

KIDNAP CAFE

a short story for English reading and speaking

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Introductory Questions

1. What does the word ‘kidnapped’ mean?
2. What about the word ‘abducted’?
3. What is the difference between these two things?
4. Do you know any stories about being kidnapped?
5. Why do people kidnap another person?

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Kidnap Cafe

“Help me.”

The two words scrawled on a piece of paper. It fell out as I picked up the ketchup bottle from the table.

In front of me, the all-day breakfast that the cafe advertised outside.

We serve all-day breakfast all day every day!

The note had been stuffed between the ketchup bottle and the mustard. Dried bits of red and yellow on each of the containers.

I stared at the note and wondered how it got there. Must have been put there by a customer. Someone bored and needing to do something to entertain themselves.

I reached for the big mug of tea and took a big gulp of it.

I really needed this breakfast. As I picked up the cutlery, another note fell from the napkin.

Behind the counter, the waitress busied herself making a coffee for a customer. A man sitting at the counter. In his thirties, a phone pressed against the side of his face as he carried out a loud conversation.

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The waitress had her back to me.

I opened the second note and read: “They have kidnapped me.”

Whoever did this was playing a very good trick. To go to the effort of putting a note on the inside of a napkin wrapped around a knife and fork.

How did they do it?

They must have written it, then gone to the counter where all the cutlery was stashed next to the till. Then opened one of the napkins and placed it inside.

Who would go to that much effort?

I squeezed some ketchup on the side of my plate, between the bacon and the scrambled eggs. I cut into the bacon, pushed some egg on top of it and put it in my mouth.

On the far side of the cafe, a middle-aged couple sat at a table. The man read a newspaper while his wife stared out the window at the passing traffic. She turned her head and caught me looking and gave me a smile. One of those awkward smiles when people don’t know the other person.

I nodded and smiled back, and she beamed a bigger smile.

I picked up the steaming mug of tea beside my plate and took another gulp. As I put the cup down, I saw something protruding

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from the bottom.

It fell. Another folded-up piece of paper.

“Call the police.”

I scrunched the paper up inside my hand and pulled it down under the table.

This was no trick. This was no joke.

I glanced around the cafe. The middle-aged couple on the far side. The guy busy on his phone at the counter. Another man directly behind me.

I remember seeing him on the way in. He looked like a truck driver or something. A man going through his working day.

I had to look at him. Had to see what he was doing.

I did one of those pretend movements and turned over my shoulder like I was looking for something. I caught a quick glance at him.

His finished plate pushed forward. He slurped at his tea and read a page from his folded-up newspaper.

Three notes.

This was no game.

So what was it?

And if someone was being held here against their will, how did

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they leave the notes beside the ketchup? Or in the napkin and under my cup?

The waitress.

It had to be her.

Without thinking, I looked over at her.

She brushed a lock of hair behind her ear and put a fresh mug of coffee in front of phone man. She said something quietly to him and he looked at her impatiently.

He carried on barking into his phone and pulled out some money from his pocket, practically throwing it on the counter.

As she picked it up, she made eye contact with me. I stared back at her, looking for a clue, for any sign. A gesture or a flicker in her eye.

But she just nodded and rang the money up in the till.

Was it her? Was she the person who wrote these three notes?

Maybe someone out the back. Someone forced to work in the kitchen. Or someone downstairs.

All the buildings on this street were old. They all had basements. Stairs went down to them.

One of them was a taxi office. Another a suntanning salon.

But underneath the cafe? I couldn't remember. Maybe just an

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empty space. A large empty room. With someone held captive down there.

Held against their will in a cold, dark cell.

The food in front of me no longer seemed appetizing. I didn't want to eat it, but I didn't want to appear as doing anything unusual.

Who comes into a cafe and orders food only to leave it uneaten?

I shovelled another forkful of eggs into my mouth. They tasted dry. I had just enough saliva in my mouth to swallow them down.

The tea would help. I took another gulp from it. It had a metallic taste to it.

My shirt stuck to my skin. Sweat poured out of every pore.

But there was no need for me to feel this way. I could get up and leave. Walk out and find a policeman. Show the notes and let them handle it.

I was startled by a noise. The middle-aged man was now by the door, locking it. He nodded towards the counter.

I turned. The waitress took off her apron and spoke quietly to phone man. He glanced over at the man behind me. I heard his chair legs scrape against the floor as he got to his feet.

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I went to stand up. But my legs would not move. They felt like jelly.

I grabbed the side of the table and tried to pull myself up, but it was like I was submerged underwater.

The room span around.

Blood rushed to my head, and my hands grasped at the air in front of me.

The last thing I saw was the people in the cafe coming towards me.

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Reading Comprehension Questions

1. Where does the story take place?
2. What is the narrator about to eat?
3. Where does the narrator find the first note?
4. What does the first note say?
5. How does he assume the note got there?
6. Where does he find the second note?
7. How did the narrator feel about the second note that fell from the napkin?
8. What does the second note say?
9. How did the narrator analyse how the note was placed in the napkin?
10. Who else is in the cafe?
11. Describe the appearance of the man sitting at the counter and his actions.
12. How does the narrator refer to this man for the rest of the story?
13. Who does the narrator see on the other side of the cafe? How does he interact with them?

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14. Who was the waitress busy making coffee for?

15. Where does he find the third note?

16. What does this note say?

17. What does the narrator do with this note?

18. How does his mood change?

19. What is the man behind the narrator doing?

20. What does the narrator do to look at him discreetly?

21. Why did the narrator suspect the waitress might be involved in the situation?

22. What does the narrator suspect about the notes? Who does he think wrote them?

23. Is the cafe in a new or old building?

24. What does the narrator imagine might be underneath the cafe? What prompts this thought?

25. How did the narrator feel about the food in front of them as the story progressed?

26. What physical sensations did the narrator experience as tension built up?

27. What does the narrator consider doing?

28. What stops him from doing this?

29. What sound does he hear behind him?

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30. Why do you think the middle-aged man locked the cafe's door?

31. What does the waitress do after the middle-aged man locks the door?

32. How did the narrator attempt to stand up when they realized something was wrong?

33. How does he feel at the end of the story?

34. How did the story end, according to the narrator's perspective?

35. What emotions or feelings do you think the narrator experienced during the story?

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Essential Vocabulary

scrawled	advertised	entertain
containers	gulp	cutlery
conversation	waitress	nodded
beamed	protruding	scrunched
gesture	flicker	basement
uneaten	shovelled	metallic
apron	submerged	grasped

Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

Scrawled – *To write or draw hastily or carelessly with irregular, awkward strokes, resulting in an untidy or difficult-to-read appearance.*

Advertised – *Past tense of "advertise." To make public or*

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promote a product, service, event, or idea through various forms of communication, such as media, announcements, or displays, in order to attract attention and generate interest.

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

She scrawled a quick note on a scrap of paper before dashing out the door, hoping her roommate would see it.

The event was advertised on social media to attract a larger crowd.

Do this with all the vocabulary and, over time, this will help improve all your English skills — reading, writing, speaking and listening.

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Discussion Questions

1. How would you describe the atmosphere at the cafe when the story begins? Did it change as the story progressed? If so, how?
2. What are your thoughts on the notes that the narrator found? Do you believe they were a prank or something more serious?
3. Why do you think the narrator initially dismissed the notes as a trick or a joke?
4. How did the narrator's perception of the situation change after finding the third note? What clues led them to take the situation more seriously?
5. What emotions do you think the narrator experienced when they realized the gravity of the situation?
6. Discuss the possible motives of the different characters in the cafe, including the waitress, the man on the phone, and the man behind the narrator.
7. Would any of these people have a reason to kidnap customers that come into the cafe?
8. If so, why? What are their reasons?

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9. What do you think happened to the narrator in the story?
10. Who is doing this to them?
11. Why are they doing it to them?
12. Do you think the narrator's decision to stay and continue eating their breakfast was reasonable? Why or why not?
13. If you were in the narrator's shoes, how would you have reacted when discovering the notes? What actions would you have taken?
14. Why do you think the middle-aged man locked the cafe's door? What might his intentions have been?
15. What do you think the ending of the story implies? What do you think happened to the narrator?
16. If you were to continue the story, what do you think might happen next? How would you resolve the situation? Or — how would you escape?
17. Could this kind of thing happen in broad daylight? How is it possible to commit such a crime in the middle of the day?
18. Why does the man feel strange at the end of the story? What do you think has happened to him?
19. Why do people kidnap other people? Try to think of three reasons.

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20. Do you know of any true kidnap stories in your country? What happened?
21. If you were the person in the story, what would you do?
22. What would you think when you found the first note? How about the second note or the third?
23. Is kidnapping a serious crime in your country?
24. What is the penalty for this crime?
25. Do you think there is much planning to kidnap someone?
26. If you were kidnapped, what would you do? Would you remain calm or panic?
27. How could you plan to escape? Do you think it would be possible?

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Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

You are going to write a short story.

Take a look at the following story prompts. You can use one, two or as many of the prompts as you like to write your story.

The narrator regains control of their body just in time and manages to escape the cafe.

The waitress discreetly slips another note to the narrator with more information.

The man behind the narrator turns out to be an undercover police officer and takes charge of the situation.

The protagonist tries to signal for help from people passing by outside.

Another customer enters the cafe, and the narrator calls for help.

The narrator passes out and wakes up in the basement.

In the basement, the narrator sees another door. Where does it

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lead to?

The notes were actually intended for another customer, leading to a case of mistaken identity and a twist in the story.

Write your story.

Also, think of a suitable title for your story.

When you have finished writing your story, read it out loud in front of the class.

Or you can ask your teacher for feedback.

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Reading Comprehension Answer Key

Answers follow the numbered questions. Suggested interpretations are identified where the story leaves events uncertain. Discussion and creative writing responses will vary.

1. Where does the story take place?

The story takes place in a cafe.

2. What is the narrator about to eat?

The narrator is about to eat an all-day breakfast, including bacon and scrambled eggs.

3. Where does the narrator find the first note?

The narrator finds the first note between the ketchup bottle and the mustard. It falls out when the narrator picks up the ketchup bottle.

4. What does the first note say?

The first note says, “Help me.”

5. How does he assume the note got there?

The narrator assumes a bored customer put it there to entertain themselves.

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6. Where does he find the second note?

The narrator finds the second note inside the napkin wrapped around the knife and fork. It falls out when the narrator picks up the cutlery.

7. How did the narrator feel about the second note that fell from the napkin?

The narrator still thinks it is a trick, but wonders why someone would go to so much effort.

8. What does the second note say?

The second note says, “They have kidnapped me.”

9. How did the narrator analyse how the note was placed in the napkin?

The narrator imagines someone writing the note, going to the cutlery beside the till, opening a napkin and putting the note inside.

10. Who else is in the cafe?

The other people in the cafe are a waitress, a man at the counter talking on his phone, a middle-aged couple and another man sitting behind the narrator.

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11. Describe the appearance of the man sitting at the counter and his actions.

He is in his thirties and has a phone pressed against his face. He talks loudly, later looks impatient and practically throws his money on the counter. No further physical description is given.

12. How does the narrator refer to this man for the rest of the story?

The narrator refers to the man at the counter as “phone man”.

13. Who does the narrator see on the other side of the cafe? How does he interact with them?

The narrator sees a middle-aged couple on the other side of the cafe. The woman catches the narrator looking and smiles. The narrator nods and smiles back, and she smiles more broadly.

14. Who was the waitress busy making coffee for?

The waitress is busy making coffee for the man who is sitting at the counter and talking on his phone.

15. Where does he find the third note?

The narrator finds the third note under the mug of tea. It falls from the bottom when the narrator puts the mug down.

16. What does this note say?

The third note says, “Call the police.”

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17. What does the narrator do with this note?

The narrator scrunches it up in one hand and lowers that hand beneath the table.

18. How does his mood change?

The narrator stops treating the notes as a joke and becomes worried and suspicious.

19. What is the man behind the narrator doing?

He has finished eating, pushed his plate forward and is slurping tea while reading a folded-up newspaper.

20. What does the narrator do to look at him discreetly?

The narrator pretends to look for something and turns over one shoulder to glance at him.

21. Why did the narrator suspect the waitress might be involved in the situation?

The narrator thinks the waitress could have placed the notes beside the condiments, inside the napkin and under the mug while working in the cafe. This is a suspicion, not a confirmed fact.

22. What does the narrator suspect about the notes? Who does he think wrote them?

The narrator suspects the notes are a real appeal for help and

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thinks the waitress may have written them. The narrator also considers someone in the kitchen or downstairs; the writer is never identified.

23. Is the cafe in a new or old building?

The cafe is in an old building.

24. What does the narrator imagine might be underneath the cafe? What prompts this thought?

The narrator imagines an empty basement room or cold, dark cell where someone might be held captive. The old buildings on the street have basements, some used by businesses. What is beneath the cafe is not confirmed.

25. How did the narrator feel about the food in front of them as the story progressed?

The food no longer seems appetising. The narrator keeps eating to avoid appearing unusual, but the eggs taste dry and are difficult to swallow.

26. What physical sensations did the narrator experience as tension built up?

The narrator has a dry mouth, begins sweating heavily and feels their shirt sticking to their skin. Later, their legs feel like jelly, movement becomes difficult, the room seems to spin and blood

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rushes to their head.

27. What does the narrator consider doing?

The narrator considers leaving the cafe, finding a policeman and showing the police the notes.

28. What stops him from doing this?

The middle-aged man locks the door. The narrator then tries to stand but cannot move their legs or pull themselves up.

29. What sound does he hear behind him?

The narrator hears the scrape of chair legs as the man behind them gets to his feet.

30. Why do you think the middle-aged man locked the cafe's door?

The middle-aged man may have locked the door to prevent the narrator from leaving. His motive is not explicitly stated in the story.

31. What does the waitress do after the middle-aged man locks the door?

She takes off her apron and speaks quietly to the man at the counter.

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32. How did the narrator attempt to stand up when they realized something was wrong?

The narrator tries to stand, then grips the edge of the table and attempts to pull themselves up.

33. How does he feel at the end of the story?

The narrator feels weak, dizzy and unable to move normally, as though submerged underwater. Their legs feel like jelly, the room seems to spin and blood rushes to their head.

34. How did the story end, according to the narrator's perspective?

The narrator sees the people in the cafe coming towards them. The account ends there; losing consciousness is not explicitly described.

35. What emotions or feelings do you think the narrator experienced during the story?

The narrator initially seems curious and amused, but becomes confused, suspicious and anxious as more notes appear. By the end of the story, the narrator seems frightened and helpless. Other interpretations are possible if they are supported by details from the story.

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