The wind was blowing like a whisper that day. It brushed the trees and the nearby river in a rhythmic flow that sang. The river ran with vibrating limbs, rippling in countless rings of harmony. The air was fresh and the ground was silent. Silently waiting and listening.

The wind swayed through the air and into the barn massaging Elaina’s face. She paused for a moment, closed her eyes, and allowed the breeze to entrance her whole being. When the breeze moved on she opened her eyes with a smile and gently stroked Ester’s mane. She continued to saddle up Ester for her morning ride, when she heard footsteps approaching. She listened carefully and recognized them as Jacob’s. She took pride in her “awesome hearing abilities”, as she would call them. As a child she would hide at the bottom the stairs in her house and guess who was coming down the stairs just by the sound of their footsteps.

She began to hum a soft and gentle tone that showed off her range of harmony in a gentle relaxing sensation.

“That’s pretty!” Jacob said quietly.

Elaina turned in a quick but graceful motion pretending to be surprised, and with a smirking smile she said, “It soothes the horses.”

“Going for a ride?” Jacob asked.

“Yeah, I always take Ester in the morning before it gets too hot. Do you want to come?” She asked gently biting her lips as she looked up at him.

He paused for a while smiling at her before he answered. “Sorry, I can’t I promised your brother I’d help him with the engine for his truck.”

“Oh, okay well maybe I’ll see you later.”

“Yeah, if you’re lucky.” Jacob remarked with a snarky smirk on his face.

Slightly rolling her eyes, Elaina took Ester slowly walking away with a bright smile on her face. She took Ester through the mountain trails behind her house. This was her favorite trail. The trees were tall and strong with roots spanning over hundreds of years. The echoes of the canyons and valleys traveled in beautiful unison through the trail. The sound of springs running smoothly through the pass gave a simple serene tone to her morning rides, and she absolutely loved it. Jacob had given her a permanent smile that morning which stayed in her mood all through her ride.

She had rode Ester to the top of the mountain and was about to head back when she noticed a man up the trail. He was bent over tying a shoe lace on one of his boots. She was hesitant at first as an uneasy feeling formed in her stomach, but she brushed it off and moved toward him.

“Hello.” He said with a sincere smile.
“Hi. Are you okay?” She asked.

“Oh yeah, I’m fine! I’m just up for a morning hike.”

“Oh. Wow, I’ve never seen anyone hike this far up the mountain.”

“Yeah, I’m a bit of an extremist, I guess. Plus I’m just really awesome.” The stranger said with an attractive smile.

Elaina let out a sweet chuckle and smile. “Oh, I see!” She said smirking.

You wouldn’t happen to know the time?” He asked.

“It’s about 8:30.”

“Okay great. Um, Could I bother you for a drink of water? I’m sorry for being such an inconvenience, but I drank all my water and I need to take my vitamins.”

“Oh, umm… Sure.” She watched him and looked into his eyes. He seemed harmless and quite polite. She slowly got off Ester. She thought she could use a small break before heading home anyways. She handed a water bottle to the man. He was a tall man with broad shoulders. He looked to be in his late twenties or early thirties. He had very handsome bone structure in his face which was outlined with some scruffy facial hair up to his side burns. He was wearing a brown wool jacket with jeans and black boots. There was an attractive appearance to the man and a cute humor, which made him very likable. However, there was one unpleasant thing about him that she didn’t like. He reeked of cigarette smoke.

He handed the water back to her and she turned around to put it back in her bag. She was about to tie Ester to a nearby tree when she felt a firm pressure pulling her body. She let go of Ester’s reigns as she began to swing her arms back. She could feel one of his strong arms thrusting around her stomach. With a soft cloth wet with something, his other hand covered her mouth and nose. Her mind raced with panic as she attempted to scream. She knew she was being drugged and that she couldn’t stop it, but persistently she kicked and punched. She tried with all her strength to hurt him in any way possible, but she could feel her body going numb. As her eyesight grew dizzy, she fell to the ground, and just before she was ready to give up, she looked with concern for Ester. As her eyesight grew dark, the vision of Ester running down the trail stayed planted in her mind.

The wind brushed her hair and tickled her nose, waking her with a gentle touch. She felt the dirt under her palms and the twigs digging into her legs. She slowly opened her eyes. She could barely move. The sun’s rays seemed brighter than ever and it hurt for her to keep them open. She looked around and saw a surrounding wall of dirt. She tried to open her mouth to speak, but only slight whispers came out.

“Elaina? Mumbled a dark voice. “How are you feeling?” It came from above. She turned her head slightly upward to see a dark figure speaking on the edge of the hole. It was him.

“You gave a good fight, but I knew you would. Your horse ran off. Smart little devil isn’t she, but don’t worry. I’ll find her. I know how much you love her. Her name is Ester, right?”
“Who are you?” Elaina mumbled softly.

“That doesn’t matter right now. All that matter is I know you. You see I live up here and every morning when you’d ride through here, I would watch you. You have a unique beauty, you know that? You feel the wind so deeply and love nature so passionately. I can tell by the way you pause at times. You close your eyes while your gorgeous hair blows with the wind. That’s when your dimples tease me the most. But they won’t tease me anymore.”

Terror crept into Elaina’s stomach tangled with a sour feeling inside her whole body. She wanted to cry and scream, but she could barely move much less talk. In a low whisper she asked, “What do you want?”

“I’m sorry? You’re going to have to speak up darling. You see, I can’t hear you. But then again, No one can hear you. Don’t bother trying to escape. These old mine shaft holes are great aren’t they? You won’t be able to move or talk for quite a while.” He explained with a cruel smile.

A tear slowly traveled down her cheek. She closed her eyes tightly.

Elaina!...

Elaina!?...

Elaina, look at me!” He said raising his voice. She opened her eyes and breathed deeply.

“Don’t cry. There’s nothing to cry about. I have to go now, but don’t fret. I’m coming back later when it gets dark, and then we can leave. See you soon!” She closed her eyes and a hopeless depression crawled into her heart. She listened to the sound of his footsteps grow farther and farther away.

She leaned against the dirt wall behind her. Attempting to stand, she tried to pull herself up the wall, but she fell every time. She grasped the brown scapular her father had given her as a child. She looked down at a medal that was attached to it. It was a medal of St. Jude, the patron saint of impossible cases. She held it tightly in her hands as she desperately prayed. Praying helped her relax. It gave her the will to keep fighting and to never give up.

Elaina rested her head in the dirt and closed her eyes. She imagined herself somewhere far away, safe and with the people she loved. She pictured herself swimming in the ocean. She could feel the warmth of each wave hitting her body and absorbing her every fear. She peered out to the shore and she could see Jacob. His blue eyes shimmered against the sun’s rays bouncing off the water. His dark curls bristled in the wind as he moved through the waves slowly coming intimately close to her. With his contagious smile, he leaned down and kissed her on the cheek. There was great warmth and happiness that Jacob’s lips impressed inside Elaina, but it was too much. She broke out in tears running down her cheeks and began to sob uncontrollably. Suddenly, mid sob, she realized that her voice was reforming and that after crying so much she was able to move, shakily, but still move. Her motivation and willing heart made its peak and she was ready to fight.

She forced herself to her feet. She felt strength overcome her and she was determined to get out of that hole. The hole was about seven feet tall, and she could almost reach the top.
Where this strength was coming from, she did not know, but she used it full force. She dug her boots into the dirt of the wall and grabbed a root that was slightly dangling a little higher than her head. She pulled herself up and grabbed the edge. Swinging her legs over the top of the hole, she rolled on her side until she was far enough not to fall back in. By this time, the sun was going down, and the darkness of the night was soon to follow.

She stumbled along tumbling over dirt and broken branches. Breathless and glossy eyed, she turned around frivolously looking behind her. Swiftly swinging her head back and forth in a perplexed motion, her eye sight grew blurry again as drops began to drip down her rosy cheeks. Still persistent with an anxious face, she scanned the wild location looking frantic and worried. After about ten minutes of consistent attempts to find motion twirling through the trail coming for her, she fell to the ground in a sudden drop. She was exhausted and the strength which so valiantly broke her free seemed to be diminishing fast. Closing her eyes gently, holding back the storm yearning to pour down her face, she remained still and quiet.

As the wind tickled her face she opened her eyes slightly with a clearer vision and rested mind. Her eyes focused on the trees and the shaking leaves. She saw the leaves’ twirling colors of green, orange, and red spinning with each other in perfect unison. They reminded her of butterflies desperately trying to fly, but trapped together on a string. Closing her eyes slowly, the wind rustled the butterflies on the long branches, swaying the trees to and fro. She listened with a quiet heart. A low whisper hovered in the leaves and sang a gentle melody: “ssssshhhhh”. She breathed softly and the dancing butterflies whispered “Listen”. In that solemn moment she felt a tingle merge through her entire body, bringing her into a peaceful trance.

She listened solemnly, but in that instant all the music had ceased. The air was still and cold, but it was not silent. Broken branches creaked in the darkness. Footsteps echoed in her ears. Her heartbeat began to swim with terror and fear. Blinded in the darkness and in the midst of the silence, she leaned against the strong bark of the tree. Trying with all her heart not to make a sound, she stood perfectly still.

The footsteps drew nearer and she could smell the cigarette smoke still lingering from his jacket. The footsteps gave him away, but the smell of that grotesque smoke clarified his presence. The darkness engulfed her mind as she could hear each breathe moving slowly in and out of her small body. As still as frozen water, she sat in the warm dirt clenching the brown scapular around her neck. The medal of St. Jude dangled in between her fingers as she squeezed resting her hand right over her heart. The footsteps filled her mind with a constant fear that crept throughout her entire body.

The potent stench of him drew closer until the crackling of the leaves ceased and all became silent. “Run!” She told herself persistently, but the terror inside her body was too much for her to even move. The hope that he might brush along and not see her was all she had to rely on at that moment.

The silence seemed never ending in the darkness of those trees. Her hands began to shake as the nerves pulsing in her body began to spasm. She felt a cold chill begin to rise in her feet and it progressed up her body. Her breathing slowed as she attempted to take deep but quiet breathes of air. She focused on her breathing and gradually the nerves began to simmer. Relaxed and firm, she told herself “It’s going to be okay.”
She listened to his crackling rough footsteps move farther and farther away. With a burst of energy and passion, she jumped to her feet and ran! She ran as fast as she could in the opposite direction, not knowing where it lead, but reassured it was away from him. The muscles in her legs were burning with a terrible fire, but she didn’t stop. The trees blew past her in a dazing unison. She could hear her feet moving swiftly and smoothly. After running for a while and becoming extremely tired, she stopped and tried to listen. It was silent and happiness filled her heart with love and peace. She turned to continue walking in the same direction, when she heard the crackling. Her heart skipped a beat, but staying perfectly still she listened. They were firm, strong, but confident steps. It was Jacob.

“Jacob! Is that you?” she said with a broken voice and relieved spirit.

“Elaina!” His voice trailed closer with a small light in the distance. She ran toward the light until she saw his comforting face. She ran into his arms as a wave of joy and love possessed her entire body. “Are you okay, Elaina?” Jacob asked with his arms around her. “What happened?”

Elaina looked at him with a lingering depressed gaze and said, “Can we go home first?” “Of course.” Jacob said guiding her over where Ester was waiting. Elaina brushed Ester’s mane and kissed her head as she realized, they were in the same spot the man had taken her and the spot where Ester had escaped.