

Never Escape

My eyes flew wide open so ferociously as the beads of sweat rapidly trickled down my face and neck, my heart still beating faster than it had during my run on the treadmill before bed. Before consciousness has the chance to seep in, I have already sprung from the bed, ran down the hall, and made my way into the bathroom. Unfortunately, I often find myself here in these moments, fully awakening only once the top half of my body is hanging from the 10th-story window, peacefully gazing down at the bustling streets of New York City below.

I slowly back away from the window sill and close the glass as I begin to understand where I am, and what I am doing yet again. I often wonder if it'll go away, or perhaps all the therapy has finally cured me, nevertheless, I still have these dreadful mornings. I focus my gaze on the mirror directly above the double bowl sink and force myself to admire the tiny details in my face and skin. Without these little moments of pure bliss and near understanding of life, I'm not sure I would have made it, even all these years later. My brain gradually begins to flood with memories which alter into everlasting and cruciating nightmares, recalling every single exact detail of the *time*. That's all I've ever been able to bring myself to call it, a *time*.

The beginning of the *time* is rather a simplistic story, not very lengthy at all. The overall gist contains facts such as I was 8 years old when it all started, I had been at the mall with my mother, and a man abducted me. I don't necessarily remember much from the abduction itself, just that I was looking in an aisle a little ways away from my mother, I felt someone strongly grab me, a small white cloth covering my mouth and nose, and then I woke up in an unfamiliar place. Although it was certainly an abduction, a case hadn't been officially opened until 2 weeks

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later due to issues within the police department. I later learned that by the time they had finally begun to search for me, I was no longer on American soil.

I don't remember much from the first few weeks of the *time*. I was constantly drugged by whomever the men and women responsible for my demise were, and unconscious a good majority of the time. I recall leaving the United States, only because I had gotten on a boat headed to sea, and stayed aboard for at least a month or so. I believe I had been moved between 3, perhaps 4 reinforced warehouses, 7 different private homes, and an abandoned office building. There were a few others, a girl not much younger than me and her infant brother shared a cage with me in one of the warehouses, and I remember a group of about 5-6 teenage girls being chained to a wall inside one of the homes.

I only spoke when spoken to, and I never made eye contact unless spoken to. I avoided drawing any attention to myself and always did exactly what I was told. I was terrified but tactical. I didn't whimper when slapped, and I ate every scrap of food provided. I didn't know at the time who exactly the people were, or rather why they had grabbed me from a grocery store, but I did know I watched one of the men stab an adolescent boy to death because he had said 'No'. I learned early on that I didn't want to suffer the pain, abuse, and absolute torment that the less obedient individuals met. However, even when doing my best some of the men would come into my cell in the middle of the night to assault me. My neck still bore the scars from one evening when the pain was so unbearable I could not stop my screams, the man wrapped his belt around my neck and pulled. I had fallen unconscious during the ordeal, but I had awoken with small circular cuts around my neck from the belt buckle holes.

By the time I was able to escape, I had been in the possession of these individuals for over 7 years. At 15 years old I knew if I didn't face my fears, they would consume me. I had

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witnessed dozens of murders, endured dozens of assaults, and witnessed hundreds more, endured traumatizing abuse, and somehow found compassion within my soul whilst captured. Just a few months before my great escape, a small girl of less than a year old had wound up in the same cell as myself. She had been rather petite, even for her young age. Within caramelized golden skin, big brown eyes, and a soft innocent smile, I found a reason to be stronger than simple compliance. Before meeting her, I had figured I would be doomed to this destiny eternally, nevertheless, gazing upon those helpless eyes made me realize we needed to escape, more for her sake than my own. I had found myself dreaming of the day we would each be reunited with our parents nearly every night, holding her to my chest so she felt safe.

I never got the chance to learn her name, for she was too young to know for herself. Yet, I called her 'Baby', not just because she was one, but because her big brown eyes reminded me of Jennifer Grey in the movie *Dirty Dancing*. That was until the evening I lost her. It had been a typical day in isolation, up until the mid-afternoon, when some of the men had entered the basement of a home we had been moved to 5 days prior. Although it was normal for the men and even occasionally, some women, to come down and check on us, provide scraps for us to eat, ensure we were behaving ourselves, assault, and whatever other reasons which I couldn't begin to imagine, this particular time I could feel the anger in each step they took.

"She belongs to a fucking U.S. Senator dude, they're looking all over for her. Pablo called and said they have federal marshalls crawling down there in Cuba right now. The family has put millions into finding her, and they will do anything to make that happen." As the men panicking exclaimed their fears, the second man silently stared towards Baby, and the third hunched over in the corner, holding some sort of multi-sided tool. Baby had been laid down for her afternoon nap, and had not yet awoken from her designated place against the back wall. The

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silence illuminated the room for a few seconds longer before what I can only imagine the leader to have said, “This is risky, risky business. You know boys, I got into this game some 20-odd years ago, and I’ve never once been investigated, not even come close to pinning a single disappearance on me. You know how I do that?” I could feel my heart jumping through my throat, and my intestines twisting and turning into tight little balls amongst my abdomen. He allowed the silence to linger for just a second longer before giving a slight chuckle and proceeding to answer his question.

“I’m very careful, careful to choose those who are unloved, those who are poor, those who are homeless, essentially those who will either be unmissed, or those who miss them are too poor to do something about it. Now, I’m not quite sure who blew this pooch oh so very badly, but there's one simple solution. I do not want this girl anywhere near us, and I cannot risk a live transaction with the FBI, DEA, CIA, and everybody else in the governmental shit’s creek on my ass, especially if they don’t even know whose ass they're on yet. All they know, is they’ve linked some cases, and it may be the same suspects.”

Although the other men within the room seemed attentive, it seemed like this boss of the trio was almost preaching to himself. His words were smooth and enticing, and he certainly had an awning charm, nevertheless, his demeanor held aggressive and raged, his musculature strong and defined. It wasn’t until I was admiring his physical physique that I realized I had never seen this man before. The other two were memorable from an assault, and a feeding, but this one in particular had never come to see me. Nevertheless, he was here for Baby.

“Grab her, skin her, sell the organs individually. She’s the least traceable that way, and I’ll still get my turnaround.” His hoarse voice allowed such horrific words to flow amongst his lips as if they were a lullaby. I felt every droplet of blood moving along my veins freeze into place,

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my breathing stopped, and my heart dulled to a final thud, then silence. Every piece of my being had been frozen in time, including my consciousness. I thought nothing, I heard nothing, I felt nothing, nothing but blackness. It was the first time in my life, even in captivity I could only feel blackness.

I didn't necessarily come around until much later in the day. Baby was already gone, I hadn't recalled seeing anyone grab her, or hearing her screams, I hadn't even realized the emptiness of the basement cell until hours later. It was when I heard the faint cry of a songbird in the distance. I took the only strength I had and brought my focal point to the tiny barred window in the top right-hand corner of the area. I thought about the window before, how I could escape and finally live a free life, however, I always knew better than to try. I witnessed over the years what happens when you try to escape, and I refused to allow myself punishment. Yet, this time when I saw the window, I saw how badly I wanted me and Baby to be free. I spent countless nights without sleep, dreaming up ways we could make our grand getaway, and it was all for nothing. Or had it been?

Almost subconsciously, I had made my way over to the 2' wide by 1' high window, placed approximately 6 feet from the floor. I don't remember thinking about it, I just remember doing what I had to do. It wasn't until I was walking into the local sheriff's office did I know what I had done. I calmly explained to the detective in the building the approximate location of where I had come from, how I had been held captive since a very young age, and how I had been lucky enough to find the bars not secured over the window, and it being unlocked.

While explaining my seemingly unrealistic story, I felt as if I had been watching a story bloom inside my head, and I was relaying the script. It didn't feel real, I didn't feel real. Nevertheless, the detective contacted the FBI's missing persons department, and I was identified

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within 80 minutes of walking into that sheriff's office. I was reunited with my parents and assisted in leading officers to the home I had been held captive in, as well as helped locate at least 4 other locations of my holdings. I testified against many of the men who hurt me in court and I began my journey of therapy and healing.

I thought I would finally be ok, and whoever it had been hurting me, couldn't get to me anymore. I soon realized I didn't like large public spaces because everyone seemed suspicious. I didn't like my parents loving me, because they felt like strangers. I didn't like the sympathy, because it made me feel weak and small. Sadly enough, it became evident that I would forever be haunted by the trauma I had endured at such a young age, and for such a long time.

So here we are, it's supposedly over, yet I am still awake from my slumber and run to the bathroom window as if I were to jump. I run to the window because my mind fills with the sounds of Baby screaming and struggling and crying for help when the men come to get her, the sounds of them slapping and grabbing her as her little body thrashes away. I couldn't hear it all when I was right there, at the moment, and now I hear it every single night once I feel comfortable in my own bed. Half conscious, I ran to the window, similarly shaped to that of my escape route, attempting to run. Nevertheless, I will always awaken once I feel the cool breeze against my skin, and I will never truly outrun and escape the horrors. For they will forever live within me, and haunt me ever so.

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