

Running

A poem by T [redacted] L [redacted] Maynard

/memoir

I don't even remember the time before running. It's all an empty space filled with stories and dark holes. I ran to the TV; escaped into the land of make believe. I learned to read and ran to books; a more transportable land of fantasy. When the books and movies were not enough I ran into the deepest, darkest hole I could find. Inside of closets, cabinets, basements, attics, under the stairs, inside the walls - even drain pipes where the drone of the cars far above drowned out all the other sounds. I ran and ran. But you see you can't run from what has been put inside your head. You can't outrun the blood and bruises.

At 16, I ran to the military. A ward of the court, but still "his" possession. The recruiter petitioned the court on my behalf; one of my few true memories. This giant man of war coming back from the courts with two fearful words, that was it: "I'm sorry." And... it was never mentioned again. Just like everyone else, no one knew what to say or do, so they just pretended it never happened. Loneliness like thirst in the ocean, water all around without a drop to drink.

When the military turned its back, I ran again. I ran clear to the other side of the country away from you. Still you followed. In my dreams. Nightmares without faces, since nothing ever happened. That's what they all said. In my face they called me an ungrateful liar. "What's wrong with you?" they all asked, "why do you do that to him? He's such a good father, taking you everywhere with him!" So how could I believe anything else?

I ran and ran but I could never escape. Never waking up. Never sleeping, so *very* tired. Cuts and bruises just to see the blood, real, visible pain. Still I can't feel. Still so very tired. Trying to sleep here, I wake up there. Never resting. Always tired. Screams and silence. Will it ever end? I always try to make it go away - but I always wake up here again in the middle of nowhere. What to do now but run, run, run! They pick me up and tell me you are dead. *Peace*, I think, *peace at last*. But no. The same old nightmare, but with a face now. A face with a bullet hole.

Oh, they all speak up now. "The things he did to her, what a tragedy!" they say. Too little too late. My mind is not mine. Blood, burns, broken bones - no pain can escape the pain locked in my head - and they think brick walls and bars will make a difference? The joke's on them. I've been in prison my whole life. And still, I run.

Running to fantasy so much I never knew fact. Mentally mature beyond my years; a mother and a wife. Never a child. Emotionally and socially inept, having never had a childhood - no knowledge beyond that which was seen on TV and read in books. Isolated from anything else: first by force, then by phobia, and finally by bricks and bars.

I want to stop it. I want to stop it all! But do I really? A whole new fear; he's dead. So is death really the escape? Will it really end or just start anew? What does death really do? I stand at the edge staring into the abyss of insanity.

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All around me I see the same. The same people, the same problems - we are everywhere. I watch some slip over the edge. Running, Running, Running. Locked in a small room. Will it ever end? 30 pills. I thought that was enough. They tell me four days. Why couldn't it last? Always running into the deepest, darkest hole. They put me on meds and the darkness grows.

A choice must be made. Death or life, mindful or mindless, sane or insane, reality or illusion? Step over the edge or stand up. I made the choice to stop running. I made the choice to stop letting him ruin my life. I faced what happened to me. I faced what I, myself, had done. I made the choice to stop letting him rule me. Day after day, minute by minute, I make a choice to act differently. Year after year, second by second, I keep making the choice to change. On and on it goes. Standing in one place - facing it all.

Slowly my thinking changed. Making the choices easier. Before I knew it, emotions followed my thinking. The choice to live was no longer a choice - it was life. The peace I ran so hard to find, found me when I finally stopped running!