

The Victim

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You would not believe me because I am only an untrustworthy prisoner whose life, feelings and rights do not matter to anyone, but I swear that I am not in prison because of my own actions and their consequences. I do not deserve to be confined to the solitude and inhumane conditions of this living hell that is slowly engulfing my heart. Everything that I once was will perish behind these iron bars. Everything that I had or could have had has been taken away from me, forever.

During my first weeks in prison, I found myself beating the bars of my cell almost every night until I got exhausted and the acute sensation of pain numbed my thinking. Being confined, every day differs only in its degree of monotony. The dreary yard contains little except a dead eucalyptus tree whose feeble shade does not provide any relief from the unbearable Summer heat and the dry cracked ground gets so hot that it almost burns your flesh. At some point, I lost all hope and interest in the world because it offered me nothing to do or to explore. But that is not what hurts me the most while being in this alien environment. It is loneliness. During visits, which take place through a glass partition, I merely feel disdained and ashamed of my position as if I were some sort of inferior creature. I only found real comfort when I became friends with one of the inmates, his name was Cecil. I truly appreciated his company although most of the time it just implied sitting next to each other without uttering a word, he was my rock. Now that he is not around anymore, I have never felt so lonely, sitting in the yard all by myself.

Throughout all these years, I have been trying to get used to living behind bars, but I never did and apparently, never will. Every day, once yard time is over, the guards escort all the prisoners back to the B wing where our damp stuffy dungeons are. Out of the corner of my eye, as I shuffle towards my cell, I can see several inmates standing at their bars looking out curiously. Their faces sorrowful, their bodies wasted, we all look the same. We are all condemned to remain in this prison of oblivion for the rest of our lives. Once we are pushed inside, the cell doors are slammed shut. Then the guards bring us a small meal which I devour in two minutes like a ravenous animal. Prison rations have never been enough to stop hunger gnawing at my stomach. The lights go down, and the block feels drab and eerie. The voices fade into murmurs, and gradually die down. Nights go by painfully slowly, I lie on the floor left alone with my thoughts, trying to escape imprisonment through my mind's eye, imagining the things I used to do when I was young and happy and free.

A few years ago, a tragic event took place. I remember waking up that day with a strange foreboding that something bad was going to happen. Poor old Cecil had never done anything that would force a guard to show authority but that day he was not himself, I could see it in his eyes, they were full of hate. When we were supposed to get back to the cells after yard time, I saw that

* Segunda mención especial en el del Concurso Literario USAL en Lengua Inglesa – Categoría cuento (2020).

Cecil would not budge so the guard started bellowing at him from behind the fence. He did not even flinch. The guard decided to enter and approached him shouting: "What is wrong with you, are you too decrepit or too stupid to move? I am the boss around here, so you better do what I say". And then it happened. The guard did not have the chance to react and defend himself. In the blink of an eye Cecil launched his deadly attack and bundled him to the ground. I do not blame him, spending hours, days, weeks, months, and years in a space no bigger than a cage breeds an animalistic mindset. It can distort and destroy anyone's mind and spirits. You probably call this murder; I call it poetic justice.

Unfortunately, it was not until I was deprived of my freedom that I realized how lucky I used to be, how happiness resides in all the little things that we take for granted, such as spending time with our loved ones or smelling the scent of places that we love. You may be wondering what I did to deserve having my life taken away from me forever. I did nothing. I was a victim of trafficking, a victim of wildlife trafficking. I was only a cub when I was captured and removed from my pride in Africa and brought to America where I was kept caged and cruelly abused for years until I was "rescued" by the owners of this zoo. They claimed that I was going to be held captive only for rehabilitation and then I would be released. It never happened. They had no vested interest in seeing me return to my natural habitat; to them, I only represented profits for their business.