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(Theme: New Experiences Can Change One's Perspective/Growing Up)
Make Sure to Develop Title Related to Theme Before Submitting

June 1, 2003

The nasally voice streamed from the crackling loudspeaker: "United Flight 312 boarding in 10 minutes"

"That's me. Better not miss my flight!" Jen exclaimed as she flipped her platinum blonde hair, brown roots peeking through, over the shoulder of her sleek, black A-line peacoat. "Have a sweet day, Darling, and don't you ever stop being wonderful. See you in another life. Hahaha. Byebye!" She sped off rapidly with a gait in her step, skillfully navigating the sea of people surrounding her, her throaty laughter and pink Dooney and Bourke luggage trailing down the hallway behind her.

Jen was off to Scotland to start a new adventure with Brian, to continue her story, while my story was about to come to an abrupt end. A feeling of heavy despair and longing flooded my heart. My muscles tensed and my eyes welled. Salty tears slid over my dry parted lips, and into my mouth.

Only one hour to go until I am on that plane, heading back home. But I don't know that it will ever completely feel like home again.

~

Four months earlier.

I stepped off the plane, my stomach a ball of knots tied so tightly I thought it impossible to untangle them. *Why did I think this was a good idea? What made me think I could do this?* I asked myself, silently.

Six months earlier, I had yelped with excitement and had danced a horribly poor 20-second American version of an Irish jig upon opening my acceptance letter to the program. "What better way to learn about Irish Literature than to actually submerge myself into the culture of the Land of Scholars and Saints!" I had told Dad, whose failed attempt to mask his concern I ignored.

Now, I couldn't do anything to ignore my own concern. *I may be from the Land of the Free and the Home of the brave, but right now I'm sure not living up to the brave part of that motto, I thought to myself. Maybe Dad had a reason to be worried about me. I don't think I can do this. I can't even ask that flight attendant where to get my suitcase. She will probably think I'm an annoying, dumb American. Ugh.*

My throat started to constrict, and my heart began beating so rapidly, I thought it would win a race against Seabiscuit.

OK, Katie, get a grip. You can do this. And even if you can't, you really have no other choice.

Snapping out of my moment of self-absorption and panic, I glanced up and saw the elderly man who had been sitting near me on the plane. I remembered his thick Irish accent from the many light-hearted exchanges he'd had with the flight attendant. *He has to know where he is going.*

I followed three feet behind him, feeling like a lost puppy, heading toward a sign for “baggage reclaim.”

As I approached the belt, I saw my large, turquoise suitcase roll by. I lunged for the handle, but the weight of the bag pulled me, forcing me to let go as I lurched forward.

“Let me help you with that. It looks a might bulky for a little lass of your size,” came a raspy voice beside me.

Smoothly and effortlessly swooping my overly stuffed suitcase from the belt as though it weighed nothing but 10 kilograms, was a solidly built man donning a brown cricket cap and a worn, light-brown leather jacket. The warm, crooked-toothed smile he flashed my way eased my discomfort.

“Thanks,” I said, flashing a shy smile back.

“With greatest respect, you look a little lost. Know where you’re headin’ now?”

I rifled through my wallet, searching for the address to the flat I would be living in.

“Hehehe, ummm...here.” *Why are you giggling? Stop giggling.*

“Aaaah. Noice place, that Sandymount. A little outside Dublin though.” I would suggest ya grab a cab. There’s a cue by the curb.”

“Thank you so much! I truly appreciate it,” I said as I sauntered toward the doors.

Phew, I thought. If most Irish people are like him, I might just make it after all.

~

Two Weeks Later

(Plan: My Idea is to **tell** the reader that I was settling in, meeting both my American classmates and but still had to branch out to the Irish population. Then I will **show** them my trip to the Wicklow Mountains, where I was invited to sit in on a bag-pipe competition. This is where I spoke with some Irish competitors and really allowed myself to loosen up).

The Final Night/Goodbyes

(Plan: I will show my final goodbyes to both my Irish friends and my MSU friends, revealing the contrast between my shy and reserved nature at the beginning and my outgoing nature in the end.)

June 2003, again

(Plan: I will be back at the airport, hearing the voice again on the loudspeaker stating that my flight is boarding. Thoughts about how much I have changed will be running through my head. I will be talking to others with no reserve as I board the plane.)