

## The Escape

By Josie Neher, grade 7

My feet thumped hard against the cold, wet, yellow grass as I sprinted across a field that seemed to never end. My younger brother, Mason, followed right behind me as we explored our newest temporary community. We had just moved to yet another small town that neither of us had bothered to learn the name of since. As we were exploring, the night crept up on us, almost too quickly, but we decided to stay out longer. After all, our parents wouldn't even notice that we were even gone.

We roamed and roamed for hours on end, and around three in the morning, Mason pointed out a large stone bell tower with a lamp that oddly was still on, shining brightly against the dark night. Intrigued by the light, we both stared and nodded at each other declaring a race to the large tower. Being much taller than Mason had given me an advantage, but the playing field was evened out because Mason had such long legs and he really put them to use back in our last town. Mason was on the track team and was one of the fastest. Within the first twenty-five meters of our race, Mason already had the lead, and I decided to let him keep it so that I could make up for breaking his headphones in the car the day before. Once Mason reached

the bell tower, he stuck his scarred pink tongue out at me and acted like he had been waiting for hours. Now that I was within throwing distance I quickly bent down, ran my large calloused hands through the wet mud, and threw a baseball sized chunk at Mason. Lucky for him he moved just far enough away and it barely skimmed his light gray hoodie.

Still a bit out of breath, we both searched for a bench to sit down on, and it wasn't long before I found a ledge on the top of the long sturdy tower. I hollered for Mason to come over quickly and pointed to the top. Before I knew it, Mason was already climbing the rough brick walls up to the ledge above. Being the responsible older brother that I was, I gladly joined him. Once we had reached the top we examined our bleeding hands because, boy oh boy, that brick wall was rough. After we had compared cuts I looked out of the tower and noticed a huge lake that I mustn't have seen before. I was quick to point it out to Mason.

After sitting still for a while, and fully catching my breath, I jumped off of the tall ledge and headed over to the water. As I got closer to the railing boxing us in, I noticed that there were large rocks perched at the edge, and without hesitation I hopped the metal fence and made my way to the sturdy enough looking rocks. I'd been sitting on the rocks for nearly twenty minutes when

Mason scurried towards me, almost falling twice; I was surprised he hadn't joined me earlier.

We looked up, admiring the beautiful night sky together in silence. That's the thing about the small towns in the country that I love; being able to see the night sky. I used to run away at night to get away from the monster that was my father when he was in one of his "black moods" as Mason and I called them, and I loved seeing the stars. The scenery here was so beautiful. I hoped that one day we could beat our record of staying in a town, which currently is only about eight months.

My family and I have never been able to stay in one place for long because of my father's black moods, and my mother's inability to work due to her mental instability. I used to love my father very much but as I got older he became angrier and angrier, and I just happened to be his punching bag. I wasn't the only punching bag in the house. He'd sent my mother to the hospital many times before as well, and that's why we moved so much, to escape the police and hospitals. I was just glad that so far, my ugly cruel father hadn't touched Mason. I would never let that monster touch him, he didn't deserve it. None of us did.

The sun was beginning to rise and I'd realized that Mason and I had fallen asleep on the cold hard rocks. I sat up and peered out at the shimmering lake just an arm's length away. I let Mason sleep a little longer, although we didn't have much time to spare, at least not with the plan I'd come up with. A few short minutes had passed when I pinched Mason to wake him up; luckily I only had to pinch once. "Come on Mason, we have to get going before it gets too late in the day." I whispered in his small ear.

Mason had a confused look on his face as he whispered loudly, "Go where? I am so confused right now!" I chuckled at the dazed look on his face with his short brown hair all puffy. "Adam, what in the world are you talking about?" Mason asked, not so quietly.

"Well," I began, "you know how we've had to move around so much because of dad? Well last night I had the best idea. What if we just don't go back? That way, we never have to deal with that monster and his black moods ever again!" I was nearly shouting by the end, full of anger and anticipation at the thought of escaping our nightmare of an existence.

Mason just stared at me with his mouth hanging open. He stayed like that for a few moments until he slowly nodded his head and twisted his body

around to walk back to the tower. *"I'm finally free!"* I thought to myself, as Mason led the way back to the top.

The two of us were almost at the railings at the top of the steep hill down to the lake when we heard a loud booming voice call out, "ADAM! YOU GET HOME RIGHT THIS SECOND OR YOU WON'T MAKE IT TILL TOMORROW!" My body tensed as I realized who was calling. I turned to Mason and spoke as quickly and quietly as I possibly could.

"Mason, don't think, just do! Okay?" I didn't wait for a response, I just continued because we didn't have much time. "I need you to run down to the water and swim as fast and far as possible and once you get back on land, just start running. You're good at that. Just pretend that it's a race. I need you to go as far away as possible. I promise that I'll be right behind you. Okay?"

He nodded and I pulled him in for a hug and squeezed him tightly, not knowing if it would be the last time I would ever see my little brother. Mason sprinted down the hill and dove into the crystal clear blue-tinted water as I slowly made my way to the top of the hill with tears streaming down my face. I took one last look at the beautiful water and climbed over the fence;

my only protection was now the short distance between me and the edge of the water behind me.

As I approached my father, I thought I could just turn now and make a run for it, but before I could even turn my head around, my father's large hand came fast, balled up, heading towards my left eye. I've been hit so many times that the blow barely made me move. I instantly tensed my whole body up and dodged the next few punches aimed at my face. I chuckled as I looked at my father's frustrated face. He wasn't used to being challenged! A tiny smirk appeared on my now bruised face. I used his frustration to my advantage. I balled my fists, mustered years of bottled-up rage, and for the first time fought back, landing a punch right on the monster's nose. My monstrous father was caught off guard and I instantly made a run for it after connecting with another solid shot that sent him reeling.

My feet pounded against the stone, then the grass, as I sprinted towards the water and dove in, swimming away as fast as I could. When I came up for air just a few short seconds later I heard a loud splash. My father. I thought that I'd escaped.

Within less than two seconds I felt a tugging on my ankles pulling me backwards. I tried to kick my father's hands off but I kept on missing. He

was so much stronger than me and eventually I accepted my fate and stopped trying. I almost gave up until I remembered Mason and how I promised him that I'd be right behind him. An electric shock pulsed through my body which made me start kicking my feet again. I had one goal and one goal only: to find Mason again!

I'd kicked aimlessly near my father's face with multiple failed attempts at propelling myself forwards. As I went back under the water with my eyes open, my father's deep dark beady eyes peered into mine. Now that I knew where he was, I went up for air, filled my lungs to the top and went back under to push him down as far as possible. I wasn't getting very far when a second pair of hands started pushing him down as well. Mason. He must have swam over here, gotten tired and hid in the swampy side patches. It didn't matter, what mattered was the monster had no chance of surviving.

Suddenly we weren't forcing anything down anymore as our father slipped out of our grips and began to sink on his own. As if possessed, I swam back to the surface as fast as humanly possible, filled my lungs with crisp air and dove back down, not wanting to miss the light go out of my father's ugly eyes.

Once Mason and I got onto dry land we didn't speak. We simply stared out into the lake where our father's lifeless body was, somewhere in the deep, knowing we were now safe from him forever. It was quiet for a long time but there were sirens heading in our direction; I looked at Mason panicked with the realization of what we'd just done. Mason stared back at me with the same scared look I'm sure was on my face as well.

"I got to land like you said to do and I ran to the closest house and called 911. I didn't know what he was going to do." Mason explained with tears welling up in his eyes. My eyes widened and my jaw dropped to the ground in utter shock. I couldn't believe what he'd just said. I took what we just did into consideration and knew that we would be put in juvie, or worse. I had to tell Mason, but just as I had begun explaining what was going to happen to us, a new thought popped into my head, causing me to pause.

"What? What is it Adam?" Mason demanded as his deep brown eyes poured into mine.

"Well," I began, "we could play it off as self defense." I paused and carefully thought out our options. "Since he punched me and gave me a black eye with multiple other injuries, we could say that what we did to dad was us just saving ourselves." I paused yet again peering at Mason out of the side



of my eye. *"No, that wouldn't work."* Mason didn't look injured except for the cuts on his hands from last night. Almost as if Mason could read what I was thinking he quickly went to go rub dirt all over his small face and scratched it with the little sharp twigs. I nodded in approval at Mason's new disheveled appearance.

There was a man with a booming voice, much like my father's, calling out for Mason and I. As hesitant as we were, we headed towards the loud voice. We walked for what seemed like forever and along the way I asked Mason if we'd really gone this far, his head bobbed up and down in confirmation.

When the man with the booming voice finally came into view, his voice didn't match his appearance at all. He was of medium height and a slight build with short dark brown hair. Behind him was a frail looking woman with long dark blonde hair. As Mason and I got closer to the bell tower I realized that the woman was our mother. As we got even closer Mason and I saw the tears dripping down her long face. Seeing that made Mason's eyes well up with tears yet again. "Oh my sweet little boys!" Our mother cried out between sobs. Mason started to run towards her attempting to tow me

along behind him. He quickly gave up as I was really only slowing him down.

As I was about to reunite with my mother I overheard some police officers speaking to each other, debating really. They said something about not needing to call the ambulance to declare his death. The one with the short brown hair pointed out all of the abuse charges he already had against him, and that he truly wouldn't be missed. I could hardly disagree with that last part. He was my father, but he would not be missed.

As I finally reached the bell tower our mother wrapped her long wiry arms around the two of us. This embrace was different from any other. There was relief, anxiety, fear, and love, all captured in one moment.

It looked as if the police were going to ask me something but then decided not to. As time passed a few more squad cars showed up looking for my dead father. Even more time passed and the officer with the short brown hair declared that my father, my mother's husband and our abuser, was officially dead. The funny thing was, neither my mother, Mason, nor I, were even upset. In fact, my mother and I had to fight the smiles off our faces. I didn't believe the officer when he said that it'd been around an hour since our father's demise. Had it really been that long? It felt like only five

minutes ago that I was fighting the monster in the once beautiful water that's now filled with darkness. Filled with darkness, maybe, but somewhere in the center is a shiny piece of glory showing that it was over and that we won. We truly won!

A smile lit up my face at the thought of never having to deal with the monster that controlled our lives now that he was finally gone, once and for all.