

This Journey

by Tammy Gomez

I stand in line D at the Greyhound station, among others
heading to Fort Worth by way of Waco.
We know what that looks like on a map,
the precise stretch of I-35 that will be traveled,
the probability of traffic snags and brief bathroom breaks along the way.

So when she hands me her ticket book, with an expectant look on her face,
I realize she has no idea where she is heading. There is no map in her mind,
nothing from memory to help her assign probabilities and levels of dread to this journey.

I notice then, for the first time, that there are two other women—
mothers accompanying minors—in that same line. Line B.
For bussed. Beleaguered. Between worlds.
I pull the passbook from her tiny hand and read aloud,
translating into Spanish but leaving some words Cold English
in order to prepare her for inevitabilities of confusion.

First, you will go to Dallas. There, you have a long break. Almost seven hours.
Stay inside the station, especially at night.
Es un poco peligroso afuera. (It's a little risky outside.)
Then--I flip the ticket pages quickly—you will go to Kansas. Kansas!
That's where you're heading. Wait, there's another page.
Oh, es muy largo tu viaje. (Oh, your trip is going to be very long.)
You're GOING TO MINNESOTA!
Her face lights up, reminding me of one of
Bob Barker's lucky contestants on "The Price is Right."
Vas a pasar muchas horas en el bus, y tu destino es en el norte
de los Estados Unidos—acerca de CANADA! (You're going to spend many hours on the bus,
and your destination will be in the northern U.S—close to Canada!)
Her son, possibly 11 years old, smiles and nods.
I am the announcer of the grand prize, the unintended conveyor of critical information.
Of course, she has not chosen any of this.
She is salvadoreña with desperate hope in her eyes, yet there is no certainty in her destiny.

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