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No Escape

by MaryPat Campbell

The craziness of this place defies belief. I try to describe it but cannot do it justice. *You look at yourself from one perspective and all you see is weirdness. Move your head a little though, and everything looks reasonably normal.* Here is an example; the noise in this place is unlike anything I've ever heard before. You don't so much as hear the noise, it envelopes you from every side, there is no respite, no escape except to close off your ears or your mind or both. Then you move your head slightly, and you see some workers in the fields outside the barred windows as they come and go carrying baskets of vegetables and fruit, or containers of water or manure. All this looks normal, idyllic even. People hard at work, mostly silent except for the occasional whistle, murmur or hum as they go about their labours. It could be a farm with farm hands tilling the small fields or tending the animals. There are hens here, and cockerels, a few pigs and numerous lean cats scavenging for whatever scraps they can find.

The cats bring me back with a jolt. Lurking, creeping and spying on everything that moves. Occasionally the young ones catch birds or mice and run off to hide and eat their precious morsels. Lank fur, thin greasy tails and feet, eyes yellow and sharply watchful. They look like the inmates here, either on high alert, or else far away busy with their own troubles in their own worlds.

I'm beginning to know a few people here. The superintendent does not have a name, perhaps he is like me and nameless. Silas and Giles are not inmates, they work here and caretake, house, feed and clothe us. Jarvis and Ursula, on the other hand, are inmates like me. I would like to call them my friends, but am uncertain yet.

“What are you doing mooning around looking like you’ve seen a ghost!”

A voice bellowed at me suddenly, my eyes focused fast and I took heed immediately. I stood alert and straight, thinking how I could answer this charge, but found I could not. There is something missing between my voice box and my brains. I know what I would like to say but I do not say it.

“The moon,”

I try saying it in different registers, quietly, loudly and then in a whisper “The moon, The moon! The moon...”

The owner of the booming voice stares at me, sighs and walks quickly away shaking his head from side to side. In a few moments he is back, this time shouting and roaring, as if I have insulted him. He is a big man, with strong legs and arms, wearing grey overalls and has piercing black eyes that flash when I glimpse them behind his long unruly hair.

I try again.

“I didn’t mean... I’m sorry, it’s what you said about the moon.”

The loud man stares long and hard at me, then walks around me in a tight circle, first clockwise then back the other way. I feel his breath on me from all sides, hot and damp on my skin. I suddenly know that this man could kill me, or he could help me escape, we could flee together, up and over the walls, out past the river, on and on till we came to...

My breath heaved and the blood drained from my body, I must have blacked out. Next thing I knew I was lying on my bed looking up at the timber joists of the ceiling high above me. Someone was sitting by my bedside on a creaky old chair. I looked sideways and saw it was Giles. He looked down at me through his spectacles with pity in his eyes, and said that if I didn’t behave myself he would have to put the straitjacket on me again.