

## He Once...

The cell has a comfortable enough bed to the left and behind him and a table also to the left but in front of him. The cell is four meters wide and six meters long. He no longer cares about such things as distance measurements, not in the same way you do, but he once did. The table is a off-black color, vaguely annoying but sturdy. The walls are a smoky old white color, one that would normally impart a quality of dirty or dingy to a description of the place if he did not know better. The cell does not allow dirt, at least not for long.

The light are a dim fluorescence. You could deduce this from the slightly hum below hearing and their square shape in the ceiling. They glow a dim yellow, as though incandescent. Do not allow this to confuse you. They are plenty bright to see, though one feels an urge to squint or turn them to a brighter settings, had one the means or the chance. There are no controls on the walls.

Three meters in front of him and his position in the center of his known world is the refrigeration unit about one and half meters tall. It is a color that is somewhere between silver and steel. It is two meters to his right so he is not currently looking directly at it. Behind him, is a chest of drawers. Three in number, each drawer accessed by a simple, adequate handle. There is a shelf to the right of this, facing—as he is—away from the drawers. This shelf is something you would readily call a bookshelf, and is half used.

He once read constantly.

He is full of noise. He bubbles with taunts and screams and oral jabs and verbal smashes. They float, heedlessly, somewhere down in that sub-dermal layer of fat, yellow and hiding, materializing

only as occasional twitches and the sporadic deep breath as if charging up for some scream. The cell does not mind screams. It allows them and ignores them. This is a slight he can barely stand and so he stays stoically silent, going deaf on the inside from all the torrent that will not stop.

The table has a set of plasticware on top, half used, next to a modest set of seasonings of the salt, pepper, and hot sauce varieties much like you have seen in a restaurant and a trash can underneath but this is something he recognizes as only a formality. He once threw every little scrap away, terrified of the encroaching mess.

There is a single glass, clear and plastic, on the table. Meant for reuse. Directly in front of him is a chair, contrasting the table with its color of bland grey though matching in its height which will allow it to be slid under without problem. Directly to his left is a toilet, free standing. A sink slightly to its left. Its right taken up by a modest stool and a roll of toilet paper and a white towel.

The sink has a rag, for bathing, if the urge takes him. He once liked to clean himself. The walls are barren of nicks and scratches. They are pristine. The cell does not allow damage to occur, at least not for long. They are marred only by a poster, roughly five thousand square centimeters and twice as tall as it is wide. Its subject is a notably suggestive photograph involving a farm girl and a small sheep, dyed pink, with a look of European boredom on her face. It is clean enough, though you would probably consider it poor taste and he once was utterly disgusted by it. The poster once induced him to vomit up what scraps of food he ate. Its effect could be said to be diminishing.

The metal colored refrigeration unit (to his right and up), which he never once called “fridge”

or cooler even in that time before he stopped talking altogether some while ago, currently contains a handful of prepackaged meals of the sort you just pull the tab and they heat themselves. He knows there is only a handful of meals left since he had two handfuls worth of food when he woke up and he has eaten a handful of that already.

The menu changes daily, though it generally matches that which he craves, or at least what he once craved since food is an act of utility now. He once took the refrigeration unit and shoved it over, away from the wall. He screamed aloud in a nonsensical language of his own creation fresh from his head like a demonic tongue. He demanded to know how it kept refilling. He demanded to know, if you could understand him or luck upon a translator for such garbled sentiments, why does the color red flash inside his eyes when he gets mad and how come the plastic forks are always black like the table.

It lay upon its side for as long as he remained awake, not reproachful, resigned to let him vent his anger until some time later he passed out weak from hunger. The next time his eyes came open after sleep it was back upright, full of a good quantity of food that satiated him perfectly. There were no dents, not rends. No signs that any violence nor language had occurred, silent and fluorescent light humming. The plastic forks were white. The spoons remained black though.

The brief anger that flashed behind his closed eyes at this change was a gentle blue color.

He once would have cared to laugh.

He stands in the middle of this room and takes what would have been eighteen breaths, had either he or you thought to count, and then heads over to the table to sit down. In his hand is a book

of nursery rhymes. One of those endearing collections of hodgepodge sources from round the world and time. His eyes dart over the pages, taking in the quaint rhythmic word plays sure to delight children if he knew of any. Whatever idiocy it is that has taken his tongue, you can rest assured that he can still read just fine.

*Marmalade Mona in resplendent attire*

(it begins)

*Danced a purple hula around the big fire.*

*Up jumped Billy, adorned all in blue,*

*Crying out to Mona how he loved her hue.*

He sucks on his lips and rests his eyes a bit. He has a feeling that the lights are timed to go off whenever he closes them. He once closed his eyes when there was sunlight, when there were lights which responded to a switch. He remembers a warm pink, orange color in his vision, the luminescent combination of his blood and his pale skin filtering the white brightness overhead. It might keep him awake at night, much like you might find it difficult to sleep with the lights left on, but also was a comfort, a sign that brightness did not need him to breathe and live.

Now when he closes his eyes, only a constant darkness meets him, speckled with purple and green residuals. He opens his eyes to light. He closes them to darkness. He has tried holding them only partially open, and the light remained. As soon as he finished closing them, darkness and no warm orange pink.

His bed has a set of sheets with a single blanket all in a dull green color, including the cover to his thin but effective enough pillow. He once had a blue set. He once slept on brown. He held that

pillow, when it was blue, over his head so that only a little bit of light might incident under it and reach his eyes.

He once tried to trick the room. There it was, that dim yellow the cell provides for him without question for his every waking moment. He closed his eyes and ripped the pillow from his face and there again was that constancy.

He once believed there is a God.

*Mona said to Billy, to her Billy blue,  
"Oh sweet Billy, how rather sweet of you  
But my Marmalade is promised to Red Tom  
And he shall not like to share it none!"*

He traces his fingers over the wall. He once marked the wall to keep track of days. Closing his eyes to sleep he found the wall bare of any mark, as though that day was forgotten.

That day he marked two marks. The next day two marks were gone. He pushed it up to ten marks. Ten marks made and ten forgotten. He once despaired. He knew even the terms of day was meaningless without some sort of reasonable stimulus to assume a day had passed. Even if you do not, like him, have any sort of time keeping device you probably have, somewhere at your disposal, a sun which keeps track of days for you, or possibly a daily routine.

The cell had, in those day marking times, little besides that bed, that bookshelf, that chest of drawers, that center of the space where he likes to stand and turn in slow circles, and all those other things you have read about. The cell did not even, then, have a suggestive poster of a farm girl and a sheep. It did not even have the poster of sweet little dogs and their puppies that he once tried using to

break the off white. He once became so angry at its happiness that he pounded the wall with a book until it ripped and the poster was in pieces. He once woke up to find a poster gone and a book in new condition.

All he had was hunger and sleep. Every time he went to sleep, the room resets on him. He likely once thought this was a good thing, a fresh start. He now cries out ferociously at this, in that strange and silent garble he calls speech, when he remembers, a time becoming less and less often. On his bookshelf are other books he has barely read.

The largest volume, by far, is a book on physics and chemistry. Not so much a text book as an endless set of numbers and statistics. He wished it because he once enjoyed knowing the world. And now his world is four meters wide and six meters long, or however you prefer to state such things.

Endless statistics are wasted upon off white walls, silent but for a gentle hum as though the lights sung to themselves in a monotonous one note song, long and lamenting. He realizes, even know, past caring, that there must be some sort of exit or entrance to the room.

He realizes, his finger marking his place in the book, that the room has to allow air in, and take away waste. The water from the sink is clear and filtered, but not magical. Surely. There are no pipes. He is confused that he never thought to rip the sink from the wall. Perhaps when wakes up after when he goes back to sleep.

The food is filling, if not extraordinarily tasty, and constant. It must come from somewhere. He once thought long and hard about this question. He once was sure that he once knew. He once had a feeling that he once made this cell, himself. He once did something he should not have done.

He once knew what that was.

He once was pretty sure that he got hungry exactly three times throughout the day, when a day made sense to him, and so that would work well enough as a marker. He knew this, because he had tested this theory as a game to waste away some time. He once forgot exactly the nature of the test and the procedure. He has yet to regain that knowledge.

Three hungry times and three eating times, this became a new standard to him. After the triplicate was performed, he gave himself a comfortable time for digestion, and then took to sleep. The cell would not let him mark the walls, could not stand to not return to normalcy. He instead just counted. One hungry and eat three times cycle. Two hungry and eat three times cycle. Sixty-five hungry and eat three times cycle. A rhythm he could live with, until he one time got hungry sooner than he felt like right after going some time with getting not that hungry at all. He starved himself until he was too weak to move.

He once wasted what you might call “days” sitting in dim but bright enough yellow light staring at a table, wondering if this time was the right time to eat. He once felt so horrified at eating, he could not move his mouth to chew.

He once filled glass after glass with water, and drank until he urinated all over himself and fell to the floor.

He once woke up, hungry and ready for food, clean pants and a new dedication to making this world he was part of work. He gets out a packet of food, one including a sweet little packet of multi-fruit jelly and some toast, and pulls the tab. He waits until it makes that slight hiss indicative it is done, and removes the thin cover. He chews the

toast as noisily as he can. He takes the jelly and smears it on the book so that the words are utterly ruined, slams the page shut and tosses it against the wall.

He dumps the tray with the remaining food on the floor and then crawls into bed. His eyes close. He whips them open and then closes them, trying once more to trick the cell into a light confusion. He keeps his eyes closed, looks to where the bookshelf would be if he could see, and thinks that all books are a waste of time in a place like this, but what of Billy blue?

He sleeps.

He once dreamed. Now he sits in a white room and wonders why he is awake. It might be a dream, if dreams were such things.

He wakes up. He is not hungry, but he feels like eating. He looks across from where his feet dangle from the edge of the bed. The shelf is empty but for one volume. A hodgepodge collection of nursery rhymes. No food lies on the floor. No trash. He feels clean. He once bathed until he realized the cell did not even tolerate his personal dirt, not even when scraped his skin until it bled and he stored the dirty scab that formed later under his tongue. He once awoke, and it was gone.

You would note, if he saw him face to face, that his eyes were calm and controlled. Only a madman has those eyes. He walks over to the shelf, now a waste of time and takes the book from it and walks to the table. He opens the refrigeration unit and takes out some simple warm cereal, pulls the tab, awaits the hiss and sits down with the plate on the table and the book in front of him.

*Billy jumped and screamed at Red Tom.*

He sighs. He closes his eyes. He turns his head towards the bed, and then gets back in it again. He wakes up, takes the book from the shelf and then walks back to the table, eating a bowl of simple cereal.

*“Do not think, fool, this day is already done*

He gets another box of food, and another. He empties all the food into his stomach until he feels so full he is tired of it.

*For my day will surely come  
And it will my marmalade, drying in the sun!”  
Red Tom only laughed and twitched.  
He rolled his eyes like a man bewitched.  
But his retort was lost, alas, before it was said*

He sits down on the toilet and vomits directly into the floor in front of him. He then crawls into bed. He wakes up, grabs the book from the shelf. He glares at the refrigeration unit with something that he once would have called hatred. You would call it despair, but he has a long time to forget the distinctions he once could not make.

*For Red Tom, stabbed twice, fell down dead  
And Marmalade Mona screamed with glee.  
“What do you know? Blue is the man for me!”*

He stretches his legs, grabs the red fork (next to a black and white spoon) in front of him and starts to twist the head back and forth until it breaks out about an inch from the tines.

He once knew that suicide derived from Latin meaning “kill” and “self-referential”. He grabs the fork and starts jabbing into his arm and random intervals. Weak at first, has no immediate

plan. He gets more into it. He pierces his skin in multiple places. He cuts deep near his wrist and into his forearm. Blood begins to pool up.

He once read books about such things, with a sick fascination. He has long ceased to remember any significant thing about them.

*And the two went down grateful to their knees  
Thankful truly for their glad filled destinies.*

He knows this is not a proper children's rhyme. He screams out at the room in his own nonsense rhyming verse that it should not trick him. It should not hurt. He threatens it with a demand for a poster of feces.

*He threatens to want a door.  
He is sure he once tried this before.*

He screams for hours, until hunger has weakened him and you could not hear a peep from his throat, if he had ever used it to begin with, burnt and black. His blood sometimes hardens and he cuts at it again. He tries to stand. He stumbles. Surely you know that as much blood as he has lost, he is more or less already gone, and then he falls forward. His breath comes ragged. He laughs. You feel sorry for him.

He once would have hated you for your pity. Now he merely stops breathing. His eyes are open, but see no light. If he was only alive to care, he would have finally figured out if the dim yellow was there when he did not see it. You would now know, if only I would tell you. But even then you would not tell him.

That is the nature of things. That is his question. He once was full of better ones.

He wakes up, the sheets around him are a nice pale cream color, the walls are a slight pink. Both are absent of any sort of dirt. A poster of a dead body is to the front of him and a little to the left, across the room about four meters distant. It is a week dead. He likes to look at it because it makes him feel queasy, whatever that means.

His room is six meters wide and four meters long, if you care about such things.

To his right is a chest of drawers. The cell is quiet, and a dim yellow light comes down from the square fixtures above. There is a toilet, white and standalone next to a sink and a stool to his left directly, about three meters away from where he sits on the bed if he cared to count meters anymore.

He turns to look at it, and sees also the table at the other side of the cell, behind the toilet from this perspective. It has a small box of salt, and some pepper and some hot sauce on it. It has some strange flat things, like metallic tongue depressors that he uses to eat his food. No sharp edges. Unbreakable. He once would have appreciated their simplicity.

He walks to the center of the room. His refrigeration unit is standing to the front right of him, now, his bed is behind him and to the left. The cell has a chair, the same light grey as the table, perfectly fitting under said table. There is a trash can, empty as it seems it always is. He walks back to the bed and tucks in the cream sheets. You would normally associate their color with white beach sand that is slightly wet, or skin a long time between tans..

He smiles to himself there, and thinks it is time to get a nice bath. A nice wet rag cleaning him.

He once hated pale pink. He thinks that it might could grow on him.

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W. Doug Bolden