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DETENTION

A Thesis

by

VIRGINIA MURRAY-TORRES

Submitted to the Graduate College of  
The University of Texas Rio Grande Valley  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

December 2019

Major Subject: Creative Writing



# DETENTION

A Thesis  
by  
VIRGINIA MURRAY-TORRES

## COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Prof. Emmy Pérez  
Chair of Committee

Dr. David Bowles  
Committee Member

Dr. Steven Schneider  
Committee Member

December 2019



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## ABSTRACT

Murray-Torres, Virginia, Detention. Master of Fine Arts (MFA), December, 2019, 106 pp., references, 39 titles.

“Detention” is a novel-in-verse about an undocumented teenage girl named Guadalupe who has spent almost her entire life on the Texas side of the U.S. borderlands with her mother and sister. When she is seventeen years old, she is detained by border patrol agents, separated from her family, and spends almost six months in an immigration detention center. Her story is recounted during the three minutes she waits for the immigration judge to make a decision during her trial. During that time, her relived thoughts take us from the detention center to her family, her upbringing, and other significant events in her life through a 360° point of view of her experiences and of those with whom she interacts, such as her mother, sister, guard and others.





## DEDICATION

The completion of my Master of Fine Arts studies would not have been possible without the love and support of my family and friends. My mother, Dr. Eva Torres, my father, Jesus M. Torres, my wife, Dr. Teresa Murray-Torres, my sister, Jennifer Olmeda, my friends, Laura Chavez and Erin Robey, plus so many more who inspired, motivated, and supported me through this entire process and to the accomplishment of my degree. Thank you for your love and support.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I will always be grateful to Prof. Emmy Pérez, chair of my thesis committee, for all her mentorship and advice. From my initial class poetry class to full length book manuscript, her belief in me as a writer, as well as her wisdom, support and guidance over the years has been instrumental in the completion of the thesis process. My thanks go to my thesis committee members, Dr. David Bowles and Dr. Steven Schneider. Their encouragement, patience, and advice on my thesis helped to ensure the quality of my book manuscript and critical introduction.

I would also like to thank my colleagues at the UTRGV Graduate Office who advocated for me and encouraged me through the graduation process. Also, I would like to thank all of the family and friends who stayed up late to read previous drafts and offer feedback.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
CHAPTER I. CRITICAL INTRODUCTION.....	1
Synopsis.....	3
Intended Audience.....	3
Background Influences.....	4
Novel-In-Verse.....	5
Framework Story.....	6
Stream of Consciousness.....	6
Time.....	7
1 <sup>st</sup> Person Point of View.....	9
Series of Dramatic Monologues.....	9
Multi-Voice Poetry.....	10
Poetic Forms.....	11
Cross-curricular Alignment.....	15
Colors.....	16

Significance of Numbers.....	17
Character Breakdown.....	19
Social-political Background.....	22
Physical and Mental Health.....	24
Own Voices.....	29
Future Goals.....	31
CHAPTER II. COURTROOM: SEPTEMBER 2022; 10:06 AM.....	33
Dirty Girls (Officer Flores).....	33
10 Reasons She Can't Be a U.S. Citizen (Judge Stewart).....	36
Test Anxiety (Guadalupe).....	37
Designated Translator (Guadalupe).....	39
CHAPTER III. BOWIE HIGH SCHOOL: OCTOBER 2021.....	40
Public School Re-Education Part I (Guadalupe).....	40
Brilliance (Ms. Reynolds).....	42
Quiet (Esperanza).....	44
Public School Re-Education Part II (Guadalupe).....	46
CHAPTER IV. DETENTION: MARCH 2022.....	48
Detention (Guadalupe).....	48
Faust (Dolores: translated).....	49
Rules (Officer Flores).....	51
The Stanford Detention Experiment Part II (The Uniforms).....	52
CHAPTER V. THE BEGINNING: JUNE 2012.....	54
Lupita La Luchadora (Dolores: translated).....	54

Esperanza (Guadalupe).....	56
The Stanford Detention Experiment Part I (Officer Flores).....	57
Family Values (La Raza).....	58
CHAPTER VI. DETENTION: MARCH 2022.....	59
Juan (Guadalupe).....	59
The Snagged Thread (Guadalupe).....	60
The Stanford Detention Experiment Part III (Officer Flores).....	61
Officer Flores (Guadalupe).....	62
CHAPTER VII. THE INEVITABLE: MARCH 2022.....	63
The Pulga, Produce, and Patrolmen (Dolores: translated).....	63
The Intake (Esperanza).....	66
The Endless Car Ride (The Children).....	67
Trail of Tears (Guadalupe).....	68
CHAPTER VIII. DETENTION: JULY 2022.....	71
Juanito II (Guadalupe).....	71
The Stanford Detention Experiment Part IV (Officer Flores).....	73
Snuffed Out (Guadalupe).....	74
Starvation (Guadalupe).....	76
CHAPTER IX. HOME: SEPTEMBER 2020.....	77
Quinceañera (Guadalupe).....	77
Requerdos (Dolores: translated).....	79
Hope (Esperanza).....	81
Managing (Guadalupe).....	82



CHAPTER X. DETENTION: AUGUST 2022.....	83
Juanito Chiquito (Guadalupe).....	83
Cages (Dolores: translated).....	84
The Stanford Detention Experiment Part V (Officer Flores).....	86
Unraveled (Guadalupe).....	88
CHAPTER XI. THE END: SEPTEMBER 2017.....	89
Crochet (Dolores: translated).....	89
Happy Birthday (Guadalupe).....	90
El Cucuy (Esperanza).....	92
Waiting (Guadalupe).....	93
CHAPTER XII. COURTROOM: SEPTEMBER 2022; 10:09AM.....	94
Proof (Judge Stewart).....	94
Legacy (Guadalupe).....	95
Damn (Officer Flores).....	96
Brown and Blue (Guadalupe).....	97
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	98
APPENDIX A.....	102
APPENDIX B.....	104
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	106

## CHAPTER I

### CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

The story for “Detention” started in 2018, after months of reading articles about children being separated from their families and increasing restrictions within the immigration system. The horrible conditions immigrants faced in detention centers, and the rise in racial aggression and expressed prejudice nationwide, frightened me. When the government had the longest shutdown in U.S. history from December 22, 2018 until January 25, 2019 (Zaveri, Gates and Zraick 1), over differing beliefs on how to address immigration, it felt like the different parties within our government were at war, leaving the rest of the country to turn on each other, too. There was an atmosphere of apprehension and confusion, with everyone’s latest conversation revolving around “How did we get here?” and “What’s next?”

I was visiting my Texas borderland childhood home at the time, sitting on my parents’ couch and watching my nephews play with their superhero action figures when I wrote the first poem of the manuscript, “Detention.” My parents, sister, and wife were watching an animated children’s movie that my nephews requested, and all I could think was “I don’t understand.” Scrolling through my newsfeed of immigration articles and arguments over the border, I could not comprehend how the horrible atrocities being reported about detention centers could be happening at that exact same moment in time. My completely normal family gathering before me, and brutal family separations just a few short miles down the road. It was irreconcilable.

I remember being a young child barely starting elementary school when my parents freaked after a morning grocery trip to Las Flores in Mexico. Trying to walk back across the border and re-enter the United States, I had frozen when the border patrol agent pulled me aside and asked me if I was a U.S. citizen. After that, my parents taught me what a citizen was and drilled me until I had memorized my social security number. My older sister memorized not only her own social security number, but mine as well. Once we were old enough to get IDs, my parents lectured me repeatedly on never going anywhere without it. These were everyday rules that were part of everyday living.

It wasn't until recently that I mentioned all of this to my non-Latinx wife and was shocked when I realized that these are not fundamental, basic skills for all parents and all children. In spite of this "wrong," another truth is that I am privileged because I was born in McAllen, TX and can give the "correct" information whenever I am stopped by border patrol checkpoints and other officials. According to Michelle Hackman from the Wall Street Journal, over one million people cannot currently say the same (Par. 1). Thirty years later, I already know my nephews will have to grow up in the same borderlands my sister and I did—but things have gotten worse, not better.

That day at home in Texas, before I realized what my hand was doing, I had written a poem called "Detention." After reading and revising the poem, I made the conscious decision right then that I had to do something to protest the cruelty against immigrants happening in my hometown. I began combing through my own memories of all the people I had encountered during my life on the border, and I researched details of detention centers and immigration issues in order to write a fictionalized account of what is happening in our country every day. As a

writer, I wanted to take a stand with a story that would promote awareness and advocate for change.

### **Synopsis**

My thesis, “Detention,” is a novel-in-verse about an immigrant teenage girl named Guadalupe who has spent almost her entire life on the Texas side of the U.S. borderlands with her mother and sister. When she is seventeen years old, she is detained by border patrol agents, separated from her family, and spends almost six months in an immigration detention center. Her story is recounted during the three minutes she waits for the immigration judge to make a decision on her case. During that time, the reader is able to follow the thoughts that run through her mind in an adapted stream of consciousness format. These relived thoughts take us from the detention center to her family, her upbringing, and several other significant events in her life. Because these moments are being relived, I took liberty with suspended belief and allowed readers the opportunity to experience a 360° point of view of not only her experiences, but the experiences of those she interacts with, such as the immigration judge, her mother and sister, a guard at the detention center and others for a more holistic view of the complexity faced by the undocumented community.

### **Intended Audience**

I specifically chose my protagonist to be a teenage immigrant who was raised in the United States and is ingrained within her community because I wanted non-Latinx Americans and those far removed from the effects of immigration to be able to relate to her. The government and media have made it clear that there is a real crisis with regards to immigration in our country. Unfortunately, most people—even those morally distraught by what they read—don’t know enough about the facts of the situation, and they often times cannot relate to the

undocumented community themselves. It is often far easier to push the harsh realities at our border and all over the country out of mind, and move on to the next news story or controversy in popular culture, than to stop and truly admit that our country is exposing countless individual human beings to atrocities, even at this very moment in time.

My intention is that every person will see themselves in at least one of my characters. I want all of my readers to live vicariously through Guadalupe and her family so that we stop thinking about immigration as policy and start thinking about immigration as *people*. *People* can make connections and build relationships. Human connection affects change. It is my hope that advocacy for policy reform will follow.

### **Background Influences**

I have written poetry for as long as I can remember. All of my early work went into a green spiral notebook that was my most prized possession. As I grew up, I began to read, analyze and study poetry from different time periods and countries. I reveled in the captivating storytelling of Homer's *The Odyssey*. I dissected the rhyme scheme and wordplay of William Shakespeare's sonnets. I identified with Anne Bradstreet's, "An Author to her Book." e.e. cummings transformed my writing with the discovery of visual poetry and crafting punctuation. Maya Angelou pulled my soul and cemented the emotional focus I poured into my work. Langston Hughes gave me new perspectives on rhythm and pacing. Tato Laviera's "my graduation speech" let me know it was okay to code switch. The list goes on.

When I graduated with a bachelor's degree in English and Pre-medicine from The University of Notre Dame, I moved to Chicago with a friend, who later became my wife. I submitted my writing portfolio to BareBoned Theatre and was chosen to be one of their playwrights for the second season of a live-theatre soap opera called "The Ville." The year I

spent in Chicago, end of 2008 through the beginning of 2009, helped me learn and practice a new skill set: writing for performance.

My grandfather's passing brought me back to the Rio Grande Valley to be with my family, and I enrolled in the Master of Fine Arts Creative Writing program at the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley. After beginning my studies, I was able to publish a short story called "Chest Pains" in *The McAllen Monitor*, as well as five poems in other anthologies. I had a screenplay, *The Count on Monte Cristo*, produced by a local film group. I watched my ten minute play, *Stitches*, performed on stage at the university, and I performed as a spoken word poet at numerous venues like the Valley International Poetry Festival.

After six years, I moved to St. Louis, Missouri to be with my wife. I started working at a classroom library wholesale book distribution company called Booksource as a Literary Marketing and Sales Account Manager. As part of my job, I had to familiarize myself with current events, publishing trends, and education, as well as the tens of thousands of titles we offered to fit the curricular needs of K-12 readers. It was working here that introduced me to the concept of a novel-in-verse.

### **Novel-In-Verse**

Already in my thirties, I had never heard of a novel-in-verse before. My passion for writing and poetry had never faded, and Kwame Alexander's *Booked* opened my world to the possibility of being a novelist. When I thought of a story being told through poetry, the first thought that came to mind was narrative poetry, and according to Addison, "all texts labelled 'novels in verse' fit comfortably into it" (Addison 540). However, I have never heard it called a novel. She argues the term "novel in verse" can be used to describe a hybrid of the narrative poem and novel where "so much of the text, including voice, style, themes and context...[are]

properly designed by its author...for readers of the novel...then the poem may surely claim a generic relationship” (Addison 541). Alexander’s book took a series of poems and connected them in a way that told a larger story indicative of the modern novel. At Booksource, I learned about Kwame Alexander, Jason Reynolds, and Jacqueline Woodson, and I realized that the novel-in-verse was a recognized genre in literature. When I made the decision to turn the poem “Detention” into a novel, I had no doubt that it was meant to be a novel-in-verse that could be performed aloud—both as a whole and as stand-alone poems.

### **Framework Story**

When deciding how to bring the streams of poems together to make a cohesive, complete story arch, I remembered the book *Echo* by Pam Muñoz Ryan. It was written as a series of vignettes that took place throughout periods of history, and a framework fairytale explained the connection between each story (Ryan 3). I knew that the jumps in time in my story would need such a framework, so I chose the court proceedings of Guadalupe’s immigration trial. It seemed appropriate that a person would have a flood of thoughts and emotions go through their minds while waiting for such a big decision. The trial acts as the structure for Guadalupe’s roller coaster ride down memory lane, as she relives everything she’s been through and how she got there. It also helps cue both the protagonist and the reader back to the present and offers a clear beginning and end.

### **Stream of Consciousness**

When people think in real life, they usually jump in time by associating one experience to another and not necessarily working in a perfect sequential order. When telling their story, I wanted my characters’ journey to reflect that. Because the novel is written in the first person, I adapted the traditional stream of consciousness to incorporate the 1<sup>st</sup> person point of view of all

the characters—not just the protagonist. Using this method, the reader can follow the protagonist’s thought process into different key events while experiencing them through multiple viewpoints.

Stream of consciousness serves as the roadmap of each transition between chapters. Chapter one ends with Guadalupe’s nervousness at having to defend herself in court to prove she should become a U.S. citizen, a test she has feared her entire life. This causes her to reflect on easier times when answers seemed so obvious, such as in her U.S. History class, in chapter two. As a student, Guadalupe struggled with holding back her passion for voicing truth, which culminated in her being sent to detention. The double meaning of “detention” catapults her mind into her stay in the immigration detention center in chapter three. Reflecting on her time there, Guadalupe spends chapter four thinking back to what she considers the beginning of her journey, when her mother was hopeful of her becoming a DREAMer. From hope to the stark realities of what actually happened, Guadalupe plummets back into her memories of the detention center in chapter five. Jumping from memory to memory, the manuscript ends with Guadalupe being abruptly brought back to the present with the judge’s ruling and the aftermath that follows.

### **Time**

Each chapter holds a collection of poems that are from the same setting in time and place. A timeline is included at the beginning of the manuscript as a reference for historical context, Guadalupe’s and Esperanza’s ages, as well as significant events that occur in the manuscript. Since the entire novel takes place in the three minutes of Guadalupe’s immigration trial, the time is included in the framework and in chapters one and eleven to cue in the reader.

The idea for the entire book to take place in a span of 3 minutes came from Jason Reynolds’ *Long Way Down*. The bulk of his novel-in-verse takes place in 60 seconds, and the



time is displayed at certain intervals above the poems to show its progress (Reynolds 304). Showing the time grounds the reader in the moment, which is what I strived to achieve by placing the time in the first and eleventh chapters.

I calculated a three minute trial based on my research. In 2016, Quartz reporter Neha T. Bagri interviewed Judge Dana Leigh Marks, an immigration judge, who commented, “we are forced to do this in such a rapid fashion and with so few resources, that it’s more like a traffic court setting” (Bagri 13). This was back when the backlog was half a million cases (Bagri 3). Now in 2019, Mireya Villareal with CBS news reported “one judge in San Antonio had 52 cases on her docket that were heard by video conferencing Monday. She went through half of them in less than 30 minutes”(Villareal 4). By my calculations, that estimates to one minute per person. Taking into account that the backlog has doubled in three years and judges are constantly being forced to work faster, I hypothesize that an immigrant in 2022 can expect an average of less than one minute in court.

Importantly, it’s likely that Guadalupe in fact would not even get a trial. Due to a *notario publico* scam, Dolores and Guadalupe were falsely led to believe that their papers were in good order when ICE placed an *in absentia* court order on them, which automatically results in removal proceedings for deportation (Mulligan Sepúlveda 49). Even if they had realized what had happened and had obtained legal representation, it would be extremely difficult to stop deportation (Mulligan Sepúlveda 21). Without representation, Guadalupe’s fate was sealed.

However, I wanted “Detention” to have hope. The manuscript is filled with factually-based, utter bleakness as we see characters like Officer Flores devolve, Dolores succumb to a heart attack, and Guadalupe unravel with all the trauma to which she is subjected. The reader needs at least a small glimmer of hope. Even though realistically Guadalupe would not be given

a trial, my act of protest was to give her one anyways—with three whole minutes, too. Like the reader, Guadalupe and the million immigrants awaiting trial need hope, even if in some cases there is none. Holding true to reality, Guadalupe is inevitably deported.

### **1<sup>st</sup> Person Point of View**

I specifically chose to write the poems in the first person point of view because it aligned with my goals for the manuscript. For readers to understand and relate to multiple perspectives about immigration, I wanted them to enter the minds of each character involved in Guadalupe's situation. A third person narrative would not have been as personal, structurally building a distance between the speaker and the reader.

An example of this stylistic choice can be found in chapter five, “The Stanford Detention Experiment Part 3” (34) and “Officer Flores” (35). These two poems show the stark contrast between Guadalupe's and Officer Flores' perceptions of the exact same moment in time, which ultimately ends in sexual assault. If the reader only had access to one point of view, they would likely misread the situation, just as each character does with Guadalupe thinking Officer Flores is being nice and more humane than the other guards when in reality he is showing a sexual interest in her. While third person would have allowed some insights into the characters, it would not have been the same fully-immersed experience for the reader to walk through the characters' shoes.

### **Series of Dramatic Monologues**

The effect of writing in the first person and having multiple speakers produced a novel-in-verse composed of a series of dramatic monologues for an added performance component. In “Randall Jerrell's Modernism: The Sweet Uses of Personae” by Charlotte Beck, she uses the poet's personae poems and monologues almost interchangeably. She notes that “personae are

typical rather than individual” (Beck 69) and there are “four groups of Jarrell’s personae—soldiers, children, women, and observers—by focusing on one characteristic” (Beck 70) as opposed to “dramatic [monologues] come alive or the reader [in] their realization of a concrete situation in time and place” (Beck 69). I classify my poems as dramatic monologues because I wanted readers to develop snapshots of the characters’ perspectives for each specific moment in time and be able to relive the event as though they were there. I was heavily influenced by my background in writing works meant to be performed or spoken aloud, and I designed the structure of the poems in order to strengthen the readers’ ability to process the content.

### **Multi-Voice Poetry**

Several of the poems are written as multi-voice poetry, what Ashby McGowan of the *Whale Road Review* defines as “a style of theatrical poetry that is useful for showing different views of the same situation”(McGowan 1). There are five poems with multiple speakers in the manuscript. I did this to highlight certain situations and interactions, such as the communication barrier between Guadalupe and Juan. The split text identifies the two speakers to the reader, or readers. This format helps bring the characters to life with a visual representation of the physical space each character occupies in relation to another. Consequently, the structure allows readers to mentally picture the scene and offer stage direction for being performed aloud.

For “The Stanford Detention Experiment Part 2” (Pg. 23-24) and “The Endless Car Ride” (Pg. 41), I purposefully crammed the page in which they were written. Each column represents a different speaker, providing consistency in stage direction throughout the manuscript. I wanted readers to experience the confusing and claustrophobic chaos alongside the characters. Emphasizing that there are so many more people affected besides the main characters, readers are able to pause and digest the fact that immigration is a bigger issue than any one person. The

decision to have them speak later places the characters in the middle of the action, demonstrating to the reader that Guadalupe and Officer Flores's stories are like a drop of water in the Rio Grande.

### **Poetic Forms**

My love and appreciation for the varied styles of poetry is reflected in my incorporation of several different forms within the novel. I used the different forms as a way to strengthen or re-enforce the content of each poem. Examples that can be found in the manuscript include: personae, list, acrostic, concrete, prose, found, and sister poems.

I used the personae poem of Officer Flores to set the tone of the entire novel-in-verse by placing "Dirty Girls" first (2-4). The poem is a window into his personal thoughts and is the perfect dramatic monologue for a performance. Officer Flores' personal details and insights fill the lines of the poem. The reader is able to conclude that he is Latinx and has a grasp of the Spanish language by his reference to "*mi tia Tati*" in the sixth stanza. He is very candid in his observations in the eighth stanza, stating "everyone is kidnapped, raped and murdered to you! / every one of you has the / same story." In the nineteenth stanza, he even acknowledges that he doesn't entirely agree with either side. Readers can also deduce that he's Catholic by reading the second to the last stanza when he recites part of the "Holy Mary" prayer in Spanish. In this one poem, readers immediately recognize that Officer Flores feels guilty, angry, overwhelmed, and disgusted all at the same time. It's an emotional rollercoaster that piques the readers interest to keep reading and see what else is in store.

I used list poems to provide a stark contrast in the reader's experience. Immigration Judge Stewart is the speaker of the second poem, "10 Reasons She Can't Be a U.S. Citizen" (5). While she feels bad for Guadalupe, calling her "vulnerable," she mostly puts her personal

feelings aside and relies on logic and facts to dictate her decisions as a judge. In her fourth reason, she recognizes the flaws in immigration policy, but the title of the poem says it all. As a steward of the United States legal system, Judge Stewart sees herself bound to uphold the laws set in place by the government. Officer Flores tries to comply with similar expectations in the poem, “Rules” (22), but ultimately struggles between his conscious and inner demons. While “Quinceañera” (52-53) and “The Pulga, Produce and Patrolmen” (37-39) are not completely list poems, they both have stanzas that do list food items to highlight the inadequate meals served at the immigration detention centers.

The two acrostic poems, “Family Values” (30) and “Waiting,” (71) offer structure to abstract concepts by spelling out the title in the first letter of each stanza. After reading about Guadalupe being separated from her family and bearing witness to how another immigrant woman is treated by the guards in chapter three, the next chapter is about love and always putting family first. “Family Values” (30) is actually a list of adages my parents would tell me almost every day growing up. The acrostic form allowed me to write each adage as part of a cohesive unit. “Waiting” (Pg. 71) had a similar structural effect with all of the things in Guadalupe’s life on which she’s waiting.

Ultimately, the type of poetry I usually favor the most is concrete. The most apparent examples of this are “Brilliance,” “The Intake,” and “Trail of Tears.” Chapter two takes place at school where we see Guadalupe’s passion and intelligence. Her teacher, Ms. Reynolds, speaks to herself after class in “Brilliance,” (12) which reveals that she admires Guadalupe, but fears that her student must wise up before someone tries to “snuff out” her light. With several references to light, “Brilliance” is shaped like an overhead light fixture. Then in chapter six, the reader sees first-hand what Ms. Reynolds had feared. Though inevitable, I still wanted readers to have a

sense of questioning in their minds about what Child Protective Services will decide to do with Esperanza in “The Intake,” (40) and join in Guadalupe’s anguish in “Trail of Tears” (42)

As a novel-in-verse, “The Snagged Thread” (33) sticks out because it is a prose poem. The “snagged thread” is a literal thread that binds several of the poems together, and it is also a symbolic representation of the threads that bind all human relationships and cognitive function. In this prose poem, I was able to tell more of the story surrounding Guadalupe’s family separation, as Guadalupe retells the memory of having “you have a red thread” be the last words she tells her mother before being taken into custody. The rhythmic musicality of the recurring last words echo through her mind, as if she’s trying to put the wrong puzzle piece into a picture, and the truth of it not fitting is slowly sinking in. Subconsciously, this event becomes the severed connection which Guadalupe fixates on, along with all the other memories of and promises she’s made to her mom and sister, which culminate in “Unraveled” (65). The stream of consciousness, stringing experience to experience, is the physical representation of the cognitive threads that bind all of the characters together.

To further elaborate on the concept of thread weaving communities and families together, I used three examples of sister poems, or poems that are directly related to one another. The first group of sister poems the reader encounters are in chapter two, “Public School Re-Education Part 1 and 2” and “Brilliance” (10-17). While the interactions in the classroom can easily mark Ms. Reynolds’ reactions as ignorant and curt, “Brilliance” allows the reader to see the outbursts and disruptions from her perspective. Pairing the poems together reveals the bigger picture of a teacher managing a classroom with a wide range of student needs and being required to teach a specific curriculum—even if it isn’t “woke.” While switching between their two different perspectives, the reader can acknowledge Guadalupe’s intelligence and bright energy, as well as

recognize her flaws. The passionate fighter in Guadalupe means well as she speaks her truths, but she remains still a teenager who has trouble managing her words in more respectful and appropriate ways.

The second group of sister poems, “The Stanford Detention Experiment Part 1-5,” follow the de-evolution of Officer Flores. The poems refer to an actual psychological study conducted by Stanford University in 1971. Dr. Philip Zimbardo screened over seventy volunteer applicants and selected twenty-four Stanford University students in good physical and mental health. After using a coin toss to randomly assign a role of either guard or prisoner, the psychology building was converted into a makeshift prison where researchers could observe their behaviors for two weeks. The rapid psychological deterioration of the prisoners and escalating sadistic behaviors of the guards were so severe that the University was forced to terminate the experiment after six days(Zimbardo). In Officer Flores’ poems, “The Stanford Detention Experiment Part 1-5,” the reader bears witness to the internal struggles he goes through. The power of having so much authority over an isolated group of people in a controlled environment with little oversight, except the groupthink mentality of his peers, is a dangerous situation for everyone involved.

I wrote the “Juan” poems because of the heartbreaking reports I read about children trying to take care of each other in the immigration detention centers. The growing connection between Juan and Guadalupe build on the need for emotional comfort, human connection, and humbling displays of humanity that detained children show each other when the adults around them violate basic human rights and dignity. The New York Times quoted a lawyer at the Clint facility, saying “Children as young as 7 and 8, many of them wearing clothes caked with snot and tears, are caring for infants they’ve just met” (Dickerson 2). Guadalupe has spent most of her life helping her mother look after her younger sister, Esperanza. When separated, Juan becomes

a surrogate of sorts with whom she can fulfill that promise. The important fact that readers should take away from these poems is that these are not criminals being pulled out of American society for our safety—they are scared children in cages wondering about their mommy and daddy, or other guardian.

### **Cross-curricular Alignment**

As a veteran PreK-8<sup>th</sup> grade teacher I understand the importance of finding books that can be versatile in teaching students multiple subjects and techniques for cross curricular alignment and lesson reinforcement/extensions. In addition to having a wide variety of poems that can be taught in an English Language Arts unit, I purposefully tried to present opportunities for classroom crossover that were also in the best interest of the poems. In addition to the strong social studies curriculum present throughout the novel, I also included ties to mathematics. An example of that is “Proof” (73). This poem is an actual geometry proof, used in proving mathematical theorems. I also thought it was the perfect way to show that despite the judge’s internal struggle with deporting Guadalupe, as a steward of the immigration accounts for the United States, she is professionally bound to be objective and follow the given rules put in place with current legal policies.

The other math-related poem in the manuscript is “Managing” (57). In this poem, Guadalupe is managing her emotions, her schedule, and her family’s needs, while coping within her immigrant reality and looking at her future and figuring out how to get there. Her entire future depends on one giant financial math problem: how much money will she need to earn to help take care of her family and to pay for college? This is a real-life scenario that a lot of adults face—What’s my budget? How much is paid to taxes? How much is still needed to pay for



everything? This is something that, hopefully, every person eventually learns: life is a lot of adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing.

Ultimately, the manuscript is meant to evoke conversation. Whether read aloud by students or performers or in silence by individuals, the novel should instigate discussion or reflection about the speaker's situation, motivations, internal struggles, and external factors. There is intentionally a lot to analyze and uncover within each poem. I figured that the more puzzles, Easter eggs, and surprises I incorporated into the story, the closer the reader would pay attention.

### **Colors**

There are many colors that resonate within the manuscript. The most prevalent are red, brown, and blue because of what they symbolize. These are a play on "red, white and blue" that is associated with the American flag, with white changed to brown to reflect the Latinx characters and their struggle with the American dream. There are also two poems which feature all three colors: "Quinceañera" (52) and "Crochet" (67). Both describe their speaker's best version of community. For Guadalupe, celebrating her quinceañera was the happiest moment in her life where she was surrounded by a community who loved and appreciated her. Dolores, whose life was full of many struggles, always strived to create a haven for her children to shield them from anguish and provide the best life she could. This is exemplified by the great lengths she went through for Guadalupe's quinceañera.

In addition to the colors' collective meaning, each individual color also holds multiple meanings. Red is the color of blood and represents both the lives of the characters and the death of Guadalupe's father. Blood can be seen in the flushed trepidation Guadalupe feels in "Test Anxiety" (6), and it is visible in "The Snagged Thread" (33). Brown represents the literal color

of the main characters' skin, the significance of their Mexican ethnicity and the Latino heritage, as well as their indigenous connection to the land. Blue is used to symbolize the Rio Grande, which acts as a physical border separating countries, cultures, peoples, and opportunities. In "Brown and Blue" (76), the reader can also interpret these colors as bruises from being beaten, or mishandled, while in the detention center. Brown and blue are also the color schemes used by privately owned immigration facilities that hold contracts with the government.

### **Significance of Numbers**

Every detail within "Detention" has a significance, and the numbers used in the manuscript are no exception. All immigrants are given a nine digit alien registration number, or A#. Officers are discouraged from using real names and often call the people in the detention centers by their A# instead. Immigration lawyer J.J. Mulligan Sepúlveda recounted this during his visits to the Karnes Residential Center when the guard told him, "name doesn't help. I need the A-number" (Mulligan Sepúlveda 118) and observed as "she called out their A-numbers with a dehumanizing tone, and I wondered if, or when, these numbers might be tattooed onto the skin of the undocumented immigrants" (Mulligan Sepúlveda 119). I made reference to this fact in "The Stanford Detention Experiment Part 1" when Officer Flores is being introduced to the detention center for the first time by his supervisor. Since each immigrant is identified by only their A-number, I wanted to make sure the characters' A-numbers were significant.

Dolores's A# is 005072018, which breaks down into the date: May 7, 2018. This is the exact date the Trump Administration enacted the Zero Tolerance Policy, which aggressively separated families in detention centers. In "Detention," government officials separate Dolores from both of her daughters during a raid at their flea market. Although the Trump administration never fully complied with the Flores Settlement Agreement, on paper they ended the Zero

Tolerance Policy of separating families (Mulligan Sepúlveda 217). This created a loophole equivalent to a Faustian deal summed up by Sepúlveda: “waive the Flores protections their children have, thus causing the children to remain detained with them indefinitely, or consent to the children going into the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) custody without them and being protected by the Flores Settlement Agreement” (Mulligan Sepúlveda 218). In the poem “Faust” (20), Guadalupe is pressured into separation from her daughters—Esperanza because she is a U.S. citizen and Guadalupe in the hopes of saving her from the detention centers—so that her girls can be together. Unfortunately, Dolores’ plan does not work.

As the protagonist of the manuscript, the reader is able to connect and follow all of the hardships Guadalupe experiences. Her A# is 150901510 because it corresponds to September 15<sup>th</sup> – October 15<sup>th</sup>, also known as Hispanic Heritage Month. In Spanish, the date is given before the month. I wanted to show the irony of the U.S. nationally recognizing an entire month to celebrate and promote awareness of the Hispanic community when hundreds of thousands of Latin American people are affected by harmful, ineffective immigration policies in need of reform.

Juan’s A# is 012232008, or December 23, 2008—the day the Flores Settlement Agreement became part of federal law under H.R. 7311 William Wilberforce Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act of 2008 (Congress 235). As previously mentioned, while this was a huge win for immigration protections, not all detention centers are compliant with federal law and immigration policies. Juan is scared, cold, hungry and only comforted by another unaccompanied minor who happened to take him under her wing—Guadalupe. In September 2018, CNN announced the Trump administration’s latest proposal to circumvent the Flores Settlement Agreement, which would have nullified the current federal law (Kopan 6). While the

request was denied (Joung 23), the intent to revoke children's rights has been undeniably declared.

Even the number of chapters in the manuscript has a special meaning. Chapter eleven is commonly known as bankruptcy. With the exception of the first chapter being the critical introduction, the body of the story itself is eleven chapters. This was meant to be a commentary on the risk of moral bankruptcy our government risks as officials continue to struggle over policies for immigration reform as the human beings affected suffer the consequences in the meantime.

### **Character Breakdown**

The absolute last thing I wanted to do was simplify, stereotype or make caricatures of the characters in the manuscript. My goal was to make each character flawed, complex, and a product of the flawed, complex situations they face through the United States' immigration policies.

Guadalupe is the main protagonist of the story. Her name alludes to The Virgin Mary of Guadalupe, whom is commonly honored by Mexican and Mexican American mothers by the naming of children after her. She is strong willed, outspoken, intelligent, and passionate, and has a deeply engrained love for and need to take care of her family. She is also stubborn, doesn't always see the bigger picture, and can have emotional outbursts when her passion gets in the way of thinking things through before speaking or acting wisely. In essence, she's a teenager who has always had more pressure and responsibility than most of her peers. She continually feels the need to fight to prove herself worthy of her father's sacrifice and her mother's tireless work as a single parent in a foreign country, while acting as her sister's guardian and a good kid who deserves American citizenship.

Dolores is Guadalupe and Esperanza's mother. Her name literally translates to pain and sorrow, a sign of the emotional burden she carries from her traumatic past, through the present of living in a state of limbo with fear and uncertainty, and eventually into her doomed future. She is caring and completely devoted to her daughters, doing everything she can to raise them well. Regrettably, she hires a *notario publico* to assist with Guadalupe and her immigration case shortly after her twelfth birthday. Like many immigrants, Dolores becomes a victim of *notario* fraud—an immigration scam so common that the American Bar Association even created The Fight *Notario* Fraud Project (Association 1) to try and protect people. The reader, like Dolores, is left confused as to why her lawyer never appears while the characters are in the detention centers and at Guadalupe's trial. All of the hardships and sacrifices Dolores endures to protect her family strain her body, and there is no health care in the detention center that is sufficient to save her life. She joins her husband in death, while Guadalupe remains confined and everyone hopes for Dolores' belief that Esperanza is being cared for by her *padrinos*, or godparents, is true.

Esperanza is Guadalupe's younger sister, with whom Dolores was pregnant at the time of her crossing. Her name means hope, and she is the physical embodiment of that concept for her family. As an American citizen, her experiences are slightly different from her mom and sister, who have also shielded a lot of the family burden from her. Being five years younger than Guadalupe, she is twelve years old in the present and much younger in the stream of consciousness flashbacks. Her innocence and child-like view of their world often offers a humorous reprieve from the gravity of the stressful situations that surround her. Of her family, Esperanza is the person we hear the least from for two reasons. First, there are limits to what younger children can understand and their ability to effectively advocate for themselves, and

second, as a U.S. citizen left behind, her fate is unknown to both Dolores and Guadalupe since their forced separation.

Officer Flores is one of the guards at the detention center in which Guadalupe is held. As previously mentioned, most of his poems are called “The Stanford Detention Experiment” as an allusion to the actual Stanford Prison Experiment. He is the most complicated character in “Detention”—trying to make sense of the immigrants he guards, the internal and external struggles he has to overcome on the job, and figuring out how he fits into the role he plays at the detention center. In chapter four, Officer Flores truly wants to make a better life for his family, serve his country, and is excited about the pay raise that comes with his new job (29). His positive optimism is quickly curtailed in part two (23-24), when the illusion shatters. He is found in a situation where half of the guards are declining access to a restroom to an immigrant in their care and the other half are complacent because the supplies needed aren’t available anyway. This starts Officer Flores’ downward spiral, where his own actions can be cruel at times, too. The justification of doing Guadalupe a kindness by telling her about the death of her mother in part five masks his own oblivious callousness in the delivery of the message (64). My goal was to show that immigration detention centers affect the guards, as well as the immigrants detained.

Judge Stewart is the immigration judge who presides over Guadalupe’s case in the detention center. There is no relation or connection to any of the immigration courts’ actual judges who may have a similar name. The reason I gave the judge the same Stewart was to signify the character’s role as a steward, or employee responsible for managing the assigned accounts of their employer as designated.

To fully illustrate the complexities involved in both immigration and everyday situations, I included a few additional speakers, such as the uniforms, Ms. Reynolds, the children, and la

raza. It is easy to first read “Public School Re-Education Part 1” (10) and dismiss the teacher, but when she is given the opportunity to share her view points through “Brilliance” (12), the reader can see a more well-rounded perspective that addresses many common issues that teachers face in the classroom.

### **Social-political Background**

After a year of research, I fully admit that I am not an expert in immigration policy and history, which perfectly exemplifies my point: the vast majority of the general public is not adequately informed about immigration issues, and those who try will discover the messy, tangled knot that has kept congress at a heated impasse for decades. I asked over fifteen people of varying demographic statistics, such as sex, age, race, sexual orientation, political affiliations, religion, educational background, and economic status to read “Detention.” The one comment that was continually stated over and over again was, “I don’t know a lot about this [immigration].” While I do not have the answers on how to fix all of the United States’ immigration issues, I do think the place to start is by educating the public and advocating for immigration reform.

According to *Time Magazine*, The Flores Settlement Agreement was established in 1997 after multiple lawsuits were brought against the United States government for inadequate care and abuse in detention centers. When fifteen year old Salvadorian immigrant, Jenny Lisette Flores, won her court case, it set the legal precedent for the protection of all unaccompanied immigrant minors in custody. The protections of the agreement stipulated that children could not be held longer than 20 days and were required to be provided with: “1) access to food and drinking water; (2) medical assistance in the event of emergencies; (3) toilets and sinks; (4) adequate temperature control and ventilation; (5) adequate supervision to protect

minors from others; (6) separation from unrelated adults whenever possible; and (7) contact with family members who were arrested with the minor”(Joung 20). As previously mentioned, The Flores Settlement Agreement officially turned into a federal law in 2008.

June 2012, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, was officially announced by Homeland Securities, which allowed a two-year deferment in removal proceedings and granted successful applicants eligibility for work authorization (Archive 3). Candidates must have been under the age of 31 and physically present in the United States on June 15, 2012. Persons must be at least 15 years old to apply, and those granted DACA status must be enrolled in school and have cleared a criminal history background check (Archive 6-7). This is why chapter four, “The Beginning: June 2012” (25), is full of hope and overall upbeat in contrast to the rest of the novel-in-verse.

The term “DREAMers” comes from the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act. According to The American Immigration Council, the act has undergone at least 10 revisions since it was introduced in 2001 but never became law. It was meant to provide “a pathway to legal status for undocumented youth who came to this country as children”(Council 2-3). DACA was meant to aid DREAMers while legislators continued to work on the DREAM Act becoming official. However, the DACA policy was rescinded on Sept. 5, 2017 and is no longer accepting new applicants (Archive 1). This is important to Guadalupe’s story because in chapter ten, “The End: September 2017” (66) the reader experiences what she and her family goes through when the change in policy is announced.

In 2018, the Zero Tolerance Policy states that all immigrants crossing the border without going through a port of entry and protocols will be prosecuted for immigration crimes. From



April to June, Department of Homeland Securities forcibly separated thousands of children from their families in order to prosecute their parents. Although an executive order was issued to end this practice, “for-cause” separations are still active and currently happening to this day “if Border Patrol determine[s] the separation is necessary for the ‘welfare of the child.’ According to testimony from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), such ‘for-cause’ separations are happening at twice the rate they occurred in late 2016.” (Pierce, Bolter and Selee 2-3). Most people I spoke with believe family separations ended last year, but I wanted the separation of Guadalupe and Dolores to help readers understand that this practice is still active and possible for immigrant families.

Since “Detention” is set in the future, I wanted readers to understand the implications if the Trump administration’s 2018 proposal were passed. The result would be the nullification of the federal law of the Flores Settlement Agreement and allow Immigration and Customs Enforcement to detain children for longer periods of time without the specified protections of adequate care currently outlined—the length of which “ICE is unable to estimate how long detention would be extended” (Kopan 15). While the proposal was declined by Judge Gee, the Trump administration continues to try and get it passed (Kopan 19-20). Guadalupe spends six months in the detention center, subjected to abuse and neglect. I want to readers to know what the Flores Settlement Agreement is and why it is so important.

### **Physical and Mental Health**

It is not my intention to cover every evidence of the inadequate conditions brought to the public’s attention over the years. The range of care at detention centers vary. I did not include every negative report I came across in my research when writing “Detention” because the ultimate goal is to promote awareness, discussion, and advocate for change. If I present a one-

sided argument, the manuscript could be dismissed by conservative readers who may view the immigration crisis quite differently. The details I chose in the manuscript are meant to highlight the individual human beings who have been impacted by the consequences of not fully complying with Flores Settlement protections, lack of oversight to hold officials responsible for violations of current immigration policy, and the congressional stalemate (Alvarez 27) that has delayed immigration reform for over three decades.

According to the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement – Enforcement and Removal Operations (ERO) National Detainee Handbook, immigrants “have the right to nutritious balanced meals, clean clothes, regular opportunities to bathe and do laundry, and be given the supplies to do so...right to take regular showers, live in areas with proper air circulation and heating, and have access to medical and mental health care if needed” (Operations 4). I spent over a year researching articles to confirm or conflict with this statement because I felt it necessary to loosely base the fictional novel-in-verse on reports from actual first and second hand accounts. I used discretion on which to include so as to maintain a balanced narrative that offered the readers hope.

Multiple violations have been cited to immigration detention center’s requirement to provide nutritious and adequate meals. Newsweek reported on first-hand accounts of migrant children and teenagers collected by a coalition of attorneys with the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law (CHRCL) from their most recent trip to Customs and Border Protection facilities(Da Silva 2-3,6). A 12-year-old boy shared, “I’m hungry here at Clint all the time. I’m so hungry that I have woken up in the middle of the night with hunger” (Da Silva 10). One of the attorneys confirmed this by stating, “they are often given food that is not fully cooked or still frozen” and “there is an insufficient quantity of food provided, and many children reported that

they are hungry all the time” (Da Silva 47). Another article, by BuzzFeed, detailed an inspection report of the Essex facility documenting “slimy, foul-smelling lunch meat, moldy bread, and...open packages of raw chicken ‘leaking blood all over refrigeration units’ and staff serving hamburgers ‘that were foul smelling and unrecognizable’”(Sacks 3-4). During interviews, “detainees said that food caused infections, vomiting, and diarrhea...over a period of six months, the men filed 200 kitchen-related grievances” and was bad enough that “ICE and facility leaders replaced the kitchen manager during the visit” with inspectors (Sacks 5-6). A comprehensive report by the Georgia Detention Watch included a statement by an immigrant detained at the Atlanta City Detention Center, stating that “an entire pod participated in a hunger strike because their rice and potatoes were inedible” (Priyanka Bhatt 72).

Based on the information collected, I incorporated details into the manuscript. In “Cages” on page 61, Dolores mentions being “tired of eating green bologna on fuzzy bread” similar to the conditions found at the Essex immigration facility. Juan tells Guadalupe he is hungry in “Juanito II” (46), just like the 12-year-old boy at Clint told visiting attorneys. Guadalupe offers up her own food, to which Juan replies it’s bad. This references the multiple statements made by immigrants, including the entire pod protest at the Atlanta City facility. Guadalupe herself has an entire poem called “Starvation” on page 50.

The next section of the National Detainee Handbook declares access to clean clothes and bathe properly with the supplies to do so. Directly contradicting their own manual, “the Justice Department’s lawyer, Sarah Fabian, argued that the settlement agreement did not specify the need to supply hygienic items and that, therefore, the government did not need to do so” (Dickerson 25). A 17-year-old detained boy at the Ursula facility in McAllen, Texas told attorneys, “we have not been able to shower...no soap to wash our hands...[and] not been given

a toothbrush or toothpaste to brush our teeth” (Da Silva 11). In the same interview, a 16-year-old teen mother said officials “took our baby’s diapers, baby formula, and all of our belongings...I have never been offered a shower or been able to brush my teeth. There is no soap and our clothes are dirty. They have never been washed” (Da Silva 14). At the Atlanta City facility, “detained immigrants also reported that there [were] only 6 or 7 showers in units containing anywhere from 40 to 52 people” and then went on to say “in one unit, only 4 of the 6 showers are functional” (Priyanka Bhatt 32). The research I did while writing “Detention” was so overwhelming about subpar hygiene conditions that I knew it had to be part of the story.

There are several poems in which I make reference to the characters not being able to shower or have the supplies necessary to remain safe and sanitary. The most biggest callout is “The Stanford Detention Experiment Part 2” when a minor is denied access to a functional bathroom and the guards admit they’ve run out of toilet paper and soap (23-24). This was based off an actual grievance report, which was later taken away from public access. Subtler details can also be found in “Juanito II” when Guadalupe strokes Juan’s “greasy hair” (46) and “Snuffed Out” as Guadalupe thinks to herself “what I wouldn’t give for a toothbrush” (48).

The squalid descriptions of living conditions do not reflect the National Detainee Handbook’s assurance that immigrants will “live in areas with proper air circulation and heating” (Operations 4). After CNN released pictures taken of women and children sleeping on the ground within the fenced in Border Patrol station in McAllen, Texas, the Department of Homeland Security confirmed that “the border security and humanitarian crisis continues to worsen [and] current facilities and funding are inadequate for migrant flows” (Alvarez 6). As a Rio Grande Valley native, I can attest that the temperatures along the border often exceed 100° Fahrenheit. In contrast, multiple immigrants detained within the detention facilities share that the

temperatures are kept freezing cold with dangerously overcrowded conditions. Attorneys with the Center for Human Rights and Constitutional Law filed a statement to the courts witnessed the children “being kept in these freezing cold conditions...some of them have only a diaper and a t-shirt to wear” (Da Silva 44). Time Magazine reported that “the Department of Homeland Security’s inspector general found 900 people crammed into a space designed to accommodate 125 at most” (Joung 3). The New York Times quoted the inspector general comment on observations at a border processing center in El Paso were “cells designed for 35 people were holding 155” and “some detainees were observed standing on toilets in the cells ‘to make room and gain breathing space’” (Dickerson 6-7). While varying in temperature and location, none of these accounts can be classified as proper living spaces.

Because the physical space the characters are subjected to are literally background, I compiled several hints and details to create a composite of the settings described in inspection reports. In “Cages,” Dolores describes children sleeping on the grass, and then being placed in a small room with “only a few [people] hav[ing] enough room to sit” and a “man standing on a broken toilet” (61-62). Small clues like “my shivering arms” and “I clench my teeth to keep them from chattering” (46) let the reader know that Guadalupe’s detention center kept uncomfortably cold.

Lastly, the lack of access to adequate medical and mental healthcare in immigration facilities has led to rampant disease and preventable deaths. A report collected by the American Civil Liberties Union from the Aurora detention facility a 2012 Department of Homeland Security review in which “a nurse couldn’t get a reading on an electrocardiogram machine because she was unfamiliar with it, so she relied on her ‘gut instincts’ to analyze the results” and ended in detainee Evalin-Ali Mandza dying of cardiac arrest while in custody (Hindi 23). An

audit by the Department of Homeland Securities inspector general stated that Immigration and Customs Enforcement “failed to adequately inspect and monitor the more than 200 federal, local and private facilities it uses across the country” which allowed some medical problems to “remain unaddressed for years” (Lehren 26). An article published in 2018 by CNN exposed the atrocious lack of humanity displayed by staff at a privately run California ICE detention facility where a surprise government inspection revealed nooses “were found in about 15 cells inspectors visited” and a confirmed statement from one detainee saying “the guards laugh at them and call them ‘suicide failures’ [if] they [come] back from medical” (1, 6-7). These reports were too important not to include in my manuscript.

The key concept I wanted to highlight was that the Dolores’ death from a heart attack and the insinuated suicidal attempts by other inmates could have been preventable. In “Cages,” Dolores wishes the guards would remove a noose that has been in the holding cell. Throughout the poem, she shows signs of distress such as “the room starts spinning and my stomach churns-- / I can’t breathe” and “the pain in my chest deepens.” While death from heart attacks are entirely possible and do happen, the lines that should stay with the reader are when the guard “tells [her] to stop faking it,” and ultimately, “the guards turn their backs to us” (61-62).

### **Own Voices**

I believe in the #OwnVoices movement and fully respect and admire immigrants who write about their own experiences. My work is not intended to offend anyone by writing from an immigrant’s perspective. I consciously chose to write from a multitude of perspective that included characters who were not immigrants, too. While writing “Detention,” I researched extensively for over a year and sought out feedback from multiple people involved in immigration, as well as volunteered with an immigration non-profit organization. It is not my

intention to detract or take away from any writers who are immigrants, only to add to the conversation in support.

I may not be an immigrant, but I am a Latina, who calls the Rio Grande Valley my home. I grew up in Edinburg, TX—a border town, neighbor to McAllen, TX. I was born at McAllen Regional Hospital. I would go shopping with my family at the *pulgas* in Alton, San Juan, and Pharr. I was educated by Edinburg Consolidated Independent School District. I love “Q” tacos with bacon from the gas station, would wave down the ice cream truck and ask for *elotes con todo*, and I didn’t know that a *raspa* was actually called a snow cone until I was a college undergrad. I paid my way through my classes for a master’s degree at The University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley by working full time as a certified Texas teacher. I worked for Edinburg CISD and taught English as a second language to recent immigrants within their first three years of living in the United States, as well as migrants and students from primarily Spanish speaking homes. The border and the people who live there will always hold a special place in my heart, which is why I am compelled to continue the dialogue about the horrific realities happening to people at the detention centers in my home.

While the images and experiences portrayed are shocking and traumatic, they are meant to portray fictionalized versions of real-life events and not intended to inflict more trauma in and of themselves. “Detention” is a work of fiction, and almost all of the stories within are rooted in truth from real documented accounts. My goal was not to minimize or sugar-coat the experiences immigrants face because I did not want to down-play the reality that is currently being faced within our American borders. The graphic details I included are not written just for shock value or to try and captivate the reader with morbid curiosity, but instead are meant to

make us bear witness to the collective amalgamations of documented cases of injustice and hold all of us accountable to take action.

Unfortunately, the danger and threat of detainment and deportation is so grave to the undocumented community that hundreds of thousands of personal stories do not reach the public. I admire and deeply respect writers who have shared their personal experiences with being undocumented, such as Sara Saedi, Julissa Arce, and those who speak through the Undocupoets and Undocuwriters Campaigns (Soto 4-5). I realize not every person within the undocumented community is in a position to be able to risk telling their stories and hope for a day when the U.S. government amends this. My written work is meant as an act of advocacy and solidarity to offer support, never offense. Ultimately, I encourage those within the undocumented community who want to share their stories to seek safe outlets to please do so! The world needs to hear their stories.

### **Future Goals**

Upon completion of the successful defense of my thesis and MFA graduation, I intend to do several things with “Detention.” I plan on lengthening the manuscript to include more details of Dolores’ background in Mexico with her husband and add an additional character in the detention center with Guadalupe to show the perspective of a teenage mother who is new to the United States. After revisions, my hope is to find a literary agent to help me publish the novel-in-verse with a preface, brief history of immigration, timeline, and glossary for non-Spanish speakers. Currently, I am a volunteer for and supporter of a non-profit based in St. Louis, MO, called the Migrant Immigration Community Action project. If I am able to publish, a portion of the proceeds would go to MICA and other immigration non-profit organizations. Additionally, my intention has always been to continue Guadalupe and Esperanza’s journey by writing a



sequel. Hopefully, an MFA degree would allow me a creative writing professorship at a university, where I would be able to teach and mentor other writers, as well as continue my own writing and advocate for immigration rights and reform.

## CHAPTER II

THE COURTROOM: SEPTEMBER 2022; 10:06AM

### **Dirty Girls (Officer Flores)**

*Pinches* wetbacks.

*¡Ya! ¡Apaciguate!*

Don't you know  
they don't want you

here?

*Quien sabe* who  
“they”  
are, but  
they don't.

Quit making my job so difficult.  
You think I want  
*mi tia Tati*  
to know  
*su amiga Mariana*  
got  
shipped back?

All they see are dirty girls.

Your stench is  
death.  
Your loved ones kidnapped, raped and murdered—  
everyone is kidnapped, raped and murdered to you!  
Every one of you has the  
same story.

You really think they want the stink of your trauma  
here?

They don't even take that shit from their  
own *soldados*,  
*pendeja*.

Use your own water and take a shower.

You look all *grenuda*.  
Your rags are nothing  
but loose threads  
covered in dirt  
and cold sweats.

I can see your  
dead eyes.  
Don't look at me!

After what you make me do?  
Coming here!

You leave me a bad  
taste  
in my mouth—  
and that's because  
I'm Chicano!  
*¡Soy raza!*

I may be like you,  
but  
we will **never**  
be the  
same.  
I can't let them  
see me  
that way.

How do you think you taste  
to those *pinche gringos*  
who don't even understand  
who or what  
you are?

You're just another dirty girl  
to them.

Fuck you.  
Fuck all of you for putting me in  
this position.  
For dirtying my hands in  
*duende*  
that never  
washes off.

Don't I got a job?  
I have a family.  
I have mouths to feed.  
I have bills  
and rent  
and insurance  
and doctors  
and taxes—  
fucking taxes.

*Santa Maria, madre de Dios,  
ruega por nosotros pecadores.*

Dirty girls,  
your dirt is burying me alive.

## 10 Reasons She Can't Be a U.S. Citizen (Judge Stewart)

1. Because her family named her Guadalupe, a symbol of strength and unity to the Mexican people, bridging the gap between two peoples—Guadalupe “Lupita” Mendez is the symbolic sacrifice that will be made when a bickering nation shuts down the issue.
2. Because as an honor roll child in U.S. public schools and working part time as a waitress, she cannot afford to pay for the “privilege” of an immigration lawyer at no expense to our government.
3. Because when she was 4 years old, her mother fled a country where her uncles and father were tortured for their meager wages and entire extended family killed in a bombing.
4. Because an undocumented child has fewer rights than serial killers, rapists, and terrorists, deporting her as an orphan with no family or support to a place she has no memory of, doesn't fully speak the language, and where violence and poverty will be waiting for her is not considered a punishment.
5. Because Robin Hood couldn't send his Immigration Justice league of merry Fellows.
6. Because her mother missed their court appearance when the notice was mailed to the wrong address, an automatic *in absentia* order of removal, or deportation.
7. Because of the 733,365 immigration cases waiting for a decision, there are 350 judges who can give them an answer in only 58 immigration courts that can take up to 4 years of deciding one person's fate.
8. Because she is one of the vulnerable: vulnerable to exploitation by the government that is tied up in confusing knots of legislation, vulnerable to being left behind by the nonprofits who are so overwhelmed that she slipped through their grasp, vulnerable as the protestors and activists who are shouting for change stand helpless at the gates—unable to stop what happens inside, and vulnerable to intangibility by the people who are just trying to live their everyday lives.
9. Because the last time Congress successfully agreed on immigration reform was in 1986 when Democrats had control over both houses, and disagreement over the decades has only made matters worse.
10. Because it's easier to build walls than tear them down.

## Test Anxiety (Guadalupe)

I've been called;  
A#150901510.

Detention is over,  
one way or another.

It's time.

Four brown walls,  
one door,  
red flushing the threaded arteries  
fleeing my heart  
trying to run  
from the test  
I couldn't study for.

One computer  
with one judge.

The screen freezes,  
then loses audio.  
The uniform curses and hits it,  
but

this  
is my trial.

The *notario publico* never showed up.

The translator isn't answering the phone,  
and I wonder  
what I need translated.

I need a lawyer.

Where are my accommodations  
for this test?  
A legal dictionary,  
formula sheet of immigration laws,  
extra time,  
and opportunity for a retest,  
please?

I look around the tent,  
and the judge starts talking.

There's no one here to help me.

One me.  
Unseen.  
Unheard.  
Untranslated.  
Unaccommodated.  
Undefended.

Alone.

Please help me pass...  
I need to find my sister.

### Designated Translator (Guadalupe)

I had wanted to learn to speak *la lengua* well,  
and practice *español* so none could tell  
that all I felt was shame in “*yo no se,*”  
when mom had welled with so much pride  
and “*dile*” to the strangers “*lo que digo.*”

“*Porque miya habla ingles muy bien.*”

I navigated the world in solitude:  
“my mom needs this,” and “they said *eso.*”  
My mom’s daughter, keeper, voice authority,  
but even then I understood how different I was...  
One shoe on Texas land—y *el otro en el Rio Grande.*

A part *cuidadora* kid;  
I mexi-couldn’t then,  
and I ameri-can’t now.



### CHAPTER III

JAMES BOWIE SCHOOL: OCTOBER 2021

#### **Public School Re-education Part I (Guadalupe and Ms. Reynolds)**

Didn't he get lost?

But he thought he found India...  
Plus, there were a bunch of people already here  
and he didn't even LAND in America!

I thought the settlers were dying  
until Native Americans showed them  
how to survive?

Europeans brought disease,  
then killed everybody.  
They learned what they needed  
then killed the people  
who helped them survive.

But I read lots of nonfiction books,  
and there's a lot the textbooks don't say.  
Native Americans didn't need any help;  
this was their home!

Columbus Day—

No, he found America!

He landed in the Americas, and  
brought civilization—

You're almost right.  
Europeans brought knowledge of society.  
They befriended the Indians—

No.  
No, that's not in the textbook.  
The Indians welcomed settlers;  
settlers taught them how to—

Stop interrupting.

The colonies thrived on their own!  
The brave founding fathers  
were tired of oppression

and stood for freedom  
from Great Britain  
in the  
revolutionary War!

Umm...

Didn't Great Britain send them here  
because they were criminals  
and religious fanatics  
that didn't fit in?

What, Guadalupe?

They got kicked out...  
(like I could).

What?!

Okay, that's enough for today.

## **Brilliance (Ms. Reynolds)**

The continued chaotic conundrum of  
Guadalupe “Lupita” Mendez.

Oh, child—  
I wish I had a daughter like you:  
strong, brilliant, outspoken  
like this radiant ball of energy and light.

I’m going to have a hernia  
from the fits of laughter and bright smiles  
I have to swallow down  
from your incredibly insightful, yet totally disrespectful  
outbursts.

I have students  
who could get straight A’s just by listening to class lectures,  
who will take notes, highlight and struggle through the reading and still fail,  
who already work in construction or the fields and could not care less about school,  
who are already being scouted by college recruiters and just need to coast through a C,  
who want to go to Ivy League schools and hate their time in class wasted by disruptive students,  
who somehow made it to 11<sup>th</sup> grade and still don’t know how to read past a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level,  
and Lupita—

YOU ARE CONFUSING THEM!  
These kids need to pass the end of course.  
I’m not even sure you will pass,  
if you keep insisting on this  
“get woke” tirade.

Child, don’t you know I have a state mandated curriculum to follow?  
And the students have to follow me?  
So why don’t you?  
Oh, brilliant, bright light that can burn every other student in my class—  
why can’t you just follow and learn when and how to lead another day?

Someday that bright light is going to burn you, too.  
I really hope you never see that day,  
but you have got to learn  
that history shows  
bright lights  
get  
snuffed out...

So—don't make yourself a target,  
my sweet, brave, well-intentioned, raucous Guadalupe.

## Quiet (Esperanza)

Why can't you just  
keep quiet, Lupita?

Mami always says:  
pick your battles.

Five years later  
and all the teachers still remember you!

“Outspoken, tenacious Guadalupe!”

They see you and ask me:  
are you going to be  
a handful  
like your sister?

I love you sister, but—  
*¡Aye!*  
I'm not like you, Lupita!

I just want to  
go to school  
and live my own life,  
not make any trouble.

You need to pay attention!

Mami says  
that silence—

Silence is not a weakness.  
Silence can be wise.  
Silence can be a deep breath to release your anger  
give the other person a chance  
to change their minds.

Lupita, words mean something.  
You can't just open your mouth  
and throw them away all the time...

People will start to tune you out—  
the way I do;  
except other people aren't your sister.

They will leave  
and you won't be heard—  
not if you don't learn  
to close your mouth

and just listen.

Okay?

Remember what mami says:  
“find the quiet  
deep inside of you  
and set her free.”

Or else

your big mouth  
will get you  
in trouble

and follow me around.

## Public School Re-education Part II (Guadalupe and Ms. Reynolds)

Manifest Destiny  
is the belief that  
Americans were  
destined by God  
to travel and spread  
throughout North America.

Excuse me;  
may I please  
ask a question?

I don't understand.

What is it now, Guadalupe?

What do you not understand?

Why is it  
when Americans travel  
for land, wealth, and power  
it's God's divine intervention?  
But when anyone else travels  
to escape death, oppression, and poverty—  
the way some Europeans did  
when they colonized here—  
why is it a crime?

It's not a crime.

Then why do kids get taken away from their families  
and locked up?

They don't get "locked up."

Then they're not put in cages  
and can leave?

You know what?  
We've talked about your behavior.  
America is full of good people  
who want to do the right thing.  
Immigration is a really complicated subject,  
and off topic.

I just don't understand why—

Our government can't support  
every person who wants to cross our borders.  
While there are people who need help,  
there are also some dangerous people out there:  
criminals,  
drug dealers,  
gang members—

But most of them aren't,

and don't we already have—

Ok, let's get back to U.S. History.  
We used to share the land with Mexico  
until settlers decided to take a stand  
at the battle of the Alamo.  
That's what—

The textbook is wrong.

What?

The Alamo was their fault.

Mexico murdered brave, innocent settlers  
who were outnumbered.  
Who was oppressed in that situation?

Mexicans.

How so?

It was Mexico's land,  
and it wasn't the United States.  
Texas hadn't joined yet.

Enough, Guadalupe.  
We have to get back to the textbook.

Those settlers were guests  
who Mexico welcomed.  
Then the Texas military fort  
declared war  
when those Texas settlers decided  
they wanted it all for themselves.

I said—

Mexico didn't murder innocents.  
They answered a war Texas started.

Guadalupe,  
would you like to teach the class?  
We still have a lot to cover  
before the end of the year.

But I've read—

I know you like to read a lot,  
but you can't trust everything in books.

Like textbooks?

Detention. Now.



## CHAPTER IV

### DETENTION: MARCH 2022

#### **Detention (Guadalupe)**

The metal bars  
and it feels  
being poured into the  
of my heart—  
broken.

clang shut  
like ice  
chambers

I am a lie.  
*Ni de aqui,*

A fraud.  
*ni de alla.*  
*Nadien me quiere.*

Acid fills my tongue as  
stomach spasms

force me to my knees.  
I grip the cold, hard floor...  
emptied.

**Faust (Uniform and Dolores: translated)**

Papers.

Yes, sir. My *notario publico* made sure everything's in order.

A# 005072018?

Yes, sir. My Lupita and my Esperanza—

Sign here.

I don't understand—

You're on my list.  
Just sign the form.

I'm sorry, sir—  
what list?  
I don't understand.

Look, you're coming with me—  
one way or another.  
Now sign.

But, I can't read it. It's in English, sir.  
My *notario publico*—

Yeah, well he isn't here, is he?  
Sign the damn form.

I'm sorry, sir,  
but what is it for?

A# 150901510 – Guadalupe Mendez  
still has to be processed.  
Hurry up. I don't have all day.

But he said we were fine!  
Sir, can I call my *notario publico*?

You can request  
access to a phone  
at the processing center,  
but you are holding up the line.

I'm sorry, sir.  
I am just trying to understand  
what is happening.  
Is there something wrong  
with our papers?

I've got you down for removal proceedings.

What?

Look,  
you need to decide right now  
if you are going to sign  
and walk away with me  
or I will drag you out of here  
in front of everyone.

Wait—  
what will happen to my daughters?

You'll see them later—  
they're going to go  
in one of the other vans.

Ok.

I'm not going to ask you again.  
Sign.

Yes, sir.  
I don't mean to cause any trouble, sir.  
And I'll see them later?

That's not part of my job.  
Take them away.

What? Wait!  
You said I would see them later!  
Please, no.  
I just need to know—

I warned you.

No, wait—please!  
Lupita! Esperanza!

## **Rules (Officer Flores)**

No cell phones.

No access to detention phone,  
unless it's an approved, documented emergency.

No internet.

No talking.

No fighting.

No biting.

No stealing.

No physical contact.

No messes.

No extra blankets.

No extra food.

No extra water.

No extra clothes.

No drugs of any kind,  
unless you've been seen by one of our doctors  
and it's approved, documented and administered by one of ours.

No questions.

No complaining.

No problems.

## The Stanford Detention Experiment Part II (Uniforms and Officer Flores)

A# 883514024, shut up.

*¡Por favor, necesito ir al baño!*

The man said to quit your cryin’.

I can take her to the restrooms.

Your shift is over, Flores.

Watch her dance! That’s some kind of twerking.

Damn, she must really need to go.

We’ll take her in a little bit.

*¡Por favor!*

Let’s see how long she can hold it...

Come on guys, give her a break.

What did you say?

We ran out of toilet paper, Flores.

Are you going to run out and go buy some for your little sweetheart, there?

I think Flores has a crush.

*¿El baño?*

Fuck you. She can wait.

If she really had to go, she’d just go.

Yeah, she can use her hand to wipe her ass.

You’re disgusting.

*¡Por favor!*

Well, I still have paperwork to file.

¡Aye, por favor!

Only one of us has to take her.

¡Aye!

Oh, shit! She just pooped her pants!

That's the funniest damn thing I've seen all week!

One less problem to worry about.

Guess she doesn't need the bathroom anymore.

She's going to need a shower...

Showers are scheduled in four days. There's no more soap.

Hey, we still on for March Madness?

Damn, A# 883514024! You stink!

## CHAPTER V

THE BEGINNING: JUNE 2012

### **Lupita la luchadora (Dolores: translated)**

Lupita, *mijita chiquita*.

Is this what you want?

To be a fighter  
who can't see the bigger picture?

*Mija*, you need to find the quiet  
deep inside of you  
and set her free.

You know how hard things are, Lupita.  
Think of your sister, Esperanza.

If something happens to me,  
you need to take care of her.

If you get in trouble  
and something happens to me,  
who will look after Esperanza?

You are not a citizen yet.  
One mistake, *mijita*—  
and they will come for us.

You cannot fight anymore.

The president believes in you,  
and I believe in you.

So stop fighting, my Lupita—  
and start dreaming.

Dream of the future  
your dad and I conquered the river for.

Dream of the life  
your dad sacrificed  
for you and your sister.

Dream of peace.

Dream of never having to fight again.

Dream of the home you want for all of us to have—  
then make it happen.



## Esperanza (Guadalupe)

I'm going to take care of you.

I'll feed you.

I'll change your diaper.

I'll pick up the toys you drop and give them back to you.

I'll catch you when you fall.

I'll rub your tummy to help you sleep.

I'll never leave you, Esperanza.

Ten little fingers,

ten little toes,

three little teeth,

two little ears,

two big, round eyes,

two big, squishy cheeks,

and one tiny little nose

above the best smile ever.

I love you forever.

I'm going to protect you

because that's what big sisters do.

I won't let anyone hurt you.

I'm always going to be there for you.

## **The Stanford Detention Experiment Part I (Officer Flores)**

I got the job!

The crisp, warm feel of my wife's iron still lingers  
on my uniform, and I check to make sure I took off all the tags.  
My parents would be proud if they were still alive.

Six months of being a security guard,  
and now—

I get to protect my country  
for double the pay!

My supervisor claps me on the back,  
and I can't stop from smiling.

New immigrants and their families seeking asylum go to intake.  
Attorneys go through security at the front desk.  
Food, toiletries, clothes are in the storage area.  
Showers and bathrooms to the right.  
All files and records are stored to the section to the left.  
Incoming immigrant inmates from jails go to the holding block.

Got it.  
I am going to make a difference.

My supervisor raises his eyebrows,  
and I stop smiling.

"You can count on me, sir."

He smirks and reminds me we're officers, not sirs,  
and don't use their names—  
just call out their A#.

Tour's over. We've got work to do.

I'm going to be bringing in the next generation of Americans...  
and protecting my future kids from the bad apples.

## **Family Values (La Raza)**

**F**amily is everything.

**A**ll families fight or say things they don't mean, but are always there for each other in the end.

**M**any people—friends—will come and go in life, but family is forever.

**I**mmortality is achieved by looking at the youngest generation and knowing the legacy continues.

**L**ife is best remembered with stories of memories made together.

**I**t is important to remember that family is the greatest blessing in life.

**A**lways and forever, no matter what—love each other.

## CHAPTER VI

DETENTION: MARCH 2022

**Juan (Guadalupe and Juan)**

Don't cry.  
What's your name?

Name. *¿Tu nombre?*

Juan? I'm Lupita.  
It's going to be ok, Juan. *Todo esta bien.*

Shhh...it's ok.  
*No llores.* Please don't cry, Juan.  
Shhh, I got you.  
You're half Esperanza's age.  
Shhh...it's going to *estar bien*.

Me too...

*¡Mami!*  
*¡Quiero mi mami!*

*¿Que digo?*

Juan.

*¿Que?*  
*¡No esta bien!*  
*¡Nos enjaulamos!*  
*Nada esta bien...*  
*¡Quiero mi mami!*  
*¿A dónde esta mi mami?*  
*¡Mami!*

*No.*  
*No intiendo.*  
*Yo quiero mi mami.*

## The Snagged Thread (Guadalupe)

“You have a red thread,” I said.

The fabric of her shirt was made of tiny woven ropes interlocking in an intricate cotton pattern. There was a red thread poking its head out of the tread. I wanted to snag that detail and pluck it out of existence.

But—then parallel strands would feel the pressure and try to pull some strings, overcompensating. A line would form; and everyone would notice; and the close-knit pattern would rip apart. Ruined.

There’s no fixing that. Even if I sewed the rip and stretched the threads, redistributing the stresses as evenly as I could, it would still never look quite right. Even if you cut it with the precision of a surgeon wielding a scalpel and cut the ties, it will still sever the fabric that binds each grand design. The cut can go unnoticed from afar, but upon closer inspection—a hole will always be felt. Never the same.

As her screams echoed in my ears and uniforms forced my hand out of hers, time slowed down and zoomed in on her sweater. It was wet like mine, and as the *thump, thump, thump, thump* grew louder, I remembered a single thought cut through my heart.

“You have a red thread,” I had said.

### The Stanford Detention Experiment Part III (Officer Flores)

She speaks English.  
Strands of hair fall out of her *chongo*.  
She's got soft brown eyes,  
and I notice  
two tears roll down her cheeks  
without a single sound.

She raises her hands, then stops—  
like she wants to comfort  
the snotty, crying mess of a little boy next to her,  
but doesn't know how.

He's so loud,  
I kind of want to  
tell him to knock it off—

but she's so gentle with him.  
I almost didn't hear her speak,  
but she definitely knows English  
and I'm pretty sure she ain't all that great with Spanish.

She's still trying anyways, though.  
What the heck is she doing in there?  
She's clean and doesn't look like the rest of 'em.

She's got those tight skinny jeans  
and some kind of school shirt about robotics.  
Damn... pretty and smart, too.

She looks so deep in thought...  
I wonder what she's thinking about.  
She's got a nice rack.

Shit. She caught me looking.  
Nothing she can do about it though.  
What is your name  
and why the hell aren't you in the adult facility?

## **Officer Flores (Guadalupe)**

Tall, skinny, nice eyes,  
Mr. Flores towers over me.

The other guards call me A#150901510, but  
he sneaks a small, sad smile.

He asked me my name—  
like he knows I'm a real person.

The other guards  
are cold.

They don't care  
who we are.

So why are you being so nice to me?  
And what are you doing working for a place like this?

## CHAPTER VII

### THE INEVITABLE: SEPTEMBER 2022

#### **The Pulga, Produce, and Patrolmen (Dolores: translated)**

The pulga is my favorite place.

Four acres of dirt and asphalt  
are lined with rows of wooden tables.  
Some have blue and black tarps for shade, while others have none.  
Some have makeshift wooden or metal roofs to block out the sun.

You can find almost anything you need here.

Families smile and shout:  
Lettuce, tomatoes, onions, potatoes, peppers, avocados, corn, carrots, *nopales*,  
lemons, limes, pineapple, watermelons, cantaloupe, oranges, bananas, mangos, and more.  
That's 3 for \$1, and a dozen for \$4!

I pick out the vegetables for the week as Lupita passes along tips to Esperanza on picking fruit.

My girls turn to leave, but I playful steer them to the makeshift restaurants,  
and their eyes try not to linger over the *chalupas*, *chamoy*, and *chicharrones*.  
I'd already made them potato and egg tacos for eating,  
but today was special with a few dollars for treating!

The pulga is my favorite place.

I tell them to each pick out one item.  
Their surprised grins melt my heart as they hug me tight.  
Then, one *elote entero* with mayonnaise, chile, lemon, salt, butter, and cheese—  
and one *spiropapa* with butter and salt, pretty please!

\$8 for both, plus an *horchata* to share.

I don't get to treat my Lupita and Esperanza enough.  
Lupita's robotics team made it to state!



I tell her to remind me to give her our papers for the bus just in case,  
and Esperanza makes a face.

You never know, *mijitas*.

I have something special in mind to buy Lupita and tell her so,  
despite her protests about the money we've already spent.  
We'll have enough for rent;  
We've counted every cent!

The pulga is my favorite place.

As we walk down the dirt maze,  
I silently pray a thank you for the affordable prices.  
Food, clothes, medicine, toiletries...  
store rejects and overstock turned treasures.

Then Esperanza sees it—

A wooden table with a blue hanging tarp for shade,  
jewelry glittering in tangled heaps for \$1 a piece.  
Lupita should have some nice earrings and a necklace to wear on her big day.  
Her eyes light up despite herself and isn't sure what to say.

Esperanza digs around, helping Lupita look for matching pieces: they are my gems.

I tell Esperanza she can buy a book this weekend, too, if she wants,  
and laugh as she dances her way to the "bookstore."  
The wooden table sags heavily under the weight of the boxes of books,  
and she comes back with four and puppy dog looks.

Sigh. The pulga is our favorite place.

I cave a little by giving her \$2 for two.  
Esperanza's hug wraps around my heart, as Lupita notices my hesitation.  
I glimpse her secretly slip \$2 where Esperanza sat.  
Trying not to get too teary, I kiss Lupita on the cheek and whisper, "I saw that."

She laughs with a twinkle in her eye, and changes the subject.

Esperanza pays for all four books.  
I can't be mad, but remind Lupita to save her money for college.  
She nods, a little hurt,  
then starts to pick at my shirt.

"Mami, you have a red thread."

I lose my balance as someone runs into me.  
Screams reach my ears  
and the girls' eyes widen.  
*La migra...*

My worst nightmare has finally become a reality.

I catch Lupita's eyes  
and she grabs Esperanza's hand.  
"They" don't care if we have papers or not anymore.  
I hold my beautiful girls' hands and tell them to look at me—  
  
everything is going to be okay.

Esperanza, remember your social security number!  
If anything happens to us,  
you call your *padrinos*, okay?  
They will look after you until Lupita and I can.

Lupita, I have our papers.

If they take us in,  
you do what they say, okay?  
Do not get into trouble with these people.  
Let me do the talking.

I don't know what is going to happen.

If we get separated, you need to find each other, okay?  
Promise me, no matter what happens that you will take care of each other.  
They promise and hold me tighter.  
My throat closes up as I try to swallow down my fears and keep my head held high.

I love you, my beautiful darlings.

## The Intake (Esperanza)

Am I a U.S. citizen? Yes.  
What's my social security number?  
Please— my mami  
made me  
memorize  
it before  
I went to  
kindergarten—  
just in case  
something  
like this  
happened,  
  
sir.

Wait a minute,  
are you CPS as in  
the take your kids away  
and put them in foster care  
type of people because I'm not  
supposed to go with you guys!  
Where's my *notario publico*?  
I have to call my *padrinos*!  
I'm not going with you!  
You can't make me!  
Call my *padrinos*!  
They'll come  
for me.  
I don't  
belong  
here.

## The Endless Car Ride (Children and Guadalupe)

¡Mamá!

Tata!

¡Papá!

¡Papá!

¡Papi!

¡Papá!

Nanay! Tatay!

¡Mami! Esperanza!

¡Papi!

¡Por favor, mi papi!

¡Quiero mi mami!

Ma'! Tata!

¿A dónde esta mi papi?

¿A dónde vamos?

Saan tayo pupunta?

Where are we going?

Where is my sister?

¡Necesito ir al baño!

¡Papi!

¡No intiendo!

¿A dónde vamos?

¡No quiero ir contigo!

¡Por favor!

Balik! Balik!

Tata!

¡Necesito ir al baño!

¿A dónde vamos?

¿Que esta pasando?

¡Necesito ir al baño!

He has to go bathroom!

¡Mamá!

¡Por favor!

¡Quiero mi papi!

¡Papi!

Where is my family?

Please, just tell us something!

## Trail of Tears (Guadalupe)

I  
am so  
sorry. This  
is all my fault.  
I wish I had never  
been born. Then mami  
wouldn't have left Mexico  
and Esperanza would  
have been safe,  
protected.

I  
am  
shoved  
forward by  
a uniform and fall  
on top of a kid in front  
of me. He sobs and pees  
himself. The uniform  
laughs at him.  
I don't.

I  
grit  
my teeth  
and clench my  
fists so I don't try  
to punch the smug laugh  
right out of his mouth.  
Instead I try to  
remember.

I  
tuck  
my fist  
away, and I,  
Guadalupe, will  
remember.

I  
will  
hear the  
sobs in front

of me; I will hear  
the laugh behind me;  
and I will clench my jaw  
shut so that when I open it  
to use my voice when  
I am free, I will  
remember.

I  
will  
cry out  
the names  
of the uniforms  
and the names of the  
children, and I will  
cry out my own  
tears, too.

I  
will  
cry my  
tears for me,  
for Esperanza,  
for Mami, and for  
the life Papi  
gave up.

I  
cry  
for the  
sacrifices  
made just to  
end up ripped apart  
for who we are,  
and for who

I  
could  
have been:  
me. The uniform  
sneers and calls me  
Mary. I know that's what  
they want me to be. A  
quiet, good little  
Mary.

I  
am  
Lupita,  
*la luchadora*,  
and I want my  
family back.  
Now.

I  
am  
sorry  
all they  
see is brown.  
Maybe the world  
is better off with one  
less mouth to feed. One  
less space to take up.  
One less document.  
One less, but

I  
am  
already  
here.

## CHAPTER VIII

DETENTION: JULY 2022

### **Juanito II (Guadalupe and Juan)**

Yes?

Lupita?

Here. Take my food.

*Yo tengo hambre.*

I know, but that's all they gave us.  
It's okay. We're going to be okay.

*Es malo...*

Come here, Juanito.  
I'll keep us warm.

*Estoy frio.*

Come here.

*¿Que?*

I want to go home, too.

*Yo quiero ir a mi casa.*

I wrap my shivering arms  
around his skeletal, small frame.  
The guards pretend not to notice  
and I stroke his greasy hair as he cries.

How much longer are we going to be here?  
Is Esperanza okay?  
Is my mom?  
Will I still be able to graduate on time?  
The robotics state championship is pretty much out the window.

No one ever tells us anything.  
I clench my teeth  
to keep them from chattering  
and screaming at the uniforms.

Instead, I lie to Juanito one more time...



Shhh. It's okay. We're going to be okay.

## **The Stanford Detention Experiment Part IV (Officer Flores)**

I can see the spark dying in her eyes.  
She looks like the rest of them now  
and I hate myself for the relief I get  
from that fact that it makes this easier.

A# 012232008, it's time.  
The bag of bones looks up from her arms,  
hallowed out eyes peering into mine hopefully.  
I look at my clipboard and tell him to get up.

She asks me where I'm taking him  
and I ignore her.  
I can hear the other officers snickering in the corner,  
but she's oblivious—only concentrating on the boy and me.

When I open the cage door,  
I grab his arm and help him out into the hall.  
She tries to follow and I catch her breasts,  
then figure why not  
and give them a good pat down,  
shoving her back inside.

I tell her it's not her turn  
and glare at her for making it so damn easy.  
The other officers clap me on the back  
as I walk by,  
and loudly remark,

“Hey, let me know if you need me to restrain her some more.”

I can feel her eyes on us  
as I take A# 012232008 to transport.  
I know she heard them.

She doesn't say anything  
as I leave the building—  
and the other officers take over.

## Snuffed Out (Guadalupe)

Brilliant lights,  
florescent buzz  
shooting behind my eyes  
with a thick haze settling  
over my brain.

Why am I still here?

How could he do that to me?  
They let him—  
they patted him on the back!

Can't think.  
No.  
I can't take this anymore.

Lights,  
no cameras,  
no action—  
just locked in here  
for their own sick, private show.

Where did they take Juanito?

Think.  
I can't feel my nose.  
Think.  
Breath in—ugh, the stench!  
Breath out...something?  
Think.  
What was I thinking?  
Dry throat.  
What I wouldn't give for a toothbrush.  
Brush.  
I can't feel my nose.  
Buzz, buzz, buzz  
Buzz off stupid buzzing light.  
Swallowing nothing but dry razors.  
Think, Guadalupe, think.

How long have I been here?

Nothing.

There's nothing here.  
I can't breathe.  
There's too many people in here—  
I can't breathe!  
Get me out of here!  
GET ME OUT OF HERE!

People, cages, guns, stupid white light.  
Spinning, churching my stomach,  
I want to scratch off all my skin  
and pluck out my eyes in  
beautiful, elusive darkness.  
Let me sleep on the sun and  
burn out  
this crawling itchy, scratchy feeling  
and die.

Let me die.

How long have I been here?

Where is Juanito?

I can't do this anymore!

Esperanza is still out there somewhere and...

I couldn't stop them.

Now they have Juanito,  
and those disgusting perverts—

I can't even help myself.

I can't help anyone...

## Starvation (Guadalupe)

*Sana, sana*  
*colita de rana.*  
Heal, heal  
little tail of a frog.  
I'll eat your tail, your legs, and your whole body, too.  
Heal me.

I have nothing left.  
No home,  
no mami,  
no papi,  
*ni nadie para sanarme.*

Nothing, but:

Hunger—  
as the earth fills  
my stomach  
with rocks,  
ready to  
reclaim me.

Thirst—  
like blades in my mouth  
cutting me into  
silence.

I am nothing,  
but hunger  
and thirst  
for the person  
I was—  
and the person I am denied to be.

## CHAPTER XI

HOME: SEPTEMBER 2020

### Quinceañera (Guadalupe)

Tres leches cakes  
smothered in whip cream and  
topped with Alicia's mom's signature mix of  
strawberries, kiwi, blueberries, and peaches  
take center stage on a three tier tower on the kitchen table.

Pan dulce  
weaving warm striped hills of  
pink, white, brown and yellow  
crumbles that give way to the  
flaky, buttery bread underneath  
decorate the sides.

Fajitas  
donated by *padrino* from the restaurant are  
loaded with green, red and yellow bell peppers and onions,  
sizzling on the *comal*;  
the wind carries the savory smells  
to our crowded backyard.

Tortillas  
rolled into ovals, clouds, and imperfect circles are  
wrapped like a present in *mami's* best towel,  
ready for hungry hands to find them.

Rice  
steaming in Claudia's mom's big bright blue pot,  
are a vibrant orange cross-stitch of spices  
already being served.

Beans  
Simmer in *madrina's* crockpot,

marinating in a broth of  
cilantro, jalapeños, onions and tomatoes,  
ready to be spooned into styrofoam cups.

When I step into the yard  
with my *damas* and their *chamberlains*,  
I feel like a princess with her own royal court...  
and very own crown  
that mami insisted on buying for me  
to “complete the look.”

Looking out at all my friends,  
our dresses are a sea of red  
with mine being the biggest and brightest  
that mami’s *comadre* could sew.

Lights decorate the fence and trees,  
sparkling the air with magic  
as Vicente Fernández serenades the setting sun,  
and coaxes the stars to shine down.

Esperanza plays emcee,  
introducing my royal court  
to our guests,  
then mami takes over  
to thank all the *padrinos* of the night  
and announce me.

I want this moment to be perfect,  
and it’s the closest I’ve ever come to feeling that way—  
but the father-daughter dance starts to play  
and mami gathers her dress skirts  
and takes my hand.

She’s beaming at the me,  
and I can’t help but grin back,  
trying my best not to think about that thought  
—that thought that always keeps me up at night—  
and do my best to gently place him to the side tonight

for her.

***Requerdos (Dolores: translated)***

I remember the day you were born, my Lupita.  
Your papi and I named you Guadalupe  
because I had miscarried two times already  
and had promised you to *La Virgen*  
if she let me keep you.

Your papi brought us out to the living room  
and sang *Las Mañanitas*  
while your *tios* played their instruments  
and your *abuelitos* and *tias* danced.

He had planned the whole thing!  
Your papi loved you very much—  
they all did.

He saved for months  
to buy you a new dress for your baptism  
and refused to pay  
when men came to the house  
to steal our wages.

He was stubborn  
and a fighter,  
strong...  
just like you.

It was him, you know...  
after the bombings and our family...  
I was pregnant with Esperanza,  
and he was the one who said  
we needed to leave.

I was scared, but he wasn't.

He lifted you on top of his shoulders  
and carried you across *el rio bravo*,

determined to keep you safe.

I know it's hard, mijita,  
but he gave his life protecting us  
when the *coyotes*  
helped us cross the river



and the current swept so many people away...

He threw you onto the shore  
and pushed me toward you  
as the river took him, too.

And I know he would do it again.

He wanted a better life for you  
and for Esperanza.  
Everything he did was for our family.

He had hope  
that America would be better—

If he could see you now,  
he would have danced with you last night  
and sang *Las Mañanitas*.

He would be so proud of the woman you have become, Guadalupe,  
just like I am.

Remember—  
he is always with you, *mijita*.

## Hope (Esperanza)

Next year,  
I'm going to be in junior high and

I think we've been afraid long enough.

I'm going to be eleven!  
That means  
we've been here for over ten years  
and nothing bad has ever happened...

If it was going to happen,  
I think it would have happened already.

I'm a U.S. citizen;  
doesn't that mean my family can stay?

The news are all about  
Immigrants who are  
criminals and drug dealers and stuff—  
but both Lupita and I are on the honor roll.

I don't think we're the ones they're looking for.

I mean, Lupita  
doesn't always know  
when to stop talking,  
but that's not a crime, right?

I think Mami is right;  
she and Lupita have their papers,  
and everything is fine.

It's time to lighten up!

I tell Lupita  
she needs to join a club or something  
with kids her own age  
and Mami  
to stop worrying so much.

We're going to be fine.

## Managing (Guadalupe)

I think about what Esperanza said  
and smile  
as I work on my geometry homework.

Maybe I can.

If I ask *padrino* for a later shift at the restaurant,  
and do my homework during lunch and before school, plus weekends...

There's a robotics club at school  
I'd love to join.

Esperanza can take the bus home  
and walk to the restaurant—  
mami will already be there.

With an average of \$16 in tips every afternoon,  
minus taxes,  
times five days a week,  
plus an average of \$50 on the weekends,  
times four weeks a month,  
time twelve months a year,  
for the next three years...

won't be enough for college.

If I'm good enough,  
maybe I can get an engineering scholarship—  
or a part time job with a tech company or something.

I'm sure it would pay more than waitressing  
and when I graduate,  
I can help Mami  
and save some money for Esperanza  
to go to college, too—  
I know she wants to be a lawyer when she grows up.

School,  
work,  
robotics—

I think I can manage that.

## CHAPTER X

DETENTION: AUGUST 2022

### **Juanito Chiquito III (Guadalupe)**

It comes out as barely a whisper:  
where's Juan?

No one looks up, and I wonder if I said anything at all.

I swallow a few times and run my sandpaper tongue over cracked lips,  
then try again a little louder:  
where's Juan?

Officer Flores glances my way,  
but doesn't say anything.

Where's Juan?

My Juanito Chiquito,  
who reminded me of my lost Esperanza.

Where did he go?

Where's Juan?

Where...?

### Cages (Dolores: translated)

We were herded like pigs into a pen;  
chain link fences tormented us with views of freedom  
just out of reach.

The children slept on the matted grass—  
families still together  
when mine had been ripped  
apart.

It rained and, we had nowhere to go.  
We wrapped ourselves in foil,  
and I wondered if my Lupita was cold, wet and alone like me.

We should have stayed together.  
I remember telling myself Esperanza was safe with her *padrinos*,  
and Lupita would be with her soon.

Hopefully, they're already back together.  
Lupita would be working at the restaurant,  
and Esperanza would be doing her homework in the back.  
Yes, they should be together by now.

The room starts spinning and my stomach churns—  
I can't breathe.  
Looking up, the noose is still in the far corner,  
swinging back and forth and...  
I wish the uniforms would take it down already.

I wipe my palms on the grimy red fabric from my shirt  
and press on my chest, trying to relieve the pressure.

The guard glances my way and tells me to stop faking it.

I'm tired—  
tired of being ignored,  
tired of leaning against the peeling painted walls and water dripping on my mat,  
tired of the bright florescent lights that never rest at night,  
tired of being dirty,  
tired of eating green bologna on fuzzy bread  
and tired of being tired.

It's harder to breathe now  
and the pain in my chest deepens at the thought of my beautiful girls—  
yes, they are probably eating with Olivia's family right now  
and Lupita will help with the dishes as Esperanza clears the table.  
Rest well, my beautiful babies.

They'll take care of each other.

The small room has forty-two other adults in it.  
Most of the men are standing  
and only a few of us have enough room to sit.  
The lady beside me coughs loudly  
and gurgles as she tries to take shallow breaths.

The man standing on the broken toilet keeps looking too hard at the noose  
and I wonder what he'll do.  
I try to tell him  
not to go through with it,  
but the room starts to spin again,  
and I'm pretty sure I'm about to vomit.

Movement on the bench draws my eye as an old man reaches between a young girl's legs—  
she's not much older than Lupita, and her face turns red.  
The guards turn their backs to us.

I rub my chest harder  
trying to ease the pain, and  
then the lights finally start to dim  
as the room goes out of focus.

Good night, my babies.

They're probably safely tucked in their warm beds now.  
I made the right choice, didn't I?  
I couldn't let them stay in a place like this.  
So tired...  
So...

## **The Stanford Detention Experiment Part V (Officer Flores)**

Company just found another one dead out at another facility.  
Looks like we're going to be playing movies on the dvd player  
until the news stops running the story.

Not my job on the line—  
besides, these people come in half dead anyway.

We feed them.  
We get the babies their new diaper.  
We get the custodians to clean up after their messes;  
if it ain't coming out of one end, it comes out the other.  
We gave them a mat and thermal blanket.  
What else are we supposed to do?

I'm not their father.

Talking about thousands of them coming and going,  
and it's unfortunate but everybody's gotta die sometime.  
How many people die out in the real world?

I was eating at a restaurant a few years back,  
and I stood up to pay my bill—  
waitress comes running over  
saying some old man keeled over  
dead.  
Heart attack right there in the restaurant.  
They gave out free sodas on the house while people waited  
for the ambulance to arrive and remove the body.

Shit happens.

This job isn't for everybody; that's for sure.  
We look out for each other,  
and it's good pay with benefits.  
I just keep my mouth shut and do what needs to be done.

Shit.

Mendez with a daughter in custody...  
A#150901510.  
It's her.

She's nothing to look at now, but I remember.

Just keep my mouth shut—

and do what needs to be done.

Come on, man!

Why can't I just mind my own business.

She's going to find out eventually...

Fine.

I snap a couple of times

to bring her out of that

dumb, blank look on her face.

It takes me a while to remember her name.

Hey...Guadalupe.

Your mom's dead.

Keep it to yourself, ok?

I don't want to hear you mention this to anyone

so keep your mouth shut.

Yeah, stupid.

I need to take my own advice

and

keep my mouth shut.

Where are the dvds?

Time for a show.



## Unraveled (Guadalupe)

No.

No.

No, that did not just happen.

She's not dead.

We are going to go home and  
put this life back together  
the way it was.

She's not dead.

What am I going to tell Esperanza?  
How am I supposed to take care of her?  
I need to get out of here!

What if she already knows?

I'm not there for her.

I promised.

I promised mom.

I promised mom I'd be there for Esperanza.

I promised mom I'd be there for Esperanza, and I failed.

No.

She's not dead.

She's not dead.

She's not dead!

Everything was going to be okay...

## CHAPTER XI

THE END: SEPTEMBER 2017

### Crochet (Dolores: Translated)

In my chair I sit,  
wishing I could knit,  
a haven where we'd fit.

I'd cast on a crimson red,  
and stitch an *ofrenda* for the dead,  
who protect us from the horrors we fled.

Then, I'd stitch a coppery brown,  
for *la tierra* of the town,  
and shimmering skin of our own.

Alternating patterns of blues,  
for the time we finally find a truce,  
and *el rio* in our veins has paid its last dues.

I can bind our haven in white,  
for *Dios* to shine His light,  
and Lupita won't have to fight.

Embroidered specks of yellow,  
will glint an Aztecan echo  
to complete our haven's *cielo*.

If only...

## Happy Birthday (Guadalupe)

I missed it ...  
the *notario publico* said  
the president wouldn't go through with it.

Happy birthday to me, huh?  
September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2017  
Age: 12  
Too late for DREAMs.

*Mami* cuts my cake and tries to smile for me,  
but I can see the corners falter and droop a little.  
She never was good at lying,  
and even now,  
her eyes avoid my gaze.

Esperanza frowns, uncertain.  
She tells me to take a bite—  
She helped make the cake this year.  
I can feel as her small fingers wrap around my arm  
and ask me a question in her expression.

I choke down a piece  
and mmmm a few times for her.

I remember being her age,  
mami telling me I don't have to fight all the time.

That dream is dead now.

Esperanza puts her favorite doll in my lap to try and cheer me up,  
and I think back to how small she was back then.  
I made a promise to her and to mami.

Times may have changed, but my promise hasn't.

Staring blankly back at them,  
All I can think is:  
What am I going to do now?

Fight.

Fight for every birthday at home.  
Fight for every class that gets me into college.

Fight for the sacrifices mami and papi made to give us this life.

Fight for my mami.

Fight for my papi's memory.

Fight for Esperanza.

Fight for me—

and the life I've built.

### *El Cucuy (Esperanza)*

Mami says it isn't safe anymore.

I undo my shoelaces and  
tie the red string into a knot  
around the lock  
on my window.

I use my foot  
to shove my library books  
in front of my bedroom door  
and add a bag of *loteria* beans on top...

just in case.

I'm sure the beans will spill  
and wake me up  
if *la migra* comes for us  
in the middle of the night.

Pulling the covers over my head,  
Mami and Lupita open the door  
and walk around my alarm toward my bed—  
I forgot the door opened the other way.

Mami asks me why my books are on the floor,  
and I tell her.

She kisses my face  
and tells me she's going to call the *notario publico*  
taking care of our case.

She says everything will be okay,  
but I can see the worry in her eyes  
as Lupita looks at her feet.

I ask for them to sleep with me,  
and they sandwich me in,  
their arms and feet falling out on either side.

Please be here when I wake up...

## Waiting (Guadalupe)

Water spills onto the table as my focus slips;  
my mom looks up from her section,  
and I apologize with a quick towel to sop up  
the mess...there goes my tip.

A hairy hand with a gold watch  
reminds me to take his order,  
and all I can do is count the time  
and hours of homework I still have yet to finish.

I pause at the kitchen counter  
for the *mar y tierra botana* with side *sopas*, salad, rice and charro beans,  
hoping my stomach isn't loud enough to be heard  
and wondering if the *padrino* sneaked tidbits to Esperanza in the kitchen.

The television tunes into the news—  
*la migra* with growing numbers of immigrants in custody  
and wonder when the time will come  
to prove I belong...here.

Impeachment attempts, Russian interference, investigating emails,  
ending all my dreams and Nazis are back?

Nothing could have prepared me for any of this.

Giggling kids blow straw wrappers at their dad without a care in the world at table seven  
and tears heat up my face as I make my way to the bathroom;  
staring at myself in the mirror, I hiss that it isn't fair and scrub my cheeks—  
when will it be my turn?

## CHAPTER XII

THE COURTROOM: SEPTEMBER 2022; 10:09AM

### **Proof (Judge Stewart)**

Given: Guadalupe Mendez was not born in the United States.

Prove: Guadalupe Mendez must be deported.

Statements:

1. Guadalupe was not born in the U.S.
2. She missed her immigration court hearing.
3. She will be deported immediately.

Reasons:

1. Given.
2. Her paperwork with the correct court date was mailed to the wrong address.
3. Regardless as to whose error it was missing an immigration court hearing automatically results in deportation *in absentia*.

Case closed.

(Forgive me...)

## Legacy (Guadalupe)

I am my mother's daughter.  
Nothing will ever change that.

Her strength, wisdom and laughter—  
I am my mother's daughter.

But, all that matters to them  
is she's a wetback.

I am my mother's daughter;  
nothing will ever change that...



## **Damn (Officer Flores)**

Damn.  
3 minutes.  
She just got to confirm her name.  
Done.

I'd beat the shit out of that *notario publico*—  
If anyone ever finds him.  
Fuck.

She never had a chance.

Her frozen, wide eyes  
finally process what's going on,  
and it's hard to restrain  
her outburst.

Quit fighting me, Guadalupe.  
It's done.  
It's over.

I'm sorry, kid.

Damn.

## Brown and Blue (Guadalupe)

Brown was the hot summer day heating the *caliche* that crunched under my shoes.  
Brown is the blank wall closing in on me.

Blue was the hot shower, open sky, Rio Grande, and my favorite crayon.  
Blue is the logo that banned all crayonsf and childhood dreams.

Growing up, brown was always special.  
Brown puppies, brown bread, brown trees, brown packages, brown grass and dirt and river,  
but as soon as brown hit the fan,  
uniforms found our brown was all the evidence they needed.

Blue was my favorite color.  
Cerulean, teal, navy, turquoise, lapis, and cobalt.  
Blue are the bruises blotting my brown skin where blood bans together,  
reminding me I'm still alive with the beat, beat, beat of fists and blood and uniforms.

Brown is the steady course,  
I am *la hija de la tierra*.  
We were here first and will be here after the green and black and blue are gone.  
I am not a crayon they can ban.

I am Guadalupe,  
and  
I am my mother's daughter.

No, this is not the end.  
I made a promise—  
my mami's last request  
and papi's last breath.

I am "*Lupita la luchadora*,"  
and family is everything to me.  
I'm going to find my sister,  
and prove we belong here

because we are here to stay.

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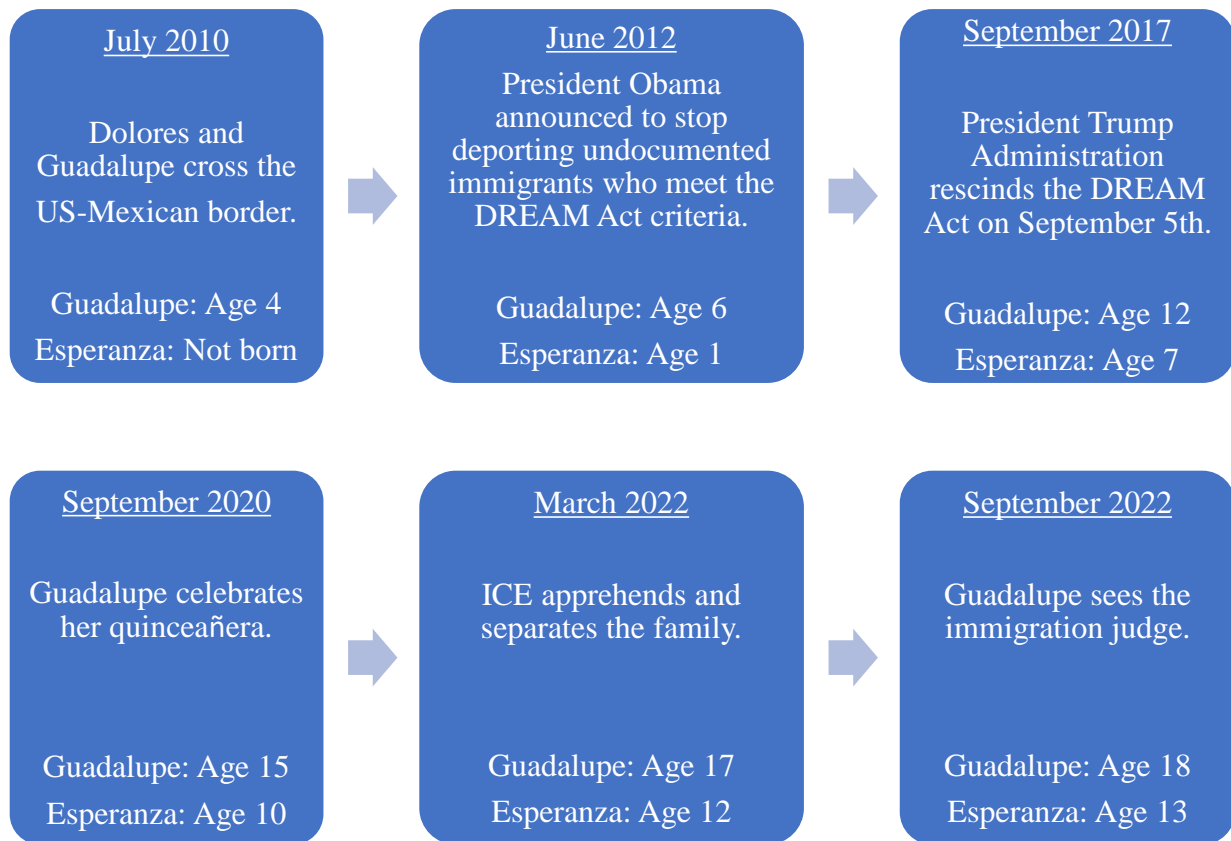
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## APPENDIX A

## APPENDIX A

### TIMELINE





## APPENDIX B

## APPENDIX B

### LIST OF CHARACTERS

GUADALUPE, *immigrant*

DOLORES, *Guadalupe's mother*

ESPERANZA, *Guadalupe's sister*

OFFICER FLORES, *immigration detention center guard*

JUDGE STEWART, *immigration judge*

MS. REYNOLDS, *Guadalupe's teacher*

JUAN, *an immigrant unaccompanied minor*

UNIFORM, *immigration field agent*

UNIFORMS, *group of immigration detention center guards*

LA RAZA, *the Latino community*

CHILDREN, *immigrants classified as unaccompanied minors*

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Virginia Murray-Torres is a published Latinx author from the Rio Grande Valley. She earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and Pre-medicine from the University of Notre Dame in 2008, and she earned her Master of Fine Arts degree in Creative Writing from the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley in 2019. Her poetry has been featured in *Boundless* and performed throughout the southern Texas border at the Valley International Poetry Festival. She currently lives in St. Louis, MO and can be reached at [virginia.murraytorres@gmail.com](mailto:virginia.murraytorres@gmail.com).