

When I was about 10 years old, I started flying by myself to spend about a week with my grandma every summer in Bainbridge Island, Washington. The quickest way to get there was to take a faerie through Seattle, which I never took by myself. From Seattle, it's nothing more than a thick lump of trees. It was a short plane ride to get there, but despite my excitement, it always felt uncomfortably long. Not because I feared heights, although that's not entirely untrue. I feared the rare tragedy of a plane crash, the contents of my suitcase floating out into the pacific. I feared that I would die surrounded by strangers, forever alone. That I would be a victim of my circumstances, stuck in a situation I could not control. Planes are supposed to be safer than cars, but plane crashes have happened. For those people, planes were not safer than cars.

In the cold, apathetic leather of my airplane seat, I curled in on myself like a beetle on its back, legs curling in and its soft, vulnerable abdomen facing the sky. During these flights, my heart pushed against my ribcage with sharp, loud thumps.

My forehead pressed up against the cold airplane window. I watched cars shrink below me, scurrying across the interstate like ants. I eavesdropped on the people behind me, their conversation floating between the seats. I could die with these people, our names could be said in the same sentence until we are forgotten, our pictures next to each other in the news, and I didn't even know who sat in front of me. I didn't know if they were leaving home or coming home or if neither place was home.

When I was younger, the people who sat next to me usually offered me a mint, or asked me about school. I was happy to share, never questioning that the way I was treated by strangers might have not been a product of the goodwill of the world, but a product of my obvious youth. That doesn't happen anymore. I get on a plane, or walk down the street, and fewer people wonder why I am alone.

In seventh grade, I took my first creative writing class, and writing immediately became my pastime. I was published for the first time that year, in a paperback anthology for youth published by Stanford graduate students. I tied myself to my writing, but kept it private. I regularly received exemplary feedback from my teachers, but kept quiet about it to anyone who didn't ask. I was published officially for the second time this past summer to a literary journal with a 4.6% acceptance rate, and felt mortified that my name was on the cover for the world to see. I wanted to be seen as a bright light without detail, not under a microscope.

When you get on a plane, you cannot get off when the plane starts to tremble, when it tilts to the ground and when the bags pour from the ceiling. When you get on a plane, there is no guarantee that people will ever care to know you, even if you die with them. Would they be able to even if they tried? In a limited space like this, can we really know each other? I shed my skin and I cannot put it back on. The people on the plane, on the street—the people who read the writing attached to my name—will not spare me because I am authentic. I am not exempt from getting on a plane that may fall from the sky, simply because I have cursed myself with the experience of being known.