The Escalator

In Paris, my father, Darius Sadr, never took the escalator. The first time I went down into a metro station with him, on April 21, 1981, I asked him why. His answer was, "Escalators are for them." By "them," he meant you, obviously. You, the ones who were going to work on that Tuesday morning in April. You, the citizens of this country, with your income taxes and compulsory deductions and council taxes—but also your education, your intransigence, your critical minds and your spirit of solidarity and pride and culture and patriotism, your devotion to the Republic and democracy, you who toiled for centuries to achieve these mechanical staircases installed meters underground.

At the age of ten I wasn't conscious of all these ideas, but that helpless look on my father's face—acquired during the months he'd spent alone in this city, and which I had never seen on him before—shook me so much that even today, every time I see an escalator, I think of him. I hear the thumps of his feet on the hard treads of the staircase. I see his body hunched slightly forward from the effort, obstinate and resolute, unshakeable in his refusal to take advantage of the momentary comfort of a mechanical ascent. According to Darius Sadr's logic, that kind of luxury was a sort of abuse, if not outright theft. His destiny was henceforth joined to the staircases of the world, to the passage of time without surprises, and the indifferent gazes of passers-by.

To really understand the complexity of that thought, you've

got to go inside my father's head—my father as he was at that time, I mean. Stormy. Disillusioned. You have to understand the tortuous, magnificently absurd reasoning at work here. To see, beneath the layer of suffering, made more severe by failure, the threads of delicacy and elegance, of respect and admiration. To appreciate the firmness of his decision (not to take an escalator, ever), and the skill with which he summed up in just a few words—he, who had spent most of his life bent over a ream of writing paper—everything that he had become, and everything you represented.

But you know as well as I do that, to claim to get inside a man's head, first you have to really know him—to absorb all of the lives he has lived, and all of his struggles, and all of his ghosts. And believe me, if I start there—if I play the "dad" card already—I'll never get around to telling you what I'm about to tell you.

Let's think some more about the impact of that sentence: "Escalators are for them." That was part of what made me decide to tell this story, even without knowing where to begin. All I know is that these pages won't be linear. Talking about the present means I have to go deep into the past, to cross borders and scale mountains and go back to that lake so enormous they call it a sea. I have to let myself be guided by the flow of images and free associations, the natural fits and starts, the hollows and bumps carved into my memories by time. But the truth of memory is strange, isn't it? Our memories select, eliminate, exaggerate, minimize, glorify, denigrate. They create their own versions of events and serve up their own reality. Disparate, but cohesive. Imperfect yet sincere. In any case, my memory is so crammed with stories and lies and languages and illusions, and lives marked by exile and death, death and exile, that I don't even really know how to untangle the threads anymore.

Some of you might already be aware of me—you might

remember the bloody incident that happened in Paris, in the 13th arrondissement, on March 11, 1994. It was the lead story on the eight o'clock news on France 2. All the next day's newspapers were full of it—of articles stuffed with falsehoods and plastered with pictures of us, with black rectangles blocking out our eyes. You might have seen me in one of those pictures. Maybe you followed the case.

I mean, I could have led with that, you know. Instead of talking about escalators, I could have opened with the story of what we call THE EVENT in our family. But I can't. Not yet. For now, all you need to know is that it's January 19 at ten past ten in the morning, and I'm waiting.

Side A

1
The Mazandaran Wind

The wing of Cochin Hospital dedicated to medically-assisted procreation has been a construction site for several months. From what I understand, the building's going to be torn down, and the department moved into the main building on Boulevard Port-Royal. This second-floor waiting room has been reduced to the bare bones. No posters or pamphlets on the walls; just twenty or so gray chairs lined up in three rows, dimly lit by the dull winter light filtering through the scaffolding outside. When I came in this morning, there was one chair placed well apart from the others, against the wall. I've been sitting on it for almost forty-five minutes now, waiting.

We had our first consultation with Doctor Françoise Gautier eleven months ago. On the warm and pleasant spring day of the appointment I'd painted my toenails red, in the slightly naïve hope of matching the image I wanted to give of Pierre and me. I'd decided to wear high-heeled sandals and, despite the army of clouds that invaded the sky while I was getting dressed, wasn't about to change my mind. While looking through our file, sent over by Professor Stein, Dr. Gautier had asked us: "So, are you going to get married?" Her tone was neutral, but the question still came as a shock; I really hadn't thought that, after Professor Stein, Dr. Gautier would care about our marital situation, too. Weren't we there to finally start the procedure? Shouldn't the questions be about medical

things now—childhood diseases, heredity, operations we'd had? Were we never going to be done with this marriage business?

"Yes, of course—in a few months," I'd said, in a voice so phony that every time I think about it I want to run far away and die.

The couple sitting across from me was already here when I arrived, as was another one at the far end of the room. Three more couples have arrived since then, each one being careful to leave a few empty seats between themselves and their neighbors. Nobody speaks. The atmosphere is permeated by a silence heavy with resignation and the noises filtering in from the hallway outside. All the faces have a tense look, a mixture of anxiety and vulnerability, that makes them look like kids lost in a supermarket.

Do I look like that too?

I don't think I do, because I don't feel anything, except maybe growing impatience.

The women across from me, whose bodies—like mine—have been turned into a battlefield, have undoubtedly already started storing up a whole range of emotions to talk about later. Long conversations filled with explanations, indignation, stifled tears and liberating laughter. "Do you realize" and "if you knew" and "no, but really," until everything comes out and dissipates into the air and is forgotten. From time to time, when she comes back from her academic travels, Mina acts like that with me (and with Leïli too, of course). She calls me, and pretty soon the details come out, and the stuff between the parentheses, and she laughs incomprehensibly, and coos, and repeats the same story in different tones. She doesn't find it unusual that I listen, hanging on the telephone for hours, because I'm her sister. Leïli listens to her too, but she doesn't have that ball of annoyance lodged in her throat, getting bigger with every sentence. Because Leïli understands her. They

share that easy ability to "spill their guts," as our mother, Sara, used to say.

Sometimes I wonder if it's really possible to be this emotionless. Even though it happens to me less than it used to now, the sensation is always there, just within arm's reach. When I was a teenager, I felt like the place inside me where emotions were supposed to be had dried up at some point without me noticing. The world seemed to me then—it still does now—to be behind glass, intangible and distant, like a silent spectacle in which I was incapable of taking part. Even then, I'd already made the connection between that feeling and the images of American GIs back from Vietnam that I'd seen in the movies and on TV. I knew in my bones how they felt, sitting on the family couch, staring at nothing, while people fussed and flapped around them. Their absence, their inability to join in the action, to build a future. Like me, they seemed submerged in silence, like drowning victims floating to the surface.

It won't have escaped anyone's notice that I'm alone.

No hand to hold. No familiar body pressed against mine, brought closer by hardship. Just this long cardboard tube labeled with our first and last names—mine and Pierre's—sitting on my knees. A long tube filled with Pierre's defrosted, washed sperm (that's how Dr. Gautier described it to me).

I can never imagine how, by what process, sperm could be washed. Every time I try, I get a picture in my head of a big sieve, like the one my maternal grandmother Emma used whenishe baked cakes. I could have looked it up on the Internet, but to tell the truth I'm just not curious enough to do that kind of research.

From the minute I set foot in this room, I've sensed that my solitude interested the other couples. A woman coming here alone couldn't be divorced or separated, or they would stop

the procedure. So, the fact that she's alone has to mean one of three things (in increasing order of domestic catastrophe):

1) An argument this morning, before leaving to come here;
2) Lack of interest on the part of the husband, who couldn't even be bothered to take the day off or postpone a meeting or business trip;
3) The rarest case: the husband is dead. In which case special authorization from a judge would be required to conceive a child post-mortem.

In any case, a woman alone in the fertility clinic of any hospital whatsoever on the entire planet is a creature to be pitied, even though her solitude makes the bad luck of the other people whom life has brought to this room seem easier to bear. *Thank God, there's someone even worse off than us!* Because this place is the exclusive territory of The Couple. The no man's land where its future, its *raison d'être*, and its ultimate purpose are at stake. The purgatory where the God of Fertility, awoken by follitropin beta injections, decides whether or not he will alter The Couple's destiny. My case doesn't correspond to any of the three possibilities. It's much more complex, more deceitful than that. It's a matter of strategy and manipulation. A plan conceived by gangsters. You have no idea yet, reader, of the risk I'm taking by writing this. Just know that of the thirteen couples I'm looking at right now, the ones feeling sorry for the woman sitting by herself, some would slam me up against the wall if they knew. They'd spit in my face. They'd throw me out in the street. None of them would take the trouble to understand or ask questions, or stop to consider that I, too, am the result of an incongruous combination of circumstances, and fate, and heritage, and bad luck, and tragedies.

That's the reason I'm writing this.

My father, Darius Sadr, the Master of the blank page, the Audacious, the Revolutionary, used to say, in his pensive and

visionary voice: "The eyes are better listeners than the ears. Ears are deep wells, made for chatter. If you have something to say, write it." But there have been moments in my life, more or less important sequences of events, when I would have done anything to be something other than what I am. I've changed countries and languages; I've invented other pasts and other identities for myself. I've fought—oh yes, I've fought—against that impetuous wind that rose a long time ago, in a far-flung Persian province called Mazandaran,[1] laden with deaths and births, recessive and dominant genes, coups d'état and revolutions, and every time I have tried to escape it, it has grasped me by the scruff of the neck and pulled me back in. For you to understand what I'm telling you, I have to rewind and start again from the beginning; I have to make you hear—like I can hear it myself, right now, as a nurse glances at me indifferently and moves away again—the voice of my uncle Saddeq Sadr, nicknamed Uncle Number Two. It's a voice in a minor key, smooth as a clarinet, telling what we used to refer to amongst ourselves as *Uncle Number Two's Famous Story.*

"Since early that afternoon, the wind had been blowing so hard that it might just as well have been announcing the end of the world. There hadn't been such a tempest in Mazandarani memory since the invasion of the Mongols! And even back then, what the Mazandaran-dwellers had taken for a storm was actually the devastating blast of air preceding Genghis Khan's

[1] To make things easier for you and save you the trouble of looking it up on Wikipedia, here are a few facts: Mazandaran is a province in northern Iran, 9,151 square miles in area. Bounded by the Caspian Sea and surrounded by the Alborz mountain range, it is the only Persian region to have resisted Arab-Muslim hegemony and was, in fact, the last to become Muslim. To imagine it, you have to picture the lush landscapes of Annecy, Switzerland, or Ireland—green, misty, rainy. Legend has it that when they first arrived in Mazandaran, the Muslims cried, "Oh! We have reached Paradise!"

bloody horde. At any rate, this biting wind blowing in from the frozen plains of Russia could portend nothing good.

"Now, picture the marvelous estate that belonged to your great-grandfather, Montazemolmolk. Two imposing buildings, each with sixty rooms, outbuildings, armories, kitchens, reception rooms, horse-filled stables . . . all nestled deep in the very heart of the forest, at the foot of the Alborz mountains. No fewer than two hundred and sixty-eight souls lived there, all under the care of Montazemolmolk. On that February day in 1896—a Saturday, I believe it was—he had given the order to draught proof the doors and windows and to stay inside until the world calmed down a bit. How long would that cursed storm last? What state would his lands be in when it was over? For hours, these questions and many others nagged at Montazemolmolk, whose mood was as dark as the sky. He lived in the main building, the *birouni*, with one hundred twenty-three armed men whose job it was to protect his lands, and a dozen young male servants.

"Though it was only across the inner courtyard from the *birouni*, the other building, the *andarouni*, seemed as remote and impenetrable as the Promised Land itself. This was where Montazemolmolk's fifty-two wives lived, women who had come from all four corners of the country, with his twenty-eight children, and twenty or so female servants. He was the only man who had the right to enter that building, the only one who knew the heavy scent of perfumes and the quarrels that hung stagnant in the icy air. The shadowy labyrinthine corridors, half-open doors, the rustle of silks, the heady sense of being longed for, desired, the languor of bodies that . . . ahem, well, you know very well what I mean!

"Yet all those nights spent in that place which he had, as it were, peopled himself, hadn't relieved your great-grandfather of the bitter sense that his world was slipping away from him. The *andarouni* remained a mysterious and crazy place, an

enigma. On that day, when the land of Mazandaran seemed to have been reduced to nothing but a pebble in God's hand, Montazemolmolk feared, above all, that the women were taking advantage of the darkness and chaos to plot against him. After all, how can you know what's brewing in the heart of a neglected woman? How can you be sure of her loyalty, her sincerity, her love? As time passed and the number of his wives increased, he would feel the sharp blade of jealousy twisting deeper and deeper in his gut each time he set foot on the first step of the spiral staircase leading to their quarters.

"It's not as if this humiliating tragedy, undoubtedly incited by Targol Khanoum, hadn't taken place! Targol Khanoum, who had once been his favorite wife, was the source of an outbreak of itching that had spread among the women's private parts and eventually found its treacherous way to Montazemolmolk's groin. Doctors had come out from the city and a lot of doors had been slammed; objects had been hurled into the courtyard and bunches of hair had been torn out; cries had echoed through the mountains. Dishonor had invaded the estate. At that moment, Montazemolmolk would have *liked* for that evil wind to blow—blow those cursed women off the face of the earth and take all this misery with them. Well, but that's another story. Anyway, after hours spent fiddling with his beard, which was as full and blond as a handful of tobacco, and pacing the room with its six doors that served as his private study, your great-grandfather made the surprising decision to turn the *andarouni*'s emergency key over to one of his youngest servant-boys. The ugliest one. The clumsiest. The one no woman would want to cuddle up to, even as a challenge. So then, Montazemolmolk . . . "

Pause. I can never remember how Montazemolmolk summoned the servant boy. Did he yell his name? Did he open one of those six doors and ask him to come in? Did he send some-

one to look for him? Sitting in my chair against the wall in Cochin Hospital, I ransack my memory in the hope of finding the forgotten fragments. No use.

I often try to remember that part of the story. Like when I'm at work, standing behind the mixing deck, smoothing out the rough sound of some unlikely rock group. Or at home, lying on the couch, Tindersticks playing in the background. Like a grade-schooler stumbling over a poem he's memorized, I keep starting over, telling myself the whole thing from the beginning, hoping the words will flow out automatically. But I always stop short at the edge of the same black hole.

I could call Leïli or Mina, but I don't. I know, thanks to the sharp intuition that comes from long years growing up beside them, that neither of them remembers the details of the story. My sisters remember other times that I've completely forgotten. Summer nights sleeping on the roof of Grandma Emma's house under a patched-up muslin mosquito net; the books Sara bought us before long vacations; trips to the hammam with my aunts and cousins in the villages of Mazandaran. On the rare occasions when the three of us are all together, without their husbands or children, having dinner in a restaurant chosen by Mina (who has been a vegetarian since THE EVENT), they always end up talking about those times. It's usually toward the end of the meal, when the wine's begun to take effect, softening the edges of our differences and easing the weight of the present. Then they warm up, and laugh, and cut off each other's sentences, and repeat the same sentences as if no others could possibly be used to describe those moments. Sometimes I wonder if the actual purpose of these get-togethers is to get to that point. To those neglected memories at the end of a path that's become otherwise inaccessible. To the little girls that we were back then, lost now in the meanderings of our fragmentary and fiction-generating memories. The adults that we have become need

those dinners to access the children we were, to believe they ever really existed.

Well, back to the waiting room. Despite my annoyance, I decide to skip over the missing fragment. I have to face facts; that part of the story has been worn away by time. It's not important, I tell myself, as long as the rest stays intact.

Play: So the ugly, clumsy young servant is there with Montazemolmolk . . .

" . . . who said to him, in his harsh and commanding voice, 'Go and see if they are obeying my orders, and report back to me. Be discreet, do you hear?' But the words were barely out of his mouth before he regretted them. No stranger, even a prepubescent one, would be able to enter that hive discreetly! Montazemolmolk averted his eyes from the boy's face, which was red with shame and excitement, and shooed him out. He was angry with himself for speaking such nonsense, revealing his fears, even though this virginal boy, stupefied at having the key to paradise in the palm of his hand, surely hadn't guessed anything. And yet after the youth left, he was even more nervous than he had been. Half an hour went by; the wind intensified, and the boy didn't come back. Impatience turned into fury, and that fury spread like wildfire through Montazemolmolk's huge body. He seized his coat and his astrakhan hat, deciding to go and see for himself what was happening on the other side of the courtyard. Because now he was certain of it—another scandal was brewing in the halls of the *andarouni*.

"No one who crossed paths with your great-grandfather in the vast, humid corridors of the *birouni* dared to stop him. He was the master of the place, the Khan,[2] with a six-syllable name

[2] Title commonly given to one who holds political or feudal power. It may be preceded by "Agha," which means "Sir." The "kh" should be pronounced in the back of the throat, like the Spanish "jota."

that proclaimed his rank and half of Mazandaran as his heritage. But more than all that, he was extremely stubborn. Everyone knew that to try to make him deviate from his chosen path was pure suicide. It was said that even the animals understood that once Montazemolmolk hitched them up, there would be no escaping him. This character trait was often commented on and lamented, in both the *andarouni* and the *birouni*. Everyone was afraid that his obstinacy would lead one day to his death. And if he died, who would take care of them? The truth is that, in those days, when Nasseredin Shah-e-Qâdjar was king, feudalism was still alive and well in the North. The great families, bound by multiple alliances, governed the land and the people. And in return for their labor and loyalty, the lords protected them, took care of them, and arranged marriages for their children. But that's another story . . .

"Your great-grandfather pushed with all his strength against the heavy iron door. But soon the wind got the better of him, and shook him like a father shakes his arrogant son. The door was ripped out of his hands. His astrakhan hat flew off. His coat caught on the branches and tore. But Montazemolmolk didn't give up. He fought with rage that equaled that of the storm, his wild hair blowing into his eyes. Inch by inch, he arrived, exhausted but valiant, at the door of the *andarouni*.

"When he finally managed to get inside the building, he was struck by the silence. It's true that when he went there, it was always quiet. But that was the familiar and delicious stillness of unknown promises, of women with kohl-rimmed eyes and pink lips holding their breath in the hope of being chosen. He was the subject of that silence, the creator of it. The quiet that surrounded him now was dense, and as disturbing as the silence of the tunnels dug beneath the mountains. He took the spiral staircase two steps at a time. Worried, he was proceeding toward the second floor—where the servants and the children

lived—when a voice stopped him in his tracks: "And just where do you think you're going?" Relieved to hear the voice of Amira, he turned around and opened the door of her chamber.

"Lounging on multi-colored woolen cushions and enveloped in a turban of smoke, Amira gazed at him through half-closed eyes. Her sarcastic smile was heavy with a whole life lived in this place, with more than half those years—since Montazemolmolk's abandonment of her—spent in this room, drinking tea, eating dates, and smoking opium. Amira had passed so many nights waiting up for your great-grandfather that she could have picked out the sound of his footsteps from among a thousand other people's. Even though Montazemolmolk had discarded her in favor of other, younger women, he respected her more than any other—because she was his first wife, and the mother of his oldest son (and three daughters, all as ugly as boiled heads of cauliflower). For her part, Amira, who was as tall and strong as a fortress, no longer respected him in the least. She didn't call him Khan anymore, but rather 'Sir,' and used the informal 'tu' when she spoke to him.

"'If Sir wants to know what's happening,' she said, 'he should go into the sitting room behind the kitchen. Go on, you scoundrel, before I gobble you up raw!' And Amira's crazy, rasping laugh followed Montazemolmolk's hurried steps as he fled from her once again.

"Montazemolmolk pushed open the door of the sitting room and stopped. They were all there! Normally, so many women together chatter as if they were in a hammam, but tonight, none of them was making a sound. Some of them were gathered around the young servant boy, who had fainted while peeping through the keyhole. He had seen things that no man ever saw—a young, half-naked girl, her legs spread, racked with pain, emptying her insides into a basin. Now, the women drew back to let Montazemolmolk pass. The blood had been

cleaned up and the basin was gone. The girl's legs were no longer spread. She was dead.

"Your great-grandmother couldn't have been more than fifteen years old. I can't describe her face to you, because from the moment she was wrapped in the shroud, no one ever spoke of her again. Where did she come from? Who was she? What was her first name? Neither you nor I will ever know. Frozen with shock, Montazemolmolk stared at the inert body, vaguely remembering that he had once spent a few minutes grasping her to him behind a shrub. Suddenly, a tiny bundle swaddled in a white cloth was shoved into his arms. 'It's a girl, Agha Khan!' were the first words that banished the silence and death. For the first time in his life, Montazemolmolk held a newborn in his arms.

"In order to avoid disappointing or disgusting him, his twenty-eight other children had been solemnly presented to him a full week after birth, their faces smooth and their cheeks rubbed with orange-flower water. Their mothers had all given them first names (which Montazemolmolk promptly forgot) by that point. It must be admitted here that, driven by competitiveness and the desire to enchant their husband, as time went by the mothers invented more and more complex names, which they often ended up forgetting themselves.

"Staring at the wrinkled face of the baby, he was horrified by its drab color. But suddenly, the bundle was wrenched from his arms and another put in its place. 'The second! The second one!' Knowing nothing about matters of reproduction, Montazemolmolk couldn't figure out at first what kind of game they were playing. Startled, he turned to the old midwife, whose face was tanned like leather. 'Twins, Agha Khan! Other than Almighty God, no one knew that the poor girl had two buns in the oven. One life for two: that is how He desired it to be.' Suppressing his shock, Montazemolmolk nodded his head in acknowledgment of the aptness of the thought. Even

though, since he had spent some time in Russia—and for reasons taken to the grave—he seriously doubted the existence of God, he continued to let everyone else believe in his faith; it was easier that way.

"In any event, Montazemolmolk looked down at his thirtieth child: your grandmother. Unlike her twin, who was as dark as a prune, she had white skin, and the fluff on her head was blond. But above all—Montazemolmolk bent over her face, looking closer just to be sure—she had his blue eyes. The astonishing blue of the Caspian Sea, not a hint of which had yet surfaced in any of his other children. At forty-eight years old, Montazemolmolk finally held in his arms the child he had secretly dreamed of, the one whose eyes would forever be a reminder of his own.

"A feeling greater than posterity flooded through him; an unexpected joy to which the women, eaten up with bitterness, were witness. This emotion didn't simply soften his features and bring a proud smile to his lips; it welled up into his throat and became a syllable, which became words, and those words burst out into the air like a slap. 'She will be called Nour,' exclaimed Montazemolmolk, his eyes never leaving the baby's face. *Nour*. Light. Ill at ease, the old midwife tried to ease the disastrous impact of this announcement on the other wives. 'And what will you call the other one, Agha Khan?' she asked, hoping he would get the message. 'Call her whatever you like.' A terse response that forever ruined . . . "

At this point in the story, Uncle Number Two would pause. The tears that would flow later, after numerous digressions and dramatic tangents, were already choking him. He'd jump up and open one of the packs of cigarettes that sat on every table in his house, take a cigarette out, light it, and draw on it deeply, puffing out his cheeks. Then, after a few restless paces, he'd sit down again, sighing heavily and looking at us with sadness and

compassion, as if he were getting ready to tell us some awful news that would turn our lives upside-down:

" . . . forever ruined Mother's childhood."

Mother.

That was what her sons called Nour, emphasis on the "M" to draw out the name, to stretch it, to bestow on our paternal grandmother the status of an icon.

Uncle Number Two's tears would really start flowing when Mother reached her fifth year. At that point, all the mistreatment meted out by the stepmothers, their hearts poisoned by jealousy and resentment, would flow out of his mouth in one long, heartbroken wail. Having to go to the well for water; having to wait on the women at table alongside the servants; being forced to sleep outside; not being given warm clothes in winter, going without food; being shut up for whole days in the latrines and in the cellar; dragging carpets outside by herself and beating the dust out of them; being sent into the forest alone to look for roots to macerate . . . it was a long list. He cried and talked, talked and cried. And finally, made effusive by grief and love, he gathered us into his arms so that we could console each other mutually, while outside, curfew fell in Tehran.

On the other side of Uncle Number Two's living room window, the Revolution was in full swing. Soon, taking advantage of the power blackout and the cover of night, the Tehranis, like a united army of angry ghosts, wove their way up the staircases to the roofs and shouted out forbidden slogans. North to south, east to west, cries of "Death to the Shah!" and "Allah Akbar!," insolent, despairing vespers thrown in the world's face, rang out and echoed. It took a few minutes, maybe a quarter of an hour at most, for the sound of machine guns to follow, and repression to take hold of the city again.

And at those times, while I dreamed of escaping that room to join the night and the rooftops, of adding my voice to that

revolutionary and melancholic chant, Saddeq clutched us against the beige sweater he'd bought at Galeries Lafayette (pronounced *Gahloree Lahfahyehd*) in Paris (*Pahrees*) and wept over a grandmother I'd never even known. I was seven years old, and only the blind, unquestioning respect all Eastern children feel for adults kept me from shoving him away and making a run for it.