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English 1 Honor

17 March 2022

My home is with you

"Just make some friends", my health teacher responds as she gives me a pitiful look when I only asked to do the project myself. I didn't understand why I needed someone else to get it done, considering that my partner was always absent or arrived towards the end of class on the days we worked on projects. I do all the work anyway and have perfect scores on the previous projects. *"Just make friends?"*, It was the same response I was continuously told, and it makes me wonder why I try to explain why it's so hard for me to talk to people, because out of everyone, *I* should know why.

I sighed to myself and picked up my school bag from under my seat to leave, I didn't want to be the last one in the classroom and my next class is quite a walk from the main building, *"If only it was that simple,"* I wanted to say, "Yeah, ok."

I am aware, as I step into the programming room, the last class of the day, that the majority of the people here are supposed to be living the high school experience, including me. I have been reliably informed by society that post-high school anxiety is entirely normal and that we should expect to feel somewhat scared after transitioning to the "best" years of our adolescence, but I don't feel so different now from how I felt in elementary school, or middle school, or on any other day since high school has started for me. I've moved now, and it's nearly a new year. Although it feels like everything has changed.

I moved away from my home, my few friends, and the majority of my life leading up to the year before COVID. I felt like I could only experience that once. I had done it before. I had grown up and been inseparable from the people I hung out with every day in middle school which, again, I naively thought I would spend my whole high school year with them. Until I had to leave, our connection was forgotten even then, and months have passed. I'm sure it would happen once more. And for someone who becomes anxious in basic interactions, I dreaded high school. I felt out of place. I was in what was supposed to be the best years of my life, but if this is what the best time of my life is, I might as well end it. An overwhelming feeling of utter hopelessness made way for thoughts that no fourteen-year-old child should have.

The following week, my parents had informed me that we would be spending Christmas break in what I had thought would inevitably be behind me. I couldn't help thinking about it all week. I had created a detailed plan and extravagant lists of items to bring and planned every day after and leading up to the trip. It was around midnight when I pulled into what was going to be my old house, sold away cheaper than its value. I had gotten out of the car feeling chilly and numb. My screentime was at an all-time high over the past 48 hours than the whole month. I had been crossing over several states, but I was doing nothing but reading, playing Animal Crossing, and listening to music.

For the past 30 minutes, I'd been watching the milliseconds on my phone, nervously waiting for dismissal. Today is the last day before the break for my friends and I had been sitting in my car, wondering if randomly showing up at their school was a good idea. Three minutes left. That's good enough. I hopped out of the car and started walking alongside the sidewalk to the school building's side door. I put my hand in my pocket because winters felt below freezing here. I pull out my phone to check their location. I decided to find the person closest to me on the

map, Magnolia. I had been introduced to her by the rest of our friend group, not long after I had started middle school. I had texted her earlier, pretending to talk about the “weekend plans” I had come up with to make my story more believable. The bell rang. As if it prompted me, I began to sprint down the hallways of my old school. I fled up the main stairs and went past what was supposed to be my homeroom with Magnolia. I couldn't find her anywhere. Had she left already? I frantically pulled my phone out and texted her, asking where she was. I ran to the front of the school building and started to walk to the buses as soon as I had caught sight of Thania, also in my friend group, and we had known each other since the start of middle school. I could hear her yelling my name at me like it was a question. She caught up to me before I could attempt to do something spontaneous, like pretend like I didn't know her.

I turn back around with shock, “YOUR HERE?!!”, she practically screams at me.

I grinned, “Heyyy”, I said it so nonchalantly. Almost as if I hadn't just driven seven hundred miles, 28 hours across eight states, to see them, but who's counting? She threw her arms around me and hugged me. We almost lost our balance and fell onto the grass. I was basically being crushed, but it was comforting in a weird way. The weight of coming back and being here. With them.

We didn't have to say it, but we all knew. We knew what we'd found here. Or, at least, I knew. I'd found it. I'd found them. There was no big announcement. No extravagant cliché plan, I thought I would have to use. It was just us. I realized that they were a greater comfort because there is comfort in having a home. A place, people, a piece of literature. Somewhere you know you can always go to. Somewhere, you don't have to be anything because sometimes normal is something brought out. A thing you put on society makes you wear it to be accepted. Seeing them again after what felt like years felt like coming home. I didn't even realize I had already

forgotten what home feels like until they reminded me after being apart, after all, living in different locations isn't ideal. Being amidst a global pandemic, being in a different part of the country, or even being as far as Pakistan shouldn't change that. Both people should try to find a way to make it work in the chaos of life. I can confidently say that most of the people with whom I am close, I don't see physically on a regular basis.