

The stranger caught his breath. "You're fooling yourself," he began. "Names have no meaning here. But if you must know, I am called George. And you?"

"I am Jareth. I have been here for many months."

"Shut up!" George shouted. "I don't want to hear your sob stories! I don't care how long you have been here, I only want out! We all have tales, don't we? I'm sure mine is no different from yours. If only you could see through this darkness. My scars are many, old man. As are the scars on my daughter's face! I refuse to linger in the past. Now is the time to plan our escape. Have you not considered escape?"

Jareth did not know how to respond. George was so full of an energy that Jareth had long forgotten. The spirits of rebellion and Cause were alive and well within George, but Jareth was only a vague echo of the man he once was. Should Jareth speak of the endless nights he had spent, fantasizing about tackling his oppressors—



banging their heads against the cold cement and running off in search of their families, who he would torture as well? Should Jareth invoke the nobility and virtues of the Cause that had led him to that cell, to die as a worn and shriveled man? Should Jareth recall the last kiss he had given to his wife, before that fateful day? The pain and worry that saturated her tearful eyes? The final, disconsolate moan that escaped her lips as he turned to leave? But Jareth remained silent. He crouched down next to his bones, and chewed on his dried lip.

"Well, speak old man! You are an elder, are you not? I hear the sound of wisdom in that raspy voice of yours. Certainly you have something, anything to lend to this conversation. Something you know that may have use, to help our escape."

Jareth hacked and cleared his throat once again. "Occasionally, they will throw a bone or two in here. That is the only food we get—the leftovers that the dogs did not eat. Water is even less frequent than food, and you will learn quickly enough to save your energy. The more you perspire, the more you are likely to die. That is all I know, my friend. That is all there is to know."

"Nonsense," George hissed. "Have you lost all hope, old man?"

"It is not about hope, my friend. Hope. Hope I have plenty of, but I fear that my time here is almost through. I am a tired man."

"Heh. Tired, eh? And why? They never tire of beating us. Of raping our wives and stealing our daughters. They never tire of—"

"Please," Jareth moaned. "As I say, I am a tired man. I feel that your arrival here is more than coincidence. These cells have been known to house more than three people. Such a small space, but they manage to keep three. But I have been alone since my arrival. I once thought that as a sign of luck. And so now, in my last hours, they have brought you. I fear that you are a replacement. My post is nearly vacated, and you are here to take my place, friend."