

The image features a vibrant orange background. In the upper left, a large palm tree silhouette stands prominently. To its right, an airplane is shown in flight, moving towards the right. In the lower right, another palm tree silhouette is visible. At the bottom, a dark silhouette of a city skyline is set against a horizontal band of blue, which represents a body of water. The title 'California Dreaming' is written in a white, cursive script across the center of the image.

*California
Dreaming*

GIL SEGEV

California Dreaming

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Did you take your phone? Did you pack enough clothes? Will you have Wi-Fi?”

Finn rolled his eyes. “Yes, yes, and yes. Would you please quit worrying?”

Now it was his mom’s turn to roll her eyes. “How can you say that? You’re about to fly out to a country you’ve never been to, in order to move in with a stranger.”

“He’s my boyfriend,” Finn snapped. “Jason’s my boyfriend, not a stranger.”

She sighed. “I’m sorry. I’m just worried.”

Finn zipped up his jacket. Someone, it seemed, had forgotten to notify Canada that it was June. “I’ll be fine. Look, there’s the taxi.”

Indeed, an inconspicuous looking minivan was pulling around the corner. His stomach churned and his heart began to beat faster. He had been dreaming of this day for the past two years and, now that it was finally here, it nearly overwhelmed him.

“George!” His mom called into the house. “Come see him off!”

His dad emerged from the house slowly and Finn wasn’t sure if it was because he didn’t want him to leave or because he was in pain. Probably both. He made his way to the driveway, where the taxi was pulling in.

He reached out for his son. “Be safe out there, alright? I know you think you’re all grown up and mature, but there’s still lots you don’t know about the world.”

“Great words of encouragement,” Finn said dryly. “I’ll give you a call when I land in San Francisco.”

George nodded and Finn could see the pain in his eyes. “Is it your chest?”

“Yeah, my chest... that’s what it is.” They both knew he was lying, but the driver was getting agitated. He sighed. “Time to go, kiddo.”

Suddenly overcome with emotion, Finn opened the door and got in quickly before he could change his mind. He only had time to silently mouth one last ‘I love you’ before the taxi pulled away. He settled in the seat, sad and excited at once. He put his headphones in and dreamt of the California sky he would soon fly over.

Finn didn't know what his first time meeting Jason would be like. Sure, they'd been dating since he was in the tenth grade, but it was always through a screen or on paper. Good morning text messages, long Friday night talks on the phone, Skype dates and even an occasional letter – a real life letter. He had a little demon in the back of his mind telling him Jason would run, screaming, in the other direction. He prayed it was wrong.

The roar of the airplane nearly drowned the heavy breathing of the elderly man beside him. Almost. Why did old people breathe so noisily anyway?

Finn couldn't keep still, wedged between the gentleman and the closed window. What was the point of flying, he wondered, if you weren't allowed to look out the window? He pulled out his phone, but then returned it to its perch in his jeans' pocket, remembering he couldn't use it. Was this all a dream? It felt like one. Yes, he decided, this was a dream. He wasn't actually going to California, because that would be silly, right?

But there was no denying it when the plane's pilot announced cheerfully, "Ladies and gentlemen, please lift your seats into the upright position and fold your trays, as we are approaching landing. The local time is eleven AM, temperature at the San Francisco International Airport is a chilly 70 degrees."

70 degrees? That's not chilly, that's boiling. Putting aside his fears of melting into a big puddle, Finn braced himself for the descent and what it would bring.

There's a certain kind of unmatched rush a person gets when he spots his luggage coming around the big conveyors. Combined with the butterflies in his stomach, it was nearly enough to make Finn fall to his knees when he saw his bright orange suitcase. But he didn't, because it would make him seem strange, and the last thing he wanted was to be labeled strange before he even left the airport.

He looked at his watch – 11:30. Jason would already be waiting for him outside, but Finn wasn't ready yet. His legs decided for him that they were going to the bathroom, where he avoided meeting strangers' gazes as he tried to make himself look presentable. A little piece of his hair insisted on sticking up whenever he smoothed it over, and he had half a mind to cancel the whole thing because of that little piece of hair. At 11:49 he left the bathroom, took a deep breath, and walked towards the exit.

Thoughts darted in his mind. So much could go wrong in the next few minutes. Scenarios that didn't make sense played before his eyes and he suddenly felt sad, so sad. He remembered all those miserable days in school, when he would tell Jason how much he wanted to be there with him, and how they promised to stay with each other if only for the other one's sake. What if things were completely different in real life from their fantasy? Could Finn handle that?

But as he opened the door and a gush of warm California air crashed into him, he felt brave. He had been dreaming of this for so long, he owed it to himself to enjoy it.

He scanned the area, looking for Jason's silver Mercedes. Where was he?

“Scuse me.”

Finn made room for the family behind him, realizing he'd been standing in the doorway. They passed, and the father gave him a look that was angry and confused at once. “Just looking for someone,” he muttered, feeling a little less brave once more.

“Well, they're not here. Get out of the way.”

Jason wasn't there. Tears came to Finn before he could control them and his face formed an expression he was sure didn't look good. He turned around to go back inside, but walked right into someone. He tried to step around them. “Sorry.”

“Finn?”

He looked up, and realized he was staring right into Jason's face. Jason was holding two Starbucks cups, looking dashing in his red board shorts and American Eagle V-neck. “I thought your flight was late so I went to get you a-”

Finn dropped the handle of his suitcase and hugged Jason, who seemed utterly unprepared. After a brief moment of mutual confusion, Jason hugged back, as tightly as the cold cups allowed him.

“I didn't see you,” the tears ran down Finn's face, eyes closed tight. “I thought you weren't coming.”

“Not coming?” Jason's voice was deep and his arms strong. “Who else in California loves you as much as I do?”

Finn pulled out from the hug, suddenly fascinated by Jason's sandy stubble and short blonde hair. “I can't believe I'm finally here,” he said, letting out a small teary laugh that sat right between cute and pathetic.

Jason handed him the Cotton Candy Frappuccino – his favorite. “Welcome home.”

And for the first time since he bought the plane ticket, Finn knew for sure he was happy.

--The End--