**Long Distance**

**A SHORT SHORT STORY**

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I WISH I could promise that if you walked away I would close my door to you forever, that I wouldn’t linger in the moment between your turning away and my locking up—it’s like that millisecond during takeoff when your seat has yet to catch you and you know how it feels to be weightless. I admit that even without reason to hope, I would continue to leave the key under the mat and the front-porch light on, to listen for the sound of your car pulling into the driveway, though I would never admit this.

I would habitually check the mail for your letters, which used to arrive sporadically, often conveniently on rainy days. Despite my best efforts, I would bump into you among ordinary objects: coffeepot, toothpaste, Wrangler jeans, popcorn, making my most routine days painfully full of you, yet equally empty. These would be my stumbling blocks, painting bruises up and down my shins.

Sometimes I lose track of you, and I am left with the confused desperation that comes when looking for a reserved seat in a dark theater. I search for your face in crowds at the airport, scouring those gathered at departure gates. Though I am constantly awaiting your arrival, you always seem to be leaving. I find it troubling how much more pronounced your departures are in my memory, as if arrivals and departures didn’t come in matching pairs, like socks.

With every door that opens, I look up, half expecting to see you walking over to me, carrying my coffee just like on the winter Sundays we spent together. Slowly, I am realizing that I can’t affectionately call them “the good old days” because they are the exception, not the rule. Sometimes I hear myself saying, “On Sundays we used to read for hours,” when it was more like, “One Sunday we read for hours.”

I am afraid that you’ve made up your mind to go for good. You keep up the conversation just enough to fill the empty space as you awkwardly pull on your sweater, your winter scarf, hat, coat, and gloves, your bag hoisted onto one shoulder. You wait for me to show you the door, as if you are a stranger and don’t know where to find it yourself. You lean in to kiss me because that is what we do when we say goodbye.

I watch as you gradually coil in on yourself routinely, mechanically, like a snake tucking itself away for winter. Sometimes I am afraid that you are inviting me into indifference, the limbo that exists in airports and elevators, to become one of those old friends you don’t see or talk to often but you still call “friend.” You forget to let me know that you made it home safely.

You call me on FaceTime tonight, stoned out of your mind after working yourself into the ground; you rarely reserve much of yourself for conversation these days. You stare at me with a stupid smile and rosy cheeks.

“You look nice,” you say.

I laugh because it is how I buy time when I don’t feel like forcing conversation—an attempt to leave enough space for you to say something more. But you don’t.

“Do you want me to let you go?” I ask, expecting you to insist on hearing about my day first.

“In a second.”

My stomach plummets. I offer you these outs, and it stings when you take me up on them.

Maybe I’m just being hormonal.

“Are you going to hang up now?” you ask.

“No, you have to.”

“Okay, bye.”