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Opening Extract from...

The Method

Written by Shannon Kirk

Published by Sphere

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Shannon Kirk is a practicing attorney and a law professor. She attended West Virginia Wesleyan and St John's Universities, is a graduate of Suffolk Law School, and was a trial lawyer in Chicago prior to moving to Massachusetts. She has been honored three times by the Faulkner Society in the William Faulkner–William Wisdom Creative Writing Competition. She lives in Massachusetts with her husband, a physicist, and their son.

The Method won the 2015 National Indie Excellence Award for best suspense, has been optioned for a major motion film by Next Wednesday productions and will be translated into several languages.

Praise for *The Method*:

'**Completely original** and totally kick-ass!
Shannon Kirk pulls no punches in this **adrenaline rush of a thriller** where the victim is the one to watch, while the kidnappers learn to fear. Loved it!' Lisa Gardner

'Crowded with **fascinating characters'**
F. Paul Wilson

'Riveting . . . a **thrilling new voice** in crime fiction'
Boston Globe

'A dark, disturbing, **damnably readable** novel'
Booklist

THE METHOD

SHANNON KIRK

sphere

SPHERE

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For Michael and Max, my loves.

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By Change." Mike's music is a muse to my writing, and I thank him for all his lines.

As a lay person, I relied upon many sources to explain such complex topics as Cross-Modal Neuroplasticity, Altered Cross-Modal Processing, and other scientific topics that are far beyond my comprehension. The following publications provided invaluable background: "Super Powers for the Blind and Deaf," Mary Bates, *Scientific American*, September 18, 2012; "Altered Cross- Modal Processing in the Primary Auditory Cortex of Congenitally Deaf Adults: A Visual-Somatosensory MRI Study with a Double-Flash Illusion," Christina M. Karns, Mark W. Dow, and Helen J. Neville's, *The Journal of Neuroscience*, July 11, 2012.

To my agent, Kimberley Cameron, thank you for giving me a chance. Thank you for taking the time to see through the slush pile, making the call, and changing my life. You are a joy to work with, the definition of grace. To Oceanview Publishing, Bob and Pat Gussin, thank you for giving *15/33* a chance, and for your enthusiasm, invaluable guidance, and support. To the Oceanview team, Frank, David, Emily, Lee, Kirsten, thank you for all the support, thank you for accepting me into the Oceanview family.

~Carpe diem every day~

Brain development can be characterized as the gradual unfolding of a powerful, self-organizing network of processes with complex interactions between genes and environment.

Karns, et. al., July 11, 2012,
Journal of Neuroscience, Altered Cross-Modal
Processing [title truncated]

CHAPTER ONE

4–5 DAYS IN CAPTIVITY

I lay there on the fourth day plotting his death. Compiling assets in a list in my mind, I found relief in the planning . . . *a loose floor board, a red knit blanket, a high window, exposed beams, a keyhole, my condition . . .*

I remember my thoughts then as though I am reliving them now, as though they are my present thoughts. *There he is outside the door again,* I think, even though it's been seventeen years. Perhaps those days will forever be my present because I survived so completely in the minutiae of each hour and each second of painstaking strategy. During that indelible time of torment, I was all on my own. And, I must say now, with no lack of pride, my result, my undeniable victory, was no less than a masterpiece.

On Day 4, I was well into a catalog of assets and a rough

outline of revenge, all without aid of pen or pencil, solely the mental sketchpad of piecing together potential solutions. A puzzle, I knew, but one I was determined to solve . . . *a loose floorboard, a red knit blanket, a high window, exposed beams, a keyhole, my condition . . . How do they fit together?*

Over and over I reconstituted this enigma and searched for more assets. *Ah yes, of course, the bucket. And yes, yes, yes, the box spring is new, he did not remove the plastic. Okay, again, go over it again, figure it out. Exposed beams, a bucket, the box spring, the plastic, a high window, a loose floorboard, a red knit blanket, the . . .*

I assigned numbers to give a dose of science. *A loose floorboard (Asset #4), a red knit blanket (Asset #5), plastic . . .* The collection seemed as complete as possible at the start of Day 4. I would need more, I figured.

The sound of the pine floor rattling outside my jail cell, a bedroom, interrupted me about midday. *He's definitely out there. Lunch.* The latch moved from left to right, the keyhole turned, and in he burst without the decency of even a pause at the threshold.

As he had at every other meal, he dropped on my bed a tray of now-familiar food, a white mug of milk, and a child-size cup of water. No utensils. The slice of egg and bacon quiche collided with the homemade bread on the plate, a disk of china with a rose-colored toile of a woman with a pot and a

feather-hat-wearing man with a dog. I loathed that plate to such an unnatural depth, I shudder to remember. The backside said 'Wedgwood' and 'Salvator'. *This will be my fifth meal on this salvation. I hate this plate. I will kill this plate too.* The plate, the mug, and the cup looked to be the same ones I had used for breakfast, lunch, and dinner on Day 3 in captivity. The first two days I spent in a van.

'More water?' he asked, in his abrupt, dull and deep monotone.

'Yes, please.'

He started this pattern on Day 3, which, I believe, is what kicked off my plotting in earnest. The question became part of the routine, him bringing my meal and asking if I wanted more water. I decided to say 'yes' when he asked and steeled myself to say 'yes' each time, although this sequence made no sense. *Why not bring a larger cup of water to begin with? Why this inefficiency? He leaves, locks the door, pipes clang in the hall walls, a spit and then a burst of water from the sink, out of eyesight through the keyhole. He's back with a plastic cup of lukewarm water. Why?* I can tell you this – many things in this world are unsolved, as is the rationale behind many of my jailer's inexplicable actions.

'Thank you,' I said upon his return.

I had decided from Hour 2 of Day 1 that I'd try to feign a schoolgirl politeness, be thankful, for I soon discovered I

could outwit my captor, a man in his forties. *Must be forty-something, he looks the same age as my dad.* I knew I had the wits to beat this horrible, disgusting thing, and I was just Sweet Sixteen.

Lunch on Day 4 tasted like lunch on Day 3. But perhaps the sustenance gave me what I needed because I realized I had many more assets: time, patience, undying hatred, and I noted, as I drank the milk from the thick restaurant mug, the bucket had a metal handle and the handle ends were sharp. *I need only remove the handle. It can be a separate asset from the bucket.* Also, I was high in the building, not below ground, as I had first anticipated, on Days 1 and 2, I would be. By the crown of the tree outside my window and the three flights of stairs it took to get here, I was most surely on a third floor. I considered height another asset.

Strange, right? I had not yet grown bored by Day 4. Some might think sitting alone in a locked room would cause a mind to give way to dementia or delusion. But I was lucky. My first two days were spent traveling, and by some colossal mistake or severe error in judgment, my captor used a van for his crime and this van had tinted side windows. Sure, no one could see in, but I could see out. I studied and committed our route to the logbook in my mind, details I never actually used, but the work of transcribing and burning the data to eternal memory occupied my thoughts for days.

If you asked me today, seventeen years later, what flowers were growing by the ramp of Exit 33, I'd tell you, wild daisies mixed with a healthy dose of devil's paintbrush. For you I'd paint the sky, a misty blue-gray rolling into a smudged mud. I'd re-enact the sudden action as well, such as the storm that erupted 2.4 minutes after passing the patch of flowers, when the black mass overhead opened in a fit of spring hail. You would see the pea-sized ice-balls, which forced my kidnapper to park under an overpass, say 'son-of-a-bitch' three times, smoke one cigarette, flick the spent butt, and begin our trek again, 3.1 minutes after the first hail ball crashed the hood of that criminal van. I morphed forty-eight hours of these transportation details into a movie I replayed every single day of my captivity, studying each minute, each second, each and every frame, for clues and assets and analysis.

The van's side window and how he left me, sitting and able to survey our progress, led to a quick conclusion: the harbinger of my incarceration was a witless monkey on autopilot, a soldier drone. But I was comfortable in an armchair he'd bolted to the floor of the van. Suffice it to say, despite his many protests about my sagging blindfold, he was either too lazy or too distracted to tie the oil cloth properly and I, therefore, ascertained our direction from the passing signs: west.

He slept 4.3 hours the first night. I slept 2.1. We took Exit 74 after two days and one night of driving. And don't even

ask about the colossal embarrassment of bathroom breaks at deserted rest stops.

When our trail came to an end, the van rolled slowly down the exit ramp, and I decided to count sets of sixty. *One Mississippi, Two Mississippi, Three Mississippi . . .* 10.2 sets of Mississippi later, we parked, and the engine sputtered in a lurching stop. *10.2 minutes from the highway.* From the topmost corner of my drooping blindfold, I made out a field cast in a twilight gray and glazed with a swath of full-moon white. The wisp-scratch branches of a tree draped around the van. *A willow. Like Nana's. But this isn't Nana's house.*

He's at the side of the van. He's coming for me. I'll have to leave the van. I don't want to leave the van.

I jumped at the loud metal-on-metal scrape and bang of the van door sliding open. *We're here. I guess we're here. We're here.* My heart ticked to the beat of a hummingbird's wings. *We're here.* Sweat accumulated at my hairline. *We're here.* My arms lost all slack, and my shoulders stiffened to straight, forming a capital T with my spine. *We're here.* And my heart again, I might have trembled the earth to quake, I might have roiled the sea to tsunami, with that rhythm.

A country breeze whooshed in as though rushing past my captor to console me. For a quick second, I became washed in a cool caress, but his presence loomed and broke the spell almost as soon as it came. He was partially masked to me, of course,

given the half-on, half-off blindfold, yet I felt him stall and stare. *What must I look like to you? Just a young girl, duct-taped to an armchair in the back of your shit van? Is this normal for you? You fucking imbecile.*

'You don't scream or cry or beg me like the others did,' he said, sounding like he'd grasped some epiphany he'd been struggling with for days.

I turned my head fast toward his voice, as though possessed, intending in my motion to un-nerve him. I'm not sure if I did, but I believe he shimmied backwards a fraction.

'Would that make you feel better?' I asked.

'Shut the fuck up, you crazy little bitch. I don't give a shit what you fucking sluts do,' he said loudly and fast, as though reminding himself of his position of control. From the high decibel of his agitation, I surmised we were alone, wherever we were. *This can't be good. He's safe yelling here. We're alone. Just the two of us.*

By the tilt of the van, I could tell he grabbed hold of the doorframe and hoisted himself in. He grunted from the exertion, and I took stock of his labored smoker's breathing. *Typical, worthless, fat slob.* Shadows and slices of his movement came toward me, and a silvery sharp object in his hand glistened under the overhead light. As soon as he got into my space, I smelled him, an old sweat, the stench of three-day-old body odor. His breath was like fetid soup on the air. I winced,

turned toward the tinted window, and plugged my nostrils by holding my breath.

He cut the duct tape melding my arms to the bolted chair and put a paper bag over my head. *Ah shit-breath, so you realize the blindfold doesn't work*.

Comfortable in the evil I came to accept in that traveling armchair, I had no clue what was in store for me. Nevertheless, I did not protest our move into what must have been a farm. Given the aftermath scent of cows grazing all day and the high blades and stalks that slapped my legs, I reasoned we entered a field of hay or wheat.

The night air of Day 2 cooled my arms and chest, even through my lined, black raincoat. Despite the bag and the drooping cloth on my face, light from the moon illuminated our trek. With his gun on my spine, and me leading a blinded way with only the moon as my pull, we waded through knee-high stalks of America's grain for one set of sixty. I stepped high so as to punctuate my counting; he sloshed behind in a gunman's shuffle. And such was our two-person parade: *one, swish, two, swish, three, swish, four.*

I compared my sorrowful march to the watery death of mariners sentenced to the gangplank and considered my first asset: *terra firma*. Then the terrain changed, and I no longer sensed the moon's presence. The ground gave a bit with my unnecessarily forced and heavy steps, and, by the