



‘I’d rather Drown!’

Megan lifted her head slightly, frowned and continued to read. A noise, slight, but enough to alert her, make her lower her book, leave her bedroom and walk down the passage. She stopped, caught her breath and listened; the clanking sound resembled a drawer scraping closed. Creeping forward she opened the kitchen door and stared into the charcoal eyes that had turned to face her. He jumped, obviously not aware that anyone was home. She turned wordlessly and ran. *Why didn't she scream, shout at him, cause him to flee?* She never did understand her reaction but it was a spontaneous instinct to escape danger; adrenaline had kicked in and she realised that she would be fighting for her life if he caught her. Running down her passage she instinctively entered the first open door; it lead to the bathroom. She could feel his hot breath on her neck as he pounded after her; not turning around she rocked back on her heels and fell hard against the door, trying to slam it shut; he was stronger, his push more violent, so forceful that she went flying forward, landing hard on the tiled floor, her head reverberating backwards from the force of her fall.

The young man pulled her up by grabbing a handful of hair and wrapped his hands around her throat. He couldn't see how her emotions swung in quick succession from rage to the shock of comprehension that this might be how she died. *How silly, all I can think is, he won't have the satisfaction of looking into my eyes as I die.*

Megan's head filled with thoughts of her children, her family, her cats, '*random*', she *laughed inwardly*, whilst struggling wildly, feeling her airway compress, gasping for breath. She felt as if her violent thrashing was happening in a dream, her struggle to survive surreal. Hungry for air she kicked backwards in desperation; his grip loosened as he stepped back to avoid her lashing limb; she gasped a portion of air before his fingers tightened once more.

The adolescent was not much taller than Megan and of small build. His only option now was to try and strengthen his strangle-hold by leaning against the wall and trying to lift her off

her feet and gain more control. She was terrified and as the pain intensified her anger drove her concentration, her instinct to survive. Clawing at his fingers she dug her nails in, tearing at his skin, ripping at his flesh. He swore at her, losing concentration and giving her the opportunity she needed to pull forward and kick back forcefully in the direction of his crotch. The boy crumbled; Megan pushed past and ran. Her throat was on fire as she struggled to inhale the oxygen her body craved. She rushed towards the lounge trying anything and everything to fight off her foe. Even though he was still in pain and gripping the injured area of his body with one hand he was closing in on her. Firstly, Megan was in her middle forties, so age was not on her side. She was also coughing violently, inhaling the life-giving air with difficulty and felt as if her throat and neck had been burnt. Grabbing cushions, lamps, small items of furniture she threw them at him but even in this brutal situation she couldn't bring herself to chuck the glass-framed photos of her children at him.

Megan was not what you would call an easy-going person. She's tough, determined, ambitious and quick-tempered. People tended to get out of her way when she was angry. This young man was about to find out the extent of her wrath. The instinct for survival left her and was replaced by the rage that consumed her. She turned on her attacker and lashed out, scratching, hitting, kicking and trying to scream; attempted strangulation had left her with almost no voice; her abuse came out hoarse and raspy.

This change in situation puzzled the teenager. He tried desperately to gain control of her thrashing hands, when she kicked again and turned to run. Surprised by her change in tactic it took him a moment to respond, enough time for her to run outside into the garden, attempting to shout for help but powerless as her voice let her down – no-one would hear her rasp for help. However, unbeknown to him, she had scraped past the panic button and hoped anxiously that she had managed to push it sufficiently to sound the alarm – no siren was heard; all she could hear was the echo of his footsteps behind hers.

With determination she flung herself into the swimming pool thinking she was out of his reach. She also prayed that he couldn't swim; he couldn't but the step that ran around the edge of the pool gave him enough leverage to once again grab her hair and drag her towards him. Her anger rose again as she gave thought to all she had to lose; her precious children and a future with them. This youngster was not going to deny her of that. She felt her hair ripping as she turned to bite him viciously, tearing and grinding with her teeth. His cry of pain and the sight of

his blood gave her a surprising amount of satisfaction and that extra rush of adrenaline to claw her way towards his body, lifting her face and drawing in air thankfully. *'I'm going to make it,'* she thought briefly.

Once again the sensation of not being able to breathe assailed her senses. She couldn't comprehend how she could escape being strangled just to drown. He pushed her head under the water, using his upper body to hold her under. Her legs flapped uselessly behind her, her arms trying to pry his fingers loose. She felt intense panic, an overpowering instinct to lift her head. Terror was causing her to lose focus, the need to inhale clouding her judgement. She was dying, there was no air left in her lungs; as she inhaled her first breath of water her lungs filled with a burning sensation. Megan decided, in that moment, her only chance of survival was to stop breathing, go limp and pretend she was dead; would he let her go and give her enough time to lift her nose above water and inhale; she didn't know – all she was aware of was a sense of peace, of heaviness, of fading light.

A piercing sound penetrated the atmosphere. The pressure on her head was released and she sluggishly willed her body, her head to lift and breathe in that life-giving fresh air. It took her a moment before she realised the noise was the alarm. The youth disappeared over the wall as a security guard jumped over another, into the garden. He gave chase whilst his colleague went to Megan's aid and helped her out of the water. Everything was muffled; the frantic activity around her had no impact on her senses; she felt an unbelievable peace and succumbed to its depths as she fell to the ground.

Megan opened her eyes, focusing on the chaos taking place. Paramedics and policemen surrounded her, security guards were hanging around and all she wanted to do was close her eyes again and feel that peace wash over her. The paramedic's voice penetrated her sleepiness as he insistently told her to open her eyes, asked her questions, tried to engage her. He wouldn't allow her to drift off into that unknown place again. Eventually, as the oxygen mask filled her lungs she struggled to sit up and take it off; no-one was going to put anything over her face ever again, not even an oxygen mask.

A Minister was available to talk to her, to explain what had happened. She smiled at him and pointed heavenward. 'I knew He wouldn't let me down,' she said. Megan was reluctant to be taken to the hospital but the paramedics were insistent. The damage of near strangulation and

drowning can be life-threatening. So often the victim may feel the effects but as most of the time the signs of damage are not visible they are unaware of the underlying damage to their organs.

When I spoke to Megan she sounded strong and although shaken refused to be a victim. She recovered physically fairly quickly but emotionally will always carry the scars with her. After many conversations with her she made a strange comment; 'I'd rather drown', she said. When I asked why she replied that although she felt the same initial panic at the loss of breathe, the pain was not the same. Strangulation was terrifying and torturous; drowning was preferable. I'm convinced that if she had only experienced one form of torment she might have felt differently.

To conclude, Megan is an incredibly courageous woman and one I am proud to be related to.