

I finally got my driver's license this summer, in the middle of the pandemic and after my virtual high school graduation. Now that I'm driving solo, I realize how strange it is to be passing through all these streets that I've known all my life, but always from the backseat. It's not the same now that I'm behind the wheel. It's not as familiar, but it also is. I have to ask my parents how to get places that I've been at least a million times, and as I follow their directions, I can feel little bells in my head going off at each and every single traffic light and gas station and other landmark. My new memories and my old memories are merging together to form something new: a mental map of my hometown, but for drivers, not observers.

It makes me feel so old, being entrusted with this massive vehicle, but it also makes me feel so young, because I don't yet know what all the buttons mean or how to use them. I've been thinking about my age a lot recently. I am eighteen now, so if I do something wrong on the road, then I'll be treated like an adult. But I've always felt like an adult. Maybe it's just a child of immigrants thing, maybe it's just a me thing, maybe it's both. I realize in comparison to my friends, my peers, I've always been a little too adult. A little too put together, a little too serious, a little too obsessed with never making mistakes or slipping up. And it's not like I wanted to get in trouble or make bad decisions. I just feel like I've been *grown* this whole time and never really got to be a kid. I wish I'd let myself be messier. My mom always says I'll miss these days when they're gone. But I already do.

I've been penny boarding through our neighborhood at night while my mom walks with me. It feels a little bit like a movie. The street lamps flicker over the asphalt and I get to sail past houses whose inhabitants I used to sell Girl Scout cookies too. We watch a new generation of kids tear up the empty church parking lot with their scooters, dark silhouettes screaming and laughing in the night. That used to be my little brother and I, usually accompanied by our watchful father. I tell my mom I can still remember him teaching me how to ride my bike. It's one of my earliest, clearest memories. He's wearing that light blue Hawaiian shirt that makes him look very much like a dad. He's holding onto the back of my seat, and I glance over my shoulder at him just to make sure he's there, and the moment I face forward again, he lets go. My immediate panic is short lived, because I'm soaring over the white lines and I feel *big*. I feel grown-up. I make a turn and now that I'm facing him I can see he's smiling, which is such a rarity that I almost stop in my tracks right there. But I keep pedalling and I wobble a little but I get the hang of it and he rotates in place, watching as I confidently zoom in some kind of shape that definitely isn't a circle, and I call out to him while I go and he's nodding and still smiling and maybe because I was so far away I couldn't see the proud pain there.

My dad stands at the top of the driveway as I set off on my second-ever solo drive. I'm going to a house 25 minutes away, and he is trying and failing to hide his anxiety. I wish he wouldn't watch because it makes it harder to just do my thing and reverse, but I know he wants to remember this. So I roll down our hill of a driveway and I turn the wheel the right way at the right moment and then I'm straightened out on the street. I pause to wave at him before I switch gears and go, and I can see he's smiling again, just like that day in the church parking lot. The

same smile, eleven years apart. He waves back, and I pull away, but in my rearview mirror I can see he's still watching me go. And as I drive those familiar roads for the first time, as I coast on a rickety penny board past houses I know like the back of my hand, I think to myself: maybe this is what growing up is. Letting go, and coming back.