Escape

Charlie Malone

“Are you ready?’’, my manager William Saunders asks reassuringly as we pull into the parking lot of one of the largest swimming pools in Los Angeles.

“I guess one can never be ready,” I say reaching for my briefcase.

Our driver opens the side door of our limousine and I step out into an enormous crowd of cameras and what seems to be every news reporter in the city. They bombarded me with questions. I answer none of them. My only focus is on the inch-thick steel chamber that I was about to be locked in and submerged over thirty feet under water. With my briefcase in hand I walk into the building and past the front office. I turn a corner and walk down a well lit hallway with pictures of famous swimmers on the walls. Opening a large metal door, I walk into the main room of the building. The floor is tiled into a very elaborate pattern with all the different shades of blue. A large structure of wooden rafters holds the giant dome ceiling above. Many rows of bleachers sit in one side of the room. It all has a very calming effect on me. The only people in the room are a few pool employees and a group of professional engineers.

“Hi, I’m Robert Victor,” one of the engineers walks over and greets me politely with a bit of an Irish accent to his voice, “I’m the head of this project.”

 “Nice to meet you,” I reply, “I’m Flynn Conrad “.

“Yes I know,” he says, “You are one the most pronounced escapologists in the world.”

“Thank you,” I say shaking his hand.

“Well, this is it, “Robert says waving his hand toward the capsule, “Go ‘head and take a look around.”

I walk over to the edge of the pool and step up onto a bridge that had been set up over the pool. While William talked to the engineers I inspect the capsule. The outside had been polished so I could see my warped reflection on the surface of the steel. There were holes in the capsule. At least a thousand of them had been drilled into it, just big enough to let water through. I was going to be placed inside in which it was going to be locked *from the outside*. So theoretically, there is no way to escape from the capsule. But through my entire career of being an escapologist I have learned many different things that would help me wiggle out of any situation.

  “Mr. Conrad,” William yelled over to me from the edge of the pool, “It’s almost time.”

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People are starting to show up. The guards are checking tickets and press passes. Some people from a film business are setting up cameras and microphones. Many wealthy citizens with special passes are getting front row seats on the bleachers (tickets to this event are very expensive). Even photographers from National Geographic were there taking pictures. I watch all of people from a room with a window which had a mirrored coating on one side so I could look out and other people couldn’t look in.

“OK Flynn, I talked with the engineers and they said that you will be able to have one of two things in the capsule, a pressurized bottle of liquid nitrogen or, a pair of bolt cutters. What are you going to choose? The engineers said it is possible to escape with either one,” William says to me.

  I think hard about it. The bolt cutters would be good for cutting through handcuffs or aluminum bars. The liquid nitrogen would be good for shrinking metal or creating a small explosion if mixed with water. “I don’t know”, I finally say, “I’ll figure it out when I’m ready. I have instructed William to not rescue me if he or anyone else sees something wrong.

“Five minutes, folks,” the announcer announces on the loud speaker, “Five minutes to the start of the event!”

I finish getting my wet suit on and I step out onto a small stage. Everybody jumps up and cheers like a thousand butterflies fluttering their wings. Waving and smiling, I walk over and onto the bridge suspended above the water.

“OK, Flynn,” the announcer says, “you have two choices: a pair of 50-pound bolt cutters or a pressurized bottle of liquid nitrogen; what are going to choose?”

“The liquid nitrogen,” I say reluctantly. Two of my assistants grab the bottle of liquid nitrogen and set it inside the capsule. They handcuff my arms behind my back and also handcuff my ankles together. They then take a welding torch and weld the handcuffs on my wrists to the handcuffs on my ankles. My assistants lower me into the capsule and shut the hatch and lock it down with a padlock. It suddenly becomes pitch black inside. The only light I can see is from the holes that had been drilled. But the light is wiped away when the capsule hits the water. “This is it,” I whisper to myself as I feel a crane lift the capsule off the bridge and into the pool. I wiggle my hand around in my handcuffs and start a timer on my stopwatch. Since the holes in the capsule are so small the water is entering it extremely slowly. But I do not have much time.

At the same time I struggle with my handcuffs I use my knees and hips to move the liquid nitrogen to the grasp of my hand. The bottle is about the size of my forearm, so it is not that difficult to move. Taking hold of it, I use the nozzle to torque on the hand cuffs and break them open. I fumble with it and accidentally press the lever on the bottle against my wrist releasing a small amount of the liquid nitrogen. When it mixed with pool water the reaction created what sounds like a grenade going off inside the capsule. My ears are ring with a terrible high pitch sound. I try covering my ears with my hands but it doesn’t do anything to stop the ringing. It surprises me. In the midst of the fiasco, I don’t realize I break through my handcuffs.

The capsule is about a third of the way full. Being able to finally stand makes a big difference. I check my watch. I have been in the capsule for almost six minutes now. I duck down to look up at the hatch. It looks very impenetrable and very well sealed. I mentally calculate I have about twelve minutes of air left. I start thinking of possibilities of how to escape. I quickly rule out trying to bust open the hatch with force considering it is made of very strong plate steel and locked down with a military grade padlock. The ringing in my ears from the previous blast is still strong; so I have a hard time concentrating on the task at hand. And then suddenly, I have the greatest idea of all time. At least it feels like the greatest idea of all time. Quickly and with enormous strength I rip off the top part of my wetsuit and grab the bottle of liquid nitrogen. The water has filled over two thirds of the capsule so I act fast. Taking a large piece of the wetsuit I press it up against the walls of the capsule and the hatch. I grab the bottle and slide it inside the space I just made. Now there is a seal between me and the hatch. Grasping the bottle in between the wetsuit I clamp down on the lever releasing almost all the liquid nitrogen onto the steel hatch. The wetsuit becomes very cold but does a very good job of keeping the liquid nitrogen off me or the water inside the capsule. I wait as I hear the metal start to crackle and shrink.

At that very moment a large amount of water starts rushing in the capsule. It worked! I remove the wetsuit away from the hatch and grab the bottle. All the liquid nitrogen is gone but a tiny bit still remains in the bottle. Maneuvering my body to try to get out I find that the hatch opening is too small to squeeze through. I take my last breath of air and take the bottle and stick it through the opening in the hatch and shove the nozzle into the padlock. As I press the lever down my hand slips and the bottle is no longer in my grasp. “NO!” I scream taking in a large gulp of water to my lungs as I look up and see the bottle floating up to the surface of the water. I start to panic fumbling with the padlock and trying to squeeze out of the tiny opening. I can feel the oxygen to my brain depleting like all the molecules were falling out of my ears and floating up to the surface. I think to myself, is this it? Is this the end of my journey? I guess doing things you love can come with consequences. I feel dizzy and my vision starts to blur and darken as I lose consciousness and black out.