

They Threw Away the Key

Another morning rises as it has done throughout your memory's life. Your home's door allows you to pass as it has done with each morning's arrival. The door is the solitary cavity to a home which you do not know is a barrack. All you know is it's home.

Upon leaving your windowless home, trampled grass and mud greet you with an occasional stone or rock. The most unique aspect of your surroundings is the perfect match the gray in the concrete wall makes with the gray in the rain clouds. The only difference being the concrete wall does not rain—it cries.

No jump or sight can scale this wall. Barbed wire adorns its crest. A chuckle interrupts your routine because the wall's height makes the wire unnecessary. This reinforces the impression it is there for mere decoration. Everyday you see the same gray. Only a gate breaks the wall's cartel; however it's the wall's cousin. They are both descendants from the same concrete family. The gate is unusual because it appears to have never opened. In your whole life you've never seen this gate open. Is a gate which never opens still a gate?

This camp is your world. When they put you here they threw away the key. You wander around your camp to see a view you just saw a couple paces ago. Occasionally, you kick a stone. Its very movement gives you pleasure because outside of you it's the only thing that moves. It's motion briefly causes you to forget your only friend: loneliness.

A particular stone displays a small hole after your foot kicks it. A little box captures your sight. Your hands dig around the hole to grab the old wooden box no bigger than your hand. Undoing the latch and working the cover causes the hinges to fall off. The box now presents a neatly folded piece of paper and a rustic key. Your fingers gently unfold the paper to have your eyes find a letter before them. They read it to you:

My friend,

I lie here watching my last breathe ride from the morning sunrise. Let me first say the key in this box is not for the gate. They told you the truth; they threw away the key. However, they didn't tell you this: You're the key.

Nonetheless, I must warn you. As my last breathe approaches, my eyes are soaking in the sight of an open gate. I, like you, was my own key, but I did not know anything else. I always lived in this camp. How could I easily ignore a life which has kept me alive?

When I went to the gate and opened it, I could not pass through. I knew it would take me to a magnificent land, but I was afraid. I was afraid of uncertainty. I was afraid what I may discover along the way. Every day I woke to imagine the wonderful life waiting for me if I would ever leave this camp. Then, when I had the chance, I did not take it.

Before you simply judge me a coward or a weakling, prepare yourself for the gate's opening. The key in this box opens the door to the tower. By now you've totally ignored the tower because you could not get in. Before you open the gate, visit the tower. Climb to the top.

My last breathe is unsaddling, so I must finish quickly. I wrote this letter to inspire you. The joy in my heart is knowing my words may help deliver the courage you may need to pass through the gate. Please do not underestimate the challenge about to confront you. An open gate assaults you with betraying thoughts. Visit the tower and prepare.

My friend, I must go now. My last breathe paces toward me. The whites of his eyes reach me now; and yet, I still must bury this box.

Farewell.

The letter has you within its grasp. The key calls for you and directs your attention to the tower. He was right: The tower had slipped to unseen parts of your mind. No windows reside in the tower except in the turret at the top.

Your legs stand you upright and carry you slowly forward toward the tower. The lock attracts the key glued to your hand. Unlocking and opening the door causes a sleepy mustiness to overrun your nose. A circular stair case being swallowed by the darkness visits your eyes. The concrete staircase invites your feet to a climb.

After a finite eternity another door holds out its hand to greet you. Touching his hand causes him to open. Light launches an immediate invasion upon your eyes' beachheads. As you climb through the door and release the door's hand, it closes behind; the turret's center now passes you to a panoramic window.

For miles and miles you gaze upon nothing but other camps like yours. There are enough camps to feed each day of a lifetime. Some are very much like yours where the gates are closed, but many, many others have open gates. In each camp is a person. Some are like you and locked by the gate. Others are like your new friend in the letter and gaze upon an open gate. They too cannot pass through.

So many cannot venture onto something better. Horror infects your sight as the urge to scream swallows you. You want your screams to push each one through, but the windows do not permit their opening. Crying and kneeling, you touch the letter. The box asks you to return the letter along with the key. Without your thought your legs raise you, and your hands open the door. The circular, concrete staircase returns you to the ground. The trampled grass and mud greet you once again as you head to the gate.

There's no point finishing your story; you know how it ends...don't you?