

## BY THE TIME WE GET TO ARIZONA

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THE BUZZ IN ULICEZ'S molars intensified as he drew nearer to the border. They'd said it would help him find his way; so long as he kept north it would keep humming along, a tiny siren song buried deep in his mouth to lead him ever onward. Really there was no need for the chip to vibrate, but the folks from Mariposa said it had to do something more than just tell the drones where you were all the time. It had to add value, they said. It had to be user friendly, so Ulicez and all the others wouldn't have sat in the dentist's chair for nothing. They could have put the chip under the skin, but then Ulicez might have been tempted to pick it out and sell it. So now it sat there in one of his teeth. He didn't know which one. They'd put him under for the surgery, and there were a couple way in the back, on the right side, that really fucking hurt. But they both felt just like bone when he ran his tongue over them. And neither one ached any more than the other when he sipped from his canteen. "Why are you walking?" his mother had asked. "They said they would send a truck for you. You know, a truck? With air-conditioning? Like they did for Elena?" Elena was waiting for him in Mariposa. Apparently they processed women differently. Something about establishing baseline reactions. Hormones. That was the official explanation: they needed more than the three-month probationary period with women, because the pheromone detectors positioned all through town could be totally thrown by menstrual cycles. But maybe they just wanted to see what the reunion would be like. If it would be romantic enough. Real enough. That was what Elena suspected. So she'd stepped up into the truck. She was smiling at him when the locks clicked down behind her. The black trucks that rumbled down from Mariposa had no drivers. Their doors locked automatically. They could take you anywhere, and you couldn't do a thing about it. To him, getting inside one of those things sounded like a pretty stupid idea. And technically, they hadn't said he couldn't walk in. He started just before dawn, when the sky was a bad bruise. He stopped in the living room, where his mother slept in the good chair. She was still half asleep when she stood up and kissed him good-bye. "There's extra ammo in the blue tin," he said, before he left. "I left the latch open, so you can get it open quick." She rubbed the swollen joints in her hands and smiled at him. "Things aren't like that, anymore," she said. "It's better, now." He didn't know if she was talking about the war, or her arthritis. Either way, he waited until she'd turned all the locks in the door before starting down the hallway and out of the building.

It was not far to Mariposa; the desert was all solar farmland, now, and much smaller than it used to be. That was what the border looked like,

now: a river of black photovoltaic cells open like flowers to the sun. Corporate surveillance flutterbys zoomed over and around them, automatically alerting the Border Patrol when they spotted a human darting northward whose gait, temperature, expression, and other secret factors did not fit the proprietary algorithmic definition of “employee.” Where the river stopped, Mariposa and the other border towns began. Mariposa was the latest. Mariposa sat in the space once occupied solely by tarantulas and the rocks they hid under. It sat half on one side, half on the other. They’d dropped it just west of the Nogales-Hermosillo highway like a flat-pack explosive device. It was still in the process of unfolding itself, Tab A into Slot B, still growing into a “planned prototyping community” or “cultural moat” or “probationary testing ground” or whatever it was meant to be. Ulicez had looked up pictures of it and it still looked raw and new, more like a movie set than an actual town. Given that everyone going there was auditioning for something, he supposed that made sense. On the way out of Nogales, El Tejón joined him. Ulicez had no idea what the old man’s real name was. He’d been called Tejón forever, likely because the whiskers on his chin were streaked with white like a badger’s. But now he melted out of the alley like a tomcat and kept pace with Ulicez without any appearance of effort or exertion. It was as though he’d been waiting for Ulicez to pass by, even though Ulicez had told only his mother that he planned to walk. Then again, it was somehow fitting that the old man be the one to take Ulicez across. They had crossed the same distance together so many times before, although by another route. “Mariposa?” the old man asked. Ulicez nodded. “Teeth hurt?” He nodded again. Tejón sucked his teeth and spat. Such was the extent of his commentary on that particular subject. As they headed for the highway, the ads began to diminish, the surfaces rendered inert by their shared demographics and direction. The last bus stop woke up as they shuffled by. It noticed the logo on Ulicez’s backpack and gave him the old bit about working at Walmart, where it surely must have come from. It told him how you could train at the nearest location and go anywhere with that training, because the system was the same everywhere, world without end, amen. Siempre más trabajo. Siempre. “Jesus,” Tejón said. “That ad hasn’t changed in, what, ten years?” “It was around when I was little.” Ulicez whistled the jingle and the old man laughed. They each waved good-bye to the ad (it was bad luck to be rude to the ads) and kept walking. At the highway interchange, Ulicez went ahead to help Tejón over the guardrail, but the old man threw his leg over without any trouble. They stood together on the rise by the crossroads, the old city at their backs and the new one burning white like a star in a field of glittering black. Above them, the real stars were winking out. Beyond the mountains, the night sky crinkled away from the horizon like burning paper. “Have you been back here, since?” “For school. Once.

Field trip.” Tejón laughed. It came out all at once in a sharp bark. “Field trip. Puta madre.” He shook his head and spat again. “Did they tell you how many people used to die here, on your field trip?” Ulicez said nothing. Of course they hadn’t mentioned it. They were there to look at the solar farms, after all, not to relive ancient history. The corporate outreach lady stood in front of his class with her transparent tablet shimmering in her hand and never breathed a word about the war. The guns. The heads. “They don’t know, do they? About before?” Ulicez shook his head. “Well, they’ll never hear it from me,” Tejón said.

TEJÓN SAID NOTHING AS Ulicez approached Mariposa. There was a clear demarcation between the farms and the town; the farms grew in gleaming black rows behind neatly cut curbs, and beyond the curbs were maquilas, and beyond the maquilas stood Mariposa, the city of transformation. The hum in Ulicez’s teeth stopped and he turned to mention it to Tejón, but the old man was already gone. Then the maquilas began to trill the end of the night shift. Squinting, he thought he saw Tejón drifting into the crowds of exhausted factory workers hustling toward the buses that would take them home. Or maybe it was just another another old man with salt in his beard. For a split second, Ulicez wished he could access the logs from all the drones they had passed under during their walk. It would help him confirm that Tejón had really been there. It was like that in the night, way back when. One minute the old man would be at his side, or his father’s, hefting a shovel or pickaxe or flashlight, and the next he would be gone, having disappeared down a bend in the tunnel like the badger he was. Now Ulicez faced the white stucco wall and the tiled arch that bridged its welcoming gap alone. He peered up at the lantern they’d hung from its center. It flickered, golden, with artificial candlelight. Slender palms, bereft of any dust, grazed the edge of the wall. He stepped through the arch. Nothing happened. He looked to his left, then to his right. No guards. No helpful theme park types, no strategically placed neighbors circling him like sharks. This early, no one was out. He saw another brown guy delivering mail. The mailman lifted his eyebrows at him, gave him a silent nod, but said nothing. And maybe that was that. The mailman’s eyes had clocked him. Maybe that was enough. He pushed forward into town, past the rows of bone-white stucco homes with pretty new red roofs. Why did everybody do that Spanish Revival thing out this way, Ulicez wondered, when it just made the houses look like shopping malls? Here everything was raw: the pavement black and even and soft as the soles of new shoes, the skinny little lemon trees leaning perilously over fresh sod lawns, the botflies so clean and quiet he didn’t notice them until they flitted away. Here they didn’t drain your blood, or chew your tissue; botflies harvested only data.

Mariposa extended fifteen miles from the border on either side, subdivided into a compass rose of quadrants with their own set of homes, businesses, schools, and service centers. In the center was a brick-paved plaza. And in the center of that stood a labyrinth of cacti and other succulents. They grew exactly where the old border crossing station used to be. He knew the spot all too well. Blindfolded, he could have pinpointed it on a map. They must have planted the maze on sod; obviously, they had not dug very deeply. Ulicez had seen aerial views of it: a twisted, thorny spiral buried deep in the new city's heart. Try as he might, he could never plot the way out. The thorns meshed together too tightly. Now he stood before it, fingers curled tightly around the scorching wrought iron that made up its fence, and peered inside. He lifted one hand and poked his index finger between the thorns. Beside him, one of the dusty pink prickly pear flowers in the garden unfurled. "Are you lost?" it asked. "Not really," Ulicez said. "Actually, I'm going home to my wife." "You should take one of my flowers, then," the cactus said. Ulicez could not spot the speaker doubtless hidden somewhere in its folds, but that didn't matter. "It'll score you some points at home." It wasn't until he was walking away that Ulicez realized the cactus had made a joke.

THE HOUSE LOOKED LIKE all the others on its street: eggshell white with an unscuffed wood door in muted turquoise and a dusty red tile roof, with a stubby little palm tree out front and some pink gravel in the yard. It was like that book about the kids who go to different worlds, and on the final one all the kids come out and bounce their balls in unison. Ulicez couldn't remember the title, or even what the story was about. All he remembered was that image: all the kids outside, bouncing their balls in rhythm with one another, like the whole street was really just made up of two mirrors reflecting one very lonely child. It had given him nightmares. Now he lived there. Elena opened the door before he could even knock on it. He'd been hers since he saw her step off a bus and into the driveway of his school, holding a melting bottle of frozen water to her bare neck. The sight of her rooted him to the spot, as though he'd accidentally shocked himself on the old metal plate surrounding the streetlight across from his building. She had looked up and smiled, and for the first time in his life, he had not looked away. He had looked right back. She walked over to him, held out the bottle of water, and asked him if he was thirsty. And that was that. Now she stepped through the door, wrapped her arms around his neck, and gave him a kiss worthy of a telenovela. Lots of sucking, lots of licking. She cheated a little to her right as she did, and he couldn't figure out why she was turning him in that direction until she kissed his right ear and whispered: "There's a camera in the planter just

over there.” She pulled away and gave him a big smile. “You walked?” He plastered on his own smile. “Why does everybody keep asking me that?” He looked her up and down and squeezed her wrists. “You look great.” In truth, Elena looked WASP-ish in her little white sundress and her tiny gold sandals and her baby-pink fingernail polish. She’d washed her hair and ironed it flat. If she’d been wearing black, he’d have thought her on her way to a funeral. Instead, he noticed the way she’d done her makeup. It was streaky with inexperience: the stuff under her eyes was paler than it had any business being, somehow highlighting the shadows there instead of hiding them. She didn’t meet his gaze. “Is there something wrong?” he asked. Her smile’s wattage increased substantially. Her voice climbed an octave. “No, nothing. Come inside.” He followed her.

The house was pure MUJI: bland, brand-free, everything all eggshell and fake white pine, all the way down to the pearly tile floor in the foyer and the not-quite-Mason-jar pendant lamp above it. It seemed bigger inside, airy. The kind of house white people had on network television. “Let’s have a shower,” Elena said. Maybe constant surveillance and performing a good marriage would have fringe benefits beyond citizenship. “Twist my arm.” The mirror smiled at them as they entered the bathroom. “CUSTOMIZE PROFILE DATA?” it asked, when Ulicez stood in front of it. He said no, thank you, and started stripping. It blanked once his nipples were reflected in its surface. “They shy away from nudity,” Elena said. “Automatic. Antilittigation factory default.” Not for the first time, Ulicez realized that Elena was the brains of their particular operation. He touched her elbow and turned her around and kissed her for real, this time, just something simple and closed mouthed with a long hug at the end, like normal people who hadn’t seen each other in a long time. A sigh shuddered out of her. Something really was wrong. “You missed me that bad, huh?” he asked. Something coughed up out of her: a laugh, a sob, he couldn’t tell. She hugged him tighter. “Yeah.” She pulled away and they stripped off the rest of their clothes. Even the shower mechanism was absurdly minimalist: you had to wave your hand to start it, and then do some complicated gesture-fu to make it warmer or colder. They’d obviously been going for Minority Report and wound up with Close Encounters instead. Finally the water reached a reasonable temperature and Elena stepped in. They’d got their hair wet when her eyes finally met his. “I’m late.” It was as though the water temperature had dipped suddenly and steeply. Out of habit, he remained perfectly still. They used to do that, in the tunnel, when they heard someone walking above. Now he did it every time he felt the slightest shift in adrenaline. “Aren’t you going to say something?” His voice had disappeared along with his motion. He worked his mouth a little to get it back. “You sure?” “My app is.” “But you have an

IUD.” “I know.” She swallowed. “I checked. The strings are still in. But the test still came back positive. It’s in a drawer over there, if you want to see.” “I’m not going to go look at your old pee stick. Gross.” He frowned. “What, did you think I wouldn’t believe you?” She looked away. That was that. Two weeks in this little Uncle Sam theme park town, and they were already distrusting each other. He leaned back against one wall of the shower. So far Elena didn’t look any different. Her mascara was running, and when she paused to wipe the water from her face it smeared away from her eyes, making her seem instantly younger. “I’m sorry,” she said. “I didn’t . . . I wasn’t . . . I know we can’t stay, if we keep it . . .” “That’s just a rumor. We don’t know that for sure.” She gave him the look that meant he was being stupidly hopeful and hopelessly naive. “Remember what happened to Maria and Guillermo?” Christ. She was right. Guillermo should have been a perfect candidate. He was supposed to be teaching magical realism to bored freshmen by now, putting his double Ph.D.s to use. His wife had a degree in early childhood education. They had a good relationship: the kind where everybody picked up their socks and the coffee was always fresh and the dishes got stacked at night. Exemplary. And they were doing well in Mariposa, or so they’d said: the kids at the daycare loved Maria, and Guillermo stayed out with his students, but not too late. Then they’d gotten pregnant and come back to Nogales. “Anchor babies,” Elena spat. “Fucking anchor babies. That’s what they’re worried about.” “That’s not it. It’s just the cost—” “It’s the same fucking thing, Ulicez. The exact same fucking thing.” He checked the dial. Their time was running out in more ways than one. “Come on. The water’s about to get cold.” He helped her out and reached blindly. “Where do we keep the towels?” “Oh. Sorry. Shit. I was going to set some out, and then . . .” Her breath hitched. She was still digging in the closet. She leaned inside it with her back to him. “Oh, shit, Ulicez. I’m sorry. I’m really sorry. I thought we’d be okay. I mean, it’s .6 percent. Six-tenths. Six fucking tenths.” Despite himself, he smiled. He reached past her, into the closet, and grabbed a towel. He hung it across her shoulders. “Well, at least we’ve got one thing going for us.” “What’s that?” “You’re getting better at swearing in English.”

THE NEXT DAY WAS orientation. Ulicez had to set up a separate appointment, because he’d come in earlier than the others on the bus, and he’d missed a last-minute time change that only the guys on the bus heard. That suited him just fine. He had enough to worry about and didn’t want to have to sit through a lecture on folding chairs with his fellow competitors. The guy at the Newcomer Processing Center said his name was Paul. He seemed like a grad student: sandals, tawny curls in a ponytail, finally developing a real tan, occasionally pausing to check that the tattoo inside his left wrist was just as edgy as he remembered. The NPC was a

big, airy building with exposed pipes and finished white oak beams against deeply saturated pastels: creamy mint, shrimpy pink. Ulicez guessed he was supposed to feel like he was in an artist's converted loft space, and not an immigration office. Paul called up some forms and toggled them over to a glass panel on his desk. Together, the two of them looked at Ulicez's file. It was all there: his height and weight and color stats, his birthdate, every address, every job. Every job they knew about, anyway. He had never been paid for the other work. That was really his dad's job, anyway. Sometimes his dad needed help. That was all. "Are my eyes really brown?" he asked. Paul cocked his head, as though he hadn't quite heard him right. He didn't get the joke. So much for shibboleths. "Is everything in order?" Ulicez asked. Paul nodded. "Yeah, everything looks good. This is your new job." He tapped one form, and the position appeared: junior laser technologist. His new responsibilities unfolded into a point-form list. He'd be working for a carbon capture company called GreenLock, using small autonomous lasers to inspect the integrity of the intake pipes, and maybe doing some repairs if the rods or mirrors inside them misaligned. He'd also have to make sure their power sources were all up to par, and that he knew the exact position of each and every one of them at all times, so none of them went around blinding the neighbor's cat by mistake. There was his signature at the bottom of the list. "Wow," Paul said. "That all sounds really technical." No shit, Ulicez thought. He opened up some footage of his work in the repair simulator, adjusting a YLF rod. "It's easy, after a while. You just have to have good hands." Paul smiled. "You must be a real hit with the ladies." Ulicez wiggled his fingers. "If my wife's testimony counted for anything, I'd already be a citizen by now." Paul's face took on a concerned aspect. "How is your wife, by the way?" Ulicez went perfectly still. "Excuse me?" "Well, the house is saying that she hasn't been feeling too well. The, uh . . ." Paul winced. "The toilet has been logging some extra activity . . ." Morning sickness. Of course. Given how tightly they watched the water out here, the water meter would have probably noticed the difference in their usage from the other users on the line, and the toilet would have accounted for it. "She gets nervous diarrhea," Ulicez lied. He watched Paul turn a gringo shade of green. When lying, it was best to go for something that made the person hearing it not want to hear anything more. Something embarrassing. His father had taught him that much. "I think, you know, with this whole thing, this whole setup, she's just on edge." "Right . . ." "She'll be fine now that I'm here." "Great." Paul tried to adjust his posture. Something tugged at the edge of Ulicez's awareness. Something he had missed. But now Paul was talking again. "You know how this works, right?" "Yeah. It works like Murder, right? Like the game?" Paul sighed heavily before starting what was obviously a memorized routine. "Your likelihood of obtaining a visa increases or

decreases based on your social capital at the end of your six-week trial period. That capital is determined by the people who live in Mariposa.

Every day, a new set of Mariposans is granted a certain number of upvotes and downvotes. If they tell anybody they're a voter, they lose their votes. Even if they're lying. The people who do play by the rules get more upvotes than downvotes to play with, but they can always choose to abstain, and not vote at all. If they do, the algorithm sorts them right back to the bottom of the deck." "So people who vote frequently, they're sorted to the top?" Paul smiled. "Yeah. It's an incentive." Ulicez nodded. It was always possible that the closet racists voted constantly, of course. But he chose not to bring that up. Instead, he asked: "When does the voting happen?" "At the end of the day. Around eight." "So after the voters have probably talked to their spouses?" Paul squirmed in his chair. "Yeah. We started doing it at five thirty, and then at noon, but fewer people voted when they were on their way home, or at lunch, or something. We're going to try it in the morning next." He smiled sheepishly. "After they've had their coffee, of course." It wasn't like Ulicez didn't know all these things going in. It was on the waiver he signed when he began the application process. Everybody back home said it would work out for him—that he was a good boy, a nice boy; that years of being a nerdy kid who found Lego cooler than guns would finally count for something in a place like Mariposa. Still, it was different hearing somebody lay it out like this.

Back home, with Elena asleep on his shoulder or his mother's stories on the display, it hadn't seemed entirely real. But here he was, his nervous sweat wicked away by aggressively conditioned air. "How do the voters know they've been chosen? Do they just get a ping?" "No. We tell them in person, the day before." His eyes widened. "I mean, not we, not me, but someone on the, you know, team." He didn't say task force. He didn't say agency. He didn't say officer. But the words hung there all the same. "Okay." Ulicez looked at the documents on the desk. "I guess I should get going to my next stop, huh?" Paul checked the time display. "Oh, yeah, jeez. Sorry." He offered his hand and Ulicez shook it. "Can you tell me where your restroom is?" Ulicez asked. "Best not to be fidgeting on my first day on the job." Paul tittered. Until this moment, Ulicez had not known that men could even make that particular sound. "Last door on the left," Paul said. It wasn't until he was zipping up that Ulicez understood what he'd missed. The toilet had only logged usage, not content. It was not detecting the change in her hormones. The only hormone detectors in the town were ambient, meant to find explosions of cortisol that might indicate dishonesty. They didn't know she was pregnant. And they wouldn't know for a good while, at least. They had time.



“WE DON’T HAVE ANY time. Arizona cuts off at twelve weeks.” “Seriously?” In Mexico, the procedure was allowed until twenty. They’d have a full five months, two months longer than the probationary period in Mariposa. Ulicez chewed halfheartedly at the remainder of his elotes. The lime here tasted all wrong. Too acidic. Not sweet. And the cheese was too salty. He had no room to complain, though. Elena couldn’t even keep hers down. “Do you have any idea how far along you are?” “For the millionth time, no.” She sighed. “I’m sorry. But it doesn’t matter, now, does it? We’re stuck. If I go to a doctor, they’ll know, and we’ll get kicked out. If I don’t go to a doctor, we’ll be accused of lying when they figure it out, and then we’ll get kicked out.” She smoothed her hair back. “Fuck. I’ll have to keep buying tampons just to grief the data.” “We don’t know if it goes that far—” “Of course it goes that far, Ulicez. Of course it does. You think they’d let a whole data-mining infrastructure that’s worked well enough for decades just sit there, going to waste? Why do you think they issued us special discount cards at Target? Because Target is the best at this game. Target probably already knows I’m knocked up.” Her voice caught. By the time Ulicez stood up to rub her shoulders, she had swiped the tears away with the heel of her hand. “I hate these fucking hormones,” she said. “I know.” He kept squeezing. “You should try to eat something. Even if it’s just ice cream.” She sniffed. “That might be nice.” “I’ll go get some.” He paused at the freezer. “Should I even bother with a bowl?” “Shut up.” Ulicez kept scooping. He wished they had condensed milk to go on top. If they had, he could simmer the can in a pot of water and caramelize its contents. Elena would probably like that. His own mother had mentioned enjoying it when she was carrying him. Jesus, what were they going to tell his mother? “If they would just stock some damn misoprostol in this godforsaken country, I could take care of this whole thing by myself.” There was no condensed milk. Ulicez picked up the bowl of ice cream and set it down in front of his wife. Even the dishware was bland here. He’d seen more interesting designs at his last trip to Denny’s. “Misoprostol?” “Cytotec. It’s for ulcers. And abortions. Well. Misoprostol and some other thing. That’s what RU-486 is.” “And they don’t sell it here?” “Nope. Not without a prescription.” She laughed. “But they do in Mexico! My sister even asked me if I wanted to take some with me. You know. Just in case. Shit.” “Eat your ice cream.” She dug in. “Thank you.” Ulicez took a pull of his beer. He watched the smaller kitchen screen embedded in the refrigerator. Madrigal wasn’t going to get anywhere in this game if he kept flailing around the pitch like that with his elbows sticking out and his knees going nowhere. The man ran like a child. It was only because he was big that they’d let him into the league; he was a bruiser and he had a chilling effect on a passing game. He was a solid wall of muscle and bone

that just plunked itself down on the pitch, looming down over the triangle formations of smaller, nimbler players. A wall. Of course. “To save us some time,” he said, “let me ask you one question.” Her spoon clinked in the bowl. “Sure.” “Would you be comfortable buying it online? This miso thing.” “It would have to go through customs.” She snorted. “Whatever that means, out here.” “Right then.” He nodded to himself, then to her. “There’s a way around this. Or a way through it, anyway. But it’ll involve me getting some things from work.”

FIRST, THEY WERE GOING to need a spider bot. Well, that wasn’t quite true. First, they were going to need a way into the labyrinth. And a couple of shovels. And then they were going to need a spider bot. And then, after that . . . After that they would need the Badger himself. “Are you sure he’ll even remember the code?” Elena asked him, in the shower. “He’s the one who taught it to me, so he had fucking better,” Ulicez said. “Where did you say that postcard was?” On the postcard, he expressed a longing for his mother’s plum jam, the likes of which he had not found in the land of the free and the home of the brave. He then mentioned an event that took place in April 1986: Chernobyl. It was surprisingly easy to tie plum jam and nuclear disaster together—all he had to do was make a joke about his mother’s inability to properly latch a pressure cooker, and done was done. “When should we say we’d like to see him again?” Ulicez asked, carefully. “As soon as possible,” Elena said. “Tell him we wish we could spend the weekend with him. You know. Like we used to.” At the mailbox, she turned to him and whispered: “Plum jam? That’s the secret code word?” He nodded. “Sure is.” “Plum jam means abortion pills. You’re sure.” “I’m sure.” “Why?” “Well, because I remember, and because—” “No, no. Why plum jam?” He winced. “If this all works out the way we want, the meaning should become pretty clear.” The next day he asked to take a look at the autonomous pipeline inspectors, “just to be sure he was familiar with them.” His boss thought that was a great idea. His boss was a Ph.D. who insisted on being called by his first name, Terry. Terry was a short, skinny man whose blond hair was turning white and whose salmon-colored polo shirts tended to highlight the rosacea around his nose. But he seemed genuinely happy to be in Mariposa: he kept a golf bag in his office, and he insisted that there would be a team-building event out on the links some Friday or other. Each spider bot was kept in an opaque plastic terrarium about the size of a shoebox. The boxes rustled as he strode past. Pressure sensors in their claws must have sensed his movement. He willed himself to ignore the inherent creepiness of their blind skittering. He needed one of them. They needed one. Way at the end of the steel racks was a box of various bots in states of disrepair. The sticker said they were older models; the parts didn’t exist to fix them any longer. “They’re spares,”

his boss said, when he carried the box out of the room with him. “We just use them for the parts that still work, when the printer gets buggy.” “Could I make one on my own, at home?” Ulicez asked. “I wouldn’t be using company time. I just want to get to know them better if I’m going to be fixing them, and it’s probably better if I just tinker alone on my own—” “—in a low-stakes environment. I hear you.” Terry beamed. “No problem. Just run them through the scanner and sign out for the manifest it spits out.” “Thank you. I really appreciate it.” “And I, for one, appreciate you taking the initiative! We need more of that kind of thinking around here.” And then Terry winked at him. Ulicez had the strangest feeling that he had just scored some points. Maybe the game wasn’t so random after all.

“WHEN DID YOU START working on this?” Ulicez shone his flashlight down the tunnel. It was still as he remembered it: a surprisingly cool, clean space seven feet high and five feet across. Cheap, unfinished Home Depot wainscoting secured the earthen walls. Orange and black extension cords extended all the way down the ceiling; back in the day they’d had it hooked to generators in basements on the other side of the border and lit the thing with utility lamps purchased one hopeful Saturday on clearance at the last auto shop in town. Now both those buildings that supplied electricity were gone, and Ulicez and Elena had to make do with the flashlights. “I was a kid,” he answered. “The work had already started before I was born, I think. I mean, they built a lot of these tunnels back then. This is just one they never found.” “Did you ever move anybody?” Ulicez shook his head. “My dad didn’t like me to do any of the real work. He just needed help with the engineering. You know, telling guys where and how to dig, how to shore it up, stuff like that.” “It looks pretty solid.” “It is. But you can’t be too careful.” Ulicez put down his backpack and withdrew a shoebox from it. Carefully upending it on the ground, he waited until the spider bot had crawled out. Lights on each of its eight legs twinkled to life, and he watched as it skittered on ahead of them, forming tight spirals from the floor to the right wall to the ceiling, down the left wall and back again, over and over. “I hate those things,” Elena said. “They’re creepy.” “They save lives. They work in pipelines all over the world.” “And they do tunnels, too?” Ulicez smiled. “Yes. They do tunnels, too.” They followed the spider along the tunnel, pausing when it paused, waiting as it fired light from its joints at various sections of wall. Occasionally its green glow would shift into yellow, but it never turned red. That was good; Ulicez hadn’t supervised the entire tunnel build, but he had confidence in the guys who did the job. The cartel had paid them good money, after all. And there were certain consequences for not doing the job right. “I wish I could have spent more time with him,” Elena said. “Your father, I mean.” “Me too.” Ulicez watched the spider appear to work something out before scrabbling

on ahead. "He liked you. He liked us, together." "Really?" He nodded. "Mom said so, anyway. After." Elena took his hand. "I'm sorry. For everything." Ulicez pulled up short. He let his flashlight dangle from his hand. It was easier to say the words in the shadows. "Stop. It's like you said. Point six percent. You couldn't see that coming. Nobody could. I sure as hell didn't." "But—" "Stop. Really. It's done. We're taking care of it. Together." He pointed down the tunnel with his flashlight. "El Tejón is down there, waiting. It's all going to be fine." He tilted his head. "Isn't it?" "There's going to be a lot of blood. It'll hurt." "But I'll be there. And we can go to a doctor. We can say it's a miscarriage." Elena looked like she wanted to say something more, but instead she just launched herself at him and wrapped both her arms around him like she expected him to blow away somehow. He set his chin on her head after a minute. "Are you having second thoughts?" he asked. She nodded. "We have to get the drugs, Elena. Having some choice is better than having no choice at all. That's why we're here. Or there. In Mariposa, I mean. That's why we came." She sniffed. "I know." She hugged him even harder, which he hadn't known was possible. The woman was a lot stronger than she looked. "It's just that you're being so nice. And so brave. And I'd like a little more of that in the world, you know?" She pulled away and wiped her eyes. She smiled. "Fucking hormones. Sorry." He reached out and held her hand. "Let's just get the stuff. If you decide this isn't what you want, then—" "No, it is what I want, I just—" "Let's just keep it a decision, okay? You can't say it's a real decision if there aren't any other options." She appeared to gather herself. "Okay." They were still holding hands when El Tejón appeared at the end of the tunnel. He was in some sort of gentleman adventurer costume, down to the pith helmet and elegant riding boots. "Why are you dressed as the Most Interesting Man in the World?" Ulicez asked. "It was the only way they'd let me inspect the rapid transit system," the old man said. He waved a fake badge at them. "Had to get underground somehow." Ulicez whistled. "Wow." Tejón brought Elena in for a hug and a kiss. Then he brought out a couple of boxes. "The directions are on the tape," he said. "And this one is some Valium. For the pain." She beamed. "You think of everything!" "Make sure to drink lots of water first. Maybe take this with a little food." "I will." "And you'll have to go to the hospital. Are you ready for that?" Elena's lips pursed. "Yes," she said after a long moment. "I think so." Tejón sighed heavily. "The sooner you use these, the better. The longer you wait, the less they work. Okay?" "Okay." "Okay." Tejón looked at Ulicez. "You take care of this one. She's going to need you." "I know." Something occurred to him. "Have you spoken to my mother?" Tejón shook his head. "There's no reason for her to know, I don't think." "Agreed." Tejón tried to smile. "I wish things could be different for you two. But they will be different, soon enough. Very

different. You'll be Americans!" "We're already Americans," Elena said. "This whole continent is America." Tejón's laugh echoed down the tunnel. He gave them each hugs and kisses. Then he shooed them on their way. When Ulicez turned around, the old man was gone. He really was a badger. "Should it be glowing red like that?" Elena tugged on his sleeve. "The spider? Isn't red bad?" Ulicez aimed his flashlight down the tunnel. A cloud of dust was wafting their way. "Yes," he said. "Red is bad. Very bad." He pointed the flashlight at the ceiling. A fine crack had worked its way along under the cable. He thought he heard trucks. He watched root hairs trembling in the light. Then he was digging in his backpack. "What's happening?" "There's been a cave-in up ahead," he said. "We have to dig. Come on." "But we're not on the other side yet! Are we?" Ulicez checked the map. Shit. "No. We're not. We're . . . we're in the solar farm. We're on the American side, still." He withdrew one shovel, then another. He held it out to Elena. She refused to take it. "Ulicez. Think. They're going to find two Mexicans digging their way out of a tunnel. They'll see it. The solar people. They'll see us trying to get back into America." Ulicez looked back at the cloud of dirt. Fuck. As if on cue, the spider bounded back to him. It was covered in grit. One of its leg joints had a pebble stuck in it. Its antennae were broken. Whatever had happened up ahead, it was still happening. "Elena," he said. "We have to dig our way out. Now. Before we're buried alive." "And saying we make it out, what do we tell the people up there?" She pointed at the ceiling. Ulicez started digging. "I'll think of something." "I have a feeling I won't like it." "Oh, I'm almost certain that you won't."

"GET NAKED. NOW." "What?" "I have an idea." Elena gave him a look that said this had better be good. But she kicked off her shoes and started stripping anyway. White and green light strobed across her increasing expanse of skin. Ulicez unbuckled his pants and shucked them down. Then he tackled his wife. "What the fuck? You asshole, my bra isn't even—" "STOP! SHOW US YOUR HANDS!" Ulicez grinned. He knelt down on the ground and held up his hands. Beneath him, Elena shot him a look that was pure death. Grudgingly, she got up on her knees and held her hands up. Behind them, keys jingled and flashlights bobbed. Ulicez had one moment to take a look around at the massive black lotuses open to the night around them, and how the stars were reflected in their gleaming surfaces, before his hands were forced down and back and enclosed in bread-tie cuffs. A very distant point was surprised and pleased at how well he was taking it. This was everything he'd ever feared, everything he'd worked his whole life to avoid: getting caught on the wrong side of the border, getting arrested. Flashlights and weapons and the desert cruel and quiet all around them. "What the . . ." The voice was panting, winded.

Whoever they were, they'd run. "Ma'am, are you doing okay?" another voice asked. A woman. Stern. "What?" Elena almost brought her hands down, then appeared to think better of it. "I mean, yes. No. I'm okay." "Was this man attacking you?" Of course. He almost laughed. Then something wiser in him reminded him that he was in front of people holding Tasers, and he reined himself in. The border botflies had motion-activated computer vision programmed to recognize all sorts of motion: running, walking, jumping. It made sense that fucking would be on the list. It was pretty distinctive, after all. And to the cameras, what Ulicez had done probably looked a lot like an attempted rape. "What? No! This man is my husband." "Marital rape is a serious problem, ma'am, you don't need to be afraid of telling—" "He wasn't trying to rape me, you fucking idiots!" Elena brought her hands down and turned around. "He was trying to fuck me. We live over there." She pointed vaguely north, at the bright lights of Mariposa. "We . . ." She was panting, now. The adrenaline was clearly washing out of her, leaving her at a loss for words. "We were just . . ." "We just wanted to get away from the cameras," Ulicez said. His voice sounded remarkably steady in his ears. "From the observation. We're on probation, in Mariposa, and there's this points system, and it's basically to see if you love your wife enough, and . . ." He licked his lips. "It kinda . . . puts a damper on things? You know?" "So we thought we'd go outside," Elena said. "Don't y'all have, like, a yard or something?" This was a kid. A rookie. "There are cameras in the yard!" Elena was gesticulating, now, playing into the whole fiery-Latina-woman bullshit. "Seriously, they watch us all the time." "Is that even legal?" the woman asked. "Arizona has a Peeping Tom law, I know 'cause my ex—" "Shut up about your ex, already." There was warmth at Ulicez's back. "If I let you go, son, are you gonna run?" "No, sir. I just want to go home." "All right, then. Shut your barn door and turn around." Ulicez did up his fly and stood up, slowly. They were rent-a-cops. Not border security, not BORSTAR, not a militia, just corporate night-shifters with orange cheese-worm dust on their shirts and dark rings under their eyes. Above them, botflies glowed green and hovered, perfectly still. Ulicez resisted the temptation to address them directly. "We're sorry," he said. "Really sorry," Elena added. "Yeah. We just . . ." He heaved a very heavy sigh. "That place will drive you crazy, you know? Just knowing how much rides on it, on how you look and how you act and everything, and . . ." "We haven't had sex in weeks," Elena said. "Really." "You married?" the man asked. "Yes," they answered in unison. As one, all three rent-a-cops laughed. "Well shit, son, welcome to the new normal," the man said. "Get your lady her sweater. Y'all want a ride back to town? We'll help you straighten everything out." Ulicez almost choked, but Elena stepped forward. "That would be so great. Thank you." She jerked her head at him. "Did I mention this was his idea?" The woman rolled her eyes. She flipped

her long gray braid to the other side of her head and helped Elena put her shirt back on. “My ex, he was like that,” she said. “One time he wanted to go under the bleachers at the high school. Naturally, after that, I found out he was running around with some freshman at the community college, and I had to end it.” “Obviously,” Elena said. “Would you shut up about that asshole?” the man said. “Honestly, Joanne, it’s bad enough when you talk our ears off about it—” “And it just means you’re really not over it, yet,” the kid said. He jingled some keys. “Can I drive?” “No, you cannot drive, I keep telling you, not at night. You let me drive, and you let me do the talking when we get up to . . .” He held up a key fob and in the distance, a massive truck started. “What’s it called, again?” “Mariposa,” Ulicez said. “We live in Mariposa.”

#### STORY NOTES—Madeline Ashby

International borders are a work of fiction. They are a consensual hallucination that we all engage in to perpetuate the status quo. In that regard, they are much like currency in that they have value, but the value itself is a fragile social construct vulnerable to the whims of history. Trust me. I’m an immigrant. In January 2006, I was denied entry to Canada. I entered the next month, after spending an hour pleading my case with border security. Finally, I immigrated to Canada. Two years later, a friend of mine was arrested at the U.S. border, and then convicted of assaulting a federal officer when he was the one who took the beating. I decided to write a design thesis on the future of border security, and what I imagined was nightmarish: a world of invisible, invasive surveillance, the kind the NSA dreams about.<sup>1</sup> This story is an effort to imagine another future. I kept some of the surveillance, but not all of it. Instead, I focused on the border space as a kind of third space, wherein social norms and other mores can be temporarily left behind like so much cultural baggage. I was drawn to stories like the 1967 TV series *The Prisoner*, where a man wakes up in a village full of people whose names have become numbers. And I was thinking of novels like China Miéville’s *The City & the City*, where the border isn’t so much a line as it is a ritual. I was also forced to reconsider some of the materials I had read during my stint in the Border Town Design Studio, which exhibited at the Detroit Design Festival in 2011. Among these was a paper by Adham Selim called “Emergent Border Cities,”<sup>2</sup> which suggested a design intervention in the border space that would act like a cultural moat as well as a border town. The community would enforce the border. The border would become the community. I was fascinated by the idea and ran with it after talking with Darren Petrucci at Arizona State University about things like corporate

sponsorship and branded communities. It was then that I lit on the idea of terraforming the desert around Nogales as solar farmland. To me, corporate security acting in the interests of protecting a technology investment would do a better job than a bunch of police academy washouts whose hiring requirements don't even include a college degree. To understand the need to blacken the desert with photovoltaic cells, you have to understand the punitive nature of the Sonora Desert. Thanks to Operation Gatekeeper<sup>3</sup> the majority of illegal immigrants have to hike or ride through it to avoid border checkpoints. To borrow a phrase from David Lean, the Sonora is God's anvil. In the summer, average temperatures hit 120°F. Every Every day, No More Deaths picks up the migrants that U.S. Customs and Border Protection dumps back in Mexico and gives them water and food, bandages their blistered feet, and treats their tarantula bites. But in reality, people die in the borderland all the time. Between 1998 and 2009, they numbered over four thousand.<sup>4</sup> Most of those men, women, and children died of exposure. I realized the solar energy that was killing them could be fueling both countries instead. At the same time, news was coming out of the American Southwest that looked like it belonged in the pages of a Margaret Atwood novel. Texas women were crossing the border to obtain Cytotec, because new laws were (and still are) eliminating abortion clinics and making preprocedural sonograms mandatory.<sup>5</sup> It was a bad year for Texas women. It was a bad year for women, period. What was life like for the immigrant women of Texas? I wondered. What would it be like to sacrifice so much for a dream of freedom, only to have that freedom taken away? It was in that spirit that I named this story after the Public Enemy song "By the Time I Get to Arizona," written about Governor Evan Mecham's racist policies<sup>6</sup> in that state. Arizona's current stop-and-frisk policies, and its measurement of the "border" as "anywhere 200 miles north of the fence,"<sup>7</sup> haven't evolved much since 1991. You might think my research and personal experience would have made the story easier to write. It didn't. I struggled with it at each step. Writing it uncovered a well of bad memories inside me, and every time I stared at the blank white page I felt I was really looking down a deep dark hole. The same history that compelled me to write about the border also frustrated my attempts to pin it down with words. When I was in the process of immigrating, so much of my anxiety was wordless. It's only now that I understand how the invasiveness of it damaged my sense of dignity. And I'm one of the lucky ones. In the end, I had to decide on an ending that was just as absurd as the border itself. Sometimes absurdity is the only thing that can combat absurdity. So what was a story about how surveillance causes us to perform citizenship as an identity became a story about how, for the people in the audience watching that performance, the ubiquitous surveillance is nothing but an unfortunate nuisance. Tragic when it happens to me, funny



when it happens to you. What's really funny, of course, is that American citizens are surveilled just as closely as the people outside its borders, and the ones trying to get in. The whole country is one big border town, to read the Snowden documents. We are all performing our citizenship. We are all living in the Village.

#### Notes

1. <http://madelineashby.com/?p=1068>
2. <http://adhamselim.blogspot.ca/2011/05/emergent-border-cities.html>
3. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Gatekeeper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Gatekeeper)
4. <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424127887323741004578417113103350812>
5. [http://austinist.com/2012/08/14/texas\\_women\\_are\\_crossing\\_the\\_border.php](http://austinist.com/2012/08/14/texas_women_are_crossing_the_border.php)
6. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalypse\\_91...\\_The\\_Enemy\\_Strikes\\_Black](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apocalypse_91..._The_Enemy_Strikes_Black)
7. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/24/us/politics/24immig.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/24/us/politics/24immig.html?_r=0)