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# The End

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# The End

The bus jerks and shakes over chunks of ice frozen to the road. The sun stays tucked behind the clouds for hours and hours. Rain speckles the window that you press your head against in an attempt to ease your nausea. Your mother sitting next to you tells you the ride would be quick, but you knew it couldn't be. You watch as she checks her phone every minute or so, until you tell her she should just put it away. Thanksgiving. Alone. On the end of Long Island. She had told you that it would be good for you two to get away and she took you and dragged you here, to Montauk, but you don't want to get away.

The Hampton Jitney runs all the way from upstate New York to the tip of Long Island. You had already passed through the Hamptons, seen the tops of mansions and the custom license plates on the backs of expensive cars. The other passengers snapped pictures of some of them, but most just gawked at the luxury. Now you're on a single road and only short evergreens line the sides, sitting in sand. Your mother tells you it's because of the salt in the air that the trees can't grow and sand spreads over the pavement. The sky is dark over you and you can hear the rumble of thunder in the distance, over the ocean.

After what felt like days, you arrive at your motel, dingy white and swarmed with weeds. You stand up, leave the bus quickly, fluorescent lights drowning out your senses. The manager of the motel can see you as she stands outside the main office smoking her third cigarette, and she smiles. You groan, knowing that you are the first guests she's had in awhile. She stabs her cigarette into the ground and rushes into the office behind glass walls, sitting at her desk and adjusting the collar on her shirt. The luggage compartment opens in the bus and your bags come spilling out, cracking against the parking lot. Your mother pulls out the rest and the bus quickly drives away.

"Thank you!" Your mom shouts and waves. She bends over and helps you with your things.

"I've got it," you say.

"Okay." She drops your things back onto the multi-colored rocks that form the lot and walks to the main office where the woman watches and stares. You pick up your clothes and boots and throw them back in your suitcase. The rain starts again and you run to the office to join your mother, your feet shifting in the pebbles. Your mother was out before you could enter, carrying two keys for room 54. The bags behind you make grooves in the rocks as you turn slowly around. The wooden stairs you climb are soggy and crooked, but she booked your room on the second floor with a balcony facing the ocean.

You can appreciate that.

The key jams angrily into the lock and your mother shoulders the door open. The room is as you expected--- everything white tinged with grey and sand in between the sheets. You rush to the thick curtains that hang over the sliding glass door leading to the balcony, and you shiver as cold air touches your skin through the glass. The ocean growls and pulls and you press your ear to the glass and you shiver again. You quickly unlock the door and slide it open, the cold air rushing into the room. Your mother yells at you as you stand and listen with your eyes closed. Slowly, you step forward and slam the door behind you. The grey sky reflects across the churning water, but the blues and greens still churn. The door opens behind you.

“Shopping?” Your mother puts her hand on your shoulder.

“Sure.”

“Do you want to drive?”

You smile. “Sure”

The car jerks and skids on the ice and you give up on parking, the back tire sitting on top of the yellow line. The store passes by in a blur, crew neck sweaters and surfboards and sunscreen. She tells you she'd buy you whatever you want, but nothing catches your eye. You ask for something anyway, because you know she needs you to.

Freezing rain taps against the glass back in the motel room. Local news hums against the quiet breaths of your mother, lying next to you. You stare at the ceiling and think of your grandmother and grandfather, sitting alone at the dinner table with too much food.

The morning came swiftly and the sky was white. The Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade plays silently on the TV. Your heart slams against your chest as the sound of your mother's voice speaking angrily into the phone. You know she's been crying. You can hear it. You know who it is. It's happened before. She'll tell him to get out and he'll apologize over and over again. In an empty house he thinks he can do what he wants. You think that you've gotten used to it but sniffles in the bathroom force you out of bed and onto the balcony, wrapped in blankets. Tears always roll. This time they sting.

It's the same as it looked before, the beach, only this time half of a white sun hangs over the middle, shining against the caps in the water. The minutes feel as if they melt into hours; your toes are numb against the rough balcony carpet. You turn and crack the door open, but the same sound fills your ears. Celebrations and despair. You face the beach and once again, you hear it call. This time, you heed it. The blankets fall to the floor as you wrap your legs around the railing, pushing yourself up and over until your feet feel free over the side and your knuckles turn white as you hang. Fear has never ceased to exist within you, but

you don't feel it now. Drop. You collapse against the freezing pavement and your bones ache in your ankles. You're okay, though, and you walk to the sand. It is off-white, like the hotel, and it soothes the pain in your legs.

There is a cold wind that runs through the air, cutting and slashing like razors, almost making you want to scream, but you keep quiet as you always do. Behind a small dune suffocated with beige powder, a mound of gold peered over, lurking just in sight. Slowly, you step closer and feel yourself sink further and further with every step. A boy sits alone in the sand, his hands intertwined over his knees. He sees you, and you turn away, knowing that he had seen you staring. He slowly rises and you watch the sand pour over his legs like a waterfall in early spring. He steps towards you and again you look away and start to walk.

"Stop." His voice cuts like the wind did, interrupting the constant chatter of the waves. You turn and look at him, and immediately you wish that you had waited on the balcony. His blonde hair turns gold against the morning sun and his skin is tanned from months in the sun. He is skinny. You can count his ribs and can't help but stare. He walks closer and looks as if he had just walked out of the ocean, the pale blue of the water seeping into his eyes, looking cold to the touch. "Stay." You do.

He introduces himself and you do the same. You both disregard the warning sign and sit on top of the same small dune, listening. He asks why you've been crying and you tell him, unsure why. Never does he interject or even make a sound; only nods. Maybe it is as if he doesn't exist, a figment, and you are talking to no one. Talking to yourself can't hurt you so you tell him everything, like he has already heard it. Like a ghost from the sea, he sits and he listens. When it's your turn, you do the same, and so does he. He speaks of his family, a sister, mother, father, baby brother. He tells of beach barbeques and bonfires, and how he loved the sweet smell of burning wood with the salt of the ocean. Abruptly, he stands.

"Come with me." He grabs your hand and stands up, pulling you with him.

You walk with him in silence, occasionally stepping on the rocks that make up the parking lots and driveways of Montauk, but you choose not to break the peace that you have forged. Soon, he stops, and you stand in front of the remains of a house. Cedar shingles lay on the ground, surrounded by mounds of ash and fallen wood. Little of the foundation stood, and long pieces of metal sit rusted over old furniture, blackened and burned. Again, he speaks of his family--- mother, father, a sister and a brother.

Gone.

Burned in a house fire while he was away, down the street at the candy shop. There is no emotion in his words, but this doesn't surprise you. You tell him that you're sorry; he tells

you that's what everyone said. Now they don't say anything. You close your eyes and breathe slowly, and he says that he still likes the smell of burning wood and the ocean, but now it's different. It's memory and love.

You tell him you love him.

He tells you that you don't.

"Go. Go to your mother. You love her. Tell her." Tears begin to roll again. He's right. She's crying too, here with you. You want to thank him, show him how you see him as a part of yourself, or nothing at all, but you turn on your heels, scraping against the rough ground. You walk, then you run. You run and feel the ache of every step and the whipping wind against your frozen cheek. Remembering the streets back to your motel is easy; forgetting the way there was different. You don't know how long you've been running, but the stinging of your feet help you guess. Soon you're pounding on your door without an answer. Room 54. You wait, and every second makes you want to look and see him again, his hair gleaming against the sand and his eyes staring deep into you. She is here. Your mother opens the door, her face red and swollen. I'm sorry, you say, even though that's what everyone says. You needed to mean it, and now, you could.

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