

Adios

by MrsQ

After seventeen years of struggling to wake up early in the morning, I had managed to wake up on my own. Actually, I think it was because I was unable to sleep that I was up so early. I had laid on the bed all night, staring at the dark ceiling, taking in every single silent noise of the night. It would, after all, be my last night there. Once my eyes opened in the morning, I knew it would be the last time I would look at my walls, the last time I would breathe the air of what, until then, had been my home. I had my last breakfast in the kitchen table and observed everything and everyone around me almost as trying to imprint them in my memory. It was cold and still dark outside. The luggage was sitting by the door and my coat was ready on top of my bookbag, which, this time, was full of card games for the ride, my jewelry and documents. I had been feeling anxious for a few days now.

Just the week before, when I said goodbye to my sister and my two-month old niece whom I left in Maicao, it had hit me that that would be the last time I would see them. We hugged each other and I burst out crying. I held her tight in my arms as if I was hoping to bring her with me. Her scent so sweet, her touch so caring and loving. Up until that point, it had been just the two of us. Always together, always supporting each other. And, in spite of our 11-year age difference, my sister knew me better than anyone else could. We had shared so many memories together, some painful, some not so painful. But there we were hugging for what would be the last time. I cried for the entire bus ride back to Barranquilla, where my father was waiting for me at the bus terminal. As soon as I saw him, I hugged him and said "I think I've changed my mind, papi. I don't think I want to go anymore." He smiled and walked me to the car. Back home, that night, I sat looking out the window, crying, looking at the starred sky for one last time and wondering whether I had made the right decision.

“Mija, vamos.” My mother rushed me as I quickly arose from the sofa where I had been sitting reminiscing of my sister and baby niece. I got in the car and couldn't help but notice how beautiful certain landscapes looked now, even though I had always found them ugly. It could've been that I was starting to feel nostalgic about leaving my land, the place where I had been born and where I had become who I was. And it could've been the uncertainty of not knowing when would be the next time I would see those landscapes again. The closer we got to the airport, the faster my heart beat. Arriving at the airport, I met with my friends, who had all gathered to say good bye to a few of us who were leaving the same day. Karen, Franklin, Natalia and I would all travel together to Miami, and there, we would each connect to flights that would take us each on our own personal journey. We joked and laughed as we waited in line to check in our luggage. Letters were exchanged and last pictures together were taken. We were all sad to say good bye, but nobody dared to mention it. I secretly hoped for the plane to break down or for some sort of document to be missing that would either delay my departure or cancel it all together. I wasn't kidding when I had told my father the night before at the bus terminal that I had changed my mind. I was terrified to leave and explore a new world on my own. But I didn't have the courage to turn it all around. Part of me felt forced to go through with the decision because I wanted to be taken seriously. This had been the first time I had ever made a decision on my own. And, for the first time, I was taking control and deciding the direction my life would take.

Thinking about this, and how foolish I would seem if at that exact point I decided to stay, I fought back the tears and the fear and took a look around for one last time. The smell of the airport, ever so familiar after having spent so many afternoons there waiting for my mom to arrive from her many two-week long business trips, was now a scent I wanted to hold in and keep forever in my mind. The faces of my friends, their laughs, the sound of their voices were now being recorded in my memory. I looked at my father, my hero, the one who had been holding my hand at every single step I took up until that

point, and I wondered how soon I would see him again. I hugged him. And I wanted to stay there, holding him. Who was going to hold my hand now? I looked at my mother and I realized that now the roles had switched. I was not there waiting for her anymore. She was there to say good bye to me. I hugged her too and I wanted to take her with me. My mami. I would miss her a lot. I cried as I said good bye to each of my friends. Then, Natalia, Franklin, Karen and I, crossed the door that would take us to the terminal from which our flight would depart. As I crossed the door, it hit me. This would be the last time in many years that I would see these people. I cried.

Once inside, we were greeted by an immigration officer who took a few minutes to explain to us some safety points about travelling. "Do not hold any packages for strangers..." he continued. The truth is that I couldn't hear what he was saying because I was hoping to catch a last glance at my family and friends through the doors. Oh, there they are. Mami and Papi waved happily, I knew, pretending to be strong so that I wouldn't cry. They did that often. Pretend to be strong or happy or not worried so that I wouldn't worry either. Somehow, they reasoned that I fed off their reactions and energy. My creators, as I always refer to them, knew me better than anyone else and were on a constant mission to protect me from the wicked outside world. They could sense when something was happening to me, or intuitively call me when they felt my energy run low. This, I found out later, would be the greatest quality of our relationship living so many miles apart from each other.

We waited a few minutes to board our planes. We sat on the floor and played cards. Being with my other three friends helped me be strong... or at least strong enough to not cry there. We talked about how we would stay in touch when we got to the U.S. Karen and Franklin were going to stay in Florida. Natalia was going to live with a host family in Oregon for six months as part of an exchange program. I was going to New York City to live with my aunt and uncle. Six months was the original plan, but I wanted to stay longer. We exchanged addresses and promised to write letters. We boarded the plane and sat together. We continued playing cards in the plane.

As the plane took off, I not only left behind my family and friends, but also my life as I knew it. I did not know it yet, but things were about to change for me.

