

"I'm running away from home, and this time I'm never coming back" cried Aaron, my seven-year-old little brother, who came stomping down the hallway of our Texas ranch home.

"Humph. Whatever!" I said...or at least in my head.

His tears made pathways down his dirt covered face. I was nine and knew already that running away was pointless. Out in the country in North Texas, there are farms and fields for miles and nothing but a few pecan or oak trees to climb.

You just have to sit there and be mad, and that can get boring fast. Been there, done that. Besides, he probably deserved whatever my mother had gotten onto him about...probably for the dirt on his face—gross! Anyway, did he want me to get involved? Why was he telling me

this? Summer vacation had just begun, and our parents were making a quick trip to the store to get some groceries. I sat down at the piano and started practicing the music for my next piano lesson.

"I'm serious! This time I'm going to build my own house out in the woods, hunt wild game, grow a garden, and buy my own car..." said Aaron rambling.

"Ok, WHAT is the matter? What happened?" I asked. If I didn't ask, he would keep telling me about running away and not actually do it. An afternoon of him walking around the fields on our six acre

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# This Time We're Never Coming Back

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Challenging Children Through  
Imagination

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property would be a nice break for me.

"Well, mom... (Sniff) said that I was supposed to...um...clean out the hamster cage...and and...it wasn't my turn...and she just said do it because it smelled like dirty hamster...and it's not fair because it's not my turn, it was yours, and and she just got all mad because I said I wasn't going to do it!!"

"Ha ha, it was my turn though," I said. "Oh, I'm sorry she got all mad, that really does stink!" Though I would have loved to avoid touching hamster poop, I was moved by his cries for justice.

"You know?" I said, "I completely agree, this was unfair and we should run away. I will go with you, because you will never survive on your own. You don't even know how to work the can opener." (Until we could hunt game, we will have to settle with canned food.) I was bored anyway.

"You get the clothes, and I'll get the food! Hurry! We need to be gone before they come back!!" I cried. "Oh...ok! I'm going! I'm going!" said Aaron scrambling to his room.

I walked into the kitchen, flung open a cabinet door so hard that it hit the cabinet beside it and looked earnestly for pioneer food that would last us for a few meals. Looking....looking... Two lonely cans of stewed tomatoes stared back at me. No wonder our parents went grocery shopping. I grabbed the two cans and the can opener. Then it occurred to me, are we really doing this? Are we really running away? For how long? What if dad was going to get the movie I asked for? I pulled weeds for over an hour for that movie! It was a sacrifice I decided I was willing to take. I was doing this for my brother who I loved, but...I loved my parents too. What if they worry? What if they call the police!? They would! I better write them a note. Maybe my mom would tell Aaron how much she loved him, and we could

watch the movie, and everything would be better!

“Ok, Aaron is you ready yet?!” Let’s go!” I said finishing the note and standing it up on the kitchen table by the vase of Indian Paintbrush flowers I had picked that morning.

*Dear Mother and Father,*

*Aaron and I are running away. Not sure how long. I am going because he is very sad, and I need to help him or he might die on his own.*

*Love Juliet*

*P.S. I love you both so please don't get me in trouble.*

*P.P.S. If you are really scared, you can find us in the cow hut.*

We left the house and crossed into the field blanketed in grass as tall as Aaron and I. The grass, partly out of being so tall and partly out of being too dry rubs together in the wind to make a sound identical to the very poisonous diamondback rattlesnake. And it isn’t comforting to know that it could be a real rattlesnake as much as it could be the grass and wind. We were silent during our walk. It was a walk of pride. We were going to live out on our own for quite some time, and not many could do that. Not even our parents, I’m sure.

Our neighbor owned a lot of land for his cattle, and right behind his barbwire fence was a tiny cow hut made with rippled sheets of aluminum. As long as their longhorn cattle were on the ranchman's other fenced pasture, Aaron and I would pretend like this was our fort and had played in it the last few years. We knew we probably weren't supposed to trespass on their property, but I never thought much about

it. There weren't any cows around today so we did what we always did—got down on our stomachs and squeezed under the barbwire. Aw no! My hair caught on one of the prongs.

Aaron beat me into the hut. There was a small doorway to this place only large enough for one cow to make it in a time. It was a lot cooler in here than out in the blazing sun.

“I'm hungry,” said Aaron. “Yeah, me too,” I said. We sat in the sand. This would be our shelter while we planned our travels. I wondered if I was too old for this game.

“Stewed tomatoes?” I asked. “Naw, I'm going to start making arrows to hunt wild game,” he replied.

“What game?” I asked, “Do you know what game even is?” “Sure. It's buffalo” he said with a smile.

“Have you ever seen a real buffalo? No. And zoos don't count.” I was doubting our trip. This was boring. Then something hit the side of the hut and fear struck my heart. *What was that?*

“Aaron did you just throw a rock at my hut?” I asked. “No!” he said. “BANG”...something hit the hut hard causing the metal walls to ring. We both scrambled to the other side of the hut, crouching into a ball. “Shhhh...” I was shaking. I was panicked. We were both very nervous, because we knew that this hut was also target practice for the older boys who liked to shoot their bb guns and we would be caught on their land. I peeked outside of the hole. There beside the hut was a huge, black longhorn rising up his leg to kick the side of the hut once more. There were more longhorns heading right towards us. I knew why. The sky was black and the clouds were low in the sky. When this event was about to happen, the animals *always* knew first. A tornado was coming.

Tornadoes in tornado alley where we lived came in a heartbeat, almost without warning. It could be

sunny one minute and tornado in the next. I came with Aaron to protect him not thinking I would actually have to. Now I really would. CRACK....Boooooom! The thunder and lightning had started as were some large raindrops, which I could hear pelting the hut. The cows were crying in angst. I knew they would try to come in the hut. What would we do?? I was on the verge of crying, and looked over at Aaron. With bright white eyes full of fear he looked at me; speechless. One horn on those longhorns could be three feet long. They stood as tall as my daddy. The black longhorn stepped in front of the hole to the hut. I could see his legs. His huge knobby knees were larger than my hands. Then a snort. Worse, I could hear the wind pounding down the trees. Hail started coming down littering the ground with snow pebbles and pounding on all sides of the hut. The wind began to pick up the roof where it wasn't nailed down.

“Don't move,” I told Aaron. I didn't know what to do. Was mom and dad home? The black cow pushed his head through the door and started walking in. I had to make a decision. I had to protect me and Aaron. Tornadoes came through all of the time and have torn down houses and barns. The sound of the wind howled through the trees like wolves.

“Do what I say, ok Aaron?” I asked. “Ok. I want to go home. I want to go back home now!” he cried. “Get on your hands and knees and crawl out of the hut. I think the longhorns will think we are baby cows and will let us sneak by.” The real thoughts flooded my mind. They could kill us with their horns. I knew that.

He and I crouched down and walked to the doorway. The black longhorn was blocking the door. Very gently, I pushed on his front leg. My heart was pounding out of my chest. To my relief, he stepped back slowly giving us just enough room to crawl out. We crawled out very slowly. Aaron was mooing.

I was proud of him. He was looking down. I was looking up. There were longhorns everywhere! They were running all across the pasture. I looked across that Texas stormy sky and my worst fears came true. Across three pastures was the twister-- a mass of grey spinning in our direction!

“Aaron, move. Move quickly! Move quicker!” I whispered still on my hands and knees. The longhorns were starting to enter our hut one by one. They were all around us. I was sure we would be trampled. If we were still in there, we would have been trapped. Rocks, sticks, and dust flew through air. The sky was so dark that it was hard to see even though it was daytime. Aaron began to cry. Bravery overcame me. I stood up, grabbed Aaron's hand and pulled him to his feet. The longhorns scurried, completely startled at seeing us. We broke into a run. Leaves and dirt were hitting my face. We squeezed through the fence. The twister was getting closer fast!

Aaron was scared and couldn't run fast enough. I needed to carry him...somehow.

“Get on my back” I yelled. The wind sounded like freight trains. It was hard to hear my own voice.

He climbed up on me. He weighed more than I thought, but my hope of getting home safely was stronger. I sprinted across the field as fast as I could with Aaron piggybacking the whole time. We made it into our driveway just as our parents pulled up.

“Juliet!” Thank goodness you are ok said my dad taking Aaron up in his arms. “Let's get inside!” said my mom. They left the groceries in the car and we ran into the house huddling in the bathtub where we always went during a tornado. It was the safest place. “Wait!” screamed Aaron. “My hamster!” He went into his room, grabbed the hamster cage and put him in the bathtub with us.

I was proud. I knew I had saved us. After the storm, we came out of the bathroom.

“Gosh Aaron that hamster stinks,” I said laughing. “You better clean the cage out.”

“Hey Juliet?” asked my dad. “What’s this letter on the table?” “Just a game,” I said smiling at Aaron.