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Category: Short Story

The Border

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Enrique opens his *madre's* old jewelry box, searching for anything valuable. His brother, Carlos, just waking up, wipes his eyes and focuses on Enrique. "Enrique what are you doing?" asks Carlos. "We just buried *mamá* last week and you feel it is okay to start emptying her belongings?"

"Carlos we have nothing to offer if we plan on crossing the border. We have a little money, which is saved for food later, and that is it. *Nada más*," says Enrique. He finds an old rusty ring and puts it in his pocket along with necklaces and earrings. "Listen, I talked to our *primo* last night. He said he heard of a guy willing to help people get across to the States and our *primo* got us in for a spot tonight."

Carlos's eyes are wide open now as he starts to panic, just like a normal twelve-year old boy would. "Look *hermano*, I know we talked about leaving here pretty soon, but I didn't think pretty soon was in a couple hours. Why the sudden rush?" Carlos asks, anxiously.

As a member of the cartel at a very young age, Enrique has finally realized there was a way out. He had been a part of the cartel for three years, joining at the age of twelve. Living in Tijuana, Mexico, the cartel controls most of the town. Without a father, Enrique had to provide for his younger brother and his sick mom, and the cartel was the only way he knew how. He did not want to tell Carlos, but just a couple days ago a twelve-year old boy had been shot as a part of the cartel. Enrique is scared that Carlos could be another victim of joining the cartel at a young age.

"The sudden rush is because we have no money," answers Enrique, "I'm taking care of it; I just need you to go out and buy food for later and be ready for tonight."

"Who's helping us get through?" asks Carlos as Enrique finally stops looking for jewelry.

"I don't know much about him, but *primo* says his name is Ricky. We meet him in the afternoon. Just go out and get food, please!" Enrique says as he starts pushing Carlos out of the house.

Carlos heads towards the plaza, passing by so many small *tiendas* and different markets. The two brothers do not live in a very rich part of town, and the roads are all cracked, for few cars to drive by. Everyone travels by foot to get to places. Carlos experiences a very busy market--so many vendors selling different food, streets full of many tourists from all over the country buying small items. Smells of *carnitas* and *tacos* flood his nose. This is the bright side of town, full of family and drunken laughter. The vibrations coming from the car radio are covered by all the people just singing and dancing in the streets. Carlos has a big smile on his face, passing by everybody saying, "*Buenas tardes*."

He starts to think of how much he will miss this place. Two kids swing by him playing with a little ball, making him think of memories of him and his brother causing trouble on this road. Finally, Carlos arrives at the lady selling *tamales* with chile. He can even remember holding his mom's hand as the two would buy tamales from this house during the *Navidad* season. As it is his turn to order, the woman making the food recognizes his face. "¿Carlos? ¿Eres tú?"

"Sí Señora Lety," says Carlos, "¿Cómo estás?"

“Not good *mijo*. I’m not sure if you heard, but my nephew was shot last week by a member of the cartel, and things are not looking too good for him in the hospital. I still cannot believe about your mother. How Are you and Enrique holding up?” *Señora* brushes a small tear from her eye.

Carlos is shocked to hear about her nephew as he had just turned twelve not too long ago, just like himself. Carlos realizes why his brother is so eager to leave. It is not just because of the shortage of money, but also to protect Carlos from becoming a member of the cartel. He tells *Señora* how the two plan on leaving at sundown and will be meeting up with a guy who can escort them across the border.

“I will miss you two, but it is for the best that you guys go. Live the life that I wish I could give to my nephew,” says *Señora* Lety. She gives him the food for free and says to use that money to pay the man who will help them.

“*Muchas gracias, Señora*,” exclaims Carlos with a big smile on his face. He gives her a big hug and a kiss on the cheek. She then proceeds to give Carlos her blessing and the two say their goodbyes. Then suddenly as Carlos turns his back and heads the other way, *Señora* Lety calls to him.

“Carlos, you need to be careful tonight,” she exclaims.

“¿*Por qué?*”

“Now there are good-hearted people out there who help people like us cross the border, but there are also bad people. They’re called *coyotes*. As soon as they take you out to the border, they double cross you and steal your stuff,” says *Señora* Lety.

“Is that for real?” Carlos’s voice begins to shake. “Will something like that happen tonight?”

“*Ay mijo*, I’m not saying that will happen to you, I just need you and your brother to be careful,” exclaims *Señora* Lety. Again they say goodbye, but this time Carlos hugs her even harder, holding back how scared he really is. Carlos goes back home and tells Enrique of *Señora* Lety. He suggests they can use the money they did not spend on food, plus the money Enrique got from selling the jewelry, to pay Ricky. He then tells him that *Señora* Lety told him about *coyotes*.

“Don’t worry Carlos, everything will be alright,” says Enrique. He hugs Carlos as the two proceed to pray and eat their final meal in Mexico. They both hope that by this time tomorrow they will be in the States.

At ten past five, the two head towards the location where they will meet up with Ricky. Carlos carries a bag with a little food and water the two gathered for the trip. Enrique tells Carlos to let him do all the talking as neither Enrique nor Carlos do not know what to expect from Ricky.

Enrique and Carlos pass a bunch of guys standing around drinking and just staring at them. Carlos starts thinking of something going wrong and grips the bag of belongings even harder. As the two arrive, they see a man wearing jeans and a grey shirt sitting on a small bench in the wide open.

“¿*Eres Enrique?*” questions Ricky.

Enrique nods as Carlos just stands right next to him with no movement.

“What do you boys have for me?” asks Ricky.

“This is all we got,” says Enrique as Carlos gives him the small bag with *pesos*. Ricky looks inside and looks at the money, counting in his head.

“This will do,” says Ricky. “We leave ten minutes after the sun goes down.” He proceeds to give them the rundown of how things will go. They plan on crossing in the desert at night, hoping no one will see them. Since they are in Tijuana, the trip should not take long, but Ricky says he will drop them off far into the States. Ricky tells them that if they listen to him they will be fine and tells the two boys stories of all the previous people he had helped. “What was your last name again?”

“Torrez,” says Enrique. “Why?”

“Now I helped a lot of Torrez people, but one guy specifically I remember. You two look like him and if I remember correctly he had two kids; one age four and a one-year old,” states Ricky.

“You saying that guy you helped was our father?” Enrique asks.

“And are you saying he is in the States?” Carlos asks.

“Could be wrong, but yes!” exclaims Ricky.

Both Enrique and Carlos stare at each other, thinking of the man who left them and their mother years ago, when the two were just little boys. They always asked their mother about what happened to him, but their mother never said a word about their father. Enrique thinks about how they are doing the same thing their father did to them. The difference is, Carlos and Enrique have nothing to leave behind. As Ricky and the two boys continue to talk, the sun continues to get lower and lower. Finally the sun sets.

“*Vamos*,” calls Ricky to both boys.

Ricky tells the boys to stay close to him as there can be no mistakes. There are a couple of small mountains the three of them have to go by before they are in open land. They walk and walk and walk with no breaks, as Ricky says they have to move fast. They lost track of time, but that did not matter to them as long as they made it across. After getting past the mountains, the brothers and Ricky are in the open. Carlos can see a few dry green plants as he suddenly steps on a scorpion. He is glad that he is wearing shoes. They get to a point in the desert and suddenly Ricky just stops.

“What are we doing?” Enrique asks, puzzled.

“This is as far as I take you *primos*,” says Ricky as he looks out in the distance and never makes eye contact with the boys.

“What do you mean?” asked Carlos as he can easily feel his heartbeat increase on the spot.

“I am sorry to do this to you boys, but trust me I need this more than you,” Ricky says as he pulls a gun out from his boot. Enrique and Carlos’ hearts drop in an instant.

Enrique, being more calm than Carlos, tells his brother to put his hands in the air.

“Give me the bag *joven*,” shouts Ricky.

Enrique quickly snags the bag from Carlos and begins to walk slowly towards Ricky. Enrique holds his hand with the bag out, but as he does so, he tries grabbing the gun from Ricky. Ricky kicks him to the ground and hits him in the head with the gun. Carlos is in shock, not knowing what to do as Ricky lunges a punch right to his face. The two brothers fall to the ground as Ricky takes off. Carlos feels his body shiver and tears run down his face. Enrique tries to think of something fast, but cannot think of any action to take.

“*Lo siento hermano*,” cries Enrique, while emotions tremble in his body. The boys are tired with no food or water to provide themselves with at all. Neither of them say a word after that as both just lay in the desert staring at the sky. Carlos always knew *Señora* Lety was right, but he never knew when was the right time to tell Enrique. They both just lay there full of exhaustion.

Enrique is finally able to get up holding his head. He checks on Carlos who is fine, just scared. The two are able to get up and they need to find some place or town. Enrique falls down as his head is still ringing from the hit. Carlos does not say anything, just helps his brother. Enrique eventually passes out with Carlos by his side. Carlos is there with his injured brother. He cannot carry him, as he is only a twelve year old boy, stranded.

Carlos thinks of seeing his father again, and decides to take his and his brother’s safety into his own hands. This

whole leaving Mexico plan was Enrique's and look where that got them. Carlos's opinion had never mattered as it was Enrique who did all the talking and planning.

He walks by himself for a bit looking for anything that might give him a direction, but does not come across anything in the view, just a bright full moon beaming down. Carlos assumes that the amount of time they've walked, that they are in the States already.

Suddenly, he hears the sound of a motor. He can see lights in the distance and tries to run in front of the moving vehicle before it passes by. He runs in front of the vehicle, making the driver slam the brakes. "*Ayúdame por favor!*" he shouts.

The vehicle stops and multiple people get out. Carlos looks at the people, seeing they wear a badge on their arms. He reads it in his head--U.S border control. His eyes open wide in even more panic.

Enrique wakes up. He sees nothing, but feels the sensation of a bag over his head. He can feel himself in a moving vehicle bumping across gravel roads. Suddenly the vehicle stops. Enrique is pulled out of the car and thrown to the ground. The bag is removed.

"Where am I?" Enrique gasps. He looks around and sees himself in a cage. The cage is full of other people either lying on the ground or holding themselves onto the cage.

"What does it look like?" says one man right next to Enrique.

"Where is my brother?" Enrique asks aggressively towards one of the guards outside the cage.
No response.

Enrique feels lost in his anger not knowing anything. Not knowing where his brother is let alone where he is.

He leans his back on the cage blaming himself for losing his brother. Enrique crawls toward a corner of the cage and huddles there alone with tears running down his face. He has no idea what to do or how to find Carlos, but he begins to pray.