**How to Go Back in Time**

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Drive down the street slowly, but not too slow. You don’t want to look suspicious. Notice that no one is home and park the car on the side of the street in front of the yard. The yard is the same—the old elm shading a quarter of the grass, flowers lining the edge near the porch—but the street is different. Your house is smaller than you remember, perhaps because of the massive stone houses built like austere statues where the Ryan’s and Bolton’s used to live. But those aren’t the only tear-downs on the street. The street is unfamiliar now. Walk between the small farm-style house and the massive Parisian one to the backyard. Look at the new garage and decide that the old one was better. Realize you don’t say this based on reality or the aesthetic charm of what you’re looking at. Wander through the yard, stepping on soggy brown leaves, the last ones to fall. A swing set stands where branches, ferns, and your little fort once were. Beneath a pile of dead leaves thin as tissue paper from last fall, you spot your brother’s mangled Nerf football, waterlogged from nearly two decades of neglect. Walk back to the car that is anchored like a boat between foreign cliffs. Reach into your purse and find the car keys. Don’t cry as you steer away from the colossal houses. Time does this to places.

Take a plane 997 miles west. Stand outside a tiny school and watch young adolescent kids balance stacks of books in their extended arms like apes. Recognize no one. Think: But of course, it’s been fourteen years since I went here. A teacher approaches you. Hope it’s someone from fourteen years ago. Convince yourself it’s someone from then. Inspect her as she nears you. No one you know. No, they wouldn’t stay here for that long. Feel something odd again, something worse than nostalgia.

“Can I help you?” the teacher asks, more as a way of telling you to leave than for the sake of actually wanting to help.

Say: “No, just visiting. I went here a long time ago.”

The teacher nods and says something about it still being a great school. Wish her a good day and return to the car. Stay in the area but find your other old neighborhood. It’s been a while so you get lost in the winding curves of road. Half the houses on your street you don’t recognize. They used to be a forest of pines and shrubs. An adolescent girl jogs down the porch steps across the street from your old house. She used to be a baby. Think: She was a baby last time I was here. Panic. She has no idea who I am. But I know who she is. Try to drive away from that strange feeling, but it follows.

Go 746 miles south by plane again. Visit a plot of grass adorned with a moss covered stone. Shiver in the November cold and breathe in the musty scent of moist leaves, flattened against the pavement like frogs crossing a busy street. Watch the chill cloud when you exhale. A crow squawks, its screech reverberating between trees and haunting your ears. Look up searching for it. Curse the crow and the sharp gray light of a weak sun hibernating in its bed of clouds. Drop a crimson rose beneath the headstone. It is silent now as you walk away from the plot. You kick a rock, but that only makes the silence greater. The rock rolls and scrapes the cement in clear and distinct clicks. It echoes among the graves.

Stand at the campus entrance, 834 miles north of the graveyard. Cinder gray stones form a wall that lines the path, and the remaining leaves tremble on brittle branches in the deep gold of the setting sun. Shove your hands in your coat pockets, hunch your shoulders against the falling temperatures, and walk aimlessly. Soon, see the stark black outline of a dorm against the cold glow of the western sky. Laugh to yourself when you see the line of benches that Julie, Ana, and Caleb always jumped on to run across and dance upon at night. Feel your laughter fade from a sound to a frozen smile, and then to melting flesh. Try to remember when you last saw them.

Take a train east and browse the aisles of the hole-in-the-wall, family-owned grocery store. Remember buying wine, cheese, and bread with your first lover. Hear his voice saying: Let’s make a chocolate cake. Picture the two of you returning to the cashier again with butter, flour, sugar, and cocoa. You stop in front of the butcher’s counter while thinking about this. The butcher asks: “Can I help you?” Say no and rush out of the store, completely aware of the strange looks from the employees. Keep remembering. Walk across the Brooklyn Bridge where you had stopped that day with the groceries before returning to the apartment. Remember how he had kissed you as you watched the boats below the steel wire and cables. Now the river is empty and preparing to freeze and your lips only feel the wind. Walk back to your apartment and eat leftovers with a small glass of wine.

Return to work the next day. Your short vacation is over. Stop at the corner with the black petals of umbrellas. Watch the signal turn blue and the dark cavalry of umbrellas advance, but forget to charge. A man’s briefcase bumps into your shoulder. Your feet ache from your pumps. Continue watching the umbrellas bobbing in the flood of bodies. You ended up back where you started, but you have no idea how you got here.