

SHORT STORY / PROSE

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Spring Break

It's long past midnight, but too early for the sun to be up. The dorm is hollow, a shell of what it once was. Your roommates have all left, their laughter and late-night rants packed into boxes and driven away. The silence is heavy, broken only by the low, mechanical hum of the AC unit—a sound that feels like it's mocking the stillness of your thoughts.

It's dark. The only light comes from the cheap LED strips you bought at the beginning of the semester, their glow now faint and flickering, like a dying star. You keep forgetting to turn them off, and they're dimming with each passing day, no match for the harsh glare of your laptop screen.

You're staring at an inbox that refuses to give you what you need. Emails. Endless emails. Applications sent, follow-ups ignored, automated replies that feel like a slap in the face. You refresh the page again. And again. And again.

Nothing.

Two months until you're thrust into the "real world," a phrase that feels more like a threat than a milestone. Two months until you're expected to have it all figured out—a job, a plan, a life. Two months until the weight of student debt crashes down on you, and the government, with its cold, bureaucratic indifference, reminds you that the clock is ticking.

You lean back in your chair, the creak of it echoing in the empty room. Your eyes drift to the ceiling, as if the answers might be written there in the cracks and stains. Two months.

Graduation looms like a storm cloud, dark and inevitable. The job market is a wasteland, and Instagram, with its cruel algorithm, serves you ads for resume builders and articles titled "10 Tips to Survive the Apocalypse." You laugh bitterly. It's not far off. Bird flu is creeping into the headlines, a silent, lurking threat. Of course. Why wouldn't it? The world has always had a sick sense of humor.

And then it hits you—a wave of déjà vu so strong it nearly knocks the breath out of you.

Four years ago. Spring break. Two months left of high school. Sitting in your childhood bedroom, staring at a different screen, refreshing a different inbox. Hoping for acceptance letters instead of job offers. The same knot in your stomach. The same dread. The same voice in your head whispering, What if it doesn't work out? What if you're not good enough? What if this is the end? You laugh. A sharp, humorless sound that bounces off the walls. Life loves its patterns, doesn't it?

The laughter catches in your throat, and before you know it, a tear escapes. Then another. You let them come. You sit with it—the hopelessness, the uncertainty, the fear. It's familiar, this feeling. You've been here before.

Four years ago, you thought it was the end. You thought the world was collapsing, and maybe it was, but you survived. You made it to college. You're here now, on the brink of another ending, another beginning.

You take a breath. Then another.

The familiarity is almost comforting. You've done this before. You've stared into the abyss and come out the other side. You can do it again.

You wipe your tears, close your laptop, and let the darkness envelop you. The world feels heavy, but for the first time in weeks, your chest feels lighter.

There's everything to worry about, and yet, somehow, nothing at all.

You lie down, the weight of the future pressing against your ribs, but beneath it, there's a quiet certainty. The world will keep spinning. The sun will rise. And in four years, you'll look back and laugh at how familiar it all feels.

You close your eyes.

Uncertain, but unbroken.