

*This post contains some disturbing content.*

The drinking started. The sounds of the people grew louder as more alcohol was drunk; pretty soon the scene became raucous and violent. Jason heard a number of women scream as the men roughly grabbed at them. The screams became a background noise to the overall din of the encampment. Through his glasses Jason spotted a tent at the edge of the yard, with men steadily going in and out. The noise continued well into the night until around midnight, when it started to gradually quiet down.

Over the next two hours Jason slowly, patiently, crawled through the grass in the field. The darkness helped to hide his trail of matted growth. But even so, he went slowly and carefully, not wanting to make his move until the group had drunk itself into sleep.

He aimed for the tent where he had seen the men going in and out, hoping that Judy might be there and hoping at the same time that she wasn't. The reality, he guessed, was probably much worse. Even at 50 years of age, Judy was not an unattractive woman. And who knew what code of conduct, if any, ruled this group? Gangs like this acted worse than a pack of animals. They killed not only to survive, but for the joy of killing itself. The violence he had seen in the Miller's house was the equivalent of what he had read about the medieval times.

*They're like the barbarians who brought down the Roman Empire, he thought. They imagined cruelty and violence towards the enemy was a virtue.*

Jason reached the back of the tent and listened carefully for some time. The only sounds he heard were low moans and whimpers. Very slowly, he inserted his hunting knife into the back of the tent and cut a small opening. He put his eye to the slit and tried to see inside. In the darkness it was nearly impossible. He could make out one small figure to the side (*Judy?*) and another, larger figure lying opposite.

Jason slowly started to slice the tent open. His heart was racing and his breathing became ragged. Still working the knife, he buried his face in the crook of his arm to cover the sound of his breath.

*Be calm. Breathe steady.*

He repeated this mantra over and over in his mind. When he finished cutting the tent open, he slowly worked his way through the large hole.

As he was pulling himself through, Jason's foot caught on the flap of material and he fell forward. The larger figure mumbled something as he started to wake up. Without hesitating, Jason thrust his body over the man, covered his mouth with one hand, and shoved his knife into the man's neck with the other. He jerked and flopped instinctively, trying to get away from the attack. Jason worked the knife back and forth without taking it out of the man's neck, slashing and cutting the life out of him. After a short struggle, a gurgling sound came out of the man and he went limp. Jason held on for a few more seconds before pulling back — he was dead. He turned quickly to other figure.

"Judy, is that you?" he whispered.

"Jason?" came her weak reply.

"Shh," he said as he went over to her, listening for sounds outside of the tent. All was quiet. Judy had a blanket thrown over her; underneath she was naked and bound.

"Jason," she whispered, "they, they ... raped me."

“Don’t talk. I’m getting you out of here,” he whispered.

He cut her bonds with his knife. He could feel the cuts and bruises on her wrists and ankles. He found a shirt which he put over her. Taking the blanket with them, he helped Judy crawl through the opening in the tent. Once outside, Jason had Judy lie down on the blanket. Holding one end, he dragged her behind him as he crawled back along his path. This time he went faster and with less caution, taking the chance that everyone was asleep. Upon reaching the tree line, Jason wrapped Judy in the blanket and picked her up in his arms.

“Hold on, it’ll be a bumpy trip. I’ve got to get us away from here as fast as possible.”

“They hurt me,” Judy said. “Over and over, they wouldn’t stop.”

Then she started moaning. Jason gritted his teeth against her sounds of pain and set out for safety.

It was hard going in spite of Judy not being very big. Jason drove himself on and on, stopping only to adjust how he carried Judy: in his arms; piggy back style; over his shoulders. But always he kept moving — whether at a walk, a shuffle, or a slow jog, he would not stop.

Two hours passed before he arrived at their farm house. He laid Judy down gently in the yard and went into the barn to retrieve a two-wheeled cart he had seen. Next he ran into the house and collected pillows and blankets. He made a padded bed in the cart and lay Judy down inside.

Jason knew she had been bleeding as he carried her, so he gently put a pillow between her legs. He told her to push it up tight to stem the bleeding. Judy was so weak that Jason had to help her. Apologizing for the bumpiness, Jason told her he was going to take her to his camp where the gang would not be able to find them.

“I’ll keep you safe, Judy. They won’t hurt you again.”

“Sam?” she said. “They shot him over and over. They laughed and shot him, again and again.”

Then she collapsed in the cart. Jason set out, running now, towing the cart behind him. He left muddy footprints on the road, but he didn’t care.

*I hope they come after me,* he thought, grimly.

His mind was getting darker as he ran on, hearing Judy’s moaning in the cart, knowing she was getting weaker and weaker. He imagined them howling after him in a blood lust, just as he imagined him exacting his revenge on them.

He turned up the old logging trail bark road, running, shuffling, stumbling — not stopping. As the grade became steeper his legs got heavier, but he kept going. It was like the worst army training run he had ever experienced. His lungs were on fire; his breath came in ragged gasps and still he went on, even at a shuffle. He couldn’t stop until he got to his camp and tended to Judy. Her soft cries drove him on and on.

At last he arrived. The camp was on top of a steep bank that had been created a century or so ago, when a flat area or “bench” was cut into the hillside to make the shelf for the road bed.

Jason laid Judy down on the blankets from the cart. As he grabbed her, he felt how wet the pillow was from her blood. He wrapped her in the extra blankets she had given him only that morning. Their worlds had disintegrated since that bittersweet goodbye. He roused Judy enough to get her to

drink some water.

“Don’t let me go,” she pleaded. “Hold me.”

He took her in his arms, keeping her wrapped tight in the blankets.

“They hurt me deep inside,” she mumbled. “I’m hurt bad.”

“You’ll be all right,” he said. “I’ll take care of you.”

“I’m cold,” she said softly. She was shivering. Jason pulled his extra parka out of his pack with one hand and draped it over her while he kept her held tight in his arms. Gently he rocked back and forth. The shivering went away and she seemed to relax more.

“Don’t leave me up here in the hills ... for the animals.” He could barely hear her voice.

“I won’t leave you. You’ll be okay, you’re going to be okay,” he said, he hoped with conviction. “I’ll take care of you.”

“Sam ... Sam,” she said. “Why did they have to keep shooting Sam?”

Jason just kept rocking her gently. Judy slipped into unconsciousness. He kept holding her and rocking her for the next two hours as her life slowly slipped away.

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