

The cell was dark, damp and cold. The walls were made of stone and the door of iron. There was a crack at the bottom of the cell where the Prisoner got his food once a day, and where the rats came in. The only thing the Prisoner could hear was his breathing, water dripping from the ceiling and the occasional chatter of rats. He sat crouched up against the wall, avoiding looking up so he wouldn't be lost in a world of torment.

Hanging from the ceiling by a single thread, was a golden key, glinting in the firelight of the never ending torch. The only key to the cell. It was too high up for any prisoner to get, but it was in the line of sight.

The Prisoner spent his days looking downward to avoid even glancing at the key, afraid of what he might do. Perhaps he would jump and try to catch it, only to slip, fall, break his neck and die. Would the guards still bring him his food? Would they be able to smell his body decaying? The Prisoner shifted uncomfortably in his place. The clinking of his shackles echoed off the walls.

He had lost count of how long he had been in prison for. Years, maybe decades. He had forgotten what had gotten him in the cell to begin with. Was he framed? He had forgotten many things sitting in solitude. Only one name still existed in the murkiness of his memory. *Jared*. Whoever that was meant a great deal to him, for better or worse.

The Prisoner let himself doze off to sleep. He was unable to tell time, only his body told him the necessary details. At the moment he needed rest. The Prisoner was awoken to the rough sound of metal against stone. The small crack had opened up and a tin plate was slid underneath by a small hand.

"E-enjoy your m-meal." A young boy's voice stammered.

"No talking with the prisoner!" A guard barked.

“Thank you, boy.” The Prisoner grunted, surprised by how rough his unused voice was, and took the plate from the pale hand.

The crack was quickly closed and locked, leaving the Prisoner in dim light once again.

That had been his first interaction he had had for quite some time. He remembered what it was like to be a young child. The feel of a cool breeze running through his hair, and another child calling out to him. *Malcom!* The voice had called in a singsong. *Come out, come out wherever you are! I can't find you!* The voice giggled as Malcolm stepped into the blinding sunlight. *There you are!* The young voice had said and giggled again. *Where were you?...*

The world dimmed as the Prisoner was brought back to reality. He didn't think much of his memory. It happened frequently, and only to be forgotten in the haziness of his mind.

The Prisoner ate the stale bread and stringy green beans off his plate. Then he washed it down with beer to clean his mouth and throat of the food. Though as horrid as the guards were, they had given him the same beverage everyday, and the Prisoner had grown reliant on it. He hoped if he was let out, beer would still be around. But he would never get out. No reason to fear such a silly thing as that.

He laid his head down against the cold ground. Endless time running out fast. Perhaps the cold cell was all he would ever know. The rats squeaked around him in a frantic search for leftovers.

*A piece here! A piece here!* One rat said. Its friend thanked him and they ravaged the remainder of bread crumbs on the plate.

*Save some for the rest!* A bigger rat squealed. *We have bellies to fill too.*

*Shut up rat, go find a new hobby.* The other rat sneered.

The bigger rat crept closer. *What did you just say to me? I want some, and I will have it.*

*Bossy.* One of the other rats squeaked quietly.

A war was about to break out.

*Don't fight. Share amongst yourselves. The next meal will come soon.* The Prisoner squeaked reassuringly to the rats, sucking air between his teeth to mimic their sounds.. They turned to stare at him but followed his word. They were used to him being right about those things.

Soon the Prisoner's mind drifted off into dreamland where a young girl took care of him. Though, through the twist of the falseness of the dream, she seemed older than him. She sang softly, her voice airy and sweet like a bird's. He felt safe.

*Jared.* A harsh voice echoed around in his mind. *He ruined you.*

The Prisoner turned in his sleep.

*He deserves death. No, worse than death. He deserves the cell you sit in right now.*

The Prisoner wished he could turn his mind off. Jared, wherever he was, had no more to do with him than a bag of jewels.

*Jared owns hundreds of those. And you; you own nothing. Are nothing. All thanks to him.*

*Malcolm! I'm sorry! I'm so sorry!* An image of a boy's face appeared. His face was tear stained. His hair the color of blood in the dark lighting.

"No you're not."

The Prisoner sat upright, his blood pouring in his ears. Jared. His best friend. The one who betrayed him and had him sent here.

When the guard slipped the food through the crack, the Prisoner reached out his arm and grabbed what he hoped was the guard's arm. The guard yelped in reply.

"I want a meeting with Jared," the guard made an attempt at a weak laugh, "Do it. I don't want to hurt you."

The Prisoner waited for days. When he realized that his request had been in vain, a familiar voice on the other side greeted him through the crack.

“Hello Malcolm. Glad to see you have come back to your senses.”

“Jared,” the Prisoner said in a strangled voice, “Why? How could you? My best friend...”

“Because you were going to start a revolution. You were going to have my father killed.”

Jared’s father... *The king*. A revolution-

“You had no idea what it was like. Everyone living on nothing. Death everywhere. My sister... And my best friend, who seems to have all the power, being powerless to help me. It was unfair.”

“Life isn’t fair!” Jared’s voice became sharp.

“That is what you say now that you have power.”

“You are a crazy man in an inescapable cell! You have no control over me anymore.”

“I don’t, don’t I,” the Prisoner said in a low voice. And then-

*Attack him*. The rats squeaked back in response and filed out of the cell.

“What the-” he heard Jared say apprehensively. Then a loud scream, followed by the chattering of rats.

*Stop, friends. Grab that key for me*. In a rush all the rats scampered up the Prisoner’s body making a chain to reach the golden key.

With it in his hand, he unlocked the cell door. Light from the torches reached his face and he squinted. The guards stood there, too terrified to go near him.

“Life may be unfair at times. But sometimes it should improve for the better,” Malcom looked at the king, blood from the rat bites seeping into his blood red hair, “I’m sorry for this. Understand this pain, and maybe help the rest not feel it the way you and I did.”

And with that he stepped over the groaning form of his once best friend, and set his way out into the woods where nothing could harm him, and the rats could keep him company for his lifetime.