

All I'd ever wanted was to get out of this small town. This tiny confined space that I was forced to fit into. I always wanted to escape and find *myself*, whatever that meant. So I left, and I moved so far away that learning who I was without the influence of conforming to that place was easy. I learned more about myself in those four years than I'd learned my entire childhood. I spent the majority of that time trying to find where I belonged, but I never did. I searched endlessly and always felt I had failed. Now, coming back from college across the country to my hometown was terrifying. I haven't seen any of these people since I left them so long ago. The people who I loved were the people I had left. My mom didn't want me to move so far away, and my dad wanted me to visit, mostly for my mom's sake I think. I never did, I couldn't bring myself to. But now, it seems there is no other place I belong but this suffocating town.

The cab driver inches closer to my red front door. Calling it mine might be unfair to my parents. I don't feel like it belongs to me though, but rather I belong to it. *Do I belong here?* "Ten minutes," the driver says. *Ten minutes*. Ten more minutes until I'm faced with the smells and the sounds I've avoided for so long. My mom and dad will get to see me again, but are they excited? My parents are expecting me, but are they expecting *me*? Do they even know the me that they will greet at that red door? My stomach twists in all sorts of knots as I plan what I could possibly say to explain how much I've changed.

Soon enough, we pass the section of land my family leases for cattle, and that knot in my stomach tightens slightly. It was there that I used to play all sorts of games that only my imaginative brain could've

thought up. Me and my cousins would go wherever our imaginations took us. It's a fond memory of mine, which calms my nerves a little bit. I used to belong there.

The road turns to dirt and suddenly I have thirty seconds before I'm in that front yard. "This is your home?" The cab driver asks. For the first time in a while, I'm forced to answer the question that's been eating at my own heart.

"Yes," I answer, "This is my home."

"Welcome home then," he says, putting the car in park and beckoning for me to get out. *Deep breath.*

I wave the driver out as I stare at the house in front of me. Butter-yellow walls and bright red doors and window frames await me. I see Annie, my parents dog, tied up on the side of the house. I can hear her barking too. I can't help but wonder if she'll recognize me. I tell myself she will, of course she will.

I don't remember walking, but somehow I end up at the top of the steps, right in front of the door. *Knock* I tell myself. All I have to do is knock. Three. *Breathe in.* Two. *Hold.* One. *Breathe out.*

The door opens on my third knock like someone was waiting for me. My dad opens it. I half expect him to look at me as if I were lost or a stranger, but he doesn't. He looks at me like I am the most important thing in the entire world.

"Hi," I say. I planned sentences and explanations, but all I could manage is that one automatic, pathetic word. In return, he grabs me and wraps me in his huge arms, pulling me inside with him. My body feels intensely warm and the metallic taste in my mouth disappears. At

some point, Mom joined in on my welcome home hug and suddenly the whole world stopped.

Later that evening, I sat out on our front porch to watch the sunset. My parents have already gone to bed. Now it's just me and the sky. I used to think that this town was too small for me, so I sought out bigger. I never considered this place my home because I didn't understand what a home was. I thought that it was wherever I end up, where I find out who I was always supposed to be, but home is where I started. The place where I first got the chance. I'm glad that I left and learned so much about the world and myself, because no matter how far I wander, every road will always lead me back to right here under this sky in this "too-small" town.