*“No, no, this is on me”*, she says, pulling her purse from her bag, refusing to let me even think about putting money towards our lattes, a shared need for coffee having bought us together in a city which we both do not know how to speak of what we feel towards it, and I do not know how to speak of how I appreciate our shared time together.

I have never been too sure about Philadelphia, never felt as if it were somewhere I could belong, even for a short period of time. As an outsider to a country that I already feel unable to call my own, it has always seemed too loud, too scary; too much like a secondary version of New York but with more of a bad rap, the sound of police sirens carrying on the breeze every time I step foot outside. My mother would always tell me it was somewhere that if I wasn’t careful when I came home, I’d be missing an arm, leg, or my driver’s license and wallet. It is to her great surprise that after this trip I am still in possession of all the above.

My counterpart for this chapter of the trip has never been too sure how to feel about Philadelphia either, as she thinks it does not quite feel like a real city but cannot place her finger on why- and we discuss this at length. Is it the roads not being quite so busy or wide? Is it the people, the accents, the almost-too-sparkly mirage that covers the city-that-isn’t-a-city during both the day and the night? Is it the lack of obsessively high buildings? There is something about Philly that she puts on par with Houston: it is an almost city that gets given the name of one the same- and it is not a dislike, perhaps, but a confused wondering that plays into why she feels this way.

If before these moments of confusion with her on street corners you had asked me if I loved Philadelphia, I would have gritted my teeth in a firm no. It is to my family’s amusement that if I am asked now, I would tell you that I have left half my heart in a city (that is not a city) that I claimed for so long to hate.

I digress.

In precise measures, after walks and after shared moments of peace in the sun, at least half of my heart sits in the corner booth of the *La Colombe* coffee shop on the corner of Penn Square, across from the Masonic Temple (with what she told me had far too many types of arches for one building), and directly next to a plaza filled with brightly coloured tables and sleepy commuters sipping on their Starbucks. It took a good couple of google searches for us to both agree on this locale, but the moments of quiet as we chose made it worth it, mutually furrowed brows over phone screens as we squinted in the first of few sunny March days.

Inside the coffee shop itself (where it is learned the hard way, that a small measure of vanilla cannot be added into a latte), my heart sits wrapped in a tan trench coat, cradling a cup that should have been made with oat milk (but of course, was not), and sharing a muffin with her. Orange and cranberry crumbs litter my lap and the floor as we try to figure out where to grab napkins from to make a little bit less of a mess. There is a quiet sort of intimacy in sharing a coffee shop muffin stolen from a hotel breakfast with someone, cutting it in half with the end of a long-handled spoon, scraping and sharing, sitting and chatting.

I did not think I could love a city, but perhaps I can love an emotional attachment to a cornerstone coffeehouse, filled with conference-goers and the aroma of $5 cups of brew. Perhaps it is easy to leave your feelings somewhere when a conversation has spiralled on so long that it feels as if I’m wrapped in a warm thread of comfort, offering up the love for a moment that keeps me smiling for hours. Maybe, it is easy to say that my heart has been left in Philly, a city that is not a city, in a coffee shop where I could not pay, and we could not shut up- and despite the wondering of if I will be able to return, I think that it is safe to leave my heart there, wrapped up in napkins and stored for a later day.