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The Definition of Escape

Olivia Wycherley

Wham! The car door slammed with such a tremor the entire body of the '66 Chevrolet pickup truck shuddered. Flakes of rust and clumps of dust flickered off the door, collecting below the battered vehicle. Surprised at the vehemence of her movement, the woman now gripping the steering wheel resolutely summonsed her confidence, her deep breaths becoming regular as she keyed the ignition. 'You can do this,' she whispered to herself, so quietly it could almost have been just a thought. 'You can do this.'

She felt the moisture forming between her palms and the wheel. Tiny droplets of sweat ran through the many lines of her tired, cracked hands. They would have been delicate hands — once — with long, slender fingers upon soft, pale palms. Now they were worn by time and the toils of domesticity, dishwater and detergents. Like maps, she thought. Every mark, line, crease and scar a chapter of her life.

Wiping her moist hands on the red scarf around her neck, the woman eased out onto the road. Maps had always intrigued her. As a child, she'd trace her finger from her country of birth to this new, desolate land so often that the oil from her fingertips had stained a pathway between the two worlds. Passing sailors had left the maps while boarding in their cramped home above the fish factory, until they set sail again or until they could stand the fishy stench no longer and fled. She couldn't blame them.

Even after so many years in the sordid town, every odour was as pungent as ever. The putrid dead fish, the permanent stench of drunkenness, sickly sweet sweat and old wine, or the stale smell of waste and rot — rotten people and wasted lives.

But she was not rotten. She would not waste away. No, not her. She would leave this town to drown in its own fish and booze and ultimately itself. She would be free! A smile broke through her dry, cracked lips. The pain of such a movement upon lips unaccustomed to the stretch was sharp, but the thought only made her smile more. The feeling was almost as foreign to her as she to the town.

With this thought and gaining excitement she accelerated. The Chevy rattled at such speeds. Soon she would reach the mountain range, soon she would be free! And, by the time her husband would return the fishing boats, with just enough fish for the week, and just enough money to drink himself into a stupor, she'd be long gone. A girlish giggle escaped her lips as she imagined him staggering home, his fists clenched by his sides, prepared to take out his rage and frustration on her — only to be disappointed. He'd call her name loudly, then perhaps 'woman!' or 'bitch!', expecting a response. He would swear and yell and flail his fists around like a sulky child who'd lost a toy, before turning to the pub to drink away his anger and loss, until he would pass out at the bar, along with the rest.

The pain he had caused her, with his hands, his mouth, with every part of his body, stopped her from pitying him. She accelerated again, the wind whipping at her face. The scarf around her neck blew out the window, flicking furiously, like the tail of a gecko after being cut — jerking and lashing, thrusting and thrashing. It was only a light scarf, not the type you could wrap tightly in when the freezing, wet winds blew in from the sea. It was the type of scarf used by dancers to wave in the wind like a sail, or by young girls to pull back their hair, or by lovers to bond or tie and seduce in the night.

The scarf held no such love for her.

Her husband had gifted it to her on their wedding day, and like all new things she had encountered in this country, she hunted through dictionaries in an effort to define it:

Scarf: n. A long piece of cloth worn around the head, shoulders or neck.

Scarf: n. A join made by cutting the ends of two pieces and bolting or strapping them together.

Yes, she and her husband were the two pieces, bolted and strapped together by marriage, cut to fit each other, though so poorly cut that they jabbed at odd angles and clashed uncomfortably in the confines of marriage. He'd gifted it to her upon their wedding day, with the note:

I'm glad we're getting hitched. I bought you this as a bridle present. Hope you like it, x.

The mistake caught her eye immediately:

Bridal: adj. Of or relating to a marriage ceremony

Not:

Bridle: n. A harness, with headstall, bit and reins, fitted around an animal's head, used to restrain or guide the beast.

Now, after a decade of marriage, the two were one and the same. But no more! No longer would either definition fit her. She would leave both to rot in this town as she drove off on her escape.

The wind grew stronger as she made it onto the range, whipping both hair and scarf frantically. The waves below pounded furiously against the cliff face as she turned the first corner of the mountain road. But instead of slowing for the bends, she sped up, the prospect of escape propelling her forward. Oh, how great it would be! Escaping him, the town and her past.

‘Escape! Escape! Escape!’ The words repeated themselves, deafeningly in her head, until she realised she was chanting them aloud, ‘Escape! Escape! Escape!’

With a final ‘Escape!’ the truck burst through the side rail that bordered the road edge. She held her breath as she became airborne. She had spent her whole life drowning. But now? Now she was flying — if only for that moment, before she plummeted downwards into the sea below.

Escape: v. To succeed in avoiding

Escape: v. To break loose from confinement. To become free.



Olivia Wycherley wrote this in 2011 when she was in Year 12 at St Mary’s Catholic College, Cairns in Queensland.