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Abandoned at Home
By Ulyses Alvarado Olvera

One afternoon, a twelve-year-old girl opens her front door not knowing what it would entail for her. It started with relentless knocking, she gets up from her twin-sized bed without waking up her two other siblings. Her dad cannot answer the door because he has not returned from the late-night bender, and her mom left them when the youngest boy turned six. Before she leaves her room, she puts on the raggedy pair of shoes she owns, just in case any broken bottle bits are still left on the hallway floor. She did not turn on the lights in the hallway because dad said he needed the money to pay his friends. The last time she messed with the thermostat, her dad took away the TV to sell. Her dad would always say, "Electricity, heat, and food all cost money, if you can't provide the money don't use it!" Quite the ironic statement for a man who is always debt and making bets he can't afford. As she makes her way to the door, the sight of the kitchen reminds her to clean the dishes and mop before dad comes back. Looking through the peephole, she sees two figures, a man and a woman. There was a frizzy redhead woman in some sort of suit. The man with her stands a bit taller, about six foot, a cop for sure with the crew cut hair.

"Child Protective Services," the woman said.

"Damn it," Is what she tells herself.

She couldn't believe that her neighbors actually called the police on them, after years of bluffing. The thought quickly disappears, replaced by the sound of the woman's voice. Her tone was kind and soft, unlike her father who only has the vocabulary to order them around and put them down.

The girl knows this lady has no malice intention, but her father would punish both her and her brothers if she let couple strangers in, especially a cop. She doesn't know whether to let them in or to ignore them till they leave, but she opens the door anyway. Her body reacts to this new situation and did the thinking for her. An older man with warm eyes and a fusion of black and grey hair smiles at her, while the lady with the frizzy red hair looks at the state of their home and

whispers something to the other man. She might be twelve-years-old, but she knows when adults whisper to each other nothing good comes out of it. After they are done discussing, they will ask her questions, an interrogation, but they wouldn't call it that. They will want her to show emotion: anything to get her to open up, but she knows looks can be deceiving. She can't trust them, it could worsen her relationship with her dad. She couldn't show weakness: not to them, not to anyone.

"Where's your father?" the cop said.

"I don't know, drinking somewhere," she said.

"You here alone?" he said.

"No, my brothers are in the back, why?"

"Just asking...you know when he will be back?"

"Like I said, drinking. Can't say for sure?"

They give each other worried looks, as if she didn't know what that meant. How long does it take to gather that they live in a shit hole of an apartment?

"Sweetie do mind if I wake them up? You can stay here with this police officer," the woman said.

"No, I'll go. You can stay here," she said.

She goes to wake them up from the dreams that makes their life seem second-rate in comparison; she tells them to grab their backpacks and fill it with their clothing. She knows they aren't coming back, so they might as well take what they can.

Back in the living room the lady asks her, "Do you need to take anything else?"

The girl takes a moment to think, she looks around the living room and it takes her less than a second to decide against the piles of beer bottles and cans, her brothers' broken toys, and the shoddy TV that only has one functional channel in Spanish. A hard pass anything there. The kitchen is no better. Unless the take-out containers, overdue bills, and dirty dishes count as a keepsake. She does scurry back to her room going straight to the dresser opening the bottom drawer, tossing out everything for one thing. A photo of her family taken one

month before her mother left. As strange as it seems, for one moment the photographer capture them happy.

She comes back to her brothers, each putting a toy in their bags. She takes a hand from each of them as they walk out the door. At this point, she doesn't know what will happen to any of them. Something bad or good can occur, but anything is better than staying back there. The lady asks them the same question once more.

“No,” the girl said walking away just as the door shuts.

She'll never need to open that door again.