

*I want to tell her I will see her tomorrow,*

But she lives in New York now, where the nights blend with the moon and the moon glimmers on the road. Google Maps says she's a twenty hour drive away, but she's at a bus stop right now, she texts me, brushing flakes of snow off the bench. She sends me a picture of herself, squinting into the split-lip chill of the air. Wisps of her hair plaster wetly to her forehead. Her mouth crinkles against the aluminum sky.

It's cold, colder than Pinecrest ever was, but I've never seen her so happy.

Her bus is due in five minutes. It'll take her from the Upper West Side to East Harlem, her home. She'd screenshotted her apartment when she first saw it on Zillow, she sends it to me when I'm walking home from school. I squint at the brick-packed peanuts of the building in the picture. It's nothing like our house, the one that I stand in. It's cracked, stilted. It's perfect for her.

*East Harlem, I reply. Isn't that dangerous?*

*Maybe, she says, But it's cheap, and it's beautiful, isn't it?*

She goes to the bank the next day to take out a loan. Her ID says she is eighteen and from Pinecrest but she tells them that she's from New York, and they seem to believe it. Her heart beats like a child's as the teller scrapes up her paperwork.

Her bus is due in four minutes. She's supposed to come home for Thanksgiving break, but she has finals. An internship. A holiday concert with her friends.

I think back to last year's Thanksgiving, when I'd barely coaxed her down from her bedroom to eat dinner. She'd been drowning, strangled with the spine-heavy weight of college

applications and scholarships and *leaving* on her shoulders. She sat at her desk with her door shut for most of that winter. I knew she was in there, breathing or crying, never both at the same time.

This year, her door is open wide. I can see the inside of her room. I haven't seen it in years.

Her bus is due in three minutes. She has a job now, at the university bookstore, but she was fifteen when she got her first job waitressing. She sits in the booth after school, textbooks on the counter, manning the register with her pencil between her teeth. She says she wants spending money, that she is fine, not tired. She comes home long after the evening melts away, dropping her tips onto the kitchen table. Coins rattle into the carpet below. She never picks them up. My mother finds them, ribbed and jingling, every time she vacuums.

Once, she brings me to work when the day is slow and syrupy and our parents are stuck in it. She presses a paper bill into my hand, one of her tips. "Three of these are enough for a coffee," she chides. "A hundred, maybe a prom dress. Isn't that cool?"

I nod, running my nail across the paper. I wonder how many would be enough for her to come home like she used to, before the evening melted into darkness, when the sky was just beginning to dusk.

Her bus is due in two minutes. She takes chemistry notes on her tablet at the bus stop. In middle school, we'd do our homework on the front porch when the weather was nice. We lived smack-dab in a ring of tiles, square houses under our feet, with cars that spin in circles past our driveway. They roll by, one after another. They never seem to leave.

She walks our neighbor's dog every Saturday, the mornings crisp with the tear of suburbia, and her skin becomes a mine of goosebumps against the air. Once, I ask her why she does it, and she shrugs. "He says he's got work meetings in the mornings. And I like their dog."

One Saturday, she opens the door to find a newspaper and an obituary, slapped across the last page. He'd left the dog to his grandchildren. There is no funeral. There is talk that he didn't have the savings.

She wonders if he ever walked his own dog, if he stepped outside long enough to feel the goosebumps up his arms. She thinks of our parents alongside him, drenched in the slow ache of money and time, toiling away at their desks while we sit on the porch and watch the days roll by. She promises me, then, that we will never go inside.

Her bus is due in one minute. Her bus pass takes her anywhere in the city, but when I was in first grade and time melted like a popsicle over my hands, our parents told us not to leave our neighborhood when we went out to play. *It's dangerous, the real world*, they scolded. *You wouldn't understand.*

But we are there anyway, running valleys through the aisles of a sun-sopped parking lot. The road is endless and so is the summer, and our sneakers ripple on the sidewalk in front of the Dollar General. She's in fifth grade and she's my older sister, so we count our change on the threaded rivers of the store's carpet. It's barely enough for a tube of dollar lip gloss, but it's enough for her to leave the store brimming holy under the sun.

"Mom says dollar store makeup is bad for you," I tell her, even though she's ten years old and knows better than me. "You'll get an infection."

She swipes a wand of gloss across her lips. It glitters, clumping over her teeth.

“Maybe,” she says, “But it’s cheap, and it’s beautiful, isn’t it?”

Her bus is due to come any minute now. *I’m still waiting*, she texts me. I am too, but I’m not going to tell her that, not when she’s already left.