

It's been a month, and you're cold and hungry. But you're used to that - after all, it's been a month. During the month your bike has become your best friend, the bike is old and has rust. It barely changes gears, but it's all that has kept you alive for the month. When the cold burrows deep inside you it's your bike that has warmed you up, riding around the block for hours at a time.

You've cried at times, when the rain soaks into your clothes and the cold wraps you up like a blanket and you couldn't kick out of it. At those times you'll almost give in and go home to make amends. But then your father's voice pops into your head, he'd say the same thing after he slapped you, "Don't cry, crying is for the weak." That will make you kick off that blanket of coldness and curl up tighter beneath whatever porch you're hiding under and tough it out for the night.

"You had to leave, they never loved you like they loved Luke," is what you'll tell yourself when you get to wondering if they're missing you. Luke... he was your brother, blue eyed and golden haired. "A charmer," "Adorable," "Precious" are what your parents said about him. And what did they say about you? "Who? Oh...right, her." "Oh, sorry, forgot you weren't home yet." Your brother is the only one who knows where you are. You snuck into his room the night you left and told him "they'll notice I'm gone by first light." And then you left. But you've come back to see him. You know it's a bad idea but you can't help yourself. You still love him, after all, he is your brother, and he has been the only one you've talked to for a long time.

But one night the worst thing will happen, your bike. Your beautiful, ugly, perfect bike will be stolen, you'll wake up in the morning and it won't be there. Just your lock will remain in the place where the bike was. The lock will be cut at the point where the hard plastic and the soft plastic meet. Then you cry. You cry and you cry and you cry, not for the bike but for what it means, you know that you have to go back. You can't survive without your bike. So you will go back, but as you creep into your room you'll pass the place where those people who raised you sleep, the ones who call themselves your parents and say that they miss you for the reporters. But you see the falseness in their tears, the glint of happiness in their eyes. You'll see them there and you'll understand that you were never meant to happen, that you were just a hiccup in the system. So you'll leave and vow to yourself never to return. Not even to steal food or see your brother.

After a day of walking you hit the highway and your legs are so weak by then that you'll fall at the shaking noise the cars make as they rumble past. But you get up in the end and keep walking, because you have to. On your slog through the highway you'll glimpse families that all seem so happy it makes you sick. After you finish emptying the remnants of whatever food you had in your stomach you'll stare at the puddle of yellowish green vomit that vibrates on the shaking highway. You'll keep walking after that, but slower than before. After a day of walking you decide to jump over the rusted metal barrier that runs along the side of the highway into the grass that runs along the border of the pavement.

You'll have the worst night's sleep you've had in a long time, lying there on the itchy grass hearing thousands of cars hurtle past you at 80 miles an hour not caring that you sleep 40 feet away from them.

You'll keep up the trek for a few more days until you cross into Maryland, the sign reads "Leaving Virginia, Come Again Soon, Entering Maryland." You'll sit there and sob. And soon a car will stop and a person will hop out and ask you if you're okay. You'll say yes and start to run because you know the police will be on their way soon.

You'll bed down next to the sign with the feeling of triumph warming you from head to toe. The night will be unexpectedly warm and you'll feel like a turn of events is happening. But like always, things go downhill. Twenty minutes after you lie down the cops pull up in a white car with their red and blue lights making your eyes burn. They'll put you in the backseat of the car and you'll yell at them to let you out but they won't, they'll take you to the station where you'll be asked questions you refuse to answer. So they'll tell you that you have to answer or be put in a home for lost girls. But that seems better to you than going back home, so you'll keep your mouth shut and wait for them to stop asking you questions.

They bring you to the girls home that night. The woman at the door has a sharp nose and glares at you through her spectacles, clearly not pleased to be woken up at midnight. But she takes you to a hot bath. After she scrubs you so much you fear for your skin, she gives you a pair of pants and a cotton shirt and then she sends you off to bed. The cot you're assigned is scratchy but it's better than what you've been sleeping on, so you lie down and pull your hoodie up until you can smell the earth and rain. You'll roll over and fall asleep knowing all is well for now.