Growing up

*Inspired by Privilege by Sarah Barber*

It’s not like they say it is. But it is like learning to ride a bike. Hands gripping the handlebars. Tongues poking out of our mouths. Concentrating on the road before us. Knees stinging from a fall, a trickle of blood covered by a princess bandage. Confident, excited, and ready to travel four feet on two wheels. It’s not like they say it is.

It’s not like they say it is. But it is like leaving home. Saying goodbye to our siblings. Saying goodbye to pets. Wondering when the next time Grandma will call, or Grandpa, or Dad, or our sisters. We know Mom will call though, she always calls. It’s not like they say it is.

It’s not like they say it is. But it is like boarding a plane. Suitcases in hand, backpacks on our backs, camera bags strapped to our chests. We find our seats, next to a middle-aged man, that maybe we recognized long ago in the distant past. He says hello. He asks how our parents are. We say they are good. But do we really know that? When was the last time you called your dad? It’s not like they say it is.

It’s not like they say it is. But it is like coming home. To houses that are not the same. To rooms that have new desks. To kitchens where the bowls have magically moved cabinets, the dish soaps are a different scent and new snacks are in the cupboards. The Wii bowling game we used to spend hours playing can’t plug into our new TV. We sleep on the floors of our sisters’ rooms and our clothes live in our suitcases. It’s not like they say it is.

It’s not like they say it is. But it is like suffocating. When our news stations display the latest acts of violence. When we spend our nights scrolling on social media. When we endlessly compare ourselves—are we too skinny—are we too fat—why do our ankles look so small—why does she look so pretty—why aren’t we like her? Our friends are living through school shootings at college, yet we are crying because we forgot to turn in our assignments. Our families are getting older. Our siblings are growing up without us. It’s not like they say it is.

It’s not like they say it is. But it is like breathing. When we wake in the morning to the soft drizzle of rain. When we pull our blankets up to our chins and sigh, a breath of the morning air. An empty house around us, the clock ticking down the moments of peace. We place our feet on the cool, wooden ground. Our legs feel heavy. The cool sink water does little to quiet the noise from our empty phones. We sigh, a breath of exhaustion. The trees sway softly outside our windows as if waving at us—friendly faces in the storm. We walk outside. A drop of rainwater hits our forehead and rolls, slowly down to our chin—falling gently to the ground. It’s not like they say it is.