

Christina Henriquez

Everything is Far From Here

On the first day, there's a sense of relief. There are other feelings, too, but relief is among them. She has arrived, at least. After three weeks. After a broken sandal strap, sunburn on her cheeks, mud in her ears, bugs in her hair, blisters around her ankles, bruises on her hips, boiled eggs, bottled water, sour berries, pickup trucks and train cars and footsteps through the dirt, sunrises and sunsets, nagging doubt and crackling hope – she has arrived.

They tell her to sleep, but that can't be right. First she has to find her son, who is supposed to be here, too. They were separated along the way, overnight, a few days ago. The man who was leading them here divided the group. Twelve people drew too much attention, he claimed. He had sectioned off the women, silencing any protest with the back of his hand, swift to the jaw. "Do you want to get there or not?" They did. "Trust me", he said.

He sent a friend to escort them. When she glanced back, she felt a shove between her shoulder blades. "It's only for a few miles", he hissed in her ear. "Walk".

By morning, the men were gone, the children gone. The friend, a man with sunglasses and a chipped front tooth, said, "I am here to take care of you". What he meant was that they were there to take care of him. Four women. Which they did. Which they were made to do.

"Where is my son?" she asks a guard who speaks Spanish. He shrugs in reply. "Mi hijo?" she asks anyone who will listen and many who won't. "He's five years old. He has black hair, parted on one side, and a freckle, right here, under his eye. He was wearing a Spider-Man shirt". People just shake their heads.

“There’s a family unit”, one woman says, pointing down the hall. “They have cribs”, she adds, as if that’s something.

In the family unit, which is one large room, she searches every crib. She gazes down at infants and eight-year-olds curled against the bars. She scans the faces of the children watching *Dora the Explorer* on a television set mounted to the wall.

“He’s coming”, a young mother sitting in the corner assures her. She has a child on her lap. “The same thing happened to me. The kids just take longer. They don’t walk as fast. Mine got here a whole week after I did. Everyone makes it eventually”.

She wants to believe that’s true.