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### Ten Thousand Miles

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## Ten Thousand Miles

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Janaki Nair

Ten Thousand Miles

"Why don't you write about the flight?" my parents say in the most casual tone, like I haven't made clear it's a taboo subject for me. I can't even fathom the idea; I never want to talk about it. How could I? Maybe I heard them incorrectly over the phone? "I really can't, I can't even think about it yet" I get out. And why should I? Some things are best left forgotten.

*As the tangerine sunset gave way to a Vanta black view, sleep seemed to fade away as well. The excitement bubbling inside settled into a pit of dread. Her previous enthusiasm and optimism about the possibilities college has to offer were nowhere to be found. She couldn't breathe; she was trying but there was no air. She couldn't even see her hands and feet; it was pitch dark. Gullible as it was, she was prepared to feel homesick, but that sinking feeling of horror she was unprepared to battle.*

*Everyone was asleep. Her anxiety seemed to be reaching new heights every second, but still no air. Frantically she pressed the light button, but nothing was happening, the air hostess call button didn't seem to be getting any response either. The comforter sprawled across her chest restricted her gasping breaths like a weighted blanket. Even after several failed attempts to meditate, she still couldn't breathe. Her body wouldn't cooperate. 'I should wake someone up' she thought.*

I try not to think about that time. The air is filled with the pleasant petrichor of rain as I walk down the long walk across the campus grounds, and it feels like home. I'm going to enter the

class and tell my professor I'll write about my first weekend at Trinity instead, and I should. Why bring up things I would rather bury? Memories I attempt to erase from my mind. There's no real need to tarnish this sunny story.

*Following the guidance of the plane's illuminated emergency track lights, she stumbled to the bathroom, surprised that she managed to make it. There was no Wi-fi so she couldn't text anyone, couldn't talk to anyone back home, couldn't seek any comfort. She was completely cut off, stranded somewhere in the air, surrounded by unfamiliar faces. She didn't know anyone, and everyone around was oblivious to her suffering. She felt so alone. The emergency call button in the bathroom wasn't working either. She really couldn't breathe.*

*Everything seemed to be hitting her. Traveling alone for the first time was one thing, not going home for four months, not seeing her brother, Sharan, for four months was another aspect of this one-way journey she was now being forced to acknowledge. She tried hard to stop thinking about the people left behind— grandparents, parents, brother, and dogs. She was leaving everything behind, only to try and settle in a place that was totally unfamiliar. Doubts began to seep through, 'I can't do this, I need to get back'. 'I need to throw up'. The never-ending darkness through the window didn't help the stress. Nothing was working; she was all alone. Nothing was working, and she still couldn't breathe.*

*She got back to her seat. Cold water splattering against her face seemed to have helped. Maybe a movie will too? She desperately wanted to go back but it was too late, she couldn't turn the plane back around. The fear of leaving home and going off to college was eating her up inside.*

*Time had never moved slower, as the sixteen hours slowly stretched into what felt like days. The nausea refused to settle; the sensation of utter panic didn't subside.*

Images of that dark moment flash past my eyes, periods of time I never want to think about. The anxiety I felt at that moment, the breathlessness. The scenery around me should be calming. The orange hue of the leaves, the grandeur of the chapel as it fades into the grey skies, usually ground me. However, I'm experiencing one of my moments of weakness where I allow myself to picture her sitting in that vessel of panic. Why is this the only thing I can think about when I sit down to write this essay? Maybe I can brave through it. Maybe writing this can finally give me closure.

*When the pinkish sun rose over the skyline of NYC it felt like looking at the world through rose-tinted glasses. The shy girl from India slipped into the background, and her elation rekindled. It was traumatic in the dark, but she'd made it, she was here. The emotions flowing through her were unlike anything she'd felt before. Seeing the never-ending rows of skyscrapers brought joy similar to hearing one's favorite song for the first time and falling in love immediately. The realization that she'd made it seemed to soothe her anxiety.*

I walked through immigration to the parking sign in front of me and I made it, limbs luggage and all. My legs were still shaking, but I could breathe. I could feel my anxiety dissolve away, leaving behind in its debris a shell of confidence I'm still learning to govern.

My aunt walked toward me, smiling so wide. I returned it, although it was a weaker one. I clearly recall the panic dwindling. A spark of pride bloomed in my chest. If I can make it through that, maybe I can manage to find my place here at Trinity as well. Maybe I'm capable of a lot more than I anticipated, I can't wait to find out.

I keep attempting to dismiss these thoughts, not wanting to relive the trauma. But every time I think about writing this essay, the flight is the only idea that comes to mind. The emotional rollercoaster that it was, it does have a happy ending, a silver lining of sorts. Despite it all, I'm happy here, the journey almost seems worth it now. I gained something I deem priceless, a new outlook, a new me.

The panic does return from time to time when I let myself think back to that time. Writing this feels therapeutic, as I peel the layers away and reminisce, I realize I truly have moved on. The cold wind brushing my face, as I walk down the lower long walk past the chapel, carries with it a sense of comfort, a sense of feeling settled. I was desperate to go back home, but I'm here and it's raining as I stroll down the long walk.

Now that I sit here and write, that plane ride almost feels like another lifetime or rather, another version of me. It feels like a grand transformation took place that day. The versions of me that sat on the two tarmacs, one in Delhi and one in New York, seem like completely different people. One ecstatic but naïve and one that set foot in America. I left my meek, unsure past behind, the girl who arrived at campus is more self-assured and confident. It's like I shed my skin, I can breathe easily.