

If I had an Extra Hour

On the days I don't have an after-school activity, I carpool home from school. My carpool consists of a quiet sophomore and her curious and excitable little sister. The little sister asks me every day, without fail, if we can walk my dog together.

I never have time for it, but I say yes. In the fall, we look for acorns, and in the spring, I teach her how to make daisy chains. If I had an extra hour, I would spend it with her. I would say yes to all her childish and wonderful ideas.

I would hang upside down from trees and go to the pool and press flowers and jump on the trampoline. I would say yes to whatever idea her infinitely curious little mind could come up with. I would learn how to be a child again.

These days my time is consumed with the stress of high school, the debate cases I need to write, the long play rehearsals, and the time I need to devote to homework or studying. I would spend my extra hour with an eight-year-old girl named Lily remembering why I fell in love with learning in the first place. I would run through my neighborhood with grass stains on my knees and flowers in my hair wondering about this crazy world I live in as we chased after her dog, Coco. If I had an extra hour, I would bake cookies with flour on my forehead and a little sister I never had by my side.

I would spend my extra hour answering the same questions I had asked years ago and laughing till my sides hurt. The world is vast and beautiful. I would spend my hour loving it until my heart burst from loving it too much. I would unearth my American girl dolls for her, and I would teach her about the American Revolution as we played.

One day, Lily would find my secret stash of chocolate, and I would chastise her, but then I would give her a whole bar for herself. "Our secret," I would say with a wink. We would sit on my porch eating ladybugs, a snack she created out of peanut butter, apples, and chocolate chips. She would ask to take "the secret passage" back to her yard, so I would make up stories about the dreadful pirates we were running from and the gold we need to hide as we dashed down the leaf-strewn staircase. We would take turns pushing each other on the pink swing in her yard under the big oak tree.

If I had an extra hour, I would help her chase my neighbors' chickens back into their yard and laugh at her "Why did the chicken cross the road?" joke like it was the first time I had heard it. If I had an extra hour, I would let her curiosity spark my own until we were shin deep in creek water looking for minnows.