

"You haven't come to visit in a while, Grace. How long are you going to keep your sister and I waiting?" says my mother as soon as I answer the phone.

"I'll be there tomorrow, Mom. I just forgot about it this week." I reply carefully.

"Alright. We miss you, you know. Be safe and don't be out too late. And bring Ryan with you tomorrow - I haven't seen that boy in weeks. Anyway, I love you. Take care!" she finishes.

I stand there, and let my phone hang from my fingers.

I don't know how long I stay in that position, leaning on the kitchen counter. My mom's words replay in my head several times, echoing and hammering at my skull as I try to breathe evenly.

I pick up my phone again, with trembling hands. I type out my message quickly and succinctly,

I'm sorry Mom, but something came up. I won't be able to visit tomorrow. I'll check my schedule and see when I can come over. xoxo Grace.

I pinch the skin on my arm viciously, trying to anchor myself here. I feel like I'm slipping away, even though I was never really centered to begin with.

I cover my face.



For the first time in a few months, I draw myself a steaming bath.

I don't exfoliate my skin.

I don't comb my hair beforehand.

I don't even remove my makeup.

I use the unopened bubble bath my sister, Olivia, gave me last Christmas, and feel a twinge of girlish delight when it fills the tub with the most luxurious bubbles I have ever seen.

I try to wade in the cramped little bathtub because it lets me pretend it's much larger and nicer than what I know it to be.

I feel the tension seep from my shoulders and I lay still and enjoy the silken heat of the water.

But it grows cold all too soon, and the bubbles have become small clusters that collect at the edges of the tub.

I don't want it to end, but my brief reprieve from my day vanishes as if it had never existed.

I continue to sit in the tub, and goosebumps start crawling up my arms.

My breath starts to quicken.

I don't move, and for the briefest moment, I eye the hairdryer on the bathroom counter. It's off, but it's plugged into the wall and it's right there and -

I cry.

I struggle to pull myself out of the tub, stumbling, and collapse onto the cold tile floor of my bathroom.