

Don't Leave

“So,” Liam’s math teacher said, running his hand down his beard, “If the value of ‘X’ is equal to—”

Liam grimaced a little, the pressure building right behind his eyes. The realization hit a moment too late, the high-pitched screech catching everyone’s attention. It came a few short seconds before the wave hit, giving people enough time to pay attention. Glass shattered and the lights flickered. Everyone in the classroom jumped down to the ground, covering their faces and screaming. People stumbled to their feet and started rushing out of the building, Liam rushing out the door at the urging of his instructor.

The parking lot was panic. Liam focused, opening his mind to listen to the surface thoughts of those nearest around him. *“Where’s Hannah? —I gotta call my mom —Do we need to call the police? —Just in time to get out of the science quiz!”*

The dozens of student voices all called out in panic as teachers filed them away from the building. Liam focused into his own mind, putting defenses up to focus on the world around him. With so many chaotic thoughts in the same place would overload him if he wasn’t careful with his ability. Satisfied that final period was over, Liam snuck away from the crowd to the student parking lot.

Jumping into his car, Liam drove off before anyone could question him. Whatever had happened at the house, it was enough to send out a massive wave of energy. He opened his mind and sensed ten or eleven news trucks already getting wind of the incident and heading straight for the school. He just hoped that people wouldn’t trace the cause back to her. They’d met in that creepy, old house. He and Emily each arrived for something different, but both wanted to get away.

He'd come for silence, to clear his mind for a change and not hear everyone else's thoughts beating against his own brain. It was back when he was still learning to control his power and mind reading was never an easy gift to use. It threw off his focus in school when he was younger and made him easily irritated when someone was trying to talk to him. In time, he learned to control the power and eventually block out thoughts when he concentrated. In his junior year of high school, he had developed more ability than he'd thought possible.

Emily had been running to get everyone away from her. She was a psychic who could move things with her mind, but Liam had called her a mover. Telekinesis was such a labor to say for an eleven-year-old. Her ability was harder for her to control, even after years of practice. She was susceptible to mood swings that could very quickly turn violent.

Turning the car, Liam broke slightly when he sensed a police car coming from the opposite direction. Pulling aside, Liam watched the three squad cars and brushed against their minds, making sure they were only going to the school to control the students and not try and find the source of the incident. It would take them hours to even understand what the event meant.

The wave was something that happened when Emily couldn't take it anymore. All of her energy, all of her contained emotions, would be released all at once and shoot out in all directions. Liam had seen it many times and once he'd been close enough to take the brunt of it, breaking his wrist. It was so bad that Emily didn't go to high school like Liam. She preferred solitude and her books as opposed to more social forms of learning. Emily didn't even go to the doctor. Just talking about it made her so nervous that things

would start breaking before she could even leave the house. As the last cop car passed, Liam pulled away from the curb and turned toward the abandoned mansion.

The house was an old, Victorian building with a porch that went around the entire house and a tall, round tower. The paint was faded green and chipping away, with the shutters hanging at odd angles and some of the shingles scattering the lawn. The house had been abandoned in the seventies and left to crumble, rotting since before Liam could remember. Half the town had forgotten it was there, so he figured it was the perfect hide. It was far back in the woods, away from the town and, most importantly, away from people.

Liam parked his car in the grass and rushed up to the abandoned manor. Every window of the house was shattered outward, bits of glass sprinkling the lawn. He ran over to the door, throwing it open. “Emily!” He called out. “Emily!”

Rushing up the stairs, Liam accidentally ripped the head off the floor level banister. He tossed the wood aside, flustered, and continued running up the steps. The house was theirs, but only because squatters required no legal paperwork. Emily spent all of her time here, hiding away from the world except for the occasional escape to shower at Liam’s house. Traces of Emily were everywhere in the house but damaged now.

The posters Liam had given her to put up on the wall for her birthday had been shredded by the wave. Her drawings were scattered, some more damaged than others, but most in good enough condition to see the playful characters frolicking along the torn pages. Her bed had been turned over by the blast and bits of the bizarrely fashioned wallpaper were scattered on the ground. Liam had joked that it reminded him of the décor

from *The Yellow Wallpaper*, but after a few years of isolation, Liam feared that might have been happening to Emily.

“It broke...”

Liam turned and saw Emily sitting on the floor with her knees together. They were the same age, but she seemed much younger when she was afraid. Skinny and lean, the young woman cowered in the corner. She was wearing a black top and dark colored pants, smeared with dirt and tattered. A bit of her shirt had been torn off at the waist and tied around her arm to bandage a cut from her last explosion. Her raven black hair was hanging limply around her face, but Liam could tell she had been crying. He rushed over and set a hand on her shoulder.

“What happened?”

“It broke,” Emily whispered again, her voice ragged and weak. In her hands, she was holding a small, ballerina figure. Liam looked at her and noticed the rest of the charm bracelet was lying there, pieces scattered around her ankles.

“It was my mother’s,” Emily said. Liam took off his coat and put it over her shoulders. “It was my mother’s and I broke it. I just got so angry...”

“Hey, it’s OK,” Liam said. He reached out to her hand, but she jerked away. “Let me in, Em. Let me help you.”

Emily nodded and set her hand down. Liam took her hand and opened his mind only to her through the touch. Thoughts were rushing through her brain, faster than usual and abnormally violent. She was angry, upset, scared and confused all at once. “*Why did she leave me? She said she’d be right back. Why didn’t she come back? SHE DIDN’T COME BACK! Freak...Freak...FREAK! No one wants you, you monster. No one will ever*

*want you! Kill yourself and be done with it! Just end it now and stop making other people suffer because of you!”*

Liam ripped his hand away and took a few deep breaths. Emily was quiet, any anger masked by her apparent calm.

“It was all I had of hers,” Emily whispered, “And I broke it...because I was angry again.”

“Shh,” Liam whispered wrapping his arm around her shaking body, “I’m here...”

“Why didn’t she come back?” Emily asked. She burst into tears and buried her face into Liam’s shoulder. Liam only held her closer and let Emily weep on his shirt. It was ugly, unrestrained crying, but Liam knew she wouldn’t cry if she didn’t need it. He held her and rubbed her arm softly. She dropped the ballerina and wrapped her arms around his neck. “Don’t leave me, Liam,” she sobbed. “Please, don’t leave me...”

“I won’t,” Liam promised, shaking his head. He held her tighter and she continued to cry. “I won’t...”