

Welcome Back

BY ELIN, TORI, IRIS

Day 1

I just need explanation of why am I here and what I am supposed to do.

Day 2

First of all, to whoever reading this, hi, and I guess i'm just as confused as you are.

Day 5

We put on the same set of clothes everyday, just like factory workers, wake up at 7:30 in the morning, and go to work. The sun here is always up and I feel like I could be melted by it somehow. The mud would sticks under my fingernails every time, but at this point I wouldn't even bother to clean them up. By the way, I do not know why but everyone here seems hostile, stare at me like I owe them money or something.

Day 10

I want to get out from this hell as soon as possible, the main reason for it might because the people here are all the same sex. At first, I thought it's just the area that I got assigned to, but it confirmed by this new friend of mine, Matt, who has been here for god knows how long, (he told me he already lost count) saying "don't bring any hopes up because only the gay couples are happy here."

Day 35

So I found something that freaked me out. The longer I spent time here, the easier I forgot about my past. I started to lose track of time because there is no phone, no clock or calendar to remind us the passage of time. Glad that I could still tell how much it passed by seeing how long my beard grew. Right now, the things I know for sure is, my

name is George, I am here for some reason, and my mom is still at home waiting for me.

Day whatever it is

As far as I can remember, i've been stuck in this place for almost 2 years.

When I first came here, the time when I still have hope, I would count the days and record my thoughts and feelings. And now I'm here again, picking up my pencil and deciding to record something I experienced that is definitely not part of the routine.

So, I might have met a female, for the very first time since I came here. I am not a hundred percent sure because she does not have a lot of feminine traits I would say.

Short, curly black hair, thick brows that are not well groomed, her eyes were wandering around anxiously. We made eye contact for a second, but I quickly moved my eyes away from her so she wouldn't notice. I passed by her and she has this distinct smell from her that is different from the rest of us that I will never forget.

Day 11 after I met the girl.

Yes, I started to count the days again. And I'm back with an interesting story.

I woke up in the middle of the night, and ran to the public bathroom because I was in a hurry.

There was a shadow of a person, standing in front of the mirror, using bandage to bind the chest. When I was still processing what was going on, standing there like a stone, the person quickly put everything on and ran away. But I smell the same scent again. I instantly knew it was her. I had a lot of questions in my mind about her. When I headed back to my room, all I could think about is the girl. Why is she here, where is she from and what happened to her?

Day 15 after I met the girl

I usually eat lunch alone. Not like I just want to be by myself, it would be great if somebody's there to talk to me. I thought today is just going to be like any other day, but the girl came to sit with me. I am surprised how she trusted me so much, I had so many questions for her and she did not hesitate to tell me her past. Our conversation was like a ping pong game, going back and forth with excitement. But you only need to know that her name is Iris and she had a plan to get out of here.

Day 20 after I met Iris

I promised her that I would tell nobody about her identity. I felt like I am the special one because I'm probably the only here know about her secret. (yes, and you too.) Now everytime when she passes by me, she would gaze at me, smiling. My heart was beating so fast that I would cast my eyes down to avoid eye-contact. I started to feel like I finally have someone there with me, and of course to rely on.

Day 40 after I met Iris

I know it is very not me when I did that. I kissed her. I could sense her body was shaking a bit. I do not know how she feels about me, after all the nights we spent together secretly in the bathroom (the only place we could chat at night) It's too hard for me to hide all the feelings and I need her to know I am always by her side to help her.

Day 50 after I met Iris

We spent endless hours talking about how we should escape this shithole together. And after our talk, we always kissed and hugged each other. However, we need to be very cautious so nobody will find out about us. Also, she hasn't been there as long as I did, but she seems like to know more about the surroundings here than I do. I thought about

escaping this place but I know I could not do this alone. I'm glad that I have a partner now, and we are in this together.

Day 60 after I met Iris

I remembered there's one time I saw this abandoned rubber boat lying in the recycling area. If we need to get out from this place, I guess it is the only way. I told Iris about it and told her I would try my best to get it for us.

The day

My palms were sweating more than usual. While I was packing my belongings, I thought of how our lives would be like when we are out of here. When we go back home, Iris and I could live the life we want. I remembered she talked about how many kids she want to raise. We will have a happy family together. I put all of the food supplies that I collected from the cafeteria into my bag, and of course, a photo of my mom. We carefully climb through the fence at 3 am in the morning, got on the boat and started our journey. I was pretty surprised of how easy it was.

1 month after the escape

It's around a month since we escaped the island, we still did not find anything around us. No humans, no animals, no sound. Iris seemed to have a serious seasick that I kind of worried about. She threw up everything she ate for breakfast today.

2 months after the escape

I felt like this is useless somehow because I can not see a thing around us. Sometimes I gave up looking for hope, but Iris is always there full of hope no matter what, but her body became a lot weaker, and I am not sure about why. We almost ate up all of our food. I woke up in the middle of the night because my stomach could not handle it

anymore. I looked around and see there's barely anything I could eat at the moment, except for some flavorless bread that is soaked by the sea water. I decided to look through everything, my bag, every corner of the boat, and lastly, Iris's bag. I found there are some chocolate bars left. But I also found something. A dairy. She also kept a diary like I do? I debated within myself, I do not know if I should read it or not. But in the end, out of curiosity, I still couldn't control my temptation...

Day 3,

This is my third day since I got here. I asked an officer for some paper and pen to write a diary. He laughed and gave me a pencil and some paper, he thought I was ridiculous. I actually don't blame them putting me on the guy island. I hate cat fights. I mean, it doesn't matter where I'm at, I would get out anyways. Everything is what I had expected in here, and of course, they gave me the hardest job, I am carrying crops and corns every day, but I worried that people will find out that I am a girl soon before I get out. I just need to hide it really well and get out as soon as possible. God, I miss David.

Day 7,

I miss cuddling with him and kissing on his lips... I just miss him so damn much... but I know I cannot rush, I know I have to plan this really well, I cannot risk anything. I overheard a guy said a teenage boy climbed over the power grid and was shocked dead. I wouldn't be so stupid to do that; my plan has to be perfect... there must be something that I can do...

Day 10,

It has been 10 days since I got here. David must be dying to see me, I will marry him as soon as I get out... I have been watching the officers, it is a bit odd, because they seemed a bit careless, like they don't even care about we do. I saw this old black man that have been here for years, chatting and laughing with them on the other day...

Day 30,

Fuck! This guy named George saw me at midnight when I was taping my breast! I am not sure if he knows what I was doing, I mean I grab all my stuff and went away as soon as he saw me. I don't know how much he saw, but he has to be silenced.

Day 31,

I am watching him the whole day, he is not a talkative guy, I don't see him talking to any other guys this whole day. I look like a total freak following him everywhere, but he seemed so careless... he just wasn't paying attention to his surroundings. I am so anxious, for god's sake, does he know my secret now?

Day 34,

So... He does know... He was sitting by himself and I went straight up to him today at lunch, I just needed to figure out how much he knows. He promised he won't tell anyone about it...

Day 50,

George has been helping me a lot these days, he covered me to go to the bathroom when I had to re-tape my breast today. We ran into each other in the bathroom at midnight a lot since the talk. I felt like he might be into me...

Day 60,

George kissed me yesterday when we bumped into each other the bathroom, I did respond. I felt deeply sorry for David, but I could use him to help me with my escape plan. I told him my plan, he said he would help me...

Day 67,

I found this hole on the power grid today, if we go at midnight, there would be a high chance to get out without anyone noticing. I just need a boat, and a lot of food. We have to start preparing. David, I am coming back to you.

Day 69,

George said he would steal a rubber boat for me, which he did. He saw the officers were throwing a broken rubber boat to the recycling area the other day and he stole it before the machine melt the boat into complete plastic. We have been collecting crackers from the dining hall. We hide everything in the woods. I'm so glad that the officers have been chilling, no one noticed...

Day 80,

Tomorrow is our escape day... the old black man talked to me today when I was putting my plates away at the dining hall. He whispered to me "you don't need to do that" and left. He might know what we have been up to, but I've got no time to think about it. everything is prepared, I need to LEAVE, tomorrow is the day.

George closes the diary slowly with a trembling hand. It is hard to tell if it's cold or just shocking.

Memories of the island bubbled up in his mind, their initial awkward encounter, each eye contact and embrace... One by one emerged, but they are immediately pricked by the knife called "Deception". He realizes that he is just a pawn in Iris' escape plan, a moment of anger and despair fill his heart. He can no longer keep the calmness, desperate to shake her awake in deep sleep and question. When Iris wakes with a start, her face is as cold as if they were enemies rather than lovers on the run. Her distant expression confirms the fact that he has been taken advantage of. His love for her fall to the bottom of the valley in an instant. The diary is thrown to the ground with all his strength, and the escape plan fall apart. The tension fills the boat.

His questioning falls upon her, shattering her last vestige of gratitude for him. All that remains in her mind and heart is the discontented and resentment that have drifted on the sea for days. She goes up to him and tries to give him a slap to vent her feelings, but he chose to abandon his manners. He shields his arm from her attack and shoves her. She is pushed down with violent pain in her stomach. Although it is her first pregnancy, she knows it is her baby leaving her. A moment of anger fills her, and she rushes at him in a desperate attempt to attack him.. The hand moves mechanically, even when its strength is exhausted.

He got accidentally pushed off the boat, and the cold waters of the night immediately engulfs him...

She got exhausted because of all the strength she used, sat down in the boat and passed out. Scattered food and diary papers, blood on wooden boards record the violence of the “war”.

At noon the next day, she awakes by the roaring stomach and searing sun. The last night's violent scene flashes through her mind. All she has in her mind now is to live, to live out of the sea. She picks up the dry bread with blood on the ground and swallows it with difficulty. Fortunately, there are no serious storms at sea these days, and the occasional rain brings her potable water. Her mindset has changed dramatically on this journey. Instead of burying her in the wrong, she is grateful for what God has given her, and shame for the crimes she had committed before. She spends her days on the boat in penance and hardship. As she watched the blood run dry on the boards, she often weeps, missing her unborn child, and her lover David, in the outside world. She also occasionally think of George, what if he had not found her plan, and had not argued, he should still be taking care of himself now, and there would have been some chat with her and her baby would still be alive. She wanted to convince herself that nothing had happened. In the meantime, she also has to endure the physical pain.

A week later, the food was about to run out, and she became less and less conscious. Suicidal thoughts often came to her mind. On an evening, she saw an island in the distance. It is like God's salvation for her. She tries to slide her oar and her eyes

fix on the island. Then she thinks of George again. If he were there, she wouldn't have to row so hard.

Finally, after a day and night of hard work, she reaches the shore, laying desperately on the land, feeling with her whole body. She looks around with tears in her eyes and finally burst into tears. She starts fishing with a very positive mindset to celebrate landing. Even though she does not catch any fish afterward, she is still optimistic. She looks around for dry sticks to make a fire for warmth before the cold night. As night fell, a light grows more visible behind her. Out of curiosity, she turns and saw a string of words in the sky: Welcome Back. The familiar prison iron fence reflects cold light, it likes an extremely sharp sword piercing her heart.

Bibliography

Ai, Weiwei, and Larry Warsh. *Humanity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018.

Bäckman, Carl G., and Sten M. Walther. "Use of a Personal Diary Written on the ICU during Critical Illness." SpringerLink. November 25, 2000.

Brewer, John M. *Prison Life*. Baltimore: S.S. Mills, 1862.

Collins, Suzanne. *The Hunger Games*. Place of Publication Not Identified: Publisher Not Identified, 2009.

Levene, Mark, Rob Johnson, and Penny Roberts. *History at the End of the World? History, Climate Change and the Possibility of Closure*. Tirril England: Humanities-Ebooks, 2010.

Östberg, Jeff. "What 24 Hours in Prison Is Really Like." *The Marshall Project*. July 27, 2018. Accessed December 03, 2018. <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2018/07/12/a-day-in-the-life-of-a-prisoner>.

Wegman, Jacob J. "Fake Love Is Better than No Love." doi:10.31274/rtd-180817-5248.