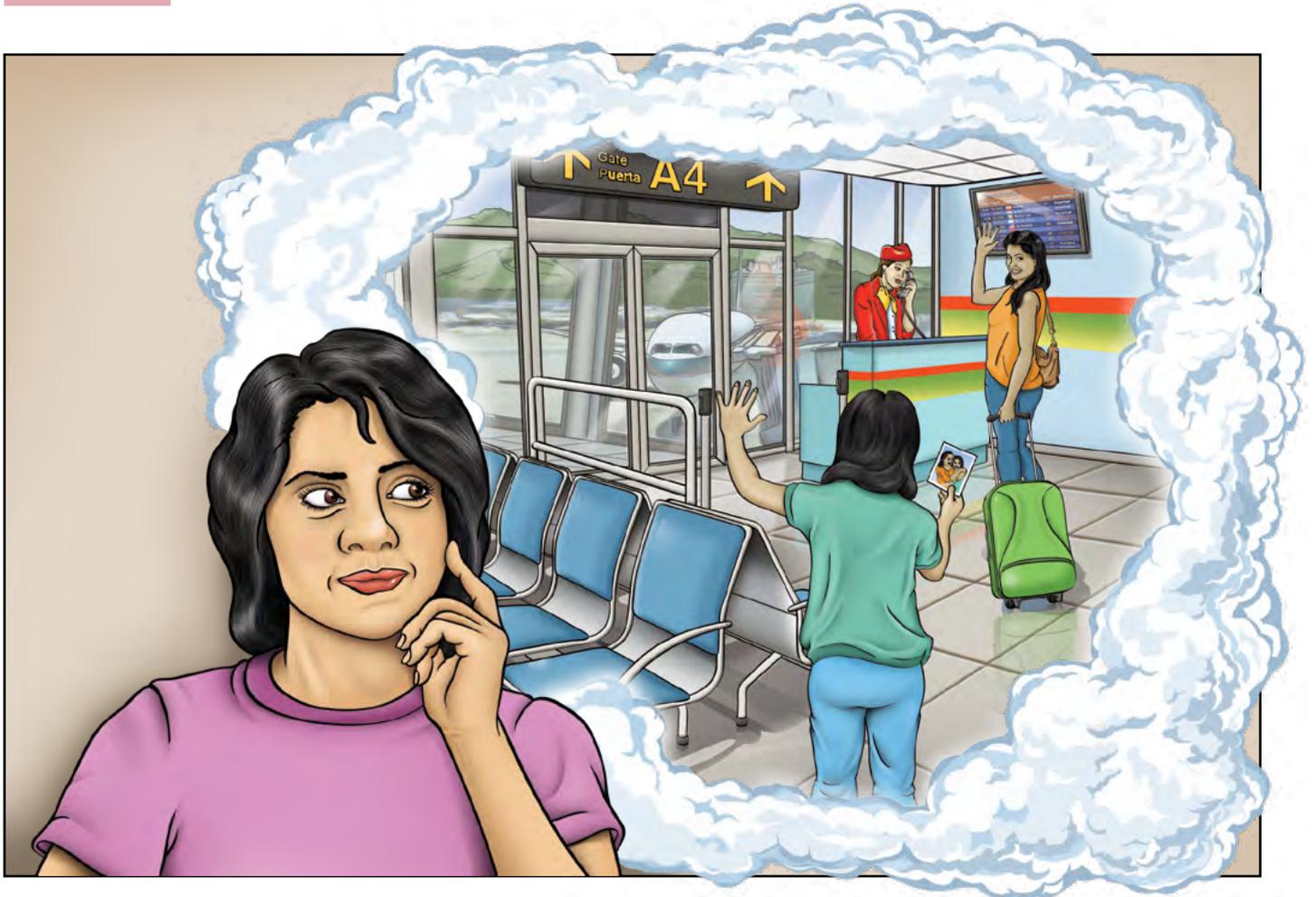


Staying in Touch



Julissa remembered back to when the girls were first separated.

Julissa was sad. In just one week, her big sister Christina would be joining the Navy. Just thinking about it made Julissa's stomach turn.

Julissa remembered back to when the girls were first separated. Five years earlier, Julissa and Christina's parents had decided to move from El Salvador to the United States. They wanted to find work and a better life. The Diaz children moved in with Julissa's grandparents. After six months, Mr. Diaz sent money for Christina to join them. Julissa and her two brothers stayed behind. Julissa **pretended** to understand but she was upset on the inside.

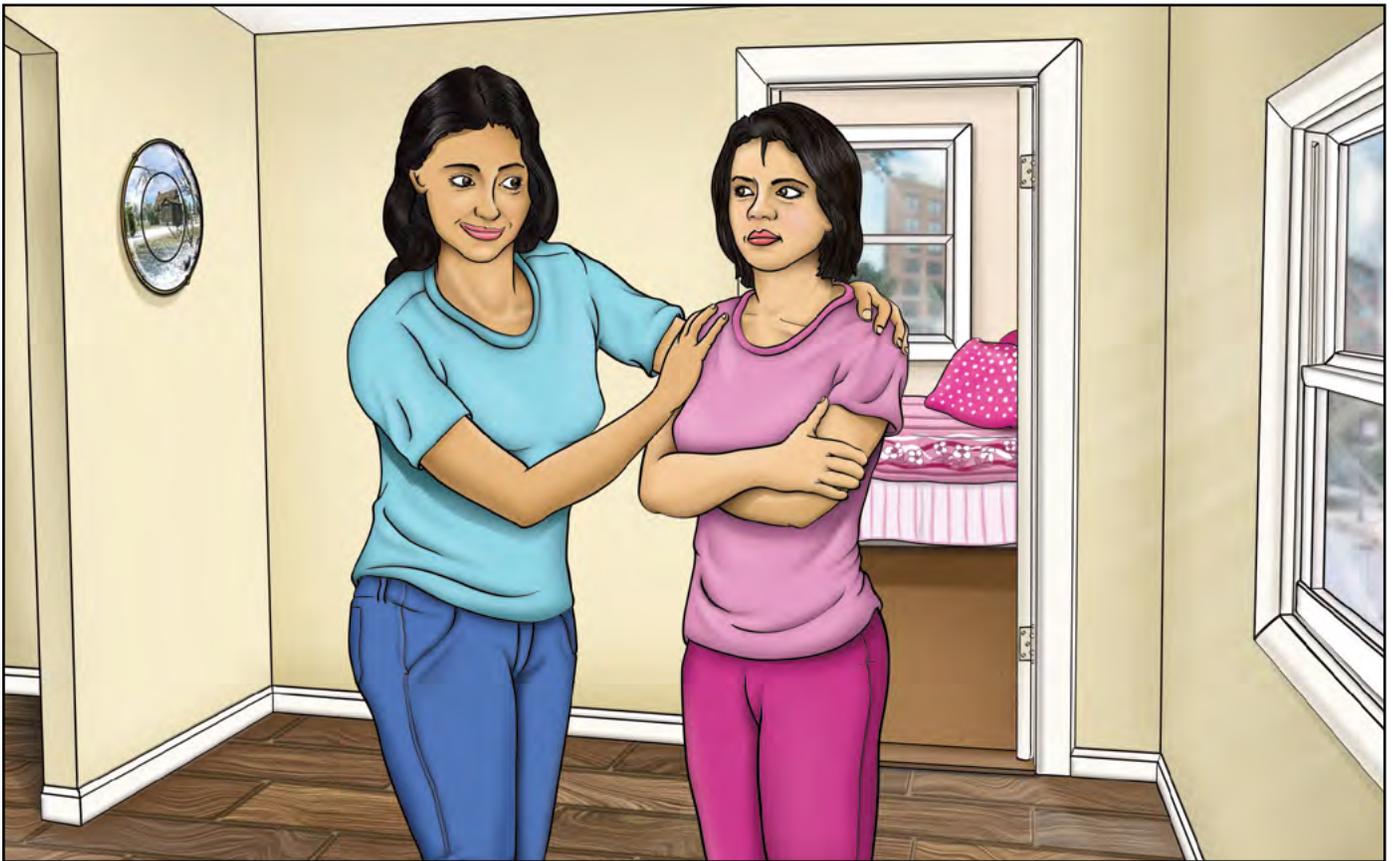
Before Christina boarded the plane for the United States, she placed a picture of the two girls hugging in Julissa's palm.

It was a special gift.

Within two weeks of moving to New York, Mr. Diaz found a job at a bakery. He worked twelve hours a day. Mrs. Diaz found a job as a cashier at a local bodega. After 18 months, Mr. and Mrs. Diaz had saved enough money to send for Julissa and her two younger brothers. It was the happiest day of Julissa's life. There was no need to **pretend** any longer.

At first, life in United States was hard for Julissa. Everything was different: the food, the school, the people, and **especially** the language.

Christina sensed Julissa's concern. "Don't worry about a thing, Julissa. I know you are concerned about your **accent**, but I'm going to do my best to help you fit in. At first, I worried about my **accent** too. I thought no one would be able to understand me. But I was wrong."



"Having a big sister is the most wonderful thing in the world."

Christina's kind words always put Julissa at ease.

Whenever Julissa felt scared or unsure of herself, she would reach into her wallet and look at the worn photograph of the two of them hugging. Like magic, it would always make her feel better. "Having a big sister to help show me the ropes is the most wonderful thing in the world," Julissa said out loud.



Throughout middle school and high school, Christina kept her promise. She was always there to help. She kept Julissa out of trouble.

Julissa was **proud** of Christina when she joined the Navy **Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)** at Memorial High School. Christina's grades went up. She spoke with greater **confidence**.

Relatives and friends told Mr. and Mrs. Diaz that the **ROTC** was helping Christina become a leader. Christina **especially** took **pride** in her appearance. She was growing more **confident** with each passing week.

Julissa asked Christina about the changes. "It's hard to explain," Christina answered. "Being a member of the **ROTC** makes me feel special. And you know what? Nobody in the **ROTC** ever teases me about my **accent**. My new friends always have my back."

Mr. and Mrs. Diaz were **proud**. They beamed when Christina was selected to represent the **ROTC** at **graduation**. She would be the first Diaz to ever **graduate!** The Diazes **especially** loved the idea of Christina serving her new country.



"Being a member of the ROTC makes me feel special."

Julissa was happy for Christina, but she could not hide her sadness. The girls would soon be separated once again. Julissa tried to force a smile. She **pretended** to be upbeat at Christina's **graduation** party.

From the corner of the living room, Christina waved to Julissa to join her in the girls' bedroom. Once they were alone, Christina put her arm on Julissa's shoulder. Smiling, she handed Julissa a small box with a bright red bow.

"What is this? Why are you giving me a gift? Isn't this supposed to be your party? I don't understand," Julissa said.

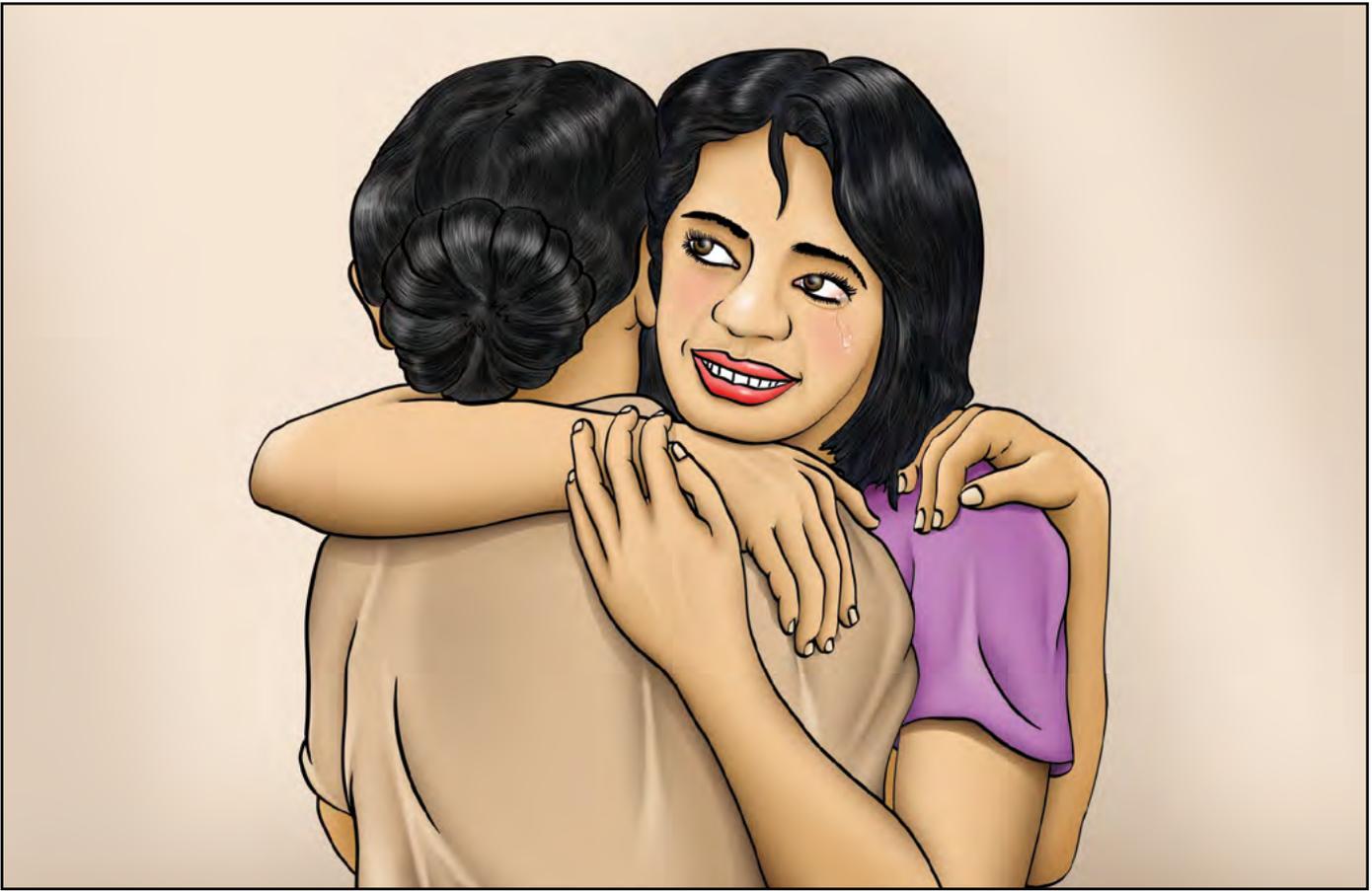


“What is this? Why are you giving me a gift?”

“You will always be a part of my life wherever I go,” Christina answered. Christina gently placed the gift in Julissa's palm. “Open the package and then you will understand.”

Julissa opened the gift. Christina then said, “Actually, Julissa, this is not just YOUR gift. It is OUR gift.”

Inside the package was a **smartphone!**



“Technology can help keep us close.”

“Is this really for me? I don’t understand,” Julissa said. “Don’t you need the **smartphone** for yourself? Why would you give me a **smartphone**?”

“Well,” Christina answered. “It’s our gift because I got an extra **smartphone** for free when I signed up for a family cell plan. Isn’t **technology** amazing?”

“I can’t believe it. I don’t know what to say,” Julissa responded.

“Please don’t say anything,” Christina answered. “The **ROTC** has taught me that my future can be whatever I choose to make it. I want you to be a part of that future too.”

Christina continued, “The Navy is going to send me to college for free after I serve my four years. Think how **proud** mamá and papá will be to have a college **graduate** in the family. And besides, everywhere I go, we can go together. We can **video chat** every day. **Technology** can help keep us close.”

As Julissa hugged Christina, she thought to herself, “Being able to **video chat** is like having Christina’s picture in my wallet come to life.”