

When there's no answer, my earlier assertion and confidence begins to vanish, ignoring my desperate attempts to cling to that meager amount of courage. .

I look around, trembling with anxiety.

Relief sweeps through me when I see that his running shoes are gone from their usual place outside the door - he's on a run.

So I decide to sit down on the porch.

And then I let the memories flood me.



The first and last time I went on a run with him, I wore new gym clothes that I knew showed off my stomach. That was also the day I got deep purple, Ryan-shaped bruises on my hips.

He was teaching me a lesson, he said. I would be getting too much unwanted attention otherwise.

I understood. Until a broken rib moved me back home for weeks, with Ryan visiting daily to make sure I recovered. As if he wasn't the cause of the problems, but the solution.

I thought I knew better.

And I thought we got better.

He had moved on.

He never again laid a finger on me to hurt me, other than my occasionally bruised lips and sore thighs.

It became good.

Except that "moving on" wasn't moving forward. It was accelerating backwards.

Stealing cigarettes was okay.

Breaking into his friend's houses was okay.

Hooking up with other girls was okay.

Until it became her.

The one he longs for now, over everything and everyone. The one that makes him forget the thrills of stealing and breaking and entering and cheating.

The one that makes him forget about me.

The one that makes him use his bare hands to break apart wood fences to reach the one who can give her to him.

I know the danger of her seductive call.

I know the all-consuming power her addictive allure holds.

And I hate her.

But I hate him more.

For hurting me. For using me. For finding her and no longer needing me.

I get up suddenly. The adrenaline rushes into me and the confidence comes back, fired by this new emotion that's erupted inside of me.