

Tuesday appreciated the food and enjoyed the desserts until she started to notice her tummy getting thicker. She was not overly worried about putting on weight but she did not want to get too heavy and be unable to move like she wanted to. She wanted to keep the few street smarts she had gained. Her skinny frame allowed her to escape unsavory characters and unfortunate situations. She could squeeze between bars in the park gates and get away. She remembered her life on the streets.

Three guys were looking for her, their drunken minds planning to 'get to know her better'. They saw her sitting on the curb outside the building next door to the bar. She looked attractive and they were ready for a little action. She turned out to be pretty feisty, which just angered them. When she slipped out of the leader's grasp, she took off running into a dark alley. Maybe not the smartest move but it probably saved her life. She found herself trapped at a dead end and her assailants were congratulating themselves and fighting over who would go first.

The cold steel of the bars bit into her thin frame as she clung to them. Her mind scrambled as she tried to think of a way out. Then suddenly she turned and slipped right through the bars. She stepped back and watched the guys run up and shake the gate, looking for a way to open it. She turned tail and hauled it at top speed down the alley to the lights at the other end.

She came out on a busy street filled with cars and pedestrians. She tried to blend in and walked quickly as far away from the alley as possible. She began to breathe a little slower and observe her surroundings. She did not see those guys anywhere, thankfully. She saw couples and groups of people walking to and from a little theater and a small Italian restaurant a few doors down. She walked across the street to the restaurant and walked in, slipping into a booth instead of waiting for someone to come and seat her. A tired but kind looking waitress came over and

put a glass of water on her table. The waitress started to speak, but was cut off by a gruff “not yet”. The waitress nodded and walked away. After gulping down the water, she slipped back out the door unnoticed, and hungry. She was getting tired and needed to find a place to sleep. A safe place. She had no money and did not know anyone. She did not know where she was. She did not know where she was going. She did the only thing she did know, walk.

She walked for hours, being careful to stay in the lighted areas but not in any one place long enough to be accused of loitering. She walked until the nearby places closed for the night and the streams of people began to thin. She was dog tired and couldn't help herself when she finally sat down on a stoop in a dark recessed doorway. She drew her knees up close and put her head on her knees. She opened her mouth and began to cry, screaming silently into her dirty jeans. She was grateful for the thin sweater she wore. The night air was cooling slowly and hopefully it would not get too cold. At least the doorway protected her from the occasional harsh wind. She curled into the wooden doorway and tried to sleep.

As the days passed, she slowly became familiar with the places nearby. She became familiar with ways to meet her basic needs, food and shelter. She knew which dumpsters to avoid and which ones would yield a decent meal at night. She knew when to move to a different street to avoid shop owners' complaints and police patrolling. She knew where to wait until midnight before going to sleep. She learned how to look and move like a guy to avoid drawing the attention of would be predators. She also learned to never trust anyone.

The nicest looking people could be the meanest most unkind ogres when they saw a dirty homeless bum, even if the bum wasn't begging. She did not beg. Sometimes people gave her a little change or an occasional dollar bill. She saved this until it added up to a cheap meal. She would go to the Chinese take out restaurant and use their bathroom to wash up and wipe away a

little of the grime from her clothes. She would take a seat in one of the red booth seats, the vinyl busted open and dirty cotton showing through, and she would count her change. Then she would order a small bowl of fried rice. She would take her time and savor the smell of the hot food, the comfort of the round bowl in her hands, the feel of a cushiony seat. She could sit here for a while before the staff would begin to complain. She would thank them and leave with a satisfied belly.

She looked forward to these treats but they came less and less frequently. The people who actually paid attention to her face stopped giving to her; perhaps they felt like enablers. She noticed people were not coming to this section of town as much as it got colder. This was not a major shopping destination so most people were on the other side of town crowding the stores. People came to this area to catch an occasional specialty movie, go to a bar, or eat a cheap meal. The bars were the only places staying busy now. And the clientele was more often than not, too drunk to notice anyone or anything. Thankfully, no one had bothered her since that first night.

She could not remember anything before that first night, though she tried. She could not remember how she got the egg sized lump on her head either, nor the bleeding cuts on her chin and near her right ear. She wiped her face with her hands and, seeing the blood, wiped her hands in the damp grass. She noted the light color of her sweater and did not want to soil it. When the guys came wandering along singing some barroom song, they nearly stumbled over her sitting on the curb. They started apologizing and asking if she was ok. She let them help her stand up and they knocked dirt off her jeans for her. When she could not tell them who was with her or where she was going, they began to take a more instinctual interest in her. She was petite and pretty, and easy. They began to nudge her into the darker shadows of the street and to touch her inappropriately. As she squirmed and protested, they became more aggressive. She had the

advantage of sobriety and quickly broke away into a run. She ran around the corner of the building and they took chase.

She too often dreamed of them, following her around, chasing her into one of the small parks. She would sprint and dive for the clump of bushes. She would lay there behind the shrubs, praying they could not hear her thudding heart and ragged breathing, and listen to the men as they stopped to peer into the darkness. Though they could not see her, they taunted her to come out and play. Their muffled minds could not be sure she was even in there and they would soon lose interest. They would clapped each other loudly on the back, proud of their manliness. As they shuffled away, she would hear them singing again. She hated this dream, but could not shake it. That had been too close a call.

She started from this dream suddenly, sweat pouring down her face. She tried to control her breathing and remind herself that she was indoors now, not in the bushes, not on the ground, not so vulnerable. She stood up and, wiping her face, walked to the door to check the locks. She checked the window locks too. She sat on the floor in front of the sofa and pulled the covers down on top of her. She curled up and went back to sleep, sheltered by the sofa. She slept fitfully.