

some things

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Summers punctuate each year with a pleasant warmth. Time feels still, my mind empties out and then the boredom — the kind where even books and TV and art projects and phones get boring — sets in. But this summer is different. I just finished college. For the first time in 22 years, there is no grade to move into, no summer job to get, no degree requirement to fulfill.

As I write this, I'm sitting in my bedroom. Actually, I'm in the guest bedroom since my sister moved into my room when I left for college. I am back at the house where I took my first steps, where I practiced dance, where I painted ceramic figurines, where I watched my little sister grow up, where I'm watching my parents grow older, and where I lived for 18 years.

Yet I crave the comfort of the college room I rented for just nine months. The three blocks around campus feel more familiar than the trails behind my house. I want to be around the friends who became my community over the last four years. To make myself more at home, but also to avoid thinking so much about graduation during the month since graduation, I've decorated my makeshift room with things I've accumulated over the years.

2019

In my jewelry box is a pair of red and silver earrings. They were a birthday present from a college friend. I met her at the start of freshman year, but we became close during the first summer I was in California instead of Oregon. I spent June in an apartment near campus, taking a class. I was unsure of whether Berkeley was the right choice for college. Everyone seemed settled, with their friend group and a major they were passionate about and goals they were

working hard to achieve, but I felt untethered. Some evenings I would walk around campus, then watch the sunset while eating dinner alone. One evening, I met that friend (an acquaintance at the time) for dinner at a pizza place. I don't remember our exact conversation, but I do remember the immediate comfort between us. Talking to her was simple. She was present and open and kind. We ended up living together in our senior year. Afternoon coffees became a daily ritual. So did trips to the gym and walks to class. Instead of eating at Silver, she made us homemade pizzas for dinner.

2012

The other day, while sorting through my old clothes, I found two rumpled tie-dye shirts. The summer when I was twelve and my sister was six, my parents decided that we needed to spend time at home with our grandparents. Without school and piano and dance lessons, it became hard to fill the day. So one afternoon, we decided to tie-dye. We sat outside, inking two shirts into supposed works of art. Later that evening, my dad brought home a water balloon kit. We ran around our backyard in matching shirts, braids heavy with water. She aimed a balloon towards my arm and missed. I threw two at her back, watching the darkening spiral of blue and pink on her shirt. Then her face, flushed with delight, came into view. She barreled towards me, laughing hard.

2016

On my phone are a bunch of audio messages from a friend who became more than that, at least on my end. Because we lived on opposite coasts, we FaceTimed. Time would

disappear when we talked. I'd sit at a nearby park, and a child screaming down the slide would remind me of their brother. I'd lay in the grass on a picnic blanket, skin warm and eyes droopy, wondering if they would like the lyrics of a song stuck in my head. I wrote down a list of things to talk about so that I wouldn't forget. The next time we called, we would either



2018

A birthday card is pinned above my desk. My friend gave it to me the day before I left for college. It's covered in the ticket stubs of all the movies we watched during the summer of 2018. Going to the theater was our favorite activity. I'd buy myself Sour Patch or Nerd Rope, but she would get Dibs or Buncha Crunch. Usually I watched movies in silence, but with her, I would talk nonstop about the actors' outfits, the books she was currently reading or whether we knew anyone in the theater. Before college, we decided to watch one movie together each month in separate theaters in separate states. That never happened. I was struggling with an essay when she wanted to go, or she was busy in the lab when I wanted to go. What replaced it were Facetimes with silences and long conversations, small gifts and sum-



mer visits where she comes back to Portland or I go to Seattle.

2009

A binder with Telugu prayers sits on my bookshelf. I filled it with paper the summer I spent in India with my grandmother. Every afternoon, I'd lay on her bed. She would recite five prayers from a yellow book which we would then practice together. Two hours would pass as follows: She sings a verse. I repeat the verse. She corrects my pronunciation. I try again. She corrects my pronunciation again. I try again. She gives up and motions to the paper. I scribble down the verse, phonetically in English, for the next afternoon's practice.



We sing through the whole verse together. I echo her, stumbling on the same few words.

2015

There is a set of gajalu tucked away in my closet. I don't look at them anymore because it reminds me of the summer I prepared for my first solo Kuchipudi performance. I practiced for three hours a day with my teacher. It was tiring, sometimes monotonous. But I still woke up everyday ready to submerge myself in every story I was telling with my body. I asked my teacher about the history behind the art form. I copied her movements, adjusting each tilt of my head, foot step and expression. Driving home from practice, the wind



chilled the sweat dripping down my back. I'd eat lunch, watch TV for the rest of the day and then wake up to do it all

2004

There are two windows in my room that look out into the backyard. When I'm procrastinating or bored or my eyes hurt from staring at a screen, I look outside. My mom loves plants, so the garden grows fluffly roses, dark and light purple clematis, tall calla lilies and giant zucchinis. My favorites are the orange-on-the-inside-and-pink-on-the-outside roses, ones that have been around since I was three. Every summer, the garden becomes my mom's project. In the evenings, after work, she goes outside with her clippers in hand and a sun hat wide enough to cover four heads. I like to watch her tend to the plants. She seems serene, not bustling behind me or my sister or my dad or my grandparents. If my window is open, I can hear her talking to the flowers just as she once whispered to me when I couldn't fall asleep.



2021

An old candle jar sits on my desk. It still smells like lavender, but now the wax is replaced by a bunch of crystals. One time, on a New York trip with a friend, I mentioned that I



liked crystals. A few months later, she bought some at a flea market in New Jersey. In the jar sits a yellow fluorite that encourages

partnership. An amber which eases stress. A lithium quartz for good relationships. A citrine that helps with creativity. And a malachite for peace. Sometimes, when my heartbeat is too loud, and my palms are sticky, and my thoughts come so fast that they collide and compress and crush into each other, I pick a crystal from the jar, and hold it close to my palm. The texture of the stone's surface, sometimes smooth or sometimes rough depending on the one I chose, is calming. I wonder what she would say. I switch the stone from hand to hand. Eventually, my mind slows and my breath is steady. I put the stone back in the jar and go about my day.

2022

Nowadays all these memories seem distant from each other, so I feel like a spider splayed within its own web. But these things that I've collected are grounding. I may not be in the same state as my college friends again, but the earrings will always remind me of the warm evening walk home after I found my first friend in a new city. Whenever I wear the tie-dye shirt, I'm comforted that though my sister and I now with our friends than with each other, her laugh is still the same. Or every-time I write a birthday card, I'll try to recreate the ease of sitting with someone who can finish my sentences. This summer, my makeshift room has become an amalgamation of the past twenty one summers that I get to sift through once again.

