“Why don’t one of you join the border patrol when you grow up?” my father suggested one time as we were inching our way toward the international border by car. We had spent all week visiting our cousins who, after all the trouble of getting their green cards, fled most of the year back to México. This made my aunt furious because she had spent countless days standing in long, insufferable lines inside buildings that amplified every heel that knocked on the tile. “I can still hear the echoes at night,” she would claim.


Indeed, all those years of crossing back and forth had given us nothing memorable. It was always the same questions, the same replies, the same look of disinterest from the man (or woman) in the migra-green outfit.

“It might make things easier,” my father said.

I thought he was being funny, since we knew plenty of people who had lived in fear of getting caught by immigration, our mother included. Many of our other relatives had been deported more than once. We despised la migra, just like Americans despise the IRS—because they were an inconvenience. But the most-hated border patrol officers were the Mexicans. Such traitors. Why would we want to join that group?
When we finally reached the inspection gate, my father flashed his green card; my brother and I held up our American birth certificates. The guard, a Mexican, barked at my father, “How long were you in México? What are you bringing back?”

And then, so unlike who he really was, my father stuttered his reply, his body twitching in the seat during this single moment of powerlessness.