

The Great Escape

I was in escape. I didn't want to return in orphanage. I was angry. I was sad. My only friend had been adopted by people who could love him and could take care of him. I should have been happy. But tonight, I would leave this jail. Everybody thought the orphanage was alright...but it wasn't. Most children had lost their parents and wanted to find others. This place was despair. The children wanted love but the women who worked there, weren't here for that. We were a family though, even if it was difficult, because we couldn't grow attached to a friend. Well, we shouldn't. There were always people who wanted a child... so they separated us, we lost a friend and we were alone again, without our brother, alone in this hell. We grew obsessed with the disappearance of a friend. We had this family, and it was all we had.

It was getting late and the streets of London were beginning to darken. Winter was coming. I didn't know where I was. I had left the orphanage because on the moment I didn't know what to do. Now, I was lost in the streets of London, I was tired, I was cold, I was angry and I felt like crying. Tonight, I was really lonely. My friends were not there. I shouldn't have left. I made it to the only place I knew - Hyde Park. I was seven. For many years, I had been resourceful enough, and I did not need anyone's help. I wore filthy trousers and a torn shirt. I was cold but I was used to it. I got to the park and I set on a bench. And I waited.

What could I do? I was a good child. I didn't understand why I didn't deserve to know happiness. I had done nothing wrong. I didn't understand.

But right now, in order to survive, I had better find shelter, and protect myself. I remembered there was a great building, like a castle, built behind trees somewhere in the park. Motivated by the idea, I tried to find this haven, and make myself safe. I soon found it at the end of a path along the trees. It was shining, all lit up with candles. A lot of candles. It took me some time to find the entry. The door wasn't locked! I got in, as quiet as a mouse, and discovered a big hall, with a lot of strange objects. I couldn't see them clearly because it wasn't lit like outside. But it felt warm and comfortable. I decided to explore this place, even if I didn't have any light.

Everything seemed big and vast. I could distinguish surprising forms and strange shapes in the darkness. In particular one which looked like a dinosaur. I had seen dinosaurs in a book at the orphanage once. Suddenly, I saw a door. It seemed to be lit behind. I hesitated. I was certain there was no one but I didn't want to be found and brought back to the orphanage. But behind the door, the light intensified, as if it was calling me. I felt a sort of heat wave, and I knew something extraordinary was coming. My curiosity was aroused, and I opened the door.

My journey began.

When I woke up, I was in a gloomy place. I could feel fresh air on my face. I could hear voices too. They were voices of men. They were deep and muffled as if they were far from me. The floor was moist and muddy. I opened my eyes gently and observed my surrounding. There were rocks around me like those of a cavern. I stood up, laboriously. My clothes were dirty and torn. I think I was slightly hurt because I felt bruises on my entire body. I touched my head to find a wound and I came across a bump. I was confused. Where was I? Bars were preventing me from leaving. Was I in prison? How? I called for help. My voice resonated in this strange corridor but silence was my only answer. I sat down again and tried to remember what had happened. I remembered I had opened the door of the building which looked like a palace. I remembered seeing a dinosaur, a door, a light. Then, it all mixed up. I understood I shouldn't have opened this door. When I thought about going on an adventure, I had not expected that. My body was flabby, and I let sleep come.

When I awoke, I wasn't in my prison cell anymore. I was in a wooden box, but I felt it moving. I thought I was in a sort of carriage. I had seen carriages in books, they were luxurious, clean and showed the power and wealth of its owner. But this one was completely different. The inside was pathetic, and dirty. The seats were torn and gave off a putrid smell. The roof was torn too as if a wild beast had been in here. I was afraid. I didn't understand why I was here while I was only a child. Suddenly, I had a start. On the seats, in front of me, there was someone. In the darkness, I had not seen them. Surprised, I saw this person was a woman. A lady? I didn't know. But she was dressed like a lady; with a pretty purple dress, a shiny collar and a great hat with a ribbon matched her dress. I didn't dare to look at her in the eyes because

children in my condition didn't have the right to speak with the upper class unless they asked you to. So I waited. It wouldn't be polite to speak first, and I wouldn't know where to start. We waited, silent, for a long time, before she finally said:

"I think you don't understand why you are in this carriage with me, right?"

Her voice was husky and deep. It was the voice of man but she was a woman. I felt this lady wasn't a good woman and she was wicked.

As I remained silent, she repeated her question. For ten minutes, I imagined all possible reasons why I could be here. It was not fair.

"I'm not sure, "I finally said". I would like to understand why I am here and if I did a bad thing..."

"You are a good child. My employer has a mission for you. If you accept, you will have a lot of money. But if you refuse...no" she added with a smile, " you won't refuse."

She seemed confident. I began to panic. I didn't know where I was and why I was here. I should never have left the orphanage. Now, I was in trouble and in company of a creepy lady who worked with a mysterious boss. I guessed this man wasn't a gentleman and he must be like her. I refused to take part in their little plan. I knew if people in high places were interested in people like me, particularly poor orphans, in the end, there was no happy ending. It was a game for them. We were the useless burdens of society, but they still needed us poor and desperate people to execute their dirty deeds and carry out their machiavelic plans while keeping their hands clean. I was not going to do it. Some of my brothers had been in troubles like that. I wasn't so stupid.

I decided to escape. Without blinking, I jumped out the carriage and landed on the floor. It hurt. The carriage continued without me. I managed to get up, painfully, and chose a path at random. Despite the bruises, I ran. Ran. Ran.

I finally stopped by a post. I was out of breath and sweating copiously. When I got my breath back and calmed down, I looked around and I discovered a beautiful city.

It was amazing! So different from London. The houses were colourful and tall. Bridges connected different streets and there was a great cathedral. When I bent down, the sun gently caressed my skin and I felt its heat. I understood I had got rid of the crazy lady and her mad carriage. For a minute, I felt safe. But not for long. Where could I go now? I didn't know this city, I didn't know these people and I didn't know what to do. I was lost and beginning to feel sleepy and I hungry.

I thought.

I wanted to discover where I was, but for the time being, I dreamt about a bed, a soft bed. I took the old tablecloth I had kept in my pocket and I covered myself. I checked it covered my torn clothes, my bruised arms and left for the city.

Smells and colours were different and numerous. Even people were similar to their city. I had arrived at a market place and my stomach started rumbling. I saw a stall of fruits in front of me. The stallholder who worked there seemed to be a good man. He cut a watermelon with a huge knife, and I hoped he would give me a slice. However, when he saw me, he shook his knife and I got scared. I went quickly.

I wanted to cry. I wanted to eat. I wanted to go back to the orphanage. Suddenly, I saw a derelict building. I came in. I wasn't alone. In the darkness, I saw a little monkey, crying. I had seen monkeys in a book but never in real. That one wore a piece of cloth which seemed stained with coffee. It wore dirty pants. It was hunched under a broken table. It didn't look dangerous, so I moved with caution and sat down next to it. After some minutes, it joined me. And we slept.

In the morning, the little monkey was gone. I was sad. Had I dreamt? I thought I had at last found someone who could my friend without being taken away from me. I stayed and hid in the refuse. And I waited. Why? What for? I didn't know. But I waited. After many hours which felt like days, I began to feel weak and sick. I knew I wouldn't survive. I wanted to die anyway. Why had I opened this door. Leaving the orphanage was a bad idea I had lost every little thing I had.

Then I must have dreamt. A strange dream.

The monkey came back and it talked to me:

“Why are you sad? Are you lost?” it asked to me, with benevolence.

“ You are not real. Monkeys don’t speak and don’t have clothes”, I said. But still, I asked, indifferent: “I don’t know where I am. Where are we?”

“ Where are we?” It repeated, surprised. “Are you a stranger? According to you, animals don’t speak? so a monkey who looks like a monkey but speaks is not a monkey... and if I have no clothes I am not real.”

I was dizzy. Its speech didn’t make any sense. I was pretty sure animals didn’t speak. I was sure, I wasn’t in London. Everything was so dazzling.

Why me? Only an orphan, without parents or money. I had not done anything wrong, it was not my fault. Yes, sometimes I stole to survive and I didn’t feel remorse. But it was only small things. Only to survive. One day, I would stop it, I promised. Everything.

“Do you want food? I have it, you know.” Was that monkey still here?

“Why would you help me? You don’t know me”, I retorted, exhausted. He came closer and whispered in my ear, softly:

“When I saw, you, I was afraid because I didn’t know if you were here for me or not. But I’m not afraid of you anymore.”

“Why?”

“My skin is expensive. And I am one of the last survivors. My family was killed by unscrupulous and greedy men. I’m hiding from them, and I do everything to survive. And you? Where are you from, stranger?”

“I live in London, in England.” I told him, suspicious. I didn’t want to tell him too much about my life. After all, I didn’t know this monkey. And it asked so many questions. But he said he had food and maybe he could help.

“I don’t like humans. You are a greedy and wicked race. You want to enslave monkeys who wear clothes or animals who speak when they shouldn’t or anything that is different to what you know, and you don’t hesitate to kill for that.” He stopped, and thought for a while. Then he continued. “But you, are still a child. You don’t seem to be already like them. You embody innocence in the world and its hope. With youth, monkeys like me, can be saved. Follow me, little fellow. I will take you to a place where you will be safe.”

I stood up. My legs were shaking. But determination and hope gave me strength. I followed him, praying to trust the right person this time.

“Do you have name?” I asked, with curiosity.

“Call me Monkey,” he just said, curtly.

The night folded in but the streets were shining thanks to candles and lights in the houses, which shone far away. I couldn't see though, but Monkey seemed to know the way. I felt safe with him even if I knew it could be wicked. But all I wanted was to eat. To be safe and to eat.

After a few minutes, I understood we weren't in the city anymore.

“What is this city? Are we next to London? I asked, worried.

“This city is the heart of Violence and Sin. I don't know your town, “London?”. Here, evil and corruption reign. People want to be rich and powerful. But the only way is cheating and lies. Now, I must find a place where you can be safe. Strangers don't get a very pleasant welcome here. This world is dangerous for someone like you. Be attentive.”

“Can we stop ? I'm tired,” I whispered, desperately.

“No we can't” was his only answer.

“Why?”

“Follow this way to the end, you will find my friend”, he answered, and disappeared once again.

I felt sad. Monkey protected me from danger. It was a good monkey. I followed the indicated way, slowly, with my last strength.

It was long and dark, but I finally arrived in a forest and saw a light behind trees. It reminded me of the Palace in Hyde Park. But this time, I had someone to meet. Monkey's friend. There wasn't anybody, but I decided to wait for him next to a tree.

One hour.

Two hours.

He wasn't here.

Monkey had lied. His friend didn't exist. Or had I dreamt?

I had decided to go, when I heard a song. Not a soft song or lullaby, but a wild song, guttural and primitive. The ground quaked and animals quivered. And the mysterious friend appeared. He was tall, strong and could weigh almost a ton. His skin was black and his head shaved off. Behind his mask, he had brown eyes and a carnivorous smile. Then, he had a spear and for clothes, animals' skins.

I was petrified. This person couldn't be THE friend.

"Who are you?" He asked with contempt.

"My name is..." I didn't have name. "A little monkey helped me to escape from the city of sins. I am an orphan. The monkey asked me to find you...so..."

He was great. And dumb. He didn't speak. He stared at me. I felt uncomfortable. Silence.

"What was the name of this monkey?" He asked.

"Monkey", I just said.

"Follow me."

I followed him. When I was next to him, he gave off a strange smell: forest, nature, perspiration and...blood. BLOOD! How? Who was he?

After some minute of walking, we arrived, and...HORROR!!

A camp. With dead animals. Everywhere. Blood and rot. I vomited. But because I didn't have food in my stomach, nothing came out. I chose to avoid questions and set down on a trunk, next to a fire. He gave me meat and we ate in silence. It was delicious.

"Listen to me. My name is Odor. I am a hunter. I am a pariah. I was excluded from my group because, according to them, I was too dangerous and too ... carnivorous. It's right. I like war and blood. But because of my vanity, my entire family was killed. Since then, I've lived alone in this forest. Here, chaos reigns. A prophecy says that one day, a Child will soothe our world and peace will reign again. Who? How? I don't know but your arrival it is no coincidence.

“You think I am THE child who will save everyone?” I asked, almost amused.

“Yes, it is the reason of your arrival.”

“Not me. I can’t help you. I am nobody.”

He looked deep into my eyes. His look was intense and penetrating.

“You have lost your mind. It is impossible. I’m not a hero. I’m an orphan”, I felt I had to add.

“For many years, I have tried to save this city, my parents. But I have failed. You won’t.”

He disappeared. Not again.

I felt a warm hand on my left arm. A voice. The voice of a man, shaking me. I looked around. I was back at the Palace. The man was holding a candle but the morning sun was gently caressing my skin. It felt warm.

So this was all dream? Of course! Talking monkeys... What a crazy dream. The man told me I had to leave before the Great Exhibition opened and that he would have to clean my mess. He seemed quite upset. On my way out, I looked around. There were giant machines, strange object everywhere. No dinosaur.

Then something caught my attention. Next to an invention -a sort of big carriage with a giant metallic door- was a portrait. Probably its inventor. I knew this dark skin. I knew these brown eyes. I knew this smile. I knew those eyes looking deep into me. Then I noticed, on his shoulder... a monkey. I slowly tried to read the name of the machine:

“The Time Machine”.

THE END