

Kidnapped

Ami Edds

We were sitting naked, our bodies pressed against one another. It was freezing and my chest hurt, taking in the bitter air. My breasts were throbbing. Pulling downward, the weight felt like ice-cold lead lumping against my ribs. My nipples were erect and chafing. The blowing draft made them harder than stone. My spine was burning clear down to my tailbone, and the rest of my rear was numb from sitting still in that unbearable, bone-chilling climate.

I tried to move my left arm, but could not. It was paralyzed from my shoulder down, and I thought, "Dear Lord, I think this is it...." Then my stomach sank and my heart skipped out of sync until I opened my eyes and saw that it wasn't so. Instead, I found a dark, hairy man who had wrapped himself around my arm and legs. At first, I was repulsed at the idea of his touching me — under ANY conditions ... but these were not any conditions! After I scaled the truck (we figured it must have been a meat freezer), I realized my body heat — as well as that of all the others' in the truck — was his only hope of survival!

Our bodies were one ... EVERYONE'S! Where one body ended, another began. Some clung to those around them, others had no choice. Towards the back of the truck, bodies were piled two and three persons high. I had little hope for those who were stuck on the bottom. We were taking each other's oxygen and we had no idea how long we would be stuck there. It felt like we were moving, so I assumed "THEY" eventually would have to stop for gas. What did I know? That didn't ever mean they would let us out. Our situation was dismal, but at least I had my faith.

In talking with God, I asked him why I was there... was I being punished for something I had or had not done? Maybe it was just my time...? I knew I was not perfect, but I had worked hard to live an honest, Christian life...

Then I prayed aloud,

Our Father, who art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven...

Some others began to join in prayer,

Forgive us of our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass
Against us...

We were crying, and I remember feeling guilty, too. How could I forgive THEM, after they had forced us into this terrible situation? We'd been stripped of our clothes... our privacy, violated; our pride, demoralized...

For thine is the Kingdom,
And the power,
And the glory, forever,
Amen.

When we had finished, the truck echoed of silence, and for a moment, a few of us thought we had found hope.

After a while, there was no way of knowing how long we had been traveling, much less what their intentions were for us, once we reached "wherever." The only thing we knew was that we were being removed from town to be held hostage someplace else... but whatever the reason, we were never told. We never saw the faces behind our masked kidnapers. They drove around in the freezer truck picking us out at random. Usually they would ask us for directions, and then one of them would grab us and throw us inside the freezer. They removed all our belongings and it was horrifying when they knocked us around until we fell into the sea of bodies. I was so embarrassed. Everyone could watch,

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but they didn't dare, it had just happened to them. Looking among ourselves, I saw a wave of confused and frightened faces. None of us could figure out THEIR logic, because there was no logic. We didn't know why we were chosen as targets, we had nothing in common, other than sharing that awful predicament.

No one could hear us — to rescue. The walls entrapping us were sound-proof and they were of glazed stainless steel. We were sealed off from the drivers that plotted our course... we were sealed off from the world!

Our only light source was a kerosene lantern that hung directly over my head. It was barely suspended by two metal chains that rattled into each other as the speed of the truck increased. I was afraid one of them would loosen from the ceiling and the lantern would drop onto my head. As we swerved and jostled over the bumpy road, my body flinched to duck from the swinging lantern. It was no use, though, I still couldn't move. The dim light merely cast a glimpse of shadows that danced across some of the blank and lifeless faces.

It was better that way. The darkness was all that offered us comfort, and it gave us our only privacy. Until that day the only naked man I had seen was my husband, Raymond. We were married at nineteen, and I remembered wondering at that age, "Do all men look like that...?" After twenty-two years and three kids, I knew a whole lot more... but none of it prepared me to be comfortably stripped naked in a truck loaded with other undressed strangers.

It was getting more difficult to withstand the grotesque conditions. Women were screaming that those who were buried beneath the piles were already dead. I wasn't surprised, the truck smelled vile! Our oxygen was fading and there was no way those below could have breathed at all. The smell was sickening and was almost as suffocating as the air itself.

My head was pounding and my stomach felt queasy. My fingers and toes itched from frostbite. Around my inner thighs and crotch, I felt a wet sensation like I used to get driving with a soda placed between my legs. Touching that area, I felt nothing damp, but on the inside it tingled and stung. I thought about wading the man on my left side, but the

thought of him waking and staring so closely at my body was just too humiliating. His weight was clinching my circulation, which was also numbing me.

I tried to think of warm things to get my mind off the cold. I thought about winter fires, bubble baths, sunshine, sweaters, and the warmth of Raymond's arms ..., then I panicked! When would I ever see those arms again? How much longer could we survive like this ... would we survive? I wondered where were my darling Jessica and Raymond? What were they doing ... looking for me, I hoped?! God, I wasn't still at the grocery store ... surely they knew that ... "Please, God, tell me they know I'm missing!"

Tears crystallized down my face. I wanted to see their faces ... touch their lips ... feel their warm bodies ... And Janet! Oh, Lord, she's expecting!" I never thought I wouldn't live to see my first grandchild ... Thanksgiving ... Christmas ... Jeff's graduation ...

... and then it happened. The truck swerved wildly, and bodies from the rear flew forward onto the others. I was knocked unconscious for a while ... the lantern had fallen from the ceiling and had landed on my head ... after I awoke I could see the others, draped across one another in new groupings along the side of the truck. We had crashed into something hard — it felt like a train! The impact was quick and forceful, and seemed to last forever ... though it happened very fast. I remember hearing the awful sound of the breaks screeching just the split second before we crashed. The accident stunned us all ... all that were alive ... I heard murmuring moans of aching pain ... the sound swelled around me ... then it grew fainter as I began to slip away. The man to my left finally untangled himself from me. I could feel him applying pressure to my head ... but the bleeding would not stop.

Then I heard distant voices again, but they were not groaning .. they were calling out to me. I could not make out what they were saying. All I could do was focus on a light that I saw in the distance. It was surrounded by darkness, but I could feel it coming closer. The closer it came — the warmer I felt, and before long, my body was tingling again. For a moment, I thought I saw Raymond. Then he faded fast into the dark. Eerie black circles whirled behind the light, trying to snuff it out. "Come, Jennifer ...," someone said ... "Come!" I couldn't place the voice, but it was clearly speaking to me.

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I started feeling more nauseous and light-headed — I thought it was from losing so much blood. I didn't try to move, I couldn't. It hurt just to open my eyes. When I did, everything was blurry. Straight ahead it was pitch black. Around me, I could still feel the warmth of the light. It had become the only thing that offered me comfort.

I sensed people were around me, but I could not find their faces. Looking down, I saw tiny images moving slowly, but the figures were doubling and I still couldn't make out a thing. Then I noticed there weren't any more voices ... only the light ... ONLY THE LIGHT!

For a moment, I thought I had been dreaming a horrible nightmare, but then I knew I had experienced the ordeal. ...so where was I? ... and where did everyone go? I assumed that when the lantern fell, everyone was left in complete darkness, so I stretched out my arms, but felt no one. Groping my way, I could not feel another body ... I could not feel a thing. Then I wondered, "Maybe my arms are still numb ...?" I decided to fold my arms together, and although I could feel something, it didn't seem right.

I felt alone ... somehow, some way, I was suddenly all alone. The light was directly above me, where the lantern once was — only it was blinding me. It was so close, I could feel heat rushing through my soul ... and then it hit me, that's all I was: a small soul! The warm glow embraced me and lifted me upward.

I felt no more pain and the nausea had ceased. It felt so good to be warm again, and I was finally beginning to see. I even could make out some of the faces below. Bodies were strewn in all directions. Rivers of blood pooled around the chalky nudes. There was so much red that I couldn't tell where all the blood was coming from ... but few persons moved. Many were slumped over one another; some curled up like shrimp, clinging to the limbs of his neighbor.

For the first time, I could see our drivers. Their faces were embedded in a web of glass that spun across the windshield. It looked like they had missed their turn, and had hit head-on into a semi.

Their faces were getting smaller as I lifted higher towards the light. I was searching

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below for one last glimpse of Raymond and Jessica ... I still wanted to see their faces ... to tell them that I would be all right ... and then I saw the back of Raymond's leather jacket, standing with his arms around Jessica ... he was staring up at me ... he was weeping, but then I knew ... once he had found me ... I could finally let go ...