

“No Blow Zone”

Emma looks out the window at the Missouri River for a moment longer, after the prospective client has turned away. Trees cluster along the bank separating the apartments from the slow flowing river. They had been the lure to draw her to Riverside. She feels it even then, a dual sense of belonging and longing. It's in all that green space.

He asks about the train. “Oh,” she half-laughs, regaining herself. “It's a no blow zone. A *very* quiet area.”

They move on with the tour, drifting through empty rooms ripe with the scent of fresh paint and plaster. Their footsteps are the first to echo on the new laminate and leave a trail of dirt, like breadcrumbs. She switches lights on and off as they walk through the units, making their way back to the leasing office.

Emma smiles as she shakes his hand, but his demeanor has already moved on—to his next appointment, next apartment. Swiveling her chair around, she slumps. “What a day,” she offers her one and only coworker.

“Right? I'm calling it,” Kristen says, standing from her desk. A torn paper flutters to the floor, swept down by her sudden movement. Tossing her coat over her arm, she half-waves. “See you Monday!”

Emma echoes her goodbye and is left alone, toying with a faux-marble paperweight. She packs up and walks out the heavy door that snaps closed behind her, encasing the clubhouse in its usual solitude. Red tulips bloom by the door, but past that, packed dirt lays in wait of sod. She must remind the crew how urgent that is. Clients

want to see grass, completion.

She stands now in front of her building, the latest to be constructed. Twenty-seven percent occupancy is not a high number. Emma kicks the stray mulch around the door and glances around. No one saw.

Resolved, she marches to her old Honda parked nearby. It's all she has left of home. Flipping down the visor, she pulls out her hairclip and shakes the curls loose. She needs, no, *deserves* a drink. Halfway reversed, Emma breaks the car. Kansas City is still new to her, like a recently bought shirt once worn. Should she try calling Kristin?

Sighing, she shifts her car into drive and is soon on the bridge. Downtown is in view, waiting for the sun to set so it can shine with its own light. Emma turns up her music, brightening as Mix 93.3's top hits play on the radio. She misses her exit.

The roads here are winding. The next turn loops down towards an industrial area. She hits her steering wheel. It honks, but no one is around to hear it. She hits it over and over, not stopping until the palm of her hand is bruised and she's left rubbing at the soreness. Parked on the side of the road as the sun sets, she stays there as night falls in behind it, bringing cooler air.

Eventually the lights of the city reflect onto the river in shimmering colors that soften her into accepting the invitation. She restarts her car, reverses, and begins again.