

Home Across the World

“Will you miss Hong Kong?” My brother Charlie asked as we looked out the plane’s window about half a minute after its wheels left the ground, at the skyscrapers and 20-story apartments and bustling streets already jammed with honking cars. It was a cold winter morning, a typical one, when we woke up at around five o’clock that day. It had been dark, and very windy. The sky was much lighter now, at eight o’clock, but still cold. I refused to wear that large, pink, lumpy jacket, though. “No,” I lied to my brother, remembering his question. “But I’ll miss my friends.” I then added, truthfully. That had been in the middle of January, more than a year ago now, when I left Hong Kong and arrived at a strange and eerie place, as all new places were.

The plane ride lasted a whole 15 hours, a ceaseless cycle of sleeping, eating, and movies, with a few video games in between. Charlie was beside me, playing one of these-- I think it had something to do with either pirates or ninjas-- that he found, on the small screen set into the seat in front of him. Archie was across the aisle, sleeping in my mom’s lap and my dad was snoring beside both of them. I guess that when I imagined the plane ride, I thought it would be more extravagant, more *meaningful* somehow, this plane ride that would take us to the other side of the world and into a strange, eerie, new life. In reality, it was just mildly uncomfortable and extremely boring.

It was still eight o’clock in the morning in California when the plane descended, even after the 15-hour plane ride, because of the time difference. I looked out the window and watched the fields, crooked green squares split apart by grey streets, swelling as we neared the

ground. I could see the houses, smaller white squares that surrounded those fields, growing larger and larger. Each square was a home, and for each home, a family was living in it, a family that belonged there.

It was pouring and yet sunny when we arrived in America, which never happened in Hong Kong or Taiwan. Hong Kong was where I grew up, and Taiwan was where I was born, where my parents grew up, and where we would visit our relatives every summer. Back there it was always either raining or sunny, which would grow into a sweltering heat that kept you up at night. Never a combination of both. As we headed towards Moraga, the cars kicked up tiny droplets of water that faded into the air like a puff of cloud. It was beautiful, the way the raindrops made swirls of mist around the wheels of all the cars speeding across the highway.

For a long time after we moved I tried to look for similarities between here and Hong Kong that aren't even there. It wasn't easy, needless to say. Besides the offices in San Francisco, all the buildings were short and flat, "like hobbit holes", my mom said on the way to Safeway, once. The whole scenery just seems empty when the tallest things around are trees, almost like a book with only the first twelve pages written. In the winter your breath comes out in a fog, and every time someone laughed you would see a puff of smoke coming out of their mouths. America was a place where when it rained the sun could still be shining, encompassing the world like a giant, golden lake with a rainbow cutting through it, a ribbon of light. And at night, if I look out from the balcony, the sky would be dotted with faint stars, not with blinking yellow apartment lights like in Hong Kong. When I look up at the stars it feels like I am looking through tiny windows that peek into both the past and the future.

Time went by like it always does, the movie of my life never slowing, pausing, or rewinding, only speeding up as I counted the days. I'd been in America for a week, a month, six months, a year, more than a year. The people here are nice, and the more I talked to them the more I realised that they weren't so different from me and the people I knew back in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Walking through the streets with the houses so spaced out became more and more natural. Then, I think it was one Friday night-- I wasn't doing anything special, just camping around the television watching a simple movie with the rest of my family. I think it was then when I came to the conclusion that America was just the same if you looked past the surface differences. Because, like Hong Kong, and like Taiwan, I could call this place my home.