

**HE STANDS IN THE SNOWFALL**  
**BY GABRIELLA SOFÍA OLSON**

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

AMERICAN PROTECTION & BORDER SECURITY PROJECT

FAMILY NAME: SOLORZANO

CHILD'S NAME: UNKNOWN

AGE: 15 YEARS

ORDER: IMMEDIATE TRANSPORT OF ILLEGAL ALIEN CHILDREN TO DETAINMENT

FACILITIES [PENDING FURTHER PROCEEDINGS]

He stands at the bus stop.

It's frigid, his breath swirling white wisps into the air like cigarette smoke, and his fingertips have long gone numb, but he doesn't notice. The snowflakes drift from the vast gray sky and settle on his Knicks sweatshirt, where he's pulled up the hood. The bracelet sits heavy around his wrist like a handcuff. It reads: the American Protection & Border Security Project.

He's not sure how long he's been waiting on this street corner, where through a curtain of icy powder—which stings his cheeks and coats him like dust—he can see the new government-erected blazing neon signs rising over the city. Large, bold letters promising a better tomorrow amid the creaking of construction cranes and the distant wail of police sirens. They are nauseatingly bright, the slogans he has come to know that preach safety, the image of purification. Exterminating the criminals, the invaders. A country washed clean.

UPDATE: UNDER FEDERAL LAW, ALL CHILDREN OF UNDOCUMENTED ILLEGALS ARE NOW  
SUBJECT TO EXPEDITED REMOVAL & WITHDRAWAL OF BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP.

All he knows is that this frozen moment in time seems centuries away from the madrugada when he was shaken awake by sweaty palms, his mothers arms outstretched around him, her voice swallowed by a hopeless cry from the hollows of her chest. He remembers the thick tears on her cheeks, the redness of her eyes, the way the dim light lay heavy all over her.

He still can hear it now, like a strange vestige of an invisible scar, the banging open of the door. The blast of arctic air that sank its nails under his flannel pajamas, fiercely cold against his

chest, where his heart slammed beneath skin. And men, men with guns strapped to their hips like they were part of their figures, a mix of machine and monster, their black-laced boots slapping the floorboards louder than thunder, their faces knotted by both frost and fury. Imprinted eternally in his mind was the hostility that lay behind those pairs of blue eyes when hands seized him. He had shivered not from the bitter weather but from the wicked cold of the barrel nudged against his bare skin. He didn't dare yelp in fear of the bullet piercing through his body.

UPDATE: USE OF FORCE IS AUTHORIZED BY UNITED STATES CLEANSING & SAFETY  
ENFORCEMENT WHEN DEEMED NECESSARY.

Through his panicked daze he had registered, mixed with frantic prayer, his mother's desperate hushed Spanish as she whispered to him "bebé, mijo, por fa' sé fuerte" but he doesn't know what strong is anymore. How can he, when in that moment where he dared meet the eyes of the third man he found not glacial emptiness but milky brown, when he saw that in those hands the same shade as his father's rested an identical iron black weapon?

How can he, when he knows the taste of metal on the inside of his cheek where they hit him with an elbow, tearing him out of his mother's arms, when he watches over and over again la Virgen María knocked off the shelf, splintering into porcelain dust on the floor? He had barely glimpsed, in the violent rush, the furniture askew, the frames ripped from the wall, the badges that flashed from the men's dark coats, yet he can't unsee the engraved letters set against an American flag. The flag that flies in front of his house, the flag he pledges allegiance to, the flag he so proudly celebrated every fourth of July, the red and white stripes that have now become the backdrop of purging *him* from his country.

So he is not even American now. He stares down at his scarred, cracked hands, still bright with bruises from years of warehouse work, left sore by the boxes he'd carry around the shed every night after school. He used to be proud. Used to be told by his Papi, *así es como salimos adelante* even though he'd fall asleep the next day somewhere between fourth and fifth period.

He remembers perhaps the most important cardboard box he's packed, which is not from the warehouse but the one that sits beside him, soggy with snow. The timer of ten minutes had blared through his head, as he was told to fit all his world into one foot cubed. His model airplane didn't fit. Mami told him, between heaving gasps of air, to pack clothes. He couldn't put his Knicks hoodie in the box, so he wore it out. Beneath the sleeve, he feels the weight of the bracelet again, a dread he can't shake. The patriotic swirls of italicized letters burn into his skin.

REGARDING PROPERTY: ILLEGAL ALIEN CHILDREN WILL BE ALLOWED TEN MINUTES TO PACK STRICTLY NECESSARY BELONGINGS IN A SEALED BOX, WHICH MUST BE NO LARGER THAN THE FOLLOWING DIMENSIONS.

He kicks up the snow off the black asphalt, which is the same color as the bounding mop of fur that is his dog, who used to wait for him to come home every day, feet skidding across the wooden floor to greet him. It's usually his job to feed him. Who will feed him after today? Is he sniffing through vacated rooms now, searching for the remnants of a teenage boy he will never find? The house must be cold and empty, a wreckage after a storm.

Down the street, he watches the old man stumbling about in the snowfall, shoveling the sidewalk. White drifts building on white. How strange it is to watch his neighbor go about his normal day as if something monumental hasn't changed. What is it like to live without a constant cloud of anxiety? To breathe without worrying that everything could be stolen from you at any moment? Even before today, he had felt the ominous shadow of change that had crept up over his neighborhood. Knocks on doors, pointed fingers. Rewards, bargains. Asking, interrogating, spying, too many whispers about papers and deportation and who really deserved to be here, too many curtains drawn tight over windows.

UPDATE: UNDER FEDERAL LAW, UNITED STATES CLEANSING & SAFETY ENFORCEMENT MAY QUESTION ANY PERSON UNDER THE SUSPICION OF WITHHOLDING INFORMATION REGARDING A FELLOW DISTRICT RESIDENT'S LEGAL STATUS. ALL PERSONS ARE REQUIRED TO PROVIDE ANY AND ALL KNOWLEDGE THEY MAY HAVE.

He doesn't know when the bus will come, in this haze of icy air. His reasoning lies in a gray fog of his mami crying at night in front of the television. His papi coming home from the factory, arms swollen and blistered, later and later until one day he just...didn't. Sometimes people disappeared that way. People like them. But of course, it was for safety. For security. For the common good.

The world seems to silence itself as he cycles through chopped up words and snippets of phrases in his mind, clips from telenovelas and Spanish 1 textbooks, because back "home" they speak Spanish. He's unsure how to escape the stalemate of standing with a foot on both sides of the border. Will they understand that his skin is a desert, and his eyes dark pools of coffee, and his hair a moonless night and his tongue must be meant for rolling his 'r's but he still smashes burgers and his whole childhood was wrapped in red white and blue?

The bracelet on his wrist is like a noose around the story his parents told him, how they clawed their way to freedom out of gunshots and gangs and food so scarce they had nearly starved. How they had wept on the floor of the midwife's house because their baby was alive and well and *American*, his small kicking feet touching this country's soil first. How the days gone without water, nights spent shaking with fever, arms battered with razor wire imprints were all worth it because the promise was now in their arms, crying out into the fragile air.

He's not ready to leave.

He's not ready when the bus pulls up and the driver's eyes are tired as if he's seen too much, too many times. His fingers grip the metal railing as he steps onboard, tethering himself to the only thing left to hold, his mother's hand a distant dream. He sees himself in every cracked fingernail of the kids who spent Saturdays scrubbing clean the floors of someone else's house, who now hang their heads low. The girl coughing in her seat like her chest is caving in reminds him of the days he suffered through class with an exploding fever because *hay que aprender* no matter what. He watches the glowing government billboards slip by out the window as he is jostled side to side next to an infant in her father's lap whose cheeks are rosy from crying. No one tells her not to cry. He watches the snow fall like feathers at first, quiet as it blurs out the window with frost and blankets the streets. In the air hangs the scent of sweat and the murmurings of prayer, remnants of reassurance. Outside, the pale sky empties itself onto the city.

Half-frozen in the wind, the country's flag hangs overhead, fighting the storm as it swallows, still shaking in the cold like an unsettled ghost.