

# White Rabbit

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You don't really know what you have until you lose it. All of it. Gone. Poof. Like a bad magic trick, one instant it's all there and the next the curtain closes and it's lost forever. Only there aren't any magic words, or a flourish of the arms, or a black cape or a top hat or a white rabbit or a stupid magic wand.

One day, you're eating a grilled cheese with the crust cut off with a glass of milk in your hands, watching your older brother clean up the dishes and whistle an old song you can't stand listening to, and the next you're watching him walk out the door with nothing but a suitcase and his favorite basketball sneakers. And you never see him again.

That was 7 years ago, back when you were just a kid with only the slightest understanding of what it meant when he walked out of that broken side door and out of your life for good. Because for the longest time you thought he was coming back. *Knew* he was coming back. Like Peter Pan coming back for his shadow, you knew your brother would return home to you. He'd walk back into the house, a smile on his face and a stupid haircut gracing his head. He'd still be whistling that damn song written in the 70's because those days were full of the "classics," and he'd walk to the fridge, move around the orange juice and the mayonnaise and pull out the ingredients to make your favorite grilled cheese.

There was nothing preventing you from believing otherwise.

But then a multitude of things happened at once. You realized that real life didn't end like a Disney movie, and that Santa Clause was, in fact, a fake. You got your first boyfriend and eventually told your parents that you hated their guts. You started paying more attention to the news and realized just how *fucked up* this world really was. You snuck out of your bedroom window and cried over boys and bullies and bad hair days. But most importantly, you realized by the end of it all, that you had finally grown up.

And your older brother who left without a word, the same brother that turned your mother into a walking zombie for months and your father into a cold recluse, was never going to come back.

And that cynicism and that anger and that *fuck the world* attitude lasted for a long time. Too long. Because things stopped making you happy and everything made you sick. And you hated him more than you hated Captain Hook or Maleficent or Scar. And it went from knowing he was coming back to knowing he wasn't to never wanting to see his face again. Because how dare he leave and not say goodbye. He was all you had. And after he left things never were the same.

But then you graduated and you went to college and you realized that those high school days of hatred and resentment were just a phase. And you hadn't, in fact, finished growing up. Because you had friends that made you laugh and watched movies that made you cry (and took classes that made you cry too but at least it made you feel something.)

And you looked back in those old photo albums—when you went home for Thanksgiving break only to have your dad burn the turkey and your mom laugh so hard she couldn't breathe—and you saw the photos of your family when they were the most complete. And you saw the smiles and the laugh lines and family road trips to the Grand Canyon. And for the first time in a very long time, you let yourself miss him.

You miss the music he'd blast through his speakers, even though you'd bang at his door and slap him and push him if only for him to turn it down a few notches. You remember waking him up early on Saturday mornings, when he'd sink deeper into the sheets and you'd tickle him until he'd acknowledge your incessant presence. And you can't believe you could have ever forgotten those after school snacks, that perfect grilled cheese that he made the best—the sandwiches he always said he made with love even as he packed his bags to go.

And because you remember, because you let yourself miss him, you can feel a weight lifting. Because now you want him to come home. You *need* him to come home. But you don't know for sure that he will. And because life is no longer about absolutes, there's room for something more.

Instead of knowing, instead of hating, instead of forgetting, you hope. You pray, you wish, you dream that one day he'll walk back into the door—probably with an ugly beard that you'll make fun of him for. And you'll latch onto him never letting him go. Not again. Not ever.

And you know now that, that hope, those happy dreams and those birthday wishes, are all you've ever really needed. Because the magician always pulls the rabbit out of the hat, and Peter Pan always finds his Wendy. All because there is someone who believes in them.