

*Run.*

Thunder boomed as my feet hit the pavement, fueling my sprint, and the lightning exploding above my head illuminated my bloodied and frantic expression as I continued down the streets of my neighborhood, breaching the train tracks that separated the houses from the main city.

*Run.*

Every inch of my body screamed as I slid under the lowering warning bar before leaping across metal trails, too desperate to put distance between me and my childhood home to care about my safety.

As I flee from the tracks and the train finally rolls past, I let myself collapse, panting, on the hard, cracked ground from years of weather eroding away what little remaining grass there had been. The rain comes down in sheets, falling unrelentingly against my flushed skin. The weight of the water bites at my skin, but I welcome it with open arms as it cools my aching muscles and washes away the blood caked onto my lower lip and brow.

While I should be crying, mourning the loss of everything that was once familiar, all that can part my lips is a cracked and broken laugh. I keep laughing and keep laughing until I feel the tightness in my chest as I run out of breath to support my hysterics. This was so funny to me in the way that it wasn't quite funny at all; I spent every day telling myself that I could handle this

until I leave, until I graduated, but here I sit, next to the railroad tracks, picking myself up off the ground and grabbing my bag before starting into a light jog, running away. I can't take this anymore.

As I continue to lightly jog down to the bus station with the rain pounding against my back, a small smile pulls at my lips despite the fear and pain stored in my heart. Staying positive is going to be a necessity until I can get some time and space to myself so that smile stays on my lips as I walk into the station and make a beeline to the bathroom, locking myself in a stall before peeling off my clothes that were plastered to my skin. I pull spare clothes out of my backpack, quickly putting them on before sitting on the stall floor to catalog my belongings. One laptop, one laptop charger, one phone, one phone charger, two pairs of earbuds, three changes of clothes, one toothbrush, a half-empty bottle of toothpaste, one wallet including my ID, debit card, and forty-two dollars cash, along with three power bars and a bottle of water was all I currently had on me and I sighed as I shoved the things back into the tightly packed bag.

Exiting the stall, I go to the bathroom and stare at myself in the mirror, taking in the grotesque appearance of the split lip and cut above my eyebrow that the rain didn't help in washing away. Slowly, I pull a paper towel and wet it before slowly beginning to dab at my eyebrow, knowing it could probably use a stitch or two. After finally washing away the last remaining bits of blood from my forehead, I shift to wipe the drips that have fallen down from my throbbing lower lip, before beginning to prod at the wound itself. Everything ached as I finished up, but I at least looked clean enough to buy a bus ticket without questions. I left the bathroom, wet clothes dangling by my side in a shopping bag, as I made my way over to the ticket booth.

"One ticket to Phoenix, Arizona, please," I say, trying to keep my tone level and relaxed despite the anxiety bubbling in my chest. The clerk raises an eyebrow as if to question my appearance,

but doesn't say anything past the price of the ticket. I hesitantly hand over the cash in my possession before paying the remaining balance on my debit card, dipping into what little savings I had.

*6:00 a.m.*

I sighed, realizing that I have three hours until my bus boards and make my way over to the overused seating area before falling into a chair. I slip in a pair of earbuds before hugging my backpack to my chest as I curl up in the old, fake leather chair. My eyes slip closed as I lay my head back against the worn material, and my tense muscles finally begin to relax. I wanted to, no, I needed to stay awake to make sure I got on my bus, but before I knew it, I felt sleep pulling at my exhausted form, and I willingly let it slip me into the world of unconsciousness.