

The Leave

Alex Lin

I splash water on my face. The cold brings me to life. I open the bathroom door, and step into the hallway, my hair neatly tied up.

"Looking good, Alex!" complimented my sister.

"Oh ya, thanks, I know, ha ha!" I reply. I always trust my sister with her compliments. Her words always calm me.

I enter my room. My two suitcases are packed and ready to go. I pick up my laptop, and slide it into my backpack.

"You ready?"

I turn around to see my Dad standing at the door to my room.

"Yea, yea, just double checking everything to make sure I haven't forgotten anything."

"Good, good."

I throw on my backpack, and touch my pockets to feel my phone, wallet and passport. I grab the two suitcases and push them out into the living room.

"Have your passport?" asks my Mom.

"Yes, yes, I got it." I reassure her.

"And your plane ticket? Hong Kong, Vancouver and then to Toronto?"

"Yes Mom, it's electronic!"

"Packed all your clothes? Got your winter coat? Touke? Snow boots? Gloves?"

"Yep, got everything. I'm sure."

I kneel down to lace up my shoes.

"I can't believe it. It feels like it was just yesterday when you were a toddler. Look at you now!" says my Mom caringly.

My Dad nods stoically. He never says too much, but I know deep down he is thinking it.

My parents are sometimes too emotional, and they worry a lot, but I understand them. They have gone through a lot to get me to where I am now, and I really appreciate it.

I smile, and stand up.

"I know, time flies doesn't it," acknowledging my Mom.

"Don't forget to let us know when you reach Vancouver," reminds my Dad.

"I know. I'll keep you posted," responding a little too emphatically.

"How long is your wait in Vancouver?" continues my Mom.

"Eh, about six hours, but I have a friend who's gonna meet me just to kill time."

"Oh, you know someone in Vancouver?" asks my sister as she walks into the living room.

“Yea, yea, it’s my friend from school, he’s going to uni in Vancouver, we’re just gonna see each other for a bit.”

I open the door and step out of the apartment. The hallway smells of the familiar teriyaki beef the neighbors next door are always cooking. I roll my suitcases to the elevator. The four of us make our way down to the ground floor of the building, and then towards the bus stop.

“What’s the bus number you have to take?” asks my sister.

“A42, it should say Airport Express on it.”

“Ah. It should be here in three minutes,” she confirms, looking up from checking her phone.

My mind races once again to make sure I have everything. I feel my father’s hands from behind touch my shoulders.

“Alex, just let me say ...”

I look up at him.

“... being a young man is the most exciting time in your life. I trust you to make the right decisions. Be smart. Stay safe. Look vigilant.”

My body is suddenly overwhelmed with a mighty surge of warmth, motivation and happiness. I now know how proud my father is of me. I nod, a confidence brewing inside me. I think I even blushed a little, my sister peering at me out of the corner of her twinkling eye with her slight, quirky smile.

“You know what you have to do when you get to Toronto? You know how to get to the campus?” You know which bus to take?” asks Mom. I hear her pleading for reassurance.

I nod again.

“Alright!” I am starting to show some impatience with these three, but I hold it back.

“Thanks for everything Dad! Really!”

He pats me on the back in his usual parent friendly, memorable way.

I turn to my mother. She sobs. I hug her.

“It’s okay, before you know it Christmas will roll around and I’ll be back here to see you guys.” I said in a comforting voice.

She smiles and gives me a big wet kiss on my cheek.

“Hey that’s the bus!” proclaims my sister.

I let go of my Mom.

I turn to my sister. We embrace tightly, holding on to each other a slightly longer second than usual, almost as if we are both thinking the same thing – that we may never ever see each other again. Its mildly dramatic, to say the least.

"I'll see ya later dude, study hard, yea? And careful with the boys!" emphasizing my brotherly caretaker role.

"Mm, yea good luck yo," she replies. We disentangle ourselves.

The bus pulls up.

I pick up my suitcases and climb on board, my parents and sister watching me from behind. I swipe my card and load my suitcases into the bag compartment. I take a seat at the back and put my headphones into my ears. I see my parents waving and I wave back to them. The doors close and the bus drives away.

I feel empty. I feel the invisible parental shield around me lift, and fade away. I feel, for the first time, alone. Since the day I was born, they have protected me and supported me. Now, it all changes. I am on my own. I am forever grateful to them. But even so, I know I can do it on my own now.

And, most important, for the first time, I realize I am truly lucky to be so fortunate, as I know a lot of other kids who do not have the luxury of a family like mine. It breaks me up. I feel sorry for them. I close my eyes.

"Thank you." I murmur under my breath discreetly to my family as I see them fade in the distance out of the rear bus window ... "what would I have ever done without you?"