

Runaway

It had to be done.

From the second she closed the door behind her this morning she has been telling herself this, repeating it over and over in her head like a mantra. She hopes that if she says it enough it will stop her hands from shaking.

She hopes that if she says it enough it will be true.

It had been shockingly easy, she thinks now as she sits on the quiet bus, speeding her along to God-knows-what. She had slipped out of bed, ages before her family would ever be up. She had felt like a ghost as she willed herself to be silent, to be transparent enough to not be seen and to pass through the front door as easily as if she was not solid.

She had been scared to even breathe.

Of course, everything was easy in retrospect. If anything, she had felt even more solid than ever at the time. Every creak and groan of the stairs (*did they always do that, or only now?*) seemed as loud as a gunshot, and her heart hammered in her chest as she unlocked the door with trembling fingers.

And then she was out.

She hadn't brought much with her, she stuffed her backpack with as much as it could fit (which was not, admittedly, much). She hugs the same backpack close to her chest now, as though it could protect her.

She had stood outside her door for just a moment, trying to tell herself that what she was doing was necessary, that what she was feeling was triumph. She tried to quell the dread and panic rising in her chest like the fog that rose with each of her breaths in the chilly morning air.

She turned away from her home and began to walk down her street.

Everything had felt oddly muted and unreal. Light was creeping in on the horizon yet the sun had not yet risen. The sky was dark yet utterly devoid of stars and the light of the still-hidden sun made it look gray and washed-out. It was empty.

It was, she thought with a rueful smile, oddly appropriate.

With each of her steps down the quiet street she found herself hoping that someone, anyone, would notice. Her mother would surely wake up hours too early and see she was gone, and she would panic and throw open the front door and beg her to come back. She would try to stop her.

But no one came chasing after her. And she kept walking.

And now, in the full light of the morning on an uncomfortable bus seat, she wonders why it had to be done. What was it that had been so bad?

There had been the divorce, but she had long ago gotten used to that. Was it the new husband, the new family, the new life her mother had been trying to start that had pushed her away?

She hugs her backpack even closer. Maybe, she thinks, it was the fact that she felt so much like part of the old life, a piece that was better left behind. As everyone moved forward, she slipped further and further back.

Long before today, she had been a ghost in her own home.

And those unforgiveable words, spoken a few nights ago, had been the last straw, *“If you don’t like it here then why don’t you just leave?!”*

At the memory of her mother’s words, she feels a flare of anger in her chest, and she tries to hold onto it as justification, but it slips from her grasp just as quickly as it came, to be replaced by something cold and creeping and heavy.

Fear.

She doesn’t know what she’s doing. And even those words, thrown at her in anger, don’t mean much anymore. Her mother didn’t want her to leave any more than she had really wanted to run away. Her mother who was trying her best to help them move on no matter how stubbornly her daughter stayed in the past.

Her mother who will cry when she wakes up and sees her gone.

That was why it had to be done, she thinks. I wanted her to notice my absence. I wanted her to cry for me.

She feels sickened by herself.

She has to go home. She has to tell her mother she’s so, so sorry.

She holds her backpack and lets the tears fall.