

The Bridge

I saw it coming towards me, yet I still didn't move. His rough hand flew across my face, leaving a burning spot where it hit. What else was I supposed to do? You don't rebel against your parents, at least that's what I was told growing up.

"Don't cry," I told myself. I knew he would reply with something along the lines of boys needing to be tough and never crying. Every day, no matter what happened, it was either mine or my mother's fault. We weren't as strong as him, so there was nothing we could do.

Twice. The number of times I tried to fight back. That is also the same number of times I learned there was nothing that would change this. Adults like to tell me that people change, but that hasn't been my experience. His beer-stenched breath, his huge baseball-like hands, his deep, demeaning voice... all remained the same.

Today was no different; I woke up to the sound of glass shattering. Maybe the coffee was too bitter, maybe it was too hot or too cold. Maybe he was just in a bad mood this morning. Whatever it was, my mother was getting an earful of it. As long as I kept quiet, hopefully I could escape unscathed.

The clock read 7 o'clock, so I unplugged it to avoid the alarm going off. My heart kept thumping; I tried to keep from making a noise, afraid he would walk in if I did. Jeans, a brown shirt, and black shoes. These, along with my backpack and glasses was all I needed. The door to my room remained shut, but I was no longer in the room. The window was my escape, my way to slip by unnoticed.

It was 7:08; walking to school would only take 15 minutes, but my first class wasn't until 8. Today was easy, easier than yesterday. My head and arm are still sore, but there is no use holding a grudge. School was nothing special, but it was better than being home. However, it never lasted as long as I wanted. It being Friday meant I would have two days without it as a crutch.

My shirt and shoes were drenched by the time I reached the door. Slowly, I turned the handle and pushed open the door. Only to have it yanked out of my hands from the other side. "Finally," he scolded, tossing me inside. I forgot my dad was off today and my mom worked until 8. That meant it was my job to cook, clean, and tend to him. Lunch, dishes, laundry, then off to my room to hide.

Friday went by fast and easy. However, that was most weekdays. The weekends were a whole other tale; I had no school, and my mother didn't have to work either. The floor was lava combined with eggshells.

"Get up!" he demanded, throwing open the door. "There's stuff to do besides sleeping all day. I jumped out of the sheets and groggily made my way to the kitchen, passing my mother as she cooked eggs and sausage. If I didn't know better, I would have thought they were for me. A granola bar and a cup of water; though not nutritious, it was fast to eat so as not to waste time.

My feet scurried downstairs as I stuffed my mouth with the granola bar, nearly choking as I finished it. We use the basement for storage, but every other day he needs something from here; he leaves it all thrown across the concrete floor. Organize, throw away trash, re-pile it- that was my job afterwards.

KRA-KSHH!

The sound of a cup or a plate breaking muffled through the floor above me. Moments later, my mother rushed downstairs with her tear-filled eyes.

"What happened? Are you ok?" I whispered.

"Yeah, it was my fault; I forgot to let the coffee cool." It wasn't a good excuse for what he did, but I accepted it to ease her. "So, how has school been?" She asked, tossing his coffee-stained shirt in the washer along with a few other clothes.

"Same boring classes, but they do seem to be getting easier."

"That's good. As long as your grades are good, you'll be able to go to any college."

"HA!" he chuckled. "What good is trying when he's a good-for-nothing son?" The sharpness cut through me; he was starting to get upset. "Hurry up and finish cleaning, then run to the store and get some more eggs and bread."

It was only three blocks away from the house, but the soft morning sky made it feel like hours. I always seem to forget how quiet the world can be, but I love the moments that remind me of it.

"Get up!" The deja vu of this morning rang through my ears as I got back to the house. "Get up!"

A part of me wanted to wait outside until he calmed down, but I knew it would only get worse for me if I took any longer. I tried to open it steadily, but the wind broke my pace and slid the door rapidly.

There he was, standing over her. His excuses glided around me, but I knew the truth.

As I walked towards the water, the stars guided the way. The soothing breeze of the night sky calmed me. The thoughts that swirled in my head like a tornado vanished in just a second. The stillness of the night filled my ears, blocking out the footsteps behind me.

I looked down at myself in the water, only to see remnants of someone I used to know.

The bridge, though old in age, stood the test of time. Leading the chaos of the world around it and pushing it through its handrails. Unleashing it onto the dark, unlit path that it led to. The fear enveloped me: do I go back the way I came, or push into the darkness of the unknown?

As I turned, prepared to return to what I knew, the chaos came surging through, passing me to the other side.

I could no longer return to my old ways; if I wanted to live, I couldn't ponder what came before I crossed the bridge. I needed to run. Run away from the chaos that he was. Run away, not knowing if what he did to her was what would happen to me.