

OCTOBER

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“I’m not sure what I’ll do, but – well, I want to go places and see people. I want my mind to grow. I want to live where things happen on a big scale.” – The Ice Palace, F. Scott Fitzgerald.

In October, I noticed it was gone. Like most things, I had to lose it to learn how much it meant to me. The chaotic continuation of first semester moments: sipping lukewarm coffee in between forgotten emails, laughing with friends on a rusty boardwalk, halfhearted runs in the afternoon sun – all of it, in its ensuing nostalgia, came to a sudden halt. Always so preoccupied, I didn’t realize it had left me. Or, perhaps, was I the one who had now left it?

In vain, I felt for its shape at the crevice of my neck, where it previously hung just right of my heart. It wasn’t an expensive necklace. It is just a simple silver chain holding a charm, the outline of South Africa at the center, about the size of a fingernail. I could find an identical one if I tried. Though this sudden awareness of my bare neck had brought an inexplicable emptiness. I had known this feeling before, though then I was far too stricken by the shining beams: *America*. A new place that wasn’t quite home, but wasn’t not a home either.

For a long time, I had been blinded by those fluorescent lights, luminous colors of blue, orange, and purple. They were everywhere I looked. Whether it be in the brightness of the October sun, or in the glossiness of the new smiles, smiles belonging to strangers who spoke with accents I had always heard on television. Their tongues painted languages of technicolor: louder voices, new pronunciations, harder ‘r’s, longer ‘a’s that all circled me in maypoles of rainbow ribbons.

Even their homes were decorated with more color (note to self, spelt with no u). Streamlines of lights and pumpkins spilt over well-manicured lawns. I could taste the pumpkins with every brisk breath, sipped in syrupy coffee. Funny that we don’t celebrate Halloween much back home.

Opportunity. I had heard this from my father, my teachers and my friends. The word enticed me with every glimmering letter. Light was all I could see, all I could think about. In the midst of the golden gleam, I had

misplaced my silver chain. Though how? When?

I began to trace my steps, back to the beginning. A time before October, lights, and pumpkins.

Beginning (*noun*, or *verb*, depending on your perspective): the dusty smell of cardboard, a new bank account, velvet envelopes clothed with heartfelt sentences (*noun*). A world experienced through the haze of jetlag, like morning fog before sunrise.

Sunset

I had received the necklace as a gift the day before my flight. We were running late; Georgie awkwardly moved the clutch of her raspberry polo as we sped up the winding incline. The windows were open slightly, welcoming the sharp sea wind and final rays of the sun that illuminated her wavy braid.

Sandwiched in between dotted cars, we laughed with relief that we had made it to the top of the hill. The descending sun bounced off the forests and crystalized the ocean. I remembered my 8th birthday, when I impulsively sprinted into its icy waves. Denim jeans stuck to my skin while sand wedged stubborn tangles into my hair. But my decision was all worth it—not because it made much sense, but merely because I had wanted to do it.

I gazed at the sun, the one that had tucked me in every night. Though now, I stood beyond it, watching the pomegranate rays fall below my untied laces. The world got darker as it brought a chilly breeze and a starry city. I glanced again at my friends, who huddled together underneath old blankets. I shuddered. The next time I saw this sky, everything would have changed.

Sunrise

My mom couldn't download an app. We were sitting in the airport café as she frantically jabbed the cellphone's screen, her fingers no match for the incessant 'Failed to Connect.'

Her soft lines converged as a tiny tear escaped from her warm eyes. All she wanted was for the digital map to show my location. She needed these pixelated coordinates, the confirmation that I would always be in the world,

alive and okay. I reminded her that her toast was getting cold.

Leaning over the table, I took her frustration and held it in the palm of my hand (I've always been the one that helps her with technology). She thanked me through another tear, a larger one. I think she cried because of the reality that hit her like frosty water: she could never know for sure whether I would be safe. No app is a crystal ball. Or that she realized I wouldn't always be around to help her with her phone. Maybe it is as simple as cold toast. Perhaps it is all three.

Look closely in these moments. Try not to be blinded by the sun. Do you see the necklace?

I already looked between the pages of my passport. I am trying to smell it through my mom's peppermint perfume. Did it fall through the window of the car, tumbling down the mountain through bush and stone? I am looking everywhere: friendships left in unread messages, the loss of the boy with the brown eyes, my reflection in a blurry morning. Did I forget it in my cousin's soap bubble laugh, or in my brother's burnt scrambled eggs? My suitcase is empty. The plane is about to take-off.

I think it fell beneath the cracks of earth. Please let me know if it is there. I cannot see it, but you may be able to.

For I am ascending further and further away from the ground.

Upwards, into a blue of ocean and sky.

This piece is inspired by a bittersweet farewell. It focuses on the complex feelings inherent to growth: missing who we once were while dreaming of we might become. It is about the progression of time, day and night, longing for the past but never being able to return.

