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THE ETERNAL TORMENT

Benjamin Mages

I sigh. How many days have I spent in this hellish torment? Has it been weeks? Months? Years? There's no way to tell time in this prison of eternal twilight. Each cycle (as it is impossible to know if one of these is actually a day) seems a monotonous repeat of the previous. First, I wake up. I am surrounded in filthy and reeking dirt that covers the walls of my cell. I have a single roommate, Jorath. He's a brute of a man, just as dirty and reeking as I am after all this time. Filthy brown hair that is plastered to his head, caked with dirt. He has dirty and scabbed skin, and looks like he had been put through a blender a couple of times. He is barely dressed in rags. I am no better.

Then the guards open the door. They are ominous black-clad figures, a dark presence that you can't help but notice. Once I feared them. That fear has long since faded into weary resignation. The guards drive Jorath and I to our feet. "Stand up scum!" one yells. "It's time for your daily jobs." What an unassuming sentence. In a different context, with a different tone, it could be simply referring to a daily chore. Sadly, such thoughts are nothing but illusions here. All thoughts of happiness are illusions here.

We are pushed across the halls until we reach a room that smelled almost as bad as our jail cell, if in a different way. The stench of blood, sweat, urine, and pain filled the air. All around the room prisoners toiled, laboriously moving wooden contraptions and levers, spinning water mills by hand, pushing heavily-laden carts, and more. All the while black-clad guards, with barbed whips in hand, lash the prisoners for performing poorly, being slow, or simply for the fun of it. No matter how hard one worked, they would still feel pain. It simply mitigated the degree of it.

WHAP! A whip lashes across my bare back. "Get to work!" one of the guards that led me out of my prison yells. I move as fast as my poor condition would allow to my usual job. I was to personally and by hand crank a wooden mechanism that would turn, doing... actually, I never found out what it did. I'm not even sure it does anything, it could simply be an unusual form of torture itself. Though perhaps that's my pain and cynicism talking. But after so much time in this hell, there is little left to me but such things...

How long do I work at this job? Until I collapse, and when I do, the guards whip me even harder, screaming for my lazy ass to get back up and work. I stagger to my feet, more out of habit than true obedience, and continue to work. But no, they don't actually want to kill us... or so it seems. We get five minute breaks every once and a while, where we are given a small amount of stale water and bread. Then we are shoved back to work. Should we need to relieve ourselves, we can do it where we stand. Somehow I manage to live, though there are times where I wonder why I even bother.

Then the black-clad guards grab me, and drag me away. They don't bother to tell me where they are bringing me, but I know. While they may not do this every cycle; in fact, usually only once every five cycles or so, it is regularly enough for me to know, know, know where they are taking me. A place that sometimes is better than my current hell, and sometimes makes me long for it...

They shove me into a chair that is in a small, darkened room. They snap barbed handcuffs over me wrists, biting into my skin and binding me to the bare wooden chair. Then my captors leave me in the darkness. Here is where things begin to vary. I would be left alone, sometimes only for a little while, and other times where I was surrounded by darkness for so long that I wondered if I had gone blind. The solitude never really got to me, despite their best efforts. I had condemned myself to solitude not long after my arrival, to be eternally alone... it was better than way.

Ah, I didn't have to wait very long this time. Two men walked into the room. The number of men itself varied, and so did their torment of me. Sometimes it was only one, but usually there were two or more. I wonder what they'll try this time? Perhaps one is a prisoner; they tried that after some time had passed since my arrival, even with Jorath once, in hopes that threats to others will make me more pliable than threats to myself. Ha! The fools didn't know that all I felt when the other pathetic wretches in this place were tortured in front of me was gratitude that they were being tortured instead of myself. I cared for no one in this prison, nobody but myself. That's the only way I survive... eternally alone.

But their walk wasn't of another prisoner and their jailor, so that wasn't it. Perhaps they were going to work me over? It was almost entertaining sometimes to see what they would come up with to cause me pain. Almost. Nothing could really entertain me anymore, but I took what I could get. It might be morbid, but this place does that to you.

But they usually brought more than two people for that, so probably not. I know! They're going for the tried and true... WHAM! One of the figures punched me in the face, while the other turned on a bright light that hit my eyes, blinding me for a moment. I licked my lip, and tasted fresh blood. "Alright maggot!" the one who punched me yelled in a gravelly voice. "You've refused to talk for quite some time now. We've been relatively patient and tolerant so far, but..." the other interrupted him.

"Now now Gareth," the second chided the first, his silky voice smooth. "We should give him his options first." Yep, I called it. They were going for the good cop, bad cop routine. This might be interesting; they hadn't tried that against me since the beginning. "Now then, Prisoner 1973," he began. He never said my name. They never do; once entering this place, all who you were is gone, replaced by an eternity of pain.

"You have two options," he continued. "You can tell us what we want to know, or we can really get serious." I couldn't restrain my look of disbelief. Suuuurrrre they weren't serious before. They seemed pretty serious to me. The guard clearly read what I was thinking from the incredulous expression on my face. "Yes, we seemed serious before, but we restrained from anything crippling. That changes today. Unless," he asked, seeming almost hopeful (ha! An act, he would be laughing at my pain), "you are willing to be reasonable?" I grimace, shaking my head. I speak for the first time I since the last interrogation, that was... no, I don't know how long ago it was. Time was meaningless here.

"I'm not about to tell you anything." I rasped. "It would make all the pain I've felt in this room since coming here meaningless." The 'nice' guard raised an eyebrow.

"So you don't really care anymore about your, I mean, your former country?" he asked, seeming bemused. Once again, I knew it was an act. If he wasn't in character, he would be snickering.

“No...” I say. I truly don’t. Not anymore. That seemed meaningless now. Nothing seemed meaningful. “But I won’t break. That’s my last bastion, the only thing keeping me sane. I will resist.” Gareth broke in.

“This is your last warning scum! Tell us what we want, and you won’t be in for the most painful experience of your life!” he demanded, but I could tell his eyes were begging for me to refuse, to allow him to cause me pain. I refused to say anything. I knew that while this may be bad, telling him would change nothing. My hell would remain forever.

“That’s too bad,” the ‘nice’ guard said, full of fake regret. “Then I guess I have to do what I have to do.” So, I wonder, what will they try this time? They’ve electrocuted me, cut me up, beaten me, and worse. What can they do to top that? I was soon to find out.

They knew that physical pain had little meaning to me anymore. Perhaps it had at first, but then my faith in my old cause had kept me silent. By the time that was no longer a factor, I stopped caring about pain. My life was pain. So what. What could they do to make it any worse?

I felt them inject me with a liquid. Unusual, but they’ve done similar things before. I suddenly felt my nerves become hyper-sensitive. Wonderful. An attempt to magnify pain, but nothing I hadn’t endured before. Where were they going with this? My torturers injected another needle into my head. What the hell? This was new. Where were they going with this? For the first time in who knows how long, my weary resignation shifted into a cold, biting fear. Abruptly I felt pain. No, that was too tame a word. Even the word agony could describe it. Nothing could. My thoughts flew from me, and there was only pain. It wasn’t supposed to be like this. I had learned to shield my mind from pain, what had changed? Make it stop, make it stop, MAKE IT STOP! I couldn’t stop screaming. I hadn’t screamed like this for what seemed to be ages. My eyes rolled up into my head, only the whites could be seen. I would do anything JUST MAKE IT STOP! And suddenly, the pain faded into a dull throbbing. I almost wept with relief. “Talk,” a guard demanded. They were done with their routine. It didn’t matter. They had broken me.

I talked. Everything I could remember, I told them. Anything to never feel that pain again. When I was done talking, they discussed the information among themselves, speaking quietly. When they were done, they grabbed me. I barely noticed in haze of remembered pain. They dragged me back to my cell. “You can stay here,” one sneered, “at least until your job starts again. Fortunately for you, this is the last time we have to meet. Have a nice day, hahaha.” He departed, and I was left in a pile, broken. Then the cycle continues, ever eternal.