



## home again

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I'm tired and weepy. I'm confused. I get this way late at night...after I let myself stop running...before I fall asleep. I distort reality...become nostalgic. I feel desperate. I crave.

Last week, it was California. It was home. I was homesick. I hated this place—the green, the hush, the peace. I was suffocating in all the open air.

I wanted *that* place—the traffic, the noise, the battle. I was suffering from withdrawal.

When I was there, I thought of here, and missed the turning leaves. Now, I'm here and think of there, and long for the smog blue sky.

In literature and in daydreams, New England is romantic. It's beauty and history and awe.

In reality and in every day, New England is sober. It's forests and antiquity and apprehension.

There's too much damn nature in Amherst! There are bugs and road kill and black cats crossing the two-lane streets.

There were great radio stations in Los Angeles. There were concrete and tall buildings and lost hubcaps rolling across the freeway.

The funny thing is, when I was driving across the country, I had the sense that I was *coming* home. I'm originally from the East Coast. My family and my high school friends are here. I couldn't wait to be back. Then, I got here, and it changed. Or, perhaps, *I* changed. I don't remember it being so humid in the summertime. I'd forgotten how cold it is in the fall. Maybe that old 1950s song was right; you *can't* go home again. At least, not to the home of your memories.

It's morning. I'm still tired, less weepy. I walk through the crisp air almost expecting it to crinkle and crack. It seems foggy...or is that in my head? I stop in front of Stockbridge Hall and stare, for a moment, at the chipped brick and white pillars. I walk past the stone chapel. It's beautiful, here.

I think I'm coming down with something. I should take Echinacea when I get to the office.

I look at my list of things to do. I think about my bed. 'Too bad there won't be anyone in it when I get home, late tonight...if only to warm a place for me to sleep between the sheets. I remember that I should be missing Ryan. What did I like about him, again?

His eyes? Blue. Or green. Light, anyway. His lips? No, that's Craig. Not his lips, but his *smile* was goofy. That was cute. It was his hugs. He liked to snuggle. He liked to squeeze, straining his body against mine. I felt trapped, yet safe. His body was always warm. But, then, it was summer.

I sniff orange oil. Up, up, up! Up, up, up! 'Time to get right on up! I sniff tangerine. I drink Emergen-C.

I sit by the pond and try to read Langston Hughes. The squirrels fascinate me. I hate rodents: mice, rats, even ferrets and hamsters. So, it would make sense that squirrels should freak me out, as well. After all, they're just rats dressed up in a cuter outfit. Yet, the bushy tail *does* make a difference. I like to watch them chasing each other around trees, scurrying around with acorns in their mouths. Today, I look up from my book to find a squirrel staring at me. "*What?*" I say to it, slightly annoyed. It moves closer to me, maintaining eye contact. OK, now, I *am* a little freaked out. I stand up and begin to walk away. Perhaps, I'll go inside and read in the graduate lounge. The squirrel is in my path. He hops to the left and then to the right—mocking me, daring me to try to get around him. I can see the smirk on his little squirrel face. He's enjoying himself. His dark pupil-less eyes bore into me. "What do you want from me?!", I want to scream. Instead, I turn and walk quickly to the Student Union. It's not until I seat myself in the graduate lounge that I realize I have a half-eaten granola bar in my hand. Oh. That's what it wanted. I really need to get some sleep.

"Are you going to the reading?" Erica, a classmate, asks, as we leave our fiction workshop. Mark Edmunson is reading some of his essays at Amherst Books, just off campus.

"No" I reply, "I'm tired. I'm just going to go home". I think about what I just said as I walk to my car. Home. Is Amherst *home*, now? If so, what is my mother's house? What is Los Angeles?

Some say home is where the heart is. Others say home is where you hang your hat. I think it's a little bit of both. Home is where you hang your heart. It's where you lay down all your burdens. It's a place where you are safe and loved. It's where you get your rest...the source of your strength.

My mother's house will always be that place. For a few years, Los Angeles was home, as well. I am not sure if Amherst ever will be. Will I ever get used to this weather? Will the Boston accent always drive me crazy? Who knows? I do know that any place where there's a space for my writing, or where it's OK for me to *be* a writer, is a good place. So, I guess I should give *this*

place a shot.

In my car, I curse the SUV going 5 miles below the speed limit in front of me. I can't wait to get to my house so that I can lay down this heavy bag of books. I can't wait to have dinner with my roommates and tell them about my day. I especially can't wait to get to bed. I'm tired and I just want to be home, again.

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