There was a person lying on the side of the interstate. It was the last thing I needed, really. I only had a few more hours left to drive before I hit California, then I would surrender to my family like a prisoner turning themselves in, chains and all. I thought I may feign ignorance and add another *tick* to the list of things that keep me up at night, but as I drove closer, I noticed something was off.

The desert was sweltering; my dashboard claimed one-oh-five. My sweat glued clothes to skin and the steering wheel numbed the pads of my fingers, forcing my hands to take turns. The dusty horizon blurred like runny watercolor paint, the artistry so shaky that even Bob Ross would admit to its faults.

Despite it all, I never expected to see a woman fused to the asphalt.

The dusty Nevada road had faint yellow medians and bushy pale shrubs clinging to life under red, slanted slopes of cliff sides. There hadn't been another car for miles. The woman was lying face-up, eyes wide, between the dirt and the rumble strips, those pesky indents that shake the truck like a white woman thrusting her salad container to get the dressing even. I pulled over with the truck bed jutted out into the road.

She didn't look well; I guess that's a given. Sweat drenched her lilac blouse to royal purple, jeans dark as night, and tangled black hair sprawled across her face and stuck to her cheek. Her skin was waxy, wet, and half absorbed into the tar. Her hands looked like Sabrina's, scraped cuticle beds and fragile fingertips that used to puzzle-piece into my hips. She was still as a doll, but then her mouth moved.

"I'm melting," she said.

I scratched the backside of my dad hat, the front inappropriately reading '*I heart MILFs'*, and tugged at my ponytail.

“I’m sorry to hear that.”

“It’s okay.” Her voice was almost drowned out by the wind.

“What happened to you?”

“I got tired and laid down. I watched the stars, and then I watched the sun scare them off. Then I couldn’t get back up.”

“What’s your name?”

“Angela.”

“Mine’s Nicky.”

“What are you doing all the way out here?” she asked.

I could still sketch out the way Sabrina’s lips told me to leave. The corners twitching. Guilty chewing. An awkward smile that revealed her left dimple for the last time. She pursed them, hesitant, and whispered my nightmares. I didn’t know anyone in Vegas, so I had to turn myself in.

My destination was faint images of retold stories, like when aunt Anabelle cooked the turkey for seventeen hours and the inside was still raw, or when someone forgot to store the leftovers so Rex ate the green bean casserole whole, or at my older sister’s wedding when dad sobbed so hard they had to send someone to buy tissues mid-ceremony. It was funny, they said. I bet it was.

“I’m driving home,” I said.

“I wish I could go home.”

“Where are you from?”

“Rio Del Mar. It’s south of San Jose, right where the Pacific Ocean takes a bite out of California.”

“You’re pretty far.”

“Not far enough.”

“I thought you wanted to go home?”

She smiled. “I can wish for both at once.”

I got a lukewarm, half-crumpled water bottle from the floor of my car and poured it on Angela’s arm. It simmered and steamed like a boiling soup. I took a hard plastic flier that some gym solicitor stuck under my wipers and wedged it where her skin met the ground, but it got soaked like a receipt in the wash. I tried to lift her with brute force, but she slipped through my fingers. There were no insides, no bones, like she was made of butter. She trickled between grains of sand and the rubber indents of my tires. I sat beside her to catch my breath.

“Thanks for trying,” she said, her voice even softer. “It’s not all bad. It’s kind of comfortable, like my body can finally relax.”

I was a little jealous. It might be nice not to face my family. To not disappoint them with the vacancy on my chest where they stapled a missing Christian poster, a missing sister, a missing heterosexual, a missing second daughter experience because I was selfish enough to love women, and foolish enough to choose a woman like Sabrina.

My ex and I spent nights grinding sweat into each other’s skin like we were trying to fuse into one. I drank her, snorted her, shot her concentrated molecules into my brain to realign it like a chiropractor snapping a neck. The high never lasted. I guess I understood Angela when she said she wished for both.

“What time is it?”

I checked my watch. “Five-thirty.”

“I feel different. Maybe it’s slowing down.”

“That’s good. Why were you walking out here, anyway?”

“I worked in Vegas for a long time, but the more I worked, the more I got jealous of the desert. It could be dry, harsh, inhabitable, and no one could force it to change. We have to adapt to it, not the other way around. Without thinking, I just ran away one day, into the red rocks, the Saguaro cacti, the Joshua trees, the Mojave heat, and the candlelight sunset. I was free. I missed my old life, so I followed this road last night, and that’s how I ended up here. I thought I had grown strong and adapted, too. But here I am, a puddle.”

“You’re melting, but you’re not even scared. That seems pretty strong to me.”

“Can I be honest with you?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m a little scared.”

I left Vegas with the clothes on my back and seven different warning lights on the dashboard of my pickup truck. It was defeat, resignation. I saw the sky get swallowed by the horizon. I drove until my legs died and the mountains turned into oceans. I watched a woman melt into the ground. And here I was.

I took her slimy hand, or what remained.

“I’ll carry you in buckets. When night comes, all the stars will come back. You’ll cool off, and you’ll breathe and breathe, and you’ll rest in a soft bed. When the sun returns, even if it took half of you, three-quarters, a quarter, you’ll still be alive, and you can try again.”