

*A gang of bullies attacks Diego Lopez at school, revealing his ugly secret. When his ESOL teacher intervenes, she is thrust into the conflict between the immigrant and local populations. The problems at school escalate, affecting the entire community. Unexpected twists and a natural disaster unite the two factions.*

## **Illegal**

by Joyce Larrabee

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They were alone, destitute ... undocumented.  
Did she make the right choice?

Joyce Larrabee

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Anita only glanced at her and then at Diego as she made her way to her desk.

Lynn stayed at her station, greeting all the students as they came in. She stood before her class soberly, pasting on a smile.

“First thing this morning we are going to find out how much you remember. Please finish this worksheet, and then we will do it together.”

They weren’t buying it, and she knew it. Diego couldn’t be ignored, but no one could deal with it openly, either. She longed to talk it all out as badly as they did. That simply could not happen.

Lynn wasn’t sure how she filled the rest of the class time, but somehow they all got through it. Maybe she could bluff her way through the next hour with the younger kids. Then she would be home free—at least for today. She was relieved when the bell rang. She sighed and turned to greet her punching, giggling younger class as they came through the door. Ah yes, ’twas good to have a bit of normalcy.

\* \* \* \*

It was near the end of the second lunch/enrichment rotation. Mrs. Bartholomew was sitting at her desk eating when she heard the scuffle begin outside her door. Instantly she was in the hall.

“Stop it! Get away from him!”

Diego was on the floor and four boys were struggling with him. She grabbed a double handful of basketball jersey and jerked with all her might. Where the strength came from she would never know. The guy fell backward and landed against the wall. She snagged the next kid by the arm and shoved him back. He collided with Pimple Face before she could get to him, and both boys went down. The fourth boy suddenly stood and started backing up, hands raised, a look of horror on his blanched white face. She noticed the leader of

the pack leaning against the wall with his arms folded across his chest. He had obviously given the order for the attack but could not be accused of actually taking part in it. He silently turned and glided away. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Antonio skid to a stop, kneeling at his friend's head. Mr. Philips had run out of his room when he heard her yell. After the boys picked themselves up off the floor, he corralled them into a corner.

She turned around to check on Diego and was sickened by what she saw. They had gotten his sweatshirt open, all right. Under a thin white T-shirt she saw a torso so badly injured that it was a wonder the boy was able to stand up, let alone walk. Along with the bruising, there were cuts and abrasions, many of them infected, bleeding through his T-shirt. He probably had some broken ribs and possibly even internal injuries.

"Diego! Diego!" Antonio pleaded.

Mercifully, Diego had passed out.

Mrs. B started barking orders. Mr. Philips was still standing with the boys, but she had taken charge, and he knew enough not to interfere. She pointed to a girl with a lunch bag in her hand.

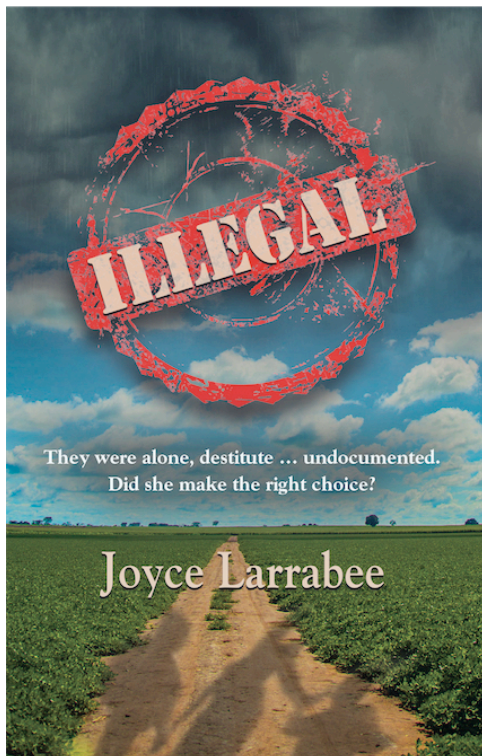
"You! Go get the school nurse down here as fast as you can. Tell her we need a blanket."

She pointed to various students as she singled them out. "You! Go to the office and have Mrs. Vaughn call 9-1-1. Tell them we need an ambulance ASAP or faster. You! Go get Mr. Cline. You! Go outside and wait for the ambulance. Direct them around to this outside door. Mr. Philips! Get these other kids back to class. You boys that attacked him, form a circle around him so the other kids can't see what you've done."

"Hey! We didn't beat 'im up! We just..." protested one of the boys.

Mrs. B's icy glare froze the end of his sentence in mid-air.





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