Runaway

I slipped out of my second floor window quietly, being sure not to make any noise that would stir my sleeping parents in the neighboring room. *They wouldn't care anyway,* I kept repeating to myself, trying to convince myself that this was for the best. After I had pulled out my backpack of extra clothes and food from the window, I knew that my decision was final. There was no going back. I glanced one last time into my bedroom, the black curtains flowing in the wind. The bright blue walls and dim light made the room look eerie and dangerous, like something out of a horror movie. It practically was to me. Peering in, I could almost hear my muffled crying again and the yelling, telling me I would never be good enough. I could feel my heart's torment, the pain that never seemed to disappear. Leaving was my only choice. I had no friends who would miss me. They all hated me for my mistakes. I had no family who would care, either. The only one I would miss would be my brother, Cade. I actually felt bad for leaving him, but he was my parents' favorite, so he would be just fine. My mother and father never had time for me, when they did it was always to tell me everything I had ever done wrong. Then, when my pain began to show, I shut myself out, refusing to continue the game they wanted me to play. They hated it, and that only made it worse. Now, I shook my head grimly at the memories and with a final wave of determination, I slid down the roof and landed on the snow-covered ground below.

I trudged through the snow, making my way out of my driveway, which branched out into another series of gravel roads. I wasn't sure where I'd go, but I was going to head straight for the forest and hope that it came out far enough away that I wouldn't be found for a while. I didn't want to be gone forever, just a few weeks, maybe months. I wanted to be gone just long enough to see if anyone would miss me. If I somehow saw that they did, I'd go back. If not, then oh well. My life would certainly be better off that the one I left behind. Crossing the road, I went for the trees and down the steep mountain. I slipped on the snow a couple of times and had to reach out and grasp the trunks of the trees for support. One wrong move and I could be sent tumbling down the hill. It would be disastrous. I discovered there

were large rocks and piercing tree limbs that were scattered out beneath the snow. I didn't even want to think about what would happen if I hit one of those.

I walked throughout the night, the full moon sending bright light through the bare branches above me. The farther I went, the colder it got. I had prepared for this as best as I could, knowing it would be cold. I had left my long hair down, letting it cover my ears and had the hood of my thick coat up over my head. I had thick socks and boots that laced up my ankles and sweatpants that covered them. I was perfectly warm for the first couple of minutes. Or maybe it was hours, I wasn't quite sure, but as the night wore on, it got worse. From where I had fallen in the snow so many times on my way down the mountain, I was practically soaked. My clothes stuck to me, becoming very heavy, and I began to freeze. My hands took the worse of the cold because the only gloves I had were very thin. My teeth chattered and my face was tight from the icy wind. As I staggered on, I lost all feeling in my fingers, toes, and face. The numbness spread across my body and I started thinking of Cade. He wouldn't want me to be doing this. I suddenly felt ashamed of myself. *He needed me and I left him. How could I?* My thoughts rang out startlingly clear in my head and I knew I had to get back. I had to deal with my pain for him. He would have never left me. My dramatic change of heart caused me to try even harder to find civilization. I struggled with my frozen limbs through the snow, but soon after, the land evened out and I began to hear the zooming of cars. The sun was beginning to come up, the bright colors of orange, pink, and red reflected off the blanket of snow. Finally, I reached a road.

I walked along the road for some time, shivering, dragging my suddenly heavy backpack behind me. No cars stopped to give me a ride, so I just kept walking. I'd take my changes getting in a car with a stranger over freezing to death. I paused at some point, opening my bag and changing socks beside the road. Those were really the only things that were dry on me now. After looking around, I realized I knew where I was. I wasn't very far from my house, surprisingly. I cursed myself silently, for choosing the hardest way to go. Because of my silly misjudgment, I was miserable.

The weather didn't get much warmer as the sun came up, but it did improve some. Being out of the deep snow was a huge relief, so I felt much better and it was easier to walk. By noon, I had found my way back home, but was startled by what I saw. A police car sat in my driveway and my front door was slightly open. I slid through the open door, hoping to get up to my room before they noticed I was gone. They usually did bother me on the weekends. I saw my parents in the living room, sitting across from a couple policemen. They were crying. I was concerned, because they hardly ever showed any emotion except anger to me, but I didn't stop. I continued upstairs and saw that my door was already open. Fear filled me. *Oh no. They know I'm gone.* I ran the last couple steps into my room and saw my little brother staring out of my open window. He spun around, his face streaked with tears, and ran straight for me.

I opened my arms to hug him, but instead of hugging me, like I thought he was going to do, he ran straight through me. Literally, straight through me! I gasped and clutched at my chest, panic almost overcoming me. I was more than confused. My mind raced but my brother's yells made me focus again. "Where's Lily! She's gone! Mommy, daddy! Where'd she go?!" My body felt numb, but it wasn't from the cold this time. My feet carried me down the stairs and to the living room, where Cade was standing with my mother and father, as the policemen bowed their heads.

"We are terribly sorry for your loss, Mr. and Mrs. Lane," One policeman began, but Cade interrupted.

"Loss? What does he mean?" He looked back and forth from my parents to the policemen. "Where's Lily?" He asked again. There was so much sadness in his voice, making my heart break. The pieces began falling painfully into place, and somehow, I knew exactly what had happened before they even said it.

"Cade, your sister isn't coming home. She ran away, into the forest, and she… she…." My mother couldn't continue. Tears fell freely down her face. My father cleared his throat and spoke up, his voice cracking.

"She's gone. She's gone, Cade." There was no attempt at making the truth hurt less, so my father made it blunt, even for my six year old brother. Cade stared blankly at them before the realization crashed over him and he ran, screaming and crying, from the room. "I'll go after him," my father whispered, before getting up and following my brother.

"I want to see her. I want her to know how sorry I am. She didn't deserve any of this. I just want…" My mother trailed off miserably. "Where did they take her?"

"The hunters found her and called 911. The ambulance took her to the hospital, but it was too late. They said that it was the cold that killed her, even though the damage done to her head from her fall on the rocks took its toll. It was not long ago, so as far as I know, she is in the hospital morgue. They will keep her there until you come or they hear otherwise from you. Once again, we give our condolences." They paused to give my mother time to ask any other questions, and then politely let themselves out. I watched as they went, my head spinning. I had no recollection of falling and hitting my head. As far as I was concerned, I felt alive. Then my vision suddenly went blank and I couldn't see anything. It was like I went blind. A picture slowly formed in front of my eyes. I saw myself, face up in the snow, blood running from a gash in my head and staining the snow crimson. I staggered back, afraid, even though I knew I wasn't really there. It was all in my head, but I knew the vision had been real. The truth hit me hard, and tears slid silently down my face as my sight returned and I was back in my living room. I felt like collapsing. I had never meant to die.

My father returned with Cade and they sat on the couch together, their arms around each other. They cried together and that seemed to kill me even more. My mother and father spoke in turns, trying to comfort Cade and themselves. "We'll miss you, Lily," my father said. "We are so sorry for everything. It's our fault," my mother continued, and my dad nodded, more tears falling from his eyes. If only they knew that I was still here, listening. A bright white light began glowing in the corner of the room, burning my eyes. A voice whispered inside my head, calling my name, beckoning me. I had seen this in the

movies, I knew what it was. I just never thought I'd be the one seeing it. I took a step forward, and then froze, turning back to my family, mourning on the couch. I didn't want to leave them. My hatred and sadness had led to my death and I wanted to prove to them I still loved them, and that I was sorry. I wanted to prove it to Cade most of all. I walked over to them and threw my arms around each of them in turn. I knew they couldn't feel me, but it was something I needed to do. Pulling away, my voice wavered as I said, "I love you all. Please don't ever forget that. I'm so sorry for leaving you." I turned away and strode toward the wall of light. I glanced back, and saw that my family seemed to be staring right at me. I got this strange feeling that they had heard my words. *But that's impossible,* I thought, shaking it off, but a new confidence seemed to fill me and somehow I knew that they would all be ok. I stepped forward, and disappeared.