

Rosalia

By Dalyz A.

I lived in the same address since I was born up until I was 6. That's when my parents decided to upgrade and move into a bigger apartment because my baby sister Caroline was almost a year old and we would all need more space. I don't remember the number of the house, I just remember the name, *Amackassin*. What a weird name for a street. We moved there around the ending months of 2002 and we used to live on the first floor, other tenants occupied the second and third.

This is where *Rosalia* comes in (It should be noted that I couldn't even recall her name, it was my mother who remembered and even then she says she's not so sure either.) We'll call her Rosalia. It doesn't help that my memory is completely flawed. I may not remember her name, but I sure remember her. I knew I had pictures with her somewhere, lost in the vast collection of memories frozen in time that my mother likes to keep. After sending her on a wild goose chase for *that* picture she told me it was nowhere to be found.

"Maybe it's in your photo albums," she said.

"No *mamá*, I already checked them."

"Did you check behind the photos? Sometimes when you were little you would shove two pictures into the same slot."

Huh. It was a long shot but sure, I checked and voila. Behind one of the pictures I found it. If it weren't for that photograph, I wouldn't remember her clearly at all. As is, my memories are already quite vague just like the rest of my childhood. My mind is like the waves of a sea, sometimes memories would come constantly and all at once, other times there would be none at all. The sea would turn still and dormant.

Rosalia was my neighbor, she lived upstairs. I can't recall the first time we met or how we even became friends, we just were. All I remember are bits and pieces. We were both of the same age. Wait, no, actually I think she was a year or two older than me. I don't know why but I mostly remember the summer days. She used to come inside my house often and we would play outside, on the huge yard we shared. We would spend our afternoons there, we yelled at each other "*Tag! You're it!*" and play hide and seek even though the yard was pretty much a whole space of nothing. Sometimes we would just lay down on the green grass and stare up at the vibrant blue skies.

Rosalia had untamable dark brown hair cut just around above her chin that was an unkempt bushy mess. On really humid days her hair would frizz up into inedible cotton candy. My mom used to say "*Pobrecita, parece que tiene un nido de pájaros en la cabeza.*"¹ She was tanner than me, her skin the color of cinnamon tea with the slightest hint of milk. She was a little chubby but she wasn't as fat as me. I was a fat kid, more so around that time. She had a great sense of humor, she would always make me laugh with her funny jokes. I knew she was

Hispanic because she understood my mother but we always talked in English so I never heard her utter a single word in Spanish.

There are many reasons why I haven't quite forgotten about her. She was the last friend I made in Yonkers before moving to Mexico that same summer. I only knew her for a small period of time, eight months, that's what my parents say. I also remember her because sometimes she used to come visit me with strange markings on her arms. They started as long red streaks that would drag from the top of her shoulders down to her wrists. When I first noticed them, I didn't really know what they were. That day I saw her as she walked to her door, she was wearing a pink long sleeved blouse. *She must be really hot in there.* Then she would come downstairs after we got home from school and she would have changed into a tank top. I asked her what the uneven lines were. She looked down at them, she'd pass her fingers lightly through the red trails and then look back up at me and shrug.

"It's nothing."

Her voice would sound nonchalant as if it really were and because I was a shy and quiet kid, I didn't push it either. And just like kids do, we would forget about it and continue to chase each other outside.

A couple days after, the red would change into an exchange of purples, yellows and greens along with some cloud-like splotches that I didn't notice before. I'd seen that combination of colors before. My father had been teaching me how to ride a bike so I was familiar with the etchings on my skin.

"I fall down from my bike a lot when I practice. You do too?"

She looked at me with a perplexed expression on her face. "No. I don't have a bike."

"Oh."

After the sun went down we would hear a holler from above, a vivacious roar that would make me tremble.

"ROSALIAAAAAAAAAA!"

Sometimes she would stay for dinner, my mom didn't mind and was always happy to feed her. The girl's head would bob up just like a meerkat and she would turn to look at us.

"That's my mom. I gotta go. Bye Odalys, bye Mrs. Odalys' mom!"

She would say quickly and by the time she finished her sentence she would already be dashing up the stairs. Later, I peeked over at my mom who was feeding mashed carrots to my baby sister who would make gagging noises and twist her cute little face in disgust. I twirled my spaghetti around my fork.

"Mom, did you see the stripes on Rosalia's arm? I think she got hurt somewhere. I asked her if she fell down from her bike but she said she didn't have one."

My mother stopped trying to make Caroline eat the orange mush and hesitated before answering.

"Ody, don't ask her again."

I furrowed my eyebrows. “But why not?”

“Because I say so,” her voice wasn’t as stern as she intended it to be. “*Ándale, acábate tu comida.*”²

“Mommy, do you know how she got hurt?”

She sighed and looked at me with a certain sadness on her beautiful features. “*Mija*, I think her mother beats her.”

“Oh.”

“Listen to me, you can’t tell her, okay? If you do, we’ll all get in trouble and even get kicked out of here. Her parents own this building, so don’t bring it up again. It’s very sad but we can’t interfere. Those are family problems and that’s how they like to live and treat their kids.”

I didn’t say anything because there was nothing to say. I couldn’t blame my mom, she was right. They were *asuntos de familia*.³ After I finished eating I picked up my plate and placed it in the kitchen sink.

“She doesn’t have a bike?” I shook my head. “Hmm, tell her we’re going to the park soon, you can let her ride your purple bike.” I nodded and smiled as I hugged her waist.

And so we did. That’s where the picture comes from. None of us is really smiling, I’m standing sideways with my purple bike between my legs and a neutral look on my face. Rosalia is holding a handle that’s pushing little Caroline on a baby tricycle. She has one of those funny faces that babies make without noticing. As to Rosalia, it appears that the camera caught her midsentence because her mouth is open in an awkward way. But I knew she was happy that day and that’s how I want to remember her.

A few days after she came down to play just like always but this time her eyes were outlined with dark purple patches, the skin around it almost black. When my mom opened the door she gasped and after a few seconds, she embraced her tightly without saying a word. After she came in, my mother went to her room and didn’t come out for a long time. I was afraid to directly look at my friend; it was fear that it would hurt her even further. Rosalia didn’t say anything, but that time she wasn’t as happy as usual, instead her eyes conveyed an unknown sadness that I had never fathomed before.

A few weeks after, I would discover a similar sadness. My mother was deported in June. My dad, my sister and I followed soon after. We moved to Mexico and I never saw her again.

Dear Rosalia, I’m so sorry. If I had been smarter and braver and my mom had been nosier then maybe you wouldn’t have gone through so much pain. Maybe your skin would’ve never been tainted with the bruises that no one deserves to have.

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1. “Poor thing, it looks like she has a bird’s nest on her head.”
 2. “Come on, finish your food.”
 3. Family matters.