

POR AMOR DE LA NIÑA
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Honorable Mention, Essay

I KNOW HE IS THEIR FRIEND. BUT I ALSO KNOW HE IS A BAD MAN. That is why I am telling the truth—even though I am surrounded by giants. Three men—three strangers wear uniforms and hats. Now I see other men looking around the back of our house. I see the gold badges on their chests. I smell the dark leather holding the metal guns. Black guns. They are big men. They fill my eyes. They are *La Inmigracion*. I am four years old. But I know these things.

This morning I saw the man run away. Running like one of the jackrabbits Dad hunts. The man looks just like one of the rabbits. He runs in a straight line not back and forth like the rabbits. Maybe he knows where he is going. I don't know. That is why the uniforms are here at our house. They ask me if the man ran toward the trees—they are smiling at me.

Now I almost forget about my parents. They are here too—standing between big men. But they know I have been taught well. I talk to adults with respect. And honesty. Maybe they wonder if I will remember their friend is a bad man.

Everyone is talking. Everyone except my parents. They are quiet. I know they want to say something—want to talk to me. They are nervous and afraid. I wonder about this new fear. My mother and father seem different. I am not afraid. I feel like a grown-up because the men are nice to me. They smile a lot. But I know they want something from me—just like the bad man. Their smiles are like his. Maybe it is a good idea for grown-ups to smile a lot when they want something.

I have never seen my parents like this. I think they are afraid. Are they afraid of the men in uniforms? I have seen them afraid when I was very sick and Dr. Smith came to our house all the time. Mom rocked me in her arms and cried a lot. I remember her crying, but I remember that Dad was sadder.

When the bad man touches my arms it does not feel the same. He has touched me like this just one time. When my parents and sisters and brother touch me it is different. That is how I know he wants something. I think he wants to hurt me. He smiles and is nice to me but I know that I am not safe around him. I don't like the way he smells. He smells like the leather holding the black guns. I want him to go away.

I know his name and what he looks like. I tell *La Inmigracion*. I nod my head up and down. "Yes," and point. Everyone turns to where I am pointing. It is on the other side of the fence. It is where the rabbits run into the bushes away from the house. Away from the strawberries that grow in straight lines. They run there when

Dad shoots at them. The big men in uniforms all go away in a hurry. We watch them leave—I never see them again. Only Dad picks me up in his arms. Mom and Dad don't feel different anymore. But I do. I am different.

