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“My Grandfather’s Journey to America”

Once, there was a boy. A boy full of excitement, who thought of all his family’s travels as an adventure, and of himself as the explorer discovering uncharted territory—oh! I’m getting ahead of myself here...I should probably start from the beginning.

The story begins in Caracas, Venezuela. Not the modern Caracas, impoverished and unkempt. The Caracas before that: the beautiful, thriving Caracas! The one with beautiful, vibrantly colored houses lining the streets, and mountains throughout, like the mountain with a little waterfall named *Pajaritos* (little birds). In fact, that particular mountain is right at the end of the street where our story takes place. One of those houses on that street was the home of my grandfather, Henry. Only he wasn’t my grandfather yet—he was only 8 years old when this story is set.

Henry breathed in the scent of Christmas dinner, trying not to burst with impatience. There was still an hour left before he could taste the food! *I don’t think I can wait any longer!* He thought, frustrated. “Please, Mamá, just a little taste?”

Mamá shook her head, laughing. “*Ten paciencia, pequeña.* You know as well as I do that the *hallaca* isn’t ready yet!”

“What about the *polvorosas de almendras*?” Henry tried.

“We’re saving that for dessert!” Mamá replied. “Why don’t you go practice your accordion?”

Henry sat up. “Oh, yeah! I’ll go get it!” He sprang up out of his seat at the dining room table. Mamá watched him go, feeling bittersweet. *If only he knew what his father and I have been planning...*

Later, in the after-dinner calm, his parents broke the news.

“WHAT?!” Henry blurted. “We’re moving?!” *I must’ve heard them wrong. Or-or maybe it’s just a joke! Any second now, Papá’s gonna laugh and tousle my hair and Mamá’s gonna call me her little monkey!* He looked up at his parents expectantly.

But they didn't laugh or even move. They just stood there looking grave. "Henry," Mamá began gently, "Your Papá's lost his place as colonel in the military, and this country's starting to get crazy. We can't stay here. We must move to Uruguay."

And that was that. In a blur, the family was packing and getting ready to leave, taking as much as they could with them, and all too soon, it was the day of their departure. Henry had to admit, he was pretty excited to see what Uruguay was like, but also really upset that he had to leave his home country. He pouted all the way to the airport and tried to pout on the airplane, but after a little while he fell asleep. Henry woke up later that day, just to find out there was still half a day's flight left. He groaned and soon dozed off again.

"Henry! Henry, *cariño*, wake up!" Mamá gently shook him awake.

"Wha...What is it, Mamá?"

"We're here, Henry! We're in Uruguay!" Those words worked like smelling salts, and before long, the family was rushing through the crowded Uruguay airport, hurrying towards their new home, where they would pass the next three years, until...

Henry gazed out the window, giddy with excitement. They were really doing it. They were moving to New York City! Where Coney Island was! *I'm gonna ride all the rides when we get there*, he thought. *I still can't believe this is happening!* Just one month ago, they had been living peacefully in Uruguay. Well...not so peacefully. Uruguay had gone from being a nice little country in South America to the top country of terrorism while they were living there.

Uruguay had been nice, and Henry had made friends there, but it was nothing compared to New York. Or, at least what he'd *heard* of New York. There was only one tiny problem with moving to the United States—none of his family could speak English. But Henry ignored that.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, they arrived! Henry couldn't believe he would finally get to see New York.

"Here goes!" Papá said, as they exited the airport.

The winter wind howled and a blast of jarringly cold air slammed into Henry. Staggering backwards, he let go of his boarding passes from Uruguay and they flew away into the distance. Numb, Henry watched as they were blown away and had the distinct feeling that New York had taken away his personality along with his boarding passes and

replaced them with a completely new person. The person who, over time, became my grandfather.