

# Just in time

## Tuesday 22:57 - Transit

The bench beneath me groans in sympathy with my barely audible moans. I have learned that cries are not looked on favourably. I distract myself by looking out of the windows as the ambulance lurches back to the hospital. I hear snatches of the paramedics' conversation of staff shortages and family drama; I would give anything for their problems.

## Wednesday 03:38 - False Alarm

I have made this journey from the maternity bay back to the cramped detention centre once already. I don't complain as I know I am lucky to still be here, two days after my due date. Thankfully the horrendous weather conditions have grounded all flights from New York airports. A brief reprise but I know it is temporary.

## Wednesday 11:55 - Return to Maternity

"What is she doing here?" a voice barks with barely disguised contempt, "this one's only five centimetres dilated! I've told you - they need to be either ready to drop or there's a danger to life!"

I try to ignore the rough hands, the dismissive tone, and the refusal to look me in the eye as the obstetrician thrusts my notes back to the ashen-faced midwife before stalking away.

"Take no notice," the porter whispers to her as he wheels me out of the cubicle, "We're crazy busy already without having to hit these stupid repatriation targets....". His voice trails off uncomfortably as he catches my eye.

*"Repatriation": What a genteel word for this process, it's almost as though I have made a choice.*

## Wednesday 17:40 - Holding Bay

I am not taken back to the detention centre, but a nearer holding bay instead. The room is cramped, and the smell of agitated anxious bodies is stifling, and nausea threatens.

As my stomach spasms, I recall Michael's last plea to me from his cell. "Promise me *Cariña*, whatever happens, you will not try to return. It's not safe."

Then two months later I received a call from his mother in Tijuana to say he was dead – another victim of the gangs we had tried to escape.

I try to sleep.

### **Wednesday 22:10 - Contractions**

These feel different, more urgent; but I say nothing, unwilling to tempt fate. I start to count backwards from 100 until I am suddenly aware of a rush of warm fluid coursing down my legs, and the white-hot feeling of a vice gripping my stomach. I vomit.

“Ok!” the porter yells, “delivery room!!”

### **Wednesday 23:58 – Delivery**

I see blinding lights, faces, and feel heat and pain and it seems to take forever until my cries merge with hers and finally it is over.

“What time is it?” I pant.

The midwife looks at me with empathy.

“It’s 23:58” she answers “time of birth, 23:52”

“Just in time” the obstetrician remarks drily.

But I don’t care, I lean back with relief and look into my daughter’s eyes, born just in time on American soil. We made it. We are safe. For now.