

EIGHT-LINERS

Amalia Ortiz

I. Esme

When her mother's social security check arrives, Esme sits Doña Lupe down with her favorite DVD of El Chavo and asks her to keep an eye on the boys. But Little Frank and Patricio have instructions of their own. Stay in the house. Play on the computer. Call me on my cell phone only if it is an emergency. Check on Buela Lupe every half hour until she falls asleep. If Buela asks, tell her Mamá is out selling Mary Kay. But please, do not mention las machinitas to her. Esme repeats this. Do not mention las machinitas to her. Buela believes those machines are not "of God."

II. Martín

Tio Rogelio goes to the triple seven to recruit bets on his football pots and to sell his DVDs. Sometimes when Tia Nana se siente bien she makes tamales para vender también. He lets me go along with him on Saturday and Sunday nights even though he don't let me go in. So, I have to stay in the van with the side door open, and when the customers come in and out I yell "DVDs," show them our printed menu, or pop a disc in the portable player if they want to check the quality. Tio says next year, when I am 16 he will trade with me, and I will get to go inside with the cooler of tamales.

III. Scribe

after reports of significant negative economic and criminal impact
after home invasions, armed robberies, after drugs, after prostitution
after cartel money laundering, racketeering, bribes-for-legal favors,

after a soft gaming control, after the quiet sanction of illegal operations, after years of law enforcement looking the other way, after extortion after selling the seized machines back to their previous owners, after, after conviction of former state District Judge Abel C. Limas, after debt, after addiction, after, why now after, now “Operation Bishop,” only after.

IV. Itzel

First, they came and took the computer— its empty spot on the desk a neat dust-free square. The living room set went next. I kinda knew it was too good to be true when they delivered it last year. The same day it disappeared, we got a new sofa...well not new, but, you know...a thrift store replacement. The flat screen went missing last, one day when I was at school. Then, the living room was so quiet it didn't need any furniture anymore. Now, I just kick it with Mauricio across the street. At first, he laughed at me, but I reminded him that half of the stuff in his house his parents bought with Flexi Compras too.

V. Prescription

Diagnosis: malignant operation profit, operation investor, operation vender, operation owner, operation landlord, operation manager, operation gaming, operation underground casino, and operation poverty. Precautions: metastasis of operation fake storefronts, operation gaming homes, operation crime, and operation corrupt officials. Pre-operative consideration: while no cartels have been named in arrests, police believe the money is too large for cartels to keep away. Recommended treatment: surgical removal through operation cite patrons, operation closure, operation arrest, and operation seizure. Prognosis: unknown.

VI. La Paca

Me encantan las machinitas—las luces, el ruido, la musica, y la compañía, their electric chirps of encouragement and alarms of celebration, their

colorful glowing fruit, bells, diamonds, and triple sevens. Mis ojos scan the 8 betting lines for matches—3 horizontal, 3 vertical, and 2 diagonal. Mi favorita is the one with los gatos because it reminds me de todos los gatitos que hang out in my neighbor Samuel's yard. I once got a jackpot on a gato machine. So now, if I see one que tiene gatitos, that's where I sit for at least an hour. Sí, me encantan, y I feel lucky tonight, real lucky.

VII. Script

After an 18 month investigation under the direction of homeland security, state and federal law enforcement agencies are working day and night to close illegal eight-liner establishments in Cameron County. There are still currently 200 gaming businesses in operation in the county, and authorities say they're not done yet. According to Cameron County District Attorney Luis Saenz, the name of the crackdown, "Operation Bishop," originated from a call the bishop made expressing concern for how eight-liners were affecting poor. The Diocese neither confirms nor denies the name's origin.

VIII. Doña Paca

Doña Paca was arrested during a raid, but she still visits las machinitas. The charges were dropped, and she got away with a warning that next time they could fine her up to \$300. She thanks God she had her papeles. She saw the fear on some of the faces arrested and surely deported. She leaves the county now, and when she can convince her comadre Sandra to go with her, las viudas drive to Laredo. There, las machinitas are as plentiful as unharvested pecans on the ground. She still prefers los gatos, and sits patiently for at least an hour whenever she finds one. They make her feel lucky, she says, real lucky.