Durango, Zacatecas, and Jalisco, which remain predominant sending states today. Overmayer-Velázquez, *Beyond la Frontera*, 80. As Mae Ngai assesses, the Bracero Program further exerted a profound influence on contemporary migrations from Mexico in its creation of "a Mexican migratory agricultural proletariat, a racialized, transnational workforce" that "remained external to...[the U.S.] national body." While the dynamics of the program were complicated, and while many former braceros themselves defend the program, Ngai categorizes the program as whole as a system of "imported colonialism" that entailed "the subordination of racialized foreign bodies...excluded from the polity by both law and by social custom." She concludes that this system of imported colonialism still informally characterizes U.S. dependence on Mexican migrants, with the continued social exclusion and now firmly legal exclusion of undocumented Mexicans. Ngai, *Impossible Subjects*, 128-129, 166. Overmayer-Velázquez, *Beyond La Frontera*, 81. Deborah Cohen adds that the Bracero Program initiated what is now a deeply entrenched pattern of U.S. growers courting the labor of Mexican migrants "even as they are the objects of derision and nationalist fears," underscoring the contradictions that have plagued and continue to plague U.S. immigration policy, particularly with respect

was not allowed to eat at certain restaurants, how he was beaten up twice, one of those times leaving him with a broken rib.<sup>5</sup> If everyone was so mean to Mexicans like abuelo in grandmother's town, how did grandmother know to be nice to him? Alex laughed to herself as she recalled asking her father that as a child. They were in love. When she was older, Alex realized how the story didn't really make sense. Her grandmother's family had renounced her after she announced her decision to marry him. And they had only dated for two months. Her first year of college, Alex learned how rare it was for braceros to remain in the United States. Even more rare for one of them to date a white woman from the United States.<sup>6</sup> She had revisited the subject with her father not very long before. His mother-in-law had related to him that it had been simply a matter of chemistry, something that was not so easy to understand. That she and abuelo had always been preternaturally drawn to one another by an intense, inexplicable attraction. That love is not something that necessarily follows logic.

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to migrants from Mexico. Cohen, Deborah. *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 3. Looking beyond racist attitudes towards braceros at the ground level, the U.S. government's own policies towards braceros reflected the way in which these laborers were subordinated to and excluded from the U.S. "national body" in Ngai's lens. Upon entering the United States to work on agricultural farms, Mexican men had to wait in line, naked, to receive a medical exam that screened for contagious diseases. Overmayer-Velázquez, *Beyond La Frontera*, 90. Before receiving their contracts, their bodies were fumigated for delousing. Ibid. Living and working conditions for braceros were abysmal with overcrowded barracks, physically demanding labor, and poor food. Ibid., 91. The Bracero Program's influence on the construction of Mexican migrants as "external to the national body" is still present in the "deterrence by death" philosophy that places Mexican and Central American migrants in danger: as Boehm reiterates, undocumented migrants are "constructed as noncitizens...[thus] their safety is not understood as the responsibility of the state." Boehm, *Intimate Migrations*, 99.

<sup>5</sup> Snodgrass explains that the Mexican government became increasingly concerned over a plethora of reports of racial discrimination against braceros. This discrimination came in the form of "physical violence from nativist gangs" as well as the refusal to serve Mexican customers in restaurants, similar to the treatment of African-Americans in the Deep South. Overmayer-Velázquez, *Beyond La Frontera*, 87.

<sup>6</sup> Snodgrass adds that the men who comprised the bracero labor force were not expected by either the U.S. or Mexican governments to remain permanently in the U.S.; their length of residence and labor contracts were designed to be temporary and seasonal. Furthermore, two thirds were married and more than half were fathers. Since the program was exclusively for men, their wives and children necessarily had to remain in Mexico, keeping their familial ties firmly in Mexico. Ibid., 89. Thus, while millions of Mexican Americans in the present can trace their families' heritage to the arrival of their grandfathers from central Mexico, those that stayed in the United States like Alex's abuelo were a firm exception to the rule of return. Ibid., 80.

Alex didn't like to think about abuelo's first experience in the U.S. because it was painful to think about his suffering. Even though she had been so young when he died, she remembered him vividly and very fondly. She also felt that his presence was somehow still with her; or within her; that she had an almost visceral bodily connection to his ghost like a baby to its mother; as if all of the times that he had held her before he died had made a permanent impression in her body that would always remain a part of her.

Let's head in for lunch. They followed Jacob up the trail that led back to the museum. The clouds were encroaching upon them from all directions. It wouldn't be much longer. Along the way, they passed a stretch of grass completely coated in the discarded litter of travelers: shoes, backpacks, clothes, trash; the only visible traces of the existence of their owners that had swiftly crept along the trail like phantoms over and over again.<sup>7</sup> Sydney, the program director, was awaiting them in the Ironwood Terraces restaurant. How was it out there? Did you all see anything interesting? A mix of groans and shrugs responded in a cacophonous chorus as they all wearily collapsed in their seats. The sharply cool, artificial, air-conditioned air circulating through the restaurant in enthusiastic waves grazed their skin, soothing it like a potent emollient. Sydney examined everyone at the table. Goodness; everyone's so tired, and you've only been out there a couple of hours; you better eat and drink up for your hike later!

Jacob took a seat beside Alex. We caught a brief glimpse of a jack rabbit, but not much else. He pointed across the table. Jack claims that he saw a gila monster out there. Jack responded with a wily grin. I did! I swear! Jacob shook his head as he gulped from

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<sup>7</sup> The ubiquity of trash along frequently-traversed trails near the border in Arizona is striking. Particularly close to rendezvous points, there are so many clothes, shoes, backpacks, deodorant sticks, etc. that you can walk the trail without your shoes touching the actual ground.

his glass of water. They're underground almost 95 percent of the time and hate the heat. They're the most difficult creature to spot in the Sonora.<sup>8</sup> Then, as if suddenly struck by something that had arrested all other thoughts, Jacob's lethargic slouch rose into an energetically upright posture. Can anyone here think of another animal harder to spot in the Sonora? Alex felt a chill creep up her spine. She looked down at her menu. Jack was intrigued. Will you give us a hint? Jacob responded without hesitation. It's a highly endangered and highly exquisite creature. Jack had lost interest. No one attempted a response. It was clear to Alex that the silence stemmed from apathy rather than lack of knowledge.

The jaguar. Jack's interest was piqued again. There are no jaguars in Arizona. Almost no jaguars, Jacob corrected him. Do you know why that is? He commenced his usual sermon on the cat; how its habitat used to extend all the way up to the Sonora Desert. How human settlement and hunting, particularly at the end of the nineteenth century, had shifted the jaguar's habitat farther south.<sup>9</sup> How jaguars had actually never been very populous in the Sonora Desert, but the area had still comprised part of their

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<sup>8</sup> Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 21.

<sup>9</sup> Though they have always been more common in tropical environments, the range of the jaguar's habitat used to extend to the southwestern portion of the United States. In addition to hunting, the effects of human settlement, industrial agriculture, and mining over the last century and a half have all contributed to the erosion of the jaguar's habitat in its formerly northernmost stretches. Medellín, *El Jaguar en el Nuevo Milenio*, 319, 376. Schyler considers the erection of the border wall inimical to any meaningful effort to restore the jaguar population to southern Arizona and New Mexico. Their recuperation depends upon open passage that would facilitate mating opportunities with jaguars farther south in the Sierra Madre. Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 37. The presence of the border wall is already exacting a devastating toll on all of the wildlife of the area and the ecosystem as a whole; most of the wall reaches up to between fifteen and eighteen feet, rendering it impossible for most species to leap across. Schyler and others have observed and photographed javelina, cottontail rabbits, and whip snakes moving along the wall and Sonoran toads repeatedly trying to jump across until they died from overexertion. *Ibid.*, 142-144. This affects plant life as well; many species of cacti are dependent upon the open movement of javelina for seed distribution: if the corridor for javelina movement is severed, the range of several cacti species will shrink. *Ibid.*, 146-147. The further destruction of land for more roads and surveillance equipment will leave scars in the terrain that might never be able to be healed. *Ibid.*, 142. As Regan summarizes, the entire border enforcement project has wreaked havoc on the borderland terrains thanks to the walls and roads constructed to facilitate the movement of border patrol vehicles as well as the ubiquitous litter left behind by migrants that have been funneled into that terrain. Regan, *The Death of Josseline*, xxvi.

territorial range. How if it were ever to recover its habitat in the southwestern United States, open movement between north and south would be necessary. How it had the strongest jaw of all the cats of the Americas, so strong that it could crush the shell of a tortoise.<sup>10</sup> This was a speech Alex had heard many times before. Jacob had been researching the jaguar for his senior thesis in the same program as she. Not so much the jaguar itself, but rather the possibilities for the restoration of its habitat in Arizona and New Mexico.

Jack smirked. What's the big deal about restoring their habitat? There's nothing special about them. They're just big cats. In his typically theatrical fashion, Jacob responded by yelling blasphemy in an exaggerated huff and clutching his chest as if he'd been wounded by a bullet. Just a cat! He repeated it more slowly for dramatic effect. J-u-s-t a c-a-t! He turned towards Alex with imploring eyes that conveyed a desperate search for reinforcement to rescue those helpless children from their intolerable ignorance. Will you explain it to them, Alex? She responded with a shrug. I don't know what to say about them. It suddenly occurred to her in that moment that she had never actually uttered the word jaguar. Jacob could scarcely remain in his seat. His voice was booming. Jaguars are without doubt the most majestic, fantastic creatures of this hemisphere! They are not simply big cats, indistinguishable from any other old cat! Their beauty; their eyes; their unique history in Mesoamerica<sup>11</sup>-a loud rip through the air just outside of the windows

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<sup>10</sup> Brown, *Borderland Jaguars*, 18-19.

<sup>11</sup> Jaguars occupy a significant place in Mexican history and indigenous religiosity. Aztec leaders utilized jaguar imagery as a political symbol to demonstrate military prowess and political authority, donning capes and constructing thrones and pillows from jaguar hides. Brown, *Borderland Jaguars*, 74. Aztec, Mixtec, and Maya warriors all wore jaguar skins and used helmets and shields adorned with the image of the jaguar in battle. Benson, *Birds and Beasts of Latin America*, 46-47. Both Maya and Aztec rulers sat on jaguar thrones, and Maya rulers are often depicted on their thrones with a large "supernatural jaguar protector" standing behind them. Ibid. In addition to its significance as a pervasive political symbol, Benson states that the jaguar represents the most important shamanic animal in pre-Columbian and contemporary

interrupted the beginnings of what doubtless would have been an exceedingly long-winded, obnoxiously didactic monologue from Jacob. Well, so much for the hike.

They ate slowly so as to draw out the time as much as possible. During a brief window after one storm had dissipated, making space in the sky for the imminent arrival of another, they all scurried to the cavernous Earth and Science Center to leisurely expend the remaining afternoon hours. Alex and Jacob darted to her car after all of the children had been picked up at the end of the day. Alex! It was a voice she recognized, but she couldn't identify the face in the blinding rain. Alex, hey! It's Stephen! The three of them climbed into her car to escape the deluge. I'll only stay a second; I just wanted to tell you that we miss you! We haven't seen you at camp for a while. He turned towards Jacob who was seated in the front passenger seat and introduced himself. Alex is famous out at camp you know! She lifted a dying man into her car and brought him to us at 3:00 am a few years back. Jacob cocked his head to one side and shot her one of his curious, contemplative stares; the one she suspected had the power to make her skin transparent before his eyes. Alex shrugged quickly and reassured Stephen that she would be back soon to volunteer. Do you need a ride somewhere? No, no I'm good; I'm interning here

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indigenous religiosity. In shamanic rituals, the shaman consumes a psychoactive drug and is believed to be transformed into an animal in the sense that "he behaves in ways that are unnatural for a man." Ibid, 18. Transformation is a recurrent theme with an impressive history in Mesoamerica; jaguars figure prominently in this theme, as far back as the Olmecs, who embraced the concept of "jaguar form-changers" illustrated in sculptures depicting a man transforming into a jaguar. Miller, Mary and Karl Taube. *An Illustrated Dictionary of the Gods and Symbols of Ancient Mexico and the Maya* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1993), 122. After the Spanish conquest of Mexico, some Catholic priests claimed that "native sorcerers" held the power to physically transform themselves into animals, including jaguars, through a pact with Satan. Ibid. The notion of a "companion spirit" and "animal other" is another common concept in pre-Columbian spirituality; for the Maya, the jaguar was a popular companion spirit animal. Benson, *Birds and Beasts of Latin America*, 47.

this summer and still have some work to finish up. Well, hope to see you out there soon; you know that you're always welcome! He gave Jacob an awkward pat on the back. You too; we're always looking for new volunteers! He leaned in for an awkward hug with Alex and then clumsily exited the car to dart back into the museum.

Alex started the car. So he's from No More Deaths? Alex nodded. She pulled out of the parking lot and started down the road. And what, Ms. Hernández, may I ask were you doing driving out in the desert at 3:00 am a few years back? Alex remained concentrated on the road, straining to see the hood of her own car. I don't really remember. Just taking a drive I guess. Jacob's unrelenting eyes were glued to her. Just a drive? At 3 am? He released a sharp cackle and reached over to tap her forehead with his middle and index fingers. There's something mighty mysterious lurking in that head of yours, my friend. Alex pretended to be engulfed in her attempt to navigate through the deluge. How often do you volunteer with them now? I haven't for a while. God, I can't see anything. I'm going to pull over for a second.

They sat in silence for a while as the rain lashed at the windows in thick, blinding splats. Jacob's hand returned to her shoulder. Hey listen; I'm sorry I said that thing earlier...about the scarecrow. I didn't mean it. I guess that whole thing this morning got to me more than I realized. Alex shrugged. It's okay; I sort of am a scarecrow I guess. She forced a laugh. Animals seem to just have a natural aversion to me. Jacob cocked his head to one side and stared at her again. And why would that be? Alex shrugged and looked away from him. He removed his hand. The air was still impenetrable through the thick walls of rain, but she could discern the ever-visible green stripe with the bright



white background moving towards them rapidly from the opposite direction in a flash.

Then another.<sup>12</sup> Jacob sighed. Looks like they're on a chase.

He continued as if he were talking to himself. I'm not sure how I feel about the whole migrant-aid thing. Alex turned towards him. What do you mean? I mean, in your case, I can understand with your grandfather's experience. Even though you've never had to experience it, you felt close to him. But I just wonder what people get out of that, you know? He had begun to peel dead skin off his left arm, the remnants of a sunburn from the day before. It's like...you're helping people who are in such a shitty situation. And you're not in their shitty situation. The distance that that creates just seems-Alex had interrupted him. But we all need water. Jacob's eyes remained fixated on his task. Yeah, I know. It's just... I guess it just reminds me of that whole "white savior" thing. Something about it just seems a little bit... selfish?

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<sup>12</sup> One of the most striking features of Tucson and particularly Arivaca, the town outside of which the No More Deaths camp is located, is that border patrol trucks are everywhere. The ubiquitous presence of their vehicles, including the helicopters that consistently fly overhead, has led some No More Deaths leaders to describe Arivaca as a zone of paramilitary occupation. While many of Arivaca's inhabitants oppose No More Deaths and the presence of undocumented migrants, they equally oppose the militarized presence of the U.S. government in their community. Regan, *The Death of Josseline*, 92. As one local describes the town's transformation since the late 1990s, "Around here, it's 1984." Ibid., 93. The conspicuous and pervasive presence of Border Patrol in the Arizona borderlands south of Tucson is one hyper-visible marker of a space that Lawrence A. Herzog classifies as a "border zone," distinct from other sociopolitical spaces on either side of the border. Herzog identifies these border zones as "fields of confrontation" between the political, economic, and social "forces" of the two neighbors that transform the space of the border zone "as a place unto itself." He largely attributes this sociopolitical and cultural encounter/fusion to demographic changes resulting from decades of Mexican migration. Herzog, *Where North Meets South*, 136. Demographically speaking, the comparatively larger Mexican-origin population of Tucson relative to its representation within the overall U.S. population illustrates the potential for demographic influence in the development of these "confrontations." The overall Mexican-origin population of the U.S. represents 10 percent of the total national population and 63 percent of the total U.S. Hispanic population. Pew Hispanic Center. "The Mexican-American Boom: Births Overtake Immigration" (July 14, 2011) <http://www.pewhispanic.org/files/reports/144.pdf>, 4. The Mexican-origin population of Tucson represents 37.3 percent of the city's population and accounts for the majority of the city's 41.6 percent Hispanic population as of 2010. U.S. Census Bureau. "Profile of General Population and Housing Characteristics: 2010," accessed March 25, 2013, [http://factfinder2.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/DEC/10\\_DP/DPDP1/1600000US0477000](http://factfinder2.census.gov/bkmk/table/1.0/en/DEC/10_DP/DPDP1/1600000US0477000).

An awkward silence passed. Jacob placed his hand on her shoulder again. I guess it is different with what No More Deaths does. We do all need water in the heat. We are all human in the end. He laughed. Just fluid-filled biological creatures I guess that need more fluid to keep ourselves going. The rain finally softened. Alex started the car. No, I see your point too. Jacob had no way of knowing, but for Alex, it was a far more selfish act than he could fathom.

#### 4. Peculiar Tracks

They crouched down, waiting for the lights to pass. A la una... the green and white moved by at a snail's pace before vanishing behind the hill. Every time Manuel had closed his eyes over the last few hours, the green and white remained in amorphous blobs against the black backdrop of his interior eyelids. ¡Vámonos! They galloped towards the door, skidding along the gravel carelessly scattered across the ground beneath their feet. It was a shorter distance than it seemed, but they were heaving at the base of the steps. ¿Crees que hay alguien adentro? Manuel spat the words in a loud whisper between choppy breaths. ¿Cómo que si hay alguien adentro si no hay ni carro ni luz? Carlos glanced over his shoulder. No, no habrá nadie. Manuel crawled up the three steps leading to the house and reached for the doorknob. It was one of those doors with a window built in. ¡Ay! He jolted backwards, tumbling down the stairs. They could hear his bones make a crackling noise as he landed at the base of the short staircase.<sup>1</sup>

They were staring at him again, like they had stared at him the previous night, though none of them could be 100 percent sure that it had been the previous night as it had become increasingly difficult to distinguish one night from any other night between countless sunrises and sunsets indistinguishable from one another in their electric oranges

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<sup>1</sup> NMD sometimes gets water from a neighbor up the road who lets the camp use her hose to fill water tanks in an emergency, even if she is out of town. When we went to fill up some water containers one afternoon, we saw that the door to her house had been ripped off its hinges. Inside, the house was in complete disarray; the kitchen was covered with trash and spilt food and liquid; there were half empty bottles of alcohol on the living room floor, and one of the bedrooms had clothes strewn all over it. There was a child's room in which a surprise visitor awaited us; a rattlesnake sound asleep, coiled up near the bunk beds. While we had no way of knowing for sure whether it was migrants who had broken into the house, the fact that no valuables were missing and only basic necessities like food and clothing were taken suggested that whoever it was had been in dire circumstances. NMD leaders informed us that this type of occurrence is not uncommon in the area; another consequence of a policy that places migrants like Manuel, Javier, and Carlos in such desperate circumstances that they are reduced to animal-like behavior in their desperate need of food and water.

and blues engulfing the sky-except for that one evening however many evenings ago in which it was all pink, Manuel recalled that sky; he was certain that it had been all pink, as far as the eye could see-separated by some amount of hours, each hour indistinguishable from the previous hour except for the sun's slightly more aggressive presence that might warm up the ground a bit more at some hour late in the day that then gave way to explosions that then became darkness that all blended together in one long, continuous stretch of sticky, sweltering existence.<sup>2</sup> ¡Está allá otra vez! Manuel peered in the direction where he had seen the eyes in his reflection. There seemed to be nothing there, at least not that he could see. Carlos was impatient. ¿Qué, la bestia otra vez? ¿El tigre? ¿El fantasma? ¡Te has vuelto paranoico, te has vuelto loco!

Javier was more circumspect. He narrowed his eyes. Espera, puede que vuelvan... ¡Agachémosnos! They stumbled to the other side of the house and lay flat. No lights. No green and white. Manuel began to drift to sleep. No, no hay nada. Manuel didn't respond. The polite tap of Carlos's foot in his gut jarred him back to consciousness. Manuel scurried back to the door and began to throw the reduced weight of his body into it. He failed at first, despite the fact that he shoved himself against it with all his force. He turned to go into it with his right hip; Manuel was right-handed and tended to have greater control over the right side of his body; yes, he was more deft with his right side so he could better execute a precise movement of his right hip at a precise angle to maximize strength and aim with his more deft right side to break down the door, only his right hip had somehow become his left hip so that he spun in a circle to push his right hip into the door, but it kept being his left hip so he spun in a circle to the left

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<sup>2</sup> In July, the surface temperature of the Sonora Desert floor can reach up to 160 degrees Fahrenheit. Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 19.

hoping to finally land with his right hip at the right angle to break down the door-  
¡Muévete, que lo hago yo! Carlos pulled Manuel off the step and kicked at the door. His strength was surprising. After only two kicks, the door came all the way off its hinges.

There was silence between them for a long while after that. Manuel commenced with the pantry while the other two hovered around the refrigerator. None of them felt the inclination to examine what it was they were shoving into their mouths like stray dogs rummaging through garbage cans in an alley. It had been three days since they had been left. Manuel moved to the refrigerator next. His movements seemed to be a peculiar mix of clumsy and decisive. He seized a gallon of milk and drew large gulps, spilling white streams down his chin. ¡Eh! He felt Javier's grip on his wrist. No demasiado a la vez. Javier's last meal had been a box of animal crackers a day and a half before, but his mind had miraculously preserved some degree of lucidity. Javier examined the gallon of milk more closely in the pitch-black to realize that it wasn't water. ¡Leche! ¿Qué haces bebiendo leche? Manuel looked at the carton. It was milk. He hadn't noticed.

They glanced at Carlos. Javier's words of wisdom had evaded him. He had his mouth placed directly underneath the faucet and didn't look like he would come up for air anytime soon. Manuel moved to the living room. The house was small. It was one of those houses without walls between the rooms so that there was no clear indication as to where the kitchen became the dining room and the dining room became the living room. He stopped. A pair of eyes behind a plastic frame caught his attention. They belonged to someone older. Even with the limits of his nocturnal vision and the smudges on the outside of the frame that slightly blurred the image, he was able to discern wrinkles along her forehead and cheeks. The brief reappearance of a stray ray of moonlight coated the

upper right-hand corner to illuminate locks of hair that appeared to be an unattractive blend of yellow and gray. Manuel walked to the table and quickly turned the frame over.

He located the bathroom a few more steps away. *Ay...* he turned the switch back off. His eyes could navigate more easily in the dark than under the piercing glare of the blinding light in the ceiling. His hand fumbled about in the medicine cabinet. He took a seat on the toilet. A layer of skin peeled off his right foot as he slowly slid off his mud-stained Nikes. It was as if the heat had melted the fibers of the shoe's insoles so that they had fused with his skin and become part of his body that he was now tearing off himself.

He removed his socks. Or what used to be his socks. Six days of traveling had transformed them into tatters of blood-soaked cotton, attached to one another by threads as thin as dental floss.<sup>3</sup> The soles of his feet were coated in blisters. Not like the ones he used to get from running or playing chase with the neighbors. He couldn't recall the names of his neighbors at that moment, despite the fact that they had played every afternoon together almost every day of his childhood, but he was sure that when they ran, they ran hard and long, although he was also sure that his feet had never looked like this. One heel was completely covered with a raised hill of pus. Smaller pockets of fluid adorned the outside of it. These contrasted with the barren landscape of the top of his right sole. Three layers of skin had been scraped off it to leave a thin, transparent film of epidermis over crimson fluid that pressed against it from underneath. It appeared poised and eager to burst through its flimsy flood wall with the slightest penetration from outside

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<sup>3</sup> No More Deaths leaders estimate that traveling from anywhere along the border between Sasabe and Nogales to Tucson by foot, assuming no complications like getting lost and/or falling ill, takes approximately seven days. They have had some patients who got lost and were on foot for almost two weeks before being found.

of it. His left foot had less variety. Just four expansive pockets of pus with an oddly shaped sliver of red enclosing the one just underneath his big toe.<sup>4</sup>

The ones on top of his toes looked different. They were smaller, deeper; as if a woodpecker had bored holes into them. Manuel dabbed a cotton ball with hydrogen peroxide from the kit and lightly grazed the sole of his right foot with it. A high-pitched shriek interrupted the robotic rhythm of the other two's continued exploration and devouring of the contents of the kitchen. Javier dropped his container of cold spaghetti and sprinted towards its direction. ¡Cállate, que nos van a encontrar! ¿Qué pasa? Manuel was hunched over, clutching his ankle. He could no longer touch the soles of his feet without inviting a searing pain that shot straight from his foot to his brain and back down again. ¿Qué has hecho? Javier knelt down beside him. Ya es demasiado tarde, voy a intentar venderlos. Dame eso. He lightly wrapped the white bandage around the foot where the three layers of skin had eroded. There wasn't enough for the other foot. Voy por zapatos. ¡Ojala viva acá un hombre! The bathroom had a second door that opened into a bedroom. Manuel felt lines of sweat begin to coat the skin of his forehead. His stomach made a peculiar rumble.

Javier returned with a pair of boots. Pruébalas. He dropped them beside him. También nos debemos cambiar de ropa. ¡Parece que el dueño de esta casa está bien gordo! Javier disappeared and then returned again, his arms overflowing with a pile of jeans, shirts, and jackets. Manuel quickly rummaged through the heap. He could feel something swimming in his stomach. The jeans were so large that he would need a belt if they were to be any use. He put on a new t-shirt and took a long black rain slicker. The

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<sup>4</sup> Blisters are basically a given during the journey, but NMD has had several patients for whom blisters were so severe that they were a completely debilitating obstacle. Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants*, 108.

boots were also too large. But he would not be able to continue without shoes. *Ay...* he couldn't even manage to slide the top of his wrapped foot into the small canyon that was the opening of the right boot. The white bandage thickly enclosing his upper foot like a thin shell could not serve as a substitute for his missing layers of skin.

¡Eh Manuel! Carlos had appeared in the doorway to the bathroom. His eyes were bloodshot. He held a bottle of whiskey in his right hand. With his left hand, he pointed an unsteady finger at Manuel. *La próxima vez que veas sus ojos, no seas tan cobarde. ¡Enfréntalo! Ponte de pie, date la vuelta y míralo justamente acá.* He pointed two fingers towards his nostrils, presumably aiming for his eyes. *¿Cómo que ya está así? Solo llevamos como quince minutos acá. Javier turned to look at Manuel. Necesitas agua. Llevamos ya una hora acá...*

Javier's body suddenly stiffened. Carlos's back straightened from its lazy slouch. *Démonos prisa, que tenemos que salir de acá.* Javier tossed a shirt at Carlos and changed out his own. He helped pull Manuel to his feet. Manuel quickly withered back into his resting place on the cold hard tile of the floor. His stomach grumbled more loudly. Sweat was emerging from his arms now. *¿Qué te pasa? Manuel began to shiver. He could no longer stand. ¿Cómo va a caminar? Carlos had dropped the bottle of whiskey at his feet. Javier looked down at Manuel. Tenemos que cargarlo. Carlos let out a loud snort. Ni hablar. Si lo llevamos, nos morimos. Javier stared at Carlos. Lo llevamos. Tan lejos como podamos. Ayúdame. Carlos reluctantly stepped into the bathroom. A la una...they lifted Manuel and lumbered their way through the living room that became the dining room that became the kitchen.*



The rumbling in Manuel's stomach was now a roar. ¿Qué le pasa? They made it out the front door. Or rather through the opening that the front door used to occupy. ¡Putamierda! Javier missed the second step and the three of them tumbled forward, hitting the base of the staircase with a loud, collective thud. It wasn't quite concrete, but the hardened base of that patch of Sonoran desert floor with gravel sprinkled on top did little to soften the blow. A strange shade of thick viscous emerged from Manuel's mouth. Carlos released a hiss of frustration in Javier's direction. ¡Lo dejamos! Sí, déjame. Manuel managed a labored whisper. The contents of his stomach were exiting his mouth in unpredictable spurts. It suddenly occurred to Manuel his error. Who knew how long the owners had been away. The milk could have been spoiled and he wouldn't have noticed.

No acá. Por lo menos te llevamos más adentro. Cerca de un sendero donde ojalá mochileros te encuentren. They lifted him and began their descent down the hill that led from the back porch of the house. Cuidado...seguro hay, hay...cascabeles por acá. Javier was panting between words. The night was still blanketed in clouds from the earlier storms, obstructing the penetration of moonlight. It was difficult to gauge where the path led. Their eyes were adjusted, but darkness always produces some degree of myopia. Sweat was dripping down Javier's and Carlos's foreheads. Espera, lo bajamos. Javier lowered him and turned Manuel's head so that the viscous could more easily flow from his mouth. It was exiting more sporadically than before and had a visibly thinner texture. But his sweat was more profuse. They lifted him and continued to stagger down the uneven, prickly terrain in the darkness.

¡Putá chingada! Javier tried to contain his voice in a whisper. He had stepped on one. It remained still. Está muerta. No, está dormida. They moved with Manuel several feet away and paused to catch their breath again, squatting down beside Manuel's body. Javier thought he noticed a slight movement out of the corner of his eye. He wiped the sweat from around it, but the dirt coating his fingers summoned tears that stung his eyeballs as they attempted to flush out the intrusion. His eyes narrowed to dim the pain and to try to see more clearly. Its tail had become erect, though the rest of its body remained motionless. Like a bolt of lightning exploding out of thin air, it erupted into a writhing, hissing frenzy. ¡Qué le pasa! Its sudden agitation seemed like a bizarrely delayed protestation of Javier's interruption of its slumber. It was difficult to be certain because of the lack of moonlight, but it also appeared to have adjusted its body so that it was hissing not in their direction, but rather the opposite of where they were squatting down.<sup>5</sup>

They continued, though they were now lugging the dead weight of Manuel's body so close to the ground that they were practically dragging him. Cuidado acá. They were traversing a patch of shrub where every plant was coated in thorns. They leaned down to lift Manuel's body higher so that they would not scrape against his stomach. One caught the left pant leg of Carlos, but he managed to steady himself without stumbling. They set Manuel down again in a small clearing. Javier climbed ahead a bit to study their surroundings. He returned sooner than expected. Hay un camino arriba. ¿Una carretera? No, solo un camino. Uno que está hecho de tierra. Manuel had emptied all of his stomach

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<sup>5</sup> Rattlesnakes are ubiquitous in the Sonora Desert and are often difficult to spot, which renders them dangerous desert companions for anyone, but especially for crossing migrants because it is easy to accidentally step on them, particularly at night. Hellman relates an illustrative account from a migrant interviewee, "Luckily, it was a clear night, which was just as well, because there were a lot of snakes, but I mean a lot!" Ibid., 89.

contents but was reeling from the cramps. His voice was scarcely audible. *Déjame acá. Ya no puedo más.* The lingering, potent residue of the green viscous on his taste buds kept the cycle of muscle contractions in his stomach and esophagus repeating. His body was now completely saturated in sweat so that he was wearing all of the moisture of his body on his skin.

Javier knelt beside him, panting like a dog. The clouds hovering over them in that moment were porous enough to permit a few scant, slender rays of moonlight to creep through. *Escúchame, Manuel. Te dejo una botella de agua que saqué de allá. Espera hasta que los calambres ya no sigan con tanta frecuencia. Bébela despacio, muy muy despacio.* Manuel was now rolling back and forth. He managed a mutter between strained breaths. *Gracias.* Carlos tugged on Javier's white extra-large t-shirt, already stained with sweat and dirt. *No tenemos otra opción. Continuemos.* Javier made a sign of the cross over Manuel's head.<sup>6</sup> *Estarás bien.* Javier lingered a moment.

The two men turned and continued up the hill, leaving behind their third companion. They crouched down by the wide dirt road and then darted across, leaping up the side of a rock formation and disappearing behind its ridge like ghosts. They shared the same thought, though neither said it out loud. *Se va a morir...*

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Adam was tapping his head back and forth against the seat. *Hmmm...* he dozed off again. Miller and Rodriguez, what's your location, over? *Ah.* He lowered the volume of

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<sup>6</sup> From her interviews with undocumented individuals who have crossed the border, Sheridan finds that many rely on faith "as a risk reduction strategy." As one interviewee relates, "Many people are dying because your mind is not your own. It becomes the mind of the natural elements that capture you, and you lose your mind with fear. Without faith in God, you are lost. If you cross with faith, God will get you out of there." Sheridan, *I Know It's Dangerous*, 44. At the NMD camp, some patients talked about faith as the decisive factor that spared them from death in the desert.

the radio and rolled down the window. Mario! Mario had disappeared behind the brush about five minutes before to relieve himself. Mario, come on! The tower caught some movement on the other side of Buenos Aires!<sup>7</sup> The air was heavy, sticky. He was the only person he knew who preferred the dry summer months, who didn't find monsoon season a welcome respite. It was still heat. Just stickier. And thicker. More suffocating. He made out a shadow approaching the truck. Mario? It vanished. Adam stepped out of the car. Mario! He placed his hand near his belt and stepped towards the direction where Mario had ventured off the trail. His ears detected the vague shuffle of feet. But not from the same direction where Mario had wandered away...<sup>8</sup>

Ha! He felt a pounce on his back as he tumbled forward. He sprang back to his feet, drawing the pistol from his belt. Mario stood behind him, a moronic grin extending ear to ear. What the fuck, man! Where did you go? Why didn't you answer me? Mario spat on the ground to his right. I have to show you something. I just saw the most huge-ass rattlesnake down the trail! Come see for a sec! Mario trotted towards the brush where he had disappeared the first time, whistling some tune Adam didn't recognize. He

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<sup>7</sup> In several locations throughout the Arivaca borderlands, there are towers with motion detectors encased in wired fences. This marks one element of Border Patrol's heightened security apparatus; floodlights, infrared cameras, "hidden electronic sensors," and "helicopter surveillance" are other features of enforcement through technology. Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants*, 87. According to Schyler, between 1993 and 2008, the US Border Patrol drastically expanded its number of field agents from 4,000 to 20,000 as part of its border enforcement initiative. Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 262. The requirements for eligibility to become a Border Patrol agent comprise the following; one must be a citizen of the United States; complete a Border Patrol exam; have working knowledge of Spanish or pass the portion of the Border Patrol exam designed to gauge one's capacity to learn Spanish; have a high school diploma or GED equivalent; pass a drug urine test; be under the age of forty; and pass an interview with a panel of agents. "Basic Qualifications and Medical Requirements for Border Patrol Agents," Customs and Border Protection, accessed March 1, 2013, [http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/careers/customs\\_careers/border\\_careers/application\\_process/basic\\_requirements\\_for\\_bp.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/careers/customs_careers/border_careers/application_process/basic_requirements_for_bp.xml).

<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, by 2008, 51 percent of all Border Patrol agents were Hispanic, the bulk of them Mexican-Americans. Hernández, *Migra!*, 227.

decided not to heed Mario's request, instead responding to the radio that they were nearby and would call for assistance if needed.

Adam always had mixed feelings about riding with Mario. Mario seemed to take the job too lightly. He always seemed more interested in scouting out animals than the job itself. *When he puts his mind to it, he's damn good though.* He could outrun a cheetah and outdrive a racecar. He also was the type of agent who had a natural gift for sniffing stuff out, like the way the old timers described how it was before all the technology came along.<sup>9</sup> And he was fearless when it came to the land. He wasn't afraid to get deep into the heart of that terrain. If the Sams can do it,<sup>10</sup> we sure as hell ought to be able to, was how he had explained it once to Adam.<sup>11</sup> Adam was still in his first year on the job. He supposed that in some ways, Mario was a role model for him. He thought about it some

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<sup>9</sup> As Broyles illustrates through interviews with Border Patrol agents, the technique of "cutting sign," or tracking movement in the desert by analyzing the terrain rather than depending on technology, is an acquired skill. Border Patrol agent Wendy Conde describes how she was taught, "You might not be able to see the footprint itself, but you can see the little rock turned up, or you can see the piece of grass bent. And then you find what they're guiding on, and you keep that in line." Broyles, *Desert Duty*, 184. In the decades following its establishment in 1924, the U.S. Border Patrol was a highly localized operation that underwent a process of increased federal involvement around the middle of the twentieth century. A constant factor in the transformation of a more decentralized and now extremely centralized direction and management of border enforcement has been the core objective of a "project of policing Mexicans in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands." Hernández, *Migra!*, 12-14.

<sup>10</sup> "Sams" refers to Samaritans, another migrant-aid group operating in the Sonora Desert that partners with No More Deaths. During my time there, a Border Patrol agent stopped two fellow volunteers to ask if they were "Sams." Migrant-aid volunteers and Border Patrol agents are generally not the best of friends. NMD volunteers have been arrested more than twenty-seven times by Border Patrol agents, typically for transporting sick migrants in dire situations to the hospital without contacting Border Patrol first so that the migrants could be taken into custody afterwards. Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants*, 111. NMD volunteers have always successfully pled not guilty in these cases, citing humanitarian aid as obligatory above all else. As one NMD defendant expressed his frustration, "To have my hands slapped by the same government that caused the problem [of migrant deaths] in the first place!" Regan, *The Death of Josseline*, 94. There have also been recorded instances of Border Patrol agents finding and slashing water gallons NMD volunteers leave on trails for crossing migrants. These acts mark an atypical degree of cruelty and animosity from Border Patrol agents but expose the sometimes hostile tension between migrant aid and border enforcement in the Arizona borderlands.

<sup>11</sup> From their interviews, Sisco and Hicken find that many migrants have the impression of Border Patrol agents as reluctant to traverse the more daunting and perilous trails of the Sonora, to "get that deep" into the terrain. Cornelius, *Four Generations of Norteños*, 58. NMD volunteers reach the same conclusion. While the main roads are covered with green and white border patrol vehicles and agents, the deeper you go into the wilderness, the fewer the number of Border Patrol vehicles there are, with the important exception of helicopters.

more while waiting .Yes, Mario was a decent guy in the end; a good guy to work with and ride with, despite his penchant for animal tracking and practical jokes.

After what seemed like an hour, Mario sauntered back with a look of disappointment. I lost it. There's too much grass right now, can't catch the impression of its body in the dirt! He climbed into the driver's seat and turned to face Adam with the same moronic grin. Well, shall we go hunting?<sup>12</sup>

They took off up the road, meandering up and down and up and down and up and down some more. Adam was having fun; riding when Mario was driving on the hilly terrain was like riding a rollercoaster. Mario drove on dirt roads as if there were no distinction between those roads and the interstate. Adam rolled down the windows. Mario's liberal interpretation of the posted "Slow" sign for vehicles generated refreshing gusts of wind that broke the heavy post-rain air as they soared through. Mario turned on the air-conditioner. The way you're driving, we've got enough cool air! Mario grunted and rolled up the windows. Cool, yes, but I want a burst of COLD! I also need music! He turned the radio on but then switched to CD mode. Hey Miller, you related to these guys? Mario always felt the need to repeat this question, knowing full well that the answer was no. He was singing at a shout. I heat up, I can't cool down, tap-tap, got me spinnin' ... round and round. Round and round, round it goes, where it stops, nobody knows. Every time you call my-

Watch out! It had suddenly appeared before them out of nowhere in the middle of the road. Mario slammed on the brakes. Its eyes locked with his, and the two appeared to

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<sup>12</sup> Border Patrol agent Joe Brigman affectionately describes his job, "Any time you can get paid to go out there and hunt human beings, catch dope, and at the same time be involved with Mother Nature, and watch the most beautiful sunrises in the world—and sometimes on the same shift you watch the sun go down—you've got the whole thing." Broyles, *Desert Duty*, 211.

be engaged in some sort of a staring contest. The creature was stoic; patiently holding its ground; confidently certain as to which of the two of them was the true intruder in the middle of that road. Think I should blow on the horn? Adam shot him a sharp glance. Are you crazy? You'll announce our presence for miles, and we'll never catch 'em! He leaned his head against the seat that was sticky with humidity. We're lucky it's not a moose. My first month, I worked the Canadian line, and there were moose everywhere. If it were a moose, we'd be dead right now. Mario continued to tap the steering wheel. A deer will attack you too if it has to. Adam wiped his forehead. Deer aren't dangerous. They won't attack. Mario was still singing at a lively pitch. They're not aggressive by nature, but if you corner one, you don't give it a lot of options. Adam rolled his eyes. The creature finally withdrew its steady, cavalier gaze from Mario and leapt a remarkably great height off the road toward some rocks. Before Adam's eyes had a chance to watch it disappear, Mario was already gunning it up the hill at full speed again.

This place is insane, I swear. A mix of Cinderella animals like deer and bunny rabbits sharing the same home with fucking rattlesnakes. Mario appeared not to be paying attention. I'm starving. Let's go hit McDonald's after we get 'em. Mario took his eyes off the road to look at Adam, without slowing down. Don't worry, Miller. We'll get 'em.

A couple of minutes later, Mario pulled over to the right side of the road and stopped the truck. He turned off the lights. This is the spot? Adam nodded. They stepped out of the car. Ah. What? Adam stuck his fingers inside his boot. I still haven't worn these new ones in yet. They're rubbing against my ankle. Shhh. Quiet. Mario squatted down and shone his flashlight close to the ground. Adam followed him with his flashlight. Closer to the ground, Miller! Adam lowered the light. You see anything? They

had lowered their voices to a whisper. No, no tracks yet. Let's walk down a bit more, we might catch a sign there. They strolled down the road. Mario squatted down again and shone his flashlight. Shouldn't we try to search off the road? Not unless something tells us to. Mario turned and grinned at Adam. He had placed his flashlight underneath his chin so that the light illuminated his copper skin to create a supernatural glow against a background of shadows. Unless you feel like wandering aimlessly in the dark, finding more rattlesnakes. Mario vacillated between serious and playful so unpredictably that he was impossible to anticipate.

Mario's back suddenly perked up while he remained squatted down. He shone his flashlight across the road. Did you hear that? Adam strained his ears. What? He took a step towards Mario. Don't move! Mario hissed back at him in a barely audible whisper. They were silent. Adam couldn't make out any sound. Mario remained crouched in the same position, so still that he could have been a statue. He stayed perched on his heels another moment before slowly rising. He motioned with his hand for Adam to follow. Adam felt his heart begin to accelerate. He always felt a twinge of excitement just before a chase.

Mario crept ahead off the road. Too far off the road. Adam lost sight of him. He was unsure as to whether or not he should call out to him. *If he's pulling another one on me, I'll kill him.* Adam started to move again, crossing the road and advancing into the brush where Mario had vanished, keeping his light low to the ground. He walked a few more steps. Some prickly pear cactus caught his pants, tripping him. His hand landed flat on top of a cluster of some sort of spiky plant that the rains had awakened from the



ground earlier that afternoon.<sup>13</sup> *Shit!* Thick red droplets began to leak out of the lines of his palms. He looked up. Mario was standing over him. He leaned down and pulled Adam to his feet. You okay? Adam attempted to brush the wet dirt off himself. Fine, just pricked my hand a little. Mario shone the flashlight on his palm. We've got some Neosporin and bandages in the truck, we can go back in a minute. Adam noticed an eager smile on Mario's face. What, did you find some tracks? Mario's grin widened. Awww yeah.

He skipped ahead, motioning for Adam to follow. They traveled only a few feet, when Mario stopped and squatted again, pulling Adam down with him. He shone his flashlight on the ground. Check these out. Adam looked. He wasn't quite sure what he was looking at. I don't see any footprints. Mario turned to him. Look closer. Adam got as low to the ground as he could. He cocked his head to one side. What the fuck? They...they look like paw prints! Mario's face was like a child's in a sea of presents on Christmas morning. What, you think a bobcat? A mountain lion? Mmm...hard to say. Mario often adopted a didactic tone when it came to matters of nature, though Adam was fairly certain that he knew less than his self-assured tone attempted to evince. They're fucking big though! Mario's voice thundered with excitement.

Adam looked around them with his flashlight. Any human signs? You think that this was the movement the tower caught? They were speaking at a normal pitch now. Mario lit a cigarette. Could be. Certainly wouldn't be the first time. He let out a laugh. Adam rested his shoulders. He felt a little disappointed that this was all it was. Mario put out his cigarette with his boot. You ready? Adam looked at him. Ready for what? To

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<sup>13</sup>As Schyler eloquently describes the transformative effect of summer storms in the Sonora Desert, "Whole communities of life here center their existence on the brief appearance of ephemeral pools that fill when summer rains arrive." Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 21.

follow the tracks. We should try to find what made them. Haven't you ever wanted to see a mountain lion? Adam hesitated. Let's radio back to them first-Mario cut him off, yelling back while gliding down the trail in strides that resembled the leaps of the deer from earlier. In a minute. We have to move fast if we want to catch a glimpse of the creature that left these behind! Adam loitered behind a moment before giving in and trotting to catch up with Mario. They both shone their flashlights on the ground, following the unusual tracks.

There were only a few patches of terrain that were not coated in the spontaneous grass the rains had pulled to the surface. And it was on those patches that the impressions from the feet of whatever it was were located. The sea of fresh grass surrounding those islands of imprinted dirt seemed oddly undisturbed. No broken brush, no stones out of place. Mario laughed. It's almost like it's challenging us to chase it. To face it head on. He's a brazen little motherfucker, this cat is! Adam began to walk more slowly, his body fidgeting. I don't know, man. Maybe we should just leave it be. He shone the flashlight around them. I have a funny feeling about this. Mario either hadn't heard him or, as was his customary habit, was ignoring him. He continued to creep along, advancing while crouched on his hind legs. Adam stopped following him to readjust his boot again. Mario vanished from sight once more. *That's it. I'm going back to the truck for some water and a band aid...*

Fuck me! Mario's yell shattered his train of thought. It was not a yell of excitement. Adam leaped in his direction down the trail. Mario! Mario, you okay? Adam was now running. He came upon Mario crouching over a large object. Was it the mountain lion? Had he killed it? Hey, what-

Adam stopped himself before completing his sentence as he arrived at Mario's location. It was not a mountain lion, but a body. A human body. It was lying there, motionless. Mario had two fingers placed on the man's neck, just below the chin. He stood up. He's got a pulse. A faint one. Radio it in, we need BORSTAR. With a helicopter.<sup>14</sup> Adam began to talk into the device attached to his shoulder. He approached Mario from behind. I don't get it; did it attack him? Mario crouched down over the body again and examined it with his flashlight. I don't think so. He doesn't have any marks. Adam walked past the body and shone his flashlight. But there aren't any more tracks. This is where the tracks stop! Mario was still examining the body. His voice was almost a whisper. At least the tracks on the dirt...

Adam lowered his legs to squat beside the body but immediately jolted away from it. Ugh, what the fuck is that smell? Mario seemed immune to it. His tone was expressionless. He soiled himself. Adam shone his light from farther back. What is that green shit around his mouth? Mario stood up again and looked at Adam with an expression of derision. What do you think it is? Mario lit another cigarette. Let's hope they get here fast; this dude doesn't have much longer.<sup>15</sup> They stood in silence for a while. Should we try to revive him ourselves? Mario shook his head. His mind seemed to be contemplating something other than the body that lay before them. Wouldn't do any

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<sup>14</sup> BORSTAR is the outfit of the Border Patrol responsible for responding to emergency situations. Agent Brigman relates the story of a migrant he found who had a faint pulse and green foam coming from his mouth. BORSTAR was able to revive him with an IV when they arrived on the scene. Broyles, *Desert Duty*, 204. "Border Patrol Search, Trauma and Rescue," U.S. Customs and Border Protection, accessed February 28, 2013, [http://www.cbp.gov/linkhandler/cgov/newsroom/fact\\_sheets/border/border\\_patrol/borstar.ctt/borstar.pdf](http://www.cbp.gov/linkhandler/cgov/newsroom/fact_sheets/border/border_patrol/borstar.ctt/borstar.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> As agent Kenny Smith explains, the difference between survival and death can come down to just a couple of hours, making the BORSTAR response time critical. Broyles, *Desert Duty*, 194.

good. He needs fluid, and he needs it fast. They were silent again. Do you think he's a first-time crosser? Mario was exhaling his smoke in a succession of ringlets. For his sake, let's hope so. If he makes it, I mean. Mario sighed. Poor bastard. Yeah, he is a poor bastard, but it was his choice to break the law.

Mario didn't respond to that comment. He climbed on top of the side of a rock and sat with his legs dangling idly. He patted the space beside him, his invitation for Adam to take a seat next to him. You should get off your feet; your boots will keep rubbing up against your ankles. We have to wait now to go back to the truck. Adam hoisted himself atop the rock, and they sat in silence again. Adam had difficulty tearing his gaze away from the body. Mario's voice thundered. Well, this is quite a spectacular evening we've had, my friend! We'll have to always remember this one. Mario tossed his cigarette to the ground and let out a laugh. Forget our fancy-ass infrared equipment, motion sensor-shit. We were led to a corpse by a fucking cat! Adam turned to look at him. He's not yet a corpse...

They sat in silence again. Adam thought he could detect the faint sound of a helicopter. Mario had lit another cigarette and was exhaling ringlets again. Nope, looks like he might make it after all. Mario hopped off the rock and began to do push-ups on the ground a few feet away from the body to kill time. I don't trust it. Mario's voice was strangely steady, as if he were doing the motion of the push-ups without actually exerting any force. What? What don't you trust? He continued his effortless up and down movement in a steady, fluid rhythm. I don't trust that cat. I feel that it's outsmarted us somehow. Adam attempted a sarcastic laugh that came off more like an unnatural snort. Don't take it so personally. I don't think it did it on purpose. Mario turned over to lie on

his back. I bet it's still here. Watching us. Thinking about how dumb we are. How we don't know shit about this place. Adam rolled his eyes. They both looked up. The helicopter was now in sight, interrupting their ruminations over the unseen cat.

## 5. I-19

Alex stretched her long, lanky limbs so that her body extended the full length of the bed. She rolled over and arched her back into an impressively concave dip while glancing at the clock on her nightstand. It took a moment for her eyes to regain their focus. *Ugh*. She had overslept. It was past six in the evening.<sup>1</sup> She sluggishly staggered out of bed and went to the dresser, where she pulled out her usual attire of loose-fitting jeans and a baggy sweatshirt. The ring of her cellphone jarred her out of her stupor with its high-pitched shrill. I'm parking near Lindy's; you on your way? Her father's voice always adopted a hyper-cheerful tone when he spoke to her on the phone. Alex could detect the presence of preoccupation in this cheerfulness, though she guessed he thought that he disguised it more successfully than he actually did. Just leaving now; I'll be there in five. Great, I love you! He would always utter these last words with such eagerness that his voice practically thundered, almost as if he were attempting to silence a latent doubt she might have as to their veracity.

She placed her cellphone on the dresser. Alex found it odd that she kept a picture of Jacob there. Not all of Jacob; just his right arm pointing his index finger at the most monstrously large rattlesnake they were sure had ever inhabited the Sonora. He had asked her to be in it too, but she had refused. Alex didn't like to look at herself, even if it was just an arm. The photo beside it caught her eye, as it did every time she went to dress herself. Abuelo cradling her, his dark bronze arms engulfing her tiny, ghostlike body. Her grandmother had her right hand placed on the back of his neck and her left hand on

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<sup>1</sup> Jaguars are highly nocturnal creatures, most active between sunset and sunrise. Afternoons are always a time of rest. Brown, *Borderland Jaguars*, 52.

Alex's cheek as she was leaned over, kissing her forehead. She was impressed by how the camera had been able to capture it. That look in abuelo's eyes. She couldn't quite explain how his eyes conveyed it, but they evinced a deep, peculiar blend of joy and sorrow. It reflected the truth of what her birth had been; the consequences of her existence for those who had contributed to it. A seemingly impossible conjunction of joy and sorrow.

This was something that Alex had never fully come to terms with, the fact that she was a killer. Her mother had been her first victim. Something had gone strangely and tragically awry that day when Ale Hernandez experienced the violence of childbirth, when that tiny, seemingly innocuous body tore through her mother's to cross into life while her mother crossed into death. She had only discussed this with her father once. It hadn't been quite a discussion. How did Mom die? The pigment in his cheeks had acutely changed shades to mirror the rich, brick-red color of the tomato soup he was sipping. His hands had trembled so uncontrollably that he had dropped his spoon. She...well, she, she got sick just after you were born. How did she get sick? Well, she got an infection, it was...well, it was serious. Did it have to do with me? No, not at all. It...it had nothing to do with you...

And then, as if suddenly seized and occupied by some invisible, commanding force, his hands had miraculously steadied, he had leaned down to look Alex squarely in the eyes, and his voice had acquired a startlingly firm tone. There's something that I always want you to remember, Alex. Your mother loved you more than anything in this world and wanted to have you. She wouldn't have changed anything to be able to have

you, despite what happened. You were and are a blessing for us. You were a blessing for her.

Motivated by the desire to investigate her entrance into this world more closely as a teenager, Alex had rummaged through piles of boxes and papers in the attic to unearth her birth certificate. She had driven to the University of Arizona Medical Center and had even been able to locate the physician who had delivered her, Dr. Evan Magee. She had figured that he wouldn't remember her or her mother after so many years and so many patients, but at soon as she had mentioned her mother's name, his eyes had widened and his face dropped. It had taken him a few moments to speak. That case. Ugh. I never really got over that case, you know. We were never able to determine the cause of death. Everything was normal, your heart rate, her heart rate, blood pressure, everything, it was all regular. And then, just as she was pushing you through, her body went into shock. It was just...ugh, medically it just made no sense. The autopsy didn't reveal anything; I spent hours reviewing her vitals to search for something, one tiny piece of something that maybe I'd missed that could somehow draw sense out of all of it...but there was nothing that made sense about it, no matter which way we looked at it. It was maddening. Don't misunderstand; I've had things go wrong before. It's not like it's the easiest process in the world, you know. But in my entire career, I've never before or since had anything like *that* happen to a patient, where her body out of nowhere just shut off like a switch.

He had paused and tightened his posture, as if in that moment it had suddenly dawned on him with whom he was speaking. Alex had listened attentively, perched on the edge of her seat. So....you mean that you don't know what killed her? He had drawn an abnormally long breath and then leaned his forehead against his hands on his desk.



Forgive me-my language will sound clumsy-but it was almost as if her body had some sort of fatal allergic reaction to the birth. You mean to me? No, no, not to the baby necessarily. To the action-he had begun to stutter-to, to the process itself...to the actual deliverance of the baby!

It had all been blurry to Alex at the time, but reflecting upon it now, it was much easier to understand. It made perfect sense, in fact. Nothing in Dr. Evan Magee's medical books could ever provide him with the true explanation of her mother's unfortunate fate, for the real explanation could not be found in anything related to science, or reason. Her father, in his hopeful ignorance, could never appreciate the extent to which it was a lie, that Alex's entrance into this world was a curse for her mother and herself. Alex Hernandez had thrust into this world a beast, and it had killed her.

She was driving now. Lindy's wasn't too far from her apartment; she could have walked, but she was still a bit dazed from the nap. Her father's eyes lit up when she entered. He nearly squeezed the life out of her every time they embraced. Despite her limited access to oxygen during those moments, Alex found his embrace a welcome refuge, like being temporarily nestled inside of a warm cocoon. As per usual, the questions rained down upon her in a deluge. How are you? How's everything going with your summer program? You look sunburned, have you been wearing sunblock out there? What about sleep? And you feel thinner. What have you been eating? All this while he was still swallowing her with his arms and she had her head firmly buried in his chest.

For as long as she could remember, her father had embraced her this way. He always held her so close to him, as if he needed it to be palpable, the rhythm of his child's heart beating, the steady, regular movement of her lungs' contraction and

expansion. To actually *feel* that she was alive, as if her standing right in front of his eyes weren't satisfying enough. Dad, it's only been a few days since we saw each other last. The answers are all the same.

He released her. They took a seat at the table where he had been waiting for her for several minutes. But you wouldn't tell me if anything had changed anyway, right? He shook his head. My little Alex, always so secretive! Alex smiled at him. I prefer independent-minded. Her father uttered a laugh and pretended to study the menu, even though he always ordered the same double garden burger every week. Alex recognized this as his attempt to mask his frustration over the truth in his statement. She supposed that this was also part of his constant need to embrace her so fiercely; it was an attempt to bridge the unspoken distance between them, the cause of which she was fully aware but of which he was in the dark. And she had no choice but to leave him there. The truth, in this case, would surely destroy him, and she didn't want to be responsible for the suffering of both of her parents.

Well, I think I know what I'll order! He slapped his menu down with such vigor that the table rattled. You? She placed hers on top of his. The same as you. He laughed. We are creatures of habit, aren't we? Their dinner conversation followed the usual trajectory. Was she excited about her senior year of college? Was Jacob still annoying her with his incessant fascination with jaguars? It had been such a hot day, this was surely the hottest summer yet, wasn't it? He was bored at the office but was enjoying his weekend painting class. They needed to go watch the bats emerge from the cave in Ruby again before summer was over. Did she like her burger?

Two people entered the restaurant amidst their conversation and walked over to the pick-up counter behind where Alex and her father were sitting. Alex vaguely recognized one of them as a TA from one of her freshman-year classes. They were in the middle of their own discussion. Yeah, but they have that border wall fund too where you can donate money. Does anyone actually contribute to it? What do you think? The people of Arizona can now “take the issue of illegal immigration into their own hands” or some shit like that. They paused for a moment. Oh, I forgot to tell you the best part; I read that since the wall is so expensive, they’re planning to use “low-cost inmate labor” to help defray costs. His companion let out a huff while drawing a twenty from his wallet. Yeah, probably the labor of the people they’ve arrested for crossing.<sup>2</sup> Alex’s former TA grunted and reached for his own wallet. Well in that case, they better hope they don’t catch too many of them and force them to work on that wall; who else is going to cook these hamburgers for them?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Lacey, Marc. “Arizona Officials, Fed up with U.S. Efforts, Seek Donations to Build Border Fence.” (*New York Times*, July 19, 2011), A16. [http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/20/us/20border.html?\\_r=2&](http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/20/us/20border.html?_r=2&).

<sup>3</sup> As Hellman argues, the prospects for a “socially just legislation” with respect to migration in the United States are bleak because of the “contradictory nature of the demands on policymakers.” The service economy of the U.S. is almost completely dependent upon migrant labor, and yet a strong xenophobic sentiment continues to exert political pressure, while failing to acknowledge the contribution of migrant labor. Hellman, *The World of Mexican Migrants*, 231. This harkens back to Deborah Cohen’s aforementioned analysis of one of the significant legacies of the Bracero Program; U.S. farms in that instance were dependent upon Mexican labor, and yet Mexican laborers were the targets of racist, xenophobic sentiment. Cohen, *Braceros*, 3. As Reagan conveys the lack of recognition of this strong dependency on migrant labor in the U.S. service economy today, “If they [undocumented migrants] can get to the border, hop the fence, slip through a superpower’s military arsenal, elude armed ranchers, drink enough water to outlast a desert trek, cough up enough money for a coyote, maybe they’ll be rewarded with a job cleaning toilets in a motel.” Reagan, *The Death of Josseline*, 12. A White House Report from 2007 affirmed the benefits of migrant labor for the “native” workforce; they help to increase the total output of the economy and complement rather than compete with the “native” workforce. “Immigration’s Economic Impact,” Council of Economic Advisers, modified June 20, 2007, [http://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/cea/cea\\_immigration\\_062007.html](http://georgewbushwhitehouse.archives.gov/cea/cea_immigration_062007.html), 2-4.

Alex's father lifted his eyes from his plate to look at her. It took him a moment to finish chewing. What does Charlie Sheen say during the opening scene of *Platoon*? When he describes hell? What is it, hell is the absence of reason or something like that? Alex shook her head but waited until she had swallowed to correct him. Hell is the impossibility of reason. That's what this place feels like. Hell. That's what he says. Her father let out an exaggerated laugh, something which Alex had learned over the years was a sign that he did not find the matter amusing in the least. The impossibility? Well, that's worse than an absence, isn't it? At least with its absence, you still have the hope for the return of its presence, right? He forced the same exaggerated laugh. Alex shrugged her shoulders and nodded in agreement.

Her father walked with her to her car after dinner. So you'll come home for dinner on Sunday? He pulled her back into his arms for another long, suffocating embrace. Yep, I'll be there. He reviewed the list of questions he had asked upon seeing her, only now, they had become instructions. Don't forget to wear plenty of sunblock and get plenty of sleep! You should go straight home and get to bed early tonight; I can tell that you're tired! Her father had detected her initial sluggishness but had understandably supposed it to be the result of the need for sleep rather than a post-sleep daze. This was part of his necessary ignorance of the fact that his daughter's body worked the opposite the way his and the rest of humanity's did. He stood on the sidewalk and watched as she drove away, waving to her until she turned the corner out of his sight.

Against her father's advice, Alex did not immediately return to her apartment. Instead, she took a drive down I-19, heading south. This was a typical drive for Alex on Wednesdays after dinner at Lindy's with her father, though she was quite sure he was

unaware of this ritual. She made it to Arivaca Road within the hour. The sun had long set. This had been the first afternoon in days when it hadn't rained. She had the windows of her car rolled down. With each gust of wind bursting through the cracked windows along the highway, Alex felt more awake, alert, as if the stagnant, suffocating summer desert air were strangely breathing life into her still lethargic body, coaxing her out of a deep slumber. She could feel her blood flow begin to circulate with more vigor in her limbs, her heart rate begin to steadily increase its previously dull pace.

She pulled into the parking lot of the Arivaca Community Center and turned off the engine. A familiar white truck with a green stripe flashed behind her. Another passed two minutes later. Another would likely pass two minutes after that. Alex had never asked permission to park in that parking lot, but she had always figured that it was less suspicious than leaving her car on the side of a dirt road for hours at end. Particularly at night.

She stepped out of the car and brushed aside some rocks underneath the back left wheel to create a small nest for her car keys. She started towards the side of the parking lot, where the landscape took a sharp curve downward. Her feet often struggled down that hill, especially since she could never see clearly at first where she was stepping. Even though her night vision was better than most. With each step, the flow of blood through her veins increased at a gushing pace, like the sudden unleashing of a wide lake trapped behind a dam.

It was stirring. Her skin was heating up with the familiar itchy, tingling, and slightly painful sensation of a million tiny pins trying to stab through her skin from the inside. She no longer felt overwhelmed by it as she had years before; she had developed a

knack for controlling the timing of it. It was still so odious to her that she could not admit it, but right at this stage of the process, it awakened a slight feeling of pleasure, exerted a hypnotic effect that briefly captured her senses, that distracted her from the horror.

She could feel her face becoming flushed as she hid behind the trunk of the familiar tree to shed her sweatshirt and jeans. She hung them on one of its flimsy branches, safe from the swarm of fire ants covering the ground below. She felt unsettlingly exposed for a moment, but she knew well enough from experience that this would only be a fleeting discomfort. She placed her knees and palms on the ground and closed her eyes, inhaling and exhaling at deliberate, short, regulated intervals. She could feel the pins erupting through the pores of her skin now, accompanied by a brief, intense feeling of her flesh burning that originated in her fingertips and spread like a ripple throughout the entirety of her body down to her toes. She arched her back into the same concave dip she had earlier that evening, though this time, her stomach reached the ground. It was complete.

She opened her eyes. Her skin felt thicker. She looked just behind her to her right. The tree was taller in relation to her now, as it always was after the transformation was complete. The legs of her pants lightly grazed the outer hairs of her back as they drifted with the sporadic breeze that bent the tenuous branch downward. She turned to gaze into the darkness. This aspect, above all others, never ceased to amaze her. It was the closest thing she could imagine to a blind person regaining her sight. The opaque, obscured blackness of the desert without moonlight had become transparent and lucid. Her eyes could now cut through the darkness with a preternatural degree of clarity at a great distance. Her neck suddenly jolted backward, thrusting her head upward. That sound,

among all the myriad sounds that the Sonora produced, remained so jarringly foreign to it. It was flying low overhead and appeared to be getting lower as it was heading towards Arivaca East. Alex, still contemplating the miraculous clarity of her vision, turned and quietly followed its direction.

## 6. The Beginning

Sight. That was the first real sign that Alex was trapped in a body that isolated her from the rest of humanity. The clues went back further though. Her mother's death, the result of her violent entrance into this world, had been the first indication, though she had remained unaware of this fact until many years later. The next most obvious sign would have to have been the curious rash she'd had as a toddler. It was discernible in all of the photos of her in their living room; faint rosy splotches coating her arms and face that followed an unusual circular pattern across her skin. It's not abnormal for children to get rashes, her pediatrician had reassured her father. They could come in all forms and sizes; emerge as ugly, amorphous welts that itched and horrified children and parents alike, he had chuckled. But they almost always had a remedy. He had prescribed eczema cream as an initial treatment.

But her pediatrician had not understood Alex's condition. What had been abnormal about her skin wasn't that she had had rashes but that they had been neither truly amorphous nor itchy. They had a pattern to them, repulsive as she found them when she studied the photos. There would be a couple of tiny splotches where her flesh was darker in color. These were surrounded by more faint circular lines enclosing them. She felt that they resembled a poorly executed still-life drawing of rose bushes in which the artist had achieved a careless, sloppy representation of the curvature of the rose petals.<sup>1</sup> They had never itched. They were never raised or inflamed. If they hadn't been visible, she and her father would never have known that her skin was different. But they were

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<sup>1</sup> Jaguars have a distinct pattern on their backs, with typically one or two dots surrounded by "rosettes," or broken rings encircling them. Brown, *Borderland Jaguars*, 16.



visible. Her skin had not responded to the eczema cream, or to any of the other myriad treatments the doctors had prescribed in a futile attempt to make the pattern disappear. Alex understood now that this had merely been another bizarre feature of her alien body, for which there was no cure. When she was six years old, the pattern inexplicably vanished.

There had also been the matter of her body temperature, three degrees above normal.<sup>2</sup> As a baby, her father had taken her to the doctor on several occasions, worried that she had contracted some grave illness responsible for all of those outbreaks of fever. After six or seven instances of this; after they had run every test imaginable, the doctors concluded that her heightened bodily temperature must be some sort of unique, inexplicable congenital attribute of her body. Of which there were more lying latent under her skin, waiting patiently to emerge.

And the matter of animals. Alex truly had always been a scarecrow. The mere hint of her presence caused a disturbance for creatures of every kind. Beginning with her first encounter with one, dogs and cats had always fled, hidden, or exploded into a fury of defensive growls and hisses when she was nearby, even if she was not yet in their range of vision.

She could have written all of those signs off as random abnormalities, but her vision was the sign that awoke her to the unsettling reality that her body itself might be abnormal. Alex began to notice at the age of thirteen that her sight began to drastically sharpen in clarity and focus, primarily in dark surroundings. She would lie awake on her back each night to stare at the ceiling before drifting to sleep. The ceiling of her bedroom

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<sup>2</sup> Normal body temperatures for jaguars can reach up to 103.1 degrees Fahrenheit. "Capture and Immobilization of Free-living Jaguars."

had almost always been partially broken up by spiderlike cracks that her father would paint over from time to time. One night, as she was gazing above her, she was able to distinguish the outline of each crack from its surroundings; to follow easily every slight twist and turn of each one's path. From then on, she could follow them clearly.

Accompanying this inexplicable improvement of her nocturnal vision were severe muscle and joint aches. They're just growing pains, her father had laughed in a typically overzealous attempt at reassurance. You're growing! Your body is changing! But they were distractingly painful, inhibiting her ability to sleep well and thus lengthening the amount of time she stared at the ceiling and contemplated the peculiarity of her eyes' improved nocturnal visual capacity.

At fourteen, the aches began to be accompanied by sporadic bouts of numbness in her limbs. They were faint at first but often would provoke an intense tingling sensation that dumbed the nerves without warning, often at inopportune moments. One of them had occurred in the school cafeteria when she had been carrying her lunch tray to the table. The entirety of her right arm had suddenly lost all sensation, causing her to drop her tray and exposing her right hand that was peculiarly tucked into an unnatural clench, as if the muscles of her hand were atrophied. You need more exercise, had been the conclusion of the school nurse. The blood in her veins wasn't circulating well, and exercise would do the trick. Alex had begun to walk to and from school to test this theory. The numbness worsened.

Her body had become increasingly so unpredictable that she had tried to remain out of sight as much as possible, reducing the amount of time she spent in public places only to those absolutely necessary. The rest she divided between seclusion in her

bedroom and frequent visits to the doctor's office to determine the mysterious cause of her bouts of numbness. She always had left out the part about her eyes, fearing that sharing that information would lead them to believe that all of these unwelcome developments and transformations within her body existed only in her mind, without physical manifestation. This was the beginning of her other life; the beginning of her secrets from her father and everyone around her. It's just nerves; that's what's causing all of the numbness and jitters, her father had energetically consoled her. She had entertained this theory for a while, especially after none of the blood tests, x-rays, MRIs, or anything else with which they had probed her had revealed anything abnormal. With the exception, of course, of her heightened body temperature. It was the continued night vision that had prevented her from fully embracing this diagnosis. It made no sense how her anxiety could improve the clarity of her nocturnal vision.

And then it had happened. The transformation which forever lay to rest all of her speculations; that which had revealed an unfathomable cause of her maladies that permanently cemented the reality that she had been born into a body whose core essence placed her firmly outside of the boundaries of normal human existence and reason. If she had known then, she would have held on to that last moment of sheltered ignorance as though her life depended on it; that last moment in which she still remained for a rapidly dissolving instance on the threshold between human and monster.

It was a night in May, three days after her fifteenth birthday. She had been staring at the ceiling as usual when the numbness began to creep through her, only that time, it had quickly intensified into a violently reverberating force, consuming the entirety of her body in frenzied convulsions; pulling it entirely out of her control. It was an

overwhelming burning, tingling sensation devouring her in its flames; exploding her skin as her joints dangled and flailed unnaturally, as though forcibly detached from her brain's control in epileptic, stilted jerks so painful that during that moment, she had begged for death. The dull throbbing in her head had intensified to the point that for a few seconds she had gone blind and descended into a coma-like state, her limbs and chest cavity collapsing beneath her.

Then she had opened her eyes. To her relief, her mind was still hers. She recognized her thoughts as her own, the internal articulation of her fear and confusion the same as before. But all other attributes of her being had become completely foreign. Her eyes were able to penetrate the darkness more lucidly than a few moments earlier, but everything looked different; the way in which the objects of her room fell into her line of vision to orient her to her surroundings was off. This was attributable to several new features of her body, first and foremost the fact that her resting posture was now horizontal instead of vertical. Her over-sized t-shirt now fit awkwardly, hanging in a loose twist over the reduced frame of her shoulders.

The space on her lower forehead between her eyes had also widened, and her eyes themselves were now suspended in her eye sockets differently; they sloped slightly downward in a more ovular, almond-shaped curvature. She looked down. Her...claws were gripping the sheets so fiercely that it was really the deep interior of the mattress she was groping. She was too preoccupied to notice, but this was another new feature of herself; she was oddly perched on the very edge of the bed in what was an extremely convex, contracted hunch so that a few moments earlier, she would have fallen off. But

she had acquired the new capacity to balance herself without realizing it or having to learn it; as if she had always known it.

She tore her...claws out of the mattress. They became caught in layers of cotton fluff on their way out causing a slight pinch in her fingertips...or whatever she should call them. She timidly stepped down off the bed. Rather than the familiar right foot, left foot descent from it, it had become right hand, left hand; right foot, left foot. Except that it was no longer hand, hand; foot, foot because the natural distinction between them had disappeared. They had been replaced by four paws with one paw that felt like the other paw that was identical to the paw behind it that felt and looked just like the paw in front of it. Her heart was racing; she had had a moment of hesitation; dread, but she approached it anyway. There she was, staring at her reflection in the mirror; from then on, an odious object with the maddening ability to lay bare the reality of what she was; staring back into her eyes with her own eyes that couldn't possibly be her eyes but that were there staring straight back at her, so they had to be her eyes because in the end, mirrors reflected the reality of what lay before them. She felt relieved to feel the pain and the accompanying blood leaking from her forehead; those were things that were familiar; pain and blood as she backed away from the cracked glass that had split her reflection into multiple reflections that made it worse because now there were even more of her eyes staring back at her.

The bright shimmer of them sliced through the darkness like a knife and illuminated her immediate surroundings<sup>3</sup> as she had retreated further backwards in horror, bumping into her dresser that had then provoked an unanticipated, violent spinning

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<sup>3</sup> One of the most distinguishing characteristics of jaguars is that their eyes glow in the dark. Benson, *Birds and Beasts of Latin America*, 46.

motion in repetitive circles as she had chased her tail and bit at the air<sup>4</sup> and then banged her head repeatedly against the wall, causing more pain and more blood but no more relief that time because she had mistakenly hoped that if she banged her head against it enough times, she might be able to break free of it. It had ended with her springing into a leap onto her bed with a surprising force in her pounce and tearing apart her sheets with her new hands or claws or feet or paws as she desperately tried to tear it off herself or rip it out from within her, whichever it was.

She had not remembered falling asleep. The next morning, she had been awakened by her father's familiar knock on the door. Alex? Are you awake? It's time for school. You've overslept a little, and I have to get to work early for a meeting. May I come in? She slowly opened her eyes. She felt a flutter in her chest. These were her eyes. She sat up in a familiar vertical posture. Her head was made of lead and there was a searing pain in the now more narrow space between her eyes, but her surroundings looked normal again. She noticed the broken pieces of glass that had been her mirror scattered across the floor and the smear of what had dried into a dark maroon on the wall opposite her. She felt an unfamiliar dull pain in her tailbone. Her voice was slightly hoarse, but it was her voice. Hey Dad. No, I'm getting dressed. I'll see you after school. There had been hesitation on the other side of the door. You sound a little sick; do you want me to come in? I can be a little late to the meeting; it's okay. No, no; I just didn't sleep very well, but I feel normal now, I promise. I'll see you after school. He had protested more, but, always respectful of her privacy, had left her in peace.

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<sup>4</sup> When jaguars are taken for captivity or observation, they often damage their teeth by attempting to bite through the metal of their cages. "Capture and Immobilization of Free-living Jaguars." In this instance, the cage is her own body from which she is trying to escape.

Unbeknownst to her father, she had skipped school that day and gone to the emergency room instead. She had dressed in a long trench coat and oversized hat that covered nearly every inch of her body, making her a most peculiar sight as she rode the bus to the University of Arizona Medical Center. She told them suicide when they had asked her what her emergency was at the front desk. They had immediately taken her to an examination room with bleached white walls where she had paced in circles awaiting the psychiatrist on call. Whatever was causing whatever this was in her, it was senseless, mad. In need of a diagnosis and a remedy; of that, she had been certain.

I'm having hallucinations. The physician had been a short, stout man with jet-black hair. He had appeared to be studying her carefully. What kind of hallucinations? That I'm someone else. Or something else. That I'm not in my own body. She had related the part about the throbbing headaches, joint aches; the burning skin. Do you recognize your new body when you're having these hallucinations? She had lied with a shake of her head, unable to say the words out loud. He had paused. Have you been feeling any anxiety lately? It could be that these are dreams stemming from anxiety. Sometimes our dreams can be so visceral and seem so real that we actually experience physical pain.

And then they had called her father in, which is what she had wanted to avoid, but it was the law, and the physician had to abide by the law. Her father's eyes were a distressing blend of sorrow and fear as the physician had asked him a series of questions and then announced a prescription for Alex: a couple of different anxiety medications for immediate usage; biweekly visits to a psychologist because growing up without a mother may have created a deep fear of abandonment that was the likely source of this anxiety; that despite the love and careful parenting of her father, one's mother is one's mother and

being raised without one's mother could lead to all sorts of issues with respect to emotional instability. Finally, the physician had given her and her father his card to phone him anytime day or night should the dreams or hallucinations worsen or provoke suicidal thoughts.

These medications had calmed her and the biweekly visits to the psychologist calmed her father. But they had not reduced the frequency or diminished the reality of its nightly visit. It became less painful over time, and the duration of the bouts of pain in her head, joints, and skin gradually reduced. But she never again passed a night in which the transformation did not occur. She became more and more reclusive throughout the rest of her high school years, withdrawn from the life around her without any close friends; undiscovered in the secrecy of her other self. Even being in the sight of others at school or during her walks home provoked a feeling of extreme vulnerability and exposure that compelled her to hide. She wanted to spend less time with her father too, but he was and always would be the one person from whom she could not escape as long as he was alive. Every morning and every night, he sat beside her and watched carefully as she removed one of her pills from the bottle and washed it down with a glass of water.

There had been one unusual afternoon at the beginning of her senior year of high school that had presented the elusive possibility that she was not alone in her condition. Alex had eighth period free and so had gone home early that day. On her way into the kitchen, she had stopped to study the picture of her mother resting on the mantel in their living room. She had always wanted to look like her mother; was envious of her preternatural, impossible beauty that arrested the gaze of everyone who had ever set foot in their house. She had long, deep brown hair and a rich, light olive complexion that



glowed and radiated through the glass frame, complemented by her unusual piercing green eyes that seemed to illuminate the room. She killed me with those eyes; one look, and I was gone forever! was how her father had related the story of their first meeting. Her sharp, pronounced cheekbones were an exact replica of abuelo's; her soft, round chin the precise reflection of grandmother's. As Alex stood enraptured by her mother's hypnotic gaze, she contemplated the peculiarity of her connection to her. She had literally shared her mother's body, and yet, after her separation from it, her mother had become a stranger to her in her absence. There was some relief in it, though; at least her mother had been spared the knowledge of what she had brought into this world.

And then a deeply troubling thought had occurred to Alex as her mind had frozen and she found herself climbing up the small wooden stairs to the attic of their house; that isolated room where her father kept all papers and items that he thought might be important, though Alex had thought that this was stupid as she climbed those stairs, her heart rate accelerating, because she knew that her father wasn't quite certain why, when, or for what they might be important since he had never once found any use for any of those papers or items but still kept them there nonetheless in a useless, accumulating mass in case some day for some obscure reason they should need some of those important papers in the attic. Alex had dug through box after box of copies of mortgage payments and kindergarten report cards when she had found it, her birth certificate. It trembled in her hands; the document which recorded her existence. She tucked it in her sweatshirt pocket and resolved to investigate that thought that was suddenly consuming all other thoughts.

But underneath where her birth certificate had lain in that dusty box was something else that had managed to capture her full attention for a few moments. There was a pile of pictures of abuelo that she had never seen. She pulled them out and gently sifted through them, her fingertips trembling as they gingerly grazed the fragile paper. She could feel a smile on her face, the first smile she had smiled without effort in years. She had never seen pictures of abuelo as a boy; he stood with a grin from ear to ear in his short corduroy overalls, holding his arms up to reach his mother and older brother's hands. She hadn't been able to recall abuelo's brother's name. Abuelo's look was one of sheer childhood bliss and wonder.

In the next and final picture, abuelo was younger; his mother was holding him on her lap, and he had the same wide grin from ear to ear. Alex's heart had stopped. She twisted it to its side and placed it right beneath her eyes so that it had touched her nose. The black and white image, plus abuelo's dark complexion made it difficult. Her heartbeats were claps of thunder as she ripped through surrounding boxes in frenzied, aimless movements until coming across an old magnifying glass from another box from who knew how long ago and held the picture underneath it to examine his left arm more closely. She could feel sweat creeping out of the pores on her forehead. They were there; two small splotches surrounded by broken ovular lines. But as she pressed the magnifying glass directly on top of it and her eyes directly on top of the magnifying glass, she noticed that one of the splotches actually looked like it might be a scab instead of a splotch because under the enhancing capacity of the magnifying glass, it looked darker than the other splotch that as she examined more closely might not be a second

splotch after all but just part of a shadow from the light that maybe what she thought had been the ovular lines was also. Her hands had continued to tremble.

The intensity of whatever it was that she had felt in response to the possibility that not only someone, but someone close to her might have been a prisoner in the same body as she fully disappeared before her as it occurred to her that what she thought she had recognized as her rash was located only on his left arm rather than the entirety of his body. She had noticed one of his shirts lying at the bottom of the box as she finally released the picture and the magnifying glass that she had gripped with such force that it had left a red impression in the palm of her hand. It was the white button-down one that grandmother had saved from their wedding. She lifted it closer to her nostrils. Her eyes had begun to burn as she inhaled his scent; that familiar, comforting aroma of his skin that had been preserved so freshly in its threads as if he had worn it yesterday.

Alex had sobbed for three hours. Her father had responded to a peculiar whimpering noise he thought was squirrels or cats in the attic when he arrived home from work. He rushed over to her, pulled her into his chest and sat cradling her like an infant on the attic floor for another two hours. She was unable to speak for a while. I just smelled the shirt, and it made me miss him. I don't know. She had lied to him again. Partially, at least. She did miss abuelo, but those were tears of atonement more than longing. Atonement for having betrayed abuelo by entertaining for one second the possibility that he could be associated with her condition; with the horror of the existence of her other self. Abuelo's memory, his lingering presence within her, was the opposite of what her other self produced outside and within her. She had desperately prayed that his ghost or spirit or whatever remained with her of him would forgive her.

The rest of the first semester of her senior year of high school proceeded as before; Alex ate lunch by herself in the hallway every day, her only social contact confined to her nightly dinners with her father. Until something strange happened. Scott Williamson had approached her at school in the hallway one day in December, just before school was letting out for winter vacation. I sit behind you in calculus. You're Alex, right? Alex stood awkwardly in response, like a deer caught in headlights. She managed to nod. Would you like to go out sometime over the break? She stood in amazement at how effortlessly, how confidently, the words had escaped his lips. She had become so cautious in her relations with others that the casualness of his demeanor was completely foreign to her.

Before verbally formulating a response, her head was already nodding. Great! How about the day after Christmas? There are a bunch of cool bands playing that night on 4<sup>th</sup> Ave. We could catch a couple of them. Give me your number. Alex was speaking like a robot; briskly reciting the digits of her cell number and giving him her home address. After he left, she immediately felt a rush of anxiety. Who knew how late they'd be out listening to music; at some point, she would need to allow it to come out for a while or it would come out without her. She also had not had a conversation longer than five minutes with anyone besides her father over the last three years.

The day after Christmas; that was the day. It had been a startlingly cold day, one in which the air had a crisp edge to it. She had been unsure of what to wear, so she had gone shopping and bought a plain black dress, plus a new puffer jacket; if the day felt bad, the night was likely to be far worse. He had called her earlier in the day to confirm the time and she had told him then that she had a curfew of midnight or 1 am at the latest.

She left out that it was not her father who demanded that she be home for the unusual reason that there would still be plenty of hours of darkness left. He also had asked her if she could drive; his car was in the auto shop for some sort of engine repair. She picked him up in her used, dusty black Pathfinder at 6, and they headed to 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

The setting was ideal; the music was so loud and the restaurant so crowded that they didn't have the opportunity for much conversation. It was around 7:30 when he leaned over and surprised her with it. Do you want to drive down to the border? I know a good road near the mountains from where you can see Mexico! It's really beautiful at night. I mean, you can't tell that it's Mexico because all of it looks the same, but it's still pretty cool. Alex looked down at her watch. He anticipated her. I can drive if you want; I'm pretty quick behind the wheel and I know how to get there; I hike there sometimes. I can definitely have you back on time! Alex did not understand herself in her interactions with Scott Williamson. She did not want to go; knew that she could not go, but found herself nodding again.

The car ride down I-19 was swift and silent. She had felt strange riding in the passenger seat with someone she didn't really know driving her car. They had reached Arivaca quickly, in less than one hour. I've been here before. It was her first time initiating conversation with him. Scott turned to her. Yeah? Alex nodded. For a social justice elective at school last year, we volunteered for a few Saturdays with No More Deaths. They're down that road back there. Scott nodded. That's cool. They sat in silence again. Get ready; this road can get a little bumpy. They had entered Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge. Maybe we'll see some cool animals along the way! Alex remained silent.

Ugh, shit. Blindingly bright lights had approached them from behind. Scott pulled slightly to the right of the road and put the car in park. He turned towards her and laughed. That's one thing that's annoying about driving down here. These guys are everywhere. He had rolled down the window. One agent approached on his side while the other was cautiously walking around the car in a circle. The one beside Scott began. Evening, sir. May I ask what brings you out here tonight? Scott's voice was steady, relaxed. We just felt like taking a drive. I've hiked here before but wanted to take her to see it at night. The agent nodded. You both U.S. citizens? Yes sir. May I see some identification? Alex and Scott simultaneously reached for their wallets, removed their driver's licenses, and handed them over to the agent. He examined them for a moment with his flashlight. Thank you; we just have to follow protocol. He handed them back. Listen, though; it's not the safest place out here at night, especially for young people, you know? So don't plan on staying too late, alright? If you need anything though, there are plenty of agents around. Scott was nodding. Thank you very much, sir. The other agent was standing behind the car. If you don't mind, we're going to take down your car's license plate number and a description of the car to radio it to the other agents on duty. If not, you'll keep getting pulled over all night. Thank you, sir, much appreciated. The agent nodded. Alright then; you kids be careful. And remember, not too late out here! The agent behind the car remained a moment while writing something down and speaking into his radio. He gave the thumbs up sign, and Scott pulled away.

They continued for another twenty minutes before reaching a narrow road that was etched out on top of one of those tall mountains. Scott slowed down the vehicle to a crawl before putting it in park. There it is, over there. That's Mexico. Scott had been

right; she wasn't able to tell how those rolling mountains farther in the distance were in any way distinguishable from those immediately enclosing them. Scott pulled out his phone. Look at this; it's setting the time to the time in Mexico City. Pretty cool, right? Alex nodded and looked down at her watch. It was already 9:30. Listen, I can't stay here too much longer; it might take us a while to drive out of here. It hadn't looked like he was any closer to her, but she felt his body nearer to her somehow as he nodded. No worries, no worries. We can just look at the sky for a bit and then head out. The sky had looked spectacular. The stars and moon were so close that she could reach out and touch them in what was a piercingly clear night. He hadn't fully turned off the vehicle so that they could admire it while cloaking themselves in the warmth from the car heater.

The jarring feeling of his mouth on her neck interrupted her contemplation. She involuntarily slammed her own body against the window in a reflexive jerk. Jesus, it's okay. Relax. Do you want to move to the backseat? Alex was searching for words. Her body was still plastered against the window. She felt a familiar stirring in her gut and a light tingling in her fingertips and toes. Her voice came out in a meek, timid tone. It's just...you know, I don't really know you. I've never...she looked down. I've never gone on a date before. He laughed lightly. Yeah, I figured that. It's okay, though. Don't you want to have an adventure? I mean, you don't know me but you let me drive your car with you in it to the fucking border. She detected a slight escalation of volume in his voice. Clearly, some part of you wants some adventure.

She couldn't explain to him how she had gone along with him to cling to what might have been one of the rare opportunities in her life for some kind of normal interaction with a human being, even if only for a few hours. I just...I think that maybe I

should take baby steps, you know? Like maybe we can go out again another time. His blue eyes looked electric as they caught the light of the bright glare from the moon. Baby steps? Wake the fuck up; look around you. You don't come here with a practical stranger if you're looking for baby steps. She noticed a growing unsteadiness in his voice that suddenly awakened a deep feeling of alarm in her. They were in her car, but he was in the driver's seat.

She was rapidly trying to navigate through the cluster of muddled thoughts in her head, to orchestrate some plan of escape, when he had his hands on her shoulders. Listen to me. You wouldn't have come here with me unless you wanted to. So stop this dumb-girl, playing-hard-to-get bullshit because I'm not in the mood for it. You're so fucking ugly; you're practically the ugliest girl in school, so shut up and be grateful. The mountains, the stars; they were all spinning like a tornado. The voice in her head was a scream. *You fucking idiot, you fucking idiot.* She had been so sheltered from human contact over those years that she had not been able to recognize the signs; to anticipate his transformation into that. She had allowed herself to be lured into a highly effective trap; completely isolated; far away from everyone and everything atop that mountain near the mountains that somehow were Mexican mountains that were the exact reflection of the mountain on which they sat in the stifling, suffocating air of her dirty black Pathfinder; isolated except for the Border Patrol agents who would be somewhere around if those young kids should need anything because it could be really unsafe for young kids out there, didn't they know? She felt a searing pain within her abdomen, for once, one that her body had not produced itself. Her heart was beating with such force that her entire chest cavity was pulsating violently.



*Nooooooooooooo*...he had awakened it too soon. She could feel it coming alive beneath her skin. After all of her continued, labored efforts to tame and conquer it over the years; to keep it buried inside of her save for a few moments each night, were rapidly crumbling before her. She would not be able to keep it at bay much longer. Her body locked in terror. She would even choose what was happening in that moment over exposure. Her skin was on fire. It hadn't come out yet, but it was poised to emerge at any second. What the fuck? Jesus Christ, what's wrong with your eyes? He began to try to slap it out of her, which only accelerated its imminent arrival to the surface. What the fuck? Stop! Your eyes! Stop it! What's wrong with you? Fucking stop it, goddamnit! He shook her violently, his tone of voice becoming unnaturally high-pitched. He was shaking her so hard that with a few more motions he might have killed her. It was in control of her now, though, even though it wasn't fully visible yet outside of the glow in her eyes. Her fist shot into his face, knocking him all the way against the other window. You fucking bitch! He clutched his nose as the blood began to gush from it. You fucking freak! He scrambled to find the handle and pushed opened the door, stumbling out of the driver's side of her Pathfinder. He fled at the speed of light up the road from which they had come and disappeared out of sight.

Alex stumbled out of the passenger side, dragging her body against the ground. It hadn't fully emerged yet, leaving her body suspended in that in-between state that she hated more than any of it. She was locked in pure pain for those moments that dragged on for an eternity. Her dress was ripped in the process, but it was over quickly after. She breathed in deep that freezing cold air with a vigor she had never before felt. It was suddenly clear to her; that fact that she had been trying to bury from herself all those

years. That this wasn't merely something inside of her body; it was her body, and she would never be able to exist outside of it. She leapt down the mountain, innervated for the first time in years by the fact that that was the night. She wasn't sure how she would do it, but she would find a way to escape from it forever.

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Rafael's limbs had been shaking badly that same night after Christmas. He had had a blanket wrapped around him, one that he had found folded neatly inside of a white bucket beside a tree a few feet back. He had been able to distinguish that tree from all of the other indistinguishable trees mixed in with the indistinguishable rocks along the indistinguishable trails that hadn't been so different from the indistinguishable jumpsuits in their disorienting similarity; a painful orange worn by him, he who was one brown face that could have been any other brown face indistinguishable from all the other brown faces except for Rafael Chta-whoa, how the fuck do you pronounce this one?

This exceptional tree had been memorable for its massive trunk; its bulging roots interlaced in an imperfect, inextricable tangle with the curved stones in which it was embedded. ¡Suerte! had been written on the side of the bucket in large black letters underneath it; he could remember that clearly; was sure that he had read that.<sup>5</sup> He could remember that because he could still remember his two simple goals for this time: to avoid detection and to avoid death, and he had thought, So far, so good when he had read it. Though he thought that he could remember those having been his goals the last time too, so it wasn't clear to him if he had really seen ¡Suerte! on this particular trip because he might have read that on his last trip when those had also been his goals. *Sí. Es así. Sí.*

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<sup>5</sup> At designated sites along more obscure trails, NMD volunteers leave food and water, usually leaving behind a note that says something like ¡Suerte! on the outside of the food bucket or water gallons.

This was something else that he had remembered from his last trip, making it even more difficult to distinguish between the two trips. He rarely thought his thoughts in Spanish.<sup>6</sup> He had also lost sensation in his feet the last time too. Numb feet and thoughts in Spanish. He thought that he recalled having had a blanket then too, so perhaps ¡Suerte! had really been written on the bucket the last time. But he had a blanket this time too, so it really could be this trip when he had read ¡Suerte! in the bold black letters. But then it must be this trip because he was sure that last trip they had pulled his hands behind his back and briskly asked him to step into that space on the back of the truck that he was sure he could remember thinking would not be able to fit a dog.<sup>7</sup> ¡Aja, sí! He could also remember that he thought it strange that the tall man seemed to pose it as a question, even though he hadn't understood the tall man's words, as if he would really have a choice at that point not to step into the chicken coop on the back of that tall man's truck that was white with a green stripe, he was certain as he recalled. So he was really having much greater ¡Suerte! this trip with at least one of his goals; he had not been caught.

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<sup>6</sup> With the legacy of the Bracero Program, most Mexican migrants until the 1980s shared a common ethnic (*mestizo*), regional, and social background from rural sending communities in central and western Mexico that persist as dominant sending regions into the present. Overmyer-Velásquez, *Beyond la Frontera*, 162. However, more contemporary migrations from Mexico are marked by a greater diversity in sending regions and in the ethnic composition of migrants themselves; between 2005-2007, an estimated 15 percent of Mexican farm workers in the U.S. were indigenous. Ibid., 165. More than one in ten individuals in Mexico comes from a family in which an indigenous language is spoken at home. Ibid., 161. Western and southern Oaxaca account for the bulk of indigenous Mexican migrants in the U.S., with 73 percent coming from Oaxacan sending communities. Ibid. This introduces another disadvantage specifically for indigenous migrants; within Mexico, indigenous populations already confront discrimination and racism that they continue to face after crossing from their fellow compatriots and within a host society that exhibits racist tendencies towards both. Ibid., 162. In a hierarchical economy with migrant labor primarily occupying positions in the service and construction sectors, indigenous migrants tend to work in the lowest-paying jobs within those sectors. Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> When I saw my first Border Patrol truck on Arivaca Road, I remember asking the lead volunteer what that space in the back was used for. From the outside, the compartment truly looks like it would not be large enough to hold a small animal. Alas, the space is not designed to catch and transport animals.

As he sat shivering against a rock, his teeth chattering so loudly that they mimicked a rattling car engine, Rafael noticed that he couldn't feel his feet.<sup>8</sup> He could recall having had trouble over what he was sure were the last two hours just before the present hour moving his legs. It had begun as a dull numbness that he was fairly certain was now spreading up his body. It was detaching his legs from the rest of him; he could tell because now, when he told his legs to move, nothing happened. They just were lying there in an awkward, listless position. For whatever reason, this did not frighten him; he could still recognize that, that he did not feel frightened. *Porque tengo sueño...* He let out an involuntary laugh in response to another Spanish thought, making his chattering teeth clank against one another with even greater force so that they sounded like two pieces of steel grinding against one another.

Rafael could feel his body slowly slip away from him as he sat against that rock wrapped in a blanket, but he was strangely relaxed. He didn't really notice the sound of movement near him because it was hard to tell if it was even movement. It was more like a light streak of wind rapidly cutting through that startlingly still, clear night like an oar on a preternaturally placid lake, quietly disrupting the jarring stillness of the water it sliced. Distracted by her newfound commitment to escape it, Alex had nearly stepped on him.

It took her a moment to realize what she was looking at. She froze dead in her tracks. Both of their bodies were so still that they could have been a painting. They stared at each other awkwardly as the recognition set in, both cocking their heads to one side;

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<sup>8</sup> Some symptoms of hypothermia include excessive shivering; lack of coordination of one's limbs; clumsy movement; slurring of speech; confused thinking; sluggishness; nonchalance towards one's condition; deterioration of consciousness; faint pulse; and delayed, shallow breathing. "Hypothermia," Mayo Clinic, accessed February 22, 2013, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/hypothermia/DS00333>.

each incredulous at the presence of the other. He seemed to have a faint smile on his face as his voice crept out of him in a whisper. Ocelótl... Then, her presence awakened in him one of his last remaining bouts of consciousness. The soft weariness of his eyes gave way to a fiercely alert terror as the upper part of his body began to tremble uncontrollably and the chattering of his teeth climbed to a deafening clatter.

This had been her greatest fear all along; that someone else would not only catch her as her other self but recognize her as such; his look of terror even more so than Scott Williamson's was like the mirror's, confirming the reality of who and what she was. As she stared at his trembling body, Alex felt briefly consumed by the urge to destroy him for having this knowledge of her, even though it was she who had stumbled into his sight. Their eyes looked like almost perfect reflections of the other; the blend of startled terror and incredulity. Alex suddenly turned and darted back towards the direction of the car. She was surprised by how she was able to navigate the rocks and hills with such effortless ease and balance; how naturally swift and deft and confident her strides were along it that they didn't seem her own. There was a startling, unfamiliar fluidity to the motion of her feet and shoulders. She had never stepped out of her room while in this form and thus had never exercised or experienced her other traits. She reached the car quickly. She was able to return to herself, or the other part of herself, more quickly and easily than usual; almost as if that part were thanking her for finally allowing it to live as itself and she as part of herself for a few moments.

It suddenly dawned on her. How was she going to accomplish this? She could get her car closer to him by driving back up the road and turning down to the left, but she would never be able to carry him all the way back to the car. She contemplated it as she

started down the road curving to the left. She got her car as close as she could without risking a flat tire. She stepped out of it. This would mark the first time she was choosing to adopt her other form; to invite it to consume her. She had spent so many years trying to reduce its presence that it took her a few moments to figure out how to deliberately arouse it from within her.

With her torn plain black dress wrapped around her front right leg, she glided back down to the body, remembering precisely the trail she had taken before. His eyes were now closed, but she could sense his vague pulse. She would still use the dress in case he woke up. With her teeth and left front paw, she unwound it and cloaked his face with it, securing its position with her teeth and jaw behind his neck as she gripped the collar of his sweatshirt in her mouth. She started backwards but then moved her mouth to grip part of his sweatshirt over his left shoulder so that she was able to walk forward while dragging him slightly to her left. She was able to hold him with her jaw high enough so that his entire torso was moving in air, with only his senseless legs brushing against the frozen hard ground as they crept along in what was a most unusual sight, even in the Sonora. Although she had to set him down a few times along the way, her jaw was unfamiliarly strong, another feature of this form that she had never had the opportunity to exercise in the confines of her room. After they made it to the car, she switched back. It was even easier than before to become human again.

She pulled his torso first and then pushed his stiff legs behind it into the car, laying his body across the back seat. She opened the trunk and grabbed a blanket and a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt for herself. She removed his shoes and socks and enveloped his frozen feet that resembled abnormally large, oddly shaped blue ice cubes in

the blanket. She started the car and turned the heat on at full blast, pointing the vents towards the backseat. She drove at a normal but cautious speed. Two white trucks coming from the opposite direction had slowed down but then sped up again as they passed her. One approached her so close from behind that it was practically touching her, but then it suddenly passed around her, the agent on the passenger side waving to her as they sped ahead. She had forgotten why. If you don't mind, we're going to take down your car's license plate number and a description of the car to radio it to the other agents...that agent had inadvertently bestowed upon her and the passenger in her backseat a shield of invisibility that enabled them to fly under the radar in that sea of white with green stripes.

They arrived at the No More Deaths camp about an hour later. She had nearly tipped her car over twice while descending two of the steep hills along the way but had managed to balance it by the taxing integration and coordination of sharp turns of the wheel with her hands and well-timed pressure on the brakes with her feet. Two people emerged from their tents near the driveway as she pulled in, narrowing their eyes to determine who it was. She rolled down the window, muttering while pointing back, He needs help, and put the car in park. They quickly opened the back door, removed the man from the backseat and rushed him to a cream-colored tent with a large red cross painted on its roof. Two other people had emerged from one of the trailers in response to the commotion, all bundled up in layers of thick sweaters in the cutting, icy night air. I found him on the side of the road, freezing. It was an easy lie. They thanked her profusely; told her that she surely had saved his life. On her drive back to Tucson, Alex realized that the past two hours were the first in the last three years in which she had devoted a few thoughts and seconds to someone and something other than herself and her condition.

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And so it had begun that freezing night after Christmas nearly four years before. After that instance in which her existence and that of a man whom she would never know had depended on one another. It had continued without stop ever since. It was a compulsion; a way in which her existence as a peculiar aberration of nature and reason was provided a space for the emergence of that which always lurked within her. It was within that equally peculiar space where her handicap, the impossible other aspect of her being, was an acute advantage that mocked those she helped to deliver; those whom that same space of which she was a natural master in her horror; where creatures fled her presence; where she had torn flesh with her teeth and cracked skulls with an effortless snap of her jaw; that peculiar space that was the same space that dangled the non-peculiar others helplessly over the threshold where death and insanity ravenously awaited to devour them.<sup>9</sup> That peculiar space where night after night, she became what reason could not comprehend; she who could remain hidden in plain sight in that space; she who enjoyed the privilege of invisibility, shielded by the cover of her peculiar tracks in the dirt that were not of a human; hidden within a body that could leap back and forth and back and forth and back and forth again over the rapidly dissolving remnants of what was left

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<sup>9</sup> As Sheridan concludes, humanitarian aid treats the symptoms of the problem without actually addressing the problem itself. However, as long as U.S. border policy persists in its “deterrence by death” strategy, such aid will remain critical. Sheridan, *I Know It's Dangerous*, 98. The existence and necessity of these humanitarian aid groups like No More Deaths and the Samaritans demonstrates the extent to which U.S. policy adheres to the problematic notion that “our allegiance to a country’s legal code should be stronger than our connection to another human being.” Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 207. Or, as the earlier reference to Boehm’s analysis reiterates, because undocumented migrants are “constructed as noncitizens” and “their safety not understood as the responsibility of the state,” groups like NMD are endowed with greater responsibility in treating the victims of an unjust, unreasonable policy. Boehm, *Intimate Migrations*, 99.



of the fraction of the line still unmarked,<sup>10</sup> in a space in which perhaps the only viable countermeasure to madness could be found in that which was equally mad.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The border wall, which began in 2007 as another phase of U.S. border enforcement and militarization, currently stretches around one-third the length of the U.S. border with Mexico, which, as Schyler's analysis was already referenced, severely "undercuts the ecological integrity of the borderlands." Schyler, *Continental Divide*, 151. The section of the wall extending through Arizona covers more than three hundred miles, severing eighty percent of the state from Sonora to the south. Regan, *The Death of Josseline*, xxvi.

<sup>11</sup> Alex's involuntary physical transformation into a literal animal aims to serve as a symbolic manifestation and reflection of the way in which current U.S. border policy produces the violent physical transformation of undocumented migrants' bodies by funneling them through the brutal Sonora Desert within a context of historical and contemporary political and economic inequality. Migrants do not literally become animals like Alex, but our primal, fundamental animal needs like food, water, and normal resting body temperature are placed in peril for those undertaking undocumented crossings. During her first transformation in this chapter, Alex literally chases her tail, while migrants undergoing the physical transformations of dehydration or hypothermia figuratively chase their tails in confusion and pain as their bodies slowly deteriorate. Her transformation is further aimed to serve as a symbol of the lack of reason inherent in contemporary U.S. border enforcement and treatment of undocumented migrants. In a contemporary U.S. setting, the madness associated with a human literally and inexplicably shifting into an animal places Alex outside of normalcy and aims to mirror the madness of a policy that would deliberately place undocumented migrants like Leandro, Sole, Manuel, Javier, Carlos, and Rafael in a situation in which they are reduced to animals because they are constructed outside of the normalcy of citizenship. In addition to serving as a reflection of the madness of the policy and the violence of these physical transformations, Alex's dual existence is also designed as a stark contrast to undocumented migrants to further accentuate their disadvantaged position in the context of a clandestine border crossing. As evidenced most clearly in this chapter, her dual existence gives her dual mobility as both human and animal in southern Arizona; her human skin, "cloaked in whiteness," (Hernández, *Migra!*, 2) and status as a citizen make Border Patrol benign to her, while her jaguar body affords her heightened control over the terrain into which she can blend and traverse effortlessly.

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### **Biography**

Originally from New Orleans, Louisiana, Hannagan Johnson earned her B.A. at Columbia University in history, with a regional specialization in Latin America. Her primary areas of research interest in Tulane University's Latin American Studies M.A. program include U.S.-Mexico relations and immigration history and reform. Hannagan spent part of her summer last year volunteering with migrant-aid NGO No More Deaths in the Sonora Desert to observe firsthand the conditions of undocumented migrant crossings through Arizona. After completing the M.A. program at Tulane, Hannagan plans to continue writing and hopes to pursue a career as a high school educator.