

*Tina Tocco*

## Reinvention

When my father's new wife asked about the girl in the picture, he said I came with the wallet. Bernadette told me this herself the first night I stayed at the house in Santa Clara. Bernadette does mani-pedis on Tuesdays and Thursdays at Neil's Nails, and I tell myself the combination of polish remover and nail gel encouraged her to believe his tale. When she started out, Bernadette could only paint stripes—diagonal, in one direction—but by the time she moved on to shapes, it occurred to her that the girl in the picture had gone from pigtails to a pixie cut. Bernadette worked at a hair salon before reinventing herself.

My first night at the house, and every night, she called my father "Jack." Every uniform from every place he ever worked said "Juan." But he didn't work at a place that made you wear a nametag anymore, and he didn't call me *mija* when he shut the door to the spare room that night. At lunch that last afternoon, he called *empanadas* "turnovers," and as he steered me through the airport, he tipped a skycap \$10 to carry the duffle bag I'd borrowed from Mom.

So at the terminal, when my father said, "Bye, Carly," which is not exactly me, I didn't bother to correct him. And when Bernadette called, "See you soon, Carly!" over Connor's stroller, I didn't bother to correct her, either.