



Rosalinda (right) and Rosa López live in a singlewide, two-bedroom trailer in a mobile home park just outside of Seven Springs, N.C. During the summer and fall of 2002, Yolanda Méndez Torres lived in the same trailer with Juan García Aguilar and about 10 other men while they worked in local fields.

Abuser tries to keep ordeal quiet

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catchers and breakfast burritos. Indian casinos, rust red plateaus and auto dealerships with American flags. The van breaks down, and everybody hides under a bridge until it's fixed.

More than a day later, they arrive just outside of Seven Springs, N.C., in a mobile home park on Cabin Creek Drive.

114 Cabin Creek is a singlewide, two-bedroom trailer with dirty white synthetic siding, backed against a clothesline and tobacco field. There are sheets on the windows, foam board ceilings, stained mattresses. And thin walls.

Yolanda and as many as 10 men live inside. Everybody knows she is Juan's woman. The two sleep together in a single bed in a room not much bigger than a walk-in closet. Juan's wife and family remain in Mexico.

For the old cat, a tender rat, Yolanda hears the men say.

Anyone could put an end to this with an anonymous phone call to police. But fear keeps people from speaking up. It's the fear that police will come. Then Immigration. Men will be deported. Money will dry up. Families will rupture.

Juan tells Yolanda that if she called police, they would send her back to Mexico. He would follow. She knows what could happen next.

If she was in school, there would be a network of counselors and teachers and friends and parents of friends. If she was a resident or spoke English, she might know about shelters or laws. As it is, she can barely read or write in Spanish.

Here, there is only silence.

Seven Springs, population 86, is a historic town in eastern North Carolina on the banks of the Neuse River. Its main strip boasts the Seven Springs Restaurant — run by Ola Mae Adams — an antique store, post office and the volunteer fire department. Just to the north, 59 steps up a hill, stands the white wood Methodist church, its dented copper steeple the highest point around. Bobby Mozingo does Civil War re-enactments in these parts, and Jewel Kilpatrick is the silver-haired mayor.

Then there is the migrant town just



The trailer, at 114 Cabin Creek Drive, was Yolanda's prison. She and Juan slept in a single bed in a room not much bigger than a walk-in closet. Juan threatened that if she called police, she would go back to Mexico, and he would follow.

outside the city limits, fed by the fields of corn, wheat, beans and tobacco. By the Southern Produce plant, Carolina Turkey and a hog plant not far from that.

Limbo King, his belly bulging over his pants with a rat's nest of chest hair and untamed beard, has been property manager at Cabin Creek for more than a decade. He talks, often while chain smoking, in piecemeal Spanish with a North Carolina drawl. He likes the job, he says, because it lets him sleep with Hispanic men.

On the highway and dirt roads, he knows of the brothels and bars that dot the land. Women, he says, come in from New York, among other places. Sex costs about \$30, but the rate is negotiable.

As far as labor in the fields is concerned, Ismael Pacheco, known simply as Pacheco, is the man. He owns many of the mobile homes around Cabin Creek. Each morning, trucks and vans show up to take men to farms and packing plants that have made deals with Pacheco's contract labor company. The supply of workers is rarely an issue.

Some come from Florida after orange

season. Others come straight from the border.

Logs record names and hours worked, handwritten on notebook paper. \$5.15 an hour for work at Lewis Nursery and Farms picking pickles, with other farms paying per container for sweet potatoes and peppers picked.

When Juan and Yolanda arrive, it's blueberry season.

In the mornings, they wake before sunup for the hourlong ride to the field.

The field is her escape. The heat, she thinks, is unbearable, but there are cows and horses and birds' nests and ants with wings to look at. The bosses give her small containers to put the fruit in. Not too green or too ripe. Remember the gloves. They get coffee and bread and beans at lunch. She tries not to think about the trailer, about what's awaiting her when she returns.

At sundown, on the trip home, she sometimes falls asleep in the van. She rushes to beat the men to the bathroom to shower and wash off the pesticides.

Then it's almost always the same, the dull dread when darkness comes. He

comes for her after dinner or when everyone else has gone to sleep. Sometimes she struggles. More often than not, she is resigned to the futility of struggling. Sometimes she goes to the bathroom and cries and vomits. Then back to the mattress for sleep. He tries to press his body against hers. She pushes him away and faces the other way, a small act of rebellion.

Two blocks away, Laura Hernández sells perfumes door to door. She meets Yolanda one day out on her rounds. There is a mixture of empathy and sadness, seeing the teenage girl in the company of such men. She was about Yolanda's age when she came to America.

Is he your husband?

No, he's my father.

Her intuition tells her it isn't true. Over the next few months, she sees Yolanda a handful of times. Her daughters — Daisy, Diana, Dilayla and Dalia — give her clothes. Laura thinks fleetingly about adopting the girl.

But Juan is already planning to leave. He isn't paying down the debt fast

enough. In addition to the smuggling debt, there are the rent and electricity and daily expenses. He decides to run from Seven Springs in the winter of 2002. He calls his friend César Santana and asks if he can line up some work. César is heading a crew of laborers working on Wal-Mart gas stations. He agrees to pick up Juan by night at a McDonald's parking lot in nearby Mount Olive. The Hernándezes drive Juan and Yolanda into town.

César sees the little girl step out of the SUV and thinks it is Juan's daughter. Juan has not told him otherwise.

They drive all night to Bremen, Ga., 50 miles outside of Atlanta. Yolanda notices César examining her through the rearview mirror.

They arrive at the Days Inn near the interstate in the morning and move into their hotel rooms. Juan gets to work with César pouring concrete for a Wal-Mart gas station down the road.

In the mornings, Juan takes the key card with him, leaving Yolanda alone. She has nothing to eat except a bag of chips on some days, until Juan brings her dinner. Hour on hour, she watches television. Terminator. RoboCop. Stuart Little.

Why don't you take her some food, César asks Juan at a Mexican restaurant.

No, she's already eaten.

César knows it isn't true. His workers soon tell him that Yolanda is Juan's woman.

César understands the kind of trouble he could be in. About three days after they arrive, he goes to Yolanda's room while Juan works.

Yolanda struggles with the door and looks scared when she gets it open. César tells her something strange is going on inside the hotel and he wants answers.

First of all, how old are you?

18.

César laughs. Please, little girl, you're lying to me. My daughter's about the same age as you, how can I not know how old you are? I can tell by your face that you're too young to be 18 years old. How old are you?

Yolanda won't tell.

This man García has a wife. He has five kids. He's three times your age. He's

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Jacqueline López, 10 months, explores the window of the trailer where Yolanda lived with Juan in a mobile home park near Seven Springs. Yolanda used the fields as an escape from her ordeal with Juan.

Juan Olaya (left) and Jesús Soto Ornelas work in tobacco fields near Seven Springs. Migrants also tend corn, wheat, beans and other crops. Juan and Yolanda arrived during blueberry season.