

A meeting with Papá Carlos

The sun was bright, and the air smelled of sugar and coffee. A small distance away you could hear the jingling of keys, wind chimes, and the rustling of palm trees. The fluttering of butterfly wings, and the chirping of parakeets. I woke up to those sounds, those delightful smells, on a bed of soft grass, and flowers. I was dressed in a baby blue dress, decorated with flowers in my hair, bouncing ringlets, and gold sandals. I was on a street I remembered, one I knew from my childhood. I walk down it, saying hello to people who know me and seem familiar, safe, and warm, but I don't quite know them. I walked down, and there she was, that beautiful purple house, 134 Calle 15 Jardines del Caribe, and there he was. In his signature fedora, a light yellow-flower patterned playera, and white pants, he leaned against the fence, waiting. I walk up, and I can't believe he's standing in front of me. I keep saying to myself this is a dream because this certainly isn't a memory. He sees me coming, smiles, and opens the gate, "que bueno que llegaste, como estas..". He brings me in for a long, warm embrace, pulling back to wipe my tears away. I hug him back, breathing every bit of him in that scent of honey, smoke, and coffee, that scent that unlocked so many childhood memories. He takes a look at me and says, "wow ya estas grande.... tan bella que estas.." after a quick pause he adds "entra, entra, tenemos mucho que hablar". He sits me down on those camel leather couches and gives me a cup of coffee. He asks me how I'm doing, and I can't answer the question because I am not sure if this is real, it feels real, he feels real but I'm unsure. He grabs my hands and says, "no tenemos mucho tiempo... Meralis, ¿cómo estás?", and I tell him everything. How I'm doing, how I'm feeling, how sad I am that I grew up before I was able to spend some proper time with him, and how sorry I was for not coming sooner. He reassured me that it was okay and that he was happy and full of life. He asked me about London wondered if I liked the city, and asked me if I was enjoying the country. I showed him pictures and shared with him my favorite memories. Told him how scared I was to hike the White Cliffs of Dover, and thanked him for his courage to get me through. Told him how scared I was of feeling, and being alone while exploring London and the countryside, and how thankful I was for the people that came along on this trip. He asked me if I was happy if I was truly happy, and I said "si, estoy feliz", and he knew I wasn't lying because I could never lie to him. He asked me how my sisters were doing, and if they were okay, and I told him how much I would've wished for him to see them now, how big they've gotten, how strong and smart they are, how beautiful they all are. He says, "lo se... pero si las veo, y están bellas todas". He then asked me about my father, and how he was doing, and I told him that I didn't really know. He gave me that look, that serious look he always gives before looking at me and saying, "Meralis.. Dime como esta Carlos", and I told him that he was sad, and maybe a little lost.. " te extraña mucho Papá... te ama tanto..". He smiles, and nods, saying how proud he is, and how happy he is for his son. He wishes my mother continuous luck, he knows my dad isn't easy. We walk out to the marquesina, and there we sit and talk, we walk around and enjoy the day, we laugh together, and we hug each other. He then reminds me that we don't have a lot of time, and I will be going soon, and before the end of it he says, "te deseo toda la felicidad en el mundo. Dios te bendiga mi niña, portate bien y cojelo con calma".

Memory and dreams are things that often confuse me. To dream in many ways has always been a way of remembering a past I can no longer touch or feel. In the land of dreams, I've often

found truths I've buried, and I've found all the grief and fear I've run from. My dreams also take me back to joy and serenity, the kind I sometimes think I am incapable of feeling and enjoying in its full breadth. Three years ago now I was so distraught, so drowned in my grief that I was unable to get on a plane and celebrate the life of my late grandfather. To say I was hysterical is an understatement. In my emotional state then, flight attendants would not have let me on the plane. As my heart shattered, a whole world away, my family convened to lay him to rest. Maybe in an effort to find peace from things, places, people, and situations we find unsettling, we dream. I imagine that most artists began with a dream that later became the body of work they became most known for. Writers often must dream if they hope to reimagine the world we live in or simply create a new one. But, what must you do to access the knowledge you thought lost? What can you do to regain a connection? I've been thinking a lot about grief lately, and how we live in a world surrounded by perpetual grievers. That terrifies me in a way. Among the strongest emotions that bind us together is grief. I heard someone say to me how much you grieve is how much you love, and I still carry an amount of grief with me that abruptly sweeps me off my feet here and there. Are dreams enough to cope with loss that will never leave us? I hope so.