

“Cause today I drove through the suburbs, and pictured I was driving home to you.” I belt the lyrics, my throat gasping for precious oxygen. My lungs a tank longing for air, *how does Olivia Rodrigo do that?* The next few lines come easier, I reach a cuss and skip right over. These headphones are a blessing, I no longer fear my parents in the other room. Forbidden songs are news of the past! I hear a distorted sound, muffled by the blasting lyrics of my favorite song.

I pause my spotify on my smart-phone, the case is new and hard to grip, smelling of plastic. I wince, wishing the odor would disappear. Sometimes I almost wish it were scented to match its vibrant lime color. Removing my worn down blue headphones, I respond to the muffled noise I assume was the voice of a human, “What is it?”

“Tori, Please come downstairs!” Mom shouts from the bottom of our stairwell, the tunneled form of the walkway creates an echo to carry the sound. I shuffle across the planks of my wood floor, subtly fidgeting with my sweater. The woven material is soft on my hand, I wrap it on and off my index finger. Just as I grab the copper colored door knob and turn it to the right, I hear the sound of something squeaking. Startled, I flinch. I attempt to turn the door knob yet again, the squeaking sound reappears. How silly that I had been frightened by a door knob! Ignoring the obnoxious sound I step out of my room and bask in the golden yellow light of the hallway.

It takes my eyes a while to adjust to the combination of sunlight and LED lighting that illuminates the hall. My parents often tease me for never turning on my lights, they find it funny that I live like a vampire, my blinds drawn shut and my light switch facing down. I have the most awful comebacks so I always say something like, “So what”. In response- lame..

Once my eyes adjust I follow my mothers call, cascading down the door-lined halls, to the right my older brother- sorry, *sibling's* room. They recently transitioned to they-them pronouns and my family and I are still adjusting to applying the non-binary specific terms when referring to them. My feet move in muscle memory, accustomed to the stairs my friends call steep. Once I reach the last step I grasp the railing, breaking the room down with my eyes, categorizing the walls, the photos. Something is off, something has been moved. This room is different, I can tell. I drag one foot in front of the other, walking as slowly as I can trying to absorb the room. The photos are still on the wall, the coffee table still houses the same frames and lamps. Then it hits me! The lights, the blinds are shut closed, the blinds are *never* shut. My parents love the outdoors and ever since we planted our new garden my mom looks outside 24/7. She says nature makes her feel free, for me it feels that nature is mocking me. The life of a plant is one of ease, they don't have to deal with talking to people, keeping secrets, going to school, I step forward, freed from the mocking of the flowers. The blinds are a shield to my pain, but the shield is two ways. It also protects others from my jealousy. Sometimes I feel like others live lives of bliss, my early period, my first grade hold back. It feels like a joke, like I'm a character of a sitcom, a cruel comedy with canned laughter after my every move.