

TOILET BREAK



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‘We have to cease to think if we refuse to do it in the prison-house of language; for we cannot reach further than the doubt which asks whether the limit we see is really a limit...’

Friedrich Nietzsche

‘A prisoner who dreams that [they are] free, starts to suspect that it is merely a dream...’

Rene Descartes

‘The final inmate who escaped from a jail in Tennessee by ripping a toilet from a wall and climbing to freedom... has been captured. The county sheriff’s office told CNN that the inmates escaped after a water leak occurred behind a stainless steel toilet attached to a wall. Cocke County Sheriff Armando Fontes added: ‘We’ve had multiple issues with this facility concerning water leaks, sewage breaks and general deterioration of the facility.’

CNN.com



At night I explore my tiny little room with a toilet, the concrete walls that contain me within it — nothing to do in here really, stare at the walls, twiddle my thumbs — kneeling on the floor pressing my palms to the cold face of the total blockage, the outside world just a few feet away, folded somehow to this tiny space, which reeks, by the way, less chic en-suite than the shit thing that sits in the corner waiting, almost smiling, somewhat inviting — if only I could be out there somewhere, breathing the air, running about, or just speaking out loud. In here the words just echo around, I mean, when the guard shouts ‘lights out’ the reverberation bounces at such a pitch that the darkness that follows seems almost eternal, like somehow the guard’s mouth had opened to reveal a void so vast it had totally swallowed the sun. Just think of it, a widening mouth, the light extinguished in one massive bite — it’s funny what the other inmates chant to the guards at night, somehow deeply profound, ‘hey guards, if you swallow the sun, be wary tomorrow

what comes out of your ...’

Honestly, two years in prison for smashing someone’s face in seems a little iniquitous. The judge, all pomp with gabble in hand, took great care to enunciate how long it would take my victim to speak again... ‘Years of vocal therapy, dozens of surgeries!’ Me looking up earnestly, fully expecting the judge to show some sort of solidarity, I was amazed at the length the sentence, it was pure eloquence, like grammar had no hold on it, that somehow if language was a prison, that this judge had totally rigged the system, they could spout out anything, say anything, all with a wash of impregnable legality, which I have to say — as I was acting as my own legal counsel — totally threw me.

I suppose being in here is my fault really; if you premise a conversation with the line ‘I was just thinking...’ there is a high probability someone will reply ‘don’t hurt yourself love!’ My mistake was to take this

line seriously, attempting a comeback so powerful that it communicated how close I was to punching this fucker in the face. A moment where the limits of language morphed my intended arbitration into a clenched fist that pulled my whole being into what — in hindsight — seems a bit of a misplaced gesture... I should never have punched the fucker in the face, and definitely not repeatedly. Suffice to say, the judge did not appreciate me, explaining in reply to their carefully enunciated words, how certain post-structuralist philosophies attempt to reveal the limits of one's own understandings, and that my unintended aggression 'was only a manifestation of my will to break free of these limits...'

It's dark in the cell, and I run my hands over the walls to reveal nothing but a concrete consistency. I've even licked them in some vain attempt to yield the smallest of cracks, like some lover looking for weakness in the softest of spots; a mass of compressed and hardened aggregate that I must report is

not as tasty as I had thought. It's just such a bleak construction this prison, no doors and no windows, nothing to remind me of the outside — I kinda thought they'd at least have put some art on the walls, something to break the monotony. I reckon curated properly, this little grey cube would totally make some avant-garde types wet their pants, but I assume the wardens thinking was that there's just no way to get punters paying entrance, there's limited government funding as it is, especially for a prison with such poor visitor attendance — but I suppose it's not all doom and gloom. There's a bit of light from up top where they slop in the food I consume, a little hatch in the ceiling, just big enough to squeeze through — I could probably use it as an escape route if it wasn't so high, jumping off the walls all Super Mario style, clinging to its edges like some par cour wannabe. But the hatch's aloofness has obviously been designed to prohibit even the thought of being free, of escaping — it's so high up, stretching my fingers towards

it in some dream state that holds my hand fixed in such a pose that for a moment I'm frozen, like my social standing was a statue of positioning, a stupid figure cast in concrete, my potential grey, my future flat, the architect of this place has seen to that.

What the guards don't know is that I snuck in my iPhone, and the screen turned to full brightness offers a pretty decent nightlight. I mean there's no Wi-Fi so it's pretty much useless — the shitty thing constantly reminding me of my lack of connectedness: no Googling, no streaming on Netflix, zero on my pay-as-you-go balance — me licking the walls like a moron in the room's dark desperateness, the judge's face emerging from the blankness. I mean, the gabble came down pretty hard — all red veined appraiser spitting out words — I guess I must of hit a nerve —the judge drooling out the mouth, shouting twisted manic stuff, like 'eternity had it in for me,' and that 'if there was a god, I would die in prison, rotting slowly, on what ever words they fed to me,' and

with no 4G I lack the ability to check their words correctness, my bloody fingers can only scratch the surface, the hardness of the language reducing my fingers to little stumps that scrape the walls in arced lined diagrams, trying to draw complex escape plans, to fracture the walls rigidity with abstract shapes so vastly oblique that the whole mass of this place might somehow twist me outside, frantically dipping my newly nibbed fingers into every orifice, pulling out every last bit of shit, the walls caked in it.

Some say that the reason bibles are so widely read in prisons is that ‘the gospels hold redemption in their pages.’ Honestly, can you imagine anything more stupid? Like the printed word might actually hold some escape for an inmate. For example: If I write the word **CROWBAR**, it’s not like a crowbar appears. I mean I’ve tried it, scrawled it on the walls from the basest of materials. Grabbing at it, only to be confronted by the reality of it: it is only a word. How can a

word possibly hold any materiality? If only I had a real tool, something that could break this rigidity — poring over my drawings, trying to unearth an escape to the outside, some tiny detail, ‘there must be something I’ve missed’. My iPhone in hand, scanning all around, moving from wall to wall, from detail to detail, getting closer, until my nose, pressed up against it, starts to get the smell of it... ‘Of course, the toilet!’ For months I’ve been pouring my shit into it, watching it float away in channels so single minded they hit the right spot with every plop. In other words, the outside world is only a shit away.

So I grab my bible from the side table, and quickly thumb to the book of Daniel — chapter 5 to be exact. You know, that bit where the big disembodied hand appears at King Belshazzar’s feast, and everyone’s like: ‘what the fuck is that?’ and the big hand starts writing all this strange stuff on the wall, which none of them can interpret at all, and so Belshazzar calls in Daniel, and

Daniel just looks at them, and probably tutting disapprovingly, measuredly recounts the meaning of the strange scrawl, that God is pretty pissed with them all, and that Belshazzar's days are measured, that he's probably gonna die pretty soon and he actually dies that night, so in fact Daniel was right — and I run my finger about half way down this passage to feel the carved shape in the bible paper, catch the glint of metal, a spanner shaped hole and whispering to myself I say, 'I guess redemption does lie in the pages after all.'

It's very hard for me to express how good this spanner feels in my hand, like finally I have a realistic plan, and levering it behind the toilet's cistern, I yank with full force, smashing apart the rusted plumbing which spurts out gushing fountains so impressive I stand there for a second, watching the room slowly fill with piss-water and little floaters, it rising past my ankles, way up my body till it starts to take me, to raise me — you know that feeling you get in your gut

when you're first asked to speak publicly? That lurching rising feeling, like vomit might be your speech, not the public lecture you had promised, but a total blockage. Like some red-faced tosser had locked you up in some prison of language, and now all you want to do was beat the fucker up, raze them to the ground and beat them to a pulp with your every vocal sound. Well, this is that moment, that rising feeling, like all your being must be overcome! — gradually ascending towards the little hatch, it opening up wide like a mouth, the prisoner's head just poking out, shouting out these words really loud... 'Hey judge! You shit adjudicator! I am coming to get ya!'

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By Sam Knowles

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