

## Storm's Escape

Being in the wrong place at the wrong time, I paid no attention to people passing up and down in front of our jail cells. They looked at us and shook their heads, passing down the walkway to view others. Our jail was in open sunshine during the day and illuminated all night by a bright light hanging on a tall post not twenty feet from my prison cell. Prisoners were in separate sections, one to every ten feet by six feet cell. The back half was on a concrete floor and the front half on dirt. Guards could quickly view our entire area and hardly slow their inspection walks.

Keeping my head low, I could not see above the knees of the guard as he walked the sidewalk in front of my area. Even though this particular guard had shown kindness from time to time, I learned to wait for him to make friendly remarks before I even tried to approach him at the wire. He remained free while I was locked behind bars and woven steel fence. At least he didn't hold the big water hose pressure on me like others did. Our cells needed to be cleaned but the concrete floor survived the infrequent washings easier than prisoners. I finally learned that I could not hide in my unanchored small one room quarters because the water pushed it around on the concrete floor like a cardboard box.

It seemed like after every wash-down, my little shed-like box and my bed pad would just about be dry when the next 'cleaning' came.

I had paced off the length and depth of my lock-up so many times that I could do it without counting the distances. When the weather wasn't bad cold or very hot, our outdoors confinement in our zoo like prison was better than being stuck inside the big building just a short distance away. I did not know what went on inside that building but painful yells and groaning echoed almost daily. If you were sent there, you never came out. From my cell, I could see several more cages down the row and knew no captive had it better than the next. Our once a day food ration wasn't too bad even being shoved at us in bowls.

Escape was on my mind everyday. I had no tools, saws, cutters, or weapons to use for a get-away. But hope of escape was full time.

The wire and steel bars overhead matched the ones all around me. No friendships developed with my next door cell mates. We just didn't talk. I looked at them and they looked at me. It didn't matter. We couldn't help one another.

My desperate need to be free grew as the days piled on top of days. I had already been captured and confined too long. Enough was enough. If I could get out of my jail and through the distant big gate, I would make it forever or to where ever.

Finally, a bad summer thunderstorm hit our prison area. Beyond us, I saw tops of the big trees bend, sway, and break off large limbs. Lightning struck close and once lit up our wire and steel rods. Pouring rains soaked us.

After about an hour, I noticed that not one man had walked the sidewalk in front of the cells. It became evident they were all staying safe in the big building. Then, their lights went out when the electric transformer blew out with sparks and blue flames spewing a few seconds. We were in the dark for the first time in my whole prison time.

I peeked out from my shed as thunder and zigzag bolts in the night sky went into the distance. The rain continued but the winds blew less.

This was my time. Escape. I crawled off the concrete portion and onto the dirt that now was mostly mud. In the midnight darkness, I bumped into the wire and bars with my forehead and immediately began to scratch, dig, claw, and pull mud and dirt from under the wire. I worked fast and without a sound. Soon I'd be free. It could have been an hour or more, but I dug beneath the wire and squeezed my body in a rolling motion until I came out on the other side.

Keeping low, I moved on all four at a fast clip – heading for the wall and big gate. Mud fell off my body as I kept a frantic pace towards freedom. I looked from side to side seeing nothing in the darkness but the tall wall and big gate.

Electric power came back on. Lights beamed into the cells. Men began filtering out of the big building. I was at the locked gate but I found no way to get through. I ran along the fence while keeping a glance back to the jail area. Behind a bushy section next to the fence, I rested and considered my next move.

Before I had fully recovered my breath, men called out to one another. I looked through the thick bush to see them gathering at my cell and another cell down the row.

They laughed and pointed and laughed some more. The men fanned out with flashlights and spotlights, holding what looked like sticks or rifles.

One man called to the others and they gathered near the big gate. They threw a net over another prisoner who apparently had made it out of his cell, too. He wanted to fight them and paid for that attitude with a hard lick across his head from a club. They dragged him away.

Extra beams of light flashed along the fence. I knew I was being searched for. Luck, good fortune, or destiny was mine. As I backed up close to the fence, I discovered my rear had slid through a broken place in the boards. I heard a man call out that he thinks I came in this direction. He approached my hiding place. Without taking my eyes off the man, I pushed my back and rear through the fence opening and soon gained total freedom on the outside.

I ran and ran until I felt like my tongue was hanging out. I stopped ever so often, checking to see if anybody was closing in on me. I saw no spotlights, couldn't hear men yelling, but heard only my pounding heart. Stopping at a small creek, I took a quick drink before resuming my run. All night and all day, I ran and rested, ran and rested. I didn't know where I was but it was away from prison.

I went deeper into the woods, far from any town, not wanting to be seen. At dark, in a dense brush thicket, I dug a shallow hole, leaving the loose dirt, leaves, and twigs around the edges of my curled-up body. I wanted to sleep but strange noises and unfamiliar sounds caused me to repeatedly stare into the darkness. I thought I could hear wild beasts, like bears or big cats, moving near my hiding place so I remained still until dawn. Sunlight relieved some fears and allowed me a quick nap.

After two more days of walking and hiding, I felt a hurting hunger. Watching for danger, I entered a small yard on a big farm and moved closer with caution. A boy bounced off the front porch of the farmhouse and ran up to me. I didn't try to run away, I sprawled down, turned my stomach up in the air, and whined.

He said, "Hey, boy, where did you come from? Are you hungry? I just lost my old dog last month. I knew I'd find a new one. He stroked my hair, patted my head, named me Storm, and treated me to the best meal I had had in years (even though it was in a bowl).