

1.

‘Dear God help me!’ She whispered into the darkness. She was crouching behind a low bush, peering into the blackness beyond. Only few stars in the sky indicated that she was still in this world. The clouds covered the moon this night, so here, away from populace, it was almost pitch-black.

She started doubting whether what she had in mind was a good idea after all. Only crazy people would think up such a plan. But then, there was nothing else left for her. Now or in 20 years she would have to make that move, is she even lived by then. But life was something precious that she didn’t want to give up, no matter what. There was faint hope – better than no hope at all. As long as she burned for freedom, anything less would not do. It would not do at all.

She peered into the darkness again towards the faint light, but could not discern any shapes. If they found out that she was gone, they would send out search parties. Considering that she was locked up securely, they surely didn’t expect that she would be leaving. But she didn’t dare hope for their self assurance. She had to decide now what to do next. She never really thought past the part when she would finally make it outside to fill her lungs with fresh air again. Her only thoughts before were only to escape the locks on her prison. Now she was out and the realisation that she had nowhere to go threatened to choke her. She tried to breathe slowly in and out and in and out just as they taught her in her prison.

Checking for any movement for the last time, she finally turned in the other direction. The more distance that she can put between herself and her prison and the faster it happens, the better. She continued to crouch as she made for the trees. She didn’t dare get up and run in case the moon came out of the clouds, it would light her for all pursuers to see, and she couldn’t risk that, not now when she was almost free.

The tree line was getting closer. She studied this forest from her prison on rare occasions when they took her out into the yard to show her what she could always have if she submitted to their will. She had no intention of submitting however, no matter what they did to her, it was better to die than to submit to them. She used to sit on the bench that was facing toward the other wall of the compound, but from the corner of her eye she could see the forest. She tried to make sure that her captors didn’t see that she was looking at it. They didn’t allow her to look outside; they only brought her out to breathe some air. But she stole glances, trying to discern the best place to hide and the quickest route to it if she were to escape.

She finally reached the tree line, but she didn’t get up, not yet, not until she was deep enough in the forest so that her shape would not be seen darting between the trees. She stumbled over a root and cursed as she tumbled down a hillock. She reached out with her arms, trying to grab hold of something to slow her fall, but couldn’t catch anything. Finally she landed with an oomph and face down on the relatively soft ground. She sighed, face down; again, some things never change. She turned over and sat up, trying to

see from which way she fell down; but in the forest it was even more dark than in open ground. Here even the weak light of the stars didn't reach. The trees towered above her like silent sentinels, spreading their arms up and out, creating a canopy over her head. At least, if it rains, it should remain relatively dry. She entertained the thought of digging herself under a pile of leaves to sleep but decided against it. Perhaps now, if they knew of her disappearance they would not be able to track her, but once the sun was up, her trail would be easy to follow. It was better to keep moving.

She felt around with her left hand and almost yelped in pain, she had to bite her lip in order to prevent herself from doing so. She brought it around for a look, but since she couldn't see, had to content with feeling it with her right hand. Her wrist was sprained; she must have fallen on it when she landed. Awkward, but at least it was not broken, this heartened her. She leaned on her right hand cautiously, and having found no pain in it, raised herself up. She would have to feel her way in the darkness until she could find something that could help her..

After some time, she couldn't tell how long she was shuffling between the trees, feeling her way with her right hand, she hoped that she was not going in circles, she saw faint light ahead – it was a clearing. In the faint light of the stars she saw some plantain plants growing in the clearing. After checking the shadows for anything lurking, she took a few leaves from the nearest plant, then returned to the shadow of the trees where she saw a birch tree and peeled a piece of the soft bark off. She then slid down and leaned her back against the tree.

Plantain was not as good as arnica but it had some properties that would speed up the healing a bit; hopefully the bark would keep the moisture from the plantain leaves from soaking through the cloth which she ripped off from the hem of her dress. Gingerly she brought her left hand before her eyes. It was starting to swell a bit, but not so much that she couldn't do anything about it. She took a firm hold and clenched her teeth before feeling if the bones were all in correct place. She tore a strip of cloth and put on it the piece of bark, then crushed some of the plantain leaves on it so it would give a little juice, then balanced that on one knee and leaned forward so that her wrist remained on one position. It wasn't comfortable, but it had to be done. She then wrapped the cloth around the bark leaves and her wrist as tightly as she could and used her teeth to help her tie a knot at the end. The sharp pain took her breath away and she moaned as her head spun. Breathe, she told herself, in and out in and out. With that done she tied the ends of the remaining cloth into a knot as best as she could, hung it over her left shoulder and leaned forward again to slip her injured arm into it.

She exhaled as the pain faded into a dull ache. After some rest, she could use her left hand again, but there was no time to stay and rest until it gets better, she had to push on. It was impossible to tell how much time had passed; it could be morning from minute to minute. She listened for a minute to get her bearings, somewhere there was faint sound of water. If she could find a spring or a river, it would be good to drink before continuing her journey. It was getting brighter in the clearing while she listened, she glanced up, afraid of pink rays in the sky, instead she saw a full silver moon. The skies had cleared.

At least now she would be able to see a bit where she was going through the thick canopy of the forest.

2.

She knew that she should be running. But instead, she was standing still. She didn't know where she was, but the place felt familiar. There were shapes around her, it wasn't clear if they were trees or people. Just dark shapes in grey light, they were spaced out evenly. And he stood next to her, smiling his easy smile and telling her that it was alright. That she wouldn't be doing anything bad. But to do the greater good she had to hurt them a little.

Then she saw what the shapes were. They were tall beings with muscular arms that ended in long angular nails; in these nails each of them held a human. The humans were unconscious; their heads were lolling to the sides, some to left, some to right. She felt peculiar watching them, like she had no emotion. He kept cooing to her softly, encouraging.

One of the beings, they reminded her of demons, stepped forward with a man clutched between its hands. She felt remorse at that, these people didn't do anything to her, how could she hurt them. It's only a little bit, he insisted, they won't feel a thing, they will be at peace, and you would have done something to help their lives, helped to end their suffering. Come, he cooed. They stepped closer to the man. She didn't want to, but her legs kept moving. Her heart was rising to her throat, she wanted to say that word but she couldn't. He stood to side of the man now, caressing the side of the man's face with a long graceful finger.

His skin was milky; she traced his finger up to his arm and then his chest neck and face with her eyes. He was beautiful. Come, he said softly, his words sounded like a balm on her soul. And then you can fulfil your duty and your desires. You would help a lot of people, end their suffering. His nail pressed into the man's skin and a drop of blood collected there. She shivered inside, attracted and repulsed at the same time. This is what you were born to do, don't you see, don't you feel it? She heard noise; it was coming from beyond the beings. She ignored it and looked at him.

He looked like an angel. Soft wavy hair caressed his ears which looked like delicate carvings, his muscular jaw, sensuous lips that set in just the right position. She heard noise again, it was incessant. It is a warning, she thought. I must get away from here. He was waiting for her to do something, to step closer and seal her fate. The noise again, more incessant it reverberated through her. It's a warning, she thought again, but she was looking into his eyes, they were drawing her in, promising her everything. Yet her soul was screaming inside her to move away, to step towards the strange sound. Just one step, she wondered what it would be like to be even closer to him, to breathe on his neck, to lean into his arm. A warning...

3.

She opened her eyes. The sun was rising in the distance. What a strange dream. She inhaled the sweet air deep into her lungs, savouring the aroma of every single breath. You can never know when you may run out of these. She climbed out of the cramped cave cautiously, it was more like a hole really, but there wasn't much else to hide her for the night. Better safe than sorry. Next to the cave was a small stream. It was there that she came to face with a pair of eyes. It was a fox. The animal didn't run away, instead she looked at her (she didn't know why she decided that it was a female fox rather than a male. She had never heard about differences between the male and the female), then she looked back at the cave and then back, turning her head expressively. Her eyes were intelligent. She didn't move, perhaps the fox will get bored and go on her way. Why don't you go home? She blinked. Then the fox was away. She shook her head and squatted to take a few drinks of water from the stream, maybe she just imagined the fox, and if not then surely she imagined the fox speak to her in her head.

It was a shame that she couldn't take anything with her to carry provisions and water, or at least just water. But if she'd gone to get any of these things before she left, she would have been caught for sure. For three days now she moved at a fast pace, never running, it was better to conserve her energy, running would just tire her out and she would make less distance. Yet in these three days she hadn't heard any sounds of pursuit. Maybe they gave up once they couldn't find her. Or maybe they didn't bother because they knew something that she didn't. Perhaps they were waiting for her ahead. That was more likely, it was not easy to escape, but then why would they not chase her? It wasn't possible that they would still believe that she was in confinement. Usually they would check in on her every day. They wouldn't bring any food, but just check that she was still alive in there. They often placed her in confinement when she wasn't cooperative.

It happened more often than they liked. But then she had already decided that it was better to die than to give in to them, besides she didn't actually understand what it was that they wanted her to give them. The day that she woke up in the compound, she couldn't remember anything. Not even her name. They often asked her name, but she couldn't even answer that question because she didn't know. But when she told them that, they got angry and placed her in confinement. They didn't want to beat her because they were afraid to damage her in case that might result into memory loss, but they did cut her. Many tiny cuts to make her bleed slowly, but when that didn't help they placed her in the small cell. Perhaps they hoped that when she was alone she might start to remember, that is if she was telling the truth about not remembering anything. But solitary confinement was the worst punishment, even if it was them she was talking to, it was still talking, instead of going crazy in her head, trying to breathe and frustrated and not remembering anything. Perhaps it was better not to remember; maybe if she did they might torture her more and perhaps then they would succeed.

She shook the ideas from her mind as she got up. Whatever happens now, she will deal with it when she comes to it. But still, it would be nice to remember her name. She thought back to the fox and the strange words that she thought she heard in her mind. Go home... why not? If only she could remember where, 'home' was.

4.

‘Why do you keep running away from me?’ He asked gently, tentatively. He was so handsome in a black robe with golden embroidery on the cuffs and hem. For some reason it really looked good on him. It looked natural. His eyes were blue colour, like warm waters of a lake. Lakes were usually cold, but his eyes reminded her of warm water. The gold flecks in these blue eyes were tantalizing.

He didn’t come closer to her. She ached for him to come closer, but he just stood where he was, a frown on his gentle face. Perhaps he didn’t want to seem threatening. But then why would anyone feel threatened by him? He was the embodiment of goodness. He radiated light, perhaps if not for his robes, she would be blinded.

‘I hope I didn’t scare you?’ His hands were peaceful at his sides. His lips, although currently down turned in his frown were still perfect. His wavy hair was brown with these gold flecks like these in his eyes. She found power to shake her head, even if she didn’t have power to go to him. She wanted to run into these arms, to drown in these eyes. But all she could do was shake her head so that he could understand that she wasn’t scared.

His lips curled a bit in a slight smile. ‘But why do you keep running then?’ He seemed genuinely curious. ‘It makes me think that you think me bad; I couldn’t bear it if you would think that.’ He trailed off and looked away. She wanted him to look at her again, to see these eyes. It was torture that he was looking away. She ached for his eyes on her again. She ached for his hands, for his mouth. She shivered.

His eyes snapped back. ‘Are you cold?’ He made a step toward her. She shook her head, and then cursed silently. If only she nodded then he would surely be next to her, trying to make her warm. Why for this one time couldn’t she lie? She wanted to nod her head now, but he’d already looked away. However he didn’t step back and that was a comfort. Perhaps if she shivered again, this time she could think before she made an answer.

She wanted to speak, but her voice wasn’t listening to her. And her body didn’t take her commands. It was clear that he was disappointed too. Perhaps, he wanted to take her into his arms as much as she wanted him to. Maybe, but she could not ask. She could not do anything but move her head and eyes. Perhaps if he asked her something else she could lead him to the right answers. Perhaps...

‘I don’t understand...’ It was clear that he was upset, but his voice remained soft and gentle. She wanted nothing more than to just hear him speak again. ‘You run away, and then again you are here. How does that happen?’ He looked at her again, waiting for the answer that she couldn’t give. She wanted to shrug her shoulders to tell him that she didn’t know, but she couldn’t move them. If only he would ask a question that required a yes or no answer!

‘Alright, if you want to stay where you are, it is fine with me,’ she shook her head, hoping that he would understand that she didn’t want to stay where she was. ‘but it would be much more comfortable if you sit down.’ She nodded. She wished that he would understand that she couldn’t move. Maybe if he touched her she would be able to move again. ‘Ok...’ he sighed heavily, and his shoulders slumped in resignation. He moved to sit in one of the chairs. It took him further away from her. Just then as he turned his face away to glance at something, she felt that she was regaining the ability to control her body. But just as she opened her mouth, the whole scene faded away as though the light went out.