

The Other Side of the Window

by Mandey Sauer

The morning I finally went outside, the sun shone so bright I had to close my eyes. This was my first taste of freedom in months, and it was warm and heavenly. I looked to my left and saw the window I had lived behind for so long and shuddered. I glanced to my right and saw the kitchen window that I had once hoped would lead to my liberation, but ultimately led to nothing more than my opinion that some neighbors aren't nose enough.

My captor had come into my room a few days earlier in a rage. How could these people expect him to pay for utilities and a mortgage when he has so many important things going on? Don't they know he is an artist trying to launch his rap career? Assholes!

I said nothing, I knew when not to speak. He had no talent for rap, but if you asked him, I was holding him back. We were down to electricity and water, and the house was in foreclosure; he was getting desperate. The easiest solution to him would be to get rid of me, but he's not the kind of man to just relinquish control. My situation had become precarious, to say the least, but he had not broken me. My mind was still sharp and defiant, and this was my opportunity for step one. I might not get another one.

"I could drive a cab. It pays cash so we'd have money every day and you could ride with me so you could protect me." Play to his masculinity, he loves that. He looked at me with suspicion. "I promise, I won't ever go without you. You're my knight in shining armor." Stroke his ego, he'll eat that up. He mulled it over for a few moments, but I knew he needed more convincing. "My sister works there and her boyfriend rides with her all the time." I hadn't been allowed to see my sisters or anyone else in months, but he seemed to accept this as the truth. "What would you need to get started?" On to step two.

As we walked, I was taking in the smell of the morning air and realized freedom has a smell. It smells sweet and fills not only your lungs but your entire being. It makes you feel like you could fly away and never look back. Like you could soar above the houses, trees, and clouds, and never have a care in the world. It makes you feel weightless.

My bliss was interrupted by a sharp smack to the back of my head, “Are you listening to me you stupid bitch?” I hadn’t even heard him speak. “I’m sorry, I didn’t hear you.” Another smack, “Pay attention dumbass. I said, when we get in there don’t say shit to nobody. Get done and get the fuck out, understood?” I nodded. I understood that one misstep and I would end up on a milk carton.

We went to the DMV, and I was able to get my chauffeur license. Our next stop would be the cab company where I would need to try to get them to do an interview right then because we didn’t have a phone. As luck would have it, they were short-staffed and more than happy to interview me on the spot.

The manager’s name was Ann, and her husband Herman was the company mechanic. She was kind, spoke with confidence, and asked her questions with the ease of someone who has done this many times. “And who is the gentleman out in the lobby?” she asked. “That’s my husband.”

“Have you been together long?” I could hear suspicion in her voice. “We’ve been married for about 9 months, together a little over a year. She looked shocked, “A year? That’s pretty fast. You’re only 19, how do your parents feel about that?” I need to change the subject, this is dangerous. “My mom lives up north and hasn’t met him yet. My dad died of cancer when he was 36, I was 12.” Subject change successful. After a lengthy discussion about the perils of cancer and young people, I was hired and would start that evening. On to step three.

I knew step three would be difficult, but I couldn't think of a single time that anyone held against their will had ever escaped alive easily. If he caught on, I was dead. Likewise, if my plan failed, I was also dead, so why not? I just had to figure out how to get there.

Over the next couple of weeks, things were pretty good. I was only beaten or raped a few times a week and his fits of rage were short-lived. If it had been a busy shift, he'd lock me in my room and leave. He'd take the money to buy marijuana and 40-ounce bottles of beer and go stay at his brother's house. If the shift was slow, it was a rough night. Luckily, I usually made well over the required amount of money to not be assaulted.

I knew he wasn't spending any of my money on bills and I had overheard him talking to his brother about moving into his basement. He had said that he wasn't sure if I'd be coming with him. That things had been rough with us lately and I spent all of my free time in my room. He figured I was about to leave him. I needed a plan and soon.

A couple of nights later I got a call over my CB radio asking if I would be willing to take two men from the airport to a house about 30 miles north of the city. I knew the fare would be big and it would mean a peaceful night for me, so I quickly agreed.

As we drove to the airport he seemed to be in a good mood. We chatted, and laughed, and appeared almost normal. The men were friendly and engaging and the conversation flowed naturally between all four of us during the trip north. When we arrived at the house, they thanked me and gave me an additional hundred dollars for a tip.

When we started the drive back, the silence was deafening, and I could feel his eyes on me. My body tensed up. I knew I needed to try to defuse whatever bomb was about to drop.

I tried to be casual, “Those guys were pretty nice, huh? They gave me a hundred-dollar tip. With that and the money we’ll make with the fare, you could probably buy a half ounce.” I could hear his breathing getting heavier.

“You fucking whore.” He said it like he was stating a fact and I knew things were going to get bad. “Why didn’t you just pull over and fuck those honkeys right on the side of the road?!” A punch landed on the side of my face.

“I was just making friendly conversation.” Another punch. “You were flirting with them right in my fucking face you FILTHY WHORE!” ‘Filthy whore’ was punctuated with slaps to my face. I continued to drive, dodging hands and insults, never letting off the accelerator. I had to get within radio range, I suspected I hadn’t been the only one making plans.

It felt like I had been driving for hours when suddenly the radio came to life “Cab 3, are you back yet?” He stopped yelling and looked at me. “I have to answer it, or she’ll send the police. She knows I should be back in range by now.”

A shaky hand picked up the mic, “I’m here. I’ll be back in town in about ten minutes.” I set the mic back down and he picked up where he left off. Ten minutes later the hitting had stopped, we were back in a populated area after all, but the sharp words still flew at me like daggers. Words don’t physically hurt, bleed, or swell, but they have a way of becoming an infection. They mentally fester and try to convince you that you are all the things he says you are. You are disgusting, and no one else in the world will ever want or love you. You are fat, your hair isn’t long enough, you don’t dress well, and you’re sloppy. You aren’t as pretty as the other girls he’s dated, he did you a favor; he took one for the team. You are an ungrateful, worthless bitch and a terrible wife. You can’t even get pregnant by him no matter how hard he tries; you have demons in you.

I continued to drive and didn't have a clue how I was going to get out of what would surely be the beating of a lifetime. I began to pray. "Heavenly Father, I know it seems like I only talk to you when I need something, and you said you'd never give me more than I can handle, but what about my mom? She has already buried one child; do you think she could survive burying two? If you could help me, I swear I'll never go back, and I'll spend my days thanking you any way I can. Please, God."

A moment later, the radio crackled to life, it was Ann. "Attention drivers. As you know it is against city ordinance to have a front-seat passenger and is punishable by a \$100 fine and possible suspension of your cab license. The police department just called and said if you have a front-seat passenger, you need to drop them off immediately or you will be ticketed."

I looked at him, "I need to drop you off." He was fuming. "You can drop me off, that's fine. Go turn in your cab and bring your ass back here, I'm not done with you yet." I pulled up to the front of the house and he got out. "You have 10 minutes, don't make me come look for you." He walked away.

When I got to the office, Ann was waiting for me, "What the hell was going on out there? I can see the marks on your face. Tell me what's going on or I'm calling the cops." I looked at her, my face as calm as I could make it, "Nothing. I'm fine." She leaned forward, her bright blue eyes staring into my scared brown ones, and I started to cry.

"He hits you, doesn't he?" I said nothing.

"It's a lot worse than that, isn't it?" I sobbed, "I have nowhere to go, I have nothing, and if I don't go back there, he'll kill me." She put her hand on my shoulder, "Honey, if you do go back there, he'll kill you." I knew she was right, but my plan had failed. I was still all alone and at his mercy. "You're not going back there; you're coming to our house."

I felt a looming presence behind me. A low voice said, “We got you lil mama.” Herman was well over six feet tall, dark-skinned, very large, and muscular. He put his huge arm around my shoulders as gently as a grandmother might, “Let that motha’fucka’ come see me if he wanna put his hands on someone.”

That night I slept in an entirely different room. There was no big heavy lock on the door, I could go to the bathroom whenever I wanted, and no one would beat me for snoring if I dozed off. It was warm and comfortable. I could see Herman sitting in his easy chair, slowly rocking back and forth, a formidable presence even in his own home, but no one here was afraid of him. I felt safe and I was finally free. Step three was complete.

I slept for three days.

If you or a loved one are experiencing domestic violence, you are not alone. Text “START” to 88788, call 1-800-799-SAFE, or live chat online at thehotline.org