

The first time was an accident, mostly. It was just past two in the morning on a Sunday in March, and this kid had fallen asleep on the train. I was on my way back from work, still in my corset and tights under my long winter coat. The only other people in the car were two homeless guys who probably would have moved in on the sleeper if I hadn't done it first. He had a messenger bag in his lap with the strap wrapped tight around his chest and under his arm, but his head was lolling back and you could tell he was out like a light. I stalked back to where he sat, the roar of the train covering the thud of my boots on the tacky floor of the car, and sat down on the seat next to him. He didn't stir. I tapped his bag with my gloved fingers, watching his face. Nothing. So I flipped open the flap of his bag and reached my hand inside, grabbing the first thing I came across so I could fish around.

I wouldn't have taken it normally. I didn't steal for fun~ I only took stuff I could sell. But the train lurched, and his head jerked up and his eyes opened and I jumped back on instinct, taking what was in my hand with me. Turned out, he hadn't really woken up, but by the time I was sure he was back asleep hadn't noticed anything, I was already standing by the doors. The homeless guys were staring at me, laughing lowly and looking me up and down. The next stop was mine anyway, and when the doors opened, I took off.

It wasn't until I was on the escalator up from the subway that I even looked at what I'd taken. It was a sketchbook—undecorated brown cardboard cover, unlined pages full of drawings and scribbled words arranged like poetry. Most of the writing was en español. That alone wouldn't have surprised me much, but what was tucked in between the last page and the back cover did: a green passport with gold engraving on the front. Mexico. I flipped it open, and the boy's face smiled up at me from his photograph, all his teeth showing, his hair thick and long. Emiliano Ramirez, 19 years old, from Los Cabos. I flipped further and found a student visa to the states.

So I'd stolen his ID. That was a first. I was just a petty thief, looking for extra cash to party with while I danced and waited tables to pay my way through college. I took iPods and android phones and sold them to a guy who lived down the hall from me in the dorm. He was the one who dealt in contraband. Sometimes he paid me in weed and booze. What was I going to do with a passport? Start making fakes for exchange students? That was way beyond me. I'd stolen this kid's identity for no reason.