

(Static fades in, lingers, and then cuts)

Running away from your problems has consequences. No matter how you pitch it.

(Music fades in)

The most obvious one is, well, obvious. You'll never find out how things end. I left home. I doubt any of my younger siblings will forgive me. I don't know if they're okay now or if they will find 'okay' someday. I'd prefer they'd find happiness, but you know, standards and all that: you've got to set them accordingly, and happiness is hard to find. No one knows that better than I do at this point. Then I left Lottie, and for a while, I knew what was happening with her. But the updates have stopped, and I can't be sure why. It wasn't a great place to leave her, and she wasn't in a great state. There are so many reasons for this silence, and they are all terrible. But above all, or at least the most relevant right now, all those years ago, I ran away from my mother in what was potentially, though who can say, her worst hour. So I couldn't know how it went for her. Maybe I could have speculated. Make some logical assumptions, but I could never know for sure.

I didn't know a lot about her. From what I can recall, I need to add and always add. I've just filled in some blanks. And some blanks are easier to fill than others.

(Music fades out. Adjusting blinds)

Like that she was not going to take kindly to me busting out her window.

(Music fades in)

Oh yeah, that was her car, which is far from comforting, right? I mean, I'm well aware that I've done something to technically wrong her, so you know, I earn what I get,

and then there's that weird mind warp that comes from her not actually being a stranger but being someone I don't know in the slightest. Or the kidnapping. Great times all around.

Oh yeah, we've got a lot to catch up on, right? Like how the building my mom dragged me to now has a matching broken window. Well, matching to her car, which apparently she didn't bother to get fixed before she snatched me. But that's not the part you want to hear about, is it? Even if there is something fascinating about the lackluster decisions we make about car maintenance.

Sorry, but my mind is still racing. That being said, you probably also don't want to hear me vent about how she is a great example of the problem with the guardian angels and that whole mythos. I-- (Sigh) Sure, save the kid in the baby carriage from the wayward train, but maybe the train conductor needed to veer off course for some reason. Ever think of that? Like, yes I am veering off course right now, but I need to do it. I need to grab this doctor to save Lottie if there is any chance she can be saved.

And I'm not making sense, right now. But I think there is sense to be made, but I... (Sigh) I don't know how she got me. Entirely. And that's the natural place to start, right? It all started when I was walking down the street when suddenly... Insert series of events here. A series of events that I don't fully remember.

Once again, I can speculate. I'm guessing I let my guard down around her. On some level, she's still familiar. Deep in my cells. These cells--or their ancestors if you want to play pseudo-scientific--once resided in her, and that's a hard memory for this body to purge. So she must have gotten close to me, and then I was done for. I

remember waking up groggy. The sort of groggy that really only comes from being drugged, but that's another phase of her plan that I experienced but can't explain.

(Music fades out)

What I do know is this. She grabbed me, transported me to that building, and then held me, supposedly for my own benefit, which is a debate that did not go well.

(Music fades in)

She told me that she had been watching me, that she had always been. And I get it. There's supposed to be something... poetic or beautiful about a mother hanging around to watch over her children despite them living in the home of her abuser. Or that's what a lot of people would think, but I don't fully agree, which isn't an attempt to justify how I handled it. Shocking. But there were times.... There were times when I was struggling to live. When I was about to break down on the pavement and sob or scream or something, and it wasn't always the fatigue that came from working in the medical field because that's... equal parts terrible but understandable. And she couldn't have prevented that sort of stealing my resume and sending it out. Not that it would have taken me the whole way, but it would be all she could do. No, I'm talking about the stress that came from I was raising her children. I was raising her kids in a nightmare she got to leave. We were all in that nightmare. And she saw that. She knew that better than anyone else. Why watch us and not actually help us? It just seems like... mocking at some point. Like she was mocking us, or it was a weird voyeurism where she gets to play the martyr and not just avoid chastisement.

That was the first strike. Not a great beginning to this play of hers.

No, it didn't go well. At that point, I didn't give a flying rat's butt about what she had to say. Or a stationary rat's butt. The nature of the butt did not determine whether or not I gave it is what I mean.

Nothing could make me care. Because in my mind, she was wrong from the get go. She was wrong in thinking that trying to make sure I made good choices was enough. Because I needed more than that. At so many points, in my life, I needed more than that from her, so I wasn't going to take anything.

And no, I wasn't making a good choice by going back there. I concede on that front. But necessity doesn't always make for sound judgment. And this was about necessity and nothing else to me. She wanted it to be something else. She wanted to save me from myself. Seemingly just so she could get a kick in while I was down.

Literally down. Like on the floor. That's where I woke up. She had me tied up in an almost comical movie villain sort of way on the floor of another abandoned apartment. It was a nicer apartment than the ones I had been in though. Marble countertops in a reasonably sized kitchen with a half-finished brick fireplace in the dining area where I was being kept. You know, that sort of thing. It could have made a nice family home, or not exactly. Maybe a starter place for some young couple. I don't have a good frame of reference for that. But that's never going to happen now, which is something of a heart pull because why not make a not so subtle argument for neighborhood revitalization on top of mocking me and preventing me from doing what I really need to do.

And it was need, Lucent. I... I haven't heard from Lottie or anyone at that house since before I was taken.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

If something did happen to Lottie, I could have grabbed that doctor and made it back in time. I could have saved Lottie if it weren't for this. If Mom hadn't kidnapped me at the very least, but we never even got to a much needed discussion on the library. No, I don't know if she burned it down. But right now, I wouldn't put it past her.

She wouldn't talk about anything that wasn't me. And I tried to be clever with that hand. But I wasn't good at playing it.

"Do you know why I left?" I asked her.

"Do you," she replied. Her voice was weirdly sing-songy and the sort of voice that had a warmth to it as it flowed from her lips. Some would have called it sweet. But to me, it had long since turned sour.

"To be happy," I said.

"That girl won't make you happy. It will be the same thing it always was," she replied

Caregiving responsibilities, I'm guessing is what she meant. But she didn't argue the point. She just declared it. Like it was a simple truth whether or not I wanted to believe it. Like I was stupid for thinking that way, for being behind on everything but specifically this. I didn't think it was possible, but I found it in me to hate her even more.

Two strikes, it was. Maybe you aren't out at that point. Maybe there's no formal rule penalizing you for your carelessness, but you sure are making your team manager nervous. They may hold it against you when contract renewal time hits. Suddenly, you aren't as safe a bet as you once were. And they won't forget that.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

We had been going back and forth for a while. It was enough time for the drug of choice, whatever it was, to wear off. She'd given me a bottle of water and brought it to my lips as a bare minimum sort of favor or caregiving act. Really tempting to spit it into her face, but I fought the urge on that one. By then, I was feeling better physically, which meant I was feeling bitter emotionally. Because it's weird how sometimes those things just can't co-exist.

At bare minimum, I wanted to emotionally gut punch her, and I had one target point. It wasn't about me. Or the kids. She clearly didn't care about us. So it wasn't a great one, but I tried to strengthen my position.

"What happened with Dad?" I asked.

Cue the general divorce talk parents have with their kids, but I stopped her.

"That's not what I meant," I said. "I saw you in a procedure room."

I gave her the date. Her look was blank. Strike three.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

He got her too. I shouldn't have been surprised at all, right? Dad had her in his clutches, and if you're going to start evil science like he does, you need to do a memory wipe too if you have the option. Common sense. And he was a genius. He had a little more than common sense.

But so did I. So I didn't let it slip that I had my hand free. Because comical movie villain rope ties aren't secure. That's why they're comical. And because she's not good at this, there were still heavy objects about. Like a brick waiting to find a home in a fireplace. Outside. Out through a window will technically suffice.

Brick meet window. Body flies through. It was all so quick. I--I was out before she knew it. She was sleeping in the other room. I didn't give her time to react, though I'm sure she did. I'm sure she heard the commotion and panicked, but I was long gone before she could get her act together. And she hasn't found me yet. I don't know how hard's she's trying. And I can't think about that now. I'm trying to find some half-hearted forgiveness-esque thing in me to give her just to clear up my mind. But it isn't going well.

(Music fades out. Zipper sound. Music fades in.)

But I need the brain space. We all have things we have to do. At the end of the day, we all have duties and obligations. And it's one giant fricking puzzle. Except it's not. It's not a puzzle that comes in a cardboard box that has that plastic layer that both gives the box shape and design, specifically a design that includes the pretty, pretty, picture you're supposed to assemble with all the pieces. Nope. Not right now. That would make too much sense. Instead, I'm dealing with a bunch of solid colors that will never make a clear picture no matter what I do because I, Zaneta, don't get to have a clear picture apparently. That's not what I was born into. And I certainly haven't made it any better from my choices, always painting over pieces and chucking out important ones and grabbing a new handful from some other box.

(Exhale) I mean, look at how I am with metaphors. Not a great sign of things to come. But I am my mother's daughter, I should say. For better or worse.

(Static starts. Music cuts. Static fades out)

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by MJ Bailey. If you like the show, please consider leaving a review and-or telling many friends about it. Thanks.