

A Place Outside

Unlocked. Locked. Two words; upon utterance, they do little to describe the life that became of the sounds made as they rung in our ears. I lived among such sounds and their clacks and rings came to define me and my world. They had a cadence, bound together, in time never fulfilling me until the latter was complete and the echoes from the metal doors subsided.

“You’re gonna be released,” someone said. Randy said. Randy? He broke my habitual eyes-shut time. Overwhelming sensation. Reticent Randy did not take note of it. In fact, I realized he didn’t even have his notepad open, with his perpetual scribbles. Randy picked up the books next to me, the ones from my favorite shelf nearby. He did not take the books and pack them into his satchel. He did not clasp its buckle, tap it twice, and set it gently on the table. Instead, he looked at them and grinned.

“You’re gonna be released, Curtis,” Randy said. I thought it was the first time he said that. He seemed to sense my amazement at the situation. I had watched his mouth that time and grinned aloud at how his jaw moved in expression, and I nearly forgot to comprehend his words. He misunderstood my joy.

A bell sounded after a silence. The three o’clock bell actually. Fifteen minutes left before a change in the diversions room. Such sounds were my refuge—from the harsh realities of the sinister ones in white – white jackets without straps. I was initiated with the muffled clicks of a thick, soft door as I remember. Funny. It is so funny to think of it. It is somehow precious to me and I get a chill when I have the chance to hear it sometimes as a passerby. But the power was with the cold steel. I was a victim of me and I reveled in the devices used for my containment. My world was a methodical one. Click open and click close. This rhythm was my key to balance and with it I could breathe deeply.

A white jacket entered the diversions room and approached my distant corner. For the next few minutes I think she gave a rundown of the transition period I would be a part of before they would let me through the door. This being a time I couldn't envision, I couldn't restrain myself to listen. My thoughts drifted along the line of years I spent in that magical castle. Twenty-one. Four from a quarter; one from a fifth. Days days days. Oh, what I'd heard. What was she saying?

The white jacket said magic happens and that is why they were releasing me back into the outside. I imagined an existence again apart from these walls; I didn't know. Vividly, I could see only a door closing. Click. I could hear it, but it was soft. It was very soft, and I felt myself trembling.

The new home was not far from the old one. I shared a room with three fellows, and there weren't any walls between us. I was suspicious of everyone and it caused my sleep to suffer. Always I was the first to rise. I would watch each of them carefully as they began each day, though they seemed to have little interest in me so early.

After two weeks, however, word of my ways was passed on to Joan, the warden of the house. She assessed my inhibitions and said they were usual with the new ones to the house and tried to convince me. I didn't believe her; that was a strange place. It is one where doors didn't open and close in the same way. Questions weren't always followed quickly by answers. Time, I knew, was laughing at me. I knew what my answer had to be; I had to get away from there.

I managed to sneak away one opportune night.

To stay in our fringed outside, we of the house had boundaries. Only with supervision could we venture and even their power was unnecessary after a few miles. The sensors on our ankles were all that was needed to instill us with a fondness for remaining. Poor Dillon was twice reminded.

The nearest town was about two miles away, and a brisk walk quickened my travel time. The early morning there began with a cacophony of clicks as the shops opened and their wares were unleashed to the frenzied patrons.

“Taken buy door order class Brian ask,” someone said. Crash! Something shattered. A loud honk sounded outside the store before I could see who would say such an odd statement. I stared from the window, but when several persons quickly opened a door nearby and left, I walked out, too. Outside, many cars and other motor vehicles passed—some of them oddly too close to me. The honking. Oh, where was it coming from? Was that hand wave to me? People crossed streets, played in a grassy area, ran past me – one person bumped me and started talking; I kept walking. A little faster.

I walked amidst all of that craziness and I became tense. I had faint memories of a life in the outside, but I was different. I had found order and order wasn't with me in that town.

Of course, it didn't take long for Joan and the men with the flashing truck to locate me. A man with my place in society is easily noticed by locals wishing to preserve the bits of security left when situated only miles from the castle. It's too bad. They didn't know me. They didn't know the connections I felt. The knowledge and the training from the dungeons swirled with biting delight. Surely, if they knew, it would have turned the light onto my shadow. But being the modest man that I am, I chose not to overexpose my credentials.

“Get him down! He needs to sit down, now!” a man from the truck was yelling. I didn't know what all the commotion was about. Was the town so unsettling?

As I remember, the day was quite warm, though I don't recall why I had been so wet. A crowd was gathering and somewhere in the rear was a drummer, rapidly increasing the pace of thumps on his piece. Joan was more excited than I had ever seen her. Probes seemed to extend from all of their fingers, and they joined me.

“He’s never had it this high. The heart’s got to come down. We don’t have time. We have to do it immediately!” Joan yelled.

I don’t know why, but I was falling asleep. I fought hard not to lose the battle. I was rising. Open. Close. Click. Then I found it so easy to do.

Back at the home (a week later, I think), I decided I could live in that world. I want to now. Maybe not that town, but surely there was another.

My roommate Dillon was packed and moved out one day without much warning. Soon, there was word of a replacement. A woman.

Three days passed before there was a knock at the front door. I opened it to the sight of a man. This man struggled with a wild pig on the porch, spinning and flopping. After some moments I realized the laughing pig was actually a woman. She was quite silly. I couldn’t imagine anyone being so silly as she.

“The fields,” the man who had his arms now wrapped around her said. “She loves the fields.”

And the fields loved her. Pieces of it clung to her body as proof of her oneness with it in recent moments. When they finally got her through the door into the house, Joan closed the door and turned the lock in the daytime for the first time in a while. Click; and I twitched. But I became transfixed as I watched the beauty of the movements from this woman. Where did she come from? All seemed stable suddenly and I smiled as I knew this would be a good time.

Walls went up in the house. The woman settled yet her mouth was silent save for an often-heard giggle. Her move there was lateral as the last homes couldn’t hold her. Rumor was she once escaped for a week and was deep in the outside. This is what I had to know. I had to learn the truth from her. Had she really been there in the outside? What did she learn? I had to know! But how?

Awoken I was two nights later when the front door was gently unlocked and opened. Down the stairway and through the house I went until I came upon the door ajar. There was movement not

far from the porch. I heard the grass being disturbed from its nightly bliss and I followed. And followed. It was her. She sometimes paused to get closer to the fields, and I listened.

Later, when she rested, she watched as I approached her. Her beauty brought a rival to my intentions. Burning pressures flicked images of the past before me, but “I have order now,” I remember whispering. As in the house, she was quiet in her element, but she possessed a peace that hadn’t shown itself before. I told her to tell me about the outside she lived.

“Outside?” she laughed. She passed her hand slowly across the cool grass.

Silence again. I found myself having little patience and my brow filled with moisture from the irritation.

Finally, I let it out. I told her of my success with getting out there; how the streets were alive and each person had a destination. I told her that she must tell me the secret of the outside. Gaining momentum, I told her everything that happened that one day. I jumped about; the drummer returned, giving rhythm to my steps. My arms flailed, as I relived the moments, it was tense, I think I said, I had control.

“Stop!” Her word had undeniable power. Her unwavering stare slowly softened and her face grew a smile. “The moon shines from your forehead.”

We talked for quite some time that night. It was a night of beauty and fascination.

After we both returned to bed, I thought of her tales of the outside. Her stories were crazy but that made them real; I know what I saw in that town. All of it made sense to me. All she said was true to the feelings I had felt. All the visions she had I saw clearly through my own perceptions; all but one. She spoke of leaving the city to be in the fields. The city was her castle.

“It’s all I want,” she had said.

She had found her place in the outside. I didn’t understand. All along the outside was itself a whole and never was it less than that. But, I let it go. The excitement didn’t allow me to waste time with that not understood. I fell asleep, forming plans and ideas.

A day later, another door closed behind me. A close but no click. It is a missing link I often think about. Even as the car drove me away from my new home, I listened for it. I felt perspiration. The driver watched me through the mirror. I looked to Joan next to me and she misunderstood my worry.

“Now, you shouldn’t despair on such a day,” she said with a comforting tone. “You aren’t gonna be too far away from me, you know. I’m here to help. And will make it as simple for you as I can.”

But everything was far away – the trees and meadows that we passed and the towns we went through. I put my ear near the window to hear something, anything familiar. Simple was that pane of glass. It is all that separated me from out there. As I looked out beyond it, I wondered if I could find a rhythm in that place.

I found a small crack in the window. I looked into the crack, and the light reflected and shot a stream of colors at me for a brief moment. The imbalance in the glass skewed the view to the outside, making distant objects uneven when seeing them from close range of the crack. I rocked slightly back and forth, enjoying the bouncing trees and houses. Back and forth, I saw what I should see and what that new view enabled me to see; they weren’t the same. Back and forth, I wondered how that could be. I saw Joan was busy writing in her journal, so I continued in my happy discovery. Back and forth.

Back and forth.

Back. Forth.

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