

Trapped

Short Story by Nicholas Winter

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How long does it take to bleed to death?

Depends.

That was her first thought as her eyes opened to oppressive darkness. This was not good. Not good at all. Excruciating pain at even the slightest movement and a weight on her chest she was currently puzzling over.

Stevie... she could remember her name at least.

Lying on the ground, cold and damp. Not the best way to spend a Saturday evening. Was it still night? Stevie couldn't even tell. That's the trouble with darkness, you can't see anything. Her smashed wristwatch offered no help.

Stevie tried to move. Instantly a sharp pain in her hip - something lodged just above her combat trousers - the cold steel of a six-inch tactical blade plunged all the way to the guard. With the tips of her fingers gently inspecting the flesh, Stevie was gaining a mental picture in her mind, touching just close enough to the wound to cry out once more. *Fuck me, that hurts. Note to self - stop poking the knife wound.*

What about this weight on her chest? And the hair in her mouth? Events were re-forming in her mind. Each tiny, excruciating movement recalling her last deadly encounter. Each injury a story unto itself. The cut above her eye, her bleeding nose, her scuffed knuckles, her bruised back and, of course, the new hole in her hip. All a lightning rod to the moment it happened and a link to a long list of regrets that were beginning to take shape.

With her right hand, Stevie reached up to brush the hair from her mouth but her arm felt heavier. Bound at the wrist with a plastic cable-tie to another human being. *That explains the weight on my chest then*, she thought. Then remembered who it was connected to - *Oh him, yeah, that guy, fuck him, he's dead. My only companion, dead as a dodo, but rather him than me.* Thoughts of defiance turned to her wounded pride. Duped by a snake, an utter bastard. She would no longer speak his name.

He was lying dead on top of her, putrefying with every second that passed. The same bastard who had stabbed her in the hip before lunging at her, tripping over the uneven stones underfoot and smashing his own head against the stone dais she was now lying next to. The fall had killed him but rendered her unconscious. As a final insult he had landed on top of her. No wonder her chest felt heavy.

Grasping a fistful of hair from the back of his head, Stevie pulled the bastard's face away from hers and began to breathe easier. Stevie rubbed her thumb and forefinger together realising they were now covered in his blood from the giant gash on his head. His spit had formed at the bottom of her neck and she felt it ooze away from his mouth as she tried to move it. *Wow! This fucker is heavy, not to mention he smells like a damp arsehole.* Not that she was in the habit of smelling damp arseholes.

Stevie raised her right hand and soon realised that the tight cable-tie was going to prove a problem. With her left hand free, she gripped at his shoulder and tried to push him away. The dead weight was not going anywhere. Stevie gritted her teeth and tried again, screaming through the pains in her arms and her shoulder and re-introducing herself to yet more injuries she'd forgotten about. Not enough power in just one mobile limb to push him away and no way to turn over for fear of jerking the knife and making things worse.

Perhaps a new tactic. Again, Stevie gripped his shoulder but just to keep him steady. Then she carefully wormed her way from under him, leaving only her tied hand still restricted by his bulk. The effort of getting loose just enough to occupy her thoughts a moment longer before more pressing matters would begin to rear their ugly head.

Reaching over to her pocket with her free hand Stevie pulled out her Zippo lighter. Not being a natural left-hander, she struggled for a moment to spark the flint and ignite the flame. Biting her tongue and adding a few grunts to the equation, seemed to do the trick and at last she's able to shed some light on the situation. *Holy fucking dick-tits!...Shit!* Not the most eloquent thoughts but she was in shock, mesmerised by the deadly addition to her hip bone.

Stevie passed the lighter's flame over the knife handle. The flame flickered and slowly the wet mess of blood and sweat revealed themselves. Stevie looked at the curious spectacle, glowing like a blackened ooze, she couldn't help but stare, reflections of the yellow-orange flame staring back at her as she lowered the lighter as close as she dared to the tang of the knife handle.

Gently, Stevie placed the lighter down on the ground next to her. To inspect her wound she pulled at her trousers and looked down at her training shorts underneath. *Yep - that's deep. Should I pull it out, or keep it in?* Not something she ordinarily needed to worry about. Stevie realised that her next priority would be to get both hands free. The lighter should make the plastic cable tie easy to deal with. Shuffling her position and making sure that the cable tie hovered nicely over the flame Stevie waited for a few seconds as the heat melted the plastic and she could pull arm away.

Finally, some freedom. A small victory. Pulling herself up and stepping off the cold floor for a moment, Stevie could finally take a moment to look around.

A crypt. The crypt she wished at that moment she had never found. Measuring barely two metres tall and three wide, with a vaulted ceiling all made of crumbling stone. A heavy metal door, added much later to keep thieves out. That same door was now keeping her firmly locked inside. It had taken all of her strength and a few strategic smashes with a broken stone block to get the thing open and now it had been rammed closed to seal her fate. Thrown in with the bastard while Sanchez and his men stole away her hard work - gold ingots worth thousands, hidden within a sarcophagus. The Thorn family plot and their gardens with it's old church had been hiding the riches for seventy-five years and now it would be hiding two more bodies for a lot longer, unless Stevie could find a way out.

The blood from her wound had now reached her sock. The damp environment was beginning to

seep into her bones. Stevie was barely damming her mild panic as her mind raced to find the solution but before all of that the sum of her mistakes kept flooding to the front of her mind. *Why am I such a fuck-up all the time?* Every small victory smashed into pieces by a crushing defeat that soon followed. Luck was never on her side and not another soul knew her whereabouts. In this dark corner of the world she was very much alone, and she knew it.

Pain in this moment was good, it was keeping her alive and keeping her awake. *What can I use? How can I get out?*

Stevie hobbled over to the dormant bastard. Trickster and traitor, another one of her many mistakes. She'd believed his lies and he'd led her enemies straight to her. The bastard had tried to claw and grab at her trying to stop her reaching the crypt in the first place but she'd slipped away. Soon enough he'd returned and managed to cuff her to him, preventing any further escape. Then Sanchez arrived and stole the gold for himself. The bastard, like a lap dog, had to prove his allegiance, Sanchez asked the bastard to kill her and, in the brutal scuffle that followed, he'd locked them both inside and left them to die.

Stevie pulled at his cotton shirt taking no care as his limbs flopped around and smacked onto the cold stone beneath. It was the shirt she was after and definitive action was now her priority. Stevie looked around for a loose stone, the biggest one she could find. Placing the stone inside the shirt she'd made a makeshift tool to smash against the door. Twisting the shirt around and extending her grip down to the cuffs Stevie readied herself for some drastic measures.

The stone swung wildly and crashed against the door. She swung again and again. Sound in the hollow space seemed to find itself sharply stabbing into Stevie's earholes. So loud she had to drop the stone and reassess. With her ears still ringing she had to come up with another plan. The impact of stone on metal had achieved nothing and the effort was exhausting. Forgetting the knife for a moment Stevie accidentally rested her hands on her hips, jerking the blade handle. Stevie screamed as the sudden sharp pain shot down her leg. She was beginning to feel weak at the knees, maybe this was the beginning of the end.

Feeling sorry for herself wasn't going to help anyone. Stevie grabbed the lighter from the floor and

began to inspect the fixings around the door. Finger's scraping at the old stone work and her mind racing through the possibilities. Roots from above had begun to take their hold on gaps between the stonework. Could she scrape away enough mortar to dislodge the smaller stones and create enough of an aperture to pass through? A question to answer and a new focus.

The stone was damp and some of it flaked away with a hard scrape of her fingers. With some persuasion the stone would crumble but only so far. Reaching further into the mortar and it became dryer and harder to shift. She needed a tool. A sharp tool to help her. Now where was she likely to find one of those?

Stevie looked down at her leg and stared at the knife. It should have killed her. She'd cursed the uneven stones for the pain in her back, but they'd saved her life, and the knife that should have ended her could now be her only salvation. To pull it out could breach the dam. The only phrase that was popping into her mind at that moment was 'Better out than in' but somehow, she didn't like the sound of that...

Once again Stevie gripped the first stone next to the door, clawing at the mortar but only making scant progress. Meagre trickles of dust coming away from her finger nails with each scratch and scrape. Without a tool she would need more than a lifetime.

Breathing heavily and watching the dying flames of her lighter Stevie was quickly concluding that her choices were no longer choices at all. Time to pull the knife. Now or never.

That one question kept calling back to her...

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