

Ixmiquilpan, Hidalgo, México

By Natalie Scenters-Zapico

1

Part of the simulation is not knowing
your coyote's real name. Part of the simulation
is knowing your group could leave you
behind. Part of the simulation is knowing
that if you are left behind, a pickup truck
will take you back to your hotel.

2

Through caves, through brush, through needles
we form a line by holding on
to a stranger's backpack. In the dark live
rounds are fired. I duck, people laugh.

3

The desert here is no desert at all & I think of how
I could cut a thick barrel cactus open
& eat it. In Chihuahua I've never seen
thick barrel cactus, only the thin long threads
of ocotillo that don't carry much water.

4

The chairros pay 250 pesos to walk
all night in the desert in the middle of México
to simulate a border crossing. They bring jugs
filled with water & pose for selfies.

5

When you wade across the river you only have to worry
about swimming if a current pulls you under, not the red
glare of night-vision goggles, floodlights & guns.

6

In the simulation, only two people make it
to *the other side* without getting stopped by actors
portraying la migra or narcos. All are brought back
for cups of atole. *It's three in the morning*, a girl laughs.

7

I walk back to my room, turn on the light
& the flying ants won't stop swarming. It is so dark
& have so much water left in my jug.
My teeth full of grit from the atole.

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Source: *Lima :: Limón* (2019)

