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Eduardo Wrapped in a Towel

I had never knocked on my older brother's door before, and definitely not while he was taking a shower. But that day I did. I knocked even harder when I thought he didn't listen or perhaps decided to ignore me.

"What do you want?" he yelled. I could still hear the water running.

"You need to come out and see this," I yelled back. "*Es urgente.*" And by *urgent*, I really meant urgent, surprising, and shocking.

The day before, September 10, 2001, Eduardo arrived home by surprise with three oversized suitcases. He had spent five months in Boston saving money for his wedding, where he worked two jobs with two of his college friends, *El Flaco* and *El Cheve*. His first job was at a Nike outlet store, hence the large blue bag full of sneakers in every member of the family's size. I got two pairs. I never had a pair of Nike shoes before. The first pair was pinkish, similar to the ones every girl was wearing at school, and the second pair was red. His second job was at a Wendy's. Eduardo happily explained to us what Wendy's was and how he learned the menu in a week. Luckily, he was smart enough not to bring hamburgers on a five-hour flight to Phoenix, and then a 12-hour bus ride from Phoenix to Ciudad Obregón, México.

My 18-year-old self listened to him with admiration. His stories about rude customers and his everyday American adventures sparked something in me.

That night he chatted like he had never talked before. We circled around him in the living room with our new Gap matching t-shirts and we laughed at his jokes and misadventures. "There was one customer," he started, "that didn't understand *El Flaco's* accent and spit on his face. I couldn't look at him. I just went to look for the manager. *El Flaco* cried all night."

I wondered what it felt to live in the U.S. and to have issues with other cultures and to struggle with a different language. But the thought of being away from my family held me back. Eduardo, on the other hand, seemed

to be adapting and before taking his shower that morning, he had told us how he needed to go back to Boston in three days.

That was one of the reasons he needed to get out of the shower to watch the news. I heard him grunt. He turned off the shower and came out wrapped in a towel from the waist down, taking his time, not believing the urgency of the matter. “*Ya voy*,” he said.

“*Las torres*,” I cried, pointing to our parent’s room, the only room with a TV. Eduardo stood with one hand on his hip, staring at the round-screen RCA. His whole body was dripping; his wet tousled dark curls smelled like Head & Shoulders.

His eyes followed the layers of smoke coming out of the twin towers. His mouth was open; his eyes couldn’t even dare to blink. The water had now formed a small puddle on the floor.

“Eduardo?” I asked. But he wouldn’t respond. He just stood there for at least fifteen minutes. I wondered if he thought it was a hoax or some sort of Hollywood movie. I sat on my parent’s bed and watched the news footage with him, waiting for the anchorman to say that they were advertising a film and that none of it was real. I felt every muscle in my body stiffen. I didn’t dare move. I thought if I did, another bubble would burst. I looked at my brother again, still hypnotized by the TV. I was looking for some sign that it was going to be okay. But he gave me nothing. I wondered if any of his friends were flying out of Boston that day, or visiting New York.

How was this even possible?

I kept staring at the TV and then back to my brother. He finally moved to fix the antenna behind the TV, and then back to watch the news.

His face looked weathered with worry. I tried to remember the last time I saw that expression, but I couldn’t. I only could think about how he eagerly narrated his adventures in Boston and how he loved his life in the U.S. That entire spark was gone. There was nothing left. I stared at the TV again when the news announced all borders would be closing without an official re-opening day. And that’s when Eduardo finally sat down, still wrapped in a towel.