

Imramma Schools Competition

2018 Winner

First Flight

A story by

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Lizzie tentatively opened her eyes to the muted glow of her lamp, casting lazy shadows on the walls of her narrow, cluttered room. She took sluggish steps toward the bathroom, frowning tiredly at the shrieks of incoherent chatter from her older sisters stomping around their house. Tottering through the hall, she stumbled into her parents' bedroom and blinked at the whirlwind of chaos tearing through it. Half packed suitcases littered the floor, with cascades of clothing and toiletry draped along their dresser. Sniffing disdainfully, she spun on her heel and headed back into her room. Clambering over the mounds of books scattered across her soft, maroon carpet, she launched herself onto the bed and shut her eyes. Ten minutes later Lizzie sulked drowsily as her mother hurriedly bundled her into thick, fluffy layers and worn, oversized boots, and pushed her out the front door. Heavy darkness obscured the twinkling stars occasionally peeking out from behind their inky, shapeless blankets of clouds. The engine ran steadily in their large battered car commandeered by her impatient father, his eye rolling somehow visible in the dim light. It was only after the crisp, cool air of the early morning tugged on her tousled hair that it occurred to her. After months of saving, and weeks of preparation, they were finally off to visit their family in Nigeria, on the vast, mysterious continent of Africa. The journey to the airport was hazy. Through the window pane she watched the long stretches of road race by, as the car whizzed past dark building after dark building. Her excitement grew steadily with each passing hour, the dusky dawn gradually brightening as if moved by her unrestrained joy. The sky formed a clear, pale turquoise by the time they arrived at the bustling airport. She grabbed her mother's hand, gawking at the flood of stern faced adults striding purposefully through the crowded halls to their various destinations. Wafts drifted from the numerous restaurants feeding the throngs of waiting passengers. After an arduous trip through security they finally reached the airfield. Large, looming steps awaited them at the foot of the airplane. Lizzie stared up in awe as her father guided her up the steps. The interior was striking. Soft lights dotted the curved ceiling of the plane, illuminating the faces of each seated passenger. Lizzie was gently steered towards the window seat as her parents scrambled to get them settled and ready for take off. Sighing, she plopped down. Her fingers slid across the window, wiping cool condensation from the glass. She swung her feet impatiently. After a few more agonising seconds, she climbed to her feet and peered behind her to thoroughly examine her surroundings. Tall men and women in moss green uniforms moved leisurely down the centre of the aisle. Practised smiles burst across their immaculately touched up features as they offered menus to the settling passengers. Lizzie watched curiously as they eventually lined up in even intervals, grabbing their equipment with familiar ease as the pilot's voice resonated throughout the aircraft. That curiosity turned to horror as they warned of possible danger. The longer she fidgeted there, the more the danger loomed. She opened her mouth to voice this mounting anxiety but it was too late. It was time. All of a sudden, a deep rumbling erupted from below, accompanied by a steady vibrating sensation that spread throughout her entire body.

Her mam and dad were seated a few chairs away, with sisters filling up the seats between them. The microscopic gap between their seats seemed to expand into vast, endless pits of space. Clenching the armrests on either side of her, Lizzie looked to her mother for comfort. She responded with a cheerful smile and encouraging wave. Scowling she turned away, squeezing her eyes tightly as she felt the plane begin to inch forward. Slowly, it began to glide down the smooth gravel, inch by agonising inch until suddenly it surged forward, zooming down the endless runway, speeding through the air, and then they were flying. She felt the difference instantly. First a startling pop in her ears and then a slight, sudden upsurge from the ground. Next, a breathtaking, staggering weightlessness. Being airborne was unimaginable. Breaking through the layers of rising cloud was indescribable. Witnessing it all for the first time was unforgettable. Lizzie spent the majority of the long, twelve hour flight with her face plastered against the window, her earlier anxiety forgotten as she took in the fluffy whiteness blanketing the red streaked sky beneath their tiny airship. What little sleep she managed to get was rudely interrupted by the sudden crash of the landing, the harsh jolt reopening her ears to the deafening sounds of the colossal engines. Drained beyond words, she shuffled sleepily out of her seat and into her mother's arms as she led her down the steps. Later, her brain struggled to process the explosion of culture that was Nigeria. She wondered at the brightly dressed women in silk headscarves calling out in the crowded markets. She savoured the rich aromas of unique spices that permeated the entire atmosphere. She tuned into the musical sounds that flowed from the mouths of people who looked so much like her, but were different. But nothing would strike her as much as the end of her very first flight. In that moment, the darkness had surrounded them once more, only this time it was different. A thick oppressive humidity enveloped the weary passengers as they looked up at the inky black sky, dusted with tiny white glimmers that were both familiar and foreign. It was only then, as they stood swaddled by blistering heat at midnight, that she truly began to comprehend the idea of a different continent halfway across the world from the place she called home.