

1.2 AMERICA (USCIS BABY)

The next morning, I go to the immigration offices on 7th avenue. It's 8am but already scorching hot. A long line at the front of the building. There's a teenage girl with her mom. Both are confused. Neither speaks English. I realize this building is half USCIS half ICE. Dire. I go to the back of the line. Across the street, an auto repair shop and a nail salon called Nelly's Nails. Maybe I can treat myself after this and get my nails done. When I get to the front of the line, a man with a buzz cut asks for my documentation. I pull it out of my backpack. He lets me in. Thirty minutes later, confused mother and daughter stand in the same place, same confusion on their faces. I should help but Buzz Cut tells me to hurry up. Inside there's a scanner. I put my stuff in the bin and go through the machine. A middle-aged woman with a top bun chews bubble gum very loudly. The blonde man looking at the screen calls me over. He opens my backpack and takes out a small make up bag. You got a weapon? No, of course I don't. Open it. I obey like a good girl. He points at my eyebrow tweezers. You must remove the weapon. Fuck. It's one of the good ones. Cost me \$20. It's fine, I'll throw it out. You cannot dispose of your weapon on government property. Exit and come back once you have disposed of the weapon. Really? Come on, you have a garbage can right there. The middle-aged gum chewer stares at me. Her uniform is a few sizes too small, and she wears a tight belt around her waist. I can tell she hates me.

I go across the street. I leave the tweezers wrapped in a Kleenex on top of a dumpster by the auto repair shop. Maybe it'll be there when I'm back. Two sweaty mechanics wave at me.

I return and see confused mother-daughter seated on an enormous cement planter. The mother has a flip phone. The daughter has skinny legs, tight jeans, and a yellow crop top. She smiles at me. I smile back. Her mother screams into the phone and waves a manila folder in the air. I go to the front of the line, but Buzz Cut is gone. Fuck. Excuse me sir, I was just here, but had to go throw something in the garbage. You go to the end of the line, miss. This Haitian man looks 125 years old. Can't fuckin' believe he still has to work. Damn Social Security. I wonder what church he goes to on Sundays and what he believes in. He's tiny. Like Colombian Marcela but with rich dark brown skin. And no muscle, just skin and bone. Sir, I got here at 8am and waited

in line, please. Miss, you go to the end of the line. The sun is hitting on a murderous 45-degree diagonal. I don't have any sunblock. Fuck. I turn around and face the wall, shading my acne scars. Out of the corner of my eye I see Buzz Cut coming back. I make eye contact, polite. Smize and sweeten the pitch of my voice. Heeey, remember me? I was just here and. He interrupts and lifts his wide chin, extending his left arm like doormen do in high end Park Avenue buildings. Go ahead. As I re-enter the building, confused mother is now frustrated mother. She holds the manila folder and unsuccessfully tries to communicate with the Haitian elder. Her daughter sits on the cement planter, playing with her beautiful, long black hair.

I pass the scanner. I am given a ticket with a number and escorted to a room with screens. A big sign says NO PHONES ALLOWED. Some people have their phones out, but Chewing gum already hates me, so I can't want to risk it. I try to meditate. A tall and thin woman with very white skin sits next to me. She's in a purple polyester polka dot dress, shiny plastic black shoes, and red lipstick. I can tell she feels very sexy.

It's 2pm. I eat a mashed banana I find in my backpack.

My number is up. I'm greeted by a chunky man about my height. He leads me into his office. On his desk he has Lego sets, action figures and pictures of children I assume are his. I hand him my passport. You're a Scorpio, huh? Fiery. He lifts his eyes back up straight at me, gauging our boundaries. He takes out a Bankers box like actors do on TV shows like Cold Case and slams it on the table. He pulls out my divorce certificate. You're divorced, huh? Interesting. 'Cuz you seem like such a lovely lady. Silence. I pretend to be relaxed. You know, there was another woman from Argentina taking the test in here last week. She told me there are a lot of nice bitches in Argentina. He flips through my passport in silence. I want to stand up and leave. Get him fired. But instead, I give him an awkward light chuckle. Nah, nah, nah, don't get me wrong. Listen, she couldn't speak English! She was trying to say... There are a lot of nice beaches in Argentina. I smile again. But there are no nice beaches in Argentina.

Last question: what group of people was taken to America against their will and sold as slaves? African Americans. Mmmmm. Um, black people? Mmmmm. People of African descent? You mean people like me, right? My ancestors were brought to this continent against their will, did you know that? I smile politely and stay very still. He stands up. Well, Scorpio, you passed. 20 out of 20. I stand up and shake his hand. Welcome to the United States. I smile again. But I've been in the United States since 1995.

Chewing gum asks me if want to do the ceremony that same day. She gives me a little American flag and a paper folder with a stack of papers. Over a hundred people sit in an auditorium while a young Central American man in a satin suit scrolls through a Power Point presentation about what it means to be an American citizen. The woman next to me is named Tatiana. She's 92 and Russian. She's with her son who vents it was a waste of time and money to do this, but that after forty years, Tatiana wanted to vote. The son purses his lips and shrugs like that emoji that I love and overuse. His mother only speaks Russian, but through her eyes, I can tell she is kind and loving. I wish I was her granddaughter. The young man's blue suit sparkles like the Rockettes, even under shitty fluorescent lighting. I can tell he's taking this job very seriously and I wonder how much he makes an hour. As he clicks the clicker, a Stevie Wonder song plays, and we're told to wave the flags. Tatiana waves her American flag up high, proud.

I exit and see confused mother but no daughter. I wonder if the girl is ok. She is wearing and a crop top and presumably went in there all by herself. I hope she went to USCIS and not ICE. My therapist told me to be practice gratitude, so I take a moment to be grateful to have gone to USCIS and not ICE. I cross the street and find my tweezers exactly like I left them. Boom. Another moment for gratitude. My therapist would be proud. I put the tweezers in my backpack. I look inside Nelly's Nails, but it's packed so I call an uber.

It starts to rain. I can't find Yuniur so I call. He's a block away but it's a one-way street so he can't U-turn. I walk to him, using the American flag as a makeshift umbrella. I get in the car, soaking wet. Perdoname pero tu sabes, when it rains the

Uber GPS satellites don't work right, this weather fucks up those internet waves, you know what I mean? I nod, performing accord and allyship. Yuniors Corolla has a Miami Heat bobble head on the dash and a dirty rosary hanging from the rearview. I shove the wet American flag into my backpack and open Instagram to a video that tells me what kind of tops to wear to make my arms look thinner.

And now, I'm an *americana*.