

Escape

Thursday morning arrived on the heels of a sleepless night. Judith bravely managed to keep our dark secret from Helen and the others to the bitter end. Judith, Gerard and I wore brave faces as they prepared to set out for class together, even though we knew that we might never see each other again. In the final rush of hushed *goodbyes*, Gerard gave Judith a bracelet and I placed a gold ring on her finger to remember us by.

“Go on ahead,” I heard her call out to the others at the foot of the stairs, **“I forgot my warmers,”** and in the next moment she was in the doorway one last time.

She threw her arms around us and kissed us on the cheek and cried more than I imagined that she would and I realized, in that moment, that this is the first woman friend I’ve ever known, who has truly been a friend. She wiped her eyes, wished us luck, smiled one final sad sweet smile and then disappeared down the stairs once more.

Gerard and I set about the monumental task of packing immediately. We filled the large green army duffle bag and discarded what was not absolutely essential. Judith insisted that we keep the hand painted eggs and angel from Christmas, so we wrapped them carefully and carried them in a separate bag.

So many things need to be done today; the bus schedule checked, our tickets purchased and to verify our connection in Istanbul on the famed Orient Express. We have to rush to keep an appointment with a local veterinarian to get a health certificate for Sammy. He’s going to become a US citizen after all. We had to leave it all for the last day or risk being discovered.

The doctor didn’t do anything; he just looked in the cage and gave us a certificate, written in French and English, with his signature on it. It states that Sammy Saabs is in good health and able to travel.

We all have our identity papers and it’s time to go. My mind is spinning like a roulette wheel and I’ve placed my bet. The tiny marble spirals backwards and I feel the same numbing exhilaration that I always feel when I set out on a new adventure, on the precipice of a void, confident, fearless and blind.

The snow-covered terrain is quite beautiful and yet there is instability in the air, in these people. I can't help but feel that this whole world is disappearing as we leave it behind.

We had a little trouble finding the bus; it's more modern than I expected, but less than I'd hoped for. At least we're the only ones carrying livestock; our Sammy is leaving his homeland for good.

As we crowd on board, baggage and birdcage in tow, we are refugees once again. We struggled down the narrow aisle of the bus, looked for seats and searched the faces of our fellow passengers. Were we all running away? Surely not ...but they eyed us with suspicion nonetheless. Then from the back of the bus came a shriek and my heart nearly stopped.

"Oh my god!" cried a voice and I held my breath.

A lumbering beast came towards me with arm outstretched. He was cloaked and hooded and we didn't know what to make of it, until he got closer; it was Steffon, in the middle of his own great escape. He threw his arms around me and we did the same. It was so good to see a familiar face, we laughed at ourselves and it broke the tension and we forgot the danger for a moment.

We packed into our seats and took turns carrying Sammy on our laps. For the first 24-hours of the journey we crossed the mountains dividing Iran from Turkey. At the higher elevations the snow was heavy and the cliff roads unguarded, but the driver careened along undaunted and the bus groaned and slid and only the blinding snow and dark night kept us from seeing certain death at every turn.

The temperature in the bus was not much different from outside, so we put on everything we had just to keep warm, but still we froze to the bone and the mountains seemed endless until the morning of the second day.

We woke-up in another world, sweltering in the heat of mid-morning sun.

A bleak desert landscape was all that was visible ...all morning ...dust and dunes ...on all sides and not a sign of civilization. Sammy chattered and the locals chattered back at him. Next to us, Steffon lay slumped over in his chair, like a great bear and snored.

We peeled off as much clothing as we could, but still there was no air and it must have been over 100 degrees under that blazing sun.

I didn't think to bring water or food; only a sack of seeds for Sammy. Our fellow passengers were better prepared. Even Steffon had thought to bring a bottle of water and thankfully he shared it with the three of us.

Just after noon we arrived at the Turkish border; just a few isolated buildings and a gate stretched across the road, guarded by armed soldiers. Over the gate was written **Turkey**, in a strange alphabet and spelling, but it said freedom to me.

A man in military uniform, with a machine gun slung over his shoulder, came on board and collected all of our passports. Steffon awoke with a start and in his expression I saw my own anxiety. This is the moment ...my mind stopped spinning ...everything is real again.

More than an hour of shaky laughter and jokes passed there in the cramped confines of that hot airless bus as we tried not to feel the strain or betray our fears.

Then, as if in answer to our unspoken dread, two men this time, carrying machine guns in their hands came abruptly on board and marched up to where Steffon and I sat.

One soldier examined our passport photos and then our faces, while the other stood by with a fixed naked stare and his finger on the trigger.

“You, come with us,” one said, as the other motioned with the barrel of his gun in the direction of the door. Steffon and I took our things and followed them.

There are certain situations that one can never prepare for and have to be taken as they come. Thankfully, in these moments, as in so many others before, my uncertainty manifests in me an impression of confidence, for which I am truly grateful.

We were taken into a small dusty building with a long table at the center where our luggage was torn apart. Sammy’s papers were examined and passed around and we were questioned about our activities in the country.

“You have no Exit Visa,” said a small fat man with a heavy moustache as he pawed through our things.

“I don’t need one,” I said confidently. **“I’m an American.”**

The fat man stopped rummaging as I said the word. **“American,”** he jibed back, **“I know this. I have your passport.”**

A gruff, tall man came up behind him; he patted the top of Sammy’s cage and gave me a gnarled smile. **“Nice bird,”** he said nodding.

The fat man gave him a kind of salute and went to his desk and sat behind it. The tall man motioned with a crooked finger for me to come with him, so I left Sammy behind on the inspection counter and followed him.

He turned and put an arm around my shoulders and walked me down a long corridor to a small room. Inside there was some medical equipment, a desk and a chair. I stepped inside and he threw the bolt on the door and turned to me, still smiling. I didn’t panic; I just retreated inside of myself and watched.

“Are you man or woman?” he asked. I didn’t really understand at first, what he meant. He came close to my ear. **“For sex,”** he whispered, **“Are you man or woman?”**

He reached out and brushed my eyelashes with the back of his fingers, which made it all pretty clear. **“You have very pretty eyes,”** he said, never losing his grin.

We spent a long few moments doing this little dance, but I pretended not to understand until his smile vanished suddenly and the courtship was over.

“OK ...OK ...How much money you have?” he demanded. **“You must change to Turkish money before you go.”**

“Also, you need shot.” he said. **“To pass.”** He picked up a syringe and smiled again, **“Shot ...you know?”**

“Very painful shot. Make people sick sometime.” He spoke as he laid the syringe back on the tray and tilted his head, sizing me up. **“...But I think maybe ... you pay me something and we have an arrangement? ...Yes?”**

I reached into my pocket and pulled out about 700 rials and placed it in his hand. He looked satisfied, turned, unbolted the door and pocketed the money. It was over before I had time to think about what might have happened.

All of our Iranian rials were changed to Turkish lira at a very bad rate of exchange. What little money we have is dwindling fast and I hope that it will get us to Paris ...at least it *will* get us *out* of Iran and into Turkey.

We gathered up our things and got back onto the bus. The other passengers looked on us like ghosts raised up from the dead. As we climbed on board and I could see in Gerard's face ...real terror ...that, I hadn't considered, but it doesn't matter now. We'll soon be across the border and on our way.

Steffon and I never spoke about what happened to him at the border, but I imagine that he lost a good bit of his money too. I doubt anyone locked him in a room and gave him another option ...although anything is possible.

The ice-topped gray stony peaks of the Turkish mountains are far behind us now, but there are still many hills, desert plains and valleys to pass over and through before nightfall. As we wound our way up to the ancient city Erzurum, over a mile above sea level, halfway to the Black Sea, darkness fell. There, most of the other passengers including our driver got off, leaving only a few of us behind.

A new driver took his place and we set out immediately. We traveled another twenty-one hours, straight through. The further west we travel, the more the countryside and our spirits improve. We passed through villages nestled in cool shaded valleys and saw Bedouin camps in barren desert outposts.

I only wish that we had thought to bring some food with us, to sustain us on the long trip. We haven't eaten since Thursday night and the only rest stops along the way are cinderblock buildings with holes in the floors for toilets and no food. Still, we are together and safely on our way.

Then at the end of the second day, just at sunset, we could see it in the distance — Istanbul ...with its countless mosques and minarets ...a floating mirage above the desert landscape. The fading sun reflected in thousands of panes of glass and then sank out of sight taking the city with it.

It was still a long while before we arrived, before the dark buildings closed in around us and the streets narrowed and swarmed with crowds of people. By the time we crossed the Bosphorus, dividing Istanbul and Asia from Europe, it was very dark. When we arrived at the bus station, I knew our train had gone.

In the confusion it was hard to collect our things. Gerard was busy pulling our duffle bag from the baggage compartment and I held Sammy and tried to get my bearings. Steffon clutched his belongings and looked bewildered.

I noticed the bus driver, as he looked us over with concern and came up to help. **“Don't stay here,”** he said. **“Someone ...take your money.”** He explained as best he could the fastest way to the train station, then patted my shoulder and disappeared into the crowd.

It wasn't supposed to be dark when we arrived, but the time had somehow gotten away; it has been more than two days after all. Our legs are still shaky and unsteady from sitting too long and there will be no Orient Express to catch. Staying in a hotel is out of the question since we have very little money. The only solution is to make our way to the train station and see if there is another train.

The city is alive, everywhere, even in the darkness. The streets are carved out of stone and lit with strings of lights. There is music in the alleyways and spilling out from lighted doorways. Silhouettes, in darkened corners, visible only by the burning

ends of cigarettes, watch as we pass by.

The train station was much further than it appears on my little map. We walked for nearly 2 hours dragging out things along and when we arrived ...the station was all but abandoned. The high vaulted arches echo our footsteps and give us an uneasy sense of being followed.

Our train, the Orient Express, had long gone and the only other passage to Paris available tonight is on an Italian train. We haven't the luxury of waiting another day, so we booked passage, found the track and climbed on board.

Soon, our journey began again, but our bodies are weary. Traveling in the night is like passing through endless tunnels with only flashes of sparks and streaks in the darkness. There won't be anything to see until morning and our small spare compartment consists of just two hardwood benches facing one another, a sliding door opening onto a long corridor at one end and a shaded window at the other.

The trip will take three more days. It's good to have Steffon along for company. I'd give anything for a bit of food. We brought enough seeds for Sammy, but even he looks as if he's in a state of shock.

The train slowed a little, in the middle of the early morning and then came to a stop. **"We must be entering Bulgaria,"** I said to Gerard, but he and Steffon were fast asleep.

The benches are hard and cold, but we try as best we can, to forget about hunger and the long trip ahead and settle into our compartment. Gerard wraps up in his sheepskin coat that I bought him in Teheran. It still smells like camel piss to me, but he loves it. Steffon wraps himself in a skimpy silk Chinese robe and wears wooden clogs on his bare feet.

Border patrols come on and check our papers from time to time, but we had no real trouble until we reached the Yugoslavian border, where we discovered that Steffon hadn't gotten the proper transit visas in Teheran, so once again he found himself, at the point of a gun, dragging his luggage from the train.

All we could hear was the 'clap-clap-clapping' of his wooden clogs as he followed the police down the platform. We watched from the window as he followed the men. The wind whipped up under his robe and he clutched and tugged at the cheap fabric to keep himself covered until he disappeared into an office.

A young man from England stuck his head into our compartment. **"Is there room?"** he asked and took a seat without waiting for a reply.

He sports a bristly beard and a backpack about as large as he is. He has come from Afghanistan and is heading west. He must be starved for the sound of his own voice because he immediately launched into a monologue of personal history and philosophy even before he had stored his pack.

He only paused for breath as Steffon stumbled back into the compartment, clutching his robe, flustered and red in the face.

"Don't ask," Steffon said, settling into his corner, but the young Brit couldn't help himself.

The young man sympathized and recounted the indignities he had suffered at the hands of Afghan authorities and other officials in his travels. Steffon seemed more than sympathetic ...in fact he perked right up.

I, on the other hand, was waning. I could feel a weight on my lungs and some dizziness. The long journey and not eating was catching up to me. I nestled myself into a corner and began to pass time in wakeful dreaming. The conversations, all around me, began to hum and blur and only occasionally did something offensive, reach out and shake me awake. Mostly, I tried to ignore them, but the young traveler had a flask of something in his bag and the more he drank the better he understood the universe and each and every one of our roles in it.

After hours of chewing up and digesting politics, with broad assumptions and narrow points of view, the conversation inevitably made that fateful leap into the grinning sharp-toothed mouth of religion. Gerard and Steffon were soft clay in his hands.

“I’m for God and Family,” I heard him say and as he regurgitated that trite cliché, that inane sound bite, he sent their heads into involuntary nods. He had them.

When did I become so wary of people and the plotting games they play? This prodigal fool took another swig from his flask, but no amount of alcohol or friendly candor could disguise the intent.

“Where we come from,” he smirked, full of himself, **“we hate people like you!”**

“No, you don’t,” Gerard said with a conciliatory smile, not really having heard, or maybe, having heard and not understood.

Gerard was for making peace, when we were clearly at war and I let it go, mostly for Gerard and Steffon’s sake, for the sake of tranquility and settled back and started to drift, but the poison was in my mind and my battle raged on in unspoken words behind closed eyes.

Before too long his flask was empty, his slogans were used up and the bumper stickers that he quoted were lacking. I retreated, once more into my dream, but how often, I wondered, would I replay those words or similar in my head? What gallant battles would I fight in the recesses of my mind?

As night began to fall, we all began to nod and sleep as best we could on the hard wooden benches. The rhythmic sound of wheels on rails, even managed to quiet the demons in my mind. It was dark again outside, so we rolled along, blindly west, until we came to Belgrade.

It was well after midnight, when we were all startled awake by the compartment door flying open. A robust Yugoslavian man and woman got on, with two grown children, heading for Paris. They crammed into the compartment with us and there was no more sleeping for us.

The son played the accordion and they broke out loaves of bread and serenaded us throughout the night. It was very cramped, but kind of nice. They seemed to have only enough food for themselves, but the music worked wonders on our spirits.

By morning, it was pretty clear that the mother had her eye on Steffon as a likely catch for her daughter. Side by side, they might have been related, Steffon and the girl, both had some of the same thick-ankle stock in their backgrounds.

“You have pretty face,” the mother mimed and touched her own face, as she handed Steffon a piece of sausage on a knife and then nudged her daughter and laughed. Steffon was grateful for the food but wary of the attention.

“Big!” Mama said and laughed again.

The daughter looked at the floor and Steffon clutched his robe tighter around his neck and gave a nervous smile.

Another day soon became night and the journey seems endless. I can see nothing in the window but my own reflection; a gaunt spectral creature I no longer recognize. All night the train thrashed and squealed along the tracks in complete darkness, but first light brought with it something amazing and quite unexpected.

The colorless terrain that had followed us from the East suddenly broke into brilliant blue. Outside our window was our first sight of the Adriatic Sea and for a time we forgot about food and money and our aches and pains, as white cliffs and green slender trees flew by, as our train wound in and out of the shadows of low hills and then back into blinding sunlight.

In spite of all distractions, I am fairly certain that I am becoming seriously ill. As we pull into Trieste, it's the end of our fourth day and I am feeling quite weak from not eating and my throat is swollen, perhaps from the lack of water, but I can't be sure.

The endless polkas and the lure of forbidden sausage are starting to get to me. As we pulled into the train station, I decided to take my chances and leave the train to look for some food and drink.

It's very late and the whole car is a mass of sleeping bodies, slumped across luggage or propped up against the walls. I disentangled myself, slipped out and quietly shut the door behind me.

The train usually sits for at least half an hour in these large stations, so I climbed down onto the platform and marked where I was, by the signal post and hurried into the station.

I found a vendor and he was kind enough to take Turkish lira for some fruit and water; I don't know what I paid for it, it doesn't matter. I just thanked him, held tight onto my bounty and rushed back to my train.

I ran back to the platform ...to the same signal post ...I know I'm not mistaken. It's the right place but the train is gone. My heart stopped for a moment, then began pounding and I found myself unable to move, frozen, exhausted and confused.

I got down onto the tracks and ran, from train to train, looking for something familiar. At the far end of the station, I caught a glimpse of what looked like our car being coupled onto a different train altogether. I jumped over the tracks and ran alongside clutching the fruit and water to my chest. I caught the high step and hoisted myself up as the train lurched forward and stopped, throwing me and my booty into the corridor.

I'm certain it's the right train but it's not the right car. I collected my things off of the floor and crossed into the next carriage and found a familiar door. Sure enough, there asleep, in the dark compartment, were my merry band of travelers, snoring, all in a heap. They wouldn't have realized I was even gone, until it was too late.

As I eased back into my place, I was careful not to disturb my companions, but no sooner had taken my seat, than the compartment door flew open behind me, with a bang. A man with a gun held a flashlight in my eyes and shouted at me, but I was having trouble collecting my wits. I couldn't respond.

I was startled, we were all startled and soon the whole compartment was shouting, in at least three languages. It turned out to be the Italian police and border patrol officers.

I tried to tell them what I was doing on the tracks, but they didn't seem too happy with the explanation. The poor Yugoslavian family looked as if the Nazis had come for them. The mother shielded her children with her broad arms and the others clutched their things in front of them and trembled, but the intruders were only interested in me.

"Your papers," they demanded, **"...and tickets please!"** Establishing, from my feeble response, that I spoke English.

I can't imagine what they must think. They looked a little winded, as if they'd chased me through the train yard, but I never noticed if they had. I didn't look behind; I was in a panic myself.

I showed them my goods, from the vendor and they gave back my papers, shook their heads, said something about **"Americans!"** and left.

It was well worth it for the taste of cool water and forbidden fruit. We ate there in the darkness, without another word as the train lurched back, then forward again and soon we were on our way, towards Venice.

On the morning of the fifth day, we were sound asleep when we pulled into the Gare du Nord station. The conductor roused us and it took some persuading to make us realize where we were.

The Yugoslav accordion player and his family were taken off of the train at the French border and never returned. Steffon said that we were so sound asleep that we never woke. He had moved to an empty compartment and left me curled up on a bench and Gerard slumped over Sammy's cage, oblivious to all the commotion.

As we stumbled and dragged our things onto the platform, we were a bit awestruck by the glass-domed ceiling overhead, our first hint of Paris. I'm afraid, even to think, what we must look like, Gerard in his sheepskin coat with its mangy fur collar and me, thin and frail, barely able to carry myself along, like Anastasia, wandering the streets with consumption.

We trudged across the station, our duffel bags in tow, carrying a shrieking green bird in a battered cage, but I didn't care. It was the end of an impossible long journey and we're safe and I am thrilled to have made it to this marvelous city.

As we reached the street, across a wide boulevard, I could see a café. I was so hungry that the very thought of croissants with butter and jam and coffee overwhelmed me. Suddenly, for the first time since the trip began, there in the bright Paris sun, I could feel the toll that the trip had taken on me, but Gerard was beaming and as happy as I have ever seen him.

Gerard has a friend, named Juan, who he thinks will help us find a place to stay, but in the mean time, we found a cheap hotel near Pigalle, where we settled in and cleaned ourselves up. It's funny how a body keeps going when it needs to and then when it's over, it falls apart. Examining myself, in the mirror in this shabby room, I look like a skeleton, my lungs are filling up and congested, but a hot shower was a revelation.

We are too excited to rest, so we didn't stop, not even for a nap. We had our first French meal on a bench in a small park, on the Boulevard de Rochechouart, just a baguette, salami, Coca-Cola and a bar of Swiss chocolate. After that, we took the metro to the Opera and took pictures on the grand staircase. Paris is like a dream to us and we don't want to wake up, so we strolled along the boulevards, to the Place de la Concorde and arrived at twilight.

We made our way carefully to the center island where the Luxor obelisk stands, as the cars sped around us in every direction. From where we stood, we could see the Arc de Triomphe at the end of the Champs-Élysées and the Eiffel Tower beyond the Grand Palais and the Louvre through the gates of the Jardin de Tuilleries.

I was feeling quite ill, but Gerard took my hand and gave me a small kiss and just at that moment the lights came on all over the city. All around us, as far as we could see, fountains, monuments, buildings, the whole city began to sparkle, in the clear evening air and it was the most romantic moment that I could have imagined.

We found Gerard's friend, Juan, the next afternoon. He has lent us a little cold water flat, a tiny apartment, hidden in the winding alleyways near Sacré-Cœur, until we can figure out what to do. Juan, it turns out, is a prostitute and this apartment is his work address, so we've been told to make the stay short.

The room has no heat or cooking facilities, but we'll get by. The common toilet, one per floor, is just a hole in the floor in the center of an icy pillar, around which, a spiral staircase descends, to the tunnel-like corridor that leads to the alley and then to the street. The only place to keep warm is an alcove bed that just happens to be mirrored on four sides; just a thin mattress on a plank of wood, covered with soiled linens and dirty blankets, where we lay huddled together at night.

I've read that it's *très chic* to starve in Paris, but it isn't. Perhaps it will feed my artistic soul. We arrived just over a week ago and it's the most beautiful city I've ever seen, but every day the cold affects me more. I feel my body failing. My breathing is very shaky and every night that passes, the chances of me recovering, enough to find work are dwindling.

Gerard is not well either. We went to a local hospital and they gave me some pills for the infection in my lungs; they think that it's pneumonia. Luckily, Gerard only has a bad cold.

From the hospital we took the metro to the Champs-Élysées and saw the new *King Kong* in French and we didn't understand a word, but in the theatre, holding each other, it was the first time I've felt warm. Maybe it's a good sign.

Afterwards, we bought a cooked chicken from a market and brought it back to the apartment, where it was soon stone cold, but we enjoyed it regardless.

Back in our mirrored cubicle, my labored breathing keeps me awake. A crude metal clock on the wall says that it's 4:00AM and Gerard is asleep next to me. There is a window in the ceiling, exposing a piece of sky and there is a magnificent full moon out, which I'm sure, only looks this way on a cold Paris night. I love him so much. One might say that it's the air, but if that's the case, it follows us wherever we go.

Juan is anxious for us to leave and all week he has been dropping hints that we find work or take to the streets to support ourselves, as he does. I should be grateful for his generosity, but we are doing our best.

I called home and asked Mamá if she could help and eventually found my way to the American Embassy. One way or another I've got to get back to the United States.

I need rest and real food most of all. Once I get my strength back, I can worry about conquering the world.

There is a procedure called Expedient Exportation, through the American Embassy, but one must prove desperate need and that is done by contacting our families back home. Basically, it is a loan from the government, but to get it, one has to prove that there is no other way.

On our third trip to the Embassy, we finally had some news. Mamá was in touch with the State Department and arranged the whole thing for me, but Gerard is being held up.

We called and talked to Gerard's father, but he doesn't really understand the situation. He told the Embassy that he would try to come up with a little money, so they won't proceed until they get it.

"You leave tomorrow," an embassy employee explained, handing me my ticket as if he were serving bread in a soup kitchen.

He made it clear that I had little choice in the matter and that it was charity. **"This isn't a travel agency,"** he told me, in no uncertain terms.

"Either get on that plane or stay here," he said, coldly and it didn't seem to matter to him, which course I chose.

Gerard just held onto my hand, when he heard the news and I could feel that he was frightened, but there was nothing to say about it. I am going home and he is staying here.

We walked out of the embassy past the Marine guard and onto the Place de la Concorde. It's a stormy day, but clear under the clouds. There are drifts of rain that come and go, but we didn't feel any of it. We can't find words, so we walk.

As we crossed over the Pont Alexander III the clouds began to drift apart; streams of light came through and formed a rainbow. It's sharp and bright and perfect, a perfect arch, from the Eiffel Tower across the Seine. We seem to be the only ones to see it, people walk all around us, but no one else looks up.

We walked and walked and tried to hold onto the day, but evening came too quickly. Gerard tried to be brave and only broke once ...where I could see ...as we packed up my things.

He just said, **"What will I do when you're gone?"** There were tears in his eyes, but he stopped himself. **"I'll be fine,"** he said unconvincingly and smiled.

That last night we didn't know what to say so we talked about the good times and all of the beautiful things that we'd seen. We assured each other that we would be together again soon. We said, **"I love you"** and lay awake in each other's arms and eventually fell into a light sleep of waiting and holding tight against the morning.

Seven AM found us in much the same position ...comforting ...assuring ...mostly silent and growing ever weaker in the sudden bewildering light.

Gerard came with me to the airport and stayed until I was checked in. We held each other's hands inconspicuously and kissed good-by in a doorway.

My breathing is labored and my legs are unsure, but it's this feeling of helplessness that weighs most on my mind.

He watched me go through security, then waved me on and walked away. He doesn't want to show me tears and I won't be there to comfort him.

I'm being sent to California; an agent will meet me at Kennedy Airport, cancel my passport and put me on my next plane west. Gerard will eventually be sent to New York.

I'm heading home to start again. I've lost so much weight that I'm sure no one will recognize me; I don't recognize myself. I have to stop running away from things. Someone else depends on me now. I won't rest easy until he's safe and I won't be well until we're together again.