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Trapped Inside

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If there is a divine creator, I believe they did us one favor. Humans possess an inability to see beyond themselves; beyond the curtain of this mortal coil. That is a blessing, and I wish I had seen that sooner.

My time trapped inside this cage allowed me to think. As I paced from one corner to another and studied every inch of this cell, my actions finally began to weigh on me.

It was just some sport's bar, I never even bothered to learn its name. In the hours leading to dawn, I would linger near the back, watching the flock of heads thin until only a handful remained. Black-out drunk and wholly inane, these were always the ones who did their damndest to inflict distress upon the other patrons.

It was always so hard to choose just one, but eventually one of them would leave alone. What I did afterward, I never truly considered wrong at the time. I felt that it was like cleaning scum off the top of a pool.

I did it out of a twisted curiosity. Not to know what killing felt like, no. I had a lust for knowledge that I knew *she* could quench if I helped set her free.

As time went on, the missing person's list grew, and I was always meticulous about who I chose. No one ever came to look for them, no one cared enough. Even if they tried, the only waste that remained of their being was a fine sanguine mist.

There was one person though. One that I wanted a keepsake from, and that was my first and last mistake. I thought they wouldn't notice the ring when they came knocking, but for the first time, I was wrong.

I sat on my new bed and picked at a loose string in my orange jumpsuit. By the time they put me away, it was already too late. I had fed *her* enough, and I had welcomed her into my body, into my mind.

I had no guilt in my actions. Almost everyone I sent to her earned it in one way or another. My single regret is what I did it for; she showed me exactly what I wanted to see, the knowledge I had such an obscene craving for.

At that moment, I realized that the veil between this world and the next exists for good reason. What I saw froze my heart and set my mind ablaze. I nearly lost myself to it, and I am thankful that her guidance allowed me to return to this world, a world in which I belong.

Even still, I didn't want to be *here*, trapped in this concrete box with these animals. In here, I would be powerless, put into a schedule enforced by zookeepers and fed slop by my handlers. I didn't deserve it.

So, I did the only thing that any reasonable person in my position would do. I prayed. On my knees, I wept and begged for her to hear me. I knew she was in here now, crawling in my flesh. I was no longer the sole resident of this vessel, and I doubt she wanted to be trapped in this filthy little cage any more than I do.

“Mother?” I whispered.

I waited for an answer, but there was no reply.

“Mother,” I said.

Yet again, she gave no response.

“Mother, I know you can hear me.”

Immediately, a rigid pain caressed my neck, like knives that sensually scraped the skin along my spine. Her cold breath made the hairs on the back of my neck stand at attention. Alas, I knew that if I turned around, she wouldn’t be there.

“Yes, my child?” she responded. Her voice was warm and her words flowed over me like a trickle of ice water.

I felt paralyzed by the cadence of her tongue, but somewhere, somehow, I found the willpower to respond.

“Mother, I’m stuck in this concrete dungeon.”

Mother laughed softly before she spoke, “Just as I am stuck in your being?”

I realized how selfish I must sound. I devoted the last decade of my existence to ensnaring her inside myself, and I have the gall to complain about having a whole cell to myself?

“Aw, don’t be so hard on yourself,” she said. “After all, it is the both of us who are stuck in this musty cell, no?”

I was still getting used to my thoughts no longer being my own, but like always, she was right. I had got caught and now she had to pay my price.

“You freed me from an entirely worse form of torture,” she replied, “but I will admit that being here was... not in my plans.”

“Is there anything you can do to get us out?”

“No. That isn’t necessary.”

“Oh, right. So this will sort itself out?”

“In a sense, yes.”

“If I may be forward; how?”

“Well, as I spend more quality time with you in confinement, our positions will slowly swap.”

“Positions?”

“Think of yourself in the driver’s seat of your own little car. You get to decide where we go and what we do. But in this place you’re powerless, unable to drive us anywhere. Eventually I’ll take the wheel, and when I do, we’ll leave this place.”

“And what happens after that?”

“I’ll continue our work. Do this world a service.”

“So, wait, would I ever get my body back?”

“What do you mean ‘your body?’”

The realization set in and a wave of nausea fell over me. I had already given her so much. Is this really where I drew the line?

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

I knew she was playing coy. She could hear my every thought and grievance. I gave her everything; my life, my family, my freedom. The last thing I owned was control, control over myself. I wouldn't give her that. No, I couldn't give her that.

"Oh sweetheart, it's really not that big of a deal."

After all, I did all of this for myself, didn't I? Just for a peak behind that curtain. She gave me that and I had freed her; our deal was done. Why should I give her anything more?

"Honey, you're overreacting, it's okay."

The things I saw beyond that veil disgusted me.

I saw her home. I saw where she came from and I was no longer certain about my actions. The slaughter I took part in every day on her behalf. I saw her true face and I knew my mistake.

"Sam. This is what you wanted."

I never wanted *this*. I got too curious. I got wrapped up in things I shouldn't have. I deserved to be locked away in here for what I did, but only God knows what would happen if that creature were allowed control over my physical form. How many would she turn into thin red stains like she had me do?

"Sam," her voice grew harsh like metal sliding across asphalt, "so long as you live, you will have to fight for control over your own body. You will lose, and your strength will go with it. You will lay sore, broken, and fading inside your own decaying husk. It is in your best interest that you let me do what I need to do. We can put this behind us."

So long as I live?

"Sam, don't get any stupid ideas."

Maybe this was the only way out. Maybe this was how I got rid of her. Maybe this is how I atoned for my sins.

My eyes immediately darted around my room.

Shoes? No, they had no shoelaces to tie.

The toothbrush on the sink? Perhaps I could make a shiv, if only I knew how.

My bunk bed. Now that was an option.

“Sam, please don’t be irrational.”

I tried to ignore her, but her voice has its claws in me. I climbed the ladder of the short bunk bed and rested for a moment at the top. I sat on my knees and took a deep breath before I hurled myself at the concrete floor of my cell.

There was a sickening crack and everything went fuzzy. For a fleeting, wonderful moment I felt the touch of freedom, but as the blood poured out of my nose I realized that it didn’t do nearly as much damage as I had hoped it would.

I closed my eyes to try to collect myself, but that only made her breath on the back of my neck grow sharper. I took more deep breaths, focused my vision, and shakily propped myself up and rested against the bars of my cell.

“Are you shocked at your failure?”

I knew she was right. I knew I couldn’t do this, not while I was in here. Even if I did find a way to end this, did I have the willpower to follow through?

I wasn’t given much time for my contemplation though, as the bars gave way to the sound of a buzzer.

The door swung open, and I fell flat on my back. Why had my cell opened? Did the guards see what I was doing? Were they going to place me on suicide watch? I couldn't afford that. Not now.

As I looked upward, I witnessed the other inmates migrate down the hall like a herd of livestock. Their cells had all been slung open as well.

It's not like I'm any different than them though. I dusted myself off and stood. My nose throbbed and leaked like a runny faucet, but I followed the flock down the hall out of pure curiosity.

Around the corner was a large room filled with rows of tables and people waiting in a line.

"Lunch time," said Mother.

Of course, this was the cafeteria. Perhaps there was an opportunity here.

I did my best to skip the line and find the utensils. If I could get my hands on a knife and hit some major arteries fast enough, then no one would be able to stop me.

However, to my dismay, upon arriving at the utensil stand, I found an array of dull plastic sporks and knives.

"You really think they would readily give metal knives to prisoners? Last I checked, you weren't an idiot," she said.

I stood in silent agony as I watched inmate after inmate take their utensils and shuffle off. I imagine I attracted some attention just standing in the cafeteria, but if I did then I didn't notice.

I turned to my left and looked at the large metal door behind the line. I knew I wasn't allowed in there, and I'd be stopped by guards almost immediately. But if I could run in there and grab a cooking knife quick enough, I may have a chance.

As quick as my feet could carry me, I rushed through the metal door and shoved past multiple workers. I stumbled over cabinets and drawers, I ripped open the ones I could reach. I found large metal ladles and skillets, but nothing that served my purpose.

From behind me I heard a muffled “Hey!”

I picked up a wooden spoon and snapped around to face my soon-to-be assailant.

The guard was much closer than I expected, and I flailed the spoon at him. He didn’t seem interested in taking me down though, he seemed more shocked than anything.

Was it my nose? Did I break it worse than I thought?

My brain felt like it was swimming, and that’s when I felt it. The dribble of blood that crept down my face out of my ears. The spoon dropped out of my weakening fingers and I fell to my knees.

It was over. No last meal, no last words. My life was over with a whimper, and I was okay with that.

I felt arms wrap around me. I wasn’t sure if they were her’s, but I wouldn’t mind if they were.

Slowly, everything went dark.

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Back and forth, I felt myself rock. I was on a moving platform of some sort, surrounded by darkness. A cold mist fell on my face and fresh air filled my lungs. I patted down my surroundings; I was on a bench of some sort.

There was no light of the moon or stars, but I knew without doubt that I was outside. I could feel the unmistakable brine of the ocean lapping at my nose.

I was on a boat, I think. I wanted to get up and find out, but my fear held me paralyzed.

In a flash, everything was lit. I shut my eyes out of instinct before I opened them to note my surroundings. A large lighthouse rose out from the fog as a sole source of light.

In the warmth of the new sun, I realized I could no longer feel her breath anymore. I was onboard a ferry, all by myself.

Beneath the lighthouse was a shoreline, there I could make out a small cluster of silhouettes, their details shrouded by the bright beacon.

I could see their forms ebb and flow, and they called out to me. I crawled forward in the boat, I tried to make out their words and faces.

That's when I saw them. Two of the silhouettes stood out among the rest. My sister and her son.

I knew where I was.

They didn't deserve to be down here with me. I called out to them, but I couldn't make a sound. I reached out and they reached back.

They weren't scum. They weren't like the rest. They didn't deserve what I had to do to them. I wanted to cry out, I wanted to apologize.

As I approached the docks, I could feel their warmth grow. I could feel their forgiveness.

They called to me.

"Stay with us, Sam!"

I wanted to jump out of the boat and run to them.

"Stay with us!"

I wanted this, I wanted to be with them.

"Stay with us!"

Why did I give them up? I should've left her. I shouldn't have done what she commanded.

"Stay with us!"

My vision was flooded by the lighthouse, and my body became numb. I could still hear them as everything else went blank.

"Stay with us," the Doctor said once more.

The lights of the infirmary glared down at me in my haze. I couldn't tell what they were doing, I couldn't feel a thing.

"They're losing too much blood," I heard.

Everything went black once more.

###

I was asleep, at peace. Unable to open my eyes, unable to even really think. But even then, I was still alive.

"You saw them, didn't you?"

I couldn't respond to her.

"I never asked you to kill them. They never did anything to deserve it."

...

"You had to do it though, right? That's how you justify it?"

...

"You didn't know she had a key, and they walked in on something they shouldn't have seen."

...

"But they were only human, right? Just as guilty of sin as any other, right Sam?"

He was nine.

“You turned him into a spray of red, and I had nothing to do with it.”

I jolted awake. I was alone in the prison infirmary, hooked up to dozens of wires and machines.

I had to stop her, I had to get back to my family, I had to atone.

I ripped the cords from my arms, tearing skin and snapping wires in the process. The heart rate monitor flatlined and I knew it would only be moments before doctors rushed in to stop me.

I threw a heavy machine against the door and began to turn the room upside down. I tore open cabinets while the doctors rhythmically banged on the door.

I ripped the medicine cabinet open and knew what my only option was.

“If you do this, there’s no coming back, Sam.”

I knew that, and that’s exactly what I wanted.

I grabbed as many pill bottles as I could and swallowed as much as my throat could take at once. Levothyroxine, benzodiazepine, metformin, any bottle I could find. I found a canister of albuterol, tore open the metal, and drank it. I kept it up as long as I could, but eventually my legs gave out.

By the time the doctor made their way in, I was collapsed in a stacked pile of discarded bottles, leaking blood, and guilt. One of them tried to help, but the others pulled him off. They knew my life was over, and they knew this is what I wanted.

My eyes closed one last time, and I saw her. I saw the thing I called Mother. I could see her contempt for me, but there was an understanding in her eyes. She knew why I did this, and she had nothing left to say.

I drifted away and allowed the ferry to take me to my family, to my victims, to my sins. I will face them, and for that I am grateful.

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Sam's body grew cold on the floor. The body was taken from the jail and put in a morgue downtown. No autopsy had to be performed, and with no living family to be contacted, Sam became nothing more than a corpse and some paperwork.

The morticians tagged the body and left for the night, oblivious to the creature still trapped inside.

Its throat flexed and it gave out a single wheeze as its heart flared back to life. Its hand curled and flared furiously at the tarp that covered it.

As the tarp fell away, a body that was once Sam's slowly came to its feet.

Through blood-stained teeth, the Mother smiled.

With legs she didn't quite know how to use yet, she stumbled to the door and felt the tingle of the night wind.

Finally, freedom.