

## 17, A Funeral of Sorts

The first thing I do when I get home from dinner is remove the necklace Allen gave me, not because I am suddenly done with him now that I am entering adulthood but because no matter how much I love him, this is a night for me and me alone.

I mute my phone and play Passing Afternoon, a song I have always exclusively associated with change. Then, after stripping the clothes that had held my youth, I turn on the steaming hot shower and wash it away. I had planned it all to be ceremonial, like a funeral for someone gone far too soon. I time every movement to the beat of a song or melody. I clean myself and leave my skin and body in the shower so that I will enter my room as only a soul that shines like a star about to supernova and becomes something unimaginably more wonderful.

Tomorrow, I will allow myself to think of other people again, but tonight, for perhaps the first time in my life, I allow myself to be unabashedly selfish. To sit alone and mull over my childhood. To exist in the room that had built me cell by cell, night by night, into the adult I was turning into.

Tomorrow, not a thing in my life will change and yet, in that stagnance, nothing will ever be the same again. There is an overbearing, suffocating weakness in just existing here as I lose my childhood to the numbers on the clock and the flipping of a record.

I suppose that's what I am doing, flipping a record. Part of me aches to ignore the invented significance of the night; read something, watch something, and allow myself to go numb. Like a soldier who knows he will die from frostbite and wishes to end it while he can still feel his fingers. Very quickly, I begin to ache for twelve. At least then, the waiting will be over, and there will be absolutely nothing I can do about it. With an hour to go in ten minutes, I feel somehow that there is something I can do to make time stop, as if to say to God himself,

"Wait, please, if I could please just have one more week. One more day. One more hour. One more second, then I would never ask anything of you again. Then, I could finally be happy."

I feel like a truck driver who, knowing his gas tank will be empty before his final delivery, scans a map desperately for a station even though there is not one for miles. I think of my Grandmother but stop myself. Selfishness, yes. This is a night for me and the small child sitting next to me on the carpet, who was also once me. Just how there is someone I had never seen before on my other side who, eventually, would be me and was completing the very same exercise only looking back at who I am now and wondering how I ever used to *really* be that young.

The clock struck eleven.

For some inexplicable reason, my heart rate picks up. Like a bomb will land right where I am sitting in sixty minutes and everything about me will cease to exist.

Today, right now, at 11:21, I still have a future. I can still say; *When I grow up...*

Adults can say, in earnest, that, *I'm still a kid, I'll understand when I'm older*. And though they will still say those things and mean them, they will hesitate and think, privately, never outwardly, that it had stopped being a cute phrase given to a child and was, instead, a warning. As if what they really wanted to say was, *You should know better by now*.

I play on my record player songs that I believed have shaped me. I do this unthinking of volume. Of disrupting others. For once again this is my night, and no one else's. I realize that I have to use the bathroom and begrudgingly leave my room. I regret it as soon as my foot touches the hardwood. I feel like a caterpillar who, just before blooming into a butterfly, has its cocoon violently ripped open.

I see my mother who insists on speaking with me and for the first time in my life, I refuse her. This is a night of change. A night of funerals, but not the kind with black formal wear and long hereses. The kind with dancing. With reminiscing. A celebration. Like a parade where the people in the crowd shout their favorite memories of the deceased as if to say — just because this person is gone does not mean their memory, their story, does not persist.

Twenty minutes until midnight.

Calmness washes over me like the thing I fear is hunting me has finally gone home for the night. But with ten minutes to go, I sit and wait, as though I'll be embracing an old friend who I haven't seen in many years, yet still know intimately and without interruption or lapse. Perhaps the other girl who I can't make out beside me is resting her hand on my shoulder as if to say;

"I can't wait to meet you, Madison, and I think, when you meet me, you'll be very pleased with what you see."

I imagine hugging myself as a toddler, watching proudly as she waddles across the floor. I hug my ten-year-old self, then fourteen, then sixteen, and finally seventeen. We look at each other earnestly, both knowing we will never see each other again. We shake hands, agreeing, quietly, to protect our respective benchmarks. She tells me she is excited to see what I will do. I thank her.

The clock strikes twelve.