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## From Childhood to Future

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## From Childhood to Future

*Victoria Rajkumar*

My aunt's home was my sanctuary. I remember listening to the sound of the fan in the corner of the room, hearing it turn, a low hum, feeling pleased as it gently blew the cool air in my direction, brushing my parched skin for mere seconds. A tease. I heard the sound of the ice cream truck driving down the block, Für Elise, reminding me of the passing 4 o'clock afternoon and the tiniest pleasure that was childhood. The birds were calling, an array of languages. The bluejays harped a sharper tune, while the mocking birds chimed sweetly a similar melody. I heard the passing cars in the distance and the laughter from the neighbor's children through the open window.

The sheets on the bed smelled like Downy and summertime breeze. The pillow was pricking the back of my head, ten thousand feathers, more bothersome than comfortable. The surrounding air was so steamy you could taste the Miami heat. The only relief from the scorch was the teasing fan doing its roundabout. Any second now it would come my way once more. The sunlight was peeking through the vertical blinds, which were a horrid shade of beige. The brightness of the beaming sun stung my eyes; it was such a joyful presence.

I recall my tongue being parched, as was my throat. With every humid breath I took I could taste tiny traces of sweet dust billowing around the room. I stared in wonder at the dust particles, watching them dance in the sun's spotlight. It was finally their chance, and they were putting on quite the show. The afternoon glow suited them as they twirled in slow, graceful circles, capturing the sunlight and returning rainbows.

The scent of ramen noodles lingered in the air from an earlier lunch and the homey scent that one can never seem to name invaded every crevice of the room. The scent is human, a sign that life existed within those walls and it was content with being there.

Many years have passed, but time does not cool the burn of Miami weather. I have returned to my aunt's home for a casual visit laced with awkward conversation. I am introduced to a place much different from what I left behind so long ago. "Modern" and "remodeled" are words thrown around like confetti. Upon entry, where time failed to mask the heat, the new central A/C mastered. The air was cold, unreal and hospital-like in essence. Recycled air. Newly upholstered, unwelcoming, furniture bids you to take a brief seat.

I sit on the edge of the deep maroon sofa, adorned with too many pillows in three unsightly shades of brown, and keep my hands on my lap. I take a deep breath of chilled air, so much so that it made my nose and throat burn just a bit. There is a new, unfamiliar scent; while not altogether unpleasant it was not one I'd wish to inhale again. It was pungent and fruity, the kind of smell you could purchase in a dollar store can of air freshener. It too was artificial and uninviting, I felt a bit inclined to return the smell for fear of having trespassed.

As my aunt prepared tea in the kitchen (which was also labeled as "altered"), I searched for the memory I once knew, an old friend kept away for far too long. Yet, despite my efforts, not a single trace was left for me to embrace. Was I dreaming? It was late afternoon, but I could not hear the sound of Für Elise coming down the block or the neighborhood children engaged in play. No, it was gone. The children had since grown up and moved away. Silence, it appears that the birds have taken leave as well, not a single tune was playing. All I could hear, no matter how hard I listened, was the A/C's high-powered rumble through the vents.

Through the heavily curtained window I looked for the joyful dust, eager to see the particles perform in the sunlight for me once more. The newly installed awning made it certain that the intrusive sun would keep its cancer to itself. If light were to enter, it would be from the "green" lightbulbs that twisted into one odd shape and shined their too-bright blue-ish fluorescent glow. I looked down at the wooden floor and thought of my memory, of the life that once existed here. Peering up I could now see that what was once here had left many years ago, perhaps with me. Brand new furniture, HD television and a computer workstation that had replaced the dinner table mocked me from my seat.

My aunt returned with cups of tea in Starbucks logo mugs. I wondered about her "fine china" floral tea cups (chipped in places but were always sturdy) and their disappearing act. We chatted for a bit, nothing like what I could remember and eventually I got up and made my leave. As I hugged and kissed her goodbye, I glanced over her shoulder into a home I once knew. I wondered, just what was I to expect on my next visit? I left with the disappointment of knowing that no matter what was to come it would never be what was.