

## I'm Next

I screamed as the phone fell, and ran to my room, not bothering to hang up on the other line. I ran past the living room and up the stairs, passing my mom's empty room and the fireplace room- the place where my family had spent so much time before my dad left, and he never spoke to us since. A memory flashed through my mind of my father, and the man on the other line laughed, his voice echoing through the house. A fear crept into my mind- the thought that he was here, in my house. I sprinted up the stairs faster, not turning around to look back.

When I reached my bedroom, I slammed the door behind me, panting and wheezing from running so fast. My hand automatically reached out and locked the lock built into my door knob- it was a habit I had learned from living in our house. I took a deep breath, trying to slow down my body, and I calmly sat down on the bed. Thoughts ran through my head- I was trying to figure out when and why Bruno would murder me, and why he murdered my mother. A warm tear trickled down my cheek, and I wiped it quickly, as if embarrassed that someone would notice. I glanced out the only window in my room, hoping to distract myself. I stared at the busy street with all the cars on it, watching and waiting for my mom's black pickup truck that never came.

I awoke again in my bed, not remembering the recent things that had happened. It was dark outside; the streets all calm and quiet. The

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only lights that were on were the ones by the street, so I could barely see anything. I sat up in bed, my back and shoulders aching from the awkward way I was sleeping. My long hair was tangled in an uneven knot, but I found my brush on my bedside table and yanked on it until it was somewhat less tangled. I managed to find my way to the bedroom door, and I walk downstairs where I got a cup and poured myself a glass of milk. I leaned against the countertop, trying to remember why everything was so quiet. Then my eyes fell onto the phone on the floor, and all the memories that had happened the night before poured back into me. I stared at the phone, not exactly sure what to do. It made a stern beeping sound because I had never hung up on the other line. My eyes became watery, and my knees became weak. I picked up the phone and set it back on its charging stand, then walked back up to my room silently. When I reached my room, I just made it to my bed before I hit the mattress, out cold.

When I woke up, I found myself in a hospital room, with an I.V. attached to my arm, and bright lights shining all around me. My dark curly hair was spread out all around me as it was earlier, and I was wearing a worn hospital gown. I groaned and squinted as I sat up, trying to make out the rest of the objects around the room. A nurse walked in, humming Twinkle Twinkle Little Star. She glanced over at me, and jumped a little when she noticed I was awake.

“Um, hello,” she started, her voice a little shaky.

“Hi,” I mumbled

“Let me... just, go... get my boss,” she stammered quietly as she walked out of the room, not bothering to make sure I was ok or anything. I laid back down in the bed, trying to relax. It was kind of hard to do- it's not exactly easy when you're in the hospital. The nurse reentered the room

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again, but this time there was a man behind her. I recognized the man as Bruno. My eyes widened as he smiled at me.

"Hello Nessa," he said, smoothly. Bruno was wearing black dress pants and a white lab coat. Just inside his coat by his waist I could see a holster. I froze. His old smile turned into a sneer, and a shiver crept down my back. The nurse looked at him weirdly, but didn't do anything about the strange way her boss was acting.

"How are you feeling, Nessa?" he asked me, his voice still cold.

"I'm fine..."

"Oh, really? Then why exactly are you here?" he asked smartly.

"I don't really know..."

"That's not very good, is it?"

"I guess not," I replied.

"Excuse me sir, but the patient is low on the pain medication. Would you mind getting it? Seeing as I don't really know how to do it..." asked the nurse shyly.

"Oh Sue, you should really should have learned how to do these kinds of things by now. Come along, I will show you so I won't have to do it again," he replied, a little annoyed. "You just stay here, alright Nessa?" he asked, a smirk creeping across his face again. And with that, he left the room, the nurse right behind him.

I stared at the closed door, like a deer in the headlights, not exactly sure what to do. At that exact moment, I realized that I had to get out of there. And I had to do it quick. I looked down at my arm, the one with the I.V. in it. How was I going to get out of there if an I.V. was in my arm and there was nobody there to take it out? I couldn't take it out myself- because I might lose a lot of blood and it could be dangerous. But what else could I do?

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Pressure built on my shoulders, and I felt the clock ticking above me, moving seconds closer to when Bruno would come back. What should I do? I could call for another nurse to come and take it out, but she might not want to, plus it might take too long. I looked back down at my arm. It couldn't be that hard, could it? I looked out the window next to the door to make sure nobody was coming, and then pulled off the medical tape that was keeping the needle in place. Below lay my arm with a small tube-like needle inserted in it. I shuddered, then started to regret the idea.

Then I heard Bruno's voice in a nearby hallway behind me, and realized that yes, I really did need to get out of there. Bruno could always find time where him and me would be alone... I looked back down at my arm, then placed my hand on the tube that was connected to the needle. I looked away while I pulled it out... I looked back down. The needle was out! It didn't even hurt! I looked around and found a medical kit nearby. Out of it I pulled a bandage and lay it on my arm to cover up the small hole. I then walked over to the door, and quickly looked out the window next to it. I needed to get out quick. I was running low on painkiller and my arm would probably start to hurt soon. Luckily, no one was there.

I opened the door slowly, trying my hardest not to make it creak. Still, no one was around. I quickly found my way to the elevator, and pressed the down button. Just like a scene in the movies, the minute the elevator arrived; Bruno and his assistant turned the corner into the other end of the hallway.

"Nessa dear, what are you doing up?" called Bruno, obviously a little surprised.

"I um.... I was hungry," I replied quickly.

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"Oh really? Well, you could have just called the nurse!" said Bruno, stepping closer.

"Well, I need the exercise," I said, jumping into the elevator.

"Then at least let me escort you!"

"No no, that's ok," I said quickly jamming the close button. Bruno picked up the pace and started running towards that elevator. I closed just as he reached it. He jammed the down button, but I was already on my way down.

Inside the elevator, I slumped to the floor and tried to calm my breathing. Gosh, that was close!! I looked around the large moving device, and realized I didn't know where I was going. I glanced at the button keys, and watched as the indicator told me what floor I was on. The lit-up button below it showed that I was on my way to the ground floor. I breathed a sigh of relief.

Once the elevator came to a stop and the doors opened, I cautiously poked my head out to make sure no one was there to stop me. Unfortunately, a secretary was sitting at the front desk. And there was another one escorting a tour around the hospital. Another was pushing a patient to the Cafeteria. Gosh, nurses and other employees were everywhere! I had to find a way to distract them....

Just then, the elevator door closed, and started to head back up to the 9<sup>th</sup> floor. I frantically started to push every button on the elevator, trying to make it stop before I reached the floor where Bruno was. Any floor had to be better than the one Bruno was on, right?

The elevator stopped at the next floor, where I forced myself off of the elevator.

"Hello miss! How may I help you?" asked the head nurse at the desk in front of me. She was obtuse, tall, and muscular. She had blonde hair

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that fell just down to her shoulders, and she was probably mid-way through her thirties.

"Um, I was looking for.... the Cafeteria. Yeah! The Cafeteria." I tried to sound casual, but I knew I wasn't really doing a great job. The nurse, of course, saw through it.

"Why didn't your nurse just get something for you?" she asked, giving me a weird look.

"My doctor said that I need to get some exercise," I replied quickly.

"Uh huh. Who is your doctor anyway?"

"Doctor Bruno McClellan..."

"Ah, yes. Seems reasonable of him to send you off, the lazy bum that he is. The Cafeteria is down on the first floor, to your right."

"Thank you!" I said, turning towards the elevator.

"No probe- Oh, hi, Doctor Bruno!"

"Hello Abigail. Nessa," said Bruno slyly. I stared at him.

"How did you know- where's the other nurse"?

"That doesn't matter darling! The only thing that matters is that you have a full stomach, and you are strong and healthy and resting back in bed."

"Well, I haven't gone to the cafeteria yet, so I will just be on my way," I said quickly, heading towards the elevator again.

"I will be coming with you, because I have a bit of an empty stomach too," said Bruno, following me.

"Me too! We can have a big lunch party together!" said Abigail. Bruno turned around and stared at her.

"C'mon! It will be tons of fun! Especially with me there," she said, trying to interest Bruno. She walked closer to his side. She sure was acting different around him.

"Oh, well..."

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“Pleeeeaaseeee?” she asked politely.

“Awkward!! Well, while you guys are figuring this out, I'm just going to leave you alone...” I ran towards the elevator. Bruno ran after me, but Abigail grabbed a hold of his arm pulled him back to her. The elevator arrived, and I jumped into it, this time watching it close slowly as Abigail tackled him.

I stood there in the elevator for a while, soon realizing that I hadn't pushed any buttons on the elevator. I reached out to press the number “1,” but before I could, the doors cranked back open and Bruno stepped inside, Abigail behind him. My hand thrust forward, and together the three of us shot down to the first floor.

The door opened just as quickly as it had closed, and Bruno was the first to step out. I guess he had lost his state of mind to try to follow me, because at the moment it looked like all he wanted to do was get away from Abigail. But poor Abigail, all she wanted to do was get closer to Bruno. And closer. And then there was me. With my long curly dark hair and my ratty hospital dress and my fail of a plan to get out of the big building. I had no chance whatsoever to get out that Hospital. Not a chance at all. But I had to, of course.

I broke out in a sprint towards the front doors, pausing only for a second to let them open, then running through them and out into the late summer night breeze. I then glanced around, not sure where to go from there. Left or Right? Left or Right? I heard Bruno behind me. He had finally snapped back into his normal state, and was making his way out the same door that I had. I had to think. Fast.

I dove behind a bush.

“Nessa!” Bruno screamed. “Nessa! Where are you?!”

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I squatted behind the bush, trying not to move a muscle. He walked towards the bush I was hiding behind, and I held my breath and prayed that he wouldn't find me.

"Nessa! Where are you Nessa?" he screamed. He walked the opposite way, and I let my breath go. He turned back around.

"Nessa?" he croaked.

"Get away from me Bruno!" I whispered, just loud enough for him to hear me. He crept around the bush and grabbed my arm. He brought me out into light, and then set me on the cement in a position that I was locked in and couldn't escape.

"Why would you do this to me?" I asked.

"Do what Nessa?"

"You caused my family so much pain! You left mom. You left me."

"I left your rotten family because your mother betrayed me," he replied.

"So you decided to kill her?" I screamed.

"You don't get it Nessa!" He dropped my arm and turned the opposite way from me, knowing I wouldn't walk away. This was going to be too important of a conversation.

I stood up and faced his back. "Sure I do. You and Mom got married. You had me. You left Mom, and it tore her to pieces. When you saw her hurt and sorrow, you killed her. Now you see my pain, and you are trying to kill me."

My father stood in front of me, unable to turn around. My hand slid quickly around his waist and behind his lab coat to where his illegal weapon lay. I pulled it back and held it against his back.

"Well, you know what Dad? Now you're going to pay."