

## To You, From Now

Last night, my mom had a dream that my brother and I were still children. In this dream, she and my father were leaving for a trip, and they were scrambling to find a babysitter. She said she remembered being horrified because “I’ve never left my kids with anyone!” My brother, no longer tall and quiet, was wreaking havoc through the house the way he used to, while I, still serious and stressed, ran after him in an attempt to exercise responsibility.

Those days, in reality, are long gone. My brother is eighteen now, and I am twenty. But the distance I used to feel, the separation I used to feel, between the past and the present has shrunk with time. The older I get, the more I realize that they are often one and the same. There are days where I open my eyes, still mostly asleep, and wonder why the house is so quiet. Where’d everyone go? Have I slept through my alarm? Am I going to miss the bus? Someone should’ve come to shake me awake, I think. But then I realize this room is smaller, stranger, and it doesn’t smell the same. There’s a radiator at my feet, and two layers of curtains. I remember where I am—*when* I am—and I allow myself just the briefest moment of grief before I start the day.

At some point, the novelty wore off, and now my time here is just my life. I walk the thirty, forty minutes to class with the same backpack from senior year and I stuff my hands in the pockets of the coat I got for middle school. I eat my packed lunch and attempt to squeeze some work into the break and continue to glance at the time as if it’ll make the day go by any faster. I set the locale to American English in all my notes and try not to get weirdly emotional when David Muir shows up in the lecture slides. The scope of my loneliness embarrasses me. I want to go home, I think. I want to go home.

But what I really mean is I want to go back. Back home, back then, back to when I was younger and playing pretend with my little brother and crying on the living room floor. Back to my best friend and the field where we went sledding in the winter and picnicking in the spring. Back to when I still had a grandmother on each side, even if I couldn’t communicate with either. I was so desperate to leave it all behind, to run away in pursuit of a dream where I was someone good and grown and living an exciting new life abroad. And it has been exciting, but it’s also been hard, because I didn’t create a new life for myself. I just split it in half: between the city I’ve always known, and a city three thousand miles away.

I’ve been alive for two decades now, and should be more adult than child. But who I am when I wake depends on which side of the ocean I’ve opened my eyes to. And even then, nothing is certain. Because I used to, and still do, despair over everything and everyone I lost; dragging myself deeper into the past while navigating blindly into the present. Mourning the childhood I took for granted and the adolescence I resented, the people I flinched away from or got too close to. I can go home, but I can’t go back. No train, plane, or car can deliver me to the memories that are growing hazier by the day.

It's all gone, I think. They're all gone. And I don't know what to do with myself and all the grief I'm accumulating from the constant changes in time, place, people. Do I carry it up the hill to campus? Do I leave it behind at every departure gate? I don't know. But the distance I used to feel, the separation I used to feel, between the two halves of my life is beginning to shrink with time. Because the older I get, the more I come to understand that as long as there still is a way for me to cross the Atlantic, to be asleep in one bed and then awake in another, then maybe the same goes for the past and present. It's still there, I think. They're still there. Just in a different time, and a different space.

As I am, right now.