

## **Gain the Whole World**

**by Abby Place**

Dear Honey with the flip phone, baby with the side bangs bent on facial asymmetries, oh sweet, sweet preteen with the world laid out in front of you like the most extensive and promising Claire's earring pack-

Don't wish away the shared room, matching twin wooden beds, pencil marked walls and eye level drawings, just lose the magazine clippings showing the recipe for Someone A Boy Could Love. Do not wish away the thighs that meet in the middle of your seat or the tummy that protrudes when you sit down; it protects what's inside, the most vital things: your stomach, digesting the food you can't think about touching for the sake of expanding; your heart, pounding in your ribs, throat, fingertips as you sit close to the girl who has freckles that you have tried to count and is the only one in the class who knows how to French braid.

Everything you need is here, and you will run one square mile to the school and back daily, trying to want the aching shins just like the older sisters who do this all day long every autumn, so why can't you? Humming down the sidewalk like the coarse, browned leaves from the tree in the front yard that no you no longer climb, blowing in circles around your ankles, you leave pieces of yourself in the eight block radius of your wide- street world. You run not because you want to, but because you need to want to. If we got rid of the baby fat you're convinced you have, did you ever really have it? Meals become carefully calculated lands mines, plates, the battlefield and numbers on the side of the box, the heavy artillery. Journal pages lined with meals and feelings of disgust at wanting it all. You think that this is not just losing what has to be gotten rid of, this is breadcrumb-ing your way to something better.

I don't know how to tell you that the very things you tried to shed instantaneously like the layers of clothes dropped at the threshold after getting home, are the ones you should grasp for as long as you can. Yes, even the sopping rain jacket that makes you cold, yes, even the boots that pinch. Lose the love notes from the boys that rally their friends against you when you don't reply. Keep the birthday cards in your sister's handwriting because you will only get four more of those. You'll want something to trace to feel the curve of her crammed consonants. She will give you a letter a week before her accident, right after she gets back from up North. She will slip it across the floor to you in the unpacked upheaval of her lived in-laundry and summer vacation and say, "I thought I had mailed this. I had stamps and everything." She will laugh afterwards over the items she requests you to bring in her PS portion of the letter, too polite to ask where they are when you visit. What I am saying is, don't dismiss what you see as the obligatory love, from the one that stays and combs through your hair's tangled rat's nests and sits next to you on long family car rides. Remember how when your chin dips in exhaustion over the seat belt to rest on her shoulder, amidst the light from the world passing us by, she doesn't once pull away.

You don't know it yet, but among the things you have tried to lose, nearly all of them will come back to you. Braces and the sandal sucked down by the mud in the lake are not on the list. The weight will return and your legs getting bigger and more muscular won't be a tragedy anymore. You will lose God time and time again. In fact, you won't be on speaking terms with Them, until you learn that prayers do not have to be thankful, and these days they sound a lot like yelling. These days your prayers start with, "Out of everything to lose, why her?" Honey, I remember the things you asked God for, the things you said between closed eyes and passed plates during communion, only to pray quieter, in a corner of your mind you would never admit

to having. How many calories are in the blood and body of Christ? How can I possibly want to hold my best friend's hand over the boy who has just enough freckles and wants to dance with me? Out of all the things to lose, and come back, why not her?

There are still things for you to gain here. There are still people and trees that breathe and move like her, and you can love them for as long as you are able. You can still get pieces of her back on the days when the leaves that smiled at her curl and fall to the ground, and you feel as if the whole world has forgotten her along with them. You pick up the things you tried so hard to get rid of, and you bear them, all of them. She loved you like the fullest and warmest meal, she loved you like God did, constantly and withholding nothing. There are still things to gain here.