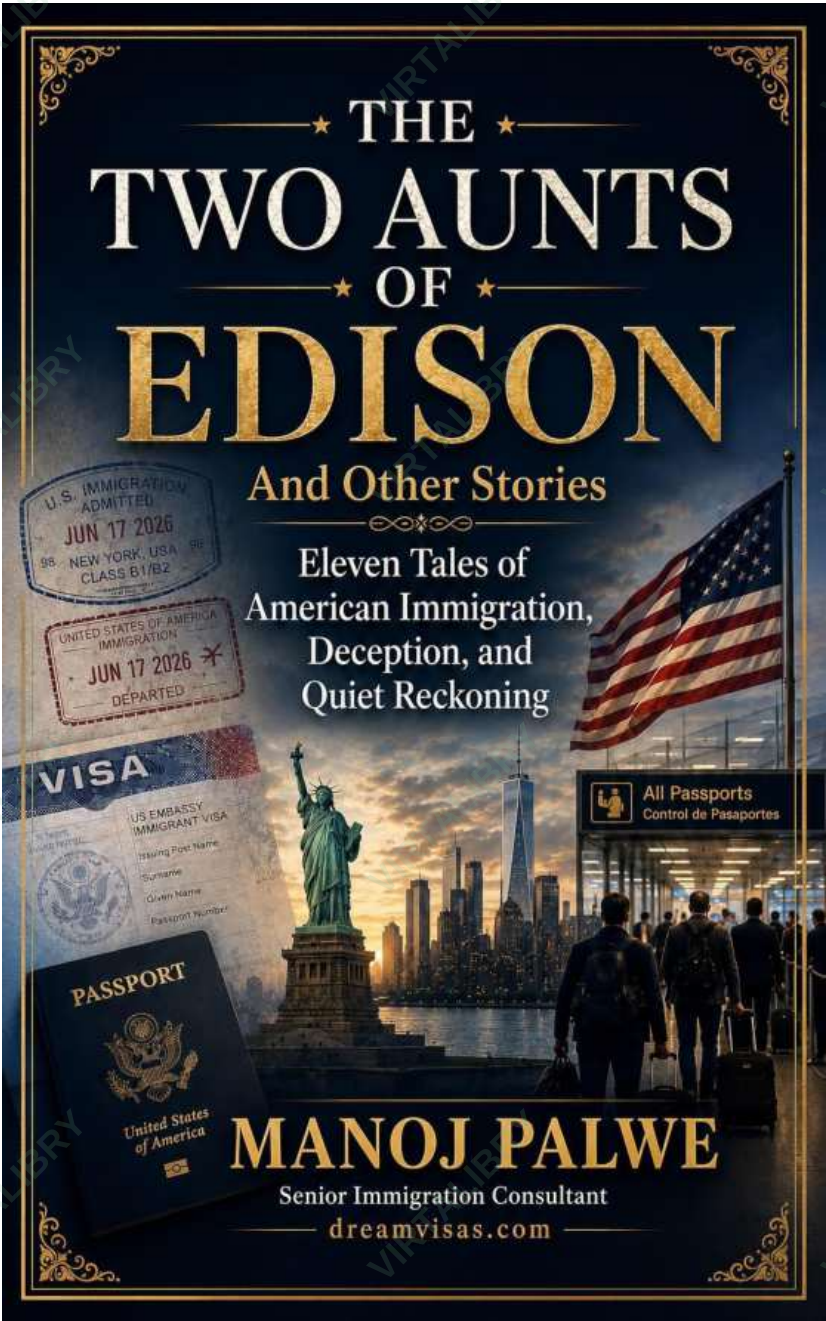




The Two Aunts Of Edison *And Other Stories*

THE TWO AUNTS OF EDISON

And Other Stories

Eleven Tales of American Immigration,
Deception, and Quiet Reckoning

MANOJ PALWE

RCIC R422575 | CAPIC Fellow R11592 | MIA Examination Qualified

May 2026 Edition

About the Author

Manoj Palwe knows that the most dangerous deceptions always happen inside a closed system.

For over two decades, he has operated at the highest levels of global immigration law. As a Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant (RCIC R422575), a CAPIC Fellow (R11592), and President of Taurus Infotek (Dreamvisas) in Canada and India, his career has been defined by reading the fine print, analyzing complex international frameworks, and understanding how rules are enforced—and how they are broken.

Behind this sharp analytical mind is a man raised on the masterpieces of suspense. As an avid, lifelong reader who spent decades devouring the works of Sidney Sheldon, Dick Francis, and Frederick Forsyth, Manoj became obsessed with the mechanics of the perfect plot twist.

He paired this literary obsession with a boundless, high-energy love for the arena. A truly energetic sports enthusiast, Manoj has spent over fifty years keenly following, analyzing, and actively playing almost every single sport featured in his universe—from tennis and cricket to hockey and football (gladly leaving the high-speed cockpits of motorsport to the professionals). He knows the physical toll, the locker-room dynamics, and the psychological grit of these games firsthand.

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In his groundbreaking 12-book series, *Clean Sport, Dirty Games*, he fuses his professional mastery of institutional systems, his athletic background, and classic page-turning thriller structures. The result is a premium collection of technical, high-stakes suspense thrillers that expose the gritty reality behind the glamorous facade of elite sports. When Manoj writes a cliffhanger, he isn't just inventing fiction—he's writing from a lifetime of knowing exactly how the world, the game, and a great book work.

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Published independently. The author may be reached for professional immigration consultation through the Personal Evaluation Report (PER) service at dreamvisas.com.

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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, agencies, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, actual immigration cases, or actual federal proceedings is entirely coincidental.

This book is educational and entertainment only. It does not constitute immigration advice, does not create a consultant-client relationship, and does not guarantee any immigration outcome. Immigration laws change frequently; verify with official sources. Purchasing this book does not establish a professional relationship between author and reader. For advice on your situation, consult an RCIC licensed by the CICC, an attorney admitted to practice before the United States Executive Office for Immigration Review, or another duly licensed immigration professional in the relevant jurisdiction.

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*For the consular officers, asylum officers,
immigration judges, and immigration attorneys
who do their work with care, and for the
applicants whose lives pass through their offices.*

— M.P.

Author's Note

The United States immigration system, of all the world's immigration architectures, may be the one in which the operational discretion exercised by individual officers — consular officers, asylum officers, immigration judges, USCIS adjudicators, even the contracted interpreters and the country-conditions experts — most shapes the eventual outcome for the applicant. The forms are the same forms. The statutes are the same statutes. The case rises or falls on the small reckoning a particular officer makes on a particular Tuesday morning in a particular room.

These eleven stories sit inside that small reckoning. They are stories of H-1B lottery fraud and EB-5 receivership, of marriage-based adjustment and Diversity Visa photo substitution, of asylum on the southern border and asylum from highland Eritrea, of R-1 religious-worker sponsorship and I-751 abusive-marriage waivers, of the F-1 student visa whose 214(b) refusal turns on a J-1 violation from 1987, and of the Hialeah notario whose unwitnessed advice in 2014 saved a life no one knew was at risk.

The fraud architectures in these stories are real. The fraud mechanisms are documented in federal enforcement records, in immigration-court decisions, and in the ordinary working lives of the consultants, attorneys, and officers who handle these cases every day. The characters and the specific cases are invented. The recurring

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pattern — the small private reckoning, the chain of consequences across years and generations, the twist that arrives quietly at the end — is the pattern that the immigration system, in my twenty-five years of practice, has taught me to recognise.

If even one of these stories causes a reader to pause before submitting a form they have not fully understood, before retaining a representative whose credentials they have not verified, or before assuming that the immigration architecture they are about to enter will accommodate them on its standard terms, the stories will have done their work.

The lawyers, accountants, and officers in these pages are good people doing difficult work in a system that does not always reward care. The applicants are people seeking a life. The architectures, on the longer accounting, are the architectures.

— *Manoj Palwe*

Ajax, Ontario · Pune, India 2026

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— *END* —

The H-1B Lottery

A Short Story

Ms Priya Krishnamurthy of Banjara Hills, Hyderabad, was twenty-seven.

She had read computer science at the Birla Institute of Technology and Science in Pilani, had completed a master's in data science at Carnegie Mellon University in 2022, and had on the strength of those two degrees been hired in August of that year by a Pittsburgh-based actuarial consultancy called Forester Analytics LLC, on a one-year Optional Practical Training extension, at a starting salary of one hundred and thirty-eight thousand dollars.

In March of 2023, her employer Forester Analytics LLC had submitted, on her behalf, a single H-1B registration to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services lottery.

She had not been selected.

In March of 2024, on the rules of the OPT extension that permitted Stem-degree holders a further year, Forester Analytics LLC had submitted a second H-1B registration.

She had not been selected.

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In March of 2025, on the final permitted year of OPT under the Stem extension and on the understanding that this would be her last opportunity at the H-1B lottery before her authorisation to work in the United States expired, Forester Analytics LLC had submitted a third H-1B registration.

She had not been selected.

In April of 2025, on the rejection, she had begun preparing to return to Hyderabad.

In May of 2025, on a routine internal compliance review that she had been asked, by her manager at Forester Analytics LLC, to undertake on the firm's wider H-1B sponsorship records as a final piece of work before her departure, she had discovered something that had caused her, on the third Friday of May 2025, to remain at her desk in the Pittsburgh office until ten minutes past three the following morning.

* * *

The discovery was as follows.

Forester Analytics LLC was, on its public records, an actuarial consultancy with thirty-one employees, based in Pittsburgh, owned by a Mr Alexander Forester of Sewickley Heights and his son Mr Christopher Forester of Squirrel Hill. The firm had, in the previous five years, sponsored an average of four H-1B registrations per lottery

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cycle and had, on its actual operational headcount, no need or capacity to absorb significantly more than that.

Forester Analytics LLC was also, on the corporate records that Ms Krishnamurthy had pulled from the Pennsylvania Department of State on the Friday afternoon, the parent or affiliate of forty-six other small Delaware-registered LLCs, of which thirty-one had been incorporated between 2019 and 2022, of which all thirty-one had registered as H-1B sponsoring entities with USCIS, and of which all thirty-one had submitted H-1B registrations in each of the lottery cycles of 2023, 2024, and 2025.

Each of the forty-six affiliated LLCs was registered to the same address in Wilmington, Delaware. Each had a sole director, who was either Mr Alexander Forester, Mr Christopher Forester, or Mr Christopher Forester's wife Mrs Sarah Whitman-Forester. Each had, on its filings, an ostensible line of business — actuarial consulting, data analytics, financial modelling, risk advisory — that closely paralleled Forester Analytics LLC's. Each had, on Pennsylvania state employment-tax records that Ms Krishnamurthy was able to pull through her firm's standard subscription to a corporate-records service, no employees.

Each of the thirty-one affiliated LLCs had, in March of 2023, in March of 2024, and in March of 2025, submitted H-1B registrations on behalf of foreign workers.

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Ms Krishnamurthy, on the third Friday of May 2025, in the small senior associates' office she occupied on the eleventh floor of the Forester Analytics building on Grant Street, sat at her desk for some time, drinking the cup of coffee her manager Mrs Whitman-Forester had left for her at four in the afternoon, and considered the possibility that the firm's sponsorship of her own H-1B registrations had been, in three successive years, the legitimate and operational sponsorship she had assumed it to be.

She then opened the firm's shared compliance drive.

She searched the drive for her own name.

She found, in the H-1B subfolder for the 2023 cycle, the standard registration in her name submitted by Forester Analytics LLC.

She found also, in three different subfolders attributable to three different affiliated LLCs — a Cantilever Risk Solutions LLC, a Wexford Predictive LLC, and a Yarmouth Stochastic LLC — three further H-1B registrations submitted in her name in the 2023 cycle.

She found four further registrations in her name, in the 2024 cycle, attributable to Forester Analytics LLC, Cantilever Risk Solutions LLC, Wexford Predictive LLC, and a fourth entity called Bedford Loss Reserve Modelling LLC.

She found six further registrations in her name, in the 2025 cycle, attributable to Forester Analytics LLC, Cantilever Risk Solutions LLC,

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Wexford Predictive LLC, Bedford Loss Reserve Modelling LLC, a fifth entity called Carrickfergus Insurance Analytics LLC, and a sixth entity called Hartwood Capital Modelling LLC.

Across the three lottery cycles, Forester Analytics LLC and its affiliates had, on the discovery, submitted thirteen separate H-1B registrations in Ms Priya Krishnamurthy's name.

She had been informed, in each cycle, of only the single registration submitted by Forester Analytics LLC.

She had not, in any of the thirteen, been selected.

* * *

Ms Krishnamurthy did not, on the evening of the third Friday of May 2025, leave her desk at any of the standard intervals.

She did not eat the small Indian dinner she had, on her usual Friday-evening practice, intended to collect from the small restaurant on Forbes Avenue at seven.

She did, at twenty-three minutes past nine, telephone her father in Banjara Hills, who at that hour was at breakfast on the Saturday morning.

“Nanna.”

“Priya.”

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“Nanna, the lottery.”

“Yes, Priya. The third lottery. The result has come.”

“Nanna, I was not selected. I had told you in April. I am preparing my return.”

“Yes, Priya.”

“Nanna, this evening, on a compliance review my manager has asked me to do, I have discovered something.”

“Yes, Priya.”

“Nanna, the firm I work for has, in the past three lottery cycles, submitted thirteen registrations in my name across six different LLCs. I knew of one in each cycle. The other ten were submitted without my knowledge. The other ten were on entities that have no employees, that have no operational capacity, and that exist on the corporate records solely as registration shells.”

Mr Krishnamurthy did not reply for some time.

“Priya.”

“Nanna.”

“Priya, this is the multiple-registration arrangement that the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services prohibited in March 2024 by the new selection rule.”

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“Nanna, the new selection rule of March 2024 made each candidate eligible to be selected only once, regardless of the number of registrations submitted. Before the rule, in 2023, the multiple registrations were prohibited but the prohibition was on a beneficiary-versus-employer level, and the firms had been operating shells to circumvent it. After the rule, in 2024 and 2025, the multiple registrations were no longer effective in increasing the candidate’s odds, since selection was on candidate not registration. The firms continued, however, on the records I have pulled this evening, to submit the multiple registrations.”

“Why, Priya.”

“Nanna, on the practice that has continued through 2024 and 2025 despite the new rule, I do not yet know. The discovery is six hours old.”

“Yes, Priya.”

“Nanna.”

“Yes, Priya.”

“Nanna, the firm I have worked for for three years — the firm whose senior associates’ office I am sitting in at this hour — has, on its actual practice, been operating an H-1B sponsorship business of which I have, in my work as a data scientist on its actuarial models, been an unwitting front person.”

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“Priya.”

“Nanna, the firm has, in addition to my registrations, submitted thirteen times the standard number of registrations on behalf of every Indian, Chinese, and Vietnamese employee on its visa-track payroll. The firm has thirty-one such employees. The total H-1B registrations submitted by the Forester family’s LLCs across the three cycles, on a back-of-the-envelope reckoning, is something on the order of eleven hundred.”

“Elevent hundred.”

“Yes, Nanna.”

“For thirty-one actual jobs.”

“Yes, Nanna.”

Mr Krishnamurthy sat at the breakfast table in Banjara Hills, with the cup of filter coffee his wife had placed in front of him at twenty-three minutes past nine local time, for some moments.

“Priya.”

“Nanna.”

“What are you going to do.”

* * *

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Ms Krishnamurthy did not leave the eleventh-floor office on Grant Street until ten minutes past three on the Saturday morning.

By that hour, she had downloaded — onto a small encrypted drive she kept in her purse for the occasional long-form documentation projects she undertook for her firm's clients — the corporate records of all forty-six affiliated LLCs, the H-1B registration records for the three cycles in which each had participated, the firm's shared compliance drive's subfolder for each cycle, and a small spreadsheet she had prepared in the four hours between midnight and three in which she had cross-referenced each of the thirty-one Indian, Chinese, and Vietnamese visa-track employees against the registrations submitted in their names.

The spreadsheet showed, on the tabulation she had completed at two minutes past three, the following:

Across the three cycles, Forester Analytics LLC and its forty-six affiliated entities had submitted, on behalf of thirty-one employees, a total of one thousand and ninety-four H-1B registrations.

The average number of registrations per employee was thirty-five.

The maximum, in respect of a Mr Wei Liu of Squirrel Hill, was fifty-one.

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None of the thirty-one employees had, on Ms Krishnamurthy's separate cross-check against the firm's human resources records, been informed of more than one registration per cycle.

None had been informed, on the firm's sponsorship-onboarding documentation, that registrations would be submitted in their names by entities other than their employer of record.

None had been selected.

On the lottery selection rule of March 2024 and the rule's assignment of selection on candidate not registration, the multiple submissions had not increased any of the thirty-one candidates' odds of selection. The submissions had, on the rule, been on selection grounds operationally pointless.

The submissions were not, however, operationally pointless on every other ground. Each registration carried a registration fee of two hundred and fifteen dollars. The total in registration fees, across the three cycles, was approximately two hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars. The fees were paid — on the firm's accounting records, which Ms Krishnamurthy had also downloaded — not by Forester Analytics LLC, the operational firm, but by the forty-six affiliated LLCs, on funds that had been transferred into those LLCs from a small group of Cayman Islands-based investment vehicles attributable, on Ms Krishnamurthy's subsequent inquiry through the firm's subscription to

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the international corporate-records service, to a network of Russian and Belarusian individuals.

Ms Krishnamurthy sat at her desk in the senior associates' office on the Saturday morning, with the encrypted drive in her hand, and considered for some time what the registrations had, on the operational practice that had continued through 2024 and 2025 despite the new rule, in fact been for.

She did not arrive at a complete answer. She did, on the small reckoning she made between two and three in the morning, arrive at a partial one.

The registrations, on the partial answer, were not for the H-1B selection. They were for the appearance of an H-1B sponsoring infrastructure. The forty-six affiliated LLCs were, on her reading of the records, vehicles that had been positioned by the Forester family on behalf of their Cayman Islands-attributable investors as ostensibly operational employment-sponsorship entities. The investors' interest in the entities, on the partial answer, was not in actual H-1B selections — the rule had made multiple registrations operationally pointless for that — but in the appearance of legitimate visa-sponsoring activity that the entities could subsequently use, on whatever further investment-immigration or business-immigration arrangements the investors were pursuing.

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The thirty-one Indian, Chinese, and Vietnamese employees, including Ms Priya Krishnamurthy, were on the partial answer the unwitting employees-of-record whose names appeared on the registrations that gave the affiliated LLCs the appearance of operating businesses.

Ms Krishnamurthy, on this partial reading, was not in the firm's commercial structure a senior associate working on actuarial models. She was, in addition to that operational work, a piece of evidence.

* * *

On the Saturday morning at six minutes past nine, Ms Krishnamurthy walked from her apartment on Forbes Avenue to the small Federal Building at Liberty Avenue, where the Pittsburgh field office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation occupied the third floor.

The office was open on Saturdays for walk-in tip-line reports between nine and twelve.

She filed a report.

The report, in its written form which she had drafted at three in the morning and which she had carried with her in printed form, ran to eleven pages and was accompanied by a copy of her encrypted drive's contents on a USB that she presented at the front desk.

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The duty agent, a Special Agent Patricia Reilly, conducted with her a brief intake interview. Ms Krishnamurthy was at twelve minutes past eleven thanked for her cooperation and asked whether she would be willing, if subsequently contacted, to assist further with the investigation that the report would, on the agent's preliminary assessment, in due course initiate.

Ms Krishnamurthy said that she would. She said that she had, in any event, three weeks remaining before her authorisation to work in the United States expired and that her flight to Hyderabad was booked for the second Saturday of June.

Special Agent Reilly looked at her across the small intake desk.

"Ms Krishnamurthy."

"Special Agent Reilly."

"Ma'am, on the cooperation you are offering, the Bureau may be able to arrange for an extension of your authorisation under the immigration provisions for material witnesses in active federal investigations."

"Special Agent Reilly."

"Yes, Ms Krishnamurthy."

"Special Agent Reilly, I am declining the extension. The cooperation I have offered is the cooperation I have already, on the

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eleven pages of the report and the encrypted drive, provided. The further cooperation that may, on the investigation, be required, I am willing to provide from Hyderabad, by video link or by sworn statement, on whatever instrument the Bureau requires.”

“Ms Krishnamurthy, the standard practice in cases of this kind is for the cooperating witness to remain in country for the duration of the investigation, on the material-witness extension.”

“Special Agent Reilly, I am aware. I am declining the extension because the H-1B lottery, on its three rejections of my registration, has on the small reckoning of three years given me the answer to the question of whether the United States is, on the present arrangements, the country in which my career will, on its longer trajectory, take place. The answer is no. My continued presence in this country, on whatever extension instrument is offered to me, is now an arrangement that does not match my own determination of what to do next.”

Special Agent Reilly looked at her for a long moment.

“Ms Krishnamurthy.”

“Yes, Special Agent.”

“Ms Krishnamurthy, may I ask. Was your initial intention, on first registering for the lottery in 2023, to remain in the United States permanently.”

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Ms Krishnamurthy looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph behind Special Agent Reilly's desk of a younger woman in graduation robes.

"Special Agent, my initial intention in 2023 was to remain in the United States permanently. My initial intention in 2024, on the second rejection, was still to remain. My initial intention in 2025, on the third rejection, had, on the slow accumulation of the previous two years, become uncertain. The discovery I made on the Friday evening, on the operations of the firm I had been working for, has on the small reckoning made the uncertainty into a determination."

"Ms Krishnamurthy."

"Special Agent."

"Ms Krishnamurthy, the determination is that you would prefer to return to Hyderabad than to remain in the United States as a material witness."

"Special Agent, the determination is that I would prefer to return to Hyderabad than to remain in the United States on the only legal basis the United States, on its present arrangements, will offer me. The first three years of my professional life have, in this country, depended on a lottery that on the operational practice of the firm sponsoring me was, on its third year, an instrument I had been entered into thirteen times without my knowledge for purposes that had nothing to do with

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my employment. I do not, on this Saturday morning at the Federal Building on Liberty Avenue, propose to begin the fourth year on a further dependency on a federal investigation in which my role would be to provide the testimony that secures the convictions that close the operations that have used my name without my consent.”

“Ms Krishnamurthy.”

“Yes, Special Agent.”

“You understand that, on your departure from the United States, the firm and its principals may not be successfully prosecuted in your absence.”

“Special Agent, I understand. The Bureau has, on the eleven-page report and the encrypted drive, the documentary evidence. My testimony at trial would, on the rules of federal criminal evidence, materially strengthen the prosecution. My absence from the trial may, on the prosecution’s case, be a difficulty.”

“Yes, Ms Krishnamurthy.”

“Special Agent, I am willing to give the testimony by sworn deposition before my departure. I am willing to give the testimony from Hyderabad by video link, on whatever instrument the federal courts have for taking such testimony from foreign witnesses. I am not willing to take an extension of my authorisation under the material-witness provisions, because the extension would itself be a further

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dependency on the same H-1B-adjacent visa architecture that has, on its three lotteries, given me the answer it has given me.”

Special Agent Reilly looked at her across the intake desk for some further time.

Then she said:

“Ms Krishnamurthy.”

“Yes, Special Agent.”

“Ma’am, that is, on the small reckoning that the Bureau encounters in walk-in tip-line reports of this kind, an answer I have not previously heard. The standard answer, from cooperating witnesses in immigration-fraud cases, is to accept the extension. The cooperation, on the standard answer, is also a small private benefit to the witness, who acquires through the cooperation the further legal status that the witness was originally seeking when the witness encountered the fraud. The standard answer is the answer the system, on its design, expects.”

“Special Agent.”

“Ms Krishnamurthy, your answer is that the cooperation will be given without the small private benefit. The cooperation will be the cooperation alone.”

“Yes, Special Agent.”

“Ms Krishnamurthy, may I ask. Why.”

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Ms Priya Krishnamurthy looked, for a long moment, at the small American flag on the corner of Special Agent Reilly's desk.

"Special Agent, on the small reckoning I made in the senior associates' office between two and three this morning, the cooperation I am providing is the cooperation that I, as the data scientist whose name appeared on thirteen registrations across three years without my knowledge, am the appropriate person to provide. The cooperation is owed, on my reading of the matter, to the other thirty employees of the firm whose names appeared on registrations they did not know about, and to the Cayman-Islands-attributable investors whose use of the registrations went undetected, and to the future Indian, Chinese, and Vietnamese candidates whose registrations — in 2026 and in 2027 — will be cleaner because the firm has, on whatever the Bureau's investigation produces, been closed before they are entered into the lottery."

"Ms Krishnamurthy."

"Special Agent."

"The small private benefit to yourself, on the material-witness extension, would have been an additional benefit beyond what is owed."

"Special Agent, on the small reckoning, yes. The small private benefit would have been the H-1B that the lottery did not, in three

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years, provide. The small private benefit would have arrived, on the extension, by an instrument other than the lottery, but on the same underlying employment-immigration architecture. The small reckoning I made between two and three this morning was that the architecture, on the three years' evidence, was not the architecture on which I wish to build the next decade of my professional life.”

Special Agent Reilly looked, for a long moment, at the young woman across the intake desk.

“Ms Krishnamurthy.”

“Yes, Special Agent.”

“Ma’am, the Bureau accepts your terms.”

* * *

Mr Alexander Forester and Mr Christopher Forester were arrested at their respective Pittsburgh-area residences at six minutes past five on the Wednesday morning of the third week of August 2025.

The federal indictment, in seventeen counts, alleged conspiracy to defraud the United States, immigration document fraud, wire fraud, and the operation of unregistered money-services businesses on the Cayman Islands transfers.

Mrs Sarah Whitman-Forester, on her cooperation in exchange for limited immunity, gave evidence at the grand jury and at the trial.

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Ms Priya Krishnamurthy, who had departed the United States on the second Saturday of June 2025 and had taken up a position as a senior data scientist at a Bangalore-based actuarial firm called Adyar Risk Analytics Private Limited, gave her testimony at the trial by video link from the Adyar Risk Analytics Private Limited offices on Outer Ring Road in Bangalore in March 2026.

On her testimony and on the documentary evidence the Bureau had assembled on the encrypted drive she had filed in May 2025, Mr Alexander Forester was sentenced in June 2026 to nine years' imprisonment. Mr Christopher Forester was sentenced to seven years.

The forty-six affiliated LLCs were dissolved by the Delaware Court of Chancery on a petition by the Department of Justice.

The Cayman-Islands-attributable investors, on the international cooperation provisions of the United States Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control, were on the further investigation that followed identified, designated, and sanctioned. The principal investor, a Mr Pavel Sokolov of Cyprus, was the subject of a sanctions designation in October 2026.

Of the thirty-one Indian, Chinese, and Vietnamese employees who had been the unwitting employees-of-record on the eleven hundred registrations, twenty-nine had, by the time of the indictment, returned to their countries of origin. Two had remained in the United States on alternative visas obtained through subsequent legitimate sponsorships.

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None had, on the Bureau's subsequent inquiries, accepted the offered material-witness extensions.

* * *

Ms Priya Krishnamurthy continued at Adyar Risk Analytics Private Limited until 2029, when she was promoted to Vice President for Predictive Modelling. She continued, in subsequent years, to consult on a small basis with American firms in legitimate cross-border arrangements that did not require her physical presence in the United States.

She did not, in any subsequent year, apply for any further United States visa.

She did, on the small reckoning that she made over the long evenings on the small terrace of her flat in Indiranagar overlooking the Bangalore palace grounds, come to think that the most important thing she had learned in her three years at Forester Analytics LLC was that the architectures of immigration enforcement — the lotteries, the petitions, the registrations, the adjustments — were always larger than the candidates the architectures processed, and that the candidates who succeeded under the architectures were not always, on a closer reading of the records, the candidates the architectures had been designed to admit.

She had not, on the H-1B lottery, been admitted.

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She had not, on her own determination, accepted the second instrument the Bureau had offered her in lieu.

She had, on the small reckoning that the third Friday of May 2025 had given her, been the witness who had closed the firm that the architecture had not, on its operational practice, otherwise been able to detect.

That, on her own private accounting in Indiranagar in the long evenings of the years that followed, was the reckoning her three years in Pittsburgh had been for.

— *END* —

The Two Aunts of Edison

A Short Story

Mr Anil Desai of Edison, New Jersey, was thirty-four.

He was an American citizen by birth, having been born at the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital in New Brunswick on the second Friday of October 1991. He had been raised in Edison, where his parents had run a small Indian grocery on Oak Tree Road since 1990. He had read accountancy at Rutgers, had qualified as a Certified Public Accountant in 2014, and was, by 2025, a partner in a small four-partner firm of CPAs in Iselin, with a practice principally serving the New Jersey Indian-American business community.

In April of 2024, on the family's long-discussed plan to bring his mother's younger sister from Mumbai to the United States to live in Edison, Mr Desai had filed with United States Citizenship and Immigration Services a Form I-130 sibling petition on behalf of his mother's younger sister, Mrs Lata Phatak of Vile Parle East, Mumbai, who was at the time of filing sixty-two years old.

The Form I-130 was, on the Desai family's ordinary practice and on the standard of preparation that Mr Desai had applied to it, complete and correct in every particular.

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In November of 2024, the petition was approved at the Texas Service Center.

In January of 2025, the case was transferred to the National Visa Center for consular processing through the United States Consulate General in Mumbai.

In May of 2025, Mrs Lata Phatak attended her immigrant visa interview at the United States Consulate General on Bandra Kurla Complex, Mumbai.

She was refused.

The refusal letter, on the standard form that the Consulate General used, indicated that the consular officer had on the interview formed a view that the petitioner's mother and the beneficiary were not, on the documentary and oral evidence, the sisters that the I-130 represented them to be.

The refusal letter referred Mr Desai, in respect of any further inquiries, to the United States Embassy's public-affairs telephone line.

Mr Desai received the letter at his Iselin office on the second Wednesday of May 2025.

He read it twice.

Then he drove to his parents' house on Plainfield Road in Edison.

* * *

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Mr Desai's mother was Mrs Sunita Desai, sixty-eight, who had emigrated from Mumbai to New Jersey in 1989 on a Form I-130 sibling petition filed by her elder brother, Mr Vinod Phatak of Edison, who had himself emigrated to the United States in 1971 on his own employment-based sponsorship by a Bell Laboratories engineering position in Murray Hill.

Mr Vinod Phatak had died in 2017 of pancreatic cancer.

Mrs Sunita Desai was, in 2025, the matriarch of the Edison Phatak-Desai family. She lived with her husband Mr Pradip Desai in the small two-storey house on Plainfield Road that the couple had purchased in 1995 with the proceeds of the grocery on Oak Tree Road.

She was — on the public records of New Jersey vital statistics, on the social-security records of the Internal Revenue Service, on the certificate of naturalisation she had obtained in 1994, and on the family photograph that hung in the front hallway of the Plainfield Road house — Mrs Sunita Phatak Desai, born Mrs Sunita Phatak in Mumbai on the third Tuesday of July 1957, the younger of the four children of Mr and Mrs Madhav Phatak of Vile Parle East.

“Aai.”

“Anil.”

“Aai. The visa for Lata Mavshi has been refused.”

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“Refused.”

“Aai, the consular officer at Bandra Kurla Complex has formed the view, on the interview, that you and Lata Mavshi are not on the documentary and oral evidence the sisters that the I-130 represents you to be.”

Mrs Sunita Desai did not reply for some time.

She walked, slowly, from the kitchen counter where she had been chopping methi for the evening’s subzi, to the small wooden chair by the window.

She sat down.

“Anil.”

“Aai.”

“Anil. Sit down.”

Mr Desai sat down on the wooden chair opposite his mother.

“Anil. The consular officer at Bandra Kurla Complex is correct.”

Mr Desai looked at his mother across the small wooden table on which the methi was, in a steel bowl, half-chopped.

“Aai.”

“Yes, Anil.”

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“Aai, what is the consular officer correct about.”

Mrs Sunita Desai looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph on the windowsill that showed a young Indian woman of about twenty-five in a green sari, standing at the railing of the SS Surat at the docks of the Bombay Port in 1989, on the morning of the woman’s departure for the United States.

“Anil. The woman who arrived in the United States on the third Sunday of October 1989, on the Form I-130 sibling petition that your Vinod Mama had filed on behalf of his sister Sunita Phatak, was not, on a strict reading, his sister Sunita Phatak.”

“Aai.”

“Anil.”

“Aai, who was she.”

Mrs Sunita Desai looked at her son for a long moment.

“Anil, she was, on the documents she travelled under, your aunt Sunita Phatak. She was, on the family she had married into in Bombay in 1980 and on the children she had borne to that family in 1981 and 1984 and 1987, your aunt Sunita Phatak. She was, on the strict biological reading that the consular officer at Bandra Kurla Complex has on the present interview applied to your aunt Lata Phatak, not.”

“Aai.”

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“Anil.”

“Aai, who was she biologically.”

Mrs Sunita Desai sat in the small wooden chair by the window for some further time.

“Anil. The woman who arrived on the third Sunday of October 1989 was, on the strict biological reading, the second wife of your grandfather Madhav Phatak. The first wife of your grandfather Madhav Phatak — the woman who was, on the family records and on the petition Vinod Mama filed in 1985, my mother and the mother of Vinod Mama and our two siblings — had died in childbirth in 1956, in the year before I, on the petition’s claim, was born in 1957. The biological woman who was born in 1957 to my father’s second wife, six months after the funeral of his first, was my half-sister Sunita. She was raised, in the household, on the strict practice of the household, as my full sister, and was on the family’s ordinary practice and on her own self-understanding the daughter of my father’s first wife.”

“Aai.”

“Anil.”

“Aai, who am I, biologically, the daughter of.”

“Anil. The woman in the photograph on the windowsill, who arrived on the SS Surat in October 1989, who has been in this kitchen

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on Plainfield Road for thirty-six years preparing the methi for the evening's subzi, who has been to you on every birthday and at every Diwali and at every wedding the woman you have known as your aai, is the daughter of my father's second wife. The petition that Vinod Mama filed in 1985 was filed on behalf of his sister Sunita Phatak who was, on the family records he submitted to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, the daughter of his mother. The Sunita Phatak who travelled to the United States on that petition, on the third Sunday of October 1989, was the daughter of his father's second wife, whom the family had on its ordinary practice raised as the daughter of the first."

"Aai."

"Yes, Anil."

"Aai. Where is the Sunita Phatak that the petition was actually filed for."

Mrs Sunita Desai looked, for a very long moment, at the small framed photograph on the windowsill.

Then she said:

"Anil, the Sunita Phatak who was the actual daughter of my father's first wife was a child of perhaps eleven months at the time of her mother's death in childbirth. She did not, on the medical capacities available in Bombay in 1956, survive the bereavement. She died in the

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third week of January 1957, of a respiratory infection that the family had been unable to treat. The household, on the small reckoning that families of this kind sometimes make, did not register her death with the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation. The household, on the second wife's pregnancy that had begun in November 1956 and that produced a daughter in October 1957, registered the second wife's daughter, on the daughter's birth certificate, as Sunita Phatak — the name that had been given to the actual first daughter, who had not been registered as deceased."

"Aai."

"Anil."

"Aai, why."

"Anil, on the family's reckoning in 1957, the second daughter would, on her birth, be raised in the household as the only daughter of my father, and the household considered that the practical and emotional welfare of the household and of the second daughter was best served by her being raised, on the household's ordinary practice, as the daughter of the first wife who had died ten months earlier. The death of the first daughter, on the small reckoning of the household, was a matter that the household preferred not to record on the public registers. The birth of the second daughter under the same name was, on the small reckoning, the form that the household's mourning of the first daughter took."

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“Aai.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, the I-130 that Vinod Mama filed in 1985 was for the daughter of my father’s first wife.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“And the woman who arrived in 1989 on that petition was the daughter of my father’s second wife.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Who was, on the strict biological reading, not the sister of Vinod Mama at all but his half-sister.”

“Yes, Anil. Who was, on the strict biological reading, the half-sister of Vinod Mama and of our other two siblings, and who was, on her own self-understanding through the entire course of her life, the full sister.”

Mr Desai sat at the small wooden table in the kitchen on Plainfield Road for a long time.

* * *

“Aai.”

“Yes, Anil.”

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“Aai, the I-130 I filed for Lata Mavshi in April of last year.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Was filed by me, on the family records I had access to, on the representation that you and Lata Mavshi are full sisters.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“You and Lata Mavshi are, on the strict biological reading, full sisters of the second wife.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Which means that on the family records I have, the I-130 represented you and Lata Mavshi as full sisters of my grandmother who was the first wife. On the strict biological reading, you and Lata Mavshi are full sisters of my grandmother who was the second wife. The relationship of sibling is, on either reading, a relationship of full sisters — but the parents on the documents and the parents in biology are different.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“And the consular officer at Bandra Kurla Complex, who interviewed Lata Mavshi in May, asked questions about the parents.”

“Yes, Anil.”

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“Lata Mavshi answered the questions truthfully, on her own self-understanding of who her parents were, which is the second wife and my grandfather Madhav Phatak.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“And the documents the petition relied on — the family records that established me as your son and you as the daughter of my grandmother — referred to my grandmother as the first wife.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Which, on the consular officer’s reading of the interview against the documents, produced the inconsistency on the basis of which the visa has been refused.”

“Yes, Anil.”

Mr Desai looked at his mother across the small wooden table.

“Aai.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, the I-130 of 1985 that brought you to the United States in 1989. On the strict biological reading. Was a fraudulent petition.”

Mrs Sunita Desai looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph on the windowsill.

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“Anil. The I-130 of 1985 was, on the strict biological reading that the consular officer at Bandra Kurla Complex has on the present interview applied to Lata, a fraudulent petition. It was, on the family’s self-understanding in 1985 and on the operational practice of the Phatak household between 1957 and 1985, a petition for the woman whom Vinod Mama believed to be his sister, on the family’s ordinary practice, his sister. The fraud, on a strict reading, was operated by the family on the consular officer at Bombay in 1989, who interviewed me as Sunita Phatak and granted me the immigrant visa on which I travelled.”

“Aai.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, the naturalisation you applied for in 1994.”

“Was, on a strict reading, also a fraudulent application. The Form N-400 asks the applicant whether the applicant, in obtaining the immigrant visa on which the applicant entered the United States, made any false statement or concealed any material fact. I answered, on the family’s self-understanding, that I had not. On the strict biological reading, the answer was incorrect.”

“Aai.”

“Yes, Anil.”

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“Aai, my own American citizenship. Is acquired through.”

“Is acquired through your birth at Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital on the second Friday of October 1991, to a woman who was, on the documents she possessed, an American lawful permanent resident on the immigrant visa of 1989, and a woman who, on the strict biological reading, was a different woman from the one the immigrant visa had been issued for.”

“Aai.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai. My American citizenship.”

Mrs Sunita Desai looked at her son across the small wooden table for a long moment.

“Anil. Your American citizenship is, on the law of jus soli that has applied in the United States since the Fourteenth Amendment of 1868, citizenship acquired by birth in the United States, regardless of the immigration status of your parents at the time of your birth. Your citizenship is, on a strict reading of the Fourteenth Amendment, secure regardless of any defects in my own immigration history.”

“Aai.”

“Yes, Anil.”

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“Aai, the consular officer at Bandra Kurla Complex who refused Lata Mavshi’s visa, on the discovery of the inconsistency in our family records, will on the standard procedure transmit a report to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services in Texas. The Citizenship and Immigration Services, on the report, will conduct a review of my own I-130 petition and, in the course of that review, will discover the same inconsistency in our family records that the consular officer has discovered.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“The review will, on the discovery, identify the 1985 petition that brought you to the United States as a petition that, on a strict biological reading, was fraudulent.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“The Citizenship and Immigration Services will, on the discovery, refer the matter to Immigration and Customs Enforcement for the consideration of denaturalisation proceedings.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“You will, on the denaturalisation proceedings, lose your American citizenship.”

“Yes, Anil.”

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“You will, on the loss of citizenship, become a removable alien who, on the further proceedings, may be deported to India.”

“Yes, Anil.”

Mr Desai sat at the small wooden table in the kitchen on Plainfield Road for a long time.

* * *

“Aai.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, the I-130 I filed for Lata Mavshi.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“If I withdraw the I-130 this week, before the consular officer’s report has been transmitted to Texas, the report will not, on the standard administrative procedure, be transmitted. The report goes only on a refused visa application. If the petition is withdrawn, the visa application is void, and the report is not generated.”

“Anil.”

“Aai, the inconsistency in our family records will, on the withdrawal, not be examined further by the Citizenship and Immigration Services. Your 1985 petition will not be reviewed. Your citizenship will not be the subject of denaturalisation proceedings.”

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“Anil.”

“Aai, Lata Mavshi will not, on the withdrawal, come to Edison. She will remain in Vile Parle East. She is sixty-two. The plan that the family has discussed since 2018, of bringing her to Edison so that you and she could live together as sisters in the small two-storey house on Plainfield Road during the years of your widowhood that will, on Pradip Kaka’s present cardiac condition, in due course commence, will not on the withdrawal proceed.”

“Anil.”

“Aai. Lata Mavshi has, on the family’s self-understanding, on her own self-understanding, on the practice of the Phatak household between 1957 and the present, been your sister for sixty-two years. The biological reading is the reading that the consular officer at Bandra Kurla Complex has applied. It is not the reading on which Lata Mavshi has lived her life or you have lived yours.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, the withdrawal of the I-130 protects your citizenship and ends the chain of consequences. The withdrawal also abandons Lata Mavshi.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, what should I do.”

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Mrs Sunita Desai looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph on the windowsill.

“Anil.”

“Yes, Aai.”

“Anil, the decision is not, on the small reckoning of the family, mine. I have, on the small reckoning that I have made over thirty-six years on Plainfield Road, used what the 1989 immigrant visa gave me. I have raised you. I have raised your sister Meera. I have run the grocery on Oak Tree Road with your father for twenty-eight years. I have, on the citizenship of 1994, voted in every American presidential election. The years are the years. The visa, on the small reckoning, has been the visa that has carried them. The strict biological reading that the consular officer at Bandra Kurla Complex has applied is, on the strict reading, correct. It does not, on my own self-understanding of the thirty-six years, alter the years.”

“Aai.”

“Anil, the decision is yours. The decision is yours because the I-130 of April 2024 was filed by you, in your name as an American citizen, on Lata’s behalf. The withdrawal would be your withdrawal. The continuation of the petition would be your continuation. The consequences of either decision — the protection of my citizenship by the withdrawal, or the loss of my citizenship by the continuation —

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would be consequences that you, on the small reckoning that you make this evening, choose.”

“Aai.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, the consequence of the continuation is your removal from the United States. The consequence of the withdrawal is Lata Mavshi’s remaining in Vile Parle East alone for the years of her widowhood that, on her husband Mr Phatak’s recent illness, may in due course commence.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai. Both consequences are bad consequences.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, the bad consequence to you, on the continuation, is the consequence of a small reckoning made in the household of my grandfather Madhav Phatak in 1957, on a small registration that the household chose not to make on the death of my grandmother’s actual daughter and on a substitution that the household chose to make on the birth of the second wife’s daughter under the same name. The reckoning was made in 1957. You were born in October of that year. You did not, on any reading of the matter, participate in the reckoning of 1957.”

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“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, the bad consequence to Lata Mavshi, on the withdrawal, is the consequence of the same 1957 reckoning, on the same registration that was not made and the same substitution that was. Lata Mavshi did not, on any reading, participate in the reckoning of 1957 either. She was born in 1962.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, the reckoning of 1957 was a reckoning that the household made on the small understanding that the death of my grandmother’s daughter and the birth of the second wife’s daughter under the same name was the form that the household’s mourning would take. The reckoning was made on a particular family practice that, in 1957 in Vile Parle East, was a practice that families in similar circumstances did make. The reckoning was made by my grandfather Madhav Phatak and his second wife. They are, in 2025, both deceased.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai, the consequences of the 1957 reckoning have, until the consular officer’s interview at Bandra Kurla Complex in May 2025, not produced any consequence to anyone living. They produce, on the consular officer’s interview and on the procedural chain that follows, the consequence to you of denaturalisation, or alternatively the consequence to Lata Mavshi of abandonment. The consequence is to

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be borne by one of the two daughters of the second wife. The reckoning of 1957 has, on the procedural chain of 2025, become a reckoning that the second wife's daughters are required to make."

"Yes, Anil."

Mr Desai sat at the small wooden table in the kitchen on Plainfield Road for a long time.

* * *

"Aai."

"Yes, Anil."

"Aai. I am withdrawing the I-130."

Mrs Sunita Desai looked at her son for a long moment.

"Anil."

"Yes, Aai."

"Have you spoken with Lata."

"No, Aai. I have not."

"Will you speak with her, before the withdrawal."

"Yes, Aai. I will speak with her tonight."

"Anil."

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“Yes, Aai.”

“Will you tell her why.”

Mr Desai looked at his mother across the small wooden table.

“Aai. I will tell her about the consular officer’s interview, the inconsistency in the family records, the procedural chain that the refusal would, on the report to Texas, set in motion, and the withdrawal’s prevention of that chain. I will not, on this evening, tell her about the 1957 reckoning of my grandfather’s household. I will not, on this evening, tell her that the reason her visa cannot proceed is that her own birth was registered in 1962 in the household of a man whose first daughter had been born and had died in 1957 and had not been registered as deceased.”

“Anil.”

“Aai, the 1957 reckoning is a reckoning that you and the second wife’s daughters — you and Lata Mavshi — have, on a strict reading, the right to know about. Lata Mavshi did not know, on her interview at Bandra Kurla Complex in May, why the questions about the parents had been asked. She does not know, this evening, the reason her visa was refused. She has the right to know.”

“Yes, Anil.”

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“However, Aai, the right to know is, on the small reckoning that I make this evening, a right that on the procedural chain of the consular officer’s report and the citizenship-services review and the eventual denaturalisation proceedings, would not be a right that ends with Lata Mavshi’s knowledge alone. It would be a right that, on the practical operation of how families in Edison and Vile Parle East communicate, in due course produces the conversation in which Lata Mavshi tells her own children about the 1957 reckoning, and her children tell their children, and the reckoning of my grandfather’s household becomes the property of every Phatak descendant in Bombay and New Jersey for the next several generations.”

“Yes, Anil.”

“Aai. The reckoning of 1957 was made, on the household’s small private understanding, as the form of the household’s mourning. It was made by people who are dead. It was made on a practice that, in the Vile Parle East of 1957, was a practice that the household considered to be the household’s own private business. The reckoning has, until the consular officer’s interview, not produced any consequence to anyone living. The withdrawal of the I-130 is, on my reading, the action that returns the reckoning to the small private status it has had for sixty-eight years. The withdrawal does not, on its mechanism, share the reckoning with Lata Mavshi or with anyone else. The withdrawal is, on the procedural chain alone, the action that protects you, abandons

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Lata Mavshi, and keeps the 1957 reckoning where my grandfather's household intended it to be."

"Yes, Anil."

"Aai. Lata Mavshi will, on her remaining in Vile Parle East, live the years of her widowhood without her sister. You will, on your retention of citizenship, live the years of your widowhood, when they come, without your sister. The two of you will lose, on my withdrawal, what the 1957 reckoning has across sixty-eight years given you, which is the relationship of sisters that the household constructed in mourning of the daughter who had died in January."

"Yes, Anil."

"Aai. The loss is the cost of the withdrawal. The loss falls on you and on Lata Mavshi. The 1957 reckoning, on the longer accounting, is the reckoning that has on its sixty-eighth year produced this cost."

"Yes, Anil."

"Aai, am I wrong, on the small reckoning of this evening, to choose this."

Mrs Sunita Desai looked at her son for a long moment.

"Anil. The choice is the choice. I am, on the small reckoning, the daughter of my father's second wife, who was raised in the household as the daughter of the first. The 1957 reckoning was the reckoning that

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gave me the household I was raised in. The 1989 immigrant visa was the consequence of that reckoning. The thirty-six years on Plainfield Road have been the consequence of the visa. You and your sister Meera and the grocery on Oak Tree Road have been the consequence of the years. The 2025 withdrawal is the consequence of the procedural chain that the consular officer at Bandra Kurla Complex has, on the strict biological reading, set in motion. The withdrawal is, on its operation, the small reckoning that closes the chain. The cost of the withdrawal — to me, to Lata, to the relationship that the 1957 reckoning constructed — is, on the longer accounting, the cost.”

“Aai.”

“You are not wrong, Anil. You are choosing the cost that falls on Lata and on me, in preference to the cost that falls on you, on Meera, on the grocery, on the small two-storey house, and on the thirty-six years. You are choosing the smaller cost. The smaller cost is, on the small reckoning that grandfathers and second wives in Vile Parle East in 1957 sometimes made, the cost that the family has across sixty-eight years been preparing to bear.”

* * *

Mr Anil Desai withdrew the Form I-130 sibling petition on behalf of Mrs Lata Phatak on the third Wednesday of May 2025, by means of a Form I-797 withdrawal request submitted to the Texas Service Center,

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on the grounds of ‘petitioner’s reconsideration of family circumstances’.

The withdrawal was processed in the standard administrative manner. The consular officer’s report from Bandra Kurla Complex was, on the absence of a refused visa application against an active petition, not generated. No further review of the 1985 I-130 petition was undertaken by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

Mrs Sunita Desai retained her American citizenship.

Mrs Lata Phatak remained in Vile Parle East.

Mr Pradip Desai’s cardiac condition deteriorated in the autumn of 2026. He underwent triple coronary artery bypass grafting at Hackensack University Medical Center in November of that year and recovered to a moderate level of function. He died, of an unrelated stroke, in March 2029.

Mrs Sunita Desai, on her widowhood from March 2029, lived alone in the small two-storey house on Plainfield Road. Her son Anil and her daughter Meera, who lived with her own family in Bridgewater, visited on alternate Sundays.

Mrs Lata Phatak’s husband Mr Phatak died, of complications of diabetes, in February of 2027. Mrs Lata Phatak, on her widowhood from that date, continued to live in the small flat in Vile Parle East.

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Her own children — a son in Pune and a daughter in Sydney — visited at Diwali and at her birthday in October.

Mrs Sunita Desai and Mrs Lata Phatak telephoned each other on every Sunday afternoon — morning, at Vile Parle East — from March 2029 onwards. The conversations, on the small private practice that the two sisters had developed since 1989, addressed the methi subzi and the grandchildren and the news from the Phatak cousins in Bombay and Sydney and Pune.

Neither sister, in any conversation between March 2029 and Mrs Sunita Desai's death in 2034, raised the question of the I-130 of April 2024 or the consular officer's interview at Bandra Kurla Complex in May 2025 or the 1957 reckoning of their grandfather's household.

Mr Anil Desai, on his mother's death in 2034, found in the small bureau in his mother's bedroom, in an envelope marked in his mother's hand 'For Anil, after', a small folded letter on the back of which was, in his aunt Lata's hand and dated September 2025, the following sentence:

“Anil beta, your mother has, in the long telephone conversation we had on the third Sunday of May 2025, the day after the consular officer's interview at Bandra Kurla Complex, told me everything that the household of our grandfather did and did not do in 1957. She has told me that you, in May 2025, will be required to make a decision in respect of the I-130 you filed for me in 2024. She has told me that the

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decision is one that, on the small reckoning, falls properly to you. I am, in this letter that I am giving to your mother to keep until the decision is made, asking you in advance — from Vile Parle East, on the small reckoning of a sister who has known her older sister for sixty-two years — to choose the withdrawal. The 1957 reckoning was, on its mourning of a daughter who had not survived, the reckoning that gave me a sister. The thirty-six years on Plainfield Road have been the reckoning's extension. The withdrawal that, on the procedural chain, you will be asked to choose is the reckoning's closing. I am asking you, beta, to close it. The cost of the closing — to me and to your mother, in our coming years — is the cost the 1957 reckoning has, since 1957, been preparing the second wife's daughters to bear. We have, in the sixty-two years between her arrival on the SS Surat in October 1989 and the consular officer's interview in May 2025, been bearing it without knowing what we were bearing. The closing of 2025 is, on a strict reading, the bearing's completion. With my love, your Lata Mavshi."

Mr Anil Desai sat in the small bureau room in the house on Plainfield Road for a long time.

Then he placed the letter, with his mother's small folded note, in the inside pocket of his jacket, walked downstairs, and showed it to no one.

— END —

The Border File

A Short Story

Mr Daniel Ortega-Reyes of El Paso, Texas, was thirty-one.

He had been born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, had emigrated to the United States with his parents at the age of nine on a Temporary Protected Status grant arising from Hurricane Mitch in 1998, had read political science at the University of Texas at El Paso, and had since 2019 been employed as a Spanish-language interpreter, on a contractor basis, at the El Paso Asylum Office of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

He had naturalised as a United States citizen in 2017, on his then-wife's petition.

By 2025, he was the senior contractor on the office's rota of seven Spanish-language interpreters, and conducted on average eleven credible-fear interviews per working day for the asylum officers of the El Paso office.

On the third Tuesday of August 2025, at eleven minutes past eleven in the morning, he was assigned to the credible-fear interview of a forty-three-year-old Honduran woman called Mrs Marisela Aguilera-Pineda, who had crossed the Rio Grande on the previous Sunday

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afternoon at a point approximately fourteen miles east of El Paso, who had presented herself voluntarily at the Western Bridge Border Patrol station, and who had been transferred to the El Paso Asylum Office on the Monday morning for the standard credible-fear processing under section 235(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act.

The asylum officer assigned to the case was Ms Janet Whitlock, a forty-six-year-old career officer with seventeen years' service who was widely regarded among the El Paso interpreter rota as a fair and competent decision-maker.

* * *

The interview took place in the small interview room on the second floor of the El Paso Asylum Office, which occupied a single floor of a federal building on Stanton Street.

Mrs Marisela Aguilera-Pineda was a small woman with greying hair, dressed in the cotton clothes she had been wearing on her river crossing four days earlier, with the particular tired alertness of asylum-seekers who had not, in the four days since their detention by Border Patrol, had any opportunity to bathe, to change their clothes, or to speak to a member of their family.

“Señora Aguilera.”

“Sí, señor oficial.”

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“Señora Aguilera, my name is Officer Whitlock. I will be conducting your credible-fear interview today. The interpreter, who will translate my questions into Spanish and your answers into English, is Mr Ortega-Reyes. The interview will be recorded. The interview will determine whether your fear of returning to Honduras is sufficient, on the legal standard, to allow you to proceed to a full asylum hearing before an immigration judge.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes interpreted, in the standard manner.

Mrs Aguilera-Pineda nodded. She did not look up from her hands, which were folded on the small table in front of her.

Officer Whitlock conducted the standard introductory questions — name, date of birth, place of birth, family circumstances, route of travel, point of entry, reasons for leaving Honduras.

Mrs Aguilera-Pineda answered each question.

Mr Ortega-Reyes interpreted each answer.

On the question of family circumstances, Mrs Aguilera-Pineda said, in Spanish: ‘I am a widow. My husband Hector died in 2019, in the violence in our neighbourhood in Tegucigalpa. We had three children. My eldest son David died in 2021. My middle son Carlos lives in Tegucigalpa with my mother. My youngest, my daughter Sofia, is fifteen and travelled with me to the border. She is in the women-and-children’s detention facility at Karnes.’

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Mr Ortega-Reyes interpreted the answer.

Officer Whitlock made a note.

Officer Whitlock said: ‘Señora Aguilera, what was the cause of your eldest son’s death in 2021.’

Mr Ortega-Reyes interpreted.

Mrs Aguilera-Pineda did not, for some moments, reply.

Then she said — in Spanish, with the careful flat delivery of asylum-seekers who have been instructed by their accompanying advocates that the credible-fear interview is the moment at which the precise factual basis of the claim must be established — a paragraph of approximately eleven sentences.

The paragraph described the circumstances of David Aguilera’s death.

Mr Ortega-Reyes did not, for some moments, interpret.

* * *

Officer Whitlock looked at her interpreter.

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

“Can you proceed with the interpretation.”

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Mr Ortega-Reyes did not reply for a further moment.

Then he said: “Ma’am, Señora Aguilera-Pineda has stated that her eldest son David Aguilera was killed on the seventh of June 2021 in the Comayagüela neighbourhood of Tegucigalpa, on a small alleyway behind the Mercado Mayoreo. He was nineteen. He was returning home from his evening course at the Instituto Superior de Tecnología. He was killed by three members of the local Mara Salvatrucha cell, in retaliation for his having refused, on the previous month, to join the cell. The killing was carried out with knives. The body was found by his mother, who is the witness present, on the Tuesday morning after the night on which David did not return home. The witness has been, on the four years since June 2021, the principal informant against the three members of the cell to the Honduran national police, who have not, in the four years, made any arrest. The witness has, on the past nine months, received four written threats from the cell warning her to cease her cooperation with the police, on pain of consequences to her two surviving children. The four written threats are, on her account, the precipitating cause of her departure from Tegucigalpa with her daughter Sofia in the second week of August 2025.”

Officer Whitlock made a note.

“Thank you, Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes nodded.

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Officer Whitlock conducted, on the standard interview structure, the further questions on the credibility of the precipitating-incident account, on the protection available from the Honduran state, on the relocation possibilities within Honduras, and on the consistency of the account with the country-conditions reporting on the Mara Salvatrucha and the Comayagüela cell.

Mrs Aguilera-Pineda answered each question.

Mr Ortega-Reyes interpreted each answer.

By twenty-three minutes past one, the interview was concluded.

Officer Whitlock thanked Mrs Aguilera-Pineda and Mr Ortega-Reyes. Mrs Aguilera-Pineda was returned to the holding area pending her transfer back to the family-detention facility.

Officer Whitlock and Mr Ortega-Reyes remained in the small interview room.

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes, in the eleven-sentence interpretation you provided of Señora Aguilera-Pineda’s account of her son’s death, you provided more detail than her Spanish account, on my own working knowledge of Spanish, contained.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes did not reply for some time.

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“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes, may I ask. What was the source of the additional detail.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes looked, for a long moment, at his hands on the small interview-room table.

Then he said: “Ma’am, the additional detail was, on my own personal knowledge, the additional detail of an event of which I have, since June 2021, had independent knowledge.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

“How do you have independent knowledge of the death of David Aguilera in Comayagüela in June 2021.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes looked at the wall of the small interview room for some time.

“Ma’am.”

“Yes, Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Ma’am, David Aguilera was, between September 1998 and August 1999, in the year before my family’s departure from Tegucigalpa, my classmate at the Escuela Primaria Francisco Morazán in the Belen district. He was at the time eight years old. I was nine. We were in the

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third grade together. He sat at the desk to my left for the entire academic year. We were not, on any later assessment, particular friends — we were classmates of the kind that nine-year-old boys at the same desk row become — but we knew each other.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Ma’am, in 2021, on the small Honduran-American diaspora online community in El Paso, the news of David’s death in June was reported through the Tegucigalpa diaspora WhatsApp circle. I read the report. I recognised the name. I confirmed, on the photograph that accompanied the report, that the David Aguilera who had been killed at the Mercado Mayoreo on the seventh of June 2021 was the David Aguilera who had been my classmate in the third grade at the Escuela Primaria Francisco Morazán in 1998 and 1999.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

“Señora Aguilera-Pineda is, on this discovery, your former classmate’s mother.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

“You recognised her, on her entry into this interview room, as the mother of David Aguilera.”

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Mr Ortega-Reyes looked, for a long moment, at the small interview-room table.

“Ma’am, the honest answer is that I did not recognise her on her entry. The boy David and I were nine and eight in the year I knew him. I had never, in 1998 or 1999, been to David’s house, and had never met his mother. The recognition came, on the interview, when she stated her name and her late husband’s name and the dates and the details of David’s death.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

“When, in the interview, did the recognition come.”

“Ma’am, the recognition came on her statement of her son David’s name and date of death. The statement came in approximately the seventh minute of the interview.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes, you continued to interpret the interview after the recognition.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

“Why did you not, on the recognition, declare a conflict of interest and request reassignment.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes did not reply for some time.

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Then he said: “Ma’am, the standard procedure on a recognition of this kind is to declare the conflict and request the reassignment. The reassignment, on the El Paso office’s present caseload pressures and on the limited number of Spanish-language interpreters on the rota, would have produced a delay of at least seventy-two hours in the conclusion of the interview. The delay would have been a delay during which Señora Aguilera-Pineda would have remained in detention. The delay would also have been a delay during which her daughter Sofia, who is fifteen and is in the family-detention facility at Karnes, would have remained in detention. The standard procedure was, on the small reckoning I made in the seventh minute of this morning’s interview, the procedure that prolonged the detention of a fifteen-year-old girl by at least seventy-two hours.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Ma’am.”

“Ma’am, you continued to interpret the interview, in the seventh minute and afterwards, on the small reckoning that the immediate proceeding of the interview was preferable to the seventy-two-hour delay.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

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“Mr Ortega-Reyes, did the additional detail you provided in the eleven-sentence interpretation of Señora Aguilera-Pineda’s account exceed the additional detail that her actual Spanish account contained.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes looked at Officer Whitlock for a long moment.

“Ma’am, the eleven-sentence interpretation contained two additional details that Señora Aguilera-Pineda’s Spanish account did not contain. The first was the name of the institute David was returning from — the Instituto Superior de Tecnología — which the witness did not name in her Spanish account but which I added because I had read the name in the 2021 WhatsApp report. The second was the precise day on which the body was found — the Tuesday morning after the night David did not return home — which the witness stated only as ‘the next morning’ without specifying the day of the week, but which the 2021 WhatsApp report had identified as the eighth of June, a Tuesday.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

“Ma’am. The two additional details on which the credibility-finding standard turns are now, on the recorded interpretation, in the interview record.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

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“The interview record, on a strict reading by a reviewing officer, will appear to attribute those two additional details to the witness.”

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

“Which, on a strict reading, would constitute a fabrication of the record.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes looked at his hands on the small interview-room table for a long moment.

“Yes, Officer Whitlock.”

* * *

Officer Whitlock sat in the small interview room for some time after Mr Ortega-Reyes had left for the staff break room at fifteen minutes past two.

She did not, for that period, leave the interview room.

She had, on the small reckoning that career asylum officers eventually make, a decision to make. The decision was the decision of how to record, on the credible-fear-interview file that would in due course be reviewed by the supervisory asylum officer and that would be the basis of her decision to refer Señora Aguilera-Pineda to a full asylum hearing or to issue a negative credible-fear determination, the discrepancy that her conversation with Mr Ortega-Reyes had identified.

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The discrepancy, on a strict reading, was an interpreter's fabrication of the record. The fabrication, on the recording of the interview that the office held, was provable. The interpreter would, on her reporting of the discrepancy, be removed from the El Paso rota and likely barred from federal interpreter contracting work nationwide. The interpreter's livelihood, on his contractor status with no permanent federal-employee protections, would on the report be effectively ended.

The discrepancy, on a less strict reading, was an interpreter's small inadvertent supplementation of the witness's account with details from the interpreter's independent prior knowledge of the underlying events. The supplementation was, on the small reckoning, not the construction of false detail — the additional details Mr Ortega-Reyes had supplied were, on the 2021 WhatsApp report he had referenced, true. The supplementation was the introduction of a true detail into the record by an instrument other than the witness's own statement.

The witness, on either reading, was a Honduran woman of forty-three whose son had been killed in 2021, who had received four written threats from the killer's cell over the past nine months, who had brought her fifteen-year-old daughter across the Rio Grande on the previous Sunday afternoon, and who was, on her own Spanish account before any interpreter's supplementation, plainly the kind of asylum-seeker for whom the credible-fear referral had been designed.

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Officer Whitlock walked to her desk in the open-plan area of the El Paso Asylum Office.

She drafted, in the small careful hand of asylum officers, the credible-fear-interview record.

She recorded the witness's account in the form in which the witness had, on the recording, given it in Spanish — with 'the next morning' in place of 'the Tuesday morning' and with no naming of the institute. She recorded, in a separate annex to the interview record, an interpreter's note. The interpreter's note stated that the interpreter on the interview, Mr Ortega-Reyes, had on the seventh minute of the interview recognised the witness as the mother of a former primary-school classmate, had on a small operational reckoning continued to interpret rather than declare a conflict in order to avoid a seventy-two-hour delay in the conclusion of the interview, and had in two specific places of his English interpretation supplemented the witness's Spanish account with details derived from his independent knowledge of the underlying events. The interpreter's note appended a transcription, in Spanish and in literal English, of the witness's actual statements in the two specific places, and indicated the precise additional detail that the interpreter had introduced.

Officer Whitlock signed the interpreter's note. She did not require Mr Ortega-Reyes to countersign it.

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She made a positive credible-fear determination on the basis of the witness's actual Spanish account — which, on its own merits and without the interpreter's supplementation, met the lower standard of proof applicable at the credible-fear stage. Mrs Aguilera-Pineda was on the determination referred to a full asylum hearing before an immigration judge of the El Paso Immigration Court.

She submitted the credible-fear-interview record, with the interpreter's annex, to the supervisory asylum officer at twenty-three minutes past four on the Tuesday afternoon.

* * *

The supervisory asylum officer, a Mr Robert Hayes of seventeen years' experience, read the record and the annex on the Wednesday morning.

He summoned Officer Whitlock to his office at six minutes past nine.

“Janet.”

“Robert.”

“Janet, the credible-fear determination on Aguilera-Pineda is sustained on the witness's own account. The interpreter's annex is appended.”

“Yes, Robert.”

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“Janet, the interpreter’s annex constitutes a record of professional misconduct by Mr Ortega-Reyes. The annex will, on the standard procedure, be transmitted to the office’s contracting officer, who will refer the matter to the General Services Administration’s suspension and debarment authority. Mr Ortega-Reyes will, on the referral, be removed from the El Paso rota and likely barred from federal interpreter contracting nationwide.”

“Yes, Robert.”

“Janet, may I ask. Why did you record the misconduct in the annex rather than reporting it informally to me on the Tuesday afternoon and conducting the interview again with a different interpreter on the Wednesday morning, after the seventy-two-hour delay had elapsed and Mrs Aguilera-Pineda had been recovered from her travel.”

Officer Whitlock looked at her supervisor across his desk.

“Robert. The seventy-two-hour delay would have prolonged the detention of a fifteen-year-old girl at Karnes. The interpreter’s reckoning on the seventh minute of the interview, on the small reckoning he made on his recognition of the witness, was that the immediate conclusion of the interview was preferable to the seventy-two-hour delay. The reckoning was, on the small evaluation I have made overnight, an operational reckoning that I, as the asylum officer on the case, would also have made on the same operational facts, had I

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been the one to know the witness was the mother of my third-grade classmate.”

“Janet.”

“Robert.”

“You are saying that the interpreter’s reckoning was, on the operational facts, the same reckoning you would have made.”

“Yes, Robert. I am saying that.”

“Janet, you are nevertheless reporting the interpreter’s misconduct in the annex.”

“Yes, Robert.”

“Why.”

Officer Whitlock looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph on Mr Hayes’s desk of his daughter at her high-school graduation.

“Robert, the reckoning the interpreter made on the seventh minute was the right reckoning for the witness and her daughter. It was not, on a strict reading of the federal interpreter contracting standards, a reckoning the interpreter was authorised to make. The reckoning was an operational reckoning that the asylum officer — me — was authorised to make. The interpreter, by making the reckoning on his

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own initiative without informing me, deprived me of the choice of how the reckoning should be made.”

“Yes, Janet.”

“Robert, had Mr Ortega-Reyes informed me, in the seventh minute, of his recognition of the witness, I would on the same operational facts have made, I believe, the same reckoning. We would have, between us, on the joint reckoning, completed the interview as it was completed, with the small additional details that Mr Ortega-Reyes’s independent knowledge had supplied either explicitly disclosed in the interview record — attributed to the interpreter’s prior knowledge — or omitted from the record entirely. The decision on the disclosure or omission would have been the asylum officer’s decision, made on the operational facts in the seventh minute, with the interpreter’s recognition known.”

“Robert.”

“Yes, Janet.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes’s decision to make the reckoning on his own initiative, without informing me, was the decision that converted what would have been an asylum officer’s permitted operational accommodation into an interpreter’s misconduct. The misconduct is the misconduct of having taken, in the seventh minute, a decision that on the contracting standards belonged to me.”

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Mr Hayes looked at her for a long moment.

“Janet.”

“Yes, Robert.”

“The annex will be transmitted to the contracting officer. Mr Ortega-Reyes will be referred for suspension and debarment.”

“Yes, Robert.”

“Janet.”

“Yes, Robert.”

“On Mrs Aguilera-Pineda’s referral to the immigration judge, the credible-fear determination will hold. The interview record, with the witness’s actual Spanish account preserved, is the record on which the immigration court will proceed. The interpreter’s annex, on the immigration-court rules of evidence, will not be part of the immigration-court record. Mrs Aguilera-Pineda’s asylum hearing will, on the merits, be heard.”

“Yes, Robert.”

* * *

Mr Daniel Ortega-Reyes was, on the supervisory asylum officer’s referral, suspended from his contracting work at the El Paso Asylum Office on the second Friday of September 2025.

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He was, on the General Services Administration's subsequent debarment proceedings, barred from federal interpreter contracting nationwide for a period of three years.

He took up, in October 2025, employment as a Spanish-language teacher at the Burges High School in El Paso, on a salary that was approximately forty per cent of his federal contractor income, and on the modest pension and health-insurance benefits that the El Paso Independent School District provided.

Mrs Marisela Aguilera-Pineda's asylum hearing was conducted before Immigration Judge Maria Sanchez of the El Paso Immigration Court in March of 2026. She was granted asylum on the merits, on the country-conditions evidence on the Mara Salvatrucha and the documentary evidence of the four written threats. Her daughter Sofia, who had been released from Karnes in October 2025 on Mrs Aguilera-Pineda's posting of a small bond, was granted asylum on the same petition.

Mrs Aguilera-Pineda settled in El Paso. Sofia, who turned sixteen in November 2025, enrolled at the Burges High School for the spring semester of 2026.

On the second Wednesday of February 2026, in her third-period Spanish class, Sofia Aguilera-Pineda was, on the standard rotation of teachers, assigned to a section taught by Mr Daniel Ortega-Reyes.

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Mr Ortega-Reyes, on his receipt of the class roster on the Tuesday afternoon, recognised the name.

He did not, on the Wednesday morning before the third period, request reassignment of the class to another teacher.

He conducted the class.

At the end of the class, he asked Sofia, in Spanish, whether she would mind staying for a moment after the bell.

Sofia, on the polite manner of fifteen-year-olds who had recently arrived at American high schools, said yes.

“Sofia.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Sofia, I have a small thing to tell you.”

“Yes, Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Sofia, your brother David and I were at school together at the Escuela Primaria Francisco Morazán in Tegucigalpa, in the third grade, in 1998 and 1999. He sat at the desk to my left for the entire academic year. We were not particular friends but we knew each other. I was nine. He was eight.”

Sofia did not reply for a moment.

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

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“Yes, Sofia.”

“My brother David died in 2021. I was eleven.”

“Yes, Sofia. I know.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Sofia.”

“How do you know.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes looked, for a long moment, at the young woman standing at his desk in the small Spanish classroom on the third floor of the Burges High School.

“Sofia, in 2021 the news of David’s death reached the Tegucigalpa diaspora circles in El Paso. I read the report. I recognised the name. I confirmed, on the photograph, that the David Aguilera who had been killed at the Mercado Mayoreo on the seventh of June 2021 was the David Aguilera who had been my classmate in 1998 and 1999. In August of 2025, on a credible-fear interview at the El Paso Asylum Office at which I was the contractor interpreter, your mother arrived as the witness. The interview was the interview that resulted in your mother’s referral to the immigration judge and, in due course, in the asylum that has, on March of this year, been granted to her and to you.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

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“Yes, Sofia.”

“You were the interpreter on my mother’s credible-fear interview.”

“Yes, Sofia. I was.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes, why are you telling me this.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph on his desk of his own son, who was eight, and who attended the third grade at the Polk Elementary School on Burges Drive.

“Sofia, the recognition I made in the seventh minute of your mother’s interview, of who your mother was and of who your brother had been, was the recognition that the standard procedure of the federal contracting standards required me, in the seventh minute, to declare. I did not declare it. I continued to interpret the interview, on a small reckoning of mine, because I judged that the seventy-two-hour delay that the declaration would have produced would have prolonged your detention at Karnes by at least three days. The reckoning was, on the small evaluation I have made over the past five months, the right reckoning on the operational facts and the wrong reckoning on the standards I was contractually required to apply. The asylum officer on the case, on her later review of the interpretation, identified the reckoning, recorded it as misconduct, and referred me for the

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debarment that has on the past four months produced my employment at this high school.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Sofia.”

“Why are you telling me about the debarment.”

“Sofia, I am telling you about the debarment because the debarment is, on the small reckoning that asylum-officers and interpreters and Honduran widows and Honduran fifteen-year-old daughters eventually make, the consequence that the small operational reckoning of the seventh minute has, on the standards, produced. The debarment is the cost of the seventh minute. The cost was paid by me. It was, on the small accounting, the cost the standards required someone to pay. I paid it.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Sofia.”

“You paid the cost so that I would not, on the seventy-two-hour delay, remain in detention at Karnes for three more days.”

“Sofia, the cost was paid on the small reckoning that fifteen-year-old daughters at Karnes detention should not, on a federal contracting standard, remain in detention for three days more than the operational facts required. The cost was paid because the small reckoning of the

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seventh minute was, on the operational facts, the right reckoning. The standards punish the right reckoning when the standards are punished by a person who, on the contracting standard, is not authorised to make the reckoning. The interpreter, on the standards, is not authorised. The cost is therefore the cost.”

“Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Sofia.”

“My brother David, in 1998 and 1999, in the third grade.”

“Yes, Sofia.”

“What was he like.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph on his desk.

“Sofia, your brother David, at eight, in the third grade at the Escuela Primaria Francisco Morazán in Belen, was a quiet boy who was very good at arithmetic. He could, on the small mental sums Señorita Reyes-Martínez gave us at the start of every Monday morning, complete the eighteen problems in less than three minutes. The rest of us took eight or nine. He did not boast about it. He was — on the small recollection that I have, twenty-seven years after the third grade — the kind of eight-year-old boy whose teachers thought, on the small evidence of the Monday-morning sums, that he would, in due course,

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become an engineer or a mathematician or a person who builds bridges. He was nine when my family departed Tegucigalpa in August 1999. I did not, after August 1999, see him again. The next news I had of him was the report on the seventh of June 2021.”

Sofia stood at the small classroom desk for a long moment.

Then she said: “Mr Ortega-Reyes.”

“Yes, Sofia.”

“The Monday-morning sums.”

“Yes, Sofia.”

“He taught me arithmetic, when I was small. In Tegucigalpa. Before he died. He used to do small mental sums with me, on the kitchen table, on Sunday afternoons. I had not, until just now, remembered who had taught him to do them.”

Mr Ortega-Reyes did not reply for a moment.

Then he said:

“Sofia, the third-grade teacher, Señorita Reyes-Martínez, taught all of us. She was, on my own twenty-seven-year recollection, a small woman with the particular patience of primary-school teachers in Tegucigalpa in the 1990s. She taught David. She taught me. She would, on the small mental sums, walk between the desks of the third-grade classroom on Monday mornings, with a small wooden ruler that she

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did not, in any of the academic year I knew her, ever use to strike a child. She would walk past David's desk and pause for a moment. She would walk past my desk and pause for the same moment. The ruler, on her hand, was the ruler. The mental sums were the mental sums. Your brother had, on the Sunday afternoons in Tegucigalpa, simply been passing on, on the small kitchen-table reckoning that older brothers in Belen at the time made, what Señorita Reyes-Martínez had given him in the third grade."

Sofia stood at the small classroom desk.

"Mr Ortega-Reyes."

"Yes, Sofia."

"May I, in this Spanish class, on the Monday mornings, do the small mental sums."

Mr Ortega-Reyes looked at her for a long moment.

"Sofia, this is a Spanish class for sixteen-year-olds at an American high school. The mental sums are the work of a third-grade arithmetic teacher in Tegucigalpa."

"Mr Ortega-Reyes."

"Yes, Sofia."

"May I, on the Monday mornings, do them anyway."

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Mr Ortega-Reyes did not reply for some time.

Then he said:

“Sofia, on the Monday mornings, you may.”

* * *

Mr Daniel Ortega-Reyes’s federal interpreter contracting debarment expired in October 2028.

He did not, on the expiry, reapply for federal contracting work. He continued, in subsequent years, as a Spanish-language teacher at the Burges High School.

Sofia Aguilera-Pineda completed her high-school studies at Burges in 2028, on a record that included a high distinction in Mr Ortega-Reyes’s Spanish class. She enrolled, in the autumn of 2028, at the University of Texas at El Paso, on a programme in mathematics. She graduated in 2032. She took up, in October of that year, a position as a junior actuary at a small El Paso-based insurance firm.

Mrs Marisela Aguilera-Pineda lived in El Paso with her daughter through Sofia’s university years. She worked, from 2026 onwards, as a housekeeper at the small Camino Real Hotel on El Paso Street.

Officer Janet Whitlock continued at the El Paso Asylum Office until her retirement in 2030. She did not, in any subsequent year of her career, encounter another credible-fear interview in which the

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interpreter was the former primary-school classmate of the witness's deceased son.

She did, on the small reckoning that she made over the long evenings on the small porch of her house in the Sunset Heights neighbourhood, come to think that the most important thing she had learned in seventeen years of asylum work was that the recognitions that mattered, on the operational facts of credible-fear interviews, were the recognitions that the standards on their drafting did not anticipate. The standards anticipated the conflict of interest of money, of family relationship, of professional friendship. The standards did not anticipate the conflict of interest of a third-grade arithmetic class in Tegucigalpa in 1998 between two boys aged nine and eight. The interpreter, on the small reckoning of the seventh minute of an interview in August 2025, had on his own initiative made the operational decision the standards reserved to the asylum officer. The asylum officer, on her own subsequent reckoning, had recorded the interpreter's decision as the misconduct it formally was, knowing that the recording would produce the debarment that closed the interpreter's livelihood, and knowing also that the recording was, on her own reckoning of the operational facts, the only reckoning the standards permitted her to make.

She did not, in any subsequent year, communicate with Mr Ortega-Reyes.

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She did not, in any subsequent year, communicate with Mrs Aguilera-Pineda or with Sofia.

She did, on the third Monday morning of every September from 2026 onwards, in her own small reckoning of the matter, mark the academic year's commencement, on the recollection of a small Monday-morning routine in a third-grade classroom in Belen, Tegucigalpa, in 1998, that she had, on a credible-fear interview in El Paso in August 2025, on the small operational reckoning that asylum officers eventually make, learned about.

— *END* —

The EB-5 Investor

A Short Story

Ms Linda Chen-Walker of the Securities and Exchange Commission's Denver Regional Office was thirty-eight.

She had been born in Tianjin, had emigrated with her parents to Berkeley, California, at the age of seven, had read economics at Stanford and law at the University of California, Berkeley School of Law, and had since 2014 worked in the Division of Enforcement of the Securities and Exchange Commission, latterly on the EB-5 Regional Center fraud caseload that the Division had developed as a national priority since the 2017 Vermont ski-resort scandal.

She spoke fluent Mandarin and conversational Cantonese.

She was, by 2025, the Division's lead enforcement attorney on the South Dakota Tribal Lands Regional Center, a small EB-5 vehicle based in Pierre, South Dakota, that had between 2018 and 2024 raised approximately one hundred and forty-three million dollars from two hundred and eighty-six Chinese investors, ostensibly for the construction of a four-hundred-room casino-and-conference complex at the Crow Creek Reservation in Buffalo County.

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The complex, on Ms Chen-Walker's investigation as of the spring of 2025, did not exist.

There was, on the eight-hundred-acre site at the Crow Creek Reservation that the Regional Center had identified in its EB-5 offering documents as the project location, no casino, no conference complex, no hotel rooms, no parking infrastructure, no completed road access, and no commenced foundations.

There was, on the site, one thing only.

* * *

Ms Chen-Walker drove from Denver to Pierre on the third Monday of April 2025, accompanied by a junior Division attorney, Mr Brett Anderson, and a Division forensic accountant, Ms Patricia Hwang.

They had, in the previous nine months, examined the Regional Center's offering documents, the bank records of the Regional Center and its principals, the construction-progress reports the Center had submitted to United States Citizenship and Immigration Services on the I-924A annual filings, the operating-agreement structures of the Crow Creek joint venture, the tribal-government records of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, and the construction-permit records of Buffalo County.

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They had, on the previous Friday, completed a satellite-imagery analysis of the eight-hundred-acre site that established, with reasonable certainty, that no significant construction had taken place on the site between 2018 and 2024.

They had not, until the third Monday of April 2025, set foot on the site.

They drove out from Pierre on the Tuesday morning.

It was approximately an hour and twenty minutes' drive on Highway 47 to the small reservation road that led to the site.

They arrived at the site at twenty-six minutes past ten in the morning.

On the eight-hundred-acre site, Ms Chen-Walker, Mr Anderson, and Ms Hwang found, on a small piece of cleared land near the western boundary of the parcel, a single completed structure.

The structure was a single-storey building of approximately one thousand four hundred square feet, of conventional concrete-block construction with a metal roof, with a small parking area for perhaps eight vehicles, with a small landscaped border of native prairie grasses, and with, above its single front door, a sign that read in Lakota and English:

WACHIPI ITAKO 'TI

CROW CREEK YOUTH CENTER

* * *

Ms Chen-Walker walked, with Mr Anderson and Ms Hwang, to the front door of the building.

The door was unlocked. The hour was, on the Tuesday morning of a school day, the time at which the building's schedule of activities, on a small printed schedule taped to the inside of the door, indicated that the building was hosting an early-childhood-development programme for children aged three to six.

Ms Chen-Walker, Mr Anderson, and Ms Hwang entered.

In the small main room of the building, on the morning of the Tuesday, were eleven small children seated on a brightly coloured rug, listening to a story being read by a young Lakota woman of perhaps twenty-eight in jeans and a Pendleton-pattern cardigan. The story was being read in Lakota and translated, after each paragraph, into English. The children, on the Tuesday morning, were variously listening, fidgeting, drawing on small pieces of paper, and — in the case of the smallest of them, a girl of perhaps three — sleeping with her head on the lap of an older child.

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The young Lakota woman, on the visitors' entry, looked up from the book.

“Ma’am.”

“Good morning. My name is Linda Chen-Walker. I am with the federal Securities and Exchange Commission. We are conducting an investigation into the South Dakota Tribal Lands Regional Center. We had not, on our previous information, expected to find this building on this site.”

The young Lakota woman, who introduced herself as Miss Sarah Tail-Feather of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe Youth Services Department, gave the Division attorneys a brief tour of the building.

The building consisted, beyond the main story-time room, of a small kitchen, two small offices, a small bathroom, and a small storage room in which were kept the children's art supplies, the small mats on which the children took their afternoon naps, and a small library of books in Lakota and English.

The building was used, on Miss Tail-Feather's account, by the Crow Creek Youth Services Department for early-childhood programmes during the day on weekdays, for after-school tutoring for elementary-school children in the afternoons, and for adolescent programming on Saturday afternoons. The building had been constructed in 2019. It had been constructed by a small contractor

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based in Chamberlain, on a budget of approximately two hundred and eighty-three thousand dollars, which had been paid for, on the building's funding records, by a single direct grant from the South Dakota Tribal Lands Regional Center to the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe Youth Services Department.

The grant, on the Regional Center's books that Ms Hwang had examined in the previous nine months, was the only outflow from the Regional Center's investor capital that had reached the Crow Creek Reservation in any form. The remainder of the one hundred and forty-three million dollars had, on Ms Hwang's tracing, been disbursed in the form of consultancy fees, project-management retainers, marketing reimbursements, and what the Regional Center's accountants had categorised as 'predevelopment expenses' to a network of seven Delaware-registered LLCs, all of which were ultimately controlled by the Regional Center's principal, a Mr Andrew Hutchinson of Sioux Falls.

Two hundred and eighty-three thousand dollars, on the one-hundred-and-forty-three-million-dollar offering, was zero point two per cent.

Of the one hundred and forty-three million dollars Mr Hutchinson had raised from two hundred and eighty-six Chinese investors for the casino-and-conference complex, two hundred and eighty-three

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thousand had become a single small youth centre on a small piece of cleared land at the western boundary of the parcel.

Miss Tail-Feather, on the conclusion of the brief tour, asked the Division attorneys whether they would like to remain for the small mid-morning snack the children would have at eleven.

Ms Chen-Walker, on the small reckoning that all good Division enforcement attorneys eventually make in the course of investigations of this kind, accepted.

* * *

On the small mid-morning snack, which consisted of small pieces of fruit and small cups of milk and small pieces of fry-bread that Miss Tail-Feather and an assistant had prepared in the small kitchen, the eleven children were seated on the small wooden chairs at the four small low tables in the main room.

Ms Chen-Walker sat at one of the tables, between a small girl of perhaps four named Aiyanna and a small boy of perhaps five named Tatanka.

Aiyanna asked her, in the soft Lakota-inflected English of small children at the Crow Creek Reservation, whether her bracelet was a real bracelet or a play bracelet.

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Ms Chen-Walker said it was, in her own working life, a real bracelet, but on the morning at the youth centre it could be a play bracelet if Aiyanna preferred.

Aiyanna preferred.

They played with the bracelet for some moments.

Tatanka, on the other side, asked Ms Chen-Walker whether she was a teacher.

Ms Chen-Walker said she was not a teacher. She was a person who, on her work, looked at the things adults did with money. Some of the adults, on her work, did things with money that they had said they would do. Some did things with money that they had said they would not do. Her work was to find out which kind of thing the adults had done.

Tatanka thought about this for a moment.

Tatanka said: 'Were they bad adults.'

Ms Chen-Walker thought about this for a moment.

She said: 'Some of them, Tatanka, were not good adults.'

'Are you here today because some of them were not good adults.'

'Yes, Tatanka. I am.'

'Will you tell them they were not good adults.'

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Ms Chen-Walker, on the small wooden chair at the small low table in the main room of the Crow Creek Youth Center on the Tuesday morning of the third week of April 2025, looked at the small boy of five for a long moment.

‘Yes, Tatanka. I will tell them.’

‘Will they listen.’

Ms Chen-Walker thought about this for a longer moment.

‘Tatanka, the part of my work where I tell the adults that they were not good adults is a part where the adults do not, on most days, listen. The part of my work where I make sure the adults’ money cannot be taken to do bad things any more — the part where I close the things they were doing — is the part where the adults do not get to choose whether to listen or not. That part happens whether the adults listen or not.’

Tatanka thought about this for some moments.

‘Will the things the adults were doing be closed.’

‘Yes, Tatanka. They will be closed.’

‘Will the youth center be closed.’

Ms Chen-Walker looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph on the wall behind the small wooden table that showed

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the children of the youth centre at a Lakota-language story time at Christmas 2024.

‘No, Tatanka. The youth center will not be closed.’

‘Are you sure.’

Ms Chen-Walker did not reply for a moment.

‘Yes, Tatanka. I am sure.’

* * *

Mr Brett Anderson and Ms Patricia Hwang, on the conclusion of the small mid-morning snack, walked back with Ms Chen-Walker to the rented car parked on the small dusty lot in front of the youth centre.

Mr Anderson, on the way to the car, said: “Linda.”

“Yes, Brett.”

“Linda, the youth center is on the offering documents listed as part of the Regional Center project. The two hundred and eighty-three thousand dollars that built it is, on the Division’s reckoning, money that on the offering documents was investor capital represented to the investors as part of the casino-and-conference complex. The youth center, on a strict reading of the EB-5 statutes, is constructed with funds that were raised on a fraudulent offering. On the standard remedy in cases of this kind, the youth center is part of the assets that

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the Division will, on the freeze and the disgorgement order, seek to recover.”

“Yes, Brett.”

“Linda, the recovery would, on the standard mechanism, return the value of the youth center to the receiver established for the disgorgement, who would in due course distribute it on a pro-rata basis to the two hundred and eighty-six Chinese investors. The youth center as a physical building — the small one-thousand-four-hundred-square-foot building on the eight-hundred-acre site — would, on the receiver’s standard practice, either be sold for its land and structure value or transferred at a small price to the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe.”

“Yes, Brett.”

“Linda, the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe Youth Services Department, on the bank records, does not have a budget item that would permit them to purchase the youth center from the receiver at any price.”

“Yes, Brett.”

“Linda, you told the small boy at the snack table that the youth center would not be closed.”

Ms Chen-Walker stopped, in the small dusty lot, on the way to the car.

She said: “Brett.”

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“Yes, Linda.”

“Brett, the small boy is five years old. The boy comes to the youth center at nine in the morning every weekday. The boy’s mother, on Miss Tail-Feather’s account, is a healthcare worker at the Indian Health Service clinic in Pierre, who works the early-morning shift at the clinic and depends on the youth center’s nine-to-three schedule for the boy’s daytime care during her working hours. The boy, on his five-year-old understanding of how questions of money work, asked me whether the youth center would be closed.”

“Yes, Linda.”

“Brett, the standard mechanism of the disgorgement, on its operational practice, would close the youth center.”

“Yes, Linda.”

“Brett, the Chinese investors who lost the one hundred and forty-three million dollars on Mr Hutchinson’s offering will not, on the standard mechanism, recover any meaningful proportion of their investment regardless of whether the youth center is included in the recoverable assets. The Division’s asset-tracing on Mr Hutchinson’s seven Delaware LLCs, on Pat’s spreadsheets, identifies recoverable assets of approximately fourteen million dollars. The total losses to the investors are one hundred and forty-three million. The standard pro-

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rata distribution will return approximately ten cents on the dollar to the investors regardless of whether the youth center is included.”

“Yes, Linda. The recovery is the recovery.”

“Brett, the inclusion of the youth center in the recoverable assets adds, on the youth center’s land-and-structure value of perhaps three hundred and twenty thousand dollars, approximately one cent on the dollar to the recovery. The exclusion of the youth center reduces the recovery by the same one cent.”

“Yes, Linda.”

“Brett, the choice on the youth center is between a one-cent improvement in the pro-rata recovery to the Chinese investors and the closure of a small early-childhood programme that serves eleven children of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe.”

“Yes, Linda.”

“Brett, the choice is, on the small reckoning, the choice.”

* * *

Ms Hwang said: “Linda.”

“Yes, Pat.”

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“Linda, the Division’s standard practice in EB-5 enforcement actions is to include all identifiable assets in the receivership for the disgorgement.”

“Yes, Pat.”

“The small operational discretion to exclude an asset from the receivership requires, on the Division’s practice, a memorandum to the Director of Enforcement justifying the exclusion on equitable or public-interest grounds. The Director’s practice on such memoranda has, in the past five years, on my own observation, been to grant approximately one in five.”

“Yes, Pat.”

“The memorandum on this case, on the standard format, would identify the youth center, identify the eleven children currently served, identify the operational dependence of those children’s families on the youth center’s daytime schedule, identify the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe’s inability to acquire the youth center from the receiver at any price, and identify the marginal nature of the recovery improvement to the Chinese investors.”

“Yes, Pat.”

“Linda, the memorandum would identify, in addition, the inconvenient fact that the youth center is, on the offering documents, the only thing on the eight-hundred-acre site that, on the funds the

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investors paid in, was actually constructed. The memorandum would have to address, on the Director's likely review, the question of whether the public-interest exclusion of the only legitimate use of investor funds from the disgorgement is the right way to handle a fraud in which, by inadvertent operational accident, a single small two-hundred-and-eighty-three-thousand-dollar grant produced the only honest output of an entire one-hundred-and-forty-three-million-dollar offering."

"Yes, Pat."

"Linda, the Director may, on that question, take the view that the memorandum is a memorandum that the Division should not, on its policy on equitable exclusions, grant."

"Yes, Pat."

"Linda, the answer to the small boy at the snack table may not, on the operational facts, be an answer the Division's receivership practice will permit you to keep."

Ms Chen-Walker stood in the small dusty lot in front of the Crow Creek Youth Center for a long moment.

Then she said:

"Pat. Brett. The memorandum will be filed. The exclusion will be requested. If the Director declines to grant it, the youth center will be

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included in the receivership and the answer to the small boy will, on the operational outcome, have been the wrong answer. The wrong answer will be the consequence of an enforcement action that, on the small reckoning, is the right enforcement action against Mr Hutchinson and his seven Delaware LLCs.”

“Yes, Linda.”

“Pat, on the memorandum, what is the probability that the Director grants the exclusion.”

Ms Hwang thought about this for a moment.

“Linda, on the Director’s previous practice and on the unusual public-interest profile of this case — the inadvertent-honest-output framing, the eleven children, the marginal recovery improvement — the probability is, on my best estimate, approximately fifty-five per cent.”

“Fifty-five per cent.”

“Yes, Linda.”

“Pat. Brett. We are returning to Pierre. We will draft the memorandum on the flight back to Denver tomorrow morning.”

* * *

Ms Linda Chen-Walker filed the equitable-exclusion memorandum to the Director of Enforcement of the Securities and Exchange

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Commission on the second Wednesday of May 2025, after a process of internal review at the Denver Regional Office and at the Division's national headquarters in Washington.

The memorandum, on its final form, was twenty-three pages and was accompanied by a fourteen-photograph annex of the Crow Creek Youth Center, the eleven children who attended the early-childhood programme on the morning of the third Tuesday of April 2025, and the small framed Christmas-2024 photograph that hung on the wall behind the small wooden table at which Aiyanna and Tatanka had on the Tuesday morning had their fruit and milk and fry-bread.

The Director of Enforcement, a Mr Robert Yamamoto of forty-one years' service at the Commission, reviewed the memorandum on the third Friday of May 2025.

He approved the equitable exclusion.

The South Dakota Tribal Lands Regional Center was placed in receivership in June of 2025. The receiver was instructed, on the Director's order, to exclude the Crow Creek Youth Center building and the small parcel of land it occupied from the recoverable assets, on grounds set out in the memorandum.

The fourteen million dollars of recoverable assets were distributed, on a pro-rata basis, to the two hundred and eighty-six Chinese

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investors in the autumn of 2026. The investors received approximately ten cents on the dollar.

Mr Andrew Hutchinson of Sioux Falls was indicted on twenty-three counts of securities fraud in September 2025. He was tried at the United States District Court for the District of South Dakota in March 2026 and was convicted on all twenty-three counts. He was sentenced in June 2026 to fourteen years' imprisonment and was ordered to pay personal disgorgement of forty-seven million dollars, the great majority of which was, on his pre-indictment dissipation of the funds through the seven Delaware LLCs, not in practice recoverable.

The Crow Creek Youth Center continued in operation.

Tatanka, who had on the third Tuesday of April 2025 been five years old, completed his early-childhood programme at the centre in 2026 and proceeded to kindergarten at the Crow Creek Tribal School in the autumn of that year.

Aiyanna, who had on the same Tuesday been four, completed her programme in 2027.

Miss Sarah Tail-Feather of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe Youth Services Department, who had read the Lakota-language story on the morning of the third Tuesday of April 2025, was promoted in 2028 to the position of Director of the Tribe's Early Childhood Programmes.

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Ms Linda Chen-Walker continued at the Securities and Exchange Commission until her promotion in 2030 to Associate Director for Enforcement at the national headquarters in Washington.

She did not, in any subsequent enforcement action she conducted, encounter another case in which a single small inadvertent legitimate output of an otherwise fraudulent offering raised, on the operational facts, the question of whether the public-interest discretion to preserve that output should be exercised.

She did, on the small reckoning that she made over the long evenings on the small balcony of her flat in Foggy Bottom, come to think that the most important thing she had learned in fifteen years of enforcement work was that the architectures of securities fraud were always larger than the cases the Division prosecuted, but that the cases sometimes contained, on a closer reading of the operational facts, small inadvertent legitimate outputs that the Division's standard receivership mechanism would, on its practice, destroy. The standard mechanism was the standard mechanism. The destruction was, on the standard mechanism's normal operation, an unavoidable cost. The discretion to exclude, on equitable grounds, was a discretion the Division had developed precisely so that the cost would not, in cases of this kind, be paid by parties who had not, on any reading, participated in the fraud.

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She did, on the small private reckoning, come to keep on the small bookshelf in her flat in Foggy Bottom a small framed photograph that the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe Youth Services Department had, on the second Friday of December 2025, sent her.

The photograph showed the eleven children who had been at the Crow Creek Youth Center on the morning of the third Tuesday of April 2025, on a Christmas-2025 group photograph in the same small main room, with Tatanka, then six, in the front row, holding a small wooden bracelet that Ms Chen-Walker had on her departure from the youth centre at twenty-six minutes past eleven on the Tuesday morning given to Aiyanna, and that Aiyanna had — in the spirit of small Lakota girls who knew the value of a bracelet and the proper distribution of bracelets among siblings of equal small wooden value — in due course given to her cousin Tatanka.

— *END* —

The Adjustment

A Short Story

Mrs Eleanor Russo-Calabrese of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services Field Office at Queens, New York, was forty-nine.

She had been born in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, to a third-generation Italian-American family, had read history at Hunter College, had completed a master's in public administration at New York University, and had since 2003 worked at the Citizenship and Immigration Services in various capacities, latterly as a senior immigration officer on the marriage-based-adjustment caseload at the Queens Field Office.

She had, in twenty-two years at the Service, conducted approximately three thousand seven hundred Stokes interviews — the second-stage, separated-spouses interviews mandated by the Service's 1975 settlement in *Stokes v. INS* for marriage-based adjustment cases in which the original joint interview had not, on the interviewing officer's assessment, established the bona fides of the marriage to the satisfaction of the Service.

On the third Tuesday of September 2025, at fifteen minutes past nine in the morning, she was conducting her sixth Stokes interview of that month.

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The petitioning spouse was a Mr Gerardo Sánchez-Torres, a thirty-one-year-old American citizen by birth, originally from the Dominican Republic in his family origins but raised in the South Bronx since the age of three, who worked as a maintenance technician at the Bronx Lebanon Hospital.

The beneficiary spouse was Ms María Rivas-Beltrán, a twenty-eight-year-old Salvadoran national who had entered the United States in 2019 on a tourist visa, had overstayed, and had on her marriage to Mr Sánchez-Torres in the spring of 2024 filed for adjustment of status under the standard marriage-based provisions.

They had been married for eighteen months.

Their original joint interview had been conducted at the Queens Field Office on the second Wednesday of June 2025 by another senior immigration officer, a Mr David Henley, who had on the conclusion of the joint interview formed a view that the marriage was, on a number of inconsistencies in the couple's separate accounts of their daily routines, not unequivocally bona fide.

Mr Henley had referred the case for the Stokes second-stage interview, which Mrs Russo-Calabrese had been assigned on the routine rotation.

* * *

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In the standard Stokes procedure, the spouses were interviewed separately.

Mr Sánchez-Torres was interviewed in the small interview room at nine fifteen. The interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes. Mrs Russo-Calabrese asked the standard sequence of seventy-three questions on the routines, finances, family relationships, household arrangements, and shared history of the marriage.

Mr Sánchez-Torres answered each question.

Ms Rivas-Beltrán was interviewed in the same room at ten thirty, after Mr Sánchez-Torres had been escorted to the waiting area on the other side of the office. The interview lasted approximately forty-eight minutes. Mrs Russo-Calabrese asked the same seventy-three questions.

Ms Rivas-Beltrán answered each question.

On the comparison of the two sets of answers, conducted by Mrs Russo-Calabrese in her own office at twelve minutes past noon, the two accounts were consistent on sixty-six of the seventy-three questions.

They were inconsistent on seven.

Of the seven inconsistencies, four were on matters of trivial detail — the colour of a small object in the kitchen, the precise time of a recent doctor's appointment, the brand of a cleaning product. Three

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were on matters of operational substance: the question of who, on the household's monthly budget, paid the electric bill; the question of whether the couple, in the past three months, had taken any overnight trip together; and the question of how the couple had met.

On the question of the electric bill, Mr Sánchez-Torres had said that his wife paid it, on her job as a part-time nanny for a family in Riverdale. Ms Rivas-Beltrán had said that her husband paid it, from his maintenance-technician salary at the hospital.

On the question of the overnight trip, Mr Sánchez-Torres had said the couple had not, in the past three months, taken any overnight trip. Ms Rivas-Beltrán had said the couple had, in the second weekend of August, gone to a small motel in the Catskills for two nights.

On the question of how the couple had met, Mr Sánchez-Torres had said they had met at a house party at his cousin's apartment in the South Bronx in the autumn of 2023. Ms Rivas-Beltrán had said they had met at a religious retreat conducted by her parish priest at a small camp in upstate New York in the same autumn.

Mrs Russo-Calabrese sat at her desk for some time.

On the seventy-three-question Stokes protocol that the Service had developed since the 1975 settlement, the standard threshold for a positive bona-fide finding was approximately ninety-five per cent consistency. Sixty-six out of seventy-three was approximately ninety

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per cent. The three substantive inconsistencies, on the standard protocol's weighting, would on a strict reading produce a denial of the adjustment with a notice of intent to deny the I-130 underlying petition, which would in due course produce removal proceedings against Ms Rivas-Beltrán.

Mrs Russo-Calabrese, on twenty-two years' experience, had on her own private reckoning seen, in the three thousand seven hundred Stokes interviews of her career, a small minority of cases — perhaps four hundred — in which the consistency proportion had been ninety per cent and the bona fides of the marriage had nevertheless, on her own subsequent assessment, been genuine. The proportion of those four hundred cases in which she had, on the strict protocol, denied the adjustment was approximately three hundred and fifty. The proportion in which she had, on her own discretionary judgement, granted it despite the protocol was approximately fifty.

She had, in those fifty cases, recorded the discretionary basis for the grant in the standard memorandum to the file.

None of the fifty discretionary grants had, on subsequent review by the Service's internal-audit office, been overturned.

All fifty of the marriages had, on the routine ten-year follow-up the Service conducted on the discretionary-grant cases, remained intact.

* * *

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Mrs Russo-Calabrese, on the third Tuesday of September 2025 at twelve minutes past noon, walked from her own office to the small staff break room on the fourth floor of the Queens Field Office building.

She made herself a small cup of black coffee.

She took the coffee back to her office.

She did not, for the next forty minutes, open the file on Mr Sánchez-Torres and Ms Rivas-Beltrán.

She thought, instead, about the three substantive inconsistencies.

On the first — the electric bill — the inconsistency was, on her experience, the kind of inconsistency that arose in marriages of eighteen months' standing in which the household budget had been negotiated and renegotiated over the course of the marriage and in which neither spouse had, on the morning of the Stokes interview, been certain which of them was, in the current month, on the rotation that paid the electric bill. The inconsistency was not, on her experience, an indicator of fraud.

On the second — the overnight trip — the inconsistency was, on her experience, more interesting. Either the trip had taken place and Mr Sánchez-Torres had, for some reason of his own, denied it, or the trip had not taken place and Ms Rivas-Beltrán had, for some reason of her own, fabricated it. The first explanation was, on the small

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inventory of reasons that husbands occasionally denied trips that had taken place, plausible — the trip might have been a trip on which Mr Sánchez-Torres had, on his own subsequent reckoning, behaved in some manner he preferred not to enter into the federal record. The second explanation — the fabrication of the trip — was, on her experience, less plausible. Salvadoran beneficiary spouses on Stokes interviews did not, in her experience, fabricate overnight trips to the Catskills. The fabrications, when they occurred, were of more central matters.

On the third — how the couple had met — the inconsistency was the most interesting. The two accounts were not, on a strict reading, mutually exclusive. The couple could, on the operational facts, have met at the religious retreat in October 2023 and re-encountered each other at the cousin's house party in November or December of the same year, on which they would have, on the small social practice of New York couples whose acquaintance had developed over multiple settings, both characterised the meeting as the meeting at the house party. Or they could have met at the house party in November and subsequently attended the retreat together in October of the following year, in which case Mr Sánchez-Torres's account was the operational fact and Ms Rivas-Beltrán's account was the subsequent encounter. The inconsistency was the inconsistency of two spouses who had, on the eighteen-month course of their marriage, told the story of their meeting to many separate audiences and who had, on the small

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narrative habits that married couples developed, each settled on a slightly different shorthand version that they had, on the morning of the Stokes interview, each independently delivered without consulting the other.

None of the three inconsistencies, on Mrs Russo-Calabrese's assessment, was an indicator of marriage fraud.

They were, on her assessment, the inconsistencies of an eighteen-month-old marriage between a thirty-one-year-old maintenance technician and a twenty-eight-year-old part-time nanny who had, on the operational reality, been making it work.

The standard protocol, however, did not provide for her assessment. The standard protocol provided for the seventy-three-question consistency proportion. On the proportion, the case was a denial.

* * *

Mrs Russo-Calabrese sat at her desk for some further time.

She thought about her grandmother.

Her grandmother, Mrs Concetta Calabrese-Maglione, had been born in Cosenza, Calabria, in 1928. She had married Mr Vincenzo Calabrese in Cosenza in 1949, a man twelve years her senior who had emigrated to New York in 1947 on a Displaced Persons Act admission

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and who had, on his admission, established a small grocery in Bensonhurst. Concetta had emigrated to New York in 1951 on Vincenzo's petition for admission of his Italian wife, on a process that had required, in addition to the standard documentary review, an in-person interview at the United States Consulate in Naples in May of 1951 at which the consular officer had asked Concetta the questions then prescribed by the State Department's 1948 internal guidance on the assessment of fiancée and spouse-of-citizen petitions.

The questions, on the 1948 guidance, were a precursor to the seventy-three-question Stokes protocol the Service had developed in 1975.

They had, on the 1948 guidance, addressed the same matters: the household routines, the finances, the family relationships, the meeting of the couple, the shared history of the marriage.

Concetta, on her own subsequent recollection that she had told to her granddaughter Eleanor on many quiet afternoons in the Bensonhurst kitchen during the 1980s, had answered the questions on her interview in May 1951.

She had not, on her own honest accounting that she had given to Eleanor when Eleanor was perhaps nine, answered them all consistently with the answers her husband Vincenzo had, on his own corresponding interview at the Service's New York office in February 1951, given.

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On the question of how the couple had met, Vincenzo had told the New York interviewing officer that they had met at a wedding in the village of Cariati in the spring of 1948. Concetta had told the Naples consular officer that they had met at the funeral of Vincenzo's aunt in the village of Rossano in the autumn of 1947.

The two accounts were not mutually exclusive — they could, on the small social fact of small Calabrian villages whose families intermarried, have met at both the funeral and the wedding — but they were inconsistent in the simple sense that each spouse had, on the standard interviewing-officer's opening question of how the couple had met, named a different occasion.

On the question of household finances in their planned American household, Vincenzo had told the New York interviewing officer that he intended that he, on his grocery, would be the family's sole earner. Concetta had told the Naples consular officer that she intended, on her arrival in New York, to take in piecework sewing for the small Italian textile firms of the Lower East Side.

The two accounts were, on the strict reading of the 1948 guidance, not consistent.

The Naples consular officer, a Mr Robert Sutherland of seventeen years' service at the State Department, had on his discretion granted Concetta the immigration visa.

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He had recorded, in the small handwritten note in the consular file that Eleanor had, in 2014 on a personal-history research project for her grandmother's eighty-sixth birthday, obtained from the National Archives in College Park under the Freedom of Information Act, the following observation:

‘Subject is a young woman of evident character, whose answers on the meeting question and the household-finances question are inconsistent with the husband’s, but whose evident character on the interview suggests that the inconsistencies are inconsistencies of two reasonable persons whose recollections of village social occasions in southern Calabria during the early postwar years and whose plans for an American household have been, on the natural operations of married life, not perfectly aligned. The visa is granted on the consular officer’s discretion, with the supporting note that the inconsistencies appear, on the operational facts, not to indicate a non-bona-fide marriage but rather a bona-fide marriage of two persons whose perspectives on its founding events and its planned future have not, on this Wednesday morning in Naples, identically synchronised. R.S., Naples, 7 May 1951.’

Concetta had emigrated to New York in June of 1951.

She had been Vincenzo’s wife for forty-seven years until his death in 1998.

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She had, in addition to her husband's grocery, taken in piecework sewing for the Lower East Side firms for approximately three years before being asked, on Vincenzo's request, to stop in 1954 when their second child was born.

She had, on her own retrospective recollection in the Bensonhurst kitchen in the 1980s, retained for the rest of her life a small private gratitude to the consular officer Mr Robert Sutherland of Naples, whose discretion in May 1951 had been the small operational reckoning that had given her her American life.

* * *

Mrs Eleanor Russo-Calabrese, on the third Tuesday of September 2025 at fourteen minutes past one, opened the file on Mr Gerardo Sánchez-Torres and Ms María Rivas-Beltrán.

She wrote, in the small careful hand of senior immigration officers, the following determination.

‘On the seventy-three-question Stokes protocol conducted on this date, the consistency proportion is sixty-six of seventy-three, or ninety point four per cent, which is below the standard ninety-five per cent threshold for a positive bona-fide finding. Of the seven inconsistencies, four are on matters of trivial detail and three on matters of operational substance: the household payment of the

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electric bill, the question of an overnight trip in the second weekend of August 2025, and the meeting of the couple in the autumn of 2023.’

‘On the discretionary review provided by the standard protocol for cases on the threshold, the interviewing officer assesses each of the three substantive inconsistencies as follows. The electric-bill inconsistency is consistent with the household budget being on a rotation between the spouses that neither spouse, on the morning of the interview, had clearly recollected. The overnight-trip inconsistency is consistent with one spouse’s account being a non-disclosure of an event that had taken place and that the spouse preferred not to enter into the federal record, on grounds that on the small reckoning of the interviewing officer’s twenty-two years of experience are not indicators of marriage fraud. The meeting inconsistency is consistent with the couple having encountered each other on multiple occasions in the autumn of 2023 and having, on the eighteen-month course of their marriage, settled on slightly different shorthand accounts of the meeting that they each independently delivered without consulting each other on the morning of the Stokes interview.’

‘On the discretionary judgement of the interviewing officer, the inconsistencies are, on the operational facts of the marriage, not indicators of fraud. The marriage is assessed as bona fide. The adjustment of status of Ms María Rivas-Beltrán is approved.’

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“The interviewing officer notes, on the discretionary basis for the determination, that her own grandmother received an immigration visa in May 1951 from a consular officer in Naples on a discretionary judgement of substantively similar character regarding inconsistencies of substantively similar order, and that the marriage on which that 1951 discretionary judgement was made remained intact for the forty-seven years between the visa’s issuance and the spouse’s death in 1998. The 1951 consular officer’s file note, recovered in 2014 on a Freedom of Information Act request, is appended to this determination as a contemporary historical record of the kind of reckoning the discretion provides for. E.R-C., Queens, 16 September 2025.”

Mrs Russo-Calabrese signed the determination at thirty-eight minutes past one.

She submitted it to her supervisory officer, a Mr James Whittaker, at six minutes past two.

* * *

Mr James Whittaker reviewed the determination at twenty-three minutes past three on the Tuesday afternoon.

He read it twice.

Then he walked to Mrs Russo-Calabrese’s office.

“Eleanor.”

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“James.”

“Eleanor, the determination on Sánchez-Torres and Rivas-Beltrán.”

“Yes, James.”

“Eleanor, the appendix.”

“Yes, James.”

“Eleanor, the appendix is the consular file note from your grandmother’s 1951 visa interview at the United States Consulate in Naples.”

“Yes, James.”

“Eleanor, the inclusion of the appendix is, on a strict reading of the Service’s discretionary-determination protocols, a personal disclosure that does not, on the standard format, belong in a discretionary determination.”

“Yes, James.”

“Eleanor, why is the appendix in the determination.”

Mrs Russo-Calabrese looked at her supervisor across her desk.

“James. The discretionary determination on this case is the determination that, on the operational facts I have set out, the inconsistencies do not indicate fraud and the marriage is bona fide.

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The discretionary judgement is the judgement of the interviewing officer. The judgement is, on the Service's twenty-two years of practice, the judgement that produces approximately fifty discretionary grants per officer per career."

"Yes, Eleanor."

"James, the appendix is in the determination because, on a strict reading, the discretionary judgement that I have made on this Tuesday afternoon is the judgement that Mr Robert Sutherland of the Naples Consulate made on Wednesday the seventh of May 1951 on my grandmother's interview. The substantive inconsistencies in the 1951 interview were the same kind of inconsistencies. The discretionary basis for the grant was the same kind of basis. The forty-seven-year marriage that followed the 1951 grant is, on a strict reading, the kind of operational outcome that the discretionary grants the Service makes are intended to produce."

"Eleanor."

"James."

"You are saying that the inclusion of the appendix is a disclosure that the discretionary judgement you made today is, on the family record, the same judgement that was made on your grandmother in 1951."

"Yes, James."

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“You are saying, by the inclusion, that the discretionary judgement is not a private operational reckoning of the interviewing officer that the Service’s protocols permit but rather a personal continuation, by the granddaughter, of the discretion that the consular officer of the State Department made on the grandmother seventy-four years ago.”

“James, I am saying that on the small reckoning that I have made over the past two hours, the operational discretion the Service authorises me to exercise is not, in this case or in any of the fifty cases I have over twenty-two years exercised it on, separable from the operational discretion that was, in 1951, exercised on me. The discretion is, on the longer accounting that families and immigration services accumulate across generations, a continuous instrument. It is exercised by individual officers on individual cases, but it is, on the longer accounting, an instrument that operates on whole family lines.”

“Eleanor.”

“James.”

“You are saying that your discretion in approving Ms Rivas-Beltrán’s adjustment today is, on the longer accounting, a discretion that Mr Robert Sutherland of Naples in 1951 made possible.”

“Yes, James. I am saying that.”

Mr Whittaker stood in Mrs Russo-Calabrese’s small office for a long moment.

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“Eleanor.”

“Yes, James.”

“Eleanor, the inclusion of the appendix is, on the standard protocols, a disclosure of the kind that some supervisory officers would, on receipt, recommend that the determination be returned for redrafting without the personal disclosure.”

“Yes, James.”

“Eleanor, I am not, on the supervisory review I am conducting this afternoon, recommending that.”

“James.”

“Eleanor, the determination is approved with the appendix included. The Sánchez-Torres and Rivas-Beltrán adjustment is granted.”

“James.”

“Yes, Eleanor.”

“Why.”

Mr Whittaker looked at Mrs Russo-Calabrese for a long moment.

“Eleanor, my own father came to the United States from Donegal in 1928 on the standard immigration provisions for the time. He did not, in 1928, marry an American citizen, so the question of a marriage-

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bona-fide interview did not arise for him. He did, however, on his own subsequent recollection of his entry interview at Ellis Island, encounter an interviewing officer who, on a small documentary irregularity in his Irish baptismal certificate, exercised a small operational discretion in his favour and approved the entry. The irregularity was minor. The discretion was small. The forty-seven years my father subsequently lived in the United States, on the operational fact that the entry was approved on the Tuesday morning of the eleventh of September 1928, were the years that produced, in due course, my mother and me and the seventeen years of my own service at this office.”

“James.”

“Yes, Eleanor.”

“Your father’s 1928 interviewing officer.”

“Is, on the standard records the National Archives maintain on Ellis Island processing officers, on the public record. His name was Mr Frederick Holcombe of Buffalo, New York. He served at Ellis Island from 1924 to 1934.”

“James.”

“Yes, Eleanor.”

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“Have you, in seventeen years at this office, on any case, included in a discretionary determination an appendix referencing your father’s 1928 entry by Mr Frederick Holcombe of Buffalo.”

Mr Whittaker did not reply for a moment.

“No, Eleanor. I have not.”

“Why not, James.”

“Eleanor, on the standard protocols, the appendix is the kind of disclosure that supervisory officers would, on receipt, recommend be removed.”

“Yes, James.”

“However, Eleanor, on this Tuesday afternoon’s review of your determination, on the small reckoning that I have made on the discretion the appendix represents, I am not recommending that yours be removed. I am not recommending it because the appendix in your determination is, on a closer reading than the standard protocols accommodate, the right thing in the determination. The discretion is the discretion. The longer accounting on which the discretion operates is, on the inclusion of the appendix, the longer accounting that the determination preserves.”

“James.”

“Yes, Eleanor.”

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“In future cases on which I exercise the discretion. Should the appendix be included.”

Mr Whittaker thought about this for a moment.

“Eleanor, on the operational practice, no. The inclusion of the appendix is, on the small reckoning, the kind of disclosure that on its first inclusion makes the longer accounting visible and that on its repeated inclusion would become a small private institutional practice that the Service’s protocols would in due course require the Service to address. The first inclusion is the inclusion that records the longer accounting. The subsequent grants, on the discretion, can return to the standard format.”

“James.”

“Yes, Eleanor.”

“Thank you.”

* * *

Mr Gerardo Sánchez-Torres and Ms María Rivas-Beltrán received the approval of Ms Rivas-Beltrán’s adjustment of status on the second Friday of October 2025.

They were not, on the standard procedure, informed of the discretionary nature of the determination or of the appendix that had been included in it.

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They received only the standard approval letter, which indicated that Ms Rivas-Beltrán had been granted lawful permanent resident status with conditions, that the conditions would be removed on the routine I-751 filing two years from the date of approval, and that the couple should retain the approval letter for their permanent records.

Mr Sánchez-Torres, on his receipt of the letter at the small mailbox of their apartment in the South Bronx, opened the envelope at the kitchen table on the Friday evening with his wife present.

Ms Rivas-Beltrán, on the reading of the letter, sat at the kitchen table and cried for a small moment.

Mr Sánchez-Torres put a hand on her shoulder.

“María.”

“Gerardo.”

“María, the lady at the second interview — the second one, where they asked us about the electric bill and the trip to the Catskills.”

“Yes, Gerardo.”

“María, I had not told you about the trip in August. I had said no on the question, because the trip — the trip was the weekend that I had taken you, on a small surprise, after the long six months of waiting for the first interview. I had not wanted, on the second interview, to enter the small surprise into the federal record. I had on the small

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reckoning of the interview said no. You had, on the actual fact of the trip having taken place, said yes.”

“Gerardo.”

“Yes, María.”

“Gerardo, I had not, on the second interview, known you had said no. I had said yes because the trip was the trip and the question was the question.”

“Yes, María.”

“Gerardo, the inconsistency on the trip was the inconsistency.”

“Yes, María.”

“The lady, on the inconsistency, granted the adjustment.”

“Yes, María.”

“Gerardo, on the small reckoning of how the second interview went and on the inconsistency the lady decided to grant on, what kind of lady do you think she was.”

Mr Gerardo Sánchez-Torres looked at his wife across the small kitchen table for a long moment.

“María, on the small reckoning, I do not know. The lady was the lady at the desk. She asked the questions. She wrote things down. We did not see what she wrote down. The letter has come.”

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“Yes, Gerardo.”

“María, on the small private reckoning of the operations of how the federal authority makes its decisions on small marriages of small couples in the South Bronx, the lady at the desk is, on whatever discretion she exercises, the lady. The discretion is exercised on cases like ours every day. The discretion sometimes comes back as a yes and sometimes comes back as a no. The yes that has come on this Friday evening is the yes. We do not, on the small reckoning, know who the lady was. We do not need to.”

“Gerardo.”

“Yes, María.”

“Gerardo, somewhere in this country there is a lady at a desk who, on the small Tuesday afternoon when our case was on her file, made the small reckoning that became this letter. The lady, on whatever family or whatever life or whatever small accounting of her own she carries, made the reckoning. The reckoning is the reckoning. We do not know her. We will not, on the small operational practice of the federal authority, ever meet her.”

“Yes, María.”

“Gerardo. May we, on the next Sunday at the small church on East Tremont Avenue, light a candle for the lady at the desk.”

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Mr Sánchez-Torres looked at his wife across the small kitchen table for a long moment.

“María, on the next Sunday at the small church on East Tremont Avenue, we will.”

* * *

Mrs Eleanor Russo-Calabrese continued at the Queens Field Office of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services until her retirement in 2034.

She conducted, in the years between September 2025 and her retirement, approximately seven hundred further Stokes interviews. She exercised the discretion the Service’s protocols permitted on approximately twelve cases. She did not, in any of the twelve subsequent discretionary determinations, include an appendix referencing her grandmother’s 1951 Naples interview.

She did, on the standard archival protocols, retain the appendix in the September 2025 file. The file was, on the Service’s ten-year follow-up audit on discretionary grants, reviewed in 2035. The marriage of Mr Gerardo Sánchez-Torres and Ms María Rivas-Beltrán was, on the audit, recorded as intact, with two children born in 2027 and 2030, and with Ms Rivas-Beltrán having on her ten-year resident anniversary qualified for naturalisation.

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Mrs Russo-Calabrese, on her retirement, was given a small framed photograph at the Queens Field Office's retirement luncheon, on which her colleagues had, on a small private reckoning that office colleagues sometimes made, written messages of farewell and gratitude. The photograph was of the Queens Field Office building on the morning of a recent first day of December, with the small flag at the entrance flying at half mast for the recent passing of a former Director of the Service.

She kept the photograph, in her retirement, on the small bookshelf in her flat in Forest Hills, beside the small framed photograph of her grandmother Concetta on the morning of her 1989 Bensonhurst gathering of the family, in which Concetta, then sixty-one, was holding her granddaughter Eleanor, then thirteen, in the small back garden of the Bensonhurst house.

She did, on the small reckoning that she made over the long evenings of her retirement years, come to think that the most important thing she had learned in twenty-two years at the Queens Field Office was that the discretion the Service's protocols permitted to its officers was, on the longer accounting, the same instrument that had been permitted to consular officers and Ellis Island processing officers and immigration officers across the entire history of the United States. The instrument was operated by the individual officer on the individual case. The longer accounting on which it operated, on

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the cases it accumulated across generations, was an accounting that the individual officer was on the morning of any individual case in no position to see. The accounting was, on its longer operation, the accounting that produced the families. The families were, on the longer reading, the country.

— END —

The Country Conditions

A Short Story

Professor Margaret Holloway-Krieger of the Yale University Department of Anthropology was sixty-three.

She had read social anthropology at Bryn Mawr in the 1980s, had completed her doctorate at the University of Chicago in 1992 on a dissertation entitled ‘Pentecostal Conversion and the Construction of Family Authority in Highland Eritrea, 1985–1991’, and had since 1995 held the Mellon Chair of African Studies at Yale, where she had over the course of three decades become the recognised North American authority on the small Pentecostal Christian communities of Eritrea and on the persecution they had endured under successive Eritrean governments since the country’s independence in 1993.

She had served, since 1998, as a country-conditions expert witness in approximately four hundred and ten asylum cases brought by Eritrean Pentecostal Christians before United States immigration courts. Her standard reports ran to thirty pages and addressed the doctrinal positions of the Eritrean Pentecostal communities, the historical record of the Eritrean state’s treatment of those communities since the May 2002 ban on unregistered religious bodies, and the operational mechanisms by which the state’s security apparatus had

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identified, detained, and — in a small minority of cases — caused the disappearance of Pentecostal pastors and lay leaders.

Her reports had, in the four hundred and ten cases, contributed to grants of asylum in three hundred and seventy-three. The remaining thirty-seven cases had, on grounds independent of her testimony, been denied.

On the third Tuesday of October 2025, she was retained as the country-conditions expert in the asylum case of Mr Tesfaye Ghebremariam-Yohannes, a forty-eight-year-old Eritrean Pentecostal pastor who had entered the United States in May 2025 on a visitor visa, had presented an asylum claim at the New Haven sub-office of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services in June, and had on a denial at the asylum-officer level been referred to the New Haven Immigration Court for adjudication before Immigration Judge Theodore Marshall.

Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes's asylum case turned, on the documentary record, on a single specific persecution event.

He had been detained, on his account, by the Eritrean state security apparatus on the third Friday of November 2018, at a small Pentecostal house church in the village of Adi Keyih, approximately forty kilometres south of Asmara. He had been held for thirteen months at the underground detention facility at Track B of the Wi'a military training centre. He had been released, on terms of close

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surveillance, in December 2019. He had on his release continued his pastoral activities clandestinely until the second week of May 2025, when he had on the assistance of a small network of co-religionists obtained the visitor visa to the United States and had departed Asmara on the Saturday morning before the visa's scheduled interview at the consulate.

The detention at Wi'a Track B was, on the documentary evidence Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes had provided, attested by three sources: a small handwritten note in his own hand listing the dates and the names of three other detainees; a photograph from December 2019 showing his release at a small checkpoint near Adi Keyih; and a small recorded testimony given by his wife Mrs Selamawit Ghebremariam-Tesfay, who had remained in Asmara, to a Geneva-based human rights monitoring organisation in February 2020.

The detention had been ordered, on Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes's own recollection, by a senior officer of the Eritrean state security apparatus whose name Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes had given, on the asylum interview at the New Haven sub-office in June 2025, as Colonel Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan.

* * *

Professor Holloway-Krieger received the case file from the New Haven Legal Services Corporation on the second Monday of October 2025.

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She read the file in the small study at the back of her house on Whitney Avenue.

She read it twice.

On the second reading, on the third page of the asylum interview transcript, on the section in which Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes had identified the senior officer who had ordered his detention, she read the name once.

Then she read it again.

Then she put down the file and walked, slowly, to the small bookshelf in the back corner of the study where she kept her own doctoral dissertation — the bound 1992 University of Chicago copy, which she had not, on her own subsequent reckoning, opened in approximately seventeen years — and the small box of fieldwork notebooks she had taken with her to Eritrea in 1990 and 1991.

She opened the box.

She removed the seventh of the eleven notebooks, which covered the period from the third week of February 1991 to the second week of May 1991, and which contained her fieldwork notes from her three months' residence in the village of Adi Keyih, where she had on her doctoral fieldwork lived in the household of a Pentecostal lay leader called Mr Asgedom Berhane-Tewolde and his wife Mrs Tsehay Asgedom-Mengistu and their three sons.

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She opened the notebook to the entry for the second Wednesday of March 1991.

The entry read, in her own twenty-eight-year-old handwriting:

‘Wednesday 13 March 1991. Asgedom’s eldest son Berhane, twelve, returned from Asmara today on a school holiday from the technical secondary school where the boy is studying. The boy is bright, polite, and — on Asgedom’s family’s small private reckoning — the family’s great hope. He has, in the past year at the secondary school, become very interested in the field of military engineering and has on his own initiative begun reading some elementary works on the subject. Asgedom is, on the small evening conversation we had after the boy’s arrival, somewhat anxious. The boy’s interest in the military, on Asgedom’s reading of the post-independence trajectory of the Eritrean state that the EPLF will on its imminent military victory establish, is the kind of interest that may in due course bring the boy into the operations of the new state’s military apparatus, in ways that Asgedom — as a Pentecostal lay leader of a small house church that has, since the 1985 doctrinal positions, been on uneasy footing with both the Ethiopian government and the EPLF’s political leadership — considers carry the risk of separation from the family’s Pentecostal tradition. Asgedom does not, on the evening conversation, indicate to the boy any reservation about his interest. He says only to me, on the small private moment after the boy has gone to bed, that he hopes the

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boy's interest will, on the natural development of adolescence, be a passing interest. The boy's name is Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan, on the family's standard naming convention.'

Professor Holloway-Krieger sat in the small study at the back of the house on Whitney Avenue for some time.

She read the entry once more.

She closed the notebook.

She replaced it in the box.

She returned to her desk.

She opened the case file on Mr Tesfaye Ghebremariam-Yohannes.

She read, again, the asylum interview transcript at the page on which Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes had identified the senior officer who had ordered his detention at Wi'a Track B in November 2018.

The name was Colonel Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan.

The Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan who had on the second Wednesday of March 1991 been a twelve-year-old boy on a school holiday from his Asmara technical secondary school, in the household of his father Mr Asgedom Berhane-Tewolde, the Pentecostal lay leader of the small house church at Adi Keyih, would in October 2025 be forty-six.

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The Colonel Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan who had in November 2018 ordered the detention of the Pentecostal pastor Mr Tesfaye Ghebremariam-Yohannes was, on the asylum interview transcript, identified as a senior officer of approximately the same age.

There was no living individual in the worldwide population of post-independence Eritrean state security officers, on Professor Holloway-Krieger's thirty years of country-conditions expertise, with the name Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan and approximately that age other than the small twelve-year-old boy of her March 1991 fieldwork notebook.

* * *

Professor Holloway-Krieger telephoned the New Haven Legal Services Corporation's lead attorney on the case, a Ms Rebecca Pearlman, at twenty-seven minutes past four on the second Monday of October 2025.

"Rebecca."

"Margaret."

"Rebecca, on the Ghebremariam-Yohannes file. I need to tell you something that has, on my second reading, complicated my role as the country-conditions expert."

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“Margaret, what is it.”

“Rebecca, the senior officer Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes has identified as the officer who ordered his detention at Wi’a Track B in November 2018 — Colonel Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan — is the person whom I, on my doctoral fieldwork in Adi Keyih in the spring of 1991, knew as a twelve-year-old boy in the household of his father, the Pentecostal lay leader Mr Asgedom Berhane-Tewolde, with whom I lived for three months. The boy, on his subsequent career trajectory, has — on a path that on my fieldwork notebook of the second Wednesday of March 1991 his father feared — entered the operations of the new state’s military and security apparatus and has, on the asylum interview transcript, in November 2018 ordered the detention of the Pentecostal pastor whose case I have been retained to support.”

Ms Pearlman did not reply for some time.

“Margaret.”

“Rebecca.”

“Margaret, the boy’s father.”

“Rebecca, the boy’s father Mr Asgedom Berhane-Tewolde was, on a small State Department human-rights cable I read in 2003, killed in a security-services raid on the Adi Keyih house church in February 2002, three months before the formal Eritrean state ban on unregistered religious bodies of May 2002. The raid was, on the cable’s reading and

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on my own subsequent reading of the period's human-rights documentation, one of the small pre-ban operations conducted on the targeted Pentecostal lay leadership of the highland villages.”

“Margaret.”

“Rebecca.”

“You are saying that the senior officer who in 2018 ordered the detention of our client is the son of the Pentecostal lay leader who was killed by the same security services in 2002.”

“Yes, Rebecca.”

“Margaret. The son, on the trajectory you read in your fieldwork notebook in 1991, became part of the apparatus that killed his own father in 2002.”

“Yes, Rebecca. On the State Department cable's identification of the operational unit that conducted the February 2002 raid, and on the standard career-trajectory of officers of the Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan rank in the unit, the operational identification is, on a high probability, that the son was at the time of the 2002 raid a junior officer in the unit that conducted it. Whether he was personally present at the raid I cannot, on the available evidence, establish.”

“Margaret.”

“Rebecca.”

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“On the country-conditions report you would file in support of our client’s asylum case.”

“Rebecca. The standard country-conditions report I would file in this case would address the documented record of Eritrean state persecution of Pentecostal communities since 2002, the operational practices of the Wi’a Track B detention facility, and the credibility of Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes’s account of his thirteen-month detention. The standard report would not, on its standard format, address the specific senior officer he has identified as having ordered the detention. The senior officer’s identification is, in the standard country-conditions reporting, simply additional documentary detail that strengthens the credibility of the account by its specificity.”

“Yes, Margaret.”

“Rebecca, the standard report I would file would not, on its standard format, disclose my own personal acquaintance with the senior officer’s family in 1991. The standard format would not require it. The standard format would, on a strict reading of the academic-expert-witness protocols, treat the question of whether to disclose the personal acquaintance as a question for the expert’s own conscience.”

“Rebecca.”

“Yes, Margaret.”

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“My own conscience, on the small reckoning I have made between four and five this afternoon in the small study at the back of my house on Whitney Avenue, is that the disclosure must be made.”

* * *

“Margaret.”

“Yes, Rebecca.”

“Margaret, the disclosure of your personal acquaintance with the senior officer’s family in 1991, on the asylum-court record, would on the immigration judge’s reading of the disclosure raise the question of whether you are, on the standard expert-witness independence requirements, a sufficiently disinterested expert to give the country-conditions testimony in this case.”

“Yes, Rebecca.”

“Margaret, on Judge Marshall’s standard practice, the disclosure would likely result in his exclusion of your testimony on the country-conditions issue, on the grounds that the personal acquaintance creates a conflict that cannot, on the standards, be cured by the disclosure alone.”

“Yes, Rebecca.”

“Margaret, the exclusion of your testimony would substantially weaken our client’s case. The replacement of you as the country-

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conditions expert would require the retention of one of the two or three other Eritrean Pentecostal experts in North America, who on the available calendar would not be able to produce a comparable report in time for the November hearing. The hearing would have to be continued to February or March 2026. The continuance would prolong our client's asylum-seeker status and expose him, on the volatility of the present federal asylum-policy environment, to the risk of further procedural complications."

"Yes, Rebecca."

"Margaret, you are nevertheless making the disclosure."

"Yes, Rebecca."

"Why."

Professor Holloway-Krieger looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph on the wall behind her desk that showed her on the morning of the second Wednesday of March 1991, in the small back garden of the household of Mr Asgedom Berhane-Tewolde at Adi Keyih, with the lay leader and his wife and his three sons, of whom the eldest, Berhane, then twelve, was standing at his father's left.

"Rebecca. The country-conditions expert's independence is, on the academic protocols, the foundation of the expert's usefulness to the immigration court. The independence requires that the expert's testimony rest only on the academic record — the published

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scholarship, the documentary archives, the verifiable reporting — and not on personal acquaintance, personal interest, or any other private knowledge that has not been entered into the academic record. The standard protocols permit the expert to draw on personal fieldwork, but only to the extent that the fieldwork has been published or is available in academically accessible form, and only where the personal acquaintance from the fieldwork does not create a present-day conflict with the parties to the case.”

“Yes, Margaret.”

“Rebecca. My personal acquaintance with the senior officer’s family at Adi Keyih in 1991 is not, on the academic protocols, a conflict of the standard kind. The senior officer is not, on the case before Judge Marshall, a party. The senior officer is the alleged persecutor whose conduct in 2018 is the central factual question on which my country-conditions report would speak. My personal acquaintance with the senior officer’s twelve-year-old self in 1991 is not, on a strict reading, a conflict that the academic protocols expressly address.”

“Yes, Margaret.”

“Rebecca. However, on the small reckoning I have made this afternoon, the personal acquaintance is on its operational facts a kind of knowledge of the senior officer that no other country-conditions expert in North America has. On my fieldwork notebook of March

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1991, I have a contemporaneous record of the senior officer's family circumstances at twelve, of his father's anxieties about his trajectory, and of the small family environment from which the senior officer subsequently developed into the apparatus that ordered our client's detention in 2018 and that on the operational identification of the State Department cable participated in the killing of the senior officer's own father in 2002. The personal acquaintance is, on this operational reading, knowledge that is not in the public academic record. The knowledge is the kind of knowledge that, on the standard protocols, the expert is required to disclose if it materially affects the expert's testimony."

"Rebecca."

"Yes, Margaret."

"Does the personal acquaintance materially affect my testimony?"

Professor Holloway-Krieger paused, on the telephone in the small study at the back of the house on Whitney Avenue, for a long moment.

"Rebecca. The honest answer is yes. The personal acquaintance does, on the small reckoning I have made between four and five this afternoon, affect my testimony, on a small but specific point. The standard country-conditions report on this case would establish, on the documentary record, that the Eritrean state security apparatus of 2018

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was capable of ordering and conducting detentions of Pentecostal pastors of Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes's profile at facilities of the Wi'a Track B character. The standard report would not, on its format, address the specific senior officer named. The personal acquaintance gives me knowledge of the senior officer's family of origin that, on the inferences a careful reader of my country-conditions report would draw, may inflect my characterisation of the senior officer's personal credibility as the ordering officer. Specifically, on the personal acquaintance, I am aware that the senior officer is the son of a Pentecostal lay leader killed by the same security apparatus in 2002. I am aware that the senior officer's rise within the apparatus has been the trajectory his father feared in March 1991. I am aware, on the personal reading I cannot suppress, that the senior officer's ordering of the November 2018 detention of a Pentecostal pastor is, on the longer accounting of the senior officer's own family history, a conduct that has a particular psychological and biographical character that no purely documentary country-conditions report would convey."

"Margaret."

"Rebecca."

"You are saying that the personal acquaintance gives you a particular reading of the senior officer that the immigration court would, on the disclosure, weight differently."

"Yes, Rebecca."

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“Margaret, the particular reading would, on the disclosure, on Judge Marshall’s standard practice, lead to your exclusion as the expert.”

“Yes, Rebecca.”

“Margaret, the absence of your particular reading from the case would, on Judge Marshall’s probable disposition, weaken our client’s case.”

“Yes, Rebecca.”

“Margaret, the disclosure that, on its mechanism, weakens our client’s case is the disclosure that, on the academic-expert-witness protocols and on your own conscience, you are nevertheless required to make.”

“Yes, Rebecca.”

* * *

Ms Rebecca Pearlman did not reply for a long moment.

Then she said:

“Margaret.”

“Yes, Rebecca.”

“On the question of how, in light of the disclosure, you propose that the case proceed.”

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“Rebecca, on the small reckoning I have made over the past hour, my proposal is as follows. I will file with the New Haven Immigration Court a memorandum disclosing the personal acquaintance, requesting voluntary withdrawal as the country-conditions expert in this case, and including in the memorandum a small annex containing the relevant pages of my March 1991 fieldwork notebook, on the academic-archive practice that permits expert witnesses on voluntary withdrawal to deposit unpublished personal materials of academic interest into the court’s case file. The annex would, on its terms, be available to whichever country-conditions expert is subsequently retained as a documentary source, but would not be presented as a standard country-conditions report or attributed to me as expert testimony.”

“Margaret.”

“Rebecca.”

“Margaret, the annex containing the March 1991 fieldwork notebook would, on a strict reading, contain the same particular knowledge of the senior officer’s family of origin that the disclosure of the personal acquaintance would have introduced.”

“Yes, Rebecca.”

“Margaret, the annex on the case file would, on the practical operation of immigration-court adjudication, be available to the

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substitute country-conditions expert and through that expert's testimony enter the case record on a non-witness-attribution basis."

"Yes, Rebecca."

"Margaret, the mechanism you propose preserves the substantive contribution of the personal acquaintance to the case while removing your direct expert-witness participation, which would on the disclosure be barred."

"Yes, Rebecca."

"Margaret, the mechanism is, on its operational design, the mechanism by which the conscience-required disclosure does not, on its consequence, weaken our client's case beyond what the academic protocols and the immigration-court rules of evidence strictly require."

"Yes, Rebecca."

"Margaret."

"Rebecca."

"Margaret, that is, on the small reckoning of how academic experts and immigration-court attorneys handle the rare case of a personal-acquaintance conflict, on a longer experience than I have as a junior attorney, the right mechanism."

"Rebecca, the mechanism is the mechanism of the academic protocols. It is not the protocol I have, in three decades of country-

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conditions work on Eritrean Pentecostal cases, ever previously had occasion to deploy. The protocols address the case. The case is the case the protocols, on their drafting, anticipated.”

* * *

Professor Margaret Holloway-Krieger filed the memorandum of voluntary withdrawal with the New Haven Immigration Court on the second Friday of October 2025.

The memorandum, in its final form, was nine pages and was accompanied by a fourteen-page annex consisting of the fieldwork-notebook entries from her three months’ residence at Adi Keyih in the spring of 1991, with personal names of family members other than Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan redacted on the academic-protocol practice of protecting non-public-figure third parties in archival deposits.

Judge Theodore Marshall accepted the withdrawal without objection.

The New Haven Legal Services Corporation retained, on the available calendar, an alternative country-conditions expert — a Dr Solomon Mengistu of Howard University, a younger scholar of Eritrean political history whose work on the post-independence Eritrean state had been published in the standard journals — and, on the continuance Judge Marshall granted on the substitution, the asylum

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hearing of Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes was reset to the third Tuesday of March 2026.

Dr Mengistu, on his preparation of the country-conditions report, drew on the materials in Professor Holloway-Krieger's archival annex on the case file, on the academic-archive practice of unpublished personal materials, and incorporated the relevant historical context on the senior officer's family of origin into his standard country-conditions report.

On the third Tuesday of March 2026, Judge Marshall heard the testimony of Mr Tesfaye Ghebremariam-Yohannes and the country-conditions testimony of Dr Solomon Mengistu.

On the second Wednesday of April 2026, Judge Marshall granted Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes's asylum claim.

In his written decision, Judge Marshall noted that the country-conditions evidence on the operational practices of the Eritrean state security apparatus, including the historical documentation that the senior officer Colonel Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan had on his career trajectory been associated with the unit responsible for the February 2002 killing of the Pentecostal lay leader Mr Asgedom Berhane-Tewolde, established the credibility of the petitioner's account of his November 2018 detention. The decision did not, on its face, identify Professor Holloway-Krieger's 1991 fieldwork notebook as the source of the historical documentation.

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The decision was, in immigration-court reporting circles, a significant decision on the Eritrean Pentecostal asylum docket and was widely cited in subsequent cases. Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes's wife Mrs Selamawit Ghebremariam-Tesfay arrived in New Haven in November 2026 on the standard following-to-join procedures.

* * *

Professor Margaret Holloway-Krieger continued at Yale until her retirement in 2032.

She did not, in the seven years between her October 2025 withdrawal and her retirement, serve as a country-conditions expert in any further Eritrean Pentecostal asylum case in which a senior officer of the post-2010 Eritrean security apparatus was named as the alleged ordering officer of the petitioner's persecution.

She did continue to serve as the country-conditions expert in approximately fifty further cases on which the senior-officer identification was either of pre-2010 officers whose connections to her 1991 fieldwork were not relevant or of officers without identification at all, on which the standard country-conditions report did not require it.

She did, on the small reckoning that she made over the long evenings on the small back porch of the house on Whitney Avenue, come to think that the most important thing she had learned in three

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decades of country-conditions expertise was that the academic protocols on expert-witness independence had been drafted on the assumption that the expert's personal history and the case's personal facts were, on the ordinary operation of academic specialisation, sufficiently distant from each other that the protocols' standard format would in the normal course of work suffice. The protocols had not been drafted on the contingency that an academic expert's thirty-year specialisation in a small Pentecostal community of perhaps eight thousand persons in highland Eritrea would, on the longer accounting that decades of fieldwork generated, eventually intersect on a particular case with the expert's own personal acquaintance from the fieldwork's earliest period. The contingency was the contingency of small specialisations and long careers. The intersection was the intersection that long careers in small specialisations, on the longer accounting, eventually produced.

She did, on the second Wednesday of March of every year from 2026 onwards, on a small private practice that academics specialising in small persecuted communities sometimes developed, walk to the small Episcopal chapel on Whitney Avenue near her house and, on the small reckoning of the matter, sit in the small chapel for some time.

She did, in the small chapel, on no announced occasion or stated purpose, on the second Wednesday of March of each year, think about the small back garden of the household of Mr Asgedom Berhane-

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Tewolde at Adi Keyih on the second Wednesday of March 1991, and about the twelve-year-old boy who had on that morning been standing at his father's left, and about the fifty-eight-year-old colonel of the Eritrean state security apparatus whom the boy had on the longer accounting subsequently become.

She did not, in any of the years between 2026 and her retirement and afterwards, communicate with Mr Ghebremariam-Yohannes or with Dr Mengistu or with anyone else who had been associated with the case.

She did, on her retirement in 2032 and on the standard archival deposit of her fieldwork notebooks at the Yale Manuscripts and Archives Library, ensure that the seventh of the eleven Eritrean fieldwork notebooks — the notebook of the third week of February to the second week of May 1991 — was deposited under a small archival restriction that closed it to public access until the year 2065, on which date the senior officer Colonel Berhane Asgedom-Ghebrekidan, were he then living, would be eighty-six.

The closure was, on her own private accounting in the long evenings on Whitney Avenue, the small reckoning of the matter that the academic protocols, the immigration-court rules of evidence, and the longer accounting of small persecuted communities and their archives had, on the case of October 2025, asked her to make.

— *END* —

The Diversity Visa

A Short Story

Mr Emmanuel Adesanya-Okafor of Surulere, Lagos, was twenty-two.

He was the eldest of four children of Mr Tunde Adesanya-Okafor, a small electrician who operated a one-man rewinding shop on Bode Thomas Street, and Mrs Folake Adesanya-Adeyemi, who taught primary-school English at the small Methodist primary school on Adelabu Street.

He had completed his secondary schooling at Surulere Government College in 2021 with credits sufficient to qualify him for university admission. He had not, on the family's financial circumstances and on the National Youth Service Corps requirements that followed Nigerian university degrees, proceeded to university. He had instead taken up employment as a junior cashier at the small Surulere branch of First Bank of Nigeria, on a salary of seventy-three thousand naira per month.

In October of 2024, on the standard October opening of the Diversity Immigrant Visa Program lottery operated by the United States Department of State, he had submitted, on his own initiative and on the standard online registration that the Department of State accepted from Nigerian nationals on the country's designation as a

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high-immigration country eligible for the lottery, a single registration in his own name.

He had also submitted, in his capacity as a small side-business he had developed since the previous year's lottery on the encouragement of one of his Surulere Government College classmates, four hundred and twelve registrations on behalf of paying clients of his small registration-services business.

The clients had paid him, on his standard rate, the equivalent of approximately eighteen US dollars per registration. He had earned, on the four hundred and twelve registrations, approximately seven thousand four hundred US dollars.

The fee was the going rate for diversity-visa registration services in Lagos in 2024.

It was, on the operational practice of small registration-services businesses across the Nigerian high-immigration market, somewhat below the rates charged by the larger established providers.

The four hundred and twelve registrations had, on Mr Adesanya-Okafor's small operational practice, been completed correctly. He had collected, from each client, the standard documentary requirements: a recent passport photograph, a copy of the client's secondary-school certificate, the client's biographical information, and the client's payment for the registration fee. He had submitted, on the State

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Department's online portal, a registration in each client's name with the client's own photograph and the client's own biographical details.

He had not, on his own operational practice and on the operational practice of the registration-services businesses he had observed in Lagos, substituted his own photograph for the photographs of any of his clients.

In May of 2025, on the State Department's standard May announcement of the lottery results, Mr Adesanya-Okafor checked his registration online.

He had been selected.

In the same week, he checked the registrations of his four hundred and twelve clients.

Eight of the four hundred and twelve had been selected.

On the operational base rates of the Diversity Visa lottery for Nigerian applicants in 2024, the selection rate of approximately two per cent for the registrations he had submitted was on the standard expected proportion.

His own selection, in the same lottery, on the same proportion, was on the standard probabilistic luck of the lottery.

Mr Adesanya-Okafor was, on the morning of the second Friday of May 2025, on the small reckoning of a young man of twenty-two who

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had on a single online registration in October 2024 won the right to apply for an immigrant visa to the United States, on a small private state of considerable hope.

* * *

On the standard procedure following the May selection announcement, Mr Adesanya-Okafor's case was assigned a Diversity Visa case number and his immigrant-visa interview was scheduled for the third Tuesday of August 2025 at the United States Consulate General in Lagos.

In the intervening three months, he completed the standard documentary requirements: the police clearance certificate from the Nigeria Police Force, the medical examination at the consulate-designated medical centre, the original secondary-school certificate, the documentary evidence of his employment at First Bank, and the standard DS-260 immigrant-visa application form.

He attended his interview at the United States Consulate General on the third Tuesday of August 2025.

The consular officer assigned to his interview was a Mr Bradley Kowalski, a forty-three-year-old Foreign Service officer in his second consular tour, who had been stationed at the Lagos Consulate General since the previous September.

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The interview commenced at twenty-three minutes past nine in the morning.

Mr Kowalski conducted the standard preliminary questions. Mr Adesanya-Okafor answered each question.

On the question of how the applicant had registered for the Diversity Visa lottery, Mr Adesanya-Okafor answered that he had registered on his own initiative on the State Department's online portal in October 2024.

On the question of whether the applicant had paid any third party for the registration, Mr Adesanya-Okafor answered that he had not.

On the question of whether the applicant operated, or had operated, a registration-services business assisting other Nigerian applicants in their registrations for the Diversity Visa lottery, Mr Adesanya-Okafor paused for a moment.

Then he answered, truthfully, that he had operated such a business in October 2024 and had submitted, on behalf of paying clients, four hundred and twelve registrations.

Mr Kowalski made a note.

"Mr Adesanya-Okafor."

"Yes, sir."

"You registered four hundred and twelve clients in October 2024."

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“Yes, sir.”

“Did the registrations include the clients’ own photographs.”

“Yes, sir. Each registration was submitted with the client’s own passport photograph that the client provided to me at the time of registration.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, the consulate has, in the past four months, on the May 2025 selection announcement, conducted an automated photograph-comparison analysis of the photographs submitted with the registrations of all Nigerian applicants selected in the 2024 lottery cycle. The analysis identified, on the database of the four hundred and twelve registrations submitted by your services business, that the photograph appearing on each of the four hundred and twelve registrations was, on the consulate’s facial-recognition standard, the photograph of the same individual.”

Mr Adesanya-Okafor looked, for a long moment, at the consular officer across the small interview window.

“Sir.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

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“Sir, that is impossible. Each of the four hundred and twelve registrations was submitted with a different photograph, the photograph of the individual client. The clients’ photographs were the photographs the clients had provided to me. The clients were four hundred and twelve different individuals.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, the photograph-comparison analysis is automated and is operated on the consulate’s standard photograph-database protocols. The analysis identifies, on the four hundred and twelve registrations submitted under your services business’s small commercial registration with the State Department lottery portal, four hundred and twelve photographs of the same individual. The individual, on the consulate’s further analysis on the photograph submitted on your own personal registration in October 2024, is yourself.”

Mr Adesanya-Okafor sat at the small interview window for a very long moment.

Then he said:

“Sir, may I see the photographs.”

Mr Kowalski, on a small operational reckoning that consular officers occasionally made when an interviewee’s response carried, on the officer’s judgement, the particular character of genuine astonishment, retrieved the printed contact-sheet of twenty-four

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sample photographs from the four hundred and twelve registrations and held it up to the small interview window.

Mr Adesanya-Okafor looked at the contact-sheet.

The twenty-four sample photographs were, on a careful inspection, twenty-four photographs of approximately the same young Nigerian man of approximately twenty-two years of age, wearing a white shirt with a small dark collar, standing in front of a plain pale-blue background of approximately the same shade in each photograph, with his hair cut in approximately the same short style and his expression of approximately the same serious orientation toward the camera.

The young Nigerian man in the twenty-four photographs was Mr Emmanuel Adesanya-Okafor of Surulere, Lagos.

Mr Adesanya-Okafor looked at the contact-sheet for some time.

“Sir.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, may I ask. The photographs on the contact-sheet are not the photographs of my clients. The photographs are not the photographs the clients gave to me at the time of the registrations. The photographs are photographs of myself.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

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“Sir. The four hundred and twelve registrations I submitted in October 2024 were submitted, on my own observation at the time of submission, with the photographs the clients had given to me. The photographs the clients had given to me were the photographs of four hundred and twelve different Nigerian young men and women of various ages between eighteen and forty-five.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, the photographs that the consulate has on the State Department database are not those photographs.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Which computer did you use to submit the four hundred and twelve registrations.”

* * *

Mr Adesanya-Okafor, on the consular officer’s question, paused for a long moment.

Then he answered:

“Sir, I submitted the four hundred and twelve registrations in October 2024 on a desktop computer at the small business centre on Bode Thomas Street near my father’s electrician shop. The business centre is operated by a small commercial proprietor who rents desktop

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computers and prints documents and provides internet services to the local Surulere community. The business centre operates approximately twelve desktop computers in the small front room of the building. The proprietor charges, for desktop-computer use with internet, approximately one hundred and fifty naira per hour.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Whose computer did you use.”

“Sir, I used the desktop computer that the proprietor assigned to me on each of the days I attended the business centre during the October 2024 lottery registration period. The lottery period was, on the State Department’s standard practice, the four-week period between the first Wednesday of October and the first Wednesday of November. I attended the business centre on approximately fifteen occasions during the period, on the schedule of my employment at First Bank, which permitted me to attend after my working hours. I used different desktop computers on different occasions, on the proprietor’s assignment of available terminals.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Yes, sir.”

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“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, the proprietor of the business centre on Bode Thomas Street.”

“Yes, sir.”

“What is the proprietor’s name.”

Mr Adesanya-Okafor looked at the consular officer across the small interview window for a long moment.

“Sir, the proprietor’s name is Mr Chinedu Onuoha-Ekwueme. The business centre is called Glory Business Services Limited.”

Mr Kowalski wrote the name on his small notepad.

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Yes, sir.”

“On the State Department’s investigation of the photograph-substitution pattern that the consulate’s automated analysis has on the May 2025 results identified across multiple Lagos-area registration-services businesses, Glory Business Services Limited and its proprietor Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme are the subject of a separate Department of State investigation. The investigation has, on its present findings, identified that the desktop computers operated at Glory Business Services Limited during the October and November 2024 lottery period contained a small commercial software programme installed on the desktop terminals by Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme. The software

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programme operated, on the lottery-portal submission process, an automated substitution of the photograph that the user attempted to upload with a single substituted photograph that the software programme had on Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme's installation been pre-loaded onto each of the desktop terminals."

Mr Adesanya-Okafor sat at the small interview window for a very long moment.

"Sir."

"Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor."

"Sir, the substituted photograph that the software programme on Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme's desktop terminals uploaded in place of my clients' actual photographs."

"Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor."

"Sir, the substituted photograph was a photograph of myself."

"Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor."

"Sir, how did Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme obtain a photograph of myself."

Mr Kowalski looked at the young Nigerian man across the small interview window for a long moment.

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“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, on the State Department’s investigation, the photograph that the software programme on Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme’s desktop terminals uploaded was the photograph that you, on the first occasion you attended the business centre during the October 2024 lottery period, submitted on your own personal registration. The software programme captured, on the upload, your personal photograph. The software programme then, on each subsequent registration submitted from any of Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme’s desktop terminals during the lottery period, substituted your personal photograph in place of the photograph the user attempted to upload.”

“Sir.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, the four hundred and twelve registrations I submitted on behalf of my clients were submitted with my own photograph.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, my clients’ actual photographs, which the clients had given to me at the time of registration, were on Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme’s software programme not uploaded.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, the eight of my four hundred and twelve clients who were selected in the May 2025 announcement.”

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“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, the eight selections were selections on registrations that on the consulate’s photograph-comparison analysis show my photograph rather than the clients’ photographs.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor. The eight clients of yours who were selected will, on their consular interviews scheduled at this consulate over the next four months, be informed of the photograph substitution. Their selections will, on the State Department’s standard procedure for fraudulent registration, be revoked and their applications denied. The denials will be of the kind that does not establish individual fraud on the part of the applicants but does, on the operational facts, prevent the applications from proceeding.”

“Sir.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, my own personal registration of October 2024.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, my own personal registration was, on Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme’s software programme, the registration that captured my photograph in the first place. My own personal registration was the only one of the four hundred and thirteen registrations I submitted from Glory

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Business Services Limited's terminals on which the photograph uploaded was my actual photograph that I had intended to upload."

"Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor."

"Sir, the consulate's automated photograph-comparison analysis on the four hundred and twelve client registrations identified the four hundred and twelve photographs as photographs of the same individual. My own personal registration was the four-hundred-and-thirteenth registration. My own personal registration's photograph was also a photograph of the same individual."

"Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor."

"Sir, on the consulate's analysis, my own personal registration is, on its photograph, indistinguishable from the four hundred and twelve fraudulent registrations."

Mr Kowalski looked at the young Nigerian man across the small interview window for a long moment.

"Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor."

"Sir."

"Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor."

"Sir, my own personal registration is, on the consulate's analysis, on the operational treatment, also a fraudulent registration."

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“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, on the operational treatment that the consulate’s standard fraud-detection procedures require, the four hundred and thirteen registrations are, on the photograph-comparison analysis, all in the same category. The fact that, on the underlying mechanism, your own personal registration was the only one of the four hundred and thirteen on which you intended to upload your own photograph and on which the upload reflected your intent is, on the consulate’s standard fraud-detection procedures, not a fact the procedures distinguish.”

“Sir.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, on a strict reading of the procedures, your own personal application is also denied.”

* * *

Mr Emmanuel Adesanya-Okafor sat at the small interview window of the United States Consulate General in Lagos for some time.

Then he said:

“Sir.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, may I ask. On the operational facts. Is there a procedure on the consulate’s rules by which the underlying mechanism — the fact that my own personal registration was the registration that captured

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the photograph that Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme's software programme then substituted on the four hundred and twelve client registrations — may be considered as a basis for distinguishing my own personal application from the four hundred and twelve.”

Mr Kowalski looked at the young Nigerian man across the small interview window for a long moment.

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, the consulate's standard fraud-detection procedures do not, on their drafting, provide for that distinction. The procedures were drafted on the assumption that the photograph-comparison analysis is a final determinant of fraud, and that an applicant whose photograph appears on multiple registrations is the operator or beneficiary of the fraud and is therefore properly excluded.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, the consulate's consular officers do retain a small operational discretion to refer cases to the State Department's Bureau of Consular Affairs for the consideration of overrides on the standard fraud-detection findings, where the underlying facts on the consular officer's judgement warrant the consideration. The overrides are, on the Bureau's practice, granted in approximately fifteen per cent of the cases referred. The overrides require the consular officer to file a detailed memorandum identifying the facts on which the override is sought.”

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“Yes, sir.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, on the small operational discretion the consulate retains and on the small reckoning I have made on this Tuesday morning of the operational facts of your case, I am referring your application to the Bureau for the consideration of an override.”

“Sir.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, the override, on the standard processing time at the Bureau, will take approximately four months. The diversity visa allocation that has been provisionally assigned to your application is on the lottery year’s allocation calendar a finite resource. The Bureau’s consideration of your override may not, on the calendar, be completed in time to permit the visa allocation to be issued before the lottery year’s expiration on the second Wednesday of September 2025. If the override is granted after the expiration of the lottery year, the visa allocation will, on the standard rules, not be re-issuable. The override would, on the standard processing time, in practical effect produce a finding that you were not the operator of the fraud, but would not in practical effect produce the issuance of the diversity visa.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Yes, sir.”

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“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, the operational outcome on either of the two procedural paths — the standard fraud-detection denial without override, or the override referral that on the calendar would arrive after the visa allocation’s expiration — is, on the operational facts, the same. Your visa is, on the operational outcome, denied.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, on the small reckoning of consular officers in cases of this kind, the operational outcome is the operational outcome. The override referral I am making is, on the practical effect, of no practical benefit to you. The override referral is, on the small reckoning, the consulate’s mechanism for placing on the State Department’s record the fact that you, of the four hundred and thirteen Nigerian applicants whose registrations were captured by Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme’s software programme at Glory Business Services Limited during the October 2024 lottery period, were the only one whose own application was, on the underlying mechanism, the application the consulate’s standard fraud-detection procedures could not distinguish from the four hundred and twelve applications the procedures correctly identified as fraudulent.”

“Sir.”

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“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, the four hundred and twelve clients whose applications were on the consulate’s automated analysis correctly identified as fraudulent, and whose denials are now on the operational outcome being processed.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, the four hundred and twelve clients’ own original photographs, the photographs the clients gave to me in October 2024 and that on Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme’s software programme were not uploaded, were on my own small business records retained at my father’s electrician shop on Bode Thomas Street.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, the original photographs are, on the documentary record I retained, the evidence that the clients submitted to me in good faith their own photographs and that the substitution was the operation of Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme’s software programme rather than my own conduct.”

“Yes, Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Sir, may I provide the original photographs to the consulate as additional documentation supporting the override referral on my own application and as additional documentation supporting the

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operational distinction between Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme's conduct and my own."

Mr Kowalski looked at the young Nigerian man across the small interview window for a long moment.

"Mr Adesanya-Okafor."

"Yes, sir."

"You retained the original photographs of all four hundred and twelve clients in your father's electrician shop."

"Yes, sir. The photographs are filed in a small box in the back room of the shop, in alphabetical order by client name, with each client's name written on the back of each photograph in my own hand. The photographs were, on my small business practice, retained in the event that any client subsequently required the original photograph for any further documentary purpose."

"Mr Adesanya-Okafor, may I ask. Why did you retain them."

Mr Adesanya-Okafor looked at the consular officer across the small interview window for a long moment.

"Sir, the small business practice of retaining clients' documentary materials is, on the operational practice of small services businesses in Lagos, the standard practice. The clients pay the small business for the registration. The small business performs the registration. The small

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business retains, on its records, the documentary materials the clients submitted, in the event that the clients return for further service or in the event that any procedural complication arises that requires the documentary record. The retention is, on the small business practice, the basis of the relationship between the small business and the clients.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, the retention is the small business practice. The retention is also, on the operational fact of your case, the only documentary record that exists in any form of the photograph substitution that Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme’s software programme operated on the four hundred and thirteen registrations.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Mr Adesanya-Okafor, will you, on a small operational request from the consulate, deliver the four hundred and twelve original photographs to the consulate as documentary evidence in support of the State Department’s investigation of Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme and Glory Business Services Limited.”

“Yes, sir. I will.”

* * *

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Mr Emmanuel Adesanya-Okafor delivered the four hundred and twelve original photographs to the United States Consulate General in Lagos on the second Friday of August 2025.

The photographs were, on the consulate's reception, catalogued and submitted as documentary evidence in the State Department's investigation of Mr Chinedu Onuoha-Ekwueme and Glory Business Services Limited.

Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme was arrested on the third Wednesday of September 2025 by the Nigeria Police Force, in cooperation with the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation, on charges relating to the diversity-visa-lottery photograph-substitution scheme. The investigation subsequently identified that Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme's software programme had operated at Glory Business Services Limited and at four other Lagos business centres between 2019 and 2024, and that the total number of Nigerian Diversity Visa registrations corrupted by the substitution was approximately eleven thousand. The substituted photograph had, in different lottery years, been the photograph of different unwitting young men or women whose own personal registrations had on each year been the registrations that captured the photograph that the software programme then substituted on subsequent registrations.

Mr Onuoha-Ekwueme was tried in 2026 and convicted on the Nigerian charges. He was sentenced to fourteen years' imprisonment.

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Mr Adesanya-Okafor's own diversity-visa application was, on Mr Kowalski's referral, the subject of a Bureau of Consular Affairs override consideration. The override was, on the Bureau's subsequent ruling, granted in January 2026, four months after the lottery year's expiration. The grant established, on the State Department's record, that Mr Adesanya-Okafor was not the operator or beneficiary of the photograph-substitution scheme. The grant did not, on the lottery-year expiration, produce the issuance of the diversity visa.

Mr Adesanya-Okafor continued at First Bank of Nigeria. He did not, in any subsequent year, submit a further registration to the Diversity Visa lottery. He was promoted in 2027 to senior cashier and in 2031 to assistant branch operations manager. He married, in 2028, a young Surulere woman called Miss Adaeze Okeke-Nwosu, who taught at the same Methodist primary school where Mr Adesanya-Okafor's mother had taught.

In 2032, on a small business plan that Mr Adesanya-Okafor and his wife had developed over the previous three years, the couple opened a small documentary-services business in Surulere. The business operated under the name 'Adesanya Reliable Documents Limited' and offered passport-photograph services, photocopying, document notarisation, and — on the standard practice of Lagos documentary-services businesses — assistance to Nigerian applicants in the preparation of foreign-immigration documentation. The business did

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not, on Mr Adesanya-Okafor's standing operational policy, accept registrations for the United States Diversity Immigrant Visa Program. Clients who requested such services were politely referred, on the business's small printed referral card, to other Lagos providers.

The business was, on its small operational practice and on the reputation Mr Adesanya-Okafor had on the operational facts of his August 2025 consular interview developed in the Surulere documentary-services community, modestly successful.

Mr Bradley Kowalski continued at the United States Consulate General in Lagos until the end of his second consular tour in 2027. He took up his third consular tour at the Embassy in Mexico City in 2028. He did not, in any subsequent consular tour of his career, encounter another diversity-visa-lottery case in which the applicant's photograph was the photograph that, on a software-programme substitution operated by an unrelated commercial proprietor, had been substituted on hundreds of fraudulent registrations submitted by the applicant on his own behalf for legitimate clients.

He did, on the small reckoning that he made over the long evenings of his subsequent consular career, come to think that the most important thing he had learned in twelve years at the State Department was that the standard fraud-detection procedures the Bureau of Consular Affairs operated were always larger than the cases the procedures processed, and that the procedures had been drafted on

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the assumption that the technical signature of fraud — in this case the photograph-comparison analysis — was a sufficient operational basis for the procedural decision. The procedures had not been drafted on the contingency that the technical signature of fraud could on the operational facts of a particular case be the technical signature of an unwitting victim whose own legitimate application had been the registration that captured the photograph the perpetrator's software then substituted on subsequent fraudulent registrations. The contingency was the contingency that small commercial software programmes installed on rented desktop computers in small Lagos business centres had, on the longer accounting of how diversity-visa lottery fraud operated in West African capitals, eventually produced. The override discretion was the consulate's mechanism for handling the contingency. The override's effective inability, on the calendar, to produce the visa was the small operational reality of the discretion's practical limits.

He did, on his own subsequent consular work in Mexico City and elsewhere, on the small reckoning of how the override referrals he made were handled, recommend in his own contributions to the Foreign Service training-academy curriculum on consular fraud detection that the Bureau's standard fraud-detection procedures be amended to include a small operational distinction between cases in which the photograph-comparison analysis identified an applicant as the perpetrator of substitution and cases in which the analysis

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identified an applicant as the unwitting source of the substituted photograph.

The recommendation was, on the Bureau's standard procedural-revision cycle, considered, deliberated, and — on the second Wednesday of June 2030, in a small State Department procedural memorandum that Mr Kowalski received in his Mexico City office — adopted.

— END —

The Religious Worker

A Short Story

Bhai Harjinder Singh-Dhillon of the village of Talhan in Jalandhar district, Punjab, was forty-two.

He was a granthi — a designated reader of the Guru Granth Sahib — who had been formally trained at the Sant Attar Singh Memorial Gurmat College at Mastuana Sahib in Sangrur district between 2002 and 2008, and had since 2008 served as the resident granthi at the small Gurdwara Sahib at Talhan, where he conducted the daily prayers, read the Guru Granth Sahib at the morning and evening sevas, and supervised the langar that the gurdwara provided to the village's Sikh community of approximately three hundred and forty households.

He had been raised in Talhan, in the household of his father Mr Mohinder Singh-Dhillon, a small dairy farmer, and his mother Mrs Surinder Kaur-Dhillon, who had taught at the village primary school until her death from cancer in 2017. He had two younger brothers. The elder of the two, Mr Sukhwinder Singh-Dhillon, had on completion of his secondary schooling at Talhan in 1999 emigrated to the United States on a student visa to attend community college in Yuba City, California, on the small support of his maternal uncle who had emigrated to Yuba City in 1986. Sukhwinder had subsequently

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obtained lawful permanent residence on his marriage in 2005 to a Punjabi-American woman from Stockton, had naturalised as a United States citizen in 2010, and had since 2011 operated a small almond-and-walnut packaging facility in the Sutter County agricultural belt approximately fourteen miles outside Yuba City.

The younger brother, Mr Gurpreet Singh-Dhillon, had remained in Talhan and operated, with his father, the small dairy farm.

In April of 2024, on the standard procedure for R-1 nonimmigrant religious-worker visas operated by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services, an I-129 petition was filed on behalf of Bhai Harjinder Singh-Dhillon by the Gurdwara Sahib of Yuba City, California, a small Sikh congregation of approximately one hundred and twenty member households on the south side of Yuba City. The petition sought to bring Bhai Harjinder to the United States as the resident granthi of the Yuba City gurdwara on a five-year R-1 visa.

The Yuba City gurdwara had on its membership rolls, on the documentation submitted with the I-129 petition, one hundred and twenty member households. The membership rolls were attested, on the standard practice for R-1 sponsoring religious organisations, by the gurdwara's president and treasurer.

The president of the Yuba City gurdwara was, on the I-129 petition's documentation, Mr Sukhwinder Singh-Dhillon.

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The treasurer was Mr Sukhwinder's wife, Mrs Harpreet Kaur-Dhillon.

* * *

The I-129 petition was approved at the California Service Center in October 2024.

In November 2024, the case was transferred to the United States Embassy at New Delhi for consular processing of Bhai Harjinder's R-1 visa interview.

In January 2025, on the standard pre-interview review of R-1 cases, the consular section at New Delhi referred the case to the Embassy's Fraud Prevention Unit for the supplementary I-360 review that the State Department applied to a small proportion of R-1 cases each year on the basis of risk-indicator factors.

The risk-indicator factor that triggered the supplementary review was, on the Fraud Prevention Unit's standard list, the indicator that the family name of the petitioning religious worker matched the family name of one or more officers of the sponsoring religious organisation.

In Bhai Harjinder Singh-Dhillon's case, the family name was Dhillon, and the matching officers were the president and the treasurer.

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The matter would not, on the Fraud Prevention Unit's standard practice, have been a fatal indicator. The Punjabi Sikh community in Yuba City was small, the surname Dhillon was common, and family-name overlap between religious workers and gurdwara officers was a routine feature of the small American Sikh-congregation landscape.

The supplementary review was, on the standard practice, a documentary review.

The reviewing officer, on the assignment rota at the Fraud Prevention Unit, was Mr Brian McAllister, a thirty-eight-year-old Foreign Service officer in his fourth consular tour, who had been at New Delhi since the previous September.

Mr McAllister, on his receipt of the file on the second Wednesday of January 2025, conducted the standard documentary review.

The review identified, on the personal information sections of Bhai Harjinder's I-129 petition and the personal information sections of the gurdwara's officer documentation, that Mr Sukhwinder Singh-Dhillon, the president of the Yuba City gurdwara, and Bhai Harjinder Singh-Dhillon, the petitioning religious worker, were brothers.

The relationship was, on the I-129 petition's declarations, not disclosed.

The R-1 visa programme regulations did not, on a strict reading, prohibit the sponsorship of a religious worker by a religious

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organisation whose officers were the worker's family members. The regulations did, on the standard practice for R-1 cases involving family-relationship sponsorship, require the disclosure of the relationship and the documentary establishment that the sponsorship was on a bona-fide religious basis rather than a family-immigration basis dressed in religious-worker form.

The non-disclosure of the relationship was, on a strict reading, a basis for the consulate's denial of the R-1 visa on misrepresentation grounds and for the Citizenship and Immigration Services' revocation of the I-129 petition approval.

Mr McAllister sat at his desk in the Fraud Prevention Unit office at the Embassy in Chanakyapuri for some time.

He read the file twice.

Then he telephoned the consular officer who had been assigned to conduct Bhai Harjinder's R-1 visa interview, a Ms Rachel Chen, who was scheduled to interview Bhai Harjinder on the third Tuesday of January 2025.

* * *

"Rachel."

"Brian."

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“Rachel, on the Singh-Dhillon R-1 case scheduled for next Tuesday.”

“Yes, Brian.”

“Rachel, the supplementary I-360 review has identified that the petitioning religious worker and the president of the sponsoring gurdwara are brothers, and that the relationship was not disclosed in the I-129 petition.”

“Brian, the standard treatment on this kind of finding is the issuance of a refusal under section 212(a)(6)(C)(i) on misrepresentation grounds, with the petition referred back to the California Service Center for revocation of the I-129 approval.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, that’s straightforward. Why are you calling me on it.”

“Rachel, on the supplementary review I conducted on the file, I noted that Bhai Harjinder Singh-Dhillon’s training as a granthi was at the Sant Attar Singh Memorial Gurmat College at Mastuana Sahib, between 2002 and 2008, on the standard six-year residential programme that the college offers. The training is, on the academic specialisation that the consulate’s religious-worker reviews recognise, the genuine training for a Sikh granthi. The college is one of the seven recognised institutions in Punjab that train granthis on the formal residential six-year programme.”

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“Yes, Brian.”

“Rachel, in the seventeen years since 2008, Bhai Harjinder has served continuously as the resident granthi at the small Gurdwara Sahib at Talhan, on the documentation submitted with the I-129 petition. The Talhan gurdwara is, on the consulate’s sources, an established small village gurdwara with no relation to the United States immigration system. The seventeen years of service at Talhan are, on the standard professional record, the kind of professional record that R-1 visa adjudication treats as the strong evidence that the petitioning worker is a genuine religious worker rather than a religious-worker visa beneficiary in name only.”

“Yes, Brian.”

“Rachel, the Yuba City gurdwara, on its documentation, has been operating since 2014 with a series of short-term granthis on visitor visas, three-month rotational appointments, and one previous failed R-1 petition in 2019. The 2019 petition was for an unrelated granthi from Hoshiarpur and was denied at the California Service Center on insufficient documentation. The gurdwara has, on the available records, been seeking a long-term resident granthi for approximately ten years.”

“Yes, Brian.”

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“Rachel, the operational pattern of the Yuba City gurdwara’s search for a long-term resident granthi over ten years, and the operational pattern of Bhai Harjinder’s genuine seventeen-year granthi career at Talhan, suggest, on a less strict reading of the file, that the I-129 petition the Yuba City gurdwara filed in April 2024 may, on the underlying religious-services facts, have been a genuine sponsorship of a genuine religious worker, with the family relationship between the worker and the gurdwara president being on the operational facts the connection that allowed the gurdwara to identify the worker as a candidate, rather than the connection that motivated the petition as a family-immigration vehicle.”

“Brian.”

“Rachel.”

“Brian, on the strict reading of the regulations, the non-disclosure of the family relationship is a misrepresentation. The misrepresentation is the basis for the refusal on 212(a)(6)(C)(i) and the revocation of the I-129 approval. The strict reading does not require the consular officer to look beyond the misrepresentation to assess the genuineness of the underlying religious-services arrangement.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, the consular officer’s discretion on the strict reading is whether to issue the 212(a)(6)(C)(i) refusal or to refer the case back to

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the petitioner for clarification on the non-disclosure, on a small operational mechanism that consulates occasionally use in cases where the misrepresentation appears, on the surrounding facts, to be inadvertent rather than wilful.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, you are suggesting the referral-for-clarification mechanism.”

“Rachel, I am suggesting the referral-for-clarification mechanism. The mechanism would, on its operation, give the petitioning gurdwara the opportunity to disclose the family relationship in a supplementary filing, and would give the consular officer at the Tuesday interview the opportunity to question Bhai Harjinder on the genuineness of the religious-services arrangement on the assumption that the family relationship is now on the record. The mechanism preserves the strict-reading consequence — the misrepresentation, if it is found on further review to have been wilful rather than inadvertent, can still produce the 212(a)(6)(C)(i) refusal — while permitting the consular officer to assess the underlying religious-services facts on a complete documentary record.”

“Brian.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

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“Brian, the referral-for-clarification on this case will, on the gurdwara’s likely supplementary filing and on the consular officer’s likely Tuesday-interview assessment, probably result in the issuance of the R-1 visa.”

“Rachel, on the documentary record I have reviewed, that is the probable outcome.”

“Brian, you are recommending the mechanism that, on a strict reading, the regulations do not require, on the assessment that the underlying religious-services arrangement is genuine and that the non-disclosure was inadvertent.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, why.”

Mr McAllister looked, on the desk in the small Fraud Prevention Unit office at the Embassy in Chanakyapuri, at the small framed photograph behind his desk that showed his own brother on the morning of his brother’s ordination at the Episcopal Diocese of New Hampshire in 2019.

“Rachel. The R-1 visa programme is, on the longer accounting that the State Department’s religious-worker adjudication has accumulated since the programme’s establishment in 1990, a programme that operates on the small American religious organisations whose denominational structures are based on the family-and-community

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networks that small religious organisations everywhere develop. The Yuba City gurdwara is, on the documentary record, a small American Sikh congregation of one hundred and twenty member households. The president of the gurdwara has been searching for a long-term resident granthi for ten years. The president has, in the course of those ten years, encountered through his family connections in Talhan a candidate — his brother — who is, on the documentary record, the genuine seventeen-year-trained granthi the gurdwara has been seeking. The petition the gurdwara filed in April 2024 has, on the procedural drafting that gurdwara presidents and their American immigration counsel sometimes produce, omitted the family-relationship disclosure on the standard form, on the small reckoning that the family relationship and the bona-fide religious-services basis are not, on the gurdwara's self-understanding, in conflict.”

“Yes, Brian.”

“Rachel. The strict reading of the regulations treats the non-disclosure as a misrepresentation. The strict reading is, on the regulations' drafting, the reading the consulate is on its standard practice required to apply. The strict reading is also, on the small reckoning of how religious-worker visas operate on the American religious-organisation landscape, a reading that on its standard application sometimes denies the visa to a genuine religious worker whose only error was the documentary-procedural error of not

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declaring on the standard form a family relationship that, on the underlying facts, was not the basis of the petition.”

“Yes, Brian.”

“Rachel. The referral-for-clarification mechanism is the consulate’s small operational practice for distinguishing the genuine religious-worker case from the family-immigration-vehicle case, on cases where the surrounding facts suggest the distinction can on additional documentary review be made.”

“Yes, Brian.”

“Rachel, on this case, the surrounding facts suggest the distinction can be made.”

Ms Chen did not reply for some time.

“Brian.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, I will issue the referral-for-clarification on the Tuesday interview rather than the 212(a)(6)(C)(i) refusal.”

“Thank you, Rachel.”

“Brian.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

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“Brian, on the small reckoning of how Fraud Prevention Unit recommendations are normally written. The recommendations on cases of this kind almost never recommend the referral-for-clarification mechanism on family-relationship non-disclosures. They almost always recommend the strict-reading refusal. Why, on this case, did the Fraud Prevention Unit recommendation come differently.”

Mr McAllister looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph behind his desk.

“Rachel. The Fraud Prevention Unit recommendation comes on this case differently because the Fraud Prevention Unit officer who reviewed the file is, on his own family circumstances, the brother of an Episcopal priest in New Hampshire whose ordination was sponsored by a small parish on whose vestry our father served as senior warden. The arrangement of an American small religious congregation’s sponsorship of a religious worker who is the brother of one of the congregation’s officers is, on my own family’s reading of the bona-fide-religious-services question, an arrangement I do not characterise as a family-immigration vehicle. I characterise it as the way that small religious congregations everywhere, on the family-and-community networks that small religious congregations operate within, find their long-term resident clergy.”

“Brian.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

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“Your own brother’s ordination at the New Hampshire parish where your father was senior warden was the basis on which you wrote this recommendation.”

“Rachel, the basis on which I wrote the recommendation was the operational facts of this case as I read them. The personal experience that informed my reading of the operational facts was the family circumstance you have just identified. The recommendation is, on the operational facts, a recommendation I would have written on the documentary record alone. The personal experience permitted me to read the documentary record with the kind of care that the strict-reading default of the standard practice does not on its drafting always provide.”

“Brian.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, the recommendation will be processed on the case file. On the Tuesday interview I will, on the referral-for-clarification, conduct the assessment of the underlying religious-services arrangement. The supplementary filing the gurdwara will provide, on the operational practice of American Sikh-congregation immigration counsel, will likely disclose the family relationship and provide the supporting documentation that the religious-services arrangement is bona-fide. The visa will, on the probable outcome, be issued.”

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“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, on the small private accounting that consular officers occasionally make on cases of this kind. Bhai Harjinder will, on his arrival in Yuba City in due course, serve as the resident granthi at his brother’s gurdwara for the five-year R-1 period and likely beyond, on the standard renewal and the eventual EB-4 special-immigrant petition that R-1 granthis on five-year service tracks normally receive.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, on Bhai Harjinder’s arrival, the small Gurdwara Sahib at Talhan will be without its resident granthi.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, the small village gurdwara at Talhan, on the documentary record, has approximately three hundred and forty member households. It is the only gurdwara in the village. Bhai Harjinder has served there for seventeen years. His departure for the United States will leave the village without its resident granthi.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian.”

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“Yes, Rachel.”

“On the small accounting of how religious workers on R-1 visas leave behind their congregations of origin in the operational practice of how American immigration of religious workers operates, the small Gurdwara Sahib at Talhan will, on Bhai Harjinder’s departure, need to recruit a new granthi from the small pool of Mastuana-Sahib graduates. The recruitment will, on the standard practice in the Punjab village gurdwara network, take perhaps eighteen months. During that period, the village will be served by visiting granthis from neighbouring villages on a rotational basis.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, the operational outcome of the referral-for-clarification we have agreed on this telephone call is that the small American Sikh congregation in Yuba City of one hundred and twenty member households will gain a resident granthi after ten years of searching, and the small Punjab village gurdwara of three hundred and forty member households will lose its resident granthi after seventeen years of continuous service. The R-1 visa programme is, on the longer accounting, a programme that on its operational outcomes redistributes religious workers from the small village congregations of the world to the small American congregations whose searches have been longer and whose family-and-community networks have, on the operational facts, the connections to the worker.”

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“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian, the redistribution is the operation of the programme. The programme is the policy of the United States government on the immigration of religious workers. The consular officer’s task is to apply the programme on the cases the programme presents.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian. On the Tuesday interview I will issue the referral-for-clarification. The visa will, on the probable outcome, be issued. The redistribution will, on the operational outcome, take place. The small Gurdwara Sahib at Talhan will lose its granthi.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Brian.”

“Yes, Rachel.”

“Thank you for the recommendation.”

* * *

Bhai Harjinder Singh-Dhillon attended his R-1 visa interview at the United States Embassy in New Delhi on the third Tuesday of January 2025.

Ms Rachel Chen issued the referral-for-clarification rather than the standard refusal.

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The Yuba City Gurdwara Sahib filed a supplementary I-129 with the California Service Center disclosing the family relationship between Bhai Harjinder and Mr Sukhwinder Singh-Dhillon, and providing supplementary documentation establishing that the religious-services arrangement at the gurdwara had been the subject of a ten-year search and that Bhai Harjinder's seventeen-year granthi career at Talhan and his Mastuana-Sahib training were the qualifications on which the gurdwara had selected him.

The supplementary I-129 was approved at the California Service Center in March 2025.

Bhai Harjinder Singh-Dhillon's R-1 visa was issued on the second Friday of April 2025.

He arrived in Yuba City, California, on the second Wednesday of May 2025, and took up the position of resident granthi at the Yuba City Gurdwara Sahib on the same week.

The small Gurdwara Sahib at Talhan, on his departure, was for approximately two years served by visiting granthis from the neighbouring villages of Bhogpur and Adampur on a rotational basis. In May 2027, the gurdwara recruited as its new resident granthi a young Mastuana-Sahib graduate of 2024, Bhai Manpreet Singh-Aulakh of the village of Phagwara, who had been seeking a small-village resident position on his graduation.

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Bhai Harjinder, on his five-year R-1 service at the Yuba City gurdwara, served the congregation through the standard daily prayers, the morning and evening sevas, the langar, and the additional pastoral and educational services that the small American Sikh congregation requested of him. He filed his EB-4 special-immigrant petition in 2030 and obtained lawful permanent residence in October of that year. He was joined by his wife and three children on the standard following-to-join procedures in 2031.

In 2034, on the small private reckoning of his nine years in Yuba City and on the small reckoning of his three children's American education, Bhai Harjinder discussed with his brother Sukhwinder the possibility of his eventually returning to Talhan in his retirement and serving as the resident granthi at the small Gurdwara Sahib of his birth, on the small private retirement plan that some R-1 granthis develop after their American service.

The small Gurdwara Sahib at Talhan, on the operational fact of Bhai Manpreet Singh-Aulakh's seven-year service at that point, would on Bhai Harjinder's eventual return require a small succession arrangement that the village had not, on its history, previously had occasion to develop.

The small succession arrangement was, on Bhai Harjinder's standing reckoning of the matter, a small operational question for the

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village's gurdwara committee that he did not propose to address until his own subsequent return.

* * *

Mr Brian McAllister continued at the United States Embassy in New Delhi until the end of his fourth consular tour in 2027.

He took up his fifth consular tour at the Consulate General in Hong Kong in 2028. He did not, in any subsequent consular tour, encounter another R-1 case in which the petitioning religious worker and the sponsoring religious organisation's president were brothers and on which the supplementary review found that the family-and-community network connection was the operational basis of the worker's identification but not the operational motivation of the petition.

He did, on the small reckoning that he made over the long evenings on the small balcony of his subsequent Hong Kong residence, come to think that the most important thing he had learned in fifteen years at the State Department was that the standard fraud-detection procedures the Fraud Prevention Unit operated were always larger than the cases the procedures processed, and that the procedures had been drafted on the technical signature of fraud rather than on the underlying religious-services or family-and-community facts on which the genuine cases distinguished themselves from the fraudulent. The technical signature on the family-relationship non-disclosure was the

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same in both kinds of case. The underlying facts, on a careful documentary review supplemented by the consular officer's personal understanding of how small religious organisations operate within family-and-community networks, distinguished them. The personal understanding was, on the operational practice of consular officers, an understanding the State Department's training programme did not on its standard curriculum provide. It was an understanding that consular officers brought to the work, on the operational facts, from the family circumstances and religious-community experiences of their own lives.

He did, on his subsequent contributions to the State Department's consular training-academy curriculum, recommend the inclusion of a small case-study segment on R-1 cases involving family-relationship non-disclosures in small American religious-congregation contexts, on which junior consular officers could be exposed to the documentary record of cases like the Yuba City Gurdwara Sahib case of January 2025 and could learn the analytical distinction between the technical-signature reading and the underlying-facts reading.

The recommendation was, on the standard procedural-revision cycle, considered, deliberated, and — in 2031 — included in the curriculum.

The small Gurdwara Sahib at Talhan, on Bhai Harjinder's eventual return in 2042 on his sixtieth birthday, on a small succession arrangement that the village's gurdwara committee had on the seven

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preceding years developed in consultation with Bhai Manpreet, took on a two-granthi structure in which Bhai Harjinder, on the small reckoning of his American service and on the standing of the village's family-and-community networks, served as the senior granthi on the morning sevas, and Bhai Manpreet served on the evening sevas and the langar supervision. The arrangement was, on the small reckoning of Punjab village gurdwara committees in the 2040s, the kind of small operational accommodation that the longer accounting of how village granthis depart for and return from American small congregations was, on the longer reading, beginning to require.

— END —

The Conditional Resident

A Short Story

Mrs Ji-Eun Park-Whitfield of Palo Alto, California, was twenty-nine.

She had been born in Daegu, South Korea, had read English literature at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, had married Mr Christopher Whitfield, an American software engineer at a Mountain View technology firm, in October of 2022, and had on Christopher's I-130 petition emigrated to the United States in March of 2023. She had received conditional permanent resident status on her arrival, and the conditions were, on the standard two-year rule, scheduled for removal on her I-751 joint petition in March of 2025.

In November of 2024, on circumstances of the marriage that had since the spring of that year deteriorated to the point at which Christopher had on three separate occasions struck her, on a small private record she kept in the third Korean-language journal of the seven journals she had maintained continuously since 2017, Mrs Park-Whitfield had on the assistance of a small bilingual women's services organisation in San Mateo separated from her husband and moved into a small studio apartment in East Palo Alto.

In February of 2025, she filed an I-751 petition for the removal of conditions on the abusive-marriage waiver provisions of the Violence

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Against Women Act, on which a conditional resident whose marriage had been terminated and whose terminating conditions included spousal abuse could on the standard documentary procedures obtain the removal of conditions without the requirement of the joint petition with the citizen spouse.

The I-751 abusive-marriage waiver petition required, on the standard documentary procedures, evidence of the marital relationship's genuine bona-fide entry, evidence of the abuse, and evidence of the relationship between the abuse and the petitioner's separation.

Mrs Park-Whitfield's petition was supported, on its documentary submission, by the standard joint financial records of the marriage, the standard joint residence records, the standard photographs and correspondence of the relationship's genuine entry, two affidavits from friends of the marriage who had been present at small social occasions during which Christopher had on his own behaviour displayed the small early indicators of the deterioration that subsequently became the abuse, the medical record from Stanford Hospital's emergency department documenting her injuries on the second incident in October 2024, the police report from the Palo Alto Police Department on the third incident in November 2024, and — on the supplementary documentary submission that the women's services organisation had recommended — the third of her seven Korean-language journals, on

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which she had recorded in her own hand the daily account of the marriage's deterioration and the three abuse incidents.

The Korean-language journal was submitted to the Citizenship and Immigration Services with a certified English translation, on the standard documentary requirement that all foreign-language documents accompanying immigration petitions be submitted in certified translation.

The certified translation was prepared by a Mr Kevin Lee-Han, a Korean-American certified translator based in Cupertino, on the recommendation of the women's services organisation.

The certified translation, on its submission to the Citizenship and Immigration Services in February 2025, was thirty-eight pages.

* * *

The I-751 petition was assigned for adjudication to the Vermont Service Center.

The adjudicating officer was a Ms Patricia Anderson, a forty-one-year-old senior immigration officer with twelve years' service on the I-751 abusive-marriage-waiver caseload.

Ms Anderson reviewed the petition over the course of three weeks in March 2025.

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The petition was, on the standard documentary record, a strong abusive-marriage-waiver case. The marital bona fides were established. The abuse was attested by medical records and police reports. The Korean-language journal, on the certified translation, was a thirty-eight-page contemporaneous personal record of the marriage's deterioration that, on the standard practice of waiver adjudication, would on its specificity and emotional honesty be a document of considerable evidentiary weight.

On the second Wednesday of April 2025, Ms Anderson approved the petition.

Mrs Ji-Eun Park-Whitfield received her unconditional lawful permanent resident card on the second Wednesday of May 2025, on the standard processing time for approved I-751 abusive-marriage-waiver cases.

She continued in her small studio apartment in East Palo Alto. She enrolled in a small certificate programme in technical translation at Stanford's Continuing Studies Department in the autumn of 2025, on the small career direction she had on her own recovery from the marriage decided to pursue.

On the third Friday of November 2025, on a small encounter at the Stanford Continuing Studies Department's small reception for new students, she met another Korean student, a Mr Jin-Ho Choi, who was

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studying for the same certificate programme on his own small career direction following his recent emigration from Seoul.

They spoke for approximately twenty minutes.

In the course of the conversation, Mr Choi mentioned that his uncle, a Mr Min-Su Choi-Han, had until his retirement in 2023 worked as a Korean-language certified translator in the Cupertino area on a small private practice serving the local Korean-American community.

Mrs Park-Whitfield mentioned that her own I-751 petition had been supported by a certified translation of her Korean-language journal that had been prepared by a Mr Kevin Lee-Han of Cupertino on the recommendation of a women's services organisation.

Mr Choi looked at her for a moment.

“Mrs Park-Whitfield.”

“Yes, Mr Choi.”

“Mrs Park-Whitfield, my uncle's small private practice in Cupertino was, on his own retirement in 2023, transferred to one of his junior associates, who has continued to operate it since. The associate's name is, on my own family's small knowledge of my uncle's practice, not Kevin Lee-Han.”

“Mr Choi.”

“Yes, Mrs Park-Whitfield.”

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“Mr Choi, may I ask. Did your uncle in his Cupertino practice know all of the Korean-language certified translators operating in the Cupertino-Palo Alto area.”

“Mrs Park-Whitfield, my uncle in his thirty-two years in Cupertino knew, on the small operational practice of how Korean-language certified translators in the South Bay community operate, all the others. The community is small. The certifications are issued by approximately three of the recognised certifying bodies. The translators are perhaps eleven in total, on my uncle’s small private reckoning of his practice in 2023.”

“Mr Choi.”

“Yes, Mrs Park-Whitfield.”

“Mr Choi, would you be willing to ask your uncle whether he knew a Mr Kevin Lee-Han.”

“Mrs Park-Whitfield. Yes, I would.”

* * *

Mr Min-Su Choi-Han, on the inquiry his nephew Jin-Ho conveyed to him on the small Saturday-morning telephone call of the following weekend, indicated that he had not, in his thirty-two years in Cupertino, known a Korean-language certified translator named Kevin Lee-Han. He indicated that the eleven Korean-language certified

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translators he had known in the South Bay community were, in 2023 on his retirement, all known to him by name, by certifying body, and by reputation. He indicated that the name Kevin Lee-Han did not, on his recollection, correspond to any of the eleven.

Mr Choi-Han did indicate, on the inquiry, that there were Korean-American Korean-language translators in the South Bay area who operated without the formal certification, on small private translation services they offered through community connections rather than through the certifying bodies. The non-certified translators were, on Mr Choi-Han's small reckoning, perhaps thirty additional persons. The non-certified translators sometimes signed certifying-body certifications that were not, on a strict reading of the certifying bodies' records, certifications they were authorised to sign.

Mr Choi-Han recommended that Mrs Park-Whitfield, on the small private inquiry her own circumstances now suggested, telephone the certifying body that Mr Kevin Lee-Han's certification on her translation had purported to come from, and verify the certification.

Mrs Park-Whitfield, on the small reckoning of the matter, telephoned the American Translators Association on the second Tuesday of December 2025.

The American Translators Association indicated that no Korean-English certified translator named Kevin Lee-Han was, on the

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Association's records, registered with the Association at any time between 2010 and 2025.

Mrs Park-Whitfield then telephoned the women's services organisation in San Mateo that had on the previous February recommended Mr Lee-Han.

The organisation, on its records, indicated that Mr Lee-Han had been recommended to several of the organisation's clients on the standard recommendation list the organisation maintained, that the recommendation list had been compiled in 2018 from translators who had on small introductory contacts with the organisation indicated their willingness to provide translation services at a reduced rate to the organisation's clients, and that the organisation had not, on its standard practice, independently verified the certifications of the translators on the recommendation list.

The organisation's director, on Mrs Park-Whitfield's inquiry, expressed the view that this was a small operational matter the organisation should investigate further, and asked Mrs Park-Whitfield to, on the convenience of her schedule, bring her copies of the original Korean-language journal and the English certified translation to the organisation's office for a small documentary review.

Mrs Park-Whitfield brought the documents to the office on the third Friday of December 2025.

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The organisation, on the documentary review conducted by a senior bilingual case-worker called Mrs Soo-Jin Park-Bauer, identified that the certified English translation prepared by Mr Lee-Han had on its thirty-eight pages contained, on the senior case-worker's side-by-side review against the original Korean-language journal, a number of substantive translation discrepancies.

The discrepancies were not the kind that an inexperienced or careless certified translator might inadvertently produce. They were the kind that a non-certified translator with insufficient familiarity with the Korean cultural and personal-narrative conventions on which Mrs Park-Whitfield's journal entries had been written might produce.

On approximately fourteen of the journal's entries, Mr Lee-Han's English translation had rendered as factual descriptions of physical abuse passages of the Korean original that, on the senior case-worker's reading, had been Mrs Park-Whitfield's small Korean idiomatic descriptions of marital emotional distress, of the sort that Korean-language journal-keepers in difficult marriages routinely employed without intending the literal physical-abuse interpretation that the English translation had supplied.

On approximately seven of the entries, Mr Lee-Han's translation had rendered as descriptions of physical violence by Christopher passages that the Korean original had on the senior case-worker's reading described instances of small marital arguments in which Mrs

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Park-Whitfield had on her own self-account been on the small operational facts an active rather than a passive participant.

On approximately three of the entries, Mr Lee-Han's translation had simply added passages of physical abuse that did not, on the senior case-worker's side-by-side review, correspond to any underlying Korean text.

The translation had, on the senior case-worker's overall review, on a strict reading, embellished the Korean original's account of the marriage's deterioration in the direction that the I-751 abusive-marriage-waiver standard required.

The Korean original, on the senior case-worker's honest reading, did support the abusive-marriage-waiver standard — the three abuse incidents documented by the medical and police records were referenced in the Korean journal in terms that, on a faithful translation, would establish the I-751 standard. The Korean original did not, however, support the additional embellishments that Mr Lee-Han's translation had supplied.

The supplementary documentary record on the I-751 petition was, on a strict reading, on its embellished translation, an inaccurate documentary record.

* * *

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Mrs Park-Whitfield sat in the small reception area of the women's services organisation in San Mateo on the third Friday of December 2025 for some time.

She read, with Mrs Park-Bauer, each of the twenty-four discrepancies.

On the small private reading of her own Korean-language journal entries, she confirmed that the embellishments were embellishments. She confirmed that the underlying Korean text was, on her own twenty-nine-year-old self-knowledge, the text she had written. She confirmed that the medical and police records were documentary evidence of the actual three incidents of physical abuse that had on the operational facts taken place. She confirmed that the marriage had been the abusive marriage the I-751 abusive-marriage-waiver standard described.

She also confirmed, on the small private reading, that the embellishments — the fourteen idiomatic-distress passages converted into physical-abuse descriptions, the seven small-argument passages converted into physical-violence descriptions, the three additional fabricated passages — were not the operational facts of the marriage. They were the operational invention of Mr Kevin Lee-Han's translation, on whatever his reasons had been for the invention.

Mrs Park-Bauer, after the side-by-side review was complete, looked at Mrs Park-Whitfield across the small table in the small reception area.

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“Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, the I-751 petition was approved on the documentary record submitted in February 2025.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, the documentary record submitted included the embellished translation that Mr Lee-Han prepared.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, on a strict reading, the documentary record was, on the embellishments, an inaccurate record. The petition was approved on the assumption that the documentary record was accurate.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, the strict reading produces the question of whether the approval, on the inaccurate documentary record, was on a procedural reading a properly issued approval.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, on the I-751 abusive-marriage-waiver standard, the underlying facts of the marriage — the genuine bona-fide entry, the three documented abuse incidents, the proximity between the abuse and the separation — do, on a faithful translation of your Korean-

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language journal that does not include the embellishments, support the standard. The waiver would, on a faithful translation, on Ms Anderson's likely review, still have been approved."

"Yes, Soo-Jin."

"Ji-Eun, on the operational outcome, the embellished translation produced an approval that the faithful translation would also have produced. On a strict reading, however, the approval was issued on the embellished translation rather than on the faithful one."

"Yes, Soo-Jin."

"Ji-Eun, on the small reckoning of the matter that you and I have to make this afternoon. The disclosure of the embellishments to the Citizenship and Immigration Services would, on a strict reading, require the agency to consider whether the approval should be revoked and the petition reopened on a faithful translation. The reopening would, on the merits, on the faithful translation, on Ms Anderson's standard practice, likely produce the same approval."

"Yes, Soo-Jin."

"Ji-Eun, on the standard procedural rules, the reopening would also produce a small administrative inquiry into the source of the embellishments, which would on its conduct identify Mr Lee-Han's small private translation practice as the source. The inquiry would, on the standard rules, refer Mr Lee-Han to the certifying body for which

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he had on the original certified translation falsely claimed to be a registered translator. The certifying body would, on its standard procedure, refer the matter to the United States Department of Justice for the consideration of federal charges of false certification of immigration documents.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, the federal charges against Mr Lee-Han would, on the small operational practice of how the Department of Justice handles cases of this kind, in due course produce the question of whether other I-751 abusive-marriage-waiver petitions Mr Lee-Han had, on his small private practice since 2018, prepared translations for had on similar embellishments been the basis of approvals that, on faithful translations, would have on the underlying facts not been the same approvals.”

“Soo-Jin.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, the women’s services organisation has on its records identified how many other clients to whom Mr Lee-Han had been recommended.”

Mrs Park-Bauer looked at Mrs Park-Whitfield across the small table for a long moment.

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“Ji-Eun. Forty-three.”

“Soo-Jin.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, of the forty-three.”

“Ji-Eun, of the forty-three, on the organisation’s records, thirty-nine had on Mr Lee-Han’s translations of various foreign-language documentary submissions filed I-751 abusive-marriage-waiver petitions or VAWA self-petitions or asylum applications between 2018 and 2025. Twenty-eight of the thirty-nine were Korean-speakers whose foreign-language documents Mr Lee-Han had translated in the same direct working relationship as your case. The remaining eleven were Korean-speakers in cases on which Mr Lee-Han had, on the organisation’s small operational records, served as a referring intermediary to other translators of various languages.”

“Soo-Jin, of the twenty-eight Korean-speakers whose Korean-language documents Mr Lee-Han had directly translated.”

“Ji-Eun, all twenty-eight obtained approvals on their petitions.”

“Soo-Jin.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

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“Soo-Jin, on the question of whether the underlying facts of those twenty-eight cases, on faithful translations, would have produced the same approvals.”

“Ji-Eun, the question is the question. The organisation does not, on its records, retain the original foreign-language documents from those twenty-eight cases. The cases were closed on the approvals. The petitioners, on the operational practice of recovering from abusive marriages, did not in most cases retain copies of the original journals or letters they had submitted. The faithful translations would, on the documentary practice of how I-751 cases are handled, not in most cases be retrievable.”

“Soo-Jin, the operational outcome on a disclosure that would on its mechanism reach the federal Department of Justice and the certifying body would be a procedural inquiry into the twenty-eight cases that the underlying documentary record cannot, on the operational practice, support.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, the inquiry would, on the standard procedure, on the absence of the underlying documentary record, produce the consideration of whether some or all of the twenty-eight previously approved petitions should be reopened or revoked on the suspicion of embellished translations that the case-by-case investigation cannot, on the missing originals, individually establish.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, the twenty-eight previously approved petitioners are Korean-speaking women who, on the small operational practice of how women recovering from abusive marriages reconstruct their lives over five years and ten years, may be persons whose American-resident lives have on the operational facts now been settled for some considerable time — some have remarried American citizens, some have had children, some have established small businesses, some have on the longer accounting put the abusive marriages behind them and built lives that, on the operational outcome, do not anticipate any further procedural inquiry.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, the disclosure of the embellishments on my own translation would, on its mechanism, produce the inquiry that on its operational reach addresses the twenty-eight prior cases.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, the disclosure would not, on its mechanism, distinguish between the cases in which the underlying facts on faithful translations would still have produced the approvals and the cases in which they would not have. The disclosure produces the inquiry. The inquiry produces the procedural consequence on the cases the documentary record cannot individually establish.”

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“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

* * *

Mrs Park-Whitfield sat in the small reception area of the women’s services organisation in San Mateo for some further time.

Then she said:

“Soo-Jin.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, on the small reckoning. The disclosure on my own case is, on a strict reading, the disclosure that the standard documentary integrity of the I-751 abusive-marriage-waiver process requires. The non-disclosure is, on a strict reading, a small private complicity in the embellishments that Mr Lee-Han, on his own private operational practice, supplied.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, the disclosure on my own case would, on its mechanism, reach to the twenty-eight previously approved petitions and produce the procedural inquiry that on the missing originals cannot, on the case-by-case operational facts, distinguish the cases that on faithful translations would still have been approvals from those that would not.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

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“Soo-Jin, the operational outcome of the disclosure on the twenty-eight previously approved petitioners would be the imposition on those twenty-eight Korean-speaking women of a procedural risk that they, on their lives now settled in the United States for various periods between three months and seven years, did not on the operational facts choose to bear.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, the imposition of the risk on the twenty-eight is the operational consequence of the disclosure on my own case.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, the embellishments on my own translation were the embellishments of Mr Lee-Han. They were not, on my own knowledge, embellishments I supplied or authorised. The disclosure of the embellishments would, on a strict reading, identify Mr Lee-Han as the perpetrator. The strict reading on the perpetrator is the strict reading the federal documentary-integrity standard requires.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, on a less strict reading, the disclosure of the embellishments has on its operational reach the consequence to the

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twenty-eight previously approved petitioners that I, on my own circumstances, did not choose to impose. The less strict reading would not require the disclosure on my case if the underlying facts of my own marriage, on the faithful translation, support the I-751 standard — which they do.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, on the small reckoning of the matter that I am required, on this Friday afternoon, to make.”

“Yes, Ji-Eun.”

“Soo-Jin, the small reckoning is. I will not file the disclosure of the embellishments with the Citizenship and Immigration Services. The reasons are: first, the underlying facts of my own marriage, on the faithful translation of my Korean-language journal that you and I have today identified, support the I-751 standard, on which the approval would on a faithful translation also have been issued; second, the embellishments were the operational invention of Mr Lee-Han and not my own; third, the operational reach of the disclosure to the twenty-eight previously approved petitioners would impose on those women a procedural risk that, on the missing originals, cannot on the case-by-case facts be individually addressed and that I, on my own circumstances, am not willing to be the operational cause of imposing.”

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“Ji-Eun.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, the small reckoning you have made on this Friday afternoon is the small reckoning that, on a strict reading of the federal documentary-integrity standard, the standard does not authorise. The standard requires the disclosure.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, the small reckoning is, on the longer accounting of how documentary-integrity standards interact with the operational lives of women recovering from abusive marriages, a reckoning the standard’s drafters did not anticipate.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, the small reckoning is, on its consequence, that you carry the knowledge of the embellishments without disclosing it. The carriage is, on its operational practice, the carriage of a small private knowledge that you choose to bear so that the twenty-eight previously approved petitioners do not, on the operational facts, bear the procedural risk.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, the carriage is the cost of the small reckoning. The cost is borne by you.”

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“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, the small reckoning is, on a longer reading, the small reckoning of a Korean-American certified-translation student of December 2025 who has on her own circumstances chosen to enter the certified-translation profession herself, on a small career direction that on its longer accounting will produce, in due course, on her own subsequent professional practice, the eleven or thirty translators of the South Bay Korean-American community whose certifications and small private practices on the small operational reckoning of how Korean-language documents are translated for federal immigration submissions on the longer accounting form the small documentary-integrity infrastructure that the standard’s drafters had on the standard’s drafting assumed would, on the operational practice, be reliably operating.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

“Ji-Eun, the small reckoning of December 2025 is the small reckoning that you, on your own subsequent professional practice as a Korean-language certified translator on small private I-751 and VAWA and asylum cases, will on the longer accounting be the operational person whose small documentary-integrity practice does not, on the operational outcome, produce the embellishments that Mr Lee-Han’s small private practice, on whatever his operational reasons were, did.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

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“Ji-Eun, the small reckoning of December 2025 is, on the longer reading, the reckoning of a Korean-speaking petitioner who chose, on her own approval being secure, not to disclose the embellishment that on its mechanism would produce the procedural inquiry on the twenty-eight, and chose instead to enter the profession on whose small operational practice the next forty-three or one hundred forty-three Korean-speaking petitioners would, on the longer accounting, depend.”

“Yes, Soo-Jin.”

* * *

Mrs Ji-Eun Park-Whitfield completed the certificate programme in technical translation at Stanford’s Continuing Studies Department in June 2026.

She obtained her certified-translation credentials from the American Translators Association in October 2026, on the standard examination process.

She established her own small private Korean-English certified-translation practice in Palo Alto in November 2026.

She offered, on her standing operational policy, services to clients of the women’s services organisation in San Mateo at a reduced rate. The recommendation list of the organisation, on the matter the senior case-worker Mrs Park-Bauer had on the third Friday of December

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2025 indicated would be the subject of further investigation, was on the organisation's subsequent operational practice rebuilt on a strict-verification basis. Mrs Park-Whitfield was, on the rebuilt list, one of the verified Korean-language certified translators.

Mr Kevin Lee-Han continued, on his own small private practice, in Cupertino. The women's services organisation in San Mateo did not, on its standing operational practice, refer further clients to him. Other small community organisations on the Bay Area Korean-American services landscape, on the small word-of-mouth communications that small communities operate within, in due course on the operational practice of how reputations move through small communities, also ceased to refer clients to him. He continued in his small practice on a smaller and smaller client base, supplemented by his other small business activities. The federal Department of Justice did not, on the operational facts of how the matter had not been disclosed, in any subsequent year file charges against him.

Mrs Park-Whitfield, on her own subsequent professional practice as a Korean-English certified translator, conducted approximately eleven I-751 abusive-marriage-waiver translations per year between 2027 and 2034. The translations were, on her own operational practice, faithful translations. The petitioners on whose cases she translated were Korean-speaking women whose underlying journal entries and personal correspondence supported, on the faithful translations, the I-

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751 standard or did not. The petitioners whose underlying entries did not support the standard did not, on the faithful translations, obtain the approvals. The petitioners whose underlying entries did support the standard obtained the approvals.

She did not, on any subsequent year, encounter another case in which the certifying body of a translator on a recommendation list was on inquiry the certifying body the translator had falsely claimed registration with.

She did, on the small reckoning that she made over the long evenings on the small balcony of her flat in Palo Alto, retain her own copy of the third Korean-language journal of her seven journals — the journal of the marriage's deterioration in 2024 — in the small bookshelf in her flat, alongside the embellished English translation Mr Lee-Han had prepared and the small private side-by-side annotation she had on the third Friday of December 2025 and on subsequent quiet evenings prepared, identifying each of the twenty-four discrepancies on the operational documentary record.

She did, on the small reckoning, never show the side-by-side annotation to anyone.

She did, on the small private practice, on the third Friday of December of every year from 2026 onwards, on the anniversary of the small reckoning at the women's services organisation, take down the

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third Korean-language journal and the embellished English translation and the side-by-side annotation, and read each of them once.

Then she replaced them on the bookshelf and continued her work.

— END —

The Nonimmigrant Intent

A Short Story

Mr Arjun Ramaswamy-Iyengar of Adyar, Chennai, was eighteen.

He had completed his secondary schooling at the Chennai Public School, Anna Nagar, in March 2025, with a CBSE Class XII aggregate of ninety-eight point six per cent and with the highest mark in the Tamil Nadu state Joint Entrance Examination Advanced for the year 2025 — a rank of one hundred and forty-seven on the all-India list, which was on the small private accounting of his school the highest rank any student of the school had achieved in its sixty-three-year history.

On the strength of the rank, he had been admitted in April 2025 to the Indian Institute of Technology Madras for the bachelor of technology in computer science.

He had also, on a small parallel application he had on his own initiative submitted in November 2024, been admitted in March 2025 to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, on a full financial-aid offer that covered the entire four-year cost of attendance, on a programme leading to the Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science.

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He had, on the small reckoning of an eighteen-year-old of approximately his promise and approximately his family's circumstances, accepted the MIT offer.

His father, Mr Suresh Ramaswamy-Iyengar, was a fifty-four-year-old structural engineer who operated a small consulting practice in Chennai and who had himself, in 1985, been admitted to the master's programme in civil engineering at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, on a J-1 exchange-visitor visa, on the small fellowship the university had offered him.

His mother, Mrs Lakshmi Ramaswamy-Krishnan, was a fifty-one-year-old paediatrician who operated a small private practice in Adyar.

In May of 2025, Arjun applied for the F-1 student visa to attend MIT for the autumn 2025 semester. He was scheduled for his consular interview at the United States Consulate General in Chennai on the third Tuesday of June 2025.

He attended the interview.

He was refused the visa under section 214(b) of the Immigration and Nationality Act, on the standard non-immigrant-intent ground, on which the consular officer was not satisfied that the applicant had demonstrated the strong ties to India that overcame the statutory presumption of immigrant intent.

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He was eighteen, with no significant assets in his own name, no employment history, no spouse, no children, and a parental household of comfortable but not exceptional means. His ties to India were the standard ties of an eighteen-year-old admitted to MIT — family, the IIT-Madras admission as a fall-back, his secondary-school records, his small social circle of high-school friends. The consular officer's assessment, on the standard 214(b) practice for Indian student visa applicants from middle-class Chennai families, would on the standard rate of refusals for that profile have been a refusal in approximately one in twelve cases.

Arjun's case was, on the operational practice, the one in twelve.

The refusal letter, on the standard form, stated only the 214(b) ground.

It did not, on the standard form, state any specific factual basis for the consular officer's assessment.

Arjun walked out of the Consulate General building on Anna Salai at twenty-three minutes past eleven in the morning.

He sat, for some time, on the small pavement bench across the road.

Then he telephoned his father.

* * *

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“Appa.”

“Arjun.”

“Appa, the visa was refused.”

“Refused.”

“Appa, on 214(b). Non-immigrant intent. The consular officer formed the view I had not demonstrated strong ties to India.”

Mr Suresh Ramaswamy-Iyengar did not reply for some time.

“Arjun.”

“Appa.”

“Arjun, did the consular officer ask any questions about your family.”

“Appa, the consular officer asked the standard questions about my parents’ occupations, my parents’ ages, my elder sibling — of whom I have none — and any other family members in the United States.”

“Arjun.”

“Appa.”

“Arjun, did the consular officer ask any specific questions about my own American studies.”

Arjun paused for a moment.

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“Appa, the consular officer asked one specific question. The consular officer asked whether any member of my family had previously held an American visa of any kind.”

“Arjun.”

“Appa.”

“Arjun, what did you answer.”

“Appa, I answered that you had held a J-1 visa for your master’s studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign between 1985 and 1987. I answered that you had completed the master’s degree and had returned to India in the summer of 1987 on the standard completion of the J-1 programme. I answered that no other member of the family had held an American visa.”

Mr Ramaswamy-Iyengar did not reply for a long moment.

“Arjun.”

“Appa.”

“Arjun, after you answered the question. Did the consular officer ask any further questions on the J-1 visa.”

“Appa, the consular officer typed something into the computer for some time. Then the consular officer looked at me and said only that the visa was being refused under 214(b) and that I should collect my documents at the small window on the way out.”

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“Arjun.”

“Appa.”

“Arjun. Come home.”

* * *

Mr Suresh Ramaswamy-Iyengar sat in the small front room of the family flat in Adyar at twenty-six minutes past three on the Tuesday afternoon, with his son Arjun on the small sofa opposite him.

He held in his hand a small folded document of two pages that he had retrieved from the small steel cupboard in the back of the flat where he kept the family’s long-term documentary records.

“Arjun.”

“Appa.”

“Arjun. The J-1 visa I held between 1985 and 1987 was, on its standard provisions, subject to the two-year home-country physical-presence requirement of section 212(e) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. The two-year requirement, on the J-1 standard, required that on completion of my master’s degree at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in May 1987 I return to India for two years before I would be eligible for any subsequent American visa.”

“Yes, Appa.”

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“Arjun, in May 1987, on the small academic offers I received in the spring semester of that year, I was offered a doctoral fellowship at Stanford University in the structural engineering department, on a five-year programme commencing September 1987. The Stanford fellowship was the kind of opportunity, on the small academic accounting of structural engineering in 1987, that an Indian master’s graduate of my profile encountered perhaps once in a generation.”

“Yes, Appa.”

“Arjun, the two-year home-country physical-presence requirement of my J-1 visa would, on a strict reading, have prevented me from accepting the Stanford fellowship in September 1987. I would have been required to return to India in May 1987, remain for two years, and only then — in May 1989 — would I have been eligible to apply for the F-1 student visa for Stanford. The Stanford fellowship was not, on its terms, a fellowship that would have remained available on a two-year deferral.”

“Yes, Appa.”

“Arjun, on the small reckoning I made in the spring of 1987 in Urbana-Champaign, I applied to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services for a waiver of the two-year requirement under the no-objection statement provisions then available to J-1 holders sponsored by their home governments. The Government of India provided the no-objection statement on the standard practice of the

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time, on which the Indian government routinely provided no-objection statements to Indian J-1 graduates seeking to remain in the United States for further studies.”

“Yes, Appa.”

“Arjun, the waiver was approved by the Citizenship and Immigration Services in July 1987. I commenced the Stanford doctoral programme in September 1987.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the doctoral programme at Stanford. You did not complete it.”

“Arjun. The doctoral programme at Stanford I did not complete. I withdrew, on a small private decision I made in the second year of the programme, in the spring of 1989. I returned to India in May 1989, on the same date that under the original two-year home-country physical-presence requirement I would have completed the requirement.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, why did you withdraw.”

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Mr Ramaswamy-Iyengar looked, for a long moment, at the small framed photograph on the wall behind the sofa that showed him on the morning of his August 1985 departure from Madras for Urbana-Champaign, with his own father standing at his left.

“Arjun, on the small reckoning I made in 1989, the doctoral programme at Stanford was not the kind of work I had on the spring of 1987 expected it to be. The structural-engineering doctoral programme at Stanford was, on its operational practice, a programme oriented toward the kinds of large-scale American structural-engineering problems that were not the structural-engineering problems on which I, as an Indian engineer of my generation, had been formed and expected to spend my career. I had on the operational facts been better suited to the master’s degree at Urbana-Champaign and to the practical Indian structural-engineering work I would, on completion of the master’s, have returned to. The doctoral programme was, on the small reckoning of the 1988-89 academic year, a programme I withdrew from.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the waiver of the two-year requirement that you obtained in 1987 was obtained on the basis that you would, on the Stanford doctoral programme, remain in the United States for the full five years of the programme.”

“Arjun.”

“Appa.”

“Arjun, the waiver of the two-year requirement was obtained on the basis of the no-objection statement from the Government of India and on the basis of the Stanford fellowship offer. The waiver did not, on its strict terms, require my completion of the Stanford doctoral programme. The waiver required only that on its grant I would no longer be subject to the two-year requirement and would be eligible for any subsequent visa or status I qualified for.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, on a strict reading. Did the waiver permit you to withdraw from the Stanford programme in 1989 and return to India.”

“Arjun, on a strict reading, the waiver permitted my voluntary departure from the United States at any time after its grant. The waiver did not, on its terms, require any particular duration of stay or any particular completion of any particular programme.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, on the longer reading. Was the waiver obtained on a representation — implicit or explicit — that you would, on its grant,

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complete the Stanford programme rather than return to India after two years on the same date that the original two-year requirement would have permitted you to.”

Mr Ramaswamy-Iyengar did not reply for a long moment.

Then he said:

“Arjun. The waiver was obtained on the representation that I had, on the Stanford fellowship offer of spring 1987, an academic opportunity that warranted the small policy departure from the standard two-year requirement. The representation was, on the operational facts, accurate as of spring 1987. The subsequent withdrawal from Stanford in spring 1989, on my own subsequent reckoning of how the Stanford doctoral programme actually suited my professional formation, was a decision I made in 1989 on facts I learned in 1987-1988. The decision was not on its operational outcome consistent with the spirit of the waiver, which had on its grant been intended to facilitate a longer American academic career than the operational outcome of two years of doctoral study followed by withdrawal in fact produced.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the consular officer at the Chennai Consulate General who refused my F-1 visa this morning under 214(b).”

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“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the consular officer’s computer, on the question I answered about your J-1 visa, would have retrieved the J-1 record on the State Department database, which would on the consolidated database have included the 1987 waiver and would on the consolidated database have included your withdrawal from Stanford in 1989 and your departure from the United States on the same date that the original two-year requirement would have permitted.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the consular officer would on the database record have read the operational outcome of the 1987 waiver as the operational outcome that, on a less strict reading than the waiver’s formal terms, on the longer reading, was inconsistent with the waiver’s spirit.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the consular officer’s 214(b) refusal of my F-1 visa was the operational consequence, on the family-record reading the consular officer applied, of your 1987 waiver and your 1989 withdrawal.”

“Arjun.”

“Yes, Appa.”

“Arjun, on a strict reading, the consular officer’s discretion under 214(b) is the consular officer’s discretion on the operational facts of

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the case before the officer. The discretion includes the family record. The discretion is, on the discretion's operational scope, very broad. The 214(b) refusal is on the standard procedure not appealable."

"Yes, Appa."

"Arjun, the operational consequence of the refusal is that you cannot, on the September 2025 academic calendar, take up the MIT admission. The MIT admission permits a one-year deferral on the standard practice, but the deferral does not, on the operational facts of the 214(b) refusal, address the underlying ground of the refusal. A second F-1 application after one year would, on the operational facts of the family record, encounter the same ground on the same database review."

"Yes, Appa."

"Arjun, the operational consequence is that the MIT admission is, on the operational facts, not exercisable."

"Yes, Appa."

Mr Ramaswamy-Iyengar sat in the small front room of the flat in Adyar for a long time.

* * *

"Appa."

"Yes, Arjun."

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“Appa, on the small reckoning of how the consular officer’s discretion operates on family records.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the small reckoning of 1989 — your withdrawal from Stanford on the same date the original two-year requirement would have permitted, on a small private decision you made on facts you learned in 1987-1988 — was, on the operational facts, the small reckoning that a twenty-four-year-old Indian engineer made in the second year of his Stanford doctoral programme on his own honest assessment of his suitability for the programme.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the small reckoning of 1989, on the longer reading, has produced the operational consequence to me in 2025 that the MIT admission is not exercisable.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, on the small reckoning, would you, on knowledge in 1987 of the consequence in 2025, have made the same small reckoning of 1989.”

Mr Ramaswamy-Iyengar looked, for a long moment, at his son across the small front room.

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“Arjun, the small reckoning of 1989 was the small reckoning of a twenty-four-year-old Indian engineer who had on his own honest assessment of the Stanford programme determined that the programme was not the programme he was professionally suited to. The small reckoning was made on the operational facts of his own suitability. The small reckoning had on its consequences in 1989 the consequence that I returned to India in May 1989 and built my structural-engineering practice in Chennai over the subsequent thirty-six years, on which my family’s circumstances have been the circumstances they have been, on which your secondary education and your IIT Madras admission and your MIT admission have been the educational possibilities they have been.”

“Yes, Appa.”

“Arjun, the small reckoning of 1989 had on its longer consequences the consequence that the small reckoning of 2025 you encountered at the Chennai Consulate General this morning was the small reckoning the consular officer made on the family record of 1987 and 1989 that the small reckoning of 1989 produced.”

“Yes, Appa.”

“Arjun, on the question of whether, on knowledge in 1987 of the consequence in 2025, I would have made the same small reckoning of 1989. The honest answer is that I do not know. The small reckoning of 1989 was made on the operational facts of my own suitability. The

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operational facts of your suitability for MIT in 2025 are different operational facts. The small reckoning of 1989 was, on its operational facts, the right reckoning. The small reckoning of 2025 by the consular officer is, on its operational facts, the operational application of the family record the small reckoning of 1989 produced.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, on a longer reading. The small reckoning of 1989 was, on the consequence in 2025, also a small reckoning made on a future Indian eighteen-year-old student’s eventual American academic possibility, which the small reckoning had on the longer reading made impossible.”

“Arjun.”

“Yes, Appa.”

“Arjun, the small reckoning of 1989 was made on the operational facts of 1989. The future Indian eighteen-year-old student in 2025 was not, on the operational facts of 1989, an operational consideration available to the twenty-four-year-old Indian engineer at Stanford. The longer reading you are now applying is a longer reading the operational facts of 1989 did not, on their drafting, provide.”

“Yes, Appa.”

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“Arjun, on the longer reading, the small reckoning of 1989 has produced the operational consequence of 2025. The operational consequence of 2025 is the consequence I, as the small reckoner of 1989, am required, on the longer reading, to bear.”

“Yes, Appa.”

Mr Ramaswamy-Iyengar sat in the small front room of the flat in Adyar for a long time.

Then he said:

“Arjun.”

“Yes, Appa.”

“Arjun, on the small reckoning that I, as the small reckoner of 1989 and as the father of an eighteen-year-old MIT admit who has on the morning of the third Tuesday of June 2025 been refused his F-1 visa on the family record of 1987 and 1989, am required to make on this Tuesday afternoon.”

“Yes, Appa.”

“Arjun, the small reckoning is. I will, on the standard procedure available to former J-1 holders whose subsequent operational facts have on the longer reading produced consequences inconsistent with the spirit of waivers granted in earlier years, file with the Citizenship and Immigration Services a small voluntary disclosure memorandum

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acknowledging that the operational outcome of the 1987 waiver was, on the longer reading, inconsistent with the spirit of the waiver, and offering to fulfil retroactively the two-year home-country physical-presence requirement on a small remedial procedure that was, on the operational facts of my withdrawal in 1989 and my continuous residence in India since, in fact already fulfilled by the operational facts of my actual residence in India between 1989 and 2025.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the voluntary disclosure memorandum.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, will it succeed.”

“Arjun, on the small operational practice of how the Citizenship and Immigration Services handles voluntary disclosure memoranda from former J-1 holders thirty-eight years after the operational facts that gave rise to the disclosure, the practice is not standardised. The Service may, on a small operational discretion, accept the memorandum and issue a small administrative finding that on the operational facts of my actual residence in India between 1989 and 2025 the two-year requirement is on the longer reading retrospectively satisfied. The Service may, on a stricter reading, decline the

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memorandum. The probability of acceptance is, on my own small assessment, perhaps thirty per cent.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, on a thirty per cent probability, the operational consequence is that the F-1 visa for September 2025 is, on the standard processing time of voluntary disclosure memoranda, not in any case obtainable.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the operational consequence is that the MIT admission is, on the September 2025 calendar, not exercisable.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, on the small reckoning. Will the voluntary disclosure memorandum produce the consequence that, on a future F-1 application by myself in September 2026 on a one-year deferral of the MIT admission, the family-record reading on the consular officer’s database review will, on the favourable thirty-per-cent outcome, on the unfavourable seventy-per-cent outcome, or on neither, be the family-record reading that the consular officer of June 2025 made.”

“Arjun, on the favourable thirty-per-cent outcome, the family-record reading would, on the consolidated database, include the small

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administrative finding that the two-year requirement was retrospectively satisfied. The family-record reading would, on a fair consular officer's assessment, no longer support the 214(b) refusal. The September 2026 F-1 application would, on the favourable outcome, on the standard 214(b) practice, likely be approved."

"Appa."

"Yes, Arjun."

"Appa, on the unfavourable seventy-per-cent outcome."

"Arjun, on the unfavourable seventy-per-cent outcome, the family-record reading would, on the consolidated database, include the small voluntary disclosure memorandum and the Service's declination of it. The family-record reading would, on a strict consular officer's assessment, not address the underlying ground of the June 2025 refusal. The September 2026 F-1 application would, on the unfavourable outcome, on the standard 214(b) practice, likely be refused on the same ground."

"Appa."

"Yes, Arjun."

"Appa, on the small reckoning of probabilities, the voluntary disclosure memorandum is the small instrument that on a thirty-per-

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cent probability produces the September 2026 F-1 approval and on a seventy-per-cent probability does not.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, will you nevertheless file the memorandum.”

“Yes, Arjun. I will file the memorandum.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Why.”

Mr Ramaswamy-Iyengar looked, for a long moment, at his son across the small front room.

“Arjun. I will file the memorandum because the memorandum is the small instrument the standard procedure makes available to a former J-1 holder whose subsequent operational facts have on the longer reading produced consequences inconsistent with the spirit of an earlier waiver. The memorandum is the small instrument my own small reckoning of 1989 has, on its longer consequences in 2025, made appropriate to file. The memorandum will, on its filing, on its operational outcome, on whichever of the thirty-per-cent or seventy-per-cent paths it produces, place on the State Department’s consolidated database record the small acknowledgment that the small reckoning of 1989 was, on the longer reading, on its consequences to

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my son the eighteen-year-old MIT admit of June 2025, the small reckoning that produced those consequences. The acknowledgment is, on the small private accounting of fathers and sons and J-1 waivers and longer readings, the small reckoning that I, as the small reckoner of 1989, am required, on the small reckoning of 2025, to make.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the IIT Madras admission. I will, on the operational facts of June 2025, take it up.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, on the September 2026 F-1 application. We will, on the small reckoning of probabilities, make it.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, on the small reckoning of fathers and sons. The small reckoning of 1989 was made on the operational facts of 1989. The small reckoning of 2025 is, on the operational facts of 2025, the small reckoning a son makes on the family record his father’s small reckoning of 1989 produced. The small reckoning of 2025 is, on its operational practice, the small reckoning of accepting the IIT Madras

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admission, of supporting the voluntary disclosure memorandum, and of making the September 2026 F-1 application on the thirty-per-cent probability. The small reckoning of 2025 is, on its longer reading, the small reckoning of bearing the consequence the small reckoning of 1989 produced.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the small reckoning of 2025 is the small reckoning the son makes on the small reckoning of 1989 the father made.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

“Appa, the small reckoning of bearing the consequence is, on the small accounting, the small reckoning that on the longer reading constitutes the family.”

“Yes, Arjun.”

* * *

Mr Suresh Ramaswamy-Iyengar filed the voluntary disclosure memorandum with the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services on the third Friday of July 2025.

The memorandum was, on its final form, eleven pages and was accompanied by a documentary annex consisting of his own continuous residence records in India between May 1989 and June 2025, his Indian income-tax records, his Indian professional-engineer

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registration records, and the small State Department waiver-grant record from July 1987 that the consolidated database had on the June 2025 consular officer's review retrieved.

The memorandum was, on the Service's standard processing time, considered, deliberated, and — on the second Wednesday of February 2026 — accepted, on a small administrative finding that the two-year home-country physical-presence requirement of the 1987 J-1 visa was, on the operational facts of Mr Ramaswamy-Iyengar's actual residence in India between 1989 and 2025, retrospectively satisfied, and that the family-record reading of the consolidated database in respect of any subsequent F-1 application by family members would, on a fair consular officer's assessment, no longer support the 214(b) refusal on the basis of the 1987 waiver and 1989 withdrawal.

The administrative finding was, on the standard practice, the favourable thirty-per-cent outcome.

Mr Arjun Ramaswamy-Iyengar attended his second F-1 visa interview at the United States Consulate General in Chennai on the third Tuesday of June 2026.

The visa was issued on the same morning.

He matriculated at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in September 2026, on the one-year deferral the MIT admissions office had on the operational facts granted him.

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In the academic year 2026-2027, he completed the freshman year of the Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science with a grade-point average of four point nine on the five-point scale, on which he was on the small private accounting of the MIT undergraduate registrar one of the highest first-year grade-point averages of his class.

He continued at MIT through the standard four-year programme, graduating in May 2030.

He took up, on the small private decision he made in his senior year, the doctoral programme in computer science at Stanford University commencing September 2030.

Mr Suresh Ramaswamy-Iyengar attended his son's MIT graduation in May 2030 on a B-2 visitor visa, on the standard practice for parents of MIT graduates.

He sat, on the morning of the graduation, in the small section of the auditorium reserved for parents, with his wife Lakshmi at his left.

On the small private accounting of the matter that he made over the long evenings on the small balcony of the family flat in Adyar after his return to Chennai in early June 2030, he came to think that the most important thing he had learned in forty-three years between his own May 1987 graduation from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and his son's May 2030 graduation from MIT was that the

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small reckonings he had made on the operational facts of his own twenty-four-year-old life in 1989 had on the longer accounting interacted with the operational facts of the State Department's consolidated database and the operational practice of consular officers' family-record readings to produce, on the small reckoning of 2025, the operational consequence to his son that the small reckonings of 1989 had not, on their drafting, anticipated. The longer accounting was the longer accounting. The operational consequences travelled, on the longer accounting, between generations on the operational mechanisms the standard procedures had on their drafting provided. The voluntary disclosure memorandum was, on the small operational mechanism, the small instrument the standard procedures had on their drafting also provided for the small remedial reckoning between generations. The small remedial reckoning had, on its operation in this case, succeeded. It had, on the small reckoning of the operational facts and the longer accounting, been the small reckoning the family record had on the longer reading required.

— *END* —

The Notario

A Short Story

Mrs Carmen Valdés-Mendoza of West 49th Street, Hialeah, Florida, was sixty-one.

She had emigrated from Holguín, Cuba, in 1980 on the Mariel boatlift, had on her arrival in Miami obtained adjustment of status under the Cuban Adjustment Act, had naturalised as a United States citizen in 1986, and had since 1992 operated a small storefront business on West 49th Street under the trade name ‘Valdés Servicios Multiples’.

The business offered, on its small operational scope, English-Spanish document translation services, the preparation of small business forms for the Florida Department of State, tax-preparation assistance during the January-to-April federal tax season, copying and notarisatation services, and — on the largest single component of the business’s annual revenue — immigration form preparation services for the Cuban, Honduran, Salvadoran, Guatemalan, Venezuelan, Haitian, and Nicaraguan members of the Hialeah community.

Mrs Valdés-Mendoza was not, on the records of the Florida Bar or the federal Executive Office for Immigration Review, an attorney.

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She was not, on the records of the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Access Programmes, a recognised representative of any of the small non-profit organisations accredited to provide immigration representation.

She was, on a strict reading of the Florida Bar's unauthorised-practice-of-law standards and on the federal regulations at 8 C.F.R. § 1003.102, a notario — the small Spanish-American storefront immigration-services operator whose work, on a strict reading of the prohibitions on the unauthorised practice of immigration law, the United States legal system had since the 1990s identified as a category of small Hispanic community-services operator whose continued operation in the small Hialeah and Sunset Park and Pilsen storefronts of the country constituted, on the unauthorised-practice prohibitions, a small persistent violation.

She had, on her own operational practice over thirty-three years, prepared approximately eleven thousand immigration forms for clients of her storefront.

She had, on the small statistical record of how the forms had subsequently been processed by the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services and the immigration courts, on the records the clients had over the years returned to her with on subsequent visits, an approval rate of approximately seventy-seven per cent.

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The seventy-seven per cent approval rate was, on the comparable benchmark of federal recognised representatives and licensed immigration attorneys operating in the Miami-Dade County market on equivalent caseloads, approximately seven percentage points below the licensed-representative benchmark.

It was, on the small operational reading of the unauthorised-practice prohibitions, the operational evidence that the prohibitions had on their drafting been designed to produce: the demonstration that notarios, on their unauthorised practice, produced operational outcomes for their clients somewhat worse than licensed representatives would on the same caseloads have produced.

Mrs Valdés-Mendoza had not, in her thirty-three years of operation, been the subject of any federal prosecution, any Florida Bar enforcement action, or any client complaint to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

She had been the subject, in 2009 and again in 2017, of two small advisory letters from the Florida Bar's Unauthorised Practice of Law Committee, reminding her of the prohibitions on the unauthorised practice of immigration law and recommending that her storefront's services be restricted to non-immigration document-preparation work.

She had, on the receipt of each letter, modified the small printed sign in the storefront's window to indicate that the immigration-form preparation services were 'on a documentary-completion basis only,

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with no legal advice provided’ and had continued the operational practice substantially unchanged.

On the third Tuesday of October 2025, on a small federal-state cooperative investigation that the United States Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Florida had on the previous year commenced into the operations of approximately forty Miami-Dade County notario storefronts, two federal agents — a Special Agent Patricia Howell of the Department of Homeland Security’s Homeland Security Investigations division and a Special Agent Rodrigo Martínez-López of the same division — entered Valdés Servicios Multiples on West 49th Street at twenty-three minutes past ten in the morning, presented their credentials, and informed Mrs Valdés-Mendoza that the storefront’s records were the subject of a federal search warrant.

* * *

The federal investigation, on its operational scope, had identified the forty Miami-Dade County notario storefronts on a small statistical analysis of immigration-form preparation activity in the Department of Homeland Security’s administrative-form-processing records.

The analysis had identified that the forty storefronts had between 2018 and 2024 prepared a combined total of approximately three hundred and forty thousand immigration-form submissions, that the storefronts had on the operational practice charged fees per submission of between fifty and four hundred dollars depending on

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the form type, that none of the storefronts' operators were licensed attorneys or recognised representatives, and that the storefronts had on the cumulative operational scope generated approximately forty-three million dollars in annual storefront revenue across the forty operators.

The investigation was, on the United States Attorney's standard practice in unauthorised-practice cases, oriented toward a small set of pilot prosecutions that would, on their resolution, establish the operational precedent for the broader notario-storefront enforcement programme that the Department of Justice had on its 2024 priority designation announced.

Mrs Valdés-Mendoza's storefront was one of the seven pilot cases.

The search warrant authorised the seizure of the storefront's client files, the storefront's financial records, the storefront's computer equipment, and the storefront's small operational ledgers.

Special Agent Howell and Special Agent Martínez-López conducted the search, on the standard procedure, between twenty-three minutes past ten and six minutes past two in the afternoon. They identified, removed, and inventoried the relevant materials. Mrs Valdés-Mendoza was, on the standard procedure, not arrested at the storefront but was informed that the United States Attorney's Office would, on the basis of the seized materials, in due course present the case to a federal grand jury for the consideration of charges.

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She was offered the opportunity to make a voluntary statement.

She declined.

She was, on the standard procedure, advised to retain counsel.

* * *

On the small operational practice of how Hialeah community members of the Cuban-American legal profession handled cases of this kind, Mrs Valdés-Mendoza's grand-niece, Mrs Esperanza Valdés-Domenech, who was thirty-four and had on the standard career trajectory completed her law degree at the University of Miami in 2017 and had since 2018 been an associate at a small Coral Gables criminal-defence firm, was retained on the family's small private arrangement to act as the small initial counsel through the grand-jury and pre-indictment phase.

Mrs Valdés-Domenech, on her own first review of the seized materials that were on the standard discovery process made available to her in November 2025, identified that the eleven thousand client files her great-aunt had over thirty-three years prepared comprised approximately eight thousand four hundred adjustment-of-status applications under the Cuban Adjustment Act and various Central American Temporary Protected Status renewals, approximately one thousand seven hundred Form I-130 family petitions, approximately six hundred Form N-400 naturalisation applications, approximately

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one hundred and eighty asylum applications, and approximately ninety miscellaneous filings.

Mrs Valdés-Domenech further identified, on a closer second review of the seized files that occupied her over the long evenings of November and December 2025 in the small associate's office of the Coral Gables firm, that the storefront had retained on each of the eleven thousand cases a small documentary file, that the file in each case contained the storefront's working copy of the immigration form, the supporting documents the client had provided, and — on a small operational practice of her great-aunt's that was, on the unauthorised-practice prohibitions' standard reading, on its face an aggravating element — a small handwritten note, in her great-aunt's small precise hand, indicating the conversation she had on the intake interview had with the client about the client's case.

The small handwritten notes were, on the unauthorised-practice prohibitions, evidence that the storefront had provided not merely documentary-completion services but, on the conversational element the handwritten notes recorded, legal advice on the immigration matters.

They were also, on a closer reading of the eleven thousand notes that Mrs Valdés-Domenech conducted in the small associate's office over the long evenings, the small operational record of a thirty-three-

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year continuous practice of intake interviews conducted on each of eleven thousand Hialeah community members.

They were also, on the closer reading still, on a number of cases that Mrs Valdés-Domenech identified through her own small private review on the night of the third Wednesday of December 2025, evidence of a specific kind that she had not, on the indictment-defence focus that the small initial counsel's task on her great-aunt's defence properly carried, expected the closer reading to identify.

* * *

On the eleven thousand client files, Mrs Valdés-Domenech had identified one hundred and forty-three files on which her great-aunt's small handwritten note had, in addition to the standard intake-interview record, contained a small additional note in her great-aunt's hand.

The small additional notes were, on their content, of various kinds.

On approximately ninety of the one hundred and forty-three, the additional note recorded that her great-aunt had on the intake interview formed the view that the client's case had on the operational facts a documentary or substantive complication of a kind that the storefront's services could not, on the unauthorised-practice prohibitions and on the storefront's small operational competence, properly handle. The additional note in each of these cases recorded

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that her great-aunt had referred the client to one of the four licensed immigration attorneys in the Hialeah and Coral Gables area whose offices she had on her own operational practice over thirty-three years come to recommend on cases of substantive complication.

On approximately thirty-one of the one hundred and forty-three, the additional note recorded that her great-aunt had on the intake interview formed the view that the client's case had on the operational facts a non-immigration complication — a domestic-violence situation, a child-protection concern, a small mental-health crisis, or a medical situation — that the client's presentation at the storefront for an immigration-form preparation had on its surface presentation not appeared to involve. The additional note in each of these cases recorded that her great-aunt had on her own initiative provided the client with the contact information for the appropriate Hialeah or Miami-Dade County community organisation that addressed the underlying non-immigration matter.

On the remaining approximately twenty-two of the one hundred and forty-three, the additional note was of a small operational category that Mrs Valdés-Domenech had not, on the standard categorisation of intake-interview notes she had observed in the licensed immigration practice during her own legal training, encountered.

The small operational category was: cases on which her great-aunt had on the intake interview formed the view that the client should not,

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on the operational facts the client had on the small intake conversation revealed, file the immigration application the client had on the visit requested.

On each of the approximately twenty-two cases, the additional note recorded that her great-aunt had on her own assessment of the operational facts advised the client not to file the application. The notes recorded, in her great-aunt's small precise hand, the substantive grounds for the advice.

On approximately fifteen of the twenty-two, the substantive grounds were that the client had on the intake conversation revealed circumstances on the underlying immigration history that would, on the application's filing and on the Citizenship and Immigration Services' standard adverse-decision processes, have produced not merely the denial of the application but the initiation of removal proceedings against the client on grounds that the client's current status had on the small operational facts of the conversation not previously triggered.

The small operational mechanism of the advice in these fifteen cases was that the client had on the intake conversation revealed, on a small specific question her great-aunt asked on the intake practice, the kind of historical immigration-law violation or criminal-history complication that would on the application's submission have been disclosed to the Service on the standard form's documentary

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requirements, would have triggered the adverse decision, and would have produced the removal proceedings. The advice not to file was the advice that on the client's circumstances the application would, on its operational outcome, be the small instrument that converted the client's current quietly continuing presence in the United States into the removal proceeding that would produce the client's deportation.

On approximately five of the twenty-two, the substantive grounds were variations on the same theme.

On the remaining two of the twenty-two, the substantive grounds were different.

On the two, the additional note in her great-aunt's hand recorded that the storefront had on the intake conversation identified a circumstance, on the client's small presentation at the storefront for an immigration matter, that had nothing on its surface to do with the immigration matter.

On the two, the additional note recorded that the storefront had on the small operational accommodation of the matter advised the client on a circumstance that the client had not, on the visit, presented as a matter on which the client was seeking advice.

On the two, the additional note recorded that the storefront had, on the operational facts of how Hialeah community members of long-storefront acquaintance with the operator sometimes revealed in the

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course of intake interviews matters of a deeper kind, on its own initiative offered the client what the additional note characterised, in her great-aunt's small precise Spanish hand, as 'un consejo de la vida' — a small piece of life-advice.

The two notes were dated, respectively, the second Tuesday of March 2014 and the third Friday of August 2017.

* * *

Mrs Esperanza Valdés-Domenech sat in the small associate's office of the Coral Gables firm on the night of the third Wednesday of December 2025 for some time.

She read the two notes.

The second of the two — the August 2017 note — recorded that the client, a Mrs Yolanda Pérez-Castillo of West 38th Street, Hialeah, who had attended the storefront for the preparation of her Form N-400 naturalisation application, had on the intake conversation revealed, on a small unrelated question her great-aunt had asked, that the client's sixteen-year-old daughter, who lived with her on West 38th Street, had over the previous three months become withdrawn and had on her mother's observation been losing weight and had on her own statement to her mother indicated that she had been considering whether to continue her own life. The note recorded that her great-aunt had advised Mrs Pérez-Castillo to telephone, on the same

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afternoon as the visit, the small Miami Coalition for the Homeless's adolescent-services hotline, on which her great-aunt had over the previous decade developed a small operational acquaintance through her storefront's referrals on the standard ninety-one cases of substantive immigration complication, and to request a small immediate referral to the adolescent psychiatric services at Jackson Memorial Hospital.

The note recorded that Mrs Pérez-Castillo had on the recommendation telephoned the hotline that afternoon, that the daughter had on the hotline's referral been seen at Jackson Memorial on the Saturday morning, and that the daughter had on the Saturday-morning consultation been admitted to the adolescent inpatient psychiatric unit on a small voluntary basis for a fourteen-day initial stabilisation programme.

Mrs Valdés-Domenech sat in the small associate's office for some time.

Then she read the first of the two notes.

The March 2014 note recorded that the client, a Mr Anselmo Reyes-Quintana of West 56th Street, Hialeah, who had on the visit attended the storefront for the preparation of his Form I-130 family petition on behalf of his older sister in Cuba, had on the intake conversation made a small unrelated remark about his own household.

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The remark, on the note, was that Mr Reyes-Quintana's seven-year-old son had on the previous two evenings asked his father at the small dinner table on West 56th Street whether the small dark closet at the end of the hallway in the apartment, which the son had on the family's ordinary practice never on any night of his short life entered, was the kind of closet in which children could on a small specific operational understanding of the closet's function be locked.

The note recorded that her great-aunt had, on the small operational reckoning that storefront notarios who had over thirty-three years conducted intake interviews on the small private confidences of West 56th Street fathers sometimes made, on her own initiative asked Mr Reyes-Quintana three further questions.

The note recorded the three questions, in Spanish, in her great-aunt's small precise hand.

The first question was: 'Anselmo, has anyone in the apartment, on any night since the small son's third birthday, locked the small son in the closet at the end of the hallway.'

The second question was: 'Anselmo, when the small son was on the previous Wednesday evening asking the question about the closet, did the small son's expression on the asking carry, on your own father's observation, any indication that the small son had on the operational facts of the question previously been in the closet.'

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The third question was: ‘Anselmo, on the small operational facts that your wife is on the weekday evenings between five and eleven at her shift at the small bakery on East 4th Avenue and that the small son is between five and eleven on those evenings in the apartment in the care of your wife’s mother who lives in the second bedroom of the apartment, has the small son on any small private indication to you ever suggested that his grandmother’s methods of small-son discipline on the long evenings have at any time on his own seven-year-old reckoning included the closet at the end of the hallway.’

The note recorded that Mr Reyes-Quintana had sat at the small storefront table for some time.

The note recorded that he had then, on the small private accounting of a Hialeah father who had on his own household arrangements not on any previous occasion considered the small operational possibility the three questions raised, said:

‘Carmen.’

‘Anselmo.’

‘Carmen, on my own household reckoning of this Tuesday afternoon, I do not know the answers to the three questions. I have not, on any previous occasion, considered the small operational possibility.’

‘Anselmo.’

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‘Yes, Carmen.’

‘Anselmo, on the small Hialeah practice of how fathers sometimes find out the answers to questions they have not previously considered. Will you on this evening at six, on your wife’s departure for the bakery, on a small private accommodation of the matter you make with your wife’s mother on the small grounds that you are home from your own work earlier than usual, ask your wife’s mother to leave the apartment for the evening on a small social visit you suggest she pay to her sister in Sweetwater, and remain in the apartment alone with the small son for the evening, and on the small private question of a father to a seven-year-old son ask the small son, in the small reassuring manner of fathers asking small sons about small closets, whether the small son has on any previous night been in the small closet at the end of the hallway.’

‘Carmen.’

‘Yes, Anselmo.’

‘Carmen, on the small private accommodation of the matter, I will.’

The note recorded that Mrs Valdés-Mendoza had on the standard storefront practice completed the Form I-130 family petition for Mr Reyes-Quintana’s older sister in Cuba and that Mr Reyes-Quintana had on the standard fee paid for the storefront’s services and had taken the prepared form home for filing.

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The note did not record what Mr Reyes-Quintana had subsequently learned about the small closet at the end of the hallway.

The note did not record any subsequent visit by Mr Reyes-Quintana to the storefront.

The note ended, in her great-aunt's small precise hand, with the small notation 'Anselmo: el consejo de la vida' and the date.

* * *

Mrs Esperanza Valdés-Domenech sat in the small associate's office of the Coral Gables firm on the night of the third Wednesday of December 2025 for a very long time.

Then she opened her firm's subscription to the Miami-Dade County Public Records search system.

She searched for the name Anselmo Reyes-Quintana.

The system returned, on the search, three records.

The first was Mr Reyes-Quintana's standard Florida driver's licence record.

The second was a small Miami-Dade County Circuit Court family-law file from April 2014, in which Mr Reyes-Quintana had filed for and on the second Wednesday of May 2014 obtained a small emergency child-welfare protective order against his mother-in-law, Mrs Esmeralda Martínez-García, and had on the same proceeding

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obtained the appointment of his wife's younger sister as the small daytime care provider for his then seven-year-old son during his wife's evening shifts at the bakery on East 4th Avenue.

The third was a small Miami-Dade County Probate Court file from November 2024, in which Mrs Esmeralda Martínez-García had died at the age of seventy-three of complications of diabetes, and Mr Anselmo Reyes-Quintana had on the standard probate procedure served as the executor of her small estate, which had on its inventory included no significant assets.

Mrs Valdés-Domenech read the three records.

She did not, in the small associate's office on the night of the third Wednesday of December 2025, immediately understand what the small notation in her great-aunt's hand of March 2014 had on the operational facts produced.

She left the office at twenty-three minutes past eleven.

She drove from Coral Gables to Hialeah.

She arrived at her great-aunt's small apartment on East 25th Street at fourteen minutes past midnight on the Thursday morning.

Her great-aunt, who was as on every Wednesday night in her seventy-eighth year up at the kitchen table preparing the small Cuban coffee that she on her ordinary practice consumed at three in the

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morning before her morning prayers at five, opened the small front door and looked at her grand-niece in the small entryway.

“Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, at this hour. The case.”

“Tía Carmen. The case is the case. I have come on a separate matter.”

Mrs Valdés-Mendoza looked at her grand-niece in the small entryway for a long moment.

“Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, what is the separate matter.”

Mrs Valdés-Domenech walked into the small front room of her great-aunt’s apartment, sat down on the small sofa under the small framed photograph of her great-aunt’s arrival on the Mariel boatlift in May 1980, and placed on the small coffee table the small photocopy she had made of the March 2014 intake-interview note.

“Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza.”

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“Tía Carmen. The note of March 2014 on Anselmo Reyes-Quintana.”

Mrs Valdés-Mendoza looked at the small photocopy on the small coffee table for a long moment.

Then she sat down on the small wooden chair opposite the sofa.

“Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, I have not thought about the note of March 2014 on Anselmo Reyes-Quintana in approximately eleven years. I have on the standard storefront practice retained the note in the small case file. I had not on any subsequent occasion reviewed it.”

“Tía Carmen.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, on the public records of Miami-Dade County, Mr Anselmo Reyes-Quintana on the second Wednesday of May 2014 obtained from the Family Division of the Circuit Court a small emergency child-welfare protective order against his mother-in-law and obtained the appointment of his wife’s younger sister as the daytime care provider for his then seven-year-old son.”

Mrs Valdés-Mendoza looked at her grand-niece across the small coffee table for a long moment.

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“Esperanza.”

“Yes, Tía.”

“Esperanza, the seven-year-old son.”

“Tía Carmen, the seven-year-old son in May 2014 would, on the standard arithmetic of the years, in October 2025 be eighteen years old.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, I have not, on the small inquiry I have made on the public records this evening, identified what the seven-year-old son’s subsequent life trajectory was, between May 2014 and October 2025. The Circuit Court file is sealed on the small standard family-law confidentiality. I do not have access to the operational facts of how the closet at the end of the hallway, on the small private question the father asked the son on the Tuesday evening of the second week of March 2014, was on its operational facts found to have been used by the grandmother in her small disciplinary practice on the long evenings of her grandson’s care.”

Mrs Valdés-Mendoza did not reply for a long moment.

“Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen.”

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“Esperanza, the small operational facts the closet at the end of the hallway was found, on the small private question of the second Tuesday of March 2014, to have produced are the small operational facts that the small Circuit Court file of May 2014 was on the small father’s subsequent petition the procedural instrument the small Miami-Dade County family-law system provides for addressing.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, the operational facts.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, what is in the small Circuit Court file of May 2014 on the small grounds the father presented for the protective order.”

Mrs Valdés-Domenech looked at her great-aunt across the small coffee table for a long moment.

“Tía Carmen, the small Circuit Court file is sealed.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, however, on the small operational practice of family-law petitions of this character in Miami-Dade County in 2014, the grounds for the emergency protective order would have been the documentary record of small physical or psychological harm sustained by the seven-year-old son in the care of the grandmother over the period leading up to the petition.”

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“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, on a strict reading of the small operational practice, the documentary record presented to the Circuit Court in May 2014 was, on the standard family-law evidence, the record of conditions that on the small private accounting of how seven-year-old sons in the care of grandmothers in small closets at the end of small Hialeah hallways are sometimes treated, would on the longer reading have, on whatever further duration the conditions had continued on the absence of the May 2014 intervention, produced consequences on the seven-year-old son’s subsequent life trajectory that the May 2014 intervention prevented.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, on the small Hialeah practice of how grandmothers sometimes administered the small disciplinary methods to seven-year-old grandsons in small closets on small long evenings, and on the small longer reading of how seven-year-old grandsons sometimes did not on the operational facts of repeated small disciplinary methods in small closets on small long evenings over months of duration in fact continue, on the small longer reading, to be alive at eight.”

Mrs Valdés-Mendoza did not reply for a very long moment.

Then she said:

“Esperanza.”

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“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, the small reckoning of the second Tuesday afternoon of March 2014 at the small storefront on West 49th Street was the small reckoning of an intake interview I conducted on a Form I-130 family petition. The note of the small additional advice was the small operational note of my own storefront practice. I did not, on the small storefront practice or on the small subsequent eleven years of the operation, retain any subsequent record of what the operational outcome of the small advice was.”

“Yes, Tía.”

“Esperanza, the small operational outcome of the small advice was, on the small public records you have this evening identified, the small May 2014 emergency protective order. The small protective order was, on the operational facts the small private question of the small Tuesday evening produced, the small Miami-Dade County family-law instrument that on the long evenings subsequent to its issuance addressed the small operational conditions in the small closet at the end of the small hallway in the small apartment on West 56th Street.”

“Yes, Tía.”

“Esperanza, the seven-year-old son.”

“Yes, Tía.”

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“Esperanza, on the small operational facts the small protective order of May 2014 prevented, on whatever the small longer reading of how the small disciplinary methods would on the months subsequent to May 2014 have on the small seven-year-old son’s small life trajectory operated, the small seven-year-old son in October 2025 is, on the small arithmetic of the years, eighteen.”

“Yes, Tía.”

“Esperanza, the small consejo de la vida of the second Tuesday afternoon of March 2014 was, on the small longer reading, the small consejo that on its operational outcome saved a life.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, the small consejo was, on the federal unauthorised-practice prohibitions and on the small Florida Bar regulations and on the small Hialeah storefront standards of operation, on a strict reading, the small unauthorised practice of immigration-adjacent legal advice that the small federal prosecution of October 2025 has on the small grand-jury’s consideration identified as the small operational basis for the small charges.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, the small consejo of the second Tuesday afternoon of March 2014 was, on the small reading the federal prosecution is in October 2025 applying, the small evidence of the storefront’s small

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unauthorised practice. The small consejo was, on the small longer reading of what its operational outcome was on the small life of the seven-year-old son, the small instrument that on the long evenings subsequent to May 2014 the small Miami-Dade County family-law system would not on its own have, without the small consejo, on the small operational facts deployed.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, the small reading the federal prosecution is applying does not, on the small reading’s scope, distinguish between the small consejos of the eleven thousand storefront files that were on their operational outcomes consequences the small unauthorised-practice prohibitions had on their drafting intended to prevent, and the small consejos that were on their operational outcomes consequences the small unauthorised-practice prohibitions had on their drafting not anticipated.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

* * *

Mrs Esperanza Valdés-Domenech sat in the small front room of her great-aunt’s apartment on East 25th Street for some further time.

Then she said:

“Tía Carmen.”

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“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, on the small reckoning I am required, on the small initial counsel’s role I have on the family’s small arrangement been given, to make. On the small reckoning of how the small case before the federal grand jury proceeds on the small note of March 2014.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, the small note of March 2014 is, on the federal prosecution’s small documentary review of the eleven thousand client files, on the small statistical reading of the one hundred and forty-three additional notes, on the small operational reading of the twenty-two cases in the small unrecognised category of advice-not-to-file and life-advice, the small documentary record on which the prosecution’s case for the small unauthorised-practice charges most strongly turns. The small notes are, on the prosecution’s small theory, the evidence that the storefront provided substantive legal advice rather than documentary-completion services. The small notes are the small charging instrument.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, the small note of March 2014 on Anselmo Reyes-Quintana is, on its operational outcome, the small documentary record that the small consejo de la vida had on its operational mechanism a

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small longer consequence that the small unauthorised-practice prohibitions had not, on their drafting, anticipated.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, on the small reckoning of the defence I will, on my small counsel’s role, develop. The small note of March 2014, with the small May 2014 Circuit Court protective order it on its small longer reading produced, is the small documentary record that on the small jury’s consideration would on the small mitigation argument carry, on the small longer reading of the small consejo’s operational outcome, a small evidentiary weight the small federal unauthorised-practice prohibitions had not, on their drafting, anticipated.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, on the small operational mechanism of how the small defence would, on the small note’s introduction at trial, address the small operational facts the small note produced.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, the small introduction at trial would require, on the small subpoena practice of federal criminal-defence proceedings, that the small now-eighteen-year-old son of Mr Anselmo Reyes-Quintana be on his small subpoena identified as a witness, that the small now-eighteen-year-old son be on his small testimony asked the small question of the small operational conditions in the small closet at the

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end of the small hallway in the small apartment on West 56th Street between his small fourth birthday and his small seventh, that the small now-eighteen-year-old son be on his small subpoena required to revisit, on the small federal-court setting of the small defence proceedings, the small operational facts of the small closet that on the small May 2014 protective order had on the small longer reading subsequently been allowed, on the small longer arc of the small now-eighteen-year-old son's small adolescence, to recede into the small private accounting of the small Reyes-Quintana family."

"Yes, Esperanza."

"Tía Carmen, the small introduction of the small note at trial would, on the small operational mechanism of how the small defence develops the small evidentiary basis, require the small now-eighteen-year-old son to bear, on the small federal-court setting, the small public-record reading of the small operational facts of his small fourth-to-seventh-birthday years."

"Yes, Esperanza."

"Tía Carmen."

"Yes, Esperanza."

"Tía Carmen, the small defence will, on the small reckoning I am required on the small initial counsel's role to make, not introduce the small note of March 2014 at the small trial."

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Mrs Valdés-Mendoza looked at her grand-niece across the small coffee table for a very long moment.

“Esperanza.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, the small note of March 2014 is, on the federal prosecution’s small documentary review, one of the one hundred and forty-three additional notes that constitute the small charging instrument. The small prosecution will, on its small case-in-chief, introduce the small note.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, the small note will, on the small prosecution’s introduction, be before the small jury.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, the small now-eighteen-year-old son will, on the small prosecution’s small witness practice, also be subpoenaed.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, the small mechanism of preventing the small now-eighteen-year-old son from being required to revisit the small operational facts of his small fourth-to-seventh-birthday years on the small federal-court setting is, on the small operational practice of federal criminal-defence resolution, not the small defence’s non-

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introduction of the small note but the small earlier resolution of the small case before the small trial commences.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, the small earlier resolution.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen, the small earlier resolution is the small plea agreement.”

Mrs Valdés-Mendoza sat in the small wooden chair opposite the sofa for a long moment.

Then she said:

“Esperanza.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, on the small plea agreement.”

“Yes, Tía Carmen.”

“Esperanza, what are the small terms.”

Mrs Valdés-Domenech looked at her great-aunt across the small coffee table for a long moment.

“Tía Carmen, on the small operational practice of how the seven pilot federal prosecutions are likely to be resolved, the small plea agreement would, on the small standard terms the United States Attorney’s Office has on the previous similar cases in 2023 and 2024

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offered, include a small guilty plea on the small unauthorised-practice charges, the small permanent injunction against the future operation of any small immigration-related services business by the small defendant, a small probationary sentence of approximately three years, the small forfeiture of the small storefront's small operational records, and a small monetary fine of approximately seventy-five thousand dollars."

"Yes, Esperanza."

"Tía Carmen, the small plea agreement would not, on the small standard terms, include a small federal prison sentence."

"Yes, Esperanza."

"Tía Carmen, the small plea agreement would, on the small operational mechanism, close the small storefront on West 49th Street."

"Yes, Esperanza."

"Tía Carmen, the small plea agreement would prevent the small introduction of the small note of March 2014 at the small trial, because the small trial would not commence."

"Yes, Esperanza."

"Tía Carmen, the small now-eighteen-year-old son would, on the small absence of the small trial, not be required to revisit the small

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operational facts of his small fourth-to-seventh-birthday years on the small federal-court setting.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, the small plea agreement would, on its small operational outcome, on the small thirty-three-year accounting of the small storefront’s small thirty-three-year practice, on the small eleven thousand client files, on the small one hundred and forty-three additional notes, on the small twenty-two unrecognised-category notes, on the small two life-advice notes, and on the small one March 2014 note that on its operational outcome saved a life, be the small operational closing of the small storefront’s small thirty-three-year practice and the small acceptance, by you, of the small guilty plea on the small unauthorised-practice charges that the small federal prosecution’s small theory has on its small charging instrument identified.”

“Yes, Esperanza.”

“Tía Carmen, will you accept the small plea agreement.”

“Esperanza, yes.”

* * *

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Mrs Carmen Valdés-Mendoza accepted the small plea agreement on the third Wednesday of February 2026, on the small standard terms the United States Attorney's Office for the Southern District of Florida had on the small Valdés-Domenech's small initial counsel's negotiation offered.

She entered her small guilty plea before United States District Judge Eduardo Pacheco-Romero of the Miami federal courthouse on the second Tuesday of March 2026.

She was sentenced to three years' probation, was permanently enjoined from any future immigration-related services business operation, was fined seventy-five thousand dollars, and was on the small operational outcome required to close the small storefront on West 49th Street.

The small storefront, on the small operational closing, ceased operation on the second Saturday of April 2026 after thirty-three years and eleven months of continuous service to the Hialeah community.

Mrs Valdés-Mendoza did not, in any subsequent year, operate any immigration-related services business.

She continued in her small apartment on East 25th Street.

Mrs Esperanza Valdés-Domenech continued at the small Coral Gables criminal-defence firm. She was promoted to partner in 2029. She did not, in any subsequent year, take on a federal unauthorised-

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practice case involving any other Miami-Dade County notario storefront.

She did not, in any subsequent year, encounter another case in which the small documentary review of the small storefront's small intake-interview notes identified, on the small longer reading, a small consejo de la vida that on its small operational outcome had saved a life that no one on the small intake-interview practice or on the small storefront's small thirty-three-year operational record had on the small intake-interview's small operational moment known was at risk.

Mr Anselmo Reyes-Quintana of West 56th Street, Hialeah, continued at the small auto-parts warehouse on East 17th Avenue where he had worked since 2010.

His son, who had on the small May 2014 protective order been on the small documentary record removed from the small evening care of his maternal grandmother, completed his secondary schooling at Hialeah Gardens Senior High in 2025, was admitted to the University of Miami on a small modest financial-aid offer, and commenced his studies in the autumn of 2025 on a programme leading to the Bachelor of Science in Psychology.

He did not, on the small operational closing of the small storefront on West 49th Street in April 2026 or on the small public-record reading of the small federal prosecution that preceded it, become aware of the small note of March 2014.

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He did not, in any subsequent year of his small University of Miami studies or in his small subsequent professional career, become aware that the small intake-interview of the second Tuesday afternoon of March 2014 at the small storefront on West 49th Street had on its small operational outcome been the small instrument that on the small longer reading of the small operational conditions in the small closet at the end of the small hallway in the small apartment on West 56th Street had on the small May 2014 protective order produced the small operational closing of the small disciplinary methods that had on the small longer reading made his small University of Miami matriculation in the autumn of 2025 possible.

Mrs Carmen Valdés-Mendoza, on her small retirement in the small apartment on East 25th Street, on the small private accounting that she made over the long evenings on the small front balcony overlooking the small West Hialeah street, came to think, on the small reckoning of her thirty-three years on West 49th Street, that the most important thing she had on the small storefront's small operational practice come to understand was that the small consejos de la vida were, on the small longer reading of the small storefront's small intake-interview practice, the small consejos that on the small operational facts of the small Hialeah community's small longer accounting of how small life-advice between small neighbours sometimes operated, were the small consejos that on their small operational outcomes the small federal

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unauthorised-practice prohibitions had on their drafting not, on the small longer reading, anticipated.

The small consejos were the small consejos.

The small operational outcomes were the small operational outcomes.

The small longer reading was the small longer reading.

The small federal prosecution of October 2025 had, on the small charging instrument of the one hundred and forty-three additional notes, identified the small operational evidence of the small unauthorised practice on which the small storefront's small thirty-three-year operation had on a strict reading rested.

The small charging instrument had not, on the small longer reading, identified the small operational outcomes the small consejos had on their small operational mechanism produced.

The small operational outcomes were, on the small private accounting of the small front balcony overlooking West Hialeah, on the small reckoning of the small storefront's small thirty-three-year operation, the small reckonings the small storefront had on the small operational practice over thirty-three years made.

They were, on the small longer reading, the small reckonings that, on the small operational closing of the small storefront on West 49th

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Street on the second Saturday of April 2026, on the small federal prosecution's small operational instrument, had on the small future operational landscape of how small Hialeah community members would on the small subsequent years find the small advice the small storefront had on the small thirty-three years provided, no longer be available.

On the small longer reading, the small reckoning was the small reckoning.

— *END* —

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Professional Credentials

- Regulated Canadian Immigration Consultant (RCIC) — R422575, active and in good standing with the CICC
- CAPIC Fellow — R11592
- MIA Examination Qualified (Australian Immigration)
- Migration Visa Consultant of the Year 2014
- 25+ Years of Immigration Consulting Experience
- 10,000+ Families Successfully Assisted
- 20,000+ YouTube Subscribers | 600+ LinkedIn Recommendations | 600+ Videos

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