

Juan Looking Good

by Matt Mendez

Juan puts on his new shiny shoes. He likes them, and when he stands his pant legs cover the thin laces and around the heel. The pants aren't baggy or tight. Not jeans. They are dark grey slacks, sharp and straight. Juan's amá ironed his shirt, starched the collar and long sleeves. It smells like lemons. Juan's tucked in, first time since he was a kid making Communion. His amá bought the clothes on her credit card and paid for his haircut—still close on the sides but longer on top, with hair to comb. Juan's tío, Richard, who works for the city and is the kind of Mexican who thinks he isn't, took care of the lawyer. Juan checks himself in the mirror, didn't know how good dressing fancy would feel.

Juan's amá is worried what the judge will do. Bang the gavel and her hijo doomed. Doomed to what, Juan doesn't know. The lawyer never explained things to him, only to Richard because he wrote the checks, but Juan's not scared. He ties his tie, knots it so the end hangs just above his belt buckle. It's too hot for a jacket, but Juan wishes it wasn't, wishes his amá would've gotten him the blue blazer with the silver-dollar buttons. Juan's put his poor amá through enough—everyone agrees—but maybe one more thing wouldn't have been too much to ask.

Juan is told to plead guilty, but the news isn't so bad. No jail time, and the record seals when he turns eighteen. Juan's familia thought it was game-over when they walked inside the courtroom and heard all the English they didn't know, but the judge gave community service and a fine, gave Juan extra innings. Juan's glad to keep playing, to swing the bat and maybe get lucky. On the way home he rolls the cuffs of his shirt and sticks his arm out the window of his amá's truck, feels finer than ever with the wind in his sleeve.

Juan's amá throws a carne asada to celebrate. His tíos and tías, all his primos, come to the house, even his abuela in her

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wheelchair. Juan's friends show, too. His boys slap him on the hand and back. The girls give hugs and tell him how good he's looking. Juan's friends want to leave after eating, after taking all the dirty looks his family had for them. They tell Juan to change and vamos. Time to *really* celebrate. "That's cool," Juan tells them, looking down. "I'm liking it here." The square toes of Juan's shoes are as black as outer space and look just as good with the stars coming out.

The party ends, and everyone heads home. Richard tells Juan not to fuck this up. His abuela says to listen to his uncle but not too hard, to take care of his amá because she's looking flaca. With his amá asleep, Juan locks the doors and goes to his room. He checks himself in the mirror one more time, stands straight. The phone rings, but he doesn't answer. Juan opens a window and lies down, closes his eyes and kicks off his shoes. He wants to sleep but can't. He hears a train passing behind his house, the slow chugging and horn pulling away until it sounds like a secret being whispered in his ear.

