

President Trump

A Novel

By

Harvey Simon

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Never let yourself be persuaded that any one Great Man, any one leader, is necessary to the salvation of America. When America consists of one leader and 158 million followers, it will no longer be America.

Dwight D. Eisenhower

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CHAPTER ONE

I've Always Tried to Ignore Politics

“Rosa, Francisco, time for breakfast,” Diana Flores yelled up the stairs to her children. “Your tortillas are getting cold!”

At the head of the large kitchen table, where four place settings were neatly laid out on the marble top, her husband, Carlos, glared at the newspaper in his clenched fists, too angry to look up from the story in *Hoy Los Angeles* about President Trump’s roundup of illegal aliens. “Újule.”

“What is it, Carlos? What are you reading now?”

“This asshole is going to ruin everything!”

“Who is it this time?”

“Trump, Diana, Trump.”

“Oh, not again. Look, I don’t want you to say anything in front of the children.” She stared her you-had-better stare as Carlos mumbled to himself. The mass deportations had begun last month with Trump bragging to an ecstatic crowd at a newly built detention center in Texas about fulfilling another of his campaign promises.

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“Our Deportation Force has hired the best people, just the best. And they’re going to do something simply amazing, believe me. The deportations are going to be very humane, all very humane. But we’re going to ship them out, because we have to take our country back. And we’re building a wall, so we’re going to *keep* them out. You’ll be absolutely amazed.”

His teenagers kissed him dutifully on the cheek before taking their usual spots at the table. “Are you ready for your big math test today, Francisco?”

“As ready as I’ll ever be, I guess.”

“That’s not good enough. I want you to be the class valedictorian. That would be something for your papa, who—”

“Didn’t finish high school,” Francisco and his blue-haired sister said in unison. “We know, dad. Things were hard in Mexico. We’re like really glad we don’t have to live there, or anything, like you and mom did.”

“You kids are luckier than you’ll ever know.”

“Don’t you want me to be a valadictor-whatever, too, dad?”

“Of course he does,” Diana added as she finished serving breakfast and sat facing her husband. “But junior high doesn’t select a valedictorian. Now, today’s Monday, so Rosa, you have cheerleading practice after school and, Francisco, you have chess club.”

“We know, mom,” Francisco said without looking up from his calculus text.

“When you get back from school, I want you both to finish all your homework. Dad and I will be home from the store at the usual time and we’ll all go out for dinner.”

Francisco glanced up from his equations. “Oh, please,

can we not go to a Mexican restaurant, for once? Please?”

“We have to get going, Carlos.” The kids had left for school and they were about to drive to the bakery they owned in Boyle Heights, on the Eastside of Los Angeles. Since expanding their staff it was no longer necessary for one of them arrive in the middle of the night to supervise the baking. Still, Diana wanted to help with the morning rush.

On the bedroom television, Jorge Ramos was reporting on the mass demonstrations organized by Latino civil rights groups in cities across the country. “All this anger is directed at one man, President Donald Trump, who demonstrators in Los Angeles hung in effigy.”

Carlos turned off the television. “Coming,” he shouted.

Carlos backed the new Toyota Tacoma out of the two-car garage and onto the street.

“Did you hear about how Trump’s Deportation Force rounded up all the workers at the American Apparel factory yesterday?” he asked.

“What’s going to happen to them?”

“First they go to one of these large detention centers the government’s built. Then they’ll be deported, just like all the rest. The deportations are just gearing up now, but I read that Trump will have to deport something like 30 jumbo jets a day full of illegals to meet his goal.”

“That’s impossible, Carlos.”

“It does sound crazy, but Trump *is* crazy. He hates people like us.”

“Well, even if deportations do increase, they’d never bother with a small store like ours.”

“Sí. So far they’re going after the big targets. But if they

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arrested our workers, we'd have to close the business. And what about us? We aren't safe either."

"We're business owners, Carlos. Americans respect that."

"Even if they don't come after us, these people they're deporting, they're our customers."

Carlos turned the car onto Bailey Street and soon they were passing Mariachi Plaza, where Mexican musicians played for the morning commuters pouring through the entrance to the Los Angeles Metro station.

"Look around you," Diana said. "Everyone here is from Mexico and I'll bet you half are just like us."

"People with no papers."

"With children who are American citizens. How could they make half the people from Boyle Heights disappear? Most of the kids have never even *been* to Mexico."

Francisco closed his textbook in frustration. The din in the tin can yellow school bus was too much even for his noise canceling headphones, and that was before his best friend, Jorge, lifted one of the ear pads and said, "Hey, man. María's been staring at you the whole ride. You two gettin' it on?"

"Why don't you just vanish, okay?"

"You study for the math test?"

"I was trying to, dude, till you showed up."

"Me, I figured if I didn't pick it up by now, I'll never get it."

"You're amazing, man. You're in all the advanced classes, but it seems like you never open a fucking book."

"I solve all the homework problems during class. Then I don't have to beast out."

“Some of us have to pay attention in class to *learn* how to solve those equations, man.”

“Hey, Francisco, I have a big secret for you.” Jorge looked around the bus. “It’s all explained in the text book! RTFM.”

“What?”

“Read the fucking manual.”

The doors swung open as the bus stopped in front of Theodore Roosevelt High School and the kids fought each other to be the first ones out.

“Who’s that?” María stared at the nude taped to the inside of Francisco’s locker.

“That’s my girlfriend.”

“Oh, that’s too bad, ’cause I was gonna offer to give you a blow job at lunch.”

“I don’t think she’d mind,” Francisco said, ripping down the photo. “Really.”

“Sorry. Too late,” María giggled. “But, seriously, did you hear about Eduardo?”

“Suspended again?”

“His fam. They’re gone.”

“What, like in the Leftovers?”

“Kinda, actually. Trump got ‘em.”

“Huh?”

“Haven’t you been watching TV, idiot? Hashtag wakeup!”

Francisco held up a couple of the textbooks he was piling into his backpack. “Not enough. My parents have me on that homework grind. I can’t even.”

“Aren’t your parents, like, illegals, too?”

“Duh! Aren’t everyone’s?”

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“That’s the point, stupid. Trump is coming to get all the parents.”

“You sound like that chapter on conspiracy theories in my social studies class.”

“Tell that to Eduardo, dickhead. ’Cause his folks are being flown back to Méjico and he and his brothers are on their own.” María slammed the locker shut and ran down the hall, tears in her eyes.

“María!”

Up and down the hall, teachers were pulling classroom doors shut.

“Hold up!” Jorge caught up with Francisco and grabbed his arm. “Dude, what did you say to María? She’s like all emo.”

Francisco shook free. “Come on, we’re going to be late for social studies.”

The two broke into a run down the now empty hall.

Rafael Rodriguez stopped his introduction to the day’s lesson plan. He slowly turned his attention to the classroom wall clock and waited for Francisco and Jorge to take their seats in the crowded classroom. He waited another moment to be sure the boys got the point. “As I was saying. Today we are discussing an historical comparison. In November 1938 an incident occurred in Germany that we know as Kristallnacht, which translates as Night of Broken Glass. Would someone like to tell us what happened that night? Esmeralda?”

“It has to do with the Nazis, I think.”

“That’s right. This is during World War II and a man named Adolf Hitler was in charge. He was head of the Nazi Party.”

Esmeralda, sitting in the back of the class, turned the page of her textbook. “Yeah, so these Nazis went on a kind of riot.”

“Thank you. The rioters were led by a group of Hitler thugs called the Brownshirts.”

Francisco put on his best I’m-stumped face. “Why did they call them that, Mr. Rodriguez?”

“Because they wore brown shirts.”

Jorge and Francisco bumped fists as their classmates tried to smother their delight.

Mr. Rodriguez pointed a finger at his star pupil, and tried to keep a straight face. “First you’re late, now you’re jivin’ me, Francisco?”

“Sorry, Mr. Rodriguez.”

“We really shouldn’t be joking, because this is serious stuff. The Brownshirts burned houses of worship, vandalized homes, looted businesses, and killed about 100 people. Does anyone know who was the target of all this violence?”

Jorge raised his hand. “The Jews.”

“That’s right. The Nazis were extreme anti-Semites. They would murder six million Jews throughout Europe by the end of the war. Kristallnacht was like opening night for the Nazi campaign against the Jews.”

Mr. Rodriguez handed out copies of a photocopied newspaper article. “As you’re reading this article, I want you to be thinking about comparisons and contrasts with Kristallnacht.”

After a few minutes, Mr. Rodriguez called on a student sitting under the classroom bulletin board, which spelled out: Today’s News is Tomorrow’s History.

“Jazmin?”

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“Mr. Rodriguez, it don’t say anything in here about the Jews. Are you sure you gave us the right handout?”

The other students giggled in agreement.

“Anyone else? OK, Francisco.”

“The article is about deportations of illegal aliens. We’re supposed to analogize that with what happened in Germany.”

“Good. So what do they have in common?”

“Well,” Francisco continued, “both illegal aliens now and the Jews in earlier times were disliked by society. I read that Hitler used the Jews as scapegoats for Germany’s problems. If Germany got rid of the Jews, the country would be great again. Hitler said that.” Francisco stared at the cloudless hazy sky filling the tall classroom window.

“Earth to Francisco. Come in.”

When Francisco turned again to his teacher, there was a light in his eyes. “I guess that’s kind of like what Trump says now about people in the U.S. without papers, that they’re taking all the jobs and we have to make America great again.”

“Excelente, Mr. Flores. Excelente. President Trump is scapegoating illegal aliens. Sergio?”

“And he’s building a wall to keep more of us out.”

“That’s the flip side of the same coin. Esmeralda?”

“But I saw something on TV about Nazis. Are there still Nazis?”

“Since President Trump was elected, groups with many of the same beliefs the Nazis had, they’ve staged marches and there have been a couple attacks on Synagogues and Jewish businesses. Many people are saying that President Trump’s refusal to condemn these groups is responsible for the rise in violence against minorities that we’ve seen this

year.”

“Are the Muslims involved in this?” Jorge asked.

“That’s a good point. Ever since President Trump banned people from many predominately Muslim nations from entering the U.S., there has been a spike in violence against mosques and people in traditional Muslim clothing have been attacked on the street.”

“But I don’t understand, Mr. Rodriguez. Trump isn’t keeping Jews out or deporting them. So why are Jews being hurt now?”

“Good question, Jazmin. There has always been some amount of anti-Semitism. But up to now, hatred toward Jews, and other minorities, was not accepted by societal norms. Trump’s election has begun changing those norms. Hate groups, including neo-Nazis, felt Trump was taking their side, beginning when he didn’t immediately repudiate a supporter who was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, which is another hate group. It gave these people license to come out into the open.”

With the end-of-class bell ringing, the high schoolers shouldered their backpacks and picked up their homework assignments from Mr. Rodriguez at the door.

Francisco was the last to leave. Mr. Rodriguez handed him the assignment, but he also had a question. “Francisco, you’re friends with Eduardo, aren’t you? He hasn’t been in class for a couple days. Do you know if he’s sick?”

“Kids are saying his parents were deported, but I don’t know.”

“Oh, Jesus. His family lives near yours, don’t they? Maybe you could stop by and see what’s going on?”

“Yeah. I guess so.”

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“And try to make it to class on time tomorrow, Francisco. OK?”

The Flores Panadería and Deli was in a small but busy strip mall on Whittier Boulevard. Carlos dropped Diana off in front and parked the pickup behind the store. When he was ready to enter the back door he texted his wife: Go.

Entering at the same time from opposite directions, they once caught a petty theft by an employee. Manolo, who had a young family, was profusely apologetic and told Carlos and Diana about his deep indebtedness. They decided to give him a second chance, along with a no-interest loan, and since then he'd become one of their best employees. There were always new employees though, so they kept their watchful eye.

Carlos greeted all the bakers and other workers by name. Diana did the same with the women working front of house at the counter.

“Hola, Arturo. Hola, Armando,” Diana said to a couple of her regular customers at one of the two tops by the large front window.

“Buenos días, Diana,” the two elderly men responded in unison.

“Que pasa, mis amigos?”

“Did you hear what the Deportation Forces did yesterday?” Armando asked.

Diana had heard enough stories about deportations from Carlos, but this was business. “No, what?”

“They raided the morning service at St. Mary’s!”

Diana crossed herself. “Oh, Dios mío. I don’t believe it. Where did they take them?”

“Same place they all go, that giant new holding center the immigration service built out by the airport,” Arturo said. “Now people are afraid to go to church.”

“Everyone’s terrified,” Armando said.

“Well, I see you two aren’t afraid to be seen in public.”

“We feel safe here, Diana,” Arturo said.

“Of course you are. The Deportation Forces go where they can find large numbers of people. Otherwise, it isn’t worth their time.”

“Sí,” the two men said in turn.

“I’d better get back to work. Enjoy your pan dulces!”

When Renata finished serving a customer she asked to speak to Diana privately. Diana and her husband had a small office above the store, reachable by a narrow stairway.

“You look worried, Renata. Is everything all right?”

Diana wiped away Renata’s tears with a tissue and the heavysset woman in her early 50s described how the Deportation Forces had taken away her husband after a raid at the meat processing factory where he worked.

“If there’s anything I can do to help, I’ll do what I can.”

“I don’t know what I’ll do without Humberto,” Renata said, sniffing. “I don’t make enough by myself to pay our mortgage.”

“I’ll talk to Carlos about giving you some more hours. What about your children?”

“They live in Nueva York. So far away.”

“Sí. Do they have papers?”

“No, so I worry if Trump will abduct them too. He is a terrible man.”

Diana agreed, but hesitated just long enough before answering that Renata raised her head from her hands to

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look at her employer again. “These deportations are horrible, of course,” Diana said. “It’s just that, well, I’ve always tried to ignore politics. Carlos worries enough about what’s happening for the both of us. I never felt like politics was any of our business.”

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