

The Backseat of a Stranger's Van:

A true story about lost dogs and lost innocence.

I have been asked many times to recount these events. The most common inquirers are the morbidly curious acquaintance, and the local news journalist looking for a heart-wrenching story to fill their prime time slot. Retelling this story has become somewhat tedious, so I decided to share it for the final time in written format.

If you have created a comforting shield around yourself in the hopes of blocking out the dark and twisted reality of the world that we call our home, prepare to have it shattered. If you already have a slight grasp of the aforementioned reality and the darkness it keeps within, prepare to lose that grasp and find out what it truly holds.

The events you are about to read are real. They took place just shy of a decade ago. Although I am the victim in which this tragic tale surrounds, pretend it is you. Or better yet, pretend it is your child. This is your final warning. Turn back now, or prepare yourself for a few less hours of much needed sleep tonight.

Beep! Beep! Beep!

"Oh c'mon," I thought, as the alarm clock my mother bought me started blaring its usual sound. I suppose she was annoyed with taking five precious minutes out of her morning routine to wake me up anymore. One might think that with her newfound time, she would pack my lunch, or perhaps make me breakfast. Nope. She now has five more minutes to sit in front of her beloved television.

"You're going to be late!" She yelled as I quickly stumbled down the stairs, grabbed a poptart, and bolted

out the door. I was actually surprised she knew I was late. She doesn't notice much when she watches her shows (which was always.)

When I opened the door, I was greeted by the gloom of the storm the night before. The ground was soaked and puddle-ridden. The air was thick with moisture. I could hear the frantic "chirps" and "squacks" of the disgruntled birds, searching feverishly for worms that were washed out onto the sidewalk. I thought for a minute how sad it was that the worms were resting peacefully in their dirt sanctuary just hours before, and now they were either dead or soon to be. This thought passed as a car hit a puddle and nearly splashed me.

Time to quit day dreaming and pick up the pace. I was already late, and if I missed first session, the office would call home. That's just what I need; a resentful mother with a reason to take her anger out on me. I was still a good fifteen minutes from school,

when I noticed a white van driving along side of me.

"Excuse me!" the stranger shouted to me from their window, "can you please help me!"

"I'm going to be late!" I replied, trying to walk even faster.

"I'll bring you to school if you just please help me find my puppy! I'm so scared. He ran away this morning," the strange man said frantically, "come here, just let me show you a picture."

He had me as soon as he said he would bring me to school. He just sweetened the deal when he said he had a picture of a puppy. I walked over to the driver's side window. He showed me a picture of himself holding a new born Husky. Yup, his story checked out. He does indeed have a puppy.

"I haven't seen it Mister, could you take me to school now?" I asked.

"Sure thing bud, just hop in the back there," he

replied as he gestured toward the back seat of his van.

When I got in, the first thing I noticed was a brand new gameboy with Pokemon in it. I was in heaven, which I would soon learn was just the evil mask of hell.

"Hey! Can I play this?" I asked, already turning the gameboy on.

"Of course you can! It's my son's, so just be careful with it," he replied with a smirk on his face just visible through the rearview mirror. Looking back on it now, that was his smirk of success. He had me. And he knew it.

I was so elated to be playing a gameboy, that I soon forgot about school entirely. I was never allowed to have a toy like this. If it couldn't be bought at the dollar store, I knew better than to ask my mother for it.

"Put your seatbelt on, I don't want you getting

hurt now!" the man said, looking at me through the mirror. I complied, but was a little shocked at how tight it was. Once again, Pokemon distracted me from the blatant red flags.

I suppose this is the point where I should describe the stranger. He was about the age of all the other adults I knew. He wasn't young, but he was old enough to be my uncle, my teacher, or my father, who I had never known. His hair was dark and greying at the temples. His eyes were a sharp, piercing blue. Not so piercing that he looked unfriendly, but just enough so that it distracted me from the scar on his upper lip. The van smelled like stale smoke being covered up by a few too many air fresheners. Most would be put off by this smell, but I was numb to it. It smelled just like my house.

I looked up from the gameboy just long enough to realize that I had no idea where I was. We were no longer on the road that my school is on. We were no

longer on a road at all. All I could see were trees and the dust being kicked up by the tires.

"Where are we?" I asked nervously, beginning to feel the panic set in.

"We're stopping at my house real quick! I'm sorry buddy, I didn't think you would mind. I'll take you to school as soon as I grab something from inside."

As he said this, I noticed a small cabin up ahead. The van started slowing down. He stopped, parked, and opened his door.

"Just hold tight, want me to grab you a drink? Just keep playing that gameboy and I'll be right out," he said as he walked towards the cabin.

I did just as he said. I kept playing Pokemon. I was already too deep to quit now. I blasted my way through the first gym, and was quickly approaching the second. After what felt like twenty minutes, I began to panic again. I was never going to get to school. I

saved my game, so tried to unbuckle my seatbelt. It wouldn't budge. I tried again. Still nothing. Now in full panic mode, I started shaking it violently and screaming. The stranger came running back to the van with a glass of water in his hand.

"Woah there little guy! What's going on?" He asked in a soothing tone.

"Take me to school! Please! I'm gonna get in trouble!" I shouted.

"Alrighty, no problem! Here, have some water," he replied, with that same smirk from earlier.

Once again, I complied. I took a few gulps, and quickly finished the glass. He stepped back into the drivers seat, and started to drive further into the woods. I thought he was just driving to the other end of the dirt road, but even if I thought otherwise, what could I have done? My head started to feel a little fuzzy, and my eyes got heavy. I could feel myself drifting into a deep sleep. A sleep that I wish I would

awake from in my own bed, just to find out that this was all just a dream. But this is not the case.

When I came back from the endless abyss of my drug-induced slumber, I couldn't move. I was confused and I was scared. I opened my eyes, but I couldn't see. I had been blindfolded and my arms and legs had been tied down. I tried to scream, but my mouth had been taped shut. I could still smell the stale smoke being horribly masked by air fresheners, so I knew I was still in the van. Except now there was a new smell. The stench of sweat and blood.

As I gained a more conscious understanding of my surroundings, I felt pain. A pain that I had never experienced before. A pain that scared me. You can guess where I felt that pain. I heard the door to the van open, followed by a cool breeze on my body. I realized that I had no clothes on. My muffled screams were greeted by a strong hand squeezing my throat. I stopped trying to scream, and the hand released it's

grip.

"Are you going to try that again?" I recognized the familiar voice of the stranger. I quickly shook my head.

"Good. Now I'm going to uncover your eyes and your mouth. If you make any noise at all, you will be covered again."

The man did just as he said. I had to hold back my cries of fear and pain. I looked down. I could see blood underneath me on the seat of the car. I looked back up to see the man staring at me, with that same smirk. I was crying, but I managed to do so in silence. He brought a glass of water to my mouth, but I hesitated. I remembered what happened last time he gave me water. I was so thirsty though that I drank it down anyway. If it did knock me out again, it would have been better than the hell I was experiencing anyway.

Unfortunately, I remained conscious and aware of the events about to take place. I'll be vague, but not

vague enough to leave room for speculation.

Bark! Bark! Bark!

My eyes darted to the man in disbelief of the faint barking I heard in the background. Once again, that smirk appeared for what I wish I could say was the last time; however, that would be a lie. He just gazed down upon me, knowing he had total control, both mentally and physically. He slowly stepped to the side revealing a dog house with a puppy behind him. The puppy was the same that I had seen posing with him in the picture earlier. The same puppy that I agreed to help look for. The same puppy that was clearly never lost in the first place.

"Would you look at that! We found my dog. How lovely!" the man said in a taunting manner.

"C-c-can I go home now?" I pleaded, praying that he would have a change of heart.

"Sure! Once I'm done," he replied.

I thought he was done. I thought he had abused me enough. I wasn't even sure what he had done to me, but I knew it was wrong. I knew it was worse than I had ever thought possible. How could this man, this creature, do such awful things to me? An innocent child? Who else had he done this to? Was I the only one? I remembered hearing a story about a boy who disappeared last year. They never found him. My heart sank.

My gaze dropped back down to the blood underneath me on the seat. I knew it was mine. It wasn't there when I first entered the van. I started crying again, which was quickly dulled out by the tape the man placed over my mouth. He got into the van and closed the door with a loud slam. He cut the ropes from hands, but I couldn't have gotten away. My legs were still bound to the seat.

I felt his cold, worn out hand on my thigh. I started to shake from the fear of what was about to

happen. I couldn't yell for him stop. All I could do was sit there while he laughed. His hand wandered to the places that were already in terrible pain from what he had done earlier. I looked up at him and stared him right in his eyes. His expression changed to one of rage. He raised a hand and struck my face so hard that he knocked me out.

I awoke some time later, only this time not in the van. Was it a dream? Was I having the most horrific nightmare imaginable? Again, I was let down by reality. I tried to sit up, but my body screamed in agony. Instead, I looked around trying to take in my surroundings. I was in a bed. The room was cold and dark, but there was a window. It was dark out now, so I knew I had been out for much longer than the previous time.

I noticed that my arms and legs weren't tied down this time. Was it a trap? Or was he so confident in the damage he had inflicted upon me that I was incapable of

escaping? I decided not to run. Partly due to the fact that he truly had caused too much damage for me to make a respectable attempt, and partly because I knew he could easily catch up to me. Instead, I slowly sat myself up. My eyes darted around the room looking for something sharp. Anything that I could use as a weapon. Near the base of the window, I spotted a shard of glass. I carefully stood up, making sure not to make a sound. I retrieved the blade and made my way back to the bed, fighting the pain every step of the way.

I layed there for God knows how long. My mind strayed to why there was a piece of glass by the window. It wasn't broken, but had there been a broken window there before? Did someone try to escape from here, only to quickly have their plan destroyed by this savage? Next I thought about my mother. I knew she wasn't worried about me. It was Friday, and I rarely came home on Fridays. I bet the school called home when I never showed up, and I bet she thought her shows were more important than answering.

I was abruptly snapped back to real life when I heard foot steps coming towards the door. I gripped the glass under the single filthy sheet on the bed. I remained completely still, keeping one eye open just enough to see the blurred outline of the man in the doorway. I could feel the glass cut into my hand as my grip tightened. He walked towards the bed, pausing when he got to me. He bent down so his face was inches from mine. I could smell his wretched breath as he opened his mouth.

"Nap time's o-"

He never got to finish his sentence. My arm sprang up like a jack-in-the-box, plunging the blade of glass deep into his neck. He stumbled backwards in shock, blood pouring from his fresh wound. I shot up out of the bed, adrenaline masking my pain. I jumped ontop of him, slashing blindly at anything I could make contact with. He stopped resisting, his body going limp. I turned on the light to reveal his lifeless body. His

eyes were open, but seemed much duller than before. He still had that smirk. I smirked back.

The remaining details are not quite as clear to me. I suppose that is due to the adrenaline from killing a man, and the deep desire to just *get away from here*. What I do remember is running straight for the dog house which sheltered that Husky. It truly was just a puppy, so I was able to hold it myself. I don't remember running for so long, but I must have ran for quite some time. Eventually I must have made it back to town, because a police officer picked me up near a gas station. It's not everyday a naked, bloody child is running down a road at night holding a frightened puppy.

I wish I could tell you that I fully recovered from the trauma brought down upon me. I wish I could tell you that time healed all my wounds. If I told you that, I would be lying to you and myself. What I can tell you is that I now have a best friend. We go on walks

together and protect each other. We both know the darkness that hides in the world, and we both know that if we're together, we're safe. I may have lost faith in mankind, but I still have faith in man's best friend.