

How To Leave Town

When I was six I tried to create an imaginary friend. I never did and I never told anyone that I was not able to do it. When I was eleven I spent a week picturing what my apartment would look like if I had one. When I was fifteen I noticed that I was thinking about the girl in my math class more than I should have been. It took me two years to tell anyone about that. When I was eighteen all I thought about was leaving.

We measure time by placing ourselves between events and memories— not dates. In 2005, I was in the living room when two men asked my father if he felt the glory of Christ in modern America. That was during the rise of conservatism and patriotic *necessity*. In 2007, I was in my parents' bed when CNN announced the victory of Obama— the victory of hope. It reminded me of Princess Leia in *A New Hope*. It was 2012 when my aunt gave me her copy of *Transatlanticism* by Death Cab For Cutie. She knew I would like it. I remember these years and how they felt based on what was going on around me— yes. But also based on what was happening inside me.

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The year Ronald Reagan died, the wooden staircase of my house broke my collarbone. That house was haunted. I remember the sound of the steps as my body hit them. While getting x-rays done I cried. I am not sure if it was because I was in pain, if I was scared, or because my parents could not go in the room with me. Perhaps it was all three, but it was the latter that became a trend in my childhood. I would sit quietly in the first grade because I missed my mother. I would sit outside my sister's classroom window during recess to be next to someone. When I look back on my initial dependencies, the feeling is distant.

My family moved for the first time when I was starting the third grade. This was the year I met my best friend. He and I remain best friends today, and for that, I am endlessly thankful. In this new place, I tried everything to separate myself from family members. I tried to paint but was never good. I began playing soccer but quit the same week. Then I thought I would try instruments. The piano, the guitar, the glockenspiel— I never caught on to them until I was older. After a few years, my family moved again. This time we lived in a house resembling a cabin in a mid-century neighborhood. I stole my father's hammer and decorated my new room. My parents

were not happy; however, they overlooked the event. I did not yet know how important this room would be during my coming of age years. My friends never came to this house. I stopped bringing my friends around.

I spent my teenage years alone in my bedroom. I enjoyed it, but sometimes I pretended I did not enjoy it. This room held my collections: records, books, photos, copies of *National Geographic*. I could surround myself with things that made me feel like the person I wanted to be. I read books about political unrest and lovers in Italy. I listened to *The Suburbs* by Arcade Fire and *This is Happening* by LCD Soundsystem. I studied photos of girls alone in cities and this one particular photo of a younger man hunched over a book with his face lit up by a banker's lamp. I shook off all the dependencies I could.

The summer I learned to drive I left home as often as I could. The friends I had in high school were older than me. I liked them more. They took me to Chicago. At the ripe age of sixteen I went to a music festival that turned into a five-day bender. I only ate peanut butter sandwiches and drank anything that would keep me awake. I was elated. That was the most time I had ever spent away from home. I did not miss it— not once. I realized that when I could, I would leave and never look back. But we all think that as kids.

In my last year at home I was never home. I went on trips with my friends; I worked; I studied; I planned protests. I drove fast when going places I was not allowed to go. I took myself to the airport or the empty buildings downtown. These were places where I could think. I knew home existed, and I would not find it the way I was living.

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As I write this, I am in a dorm room that looks out on a city that is not my hometown; my friend is sitting in her bed coding; the lights are low; everything glows yellow; I am content. The former eighteen years of my life now lie in the shadow of my independence. But we all think that as kids.