

Passage

by Hugo dos Santos

(flash fiction)

As a girl of seven, she was told to pretend the stranger was her father. Fake passports and stories to match, enough to fool an inquisitive customs officer. At first, she'd wondered whether coming to America meant she'd get a different father. A father who was there, not just a name to put to a framed picture in the living room. And now, outside the terminal, was this what an American father looked like—younger and in a jean jacket? She memorized his birthdate, the color of his eyes. He complimented her for being such a smart girl. She remembered it still, his hand on her shoulder, his comforting nod to her mother. He was a ghost that remained with her; a shadow longer than a promise. Sometimes in the shower, trying to cum after a long day at work, her unguarded mind would falter upon his gaze. Something about his heavy eyes, conveying a belief certain as an anchor. After all these years she remembered how he had said her name. He'd been the first to pronounce it in the Anglicized syllables she had later come to identify with herself. A milky glaze drizzled over the delivery. The softer R, an easy roll over the first A. It had all started with him, the doors and life and existence that formed her now as much as that birthing Portuguese village faded behind yellowed curtains of hovering dirt. A fake father was all it took to come to America. After the flight and the questions and the suitcases he disappeared into a cab and she was back to being someone else's daughter.

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Hugo dos Santos is the translator of *A Child in Ruins* (Writ Large Press, 2016), the collected poems of José Luís Peixoto, and a recipient of a Disquiet International scholarship. His fiction and poetry have appeared in various publications in the U.S. and Europe, including *upstreet*, *Queen Mob's Tea House*, *DMQ Review*, *Public Pool*, and elsewhere. He is the author of *ironbound – a blog*.