

Escaping Through Town

An array of pastels and firm expressions locked eyes with me as I stared at the magazine spreads on my bed sheets. It was the first week I had been completely home and slowly but surely, Pinterest and Architectural Digest had become two of my closest friends. I wanted to rearrange my room for months and now I was home all day, what wouldn't be a better time?

I grabbed the cup of coffee from my desk as I sipped cautiously, hearing the birds whistling outside my window by the green bushes near my window. Life was, oddly, good.

I checked my phone to see if any emails regarding school arrived. Nothing. At least that's what I told myself when I saw "Google Classroom" in bold letters, recalling having to virtually discuss my week with a gaggle of drained teenagers.

But how can I complain?

I had spent months discussing with professionals how social isolation was triggering. However, once the world began to share that same phenomenon and all of our thoughts and fears somehow became united - that feeling of personal isolation faded.

My room was filled with shiny records where my wall and window met; posters upon posters surrounded my bedroom, and I finally felt at peace with a space I had spent 13 years in, now wanting to stay here for more than just the year I had before leaving for college.

Despite this reframing of thinking, I felt trapped. As my eyes followed the letters "M" to "G", the tips fading on the decade-old computer screen, it became harder to breathe. The shaking

of my hands caused the screen to malfunction and next thing I knew, my brother emerged at my door.

Justin stared at me cautiously, “Get your mask. Let’s go for a drive.” He courageously moved the spreads and laptop himself, which I was grateful for despite spending weeks telling him not to touch my belongings.

In the car, the radio hosts’ voices melted into the background, their descriptions of the weather encapsulating every thought that would’ve crossed my mind about today. When I turned to the left, a sense of peace surrounded me in the backseat. When I turned to the right, a series of cars flashed by. In a car next to our lane, the head of a Golden Retriever popped out of the window; its tongue hung from its mouth and its eyes shined with genuine content. I smiled, and my eyes turned to its probable owner, a female driver who appeared slightly older than my brother, who was...crying.

Tears streamed down her face, her foundation disappearing as the droplets rolled into her mask loosely hanging on her chin.

My brother’s car came to a halt, and other cars confined us. We were all packed like sardines. I looked to my right again, the weeping woman turned around to the backseat, where her dog resided. Once their eyes locked, she wepted further and turned around quickly. The sudden urge to comfort a stranger ignited, wishing that I could assure her that whatever may be going on is temporary. But did I truly want to comfort this woman specifically because she was going through a tough time or did I want to comfort her in the means to reciprocate human connection?

Suddenly, another figure in the adjacent car made itself known--a man. He appeared slightly older and his hand reached out to console the woman. The words, "It's okay," mouthed. Her left hand wiped her tears away, the glistening of a diamond ring shining through the window of the blue Nissan.

A black Jeep, carrying a little girl wearing a pink tiara and holding a matching wand, caught up to the Nissan. The weeping woman peeked at the girl as she switched lanes, a bright smile flashing for the first time. As she drove away, I was able to see a bump on her stomach as the man in the passenger seat stared at both the driver and the tiara-wearing girl with hopeful eyes.

The little girl left as fast as she arrived; one minute I saw her and the next, she was gone. Like an angel sent from above, both the female stranger's and my anxieties disappeared.

We passed by the pond under a rusty bridge that no one ever dared to enter, and I knew home was near. Today's weather, as promised, was breathtaking. Thin clouds scattered the bright blue sky, but I unfortunately was able to experience it for only two minutes before we arrived. Today was not all that bad after all. And tomorrow? Well, tomorrow is my birthday!

My eyes fluttered open to the sound of excessive honking. Am I hearing this correctly? What's going on?

My legs carried me to the front of my house, where I saw...Megan? And my other friends? Inside their own cars, carrying balloons and gift bags?

Oh my god, they came for me. *For my birthday.*

I jogged over to the dining table where all the masks were. Everything felt hazy up until I opened the door and a wave of “Happy Birthday!” and screams erupted from cars surrounding the curb by my house on the hill. Tears threatened to spill out, a sense of overwhelming happiness overcoming me.

I proceeded to get closer to the cars, making sure that I was six feet away. They all put the gift bags on the ground, ready to grab as soon they all left.

I laid all the gift bags onto the dining table. I didn’t touch anything else until I approached the kitchen sink, washing my hands for twenty seconds while singing the entirety of the “Happy Birthday” song. A bit ironic, I’m aware, but it got the job done.

Quietly, I returned to my bedroom and resumed my freshly acquired hobby, grabbing the clear tape from my bed.

Life was good after all.