

Tomorrow

When the night ends morning is just one step away.

I've seen the colors in the sky turn from dark velvet into streaks of pink and purple before slowly giving way to the soft yellow tones of daybreak.

My family lived on the wrong side of the tracks. The sound of the train's whistle and the hum of its wheels lulled me to sleep every night as a child. I remember the hobos who knocked on the door and offered work in exchange for food, the door-to-door salesmen who worked not just for money but for room and board.

My mother wrung our clothes out of the wring-washer when she came home from work. Her arms struggled to hang up our clothing, paying special attention to ensure our undies were always hidden behind the shirts and pants. All of our neighbors hung up their family's unmentionables in public view – but I was told never to expose ours to the street. I never understood why. I remember as a child that family matters were never to be discussed.

I was only eleven when I was thrown away. No one woke when I gathered myself to leave. I modelled myself after *The Boxcar Children*. I rose at dawn to pack bread and cheese into a scarf tied onto a stick, walked to the train yard near our home and climbed into the first empty grain car I saw. I often came to this place in times of emotional struggle. Because my mother's anger and exhaustion was often focused on me, I found myself in the unwanted role of the family scape-goat. I loved to sing, and that day the song I had to sing was stronger than at any time before.

My song was perfect when I sang into the void. I sang Helen Reddy to transport me from where I was simply a victim. If I had to choose, I would have said my voice was stronger than my words. My words at eleven were insignificant but my voice rang clear and spoke volumes. No one in my family ever heard my voice, my words, or anything other than what they wanted to hear.

I was a disposable child in a world that never wanted me. And I never understood why. I ran for so long, and so fast, that, as a teen, I never looked back.

Every time I tried, my family greeted me with blank eyes and closed hearts. I was thrown out of my brother's wedding, my sister's graduation, and even expelled from my own sense of being for so long that I barely seemed to exist. My mother told me to leave and never come back. This was the first time I listened to her. My mind simply shut down.

I never chose to be a runaway child, the slut of choice to the men and women who bought me with their coins with no regard for social niceties. Something in these people could not be reached. Please don't lecture me about their dysfunctional minds which were never properly addressed or recognized. It is easy to blame the victims, and make the lives of these predators' families more comfortable. But I tell you, regardless of their children or social status, these creatures are broken. Perhaps they are still functional in society. Building their lives, families, stellar careers. I think that's why the secretly broken lurk in the night. Seeking their true peers. We, who share their brokenness, are the only ones who can see their hearts.

Sleeping outdoors as a runaway child taught me a lot. My guard dropped only when the night lost its fight with the morning sun. Light was a sign that I would live one more night. The shadows I existed within would fade for a while. Light also meant that hope lived in the hearts of the other homeless children, who slept, like me, undetected by the radar of society's gaze.

As throwaways, we slept under the same forgotten bridges, in scary freeway nests, and under the drunken bodies of those who fucked us and passed out after their violent lust was sated, forgetting we ever existed. They hated us for being there when they awoke, with their heads stuffed with cotton and hearts filled with regret. The money they paid us meant nothing. Better to remove the evidence of their behavior than to stare into the faces of the children they had brutalized. Better to turn away than confront their perverted desire in the stark morning light.