

One day I saw a dog get run over by a car. That was a tipping point for me.

After everything is done and gone, I find myself counting down the days I have left to live in the one place I call home. It's a funny feeling. Once you graduate from high school and you sit for a little while in silence, taking in the last taste of summertime you'll ever feel for the rest of your life, time becomes a tangible object that you can feel slipping away through your fingertips.

When you are young, the walls of your room are your entire world. A kingdom containing every object you would ever need in your life, each glistening with perfection in the sun streaming through two blinded windows every time you wake, the crooning of mourning doves there to greet you. At that point, you are at home, in those four walls. Enveloped and protected.

Soon those walls break down, and your world grows into the walls of your entire house. You don't notice it then, but the air gets slightly colder, and the walls don't hug and caress you as your room had done before. Some parts of the house get less sun than others. Some are bright in the evenings, and some aren't bright at all. From there, a cold wind blows ever so slightly onto your face, but you don't notice it then.

Your house turns into a school. The school turns into a bigger school, and that turns into your entire town. At that point, you'll know every street and alley, which spots to visit every day, and which to go to when you need some time alone. Your world then is every street you've explored and every place you've visited. It's so easy to get lost in these streets. Some do, maybe because they choose to stay, and some because they don't know how to leave. Most don't, though. Most leave, their worlds expanding even further to the ends of the universe, their true lives beginning at points where the lives of others have already ended.

And then, there was me, stranded somewhere between my room and everything else, staring down a dead dog in the middle of the street.

I blinked three times at the dog and looked around as the car sped away. The dog itself was beautiful, with flowing golden fur and a piercing look on its face. It looked like almost every other dog I'd seen, yet somehow different. It was too quiet. I touched the collar around its neck, warm from the summer sun beating

down on the two of us. The dog had yelped when the car struck it. I hadn't ever heard anything make a noise like that before in my life. It was too pitiful of a sound to have been made by such a majestic animal, and yet, it was. And now the dog lay still. It did not even stir as the gentle breeze ruffled through its fur. *Ouch*, I thought. *Ouch*.

I guess at the time I did not truly understand what had happened to the dog. It was a bump and a funny noise, so I just left it there in the middle of the street and skipped away, humming a song from some old PBS show. I wish I could say I felt bad for the owners, but the omen that the dead dog ended up now makes me more angry than anything else. I wish that dog ran out on some other street and got hit by a different car. Or maybe it wouldn't have gotten hit at all, I couldn't really care less. All I wish is that it hadn't gone and killed itself right in front of me. Its owner must have been real pieces of work to make their dog want to just jump in front of a car like that. And that driver was a real douchebag for hastily speeding away after running it over. That dog's life was just a cycle of idiots doing idiotic things to it until it was dead.

Now the dog just keeps me up in wonder what my life would have looked like if I never saw it at all.

In all aspects, childhood is nothing but a trial run at life. As soon as that change slaps you in the face, you realize that all the memories and experiences you've collected in the past eighteen years never really meant anything in the first place. It was just practice, and as soon as it's over, it's gone. Your entire world for your whole life suddenly ceases to have any significance to who you are and what you believe. Wiped clean, ready to be overwritten by new experiences and the gut-wrenching joy of adulthood.

But I wasn't ready. In fact, nobody I knew was. Our twenty-first-century childhoods had taken something from us, something that nobody really had taken away from them before we, the guinea pigs of the modern age, came along. And we guinea pigs are still children on the inside, and like children being told to go back to class after recess, we were trudging forward into the rest of our lives—whether we liked it or not.

Suddenly, I'm back to reality, lounging on a couch, soaking in the dying afternoon sun. I'd been sitting on this couch ever since I was born, and every day for the past eighteen years. The couch was a staple in my life, like so many other things in my house, and my house itself. I'd never before considered the possibility that one day, it might be gone, but today, the diploma sitting on the top of the shelf across from me reminded me that my days here were numbered. Six weeks, and I'd be off to university halfway across the country. My house would still be there, and so would the stuff inside it, and so would the couch, but in six weeks it would no longer be *my* house, or *my* stuff, or *my* couch, no matter how much I wanted to believe they were. These things would never truly be mine again. Soon they'd be relics of a time in my life that I would never get back. The house I *used to* live in, the stuff I *used to* own, the couch I *used to* sit on.

It was a painful realization, though I wondered how I hadn't thought of it until now. Most children don't realize that the only world they know would inevitably be scrapped right until it was the next thing to happen. I was no exception. I sighed as I flopped back onto the couch. *I can't be going to college already.* Books were left unfinished, and projects were left untouched. So many things I had planned to do, but I had never done them, putting them off until the next day. I thought I had the time, and now I didn't.

I stood up from the couch and slunk into the bathroom, closing the door behind me. In the mirror, a man stared back at me. A man with neatly cut hair, deep-set eyes, a straight jaw, and a patchy beard growing from his cheeks and chin. The man looked older than I was, maybe eighteen to twenty. Young, by most people's standards, but much, much older than me. And yet, he wasn't older than I was at all. I was as old as him before I even knew what was happening.

When I went out with my friends, I still saw myself as younger than all the others around us. I felt a bit shorter, my voice sounded a bit higher, and I simply did not feel like an adult in any way. I imagined others perceiving me as just another teenager, out with his friends. In my mind, that's what I was. I smiled inwardly, thinking out the people passing by looking at me and thinking that I had homework waiting on the kitchen table at my house, or that I was dreading school starting again after an unfulfilling summer vacation. It made me feel slightly better about myself. *I'm still young*, I could say. *I'm still a kid.*

Up until the last hour of my last day in school, I spewed insults and curses about homework, particularly unlikable teachers, boring classes, and so much else. I couldn't wait to pack up my bag and leave school behind for good.

I felt the first pang of doubt after taking my last class photo of the day. Everyone was scattered around in the final period, writing their names on the board and laughing and joking with each other. It was a sight I had seen at the end of every school year, and usually, I'd partake in the festivities. This time, I couldn't bring myself to it at all. Nobody had started crying as I mulled over the fact that sitting at a desk and taking notes was all I really knew how to do. Truthfully, as I looked over the class at that point, trying not to seem like a somber killjoy, I felt scared. Not the type of scared you feel after a cheap horror movie jumpscare, but a scared that slices down to your bones and chills you from the inside out. I was terrified, and I stayed terrified, feeling my chest constrict as my classmates around me started realizing the same thing that I had.

By the time our class's farewell banner came down as we gathered under it, everybody was crying.

Kids would do anything to grow up, and adults would do anything to become kids again. I had the misfortune of really understanding it after my childhood was all but over, and adulthood had not yet started. The cursed in-between. All I could do was replay the mistakes of my childhood and worry over my unpreparedness for adulthood.

I am still a child, not ready to leave, unable to go back. I'm stuck wondering why I can't accept. Why it's impossible to move on. Where it all truly went wrong. That's the cruelty of life. In the end, every child is just another dead dog, forgotten in the middle of the street.