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There's a house in the town of San Jerónimo—at least, it used to be a town before the city's expansion consumed it, pushing its edges beyond recognition. It was a modest two-storey white house, nestled within a quiet condominium of pastel and beige-coloured homes. Yet, among them, one stood out like a sore thumb: a glaringly tacky mustard-yellow house where two Argentinian ladies lived. Their stern faces are forever in my memory, forever scowling as they chastised us kids for daring to run around near their gaudy home. Their elongated faces, like caricatures of witches, were furrowed with years of disapproval, their eyes blazing with silent reproach at even the slightest glance in their direction. The condominium was serene—or at least that's how I remember it. The streets weren't paved with concrete but with large rust-coloured stones, rough to the touch and bone-dry for most of the year. The second thing I remember is the green—lush and unrelenting. Bushes thrived, trees stood tall and proud, and dandelions defiantly sprouted between the cracks in the pavement.

At the very end of the street, after a left turn from the main entrance, stood our white house. A huge tree graced the corner, its leaves falling in tune with the seasons, its branches flourishing every summer. They grew strong and wide, sometimes stretching far enough to shade the window of my room. That tree became a living, breathing part of the house—a companion, offering cool shadows in the warming sun. The house had two wide windows flanking a grand oak door—at least, I think it was oak. It was a rich chocolate-coloured door with a silver knob that always felt strangely modern against the old-fashioned charm of the door. The entrance was tiled with marble, perpetually smooth to the touch. A brown mailbox clung to the right of the entrance, and a bamboo wind chime dangled nearby, its soft, melodic clatter filling the air with gentle music whenever a breeze passed through.

Inside, the floor was of a muted white, its tiles arranged in a rhombus pattern that caught the sunlight spilling through the windows. A dark wooden entrance table stood to the right, adorned with framed photos and rustic, artificial flowers—those fake ones to decorate; they have been there ever since I can remember. Round frames with familiar faces, mostly of my sister and me. There I was, my puffy cheeks and golden curls sticking out in every direction, and there was my sister, smiling brightly despite her missing tooth, her fringe and ponytail defining her childhood look. Our wide eyes and carefree spirits were captured in those moments, forever frozen in time.

Above the table hung a mirror, where I can still picture my mom standing, deftly fixing her hair before we left the house. She rarely wore makeup, but her hair was always perfect, thanks to the arsenal of products she kept within reach. The house always smelled like home. I think everyone has their own version, that scent that defies description but feels instantly familiar. If you asked me now, I'd admit I've forgotten the exact aroma, but the memory of stepping inside and feeling enveloped in warmth remains vivid. The house had a number: A10. Though it was often chilly inside, it never felt cold. After all, it was home.

A family of five used to live in that house. My mom, my dad, my sister, our dog Nala, and me. At least that was the case for twenty years, for in the last three years I haven't seen the same house. Sure, I've visited that house twice since I moved to Canada. However, it's not home, not the same place where my sister and I grew up. Where we lived through our rebellious years, fought with our parents, and yelled at each other—only to make up five minutes later to eat something together.

The walls have turned cold, the photographs turned bitter. A happiness that seems out of reach, memories that have long been lost, faded in our minds. An empty dining room, a bare table that left no trace of endless nights of dominoes. Those nights I'll carry heavy in my heart. My dad and I started playing dominoes when the pandemic confined us to the house for at least a year. My best friend became an honorary member of the household during that time, spending weeks on end with us. My dad, ever resourceful, decided to teach both of us how to play dominoes—a game we'd master by the end of quarantine. It is strange to say those are the best memories I have with him; he had built a bridge connecting the two of us. Only now I know it was his way of saying goodbye, of leaving the house peacefully with a smile on his face.

The first to leave was my sister. After months of arguments, senseless fights, and tears, she boarded a plane to Canada. Ready for the next part of her life, seeking new adventures. My mom cried once she was gone, even though she had bickered with her through the year. I'll never forget something my dad said, something that has stuck with me ever since: "It's easier to leave angry than to leave crying."

Although the four of us had been very different people, there had been one thing we couldn't disagree on. We loved watching movies. At the cinema, my dad would only buy one bag of popcorn for all of us. That swiftly changed once we realized the popcorn would not last past the trailers. Movies had become our one thing, no matter how long our day had been, no matter if we had fought with each other. At the end of the day, the four of us would find ourselves watching, if time allowed, the fragment of a movie. Any movie. We were proud owners of every Harry Potter movie. I'll never forget the stormy night when the power went out, and how the four of us huddled together under blankets in my parents' bedroom. With only my mom's laptop to entertain us, we streamed *The Goblet of Fire* until the battery died, the rain continued pounding outside, yet the laughter and warmth filled the room, accompanying us till the end of the storm.

For some reason I thought I'd be next, probably due to the natural state of things. However, it wasn't me; it was my dad. He moved out quietly, I remember little of the conversation we had; it's lost somewhere in my memory. Both my mom and dad, sitting in front of me in the living room, both fixed on me, as if ignoring each other. And without a second conversation, he left. Taking with him a part of the house's warmth.

Then it was my turn. At that time, the words that my dad had spoken repeated in my head, "It's easier to leave angry, than to leave crying," and he was right. Stepping out of the house for the last time, walking off on the white corridor as I waved my parents goodbye has been one of the hardest things I've ever done. Even though they didn't like each other anymore, both were there, waving goodbye at me as I turned my back on them and forced myself not to look back.

It feels like a lifetime ago now—all the laughter, the marathons, the arguments that seemed so important back then. Yet, it all faded away. Now, it all seems unimportant. I feel like I forgot to cherish the important part of those memories. The memories that tied us to each other now turn cold. The house is empty now. The warm yellow light in the dining room has faded into a pale, sterile white. The rooms are bare, the games packed away, and the pictures no longer hang on the walls. I couldn't even say goodbye properly to the house.

But maybe it's better that way. Some goodbyes are too heavy to bear.