



A Study in Suburbia

by Isabel

OS42

INT. BEDROOM - NIGHT

The world is so quiet that it rings, high and soft and grainy behind my ears. Or maybe that's just all the people thinking, thinking, thinking, dreaming. Dreaming away under our low pebbled roofs that shield us from the wind and the stars, dreaming away above the bricks that pack down the dust and the ashes.

She lives in this room, and never wants to leave. She's scared to, because all the new rooms she must enter and stay in are unfamiliar, and that is not easy to deal with. There is too much to understand and grapple with and achieve in those new, crowded rooms, full of their *expectation* and *impossibility*. She might as well be the little gray moth above her head, looping up and down into the vigas and exhausting herself trying to find a way out but looking in the wrong place, the place where there is no opening, no way to break into the cold air above. *The door will open again, soon, in the morning.* And then she can be free to fly away to where she's meant to be, to where she'll be forever until she is no more. Will she find her way back to this room? The room she knew herself in, built herself in, tore herself in, wasted herself in? Who will she be when she returns?





INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE EVENING

The room is spinning, the walls are close, the carpet scratches my cheek. My head hangs off the couch, draining the blood from my heart to my brain, and I *hope hope hope* that my thoughts follow suit. The day's been so big and long, bad enough to drive me out of my room and have me seek the comfort of the quiet house after 9 o'clock, as the fire fades and the bricks turn colder. I wish tomorrow wouldn't happen, that time would give me a break before I had to face it, that I could lay in the pause between now and then and have it stretch along for hours, days, and years... until the tension lifted from my shoulder blades and the purple melted from my cheeks. *I wish tomorrow wouldn't happen.*

I.

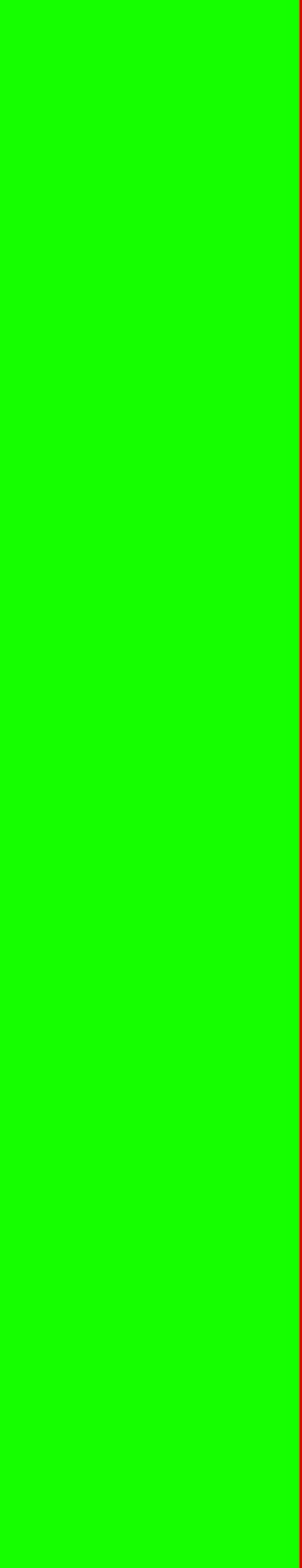
The suburban landscape of America shifted greatly after WWII. A housing shortage of about 5 million homes hit the nation, caused by the deployment and demobilization of troops on top of domestic migrations that had occurred during the war. High rents and full lodgings greeted veterans upon their return, and $\frac{1}{3}$ of them still lived with their families and neighbors in the years after the war had ended.⁴ The solution to this crisis came from new policies created by the Federal government, which accelerated suburban development and migration in metropolitan areas across the nation. These policies financially supported home ownership, built new critical infrastructure, and revolutionized the processes of home lending and building.⁴ The rate of home building was also increased by private enterprises' utilization of new mass production techniques and technologies that had been developed during the war. Home lending became less of a risk when the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) developed a "mortgage insurance program"⁴ that made low interest, long-term mortgage (about 25-30 years) a national standard. New standards for home construction were also set, as builders were granted "low-interest construction loans"⁴ and basic guidelines were implemented. Millions more American families soon had access to the opportunity to buy a home due to these changes, and many took advantage of it. By the 1960s, over six in ten American households were owned, compared to the four in ten in the 1940s.⁴ The standard post-war suburban home in 1950 was small and simple, with a single floor consisting of five rooms (typically a kitchen, living room, two bedrooms, and one bathroom), and took up an average of 983 square feet. Appliances and utilities were state-of-the-art and included in the 25-year mortgage. This shifted slightly by the mid-1950s, as buyers demanded larger homes and builders complied, creating communities and neighborhoods that were increasingly separated by class.⁴



INT. BATHROOM - MORNING

Blue magenta orange yellow gold crimson green pink purple stain the white tile. I'm afraid of the bugs that live between the bricks and confuse the shampoo and conditioner. *Which one comes first?* I forget what she just told me, so I do each twice for good measure. My hair will still be straight and static in the morning anyway, besides the bed head bump on my crown that I'll never cease to war with. *The bus is leaving!* I sprint to its blue door and yank the silver handle, the threat of disappointment clanging against my temples and down into my chest.





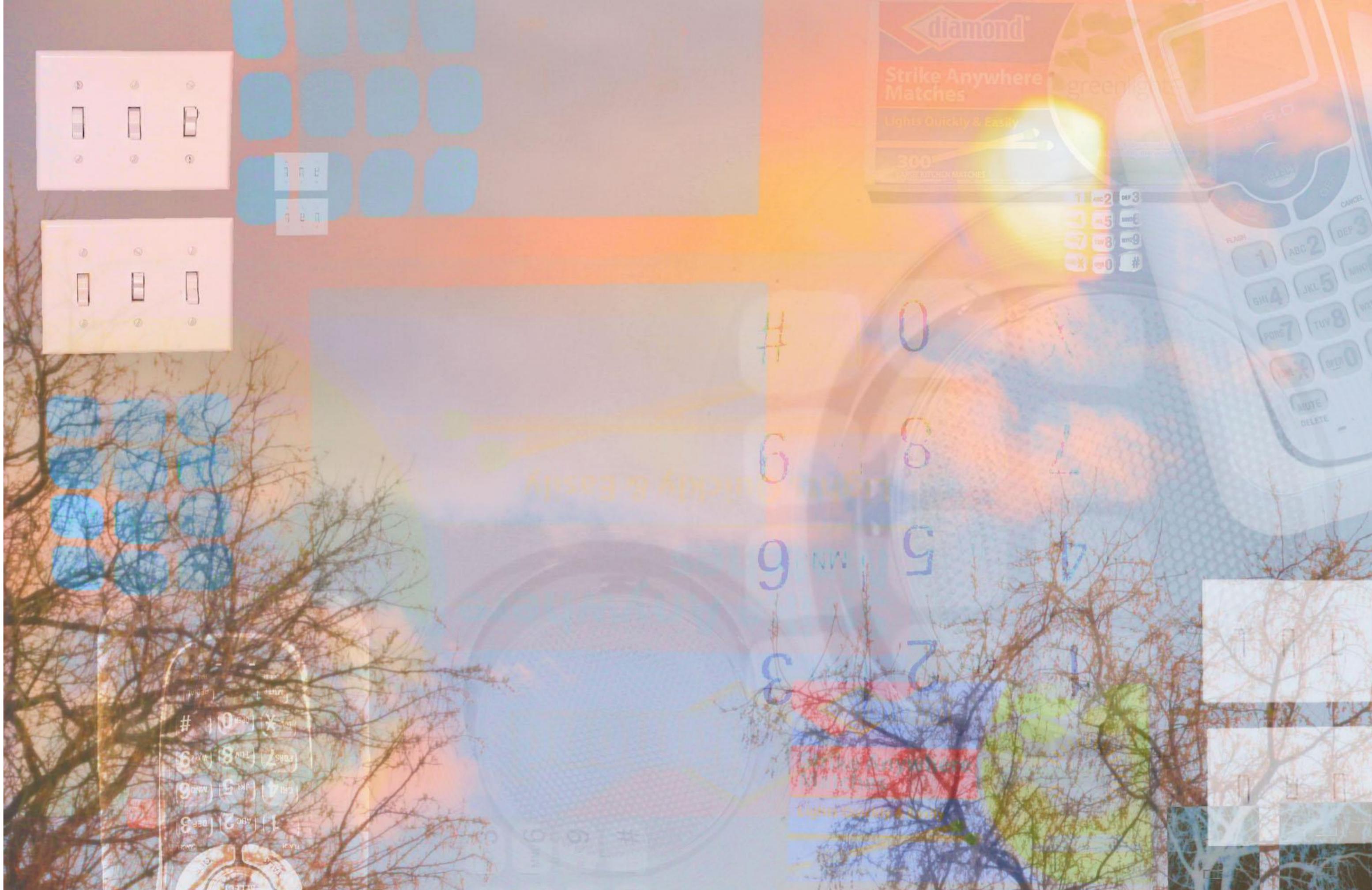
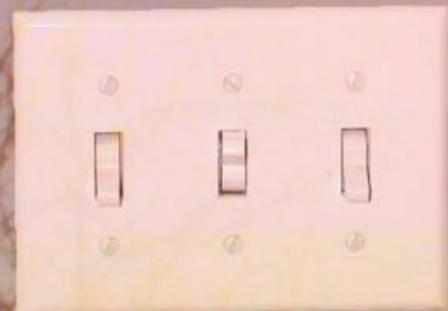
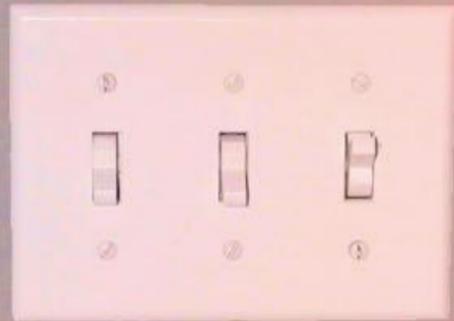
II.

Before WWII, suburban areas were heterogeneous, like the cities they surrounded.² In early 1800s America, the growth of industry and business enterprises began to separate one's workplace and place of residency, and commuting between each became more common. Some also lived close to the factories that they worked at, commonly located farther from the urban core, and still others lived at a distance from the city in order to produce food and raw materials for it.² Further, advances in transportation technology allowed more workers to travel outside of and around their city more easily and efficiently. By the late 1800s, these changes meant that most metropolitan areas in the country included industrial towns, residential suburbs, and farm centers, leading to the common "hub and spoke" model of urban development in the early 1900s.² Suburban communities began to show independence and high function, developing their own government-like structures and providing "some urban functions" to their residents.²



EXT. BACKYARD - EARLY EVENING

The aspen still bloomed in those early years. Its full, round-leaved boughs blocked out the view of Monte Alto, making me feel safe in my world. The butterfly bushes were bigger and had more sisters then, their purple flowers vivid on the roofs of my fairy houses and hanging dried in the evening sun of my parents room. The two garden boxes boasted marigolds and lettuce and peppers in the summers, each year bringing new goodies to the table. Their rectangles became my balance beams, my bare feet dancing over the low wooden planks and instinctively missing the sharp nails, around and around and around, again and again and forever until the sun set. The patio's red bricks were brighter then, the rains more often and more exciting in those Julys. The dips next to the garden beds housed huge puddles, our feet soon muddying them, their joy spreading into our jean hems and hair, before they moved on to the sky in the morning and left the bricks dusty again. The Russian olive outside the fence seemed monstrous and vigilant to me then, its chalky leaves strewn across the rounded corner of the yard where the lilac bush lived. Those purple blooms were a big deal each year, the kitchen soon lighting up with their perfume. Now, only its seven skinny stumps remain, next to the dried lavender stalks. Jack's grave lies alongside them, under the apple and crabapple tree, his shaggy ashes barely a thought anymore. My mother didn't used to buy rosemary for the kitchen; she would pluck it from the big bush under the studio window and sprinkle its plump needles across our plates. My dad grows onions and irises above its roots now, covering up the bare soil of loss.



Lights Quickly & Easily

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INT. KITCHEN - MIDDAY

I walk in, hoping it will be her, but instead it's him. I feign purpose, looking through the pantry and yanking the fridge open in search of a snack that I am not hungry for. The clink of condiment bottles fills the thick, sick silence as I work to avoid eye contact. Maybe he'll say something, maybe he won't; I'll let him decide. I wish he won't, so that I don't have to choke out my words of amiability and hear my ears ring, feel my shoulders tense, throat close, hands sweat. The casual anxiety of being at home with him feels like nothing now; the innocence and ignorance of childhood are gone but only replaced with a new pattern, norm, behavior, given, habit, language between us.





III.

With structural changes in suburban communities, the interior family structures that they support have also shifted. For instance, due to modern changes in career paths and higher gender equality in the workplace, Americans are able to work longer and settle down later, therefore causing the nationwide trend of many getting married and having children later in life, or even having no children at all.³ In addition, family structures differ between urban development levels; only 44% of urban residents are married, compared to the 50% of suburban residents, and the 51% of rural residents. Varying racial and ethnic populations across urban landscapes account for some of these disparities as well. Black residents typically live in urban cores rather than in suburban or rural areas, and also have lower marriage rates than other groups.³ 32% of African Americans living in suburban areas are married, compared to the 27% of rural residents and the 26% of urban residents. These ratios contrast those of white populations, which show larger numbers of those married living in the suburbs than in urban areas (49% of whites living in urban areas are married, 53% are in suburban areas, and 54% in rural areas.)³ Lower marriage rates in urban areas can also be explained by age differences. On average, people in urban areas are younger than those living in suburban and rural areas, and only “36% [of those] urban adults ages 25 to 34”³ are married. Further, education levels in different metropolitan areas affect their corresponding marriage rates. Rural adults are more likely to be married, but only 19% of them hold a bachelor’s degree or higher. Compare this to urban or suburban adults, about 30% of whom carry a bachelor’s degree or higher, but are less likely to be married than their rural counterparts. “This also contributes to the high rate of births to unmarried women in rural areas, as non-marital births are linked to less education.”³ Higher numbers of children are also being born outside of marriage, and/or live with only one parent.

IV.

I almost assume that suburbia will last forever, that the appeal of living apart from your city in a comfy, clean, pretty domestic environment and owning your own house will trump the option of expensive renting in the loud, restless urban core. Its survival depends greatly on the incoming groups, as existing suburbanites won't be around to protect the golf courses forever. Currently, the incoming group is millennials, who demand dynamic and environmentally conscious suburb designs, the opposite of "the energy wastefulness, visual monotony and social conformity of postwar manufactured neighborhoods."¹ So, with the new wave of residents, suburban planning will also have its makeover. Possible plans include self-driving cars, energy efficient homes, and community spaces¹ that make suburbs productive, sustainable, and autonomous, possibly even centers of production for their urban cores.

"By area, homeowner lots in suburban residential developments store as much carbon as do managed northern forests,"⁶ and their manicured lawns usually boast "carbon sequestering"⁶ plants, the types of which are commonly influenced by the lawn aesthetics of their neighbors and species native to their area. These peer-informed aesthetic decisions could be a tool used to develop new, more sustainable suburban landscaping practices, such as community gardens and region-specific energy resources. For example, solar energy is a huge resource in the Sunbelt states, and the rainy Pacific Northwest poses the opportunity to develop "advanced water management"¹. Suburbs were also designed around their residents' need to travel, resulting in "roughly one-third of all development (...) devoted to car-related infrastructure,"⁶ which takes up space that otherwise has the potential for recreation and production. There is also the issue of flooding and runoff, which pavement has no ability to control or reduce like natural landscapes would. Self driving cars parked in separate lots are a possible solution to this, which would reduce paved surfaces, such as driveways, by about up to 50%⁶, freeing up land for gardens and community spaces, and lowering emissions and noise pollution.¹





INT. CAR - MORNING

(PASSENGER SEAT, PARTLY CLOUDY)

The dirt is itchy in the daylight. The sand grains cast long shadows and reflect the white light pouring from all sides of the sky, weaving in between the juniper needles and pricking my pupils with thin pins of nothing. It is velvet in the evening, begging me to slip out the rattling window, run across the hot pavement, and lay on the pockmarked faces of the hills to watch the sun fade away another day.

INT. CAR - SUNSET

(DRIVERS SEAT, CLEAR)

So many lives are lived out every day, here in this patch of land between the rest of nowhere. I forget that, living at its mouth and only exploring the rest when *I need a break*. Privileged, to live between the quiet hills, watch the sun set every night, and ignore the grit of town until the morning. *Six thousand one hundred and thirty lives* on top of each other. But I only really know maybe one hundred of them, tops. *Who have I forgotten?*

INT. CAR - LATE AFTERNOON

(DRIVERS SEAT, CLOUDY, EARLY WINTER)

The drive to town feels like a second, the twenty minutes never exist and become rather a blip in time, a fraction of everyday that lies in a different plane. Back and forth, morning and evening, paying no attention to the hills on my right or the cliffs to my left nor the bridges above. The highway snakes around in a direction that makes no sense; town is just straight over there, I can see it clear from here, but we all must follow the pavement in the opposite direction and come around again, eventually. *Yet another scheme to make me take in the scenery of this enchanted tourist town that I am itching to escape.*

(FIVE MINUTES)

But then I left it for two months longer than I've ever been away and I missed this collection of mud bricks and potholes so much that it ached, my tears dripping down the drain every other night as I longed to be back under the painted sky and the water stained vigas with my dragons and angels embedded in the grain. I've despised every minute here in this place for the past few years that I've been scared enough to, and I love this city to the point of panic.





(FIVE MINUTES)

I'll be searching for these silhouettes everywhere I go. I feel safe between their shadows and valleys; their stability and consistency are things I shouldn't take for granted so often. I need them; if I am somewhere without these peaks for too long, I begin to feel lost and desperate, panicking at my inability to ground myself. *Will I find this comfort so genuinely again, somewhere far away from here?*

(TEN MINUTES)

I have no ability to cherish the present, or not enough at least. Or maybe I can't let things go. *Everything took so long when I was younger!* The coffee grinder at the supermarket took an hour to finish up before I could go pick out an ice cream from the freezer, the baseball games lasted entire days before I could watch a movie. *Now everything is going too quickly;* I am noticing the good moments more than I did before, but I'm also realizing their impermanence, how they leave just as soon as I wish they never would. I love things in the moment-- *the warmth, the colors, the dust, the teeth and the words.* But I torture myself with missing them the moment they disappear from my reality, and cannot lessen the pain lest I lose them for good.

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¹ Alan. "The Suburb of the Future, Almost Here." *The New York Times*, The New York Times, 15 Sept. 2017, www.nytimes.com/2017/09/15/sunday-review/future-suburb-millennials.html.

² Keating, Ann Durkin. "Suburbanization before 1945." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, 3 Sept. 2015, oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-65.

³ Livingston, Gretchen. "How Family Life Is Changing in Urban, Suburban and Rural Communities." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 19 June 2018, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/06/19/family-life-is-changing-in-different-ways-across-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities-in-the-u-s/.

⁴ Nicolaidis, Becky, and Andrew Wiese. "Suburbanization in the United States after 1945." *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History*, 26 Apr. 2017, oxfordre.com/americanhistory/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.001.0001/acrefore-9780199329175-e-64.

⁵ "Is This the Future of Suburbia?" *Latest News*, www.smartcitiesdive.com/ex/sustainablecitiescollective/future-suburbia/1170965/.

⁶ Jonathan Mingle | School of Architecture and Planning. "A New Lens on Suburbia." *MIT News*, 27 Apr. 2016, news.mit.edu/2016/future-of-suburbia-conference-0427.



Isabel Rogerson is from Santa Fe, New Mexico, a complicated and rich city that holds much significance and struggle for her. She draws inspiration from the complexities of everyday life and human relationships, using her work as an outlet for her own part in them. Examination of her own life experiences as well as those that she witnesses drive her art, working mainly in pen, pencil, and acrylic or watercolor, but beginning to explore other mediums as well. She is a junior of the class of 2021 at Santa Fe High School and a soon-to-be graduate of The Oxbow School in Napa, California.