

Nobody Escapes from Cruelty Castle

A short story by Blue-Maned_Hawk

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[This story contains two characters discussing, in a blunt-but-not-overly-detailed manner, some heavy topics that may discomfort some readers.]

Hello.

Free me from this prison immediately!

I'm not going to do that. And you're not going to be able to break out, certainly not from just punching the bars like that. Or the walls. We can't afford to have you break out, which was a pretty good motivation for us to make these cells more secure than they were when we first got here.

Ha! You'd like me to think that, wouldn't you! I shan't fall for your deceit! I'll break my way out of here in no time at all!

Why would i be trying to decieve—stop elbowing the wall. You're only going to hurt yourself.

We're below ground, you know. You'd only see a wall of dirt on the other side.

And even if you did make progress, i have the key to your cell and many people on my side. You'd be outnumbered.

Oh, good, you've stopped.

Shut up.

Heh.

Why don't you pull up that chair? I want to—good gravy. Now why'd you do that? You're not going to get me with these iron bars in the way, and you're just going to end up breaking your chair if you keep doing that. Then you'll have no place to sit.

Bah! Why should i sit down and listen to whatever words may fall out of your mouth?!

You don't have much else to do.

Then leave me to languish and die here!

I'm not going to starve you to death in your cell.

Ha! What a fool i would be to believe such words as that! What reason have i to believe you?

Humor me. Talk with me, and i can tell you.

...

Oh, good, you're not throwing it towards me this time.

Hmph.

Tell me: Why did you come to attack the castle?

As if you do not know! This is a castle of cruelty! The horrible evil that inhabits this castle has brought unto us such terrible suffering!

Okay. What kind of suffering?

I—th—wha—as if you do not know!

Humor me. What kind of suffering have we brought to you?

...

You and the people you use your horrible command upon sneak into our city in the dead of night and slay people! You slew a baker and his family, you slew a performing troupe, and you slew the servants of my local councilman! And all this is not even a scratch in the stone of what wrath you have brought unto us!

Okay. There are several things you've gotten wrong there. But if all that were true, how would what you've done to us be any better? You came to our castle, and even alone, you were able to do substantial damage to us.

I fought you monstrous scum in vengeance! You brought suffering onto us! You deserve to have this vengeance wrought onto you!

I'd like you to think about that for a moment.

Suppose that one side inflicts suffering onto another. If the right thing to do is to inflict suffering back, then that's just as true for the first side as it is for the avenging one. You'd be trapped in a cycle of each side inflicting suffering onto the other that neither side wants.

Such is simply the way of life!

Why does it have to be? Neither side wants the suffering. Why not break the cycle?

Because the cycle shall be shattered regardless, for the total destruction of one of the sides is inevitable!

Has that ever happened before?

...

Besides, if the sides were to break the cycle some other way, both sides would still be around. Then, they'd be able to combine their resources for both sides's benefit.

What a foolish choice that would be!

Why?

It's blindingly obvious!

Then can you tell it to me?

...

Well, why don't we get back to that first thing you said? About us killing people and all that.

And what of it?! You haven't any defense against that!

I do, actually, and i think i mentioned it earlier, but let's put that aside for now.

You speak of us killing people. You consider this evil because it inflicts suffering onto the city you live in, right?

Of course.

Yet so many people in the city are already suffering.

What?! You lie!

No, i do not. You mentioned the baker and his family. The money they made from selling bread was barely enough to get them by. If suddenly a bunch of people didn't buy any bread for a little bit, the family would be ruined.

That can't be!

You mentioned the performing troupe. But they weren't really a troupe, per se—they were just a group of street performers who happened to perform together. Every night, after performing, there'd be bickering about over who most needed the money they got that day—and once that was done, they'd part for the night and each lie down wherever they could find a place to sleep.

You say such things without showing them to be true! You *killed* them! Why should i believe you know such details of their lives?!

I'm going to get there. Humor me.

Bah. I have many doubts.

You mentioned those who served your local councilman, speaking of them as servants. But they didn't serve voluntarily. They were forced to, because otherwise they'd be thrust out of the councilman's estate and left to die.

He treated his servants kindly!

Would you consider giving the bare minimum to survive when one could easily give a hundredfold that being kind?

...

You still haven't spoke of how you supposedly know this! You speak empty words! You lie!

Do you know how i know the stories of all these people?

...

You say that we killed them. Tell me, were there any bodies left behind? Were there any bloodstains?

...

I never asked about that.

If you had, you would have known that the answer is no.

Because we didn't kill them in the dead of night.

We sent people in disguise into the city. They spent their time there speaking to and talking with the people who suffered. They spent their time there learning their stories—that's how i know them.

And they promised them a better life within the walls of this here castle. Because the life that they were leading in the walls of the city you live in was one of suffering.

...

Are you okay? Your eyes are so wide, and your mouth is so agape.

I...i didn't...i...

Did you know that people were suffering?

I mean, yes, i did, but...i didn't...i...

Hmmm.

...

Did you think it was just the way things were?

I...that's not...i didn't...

...

...yes.

...

...Fuck!

Oh my.

How evil i was, letting such horrible things as this happen! How cruel i was to my fellow citizens! What a foul monster i am for letting this happen!

Hey, you're not—

You do not know the full scope of the evil i've done!

I don't think that's as true as you think.

I did not merely turn a blind eye to the suffering of my fellow citizens! I exacerbated it! I was one of the people who fought against them when they sought an audience with a councilman

hellbent upon solidifying their suffering! I was one of the people who patrolled the streets, my power threatening them into submitting to normalcy! I was one of the people who conspired with the councilmen to sneak away pieces of what little they had!

I am evil, i tell you! How terrible a creature i am!

Stab my chest! Slit my wrists! Cut off my head! Let me tread the ground of this world no longer!

...

...No.

Do it! End my evils!

I don't need to kill you to do that.

My, you're breathing quite heavily.

Sit back down. I need you to listen to this.

Do you remember when i talked to you about vengeance? How a cycle of vengeance can be broken? How doing so intentionally is better at stopping suffering than continuing until one side is destroyed?

Yes, i do.

Well, a similar thing applies here. We're not going to kill you because we'd be better off with you alive.

How could that possibly be?! Do you not see that i am evil?!

You say that, but you've just stated that you *know* you've done evil things, and you regret them because you know that they were wrong. To me, that means that you're changing. It means that you don't want to do evil things. And now that you recognize the evil things you've done, you don't have to do them anymore.

If we were to say that once you've done evil things, you're forever an evil person and can't be changed...well, that would be pretty stupid. Just imagine that, like a game with twisted rules that say that if you make the wrong move, your mistake can never be fixed and you're permanently screwed. I think that in a world like that, we'd have more evil, not less. Because everyone makes mistakes. Everyone screws up sometimes. Without any way to start over, without anyone ever forgetting what you did, i think that people who did bad things would decide that since they can no longer be perfect, they might as well be as evil as they possibly can be. I don't think anybody would want that.

And frankly...it seems like you didn't really know how bad the things you were doing were. After all, you'd never been taught anything but that this was normal. I don't think you can be completely blamed for that.

...

...

You've got that look of shock on again.

I desire for what you speak to be the truth, yet some facet of it feels wrong.

But i do not know what it is that i detect, what supposed flaw in your speech i seem to see.

Maybe you're right. Maybe i've got something wrong.

Surely i must do something to atone for what evil deeds i have done. Surely it cannot simply be
that i know that i have been evil, and now i can halt my actions.

Maybe it is, maybe it isn't.

...

Do you know what our final goal is?

I do not believe so.

We want to halt the suffering for all the citizens in the city, not just the random few who we have
so far convinced to come join us. Eventually, we want to take down the systems that have
brought so much suffering to so many.

That's an absurd thing to try.

Maybe it would be now. But it might not be forever. Eventually, we'll be able to do that.

...

Do you want to assist us?

...

...Yes. I will, for it is what i must do.

Wonderful! Now let's get you out of this cell.

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