

(Static fades in and then cuts)

There was one night out on the road that stands out in my mind. Lottie couldn't sleep when she technically needed to be sleeping.

(Music fades in)

And we both knew she needed to sleep. For her own sake. And I guess for mine as well, all things considered. She needed her sleep, but as often happens with people in her situation, she couldn't. It's like the body knows that if its eyes close, there's a chance it won't wake up, and that seems like the more immediate threat, even if rest is critical to getting better. That's a Catch-22, right? I feel like I never knew how to use that term. But if Lottie were to fall asleep, she might not have woken up, but if she didn't get some level of rest, she was going to deteriorate and die anyway.

And it was kind of my fault. We were in that situation because I couldn't get her medication right away. It's not the sort of thing you can get in a pharmacy. At least, not if you're her or in her situation. With enough money anything is possible, anything is always possible, I would say. But it's because money also gives you connections, and it's through those connections that you can use more money to get what you actually want. It takes time, but that's not even the reason. Worse yet, I--I was being overly cautious. So there was a solid twelve hours when Lottie didn't have it in her system, and she suffered for it.

It's not what you think. It's not that kind of drug. It was something for her lungs, specifically. Something that keeps the tissue from getting too irritated. It was already irritated at that point, but if it got any more so, she was going to be able to breathe. At all. And she'd suffocate right then and there beside me.

I didn't know if I got it to her in time. So we were just waiting. Waiting for either the medicine to save her or for her to pass. And I guess the time would have gone so much more quickly for her if she was resting. And resting would have meant giving her body the best shot at recovery, right? But, like I said, right then and there, that was a surprisingly dangerous remedy. So maybe I should have taken a stronger position and actively tried to keep her awake. But I didn't. Instead, I dabbled in denial, devising and maintaining a fantasy in which... In which a cure was... possible.

Then again, no, you couldn't really call that a fantasy. Because in it, Lottie raised a question that I would have otherwise wanted to avoid, have stricken from the record, or otherwise cast off and make impossible to find.

"Would you want children someday?" she asked me.

And I knew why she was asking. She knew I knew why she was asking. She also knew it's the sort of thing I would have liked to avoid and that it was a touchy subject for me if there ever had been one. But at the same time, we both knew the necessity of it. It's the sort of thing that has to come up from time to time. It's just the practicalities of it that are so much harder, right? Because sometimes it just stings. And we're hardwired to avoid those things. But I owed her an answer, so I gave her the best one I could.

No. I don't want children of my own. And it's not just because I had to raise my younger siblings for as long as I did, although I'm pretty sure that played a role in it. I'm pretty sure that's a common side effect of parentification, but it's more like... Okay, I didn't tell Lottie any of this. I just thought it loudly in my head. But you know, same difference, right? Not right. Regardless, those of us who have screwed up parents, for all our talk about breaking the cycle, it's harder than you think, and sometimes it feels

like we have two options. Or I always felt like I had two options. I could either not have kids or somehow manufacture a miracle. Because I don't know how to be a good parent. And for once, not my fault. Because when it's your family that's messed up, the family you grew up in, this is all you know. You don't know what you're supposed to do as a parent. You only know what you shouldn't do, and that works for some people, but for some of us, that isn't the road map we need. We need more structure with better directions. Otherwise, even if we don't mean to, we'll fall back onto those same roads, into those same patterns. Because instinctively we look to the one star we had. Because being somewhere was better than being nowhere.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

But speaking of nowhere... That's a terrible transition, but... where to begin?

Where to begin?

It feels like I've got all the time in the world now. No, Lottie, no children, no clear direction. And maybe this is all for the best. Maybe I'm just meant to drift in the breeze. The remainder of a problem, present and a pain to the math students tackling it through no free choice of their own.

If Lottie were here, she'd tell me I was being too hard on myself. And yeah, she would have heard me say that. She wanted to listen in when I was making these recordings, and I could never tell her no. She was so intrigued by you and by everything in my life, in general terms. After the first few things, nothing frightened her. It should have, but it didn't. So I can keep being hard on myself in peace.

(Pause)

I don't know which part of the story I should tell you first, so I'm going to stick with a more linear narrative of events. As far as I am able to.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

So I left Mom's stupid kidnapping headquarters, right? I left with the bag that had all my stuff in it, that she didn't think to separate from me, which once again is a rookie mistake. And she made so many. My word. It would be funny if I didn't scrape my side on the way out the window because that hurts, especially when I laugh. You know, speaking of, don't give me too much credit for my escape. I didn't fully anticipate the size of my body relative to the size of the window and the hole I had made in it. It seems like my internal ruler was scaled for a much smaller person. Whatever, I made it work in the end. And if that's the only time in my entire life my size worked against me, then that's not what everyone kept telling me for so long, I got to prove them wrong. There's that.

But I got out. And I ran. I didn't know where I was going. That was not a familiar area for me. Not at night, but by now, I've learned how to read buildings. I've learned to discern empty spaces that can make for temporary accommodations. And I know it shouldn't be so easy for me, so keep the ego in check. But I'm far past the point where I could even consider looking a gift horse in the mouth.

So I stayed off the road, back into alleyways that didn't look familiar in the slightest bit, but what choice did I have? A broken window doesn't stop a car from running.

Maybe I should have thought about that and made a different choice. It was an impulse, though, so don't give me that attitude. It was an impulse. So much of this has strictly been impulse. But once again, it delivered me.

I passed out some place that seemed safe, and when I came too, I was in an apartment that wasn't entirely abandoned. It was just going to be uninhabited for a while. I'm guessing that, and that it was because of the renovations it's undergoing. The smell of paint there was absolutely sickening, but the night before I must have been too desperate for some sort of shelter to notice. But, yeah, in hindsight that probably could have killed me. It was certainly enough to wake me up before the sun rose, though, which I needed to do because--like I said--this space wasn't abandoned. But it looked like no one was coming right away, so I took my time. I sat up and looked out the window for what seemed like hours. And I looked out that window to see... Well, not to be cliched, but it was a very familiar sight.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

I was back in the good ole, saying that sarcastically, neighborhood. I was down the street from the house, in the old condominium building that no one in the neighborhood wanted, but hey, it was going to be a stack of high-end penthouses and not low income apartments, so people got over it.

I'd never been in there before, but I had walked past it all the time. I stood in front of it all the time. Going past that area was one way of getting the kids to school. Sure, I could have driven them any time, but Roslyn, in particular, liked the walk. She still likes the walk. And she's old enough to do it on her own.

Yeah, there she was. Roslyn was there. My baby sister was right outside. I was looking at her with her eyes cast down. And her hand was clutching the necklace I gave her. She was holding onto my promise. My promise to be there for her. A promise that I hadn't completely forgotten about. Because of course I hadn't.

I can make excuses and tell myself over and over again that it wasn't my choice. It wasn't my choice to leave, ergo it wasn't my fault that I left her, right? Except maybe I could have taken her. It's not impossible to disappear with a kid, though it does raise the stakes and it does make it so much more likely that someone who would act on it would notice. And Dad can't really make excuses for why his school aged daughter is gone. Except he could. Especially if I were there with her. Hypothetically. It would spare his pride, and his pride is the most important thing to him.

All I would have to do was get her far away, right away. Run fast and far. Preferably without a plan because it would make it harder to track us.

So yeah, it was a choice. It was a choice between you and her. And I choose you. Without really knowing what that would mean. Without any promises or assurances. Without being able to prove that this was the best thing to do. I just did it. I didn't choose her. I choose to leave her behind. And clearly, she's suffering for it. Whether it's just emotionally or not, she has been suffering. I've hurt her, Lucent. I swore I would never do that, but I clearly have. And I know what that hurt is like.

Mom being gone didn't always not bother me. Which is a very defensive way of saying that it did bother me sometimes. Someone who was supposed to love me wasn't there to give me love. Then there was Dad who was incapable of loving, and that bothered me a lot more when I was younger. When I was Roslyn's age.

(Music fades out and new music fades in)

But she had me. The kids had me, and I had always been hoping that would be enough. And maybe it could have been. But then I blew that up. Hard.

But there I was. I could fix it. Somehow, right? But then again, I was in the middle of trying to fix something else. I was trying to get to Dr. Hart. I was trying to get Dr. Hart. And even though, I was vaguely aware that this was a sort of kidnapping-esque activity. I just wasn't thinking about the details too much. Because there was an obvious reason not to, you know? At least, by that point, I knew what not to do. In terms of the kidnapping. Ethical or not, I was focused more on execution than I was on morality.

But maybe they and I could have a nice conversation first, and hopefully that conversation would lead them to agree to help Lottie. Hippocratic oath and all that.

It clearly was a choice, and you weren't relevant in it. I'll admit. But in that moment you were so far from my mind.

I sat in that apartment for a few more moments, and maybe I was just dizzy from the paint fumes, but... Well, rationally, that place did not have too many places to hide. But it did have an intense hatred of the non-affluent not otherwise specified, which I technically am now. Also, a ton of people there were more than capable of recognizing me. Also, Lottie's health--if she still had any--had to be a ticking clock.

The way I saw it, and I only had time for one of them. Once again, I had to make a choice. Except there was no arguing semantics. This was a choice. For better or likely worse.

(Static starts. Music cuts. Static fades out).

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